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The Democrats: Desperately Seeking Defeat?

By | 2004: Vol. 3, No. 4

There is an old saw of political forecasting: “it’s the economy, stupid.” Bill Clinton popularized it in his campaign to unseat George H. W. Bush and it seemed to work, despite Bush’s swift and apparently painless victory in the Gulf War (in retrospect it was not nearly as smooth as was initially reported). According to most assessments, the senior Bush was defeated by his failure to address the 1991-93 recession with bold interventions that appeared to recognize the issue, let alone make a real difference. A decade later the incumbent national administration led by senior Bush’s son, George, is presiding over a stubbornly flagging economy. Unemployment and underemployment stay high despite reports of economic growth, which in any case is fueled by vast inputs of fictitious capital: the government has issued more than $150 billion in unsupported cash; and the credit system has generated a huge consumer debt. More particularly, if many Americans are experiencing declining living standards-whether they have a full-time job or not-according to conventional wisdom the prospects for returning the president to a second term are said to be grim. If people don’t buy expensive consumer products such as autos, computers, electronic equipment, appliances and furniture it’s a sure sign they either don’t have the income (or the credit lines), or have lost confidence they can repay their accumulated loans so they stay put. Meanwhile they look to the government to help get them out of their binds. If the perceive that the government is indifferent to their plight, they surely will not support another four years of pain and suffering.

Upon taking office the second Bush administration was confronted with a largely inherited incipient recession. True to the neo-liberal, supply side tradition its chief strategy was to take trickle down measures to stimulate private investment: first, to lower interest rates on loan capital and then to cut taxes, primarily for those who could be expected to spend in job-creating activities and high levels of personal consumption. At the same time, after September 11, 2001, military spending soared, largely on the basis of borrowed money, even as the economy stagnated. Despite enacting two huge tax cuts, mostly for the very wealthy, and reducing the prime interest rate to almost the vanishing point-one percent-George W. Bush’s first term has been marked by job losses due to falling industrial production amid technological displacement, income stagnation and overproduction. The situation remains dire even after the official end of the recession in late 2002, prompting car corporations, for example, to offer zero percent interest on many of their models in order to slim down their bulging inventories; banks offered credit cards to bad-risk consumers; and, against his principles, in 2002 Bush offered a single extension to millions who had exhausted their 26 weeks of jobless benefits.

The Bush strategy mostly backfired: many corporations and venture capitalists took advantage of the tax bonanza by investing in job destroying technological innovations and in offshore

industrial and knowledge production. During its first three years in office, the US economy lost almost three million jobs, most of them in manufacturing, but also in managerial, professional and technical categories. After the impact of technology, and the black cloud of simple overproduction of goods and services the most important reason for the losses was offshore outsourcing. Many jobs in goods and knowledge production have migrated overseas to Latin America and East Asia where wages are a fifth or a tenth of those in the United States. During the outsourcing crisis, professional and technical workers as well as industrial workers became aware that in the new global economic environment nothing is pinned down. Computer and engineering jobs followed the paths paved by industrial production corporations. In the end, what Americans had been taught never to fear, that so-called third world countries could acquire the capacity to produce highly skilled, well-trained knowledge and service workers, came to pass.

The airline industry is experiencing a meltdown of unprecedented proportions: all of the major airlines are in a profits crisis; two of America's six largest carriers, US Air and United, have filed for bankruptcy protection; Delta recently announced it would cut 10 percent of its labor force over the next few years and is poised to file for bankruptcy as well; and nearly all major airline corporations have demanded pay and benefits cuts from their workers. US Air and United have gone so far as to suggest that their obligation to provide employees with contractually-negotiated benefits packages be eliminated or the costs be substantially shifted to workers.

George W. Bush has trumpeted himself as a "wartime president," owing to the self-imposed burdens imposed on his administration by the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, a title that presumably relieves the administration of most of its domestic obligations. Make no mistake: this is no fiscally conservative government. Indeed, the Bush administration has proven to be one of the biggest spenders of the post-World War Two era. In a matter of two years its military Keynesian policies obliterated the carefully crafted Clinton trillion dollar surpluses, adding more than a trillion dollars in debt. And when, as the 2004 election approached, Bush rediscovered some social programs, together with the Republican-controlled Congress and some leading Democrats like Ted Kennedy, his administration sponsored a Medicare reform that rewards the drug companies with a gift of super profits and for millions of medicare recipients very little in the way of reduced prescription drug costs.

But, even if Bush thought he could elide responsibility for economic woes by focusing on the "war on terror," the wars are going badly. Almost ignored by the media, Afghanistan is no peaceful pasture but almost three years after the US invasion, it remains turbulent and insecure, for its own population as well as the sharply thinned-out American military. Slowly the Taliban which, after all, were the target of the American occupation, have recouped and asserted their power to disrupt and otherwise unsettle the country. And, instead of being able to smoke Osama bin Laden out from his hole, the Bush administration finds itself unexpectedly bogged down in Iraq. Seventeen months after president Bush stood on an aircraft carrier and proclaimed the end of the military phase of the Iraq war, the war's pace and intensity have increased and American soldiers as well as Iraqis are suffering the consequences. Since May

2003 a full fledged insurgency has emerged among both the Shia and Sunni, and they have successfully prevented US forces from entering some key regions of the country. In early September the US military announced that it had sustained more than 1000 deaths and nearly five thousand wounded, figures that remain in dispute. Unofficial estimates of Iraqi deaths range from 37,000 to more than 50,000, with many more maimed and wounded. According to official sources significant portions of Iraq are under insurgent control, which has prompted the US military high command to announce, on September 18, a late autumn offensive to drive the insurgents from their strongholds so that elections, planned for January 2005, can go forward, a plan that has been received with considerable skepticism.

The combination of economic distress at home and seemingly endless wars which, according to many mainstream observers, are the result of poor planning by an administration that, notwithstanding its possession of technological superiority in weapons of destruction, seems unable to win the "peace," should have inspired the Democratic party. Certainly, under pressure from its still potent liberal wing-notably Howard Dean's early challenge to the center-right neo-liberal establishment-the spring primaries temporarily emboldened most of those who aspired to the presidential nomination to roundly condemn the Bush administration on both the war and economic fronts. By the Democratic Party convention at the end of July, terrified at the prospect of a Bush victory, Democratic Party activists and its erstwhile left critics ignored John Kerry's heavy baggage, notably his support of the enabling war resolution, and were united in the belief that they had victory within their grasp. Thousands of intellectuals and activists who had supported Ralph Nader in the ill-fated 2000 presidential elections declared that this time the important thing was to defeat Bush, to turn his ultra-right inner circle-notably Dick Cheney, John Ashcroft and Donald Rumsfeld-out of office and Kerry was the best hope.

Yet, Kerry's campaign has failed to catch fire; instead he has been lifted on his own petard more than once. For example, even as he assails the administration's handling of the peace, especially its unilateralism and many failures to assuage the Iraqi people from hating America and Americans, his position on the Iraq war remains ambiguously favorable to the Bush policy. After intensifying his attack on Bush's Iraq policies for their recklessness, he pledged to withdraw US troops from Iraq in four years without detailing what he would do during this period, except train Iraqis to deal with their own security, advance reconstruction efforts, and hold elections, all of which are in the Bush playbook. Kerry has called attention to the fact that the administration's declarations of a recovery after 2002 have, at best, produced low-wage jobs, and then not enough of them. But like his opponent, he has offered a supply-side solution to the jobless recovery: reward corporations who create new jobs instead of outsourcing with substantial tax credits. Consistent with his neo-liberal premises which focus on what has proven to be ephemeral private sector job creation, fearing charges that he is, after all, a tax and spend liberal, he has refused to suggest that the government could create millions of public service jobs to expand education, health care, public transportation, environmental protection, day care and recreation. He has refrained from attacking one of the administration's most egregious civil liberties disasters, The Patriot Act, for which he voted, which gives the Attorney General almost unlimited powers to detain suspected "terrorists," US citizens or not, engage in widespread surveillance, especially of opponents, and suspend

constitutional protections on security grounds. Even as the Bush campaign calls attention to its socially conservative agenda of abrogating abortion rights and promotes an anti- gay marriage amendment to the constitution, Kerry remains strangely silent except to affirm that he, too, is opposed to gay marriage.

Believing, with some justice, it has the liberals and the left in his pocket, the Kerry campaign has decided to direct much of its appeal to voters in the so-called battleground states (Ohio, Missouri, Colorado, Florida, New Mexico Wisconsin, Michigan and New Hampshire), but even more specifically it is contesting allegedly swing voters who it believes are more moderate than the Democrats' core constituency. Moderate on what? Economic policy? Do swing voters want to reward the very same corporations who are responsible for outsourcing? Health care? (in a recent survey 78 percent of the American public is in favor of a government-sponsored "guarantee" of health care). Is Kerry silent on social issues because he is courting social conservatives?

Some on Kerry's left flank have suggested that the way out of the conundrum is to dramatically expand the electorate from its current 50-55 percent of eligible votes, most of whom are, in income and class terms, in the upper half of the population and are over 35 years of age. They advise the Democratic Party and the Kerry campaign to register and bring to the polls the vast legions of the disenfranchised working poor, the unemployed, youth and women. While there is some evidence that in states like Florida, the Democrats are working to swell the participation of blacks, and may go after the youth vote in several other states, this campaign resembles tweedly dum to Bush's tweedly dee more than a crusade.

In order to mobilize and expand the disaffected:

· Kerry would have to go beyond his late September declaration that if he knew what he knows now-that Iraq did not possess weapons of mass destruction-he would not have voted for the war resolution. (Of course this is a reversal of his earlier position that he still would have cast a yes vote.)

· declare that the job crisis can be solved chiefly by policies of job creation because he understands that in more than thirty years the private sector has not delivered many jobs outside of the military and the short-lived dot.com boom.

· offer a serious solution to outsourcing: tie international trade to raising living standards in developing countries and prohibiting corporations to export jobs in order to avoid wage and benefits protections currently enjoyed by US workers.

· speak out against the announcement by some airline companies that they intend to abrogate pension and health care benefits negotiated through the union contract and attack Bush's plan to cut housing subsidies.

· support the reinstatement of guaranteed income (rescinded by the 1996 Welfare Reform Act) for those who have few or no alternatives and support a dramatic increase in the minimum

wage to European levels of about $9 an hour.

· And, he would have to state, flatly, that he favors a program of universal health care, some of which would be financed by the Federal government through the social security system by or general revenues, as in other advanced capitalist countries.

But with mere weeks left in the campaign Kerry has shown no signs of heeding this advice. Instead, fearing that the Nader campaign will siphon votes from Kerry, the Democratic Party has worked furiously to deny him ballot access. Apart from the undemocratic character of this effort, it must be read as a sign that Kerry does not intend to expand his left and popular base but will confine his efforts to the current crop of "likely" voters." Among these are a small, but perhaps critical fragment of potential Kerry voters.

And Nader has been able to attract some youth backing. One reason for this strategic choice must be that the party establishment, of which Kerry is an integral part, does not intend to offer redistributive, anti-corporate programs to address America's festering economic and social problems. In line with the drumbeat of the center/right Democratic Leadership Council, Kerry's strategy is to convince conservatives that he, not Bush, is their candidate. After all, in line with the Cold War policy he has come down solidly in favor of placing war making the traditional Western alliance With his message of fiscal responsibility and bi-partisan multilateralism Kerry has argued that Bush is, in many ways, out of the mainstream of public opinion. But now voters are looking for concrete plans for America's future, plans that Kerry simply has not offered. As a result his once commanding lead in most battleground states has disappeared and he is even losing some ground in some of his own "blue" territory.

Is it simply that the party establishment would rather lose and hold on the machinery than win by making promises that would transform the existing corporate domination of national politics and government policy? Is the prospect of a class-based campaign-the only condition under which Kerry could hope to attract new constituents-so repugnant to his handlers and to the candidate himself that they are willing to grasp defeat from the jaws of victory? These are rational explanations for the foot-dragging that has marked Kerry's performance since August 1. And they are certainly necessary to understand why he has hesitated to mount an all-out effort to win. But I want to suggest that they tell only part of the story.

In 1986 I published a cover story in *The Progressive* titled "The Party's Over." Then I argued that since 1976 when the Democrats elected its first neo-liberal president, Jimmy Carter, the party had transformed itself into a socially liberal, politically centrist and economically conservative organization. While retaining the organizational support of trade unions, feminist organizations, civil rights and a considerable fraction of urban intellectuals and members of the professional/managerial strata, the party had effectively shed its welfare state legacy, its commitment to labor, especially the working poor, and abandoned the cities to the banks and real estate interests. In short, the judgment that the Democratic party retained its earlier commitment to some redistributive polices was mistaken, and the support awarded to its candidates at the national level by organized labor and social movements was ill-deserved.

In the subsequent eighteen years the old Roosevelt coalition has hung together, sort of. The 1980s was an era of the so-called “Reagan” Democrats; the Democratic Party retained control over the two houses of Congress but lost three successive presidential elections, largely because a considerable chunk of its traditional working class base defected and the vaunted weight of the unions to deliver overwhelming majorities in the cities was undercut by rampant suburbanization, and deindustrialization. Women stayed the course, a mark of their loyalty to Roe v Wade and the Democrats’ reluctant but reliable support and blacks and Latinos were still attached to the party for its willingness to scuttle its historic Southern powerhouse when president Johnson signed the Voting and Civil Rights Acts in 1964 and 1965. As it turned out Barry Goldwater’s crushing 1964 defeat was the beginning, as Kevin Phillips argued, of the emergence of a new conservative Republican majority.

In the wake of the dramatic shift in the political temper of the country the Democrats, believing that if they clung to the “old ideas” they would certainly be consigned to a permanent minority, rather swiftly became the less odious neo-liberal wing of the new arrangements. Bill Clinton who learned his lesson when, after one term, he was defeated for reelection in the 1980 Arkansas gubernatorial race, climbed off the floor became a born-again centrist, and went on to win five terms of office, beginning in 1982. In 1988 he organized the Democratic Leadership Council which brought his centrist, neo-liberal politics on to the national stage. Indeed, his 1992 presidential race was conducted, almost entirely, on the fears of a broad swath of the electorate that the arch-reactionary George H. W. Bush would bring America down. Given general perception that the Bush presidency was both insensitive to the economic recession and objectionable in many other respects, Clinton got away with saying very little except to promise that his administration would deliver universal health care, the struggle for which, in 1993, turned out to be an unmitigated disaster mainly because it perpetuated the myth that the private sector could do it better. Even so, the big drug companies never saw a capitulation it would not trample. The Clintons mishandled the legislative and public relations effort because they were unwilling to fight the drug companies who mounted a huge campaign against their plan. The health care fiasco brought the Democrats down in both houses in 1994.

Once more, Clinton learned to incorporate conservative fiscal policy into his program; like FDR he became the most fervent salesperson for the doctrine of the balanced budget and may have been the best conservative president of the 20th century. Against a surprisingly strong campaign by Organized Labor to sink the treaty in 1993 he signed NAFTA which, in retrospect was the first major official recognition that the American government supported outsourcing to developing countries, even if it has resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs to Mexico, China, India and other countries. To add insult to injury, in the runup to the 1996 election, Clinton signed one of the most important innovations of the Right, the Welfare Reform Act, giving away the most durable guaranteed income program of the New Deal legacy. Al Gore was busy as well. In 1996 the Clinton administration promised not only to end “welfare as we know it” but to end the era of big government. Under the vice-president’s direction the Federal Government cut 200,000 or 10 percent of its jobs, a bold stroke which became a model of many states who gladly followed suit.

The Clinton legacy is this: holding its coalition together largely by fear, The Democratic Party is openly aligned with some fractions of the commanding heights of economic power-the financial services sector Its position on the global front is to defend the traditional bonds of transnational empire, to oppose unilateralism if our imperial partners, France, Germany and Japan are prepared to negotiate responsibility. At the same time it is a free trade party and has made no moves to assure workers in steel, textiles and garments and other production sectors that a Kerry administration, no more than Clinton himself, would hold up trade agreements that did not protect the jobs and living standards of US workers and those in the developing world.

But the preponderant liberal and labor leadership seems content to tail the Democrats rather than challenge the party's commitments and priorities. When Andy Stern, the president of the SEIU, with a million and a quarter members, dares utter words of criticism, a chorus mobilizes against him on the ground that as House Speaker Thomas O'Neill said on the eve of the Panama invasion, "this is no time for complicated debate." If the lib-labs are working behind the scenes to change Kerry's open-throated support for neo-liberal economic policies and in behalf of the interests of empire, so far the results have been meager. Instead, even as a dozen AFL-CIO unions have condemned the Iraq war and workers strive to keep their collective heads above water in the face of unrelenting corporate attacks against their working conditions and living standards, in fear the unions pour millions into the Kerry campaign coffers. Even Sterns says his union will contribute $65 millions. Kerry did not attend the huge abortion rights march mounted by feminist organizations but enjoys their uncritical backing, and has said not one word to reassure millions of blacks and Latinos that his administration would take bold steps to address the mounting poverty and joblessness in their communities. Still NAACP and the leaders of the black churches are solidly in his corner.

Thus it cannot even be said that labor and liberal formations are "coalition partners." Rather they have become supplicants of power and can arouse themselves only in the wake of the most right wing assaults on past gains such as abortion. Ignoring New York Giants football coach Steve Owen's statement that the "best defense is a good offense," it may be that Kerry may win the 2004 elections because as recent polls have indicated anti-Bush sentiment motivates 61 percent of his voters. But he will enter the White House without a mandate for change. Like Clinton, labor can expect only marginal gains from a Kerry administration which, if it maintains its stance of free trade, may prove as detrimental to its interests as did the Clinton's reign. Yet, as if to vindicate the most basic precept of sado-masochistic relationships, the more they are ignored or beaten, the more they crave another lashing from the whip of the authoritarian father.

Underlying these puzzling signs that the left and the liberals are prepared to do next to nothing to force Kerry to make commitments to their agenda that would guide his administration is a pervasive reality: the center-right that leads the Democratic Party will choose not to win if it means disrupting their long march, if the price of victory is that it must take a left turn, even tactically; and the party's left-principally the constituent organizations and the intellectuals-do not believe they have the legitimacy to govern. For more than a quarter century they have

submitted their fate to a centrism that boldly declares their interests secondary to the so-called "national" interest and subject to being sacrificed, if corporate America refuses to entertain or negotiate around their agendas. Still having the largest organizations of the liberal wing-as C. Wright Mills once observed-the unions have become a "dependent variable" in the political economy, their unease is not sufficient to stir them into opposition or even dissent. Disempowered and bereft of vision, the farthest horizon of the liberals is to gain some time and space to go back to business as usual. It is not a formula for the approach of a new day.

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Dubya’s Fellow Travelers: Left Intellectuals And Mr. Bush’s War

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What are “fellow travelers”? Once upon a time, during the 1920s and 1930s, the epithet referred to left-wing intellectuals who, while not members of the communist party, were sympathetic to its political project. No preening right-winger or proud moderate will let anyone on the left ever forget how writers like Lion Feuchtwanger, Romain Rolland, Lincoln Steffens, Beatrice and Sidney Webb traipsed off into darkest Russia where they received gracious NKVD-guided tours of the glorious Soviet future, and rhapsodized that, so far as they could see, it worked. Indeed, no one should forget this profoundly pathetic episode. True, many inquisitive visitors-like Andre Gide-were deeply shaken by what they experienced there as well. But it spoils all the fun to dwell on those who, in the words of Victor Serge, “had the courage to see clearly.”

Better to deal with those who saw what they wanted to see, who trumpeted ideals that lacked any relation to reality, invoked “history” because they understood nothing of the present, and-whatever their good intentions-provided what the communists liked to call an “objective apology,” or what Karl Rove today might call good public relations, for an increasingly xenophobic, imperialist, and authoritarian regime. Those naifs of times past should be held strictly accountable. A similar standard should be set, however, for their contemporary left-wing counterparts who publicly endorsed what has become a monumental political disaster in Iraq and, in the process, helped legitimate perhaps the most reactionary administration in American history.

Most of today’s fellow travelers hitch rides with the Democratic Party. But where it was once assumed that critical intellectuals should aim to illuminate, or expose, the confusions of sly politicians, stand with the more radical spirits on the ground, and push and prod the establishment to the left, these truculent champions of progress adopt the same assumptions and the same fears as the candidates on the stump. Like the rest of the Democratic Party, with some notable exceptions, Dubya’s fellow travelers initially supported the war-a smart tactic up to the giddy moment that the President considered it safe to proclaim “mission accomplished”-and now, shocked and awed by the Iraqi debacle, shake their heads and ruefully say: “sorry.”

All these pragmatists, it seems, were woefully misled by (gasp) false information. None of them, apparently, could imagine how wretchedly the Iraqi war and occupation would be mishandled. It was inconceivable, of course, that the motives of the United States government should have been anything less than impeccable. But, in fact, the sobering information was always out there in abundance. There never was the wisp of a reason for trusting Commander Bush and his neocon Rough Riders. Administration officials like Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz, in fact, openly admitted to the seamier motives inspiring the invasion. It was always ludicrous to believe that a democratic domino effect would start in conquered Baghdad; that the United States had the right, the reason and the wisdom to unilaterally pursue a "preventive" war; or that the Iraqi population would welcome the invaders with open arms. Looking at the deteriorating situation now, it is appalling what grisly travesties this loose band of "moderate" social democrats and tepid liberals have aided and abetted, and even more appalling how little the sway of genuine self-criticism appeals to these self-styled political "realists" most of whom know as little about Middle East politics or Islam as the authors of this piece know about astrophysics or break dancing.

Bush and his surly gang surely couldn't believe their luck at the willing inflow of progressive acolytes or, what Lenin would have called, "useful idiots." Here were finally some *mature, responsible, and patriotic* radicals ready to engage the "mainstream" or, to put it another way, ready to publish and speak and opine supinely in the mainstream media. The Bush boys must have died laughing at these raw recruits who showed so little savvy when the cynical call came to "rally around the flag" and who were so susceptible to the official exploitation of fear. Not all the fellow-travelers' prior knowledge of the sour realities of "hard ball" politics, or the inveterate money-grubbing and power grabbing of the upper tiers, would dissuade them from jumping head-first into that blurry Huntingtonian universe of clashing civilizations. They never cared to notice that distinct whiff of the beer hall putsch that hovered over these feral Republicans whom they embraced as saviors.

Could any sentient human being fall for the sloganeering guff of this slavering saber-toothed pack occupying the White House? Nothing was more mystifying than the improbable Damascan conversion that major figures on the left underwent as the twin towers came tumbling so terribly down. Wasn't it crystal clear that, from the start, there was nothing Dubya's gang would not use to further their agenda? Come to think of it, isn't that what all politicians at all times are supposed to do with events, turn them to advantage? Did this most elementary truism not dawn on Christopher Hitchens, Paul Berman, Michael Ignatieff, Mitchell Cohen, Todd Gitlin, Michael Walzer and other skittish strays away from the left? One suspects they may have watched too many Hollywood movies where a national emergency melts class and status lines to climax in the raising of musketeer swords for an "all for one and one for all" common good. Or perhaps they were too obsessed with Israel and too distrustful of those categorical "Arabs." Was it really so difficult to see through the endless bullshit peddled by this administration? You didn't need a weatherman to know which way the wind was blowing, or a veterinarian to diagnose that a rabid bunch of right-wingers were steering the country over the nearest cliff.

These newly minted fellow travelers never dreamed that it could happen to *them*. The paragon pundits always believed that it was only the "radicals" and ultra-leftists who were eager to embrace hero cults and orchestrated deceits. But the Republican Party-incarnating Bob Dylan's "superhuman crew who go out and round up everyone that knows more than they do"-was just waiting for the suckers. And this new batch was happy to oblige. *They* weren't lunatics like Noam Chomsky or part of that nameless crowd who supposedly expressed "glee" that on 9/11 the United States got what it deserved,1 but rather *mature, responsible,* and-always conveniently-*patriotic*.

What is the problem with Chomsky anyway? That he writes a lot of books? That the kids love him? That he has been uncompromising in confronting the goliath? That even his mistakes are bold? That he is far more often right then wrong? That he was a critic of Israeli territorial ambitions while many of its left-wing supporters were still dreaming of milk and honey? No one views him as an infallible prophet. But the fellow travelers seem obsessed with him. Certain of them, in fact, see the need to situate their milquetoast position "between" Cheney and Chomsky:2 As if, perhaps in the muddled realm of their own private world spirit, it makes sense to juxtapose the venal thinking of a *Vice President*-whose influence is paramount and whose clique has produced both the current catastrophe and an almost unimaginable decline in the world-wide standing of the United States-and a *Professor at MIT*, long outcast by the ideological mainstream, with no institutional influence whatsoever. Calling upon the "left" to position itself "between Cheney and Chomsky," is possible only by ignoring the existing relations of power. But then, that's not quite true: what results from this frisky exercise in critical analysis by the fellow travelers is yet another stale vision of a "liberal foreign policy" totally amenable to the Democratic Leadership Council.

What is it about Chomsky? Even Adam Shatz of *The Nation*,3 who really ought to know better, accused him of "evaluating the war through the prism of anti-Americanism" by spending too little time on the assault staged by the followers of bin Laden and too much on the atrocities sponsored by the United States. A supercilious argument like that of Todd Gitlin, which rests on the belief that "the tone *was* the position," really doesn't amount to a palpable reason for burning Chomsky at the stake. If you strike the right reverential tone, we guess, you can say anything. The MIT maverick is apparently just not sensitive enough to appreciate that "patriotism is not only a gift to others, it is a self-declaration. It affirms that who you are extends beyond-far beyond-yourself, or the limited being that you thought was yourself."

Snap off a salute to gung-ho Gitlin. After *he* hung old glory from his terrace in New York on 9/11, in what was surely hostile terrain rife with traitors and Islamo-symps, future generations will undoubtedly better be able to savor his thrilling insight that "lived patriotism entails sacrifice."4 Not that *his* action should be construed as providing "support for the policies of George Bush." Oh, no. But let us not forget that that this is the same stalwart who, in his *Letters to a Young Activist*, called the McCarthy witch hunt "a mixed blessing," urged leftists to hunt down "Islamic murderers," and preached that there is no salvation outside the Democrats no matter how far to the right they scurry. Members of the chorus cheering on Mr. Bush's foreign policy were probably driven crazy by Chomsky's insistence upon viewing the attacks of

9/11 as a “crime against humanity” rather than an act of war-even though, of course, bin Laden represented no particular nation or people. But that is obviously a mere technicality.

So what do these latter-day fellow travelers offer instead? A standpoint that perfectly suits a Democratic Party whose candidate presents himself as the second coming of General George Patton, the proponent of even more funds for an infinitely centralized homeland “security” apparatus, and just before smelly things started going completely down the tubes — a belated opponent of the Iraqi War. No less than Gitlin, other fellow travelers have plenty of pompous advice to offer. They wish to make sure that the rest of us recognize the crying need to make “judgments” and not fall into hopeless relativism “because the refusal to make judgments is fundamentally undemocratic and fundamentally apolitical.”5 Did Allan Bloom climb out of his coffin? Thanks for that.

It would be nice, of course, to know just who constitutes this ubiquitous “left” that the fellow travelers beat up on so valiantly. Well, of course, there’s Chomsky. But, then, he can be accused of every sin known to man with carefree impunity. Who else? We tend to doubt that “judgments” are evaded and “relativism” rules and “third worldism” is the rage among the bulk of writers for journals like *In These Times*, *Mother Jones*, *Logos, Counterpunch*, *Z-Net,* or any other left outlet with a serious constituency. Then too, unfortunately, just what political judgments the “left” should make-other than heed the advice of Michael Walzer and surrender its allegedly implacable “Third World-ism,” confess that the United States is not the “sole” bastion of “evil,” and recognize the all-absolving character of the “new” situation for the United States-always remains a bit foggy.

Luckily, our fellow travelers know what’s up. Michael Walzer and Jean Elshtain got a real firm grip on the situation when they signed the war manifesto, “What We’re Fighting For,”6 sponsored by the center-right Institute for American Values. It stands for “freedom” and, if the document explicitly equates freedom with the American understanding of it, no big deal. Enough that signatories should denounce the taking of life, urge aggressive self-defense and, after the posturing is done, banish any nagging suspicion that the crisis of 9/11 might be manipulated for imperialist purposes. Elshtain goes this one better. She primly alerts us to the seductive dangers of “appeasement,” ridicules the notion that any change in US policy will improve the situation, sternly informs us that the world is, you know, a dangerous place, and insists that the “humanist” preference for negotiating with fundamentalist fanatics-not, of course, the Israeli or Saudi or Louisiana sort-is fruitless.7

Never heard any of that stuff before? It’s always nice to encounter brash new arguments about the need to take up “the burden of American power in a violent world.” Silly cynics might wonder whether this dainty counsel amounts to a resurrection of the “white man’s burden.” Pay them no heed. No “realist” with liberal principles would ever abide the idea that foreign policy might have a racist component either. It does seem strange that the enemy *du jour* of the United States always seems to be a people of color or a nation with little taste for its brand of globalization. But, never mind.

Interesting how the signatories to the rousing “What We’re Fighting For!”-half of whom are conservative enough to actually join the present administration-never bothered to consider that perhaps the fanatics are less enraged by the way Americans live in their own country than by the policies its government pursues in the Islamic world. No less than Elshtain, however, Walzer was probably contemplating higher things like the theory of “just war” and the ethical obligation to “reconstruct” what has been destroyed. Not that he was ardently supportive of the Iraqi invasion. Walzer cheered on the first Gulf War of 1991 to save Kuwait from the clutches of Saddam,8 though Kuwait was never exactly a shining ideal of democracy, but he has said any number of different things at different times about the second Gulf War. The stance of our hero is, shall we say, nuanced.

Ever the hand-wringing Democrat, to be sure, Walzer recognized that the administration of Bush the Younger never made its clinching case for the Iraqi War.9 In spite of that, however, the war apparently had to be supported and, though it has become ever more obvious that the American presence is only stoking the chaos and the Iraqis want us out, it remains ethically incumbent upon us to reconstruct this smartly devastated nation.10 Is the reader following Walzer’s lucid argument? Let’s try again. The war on terror should not excuse “indefensible” policies though, given a state of “supreme emergency,”11 an “emergency ethics” may be required even though it provides no criteria for either judging what policies are defensible or for examining the interests of those in whose name the policies are undertaken. Still don’t get it? One more time: Since a war is being fought against terror in the name of liberal principles under ill-defined emergency conditions it jolly well might be legitimate on ethical grounds to consider employing military courts and constricting civil liberties, which violate those very liberal principles.12 Okay, since these are “complex” arguments, let’s cut to the chase. *Mature and responsible and patriotic* left-wing intellectuals should tell the Bushies: do what you gotta do and, in the name of the national security and what Gore Vidal calls “perpetual war for perpetual peace,” we’ll hold our noses and support you. Or, if that doesn’t fly, we’ll retreat into the great dusty documents of liberal Zionism and ponder deeply the reasons why its venerated values have eroded.

As for Mitchell Cohen, editor of *Dissent,* who knows what he is thinking after making the feverish claim that those who refused to support the invasion of Iraq would also surely have stood aside in 1941. His tender little missive, “The Real, Not the Comfortable Choice,”13 harked back to the Baghdad of 1941 and the specter of pogroms envisioned by the notorious anti-Jewish bigot Rashid Ali. Nothing like those good old days, and, with them in mind, heady dreams of regime change can then be transported into the present. Justifications abound: Cohen highlights the hideous character of Saddam’s regime, castigates the hamstrung UN for its “many failures,” insists upon the sky-is-falling peril posed by Saddam, calls for a democratic Iraq and turning the UN into “an effective institution with real integrity” (by which he seems to mean a marionette of the United States), and emphasizes that the choice is not between “war and peace but, absent an unlikely coup in Baghdad-the use of force “sooner or later.”14 It’s remarkable, isn’t it, how he gets to the core of what is at stake?

Not a word about the constraints, the potential costs, or the regional implications of an

invasion. And Mitch, believe it or not, 1941 is not 2004: there is no world war and there is no Hitler for whom Saddam is acting in proxy. Everyone knows now, even as so many knew before the bombings began, that Saddam posed no threat to the security of the United States and that ridding Iraq of the mustachioed monster through invasion would produce national resistance, a spur for real terrorists, a spate of anti-Americanism, and even greater chaos in the region. It also was never a question of war now or war later. Enough state department and intelligence analysts realized from the start that none of the guys we backed was in it for democracy including those American stooges in exile like Ahmed Chalabi and Ayed al-Allawi who played their neo-conservative cronies no less than you and your buddies for first class fools. Democracy? Whatever happened to the emirs in Kuwait? Still in charge? Our slick fellow travelers apparently never thought it worth the bother to consider the vulgar notion that this war was being fought for oil, for water, for military bases outside Saudi Arabia, and to provide a tart warning for what would happen to other states in the region-which Libya quickly understood-should they not toe the American line. Not to worry. No facile anti-Americanism, dogmatic Marxism, or anachronistic theories of imperialism would ever seduce our hardy fellow travelers.

The authors of this article visited Iraq with a peace delegation in January of 2003: we helped draw up an anti-war statement that both opposed the war and-easy to do-rejected Saddam Hussein.15 As soon as we returned we worked along with so many others on the left to expose the lies and the false assumptions deployed by the Bush administration in favor of invasion.16 Efforts of this sort were studiously ignored in the mainstream media, or even condemned there, on cue, by many of Dubya's fellow travelers. A petition was distributed that got 33,000 signatories. *Everyone* sensed disaster in the making. The Internet was bursting with warnings, various military leaders and the CIA-for god sakes-advised caution, the much-maligned United Nations knew that Colin Powell was shilling for his boss, and the rest of the world realized that Bush the Younger and his gun-slinging gang had gone more than slightly nuts. According to Dubya's fellow travelers, however, the critics-and especially those teeming demonstrators all over the world-were misguided idiots. Not that the erudite editors of *Dissent* and *The New Republic* weren't trying to set them straight, mind you. Our new politerati were probably learning at the feet of Michael Lind, a one-time conservative who allegedly lurched left, about the importance of embracing that always elusive "center," that the Vietnam War was darned well worth fighting,17 and that there was no need to worry about the endemic tendency of refreshingly *mature, responsible, and patriotic* social democrats to make fools out of themselves by blessing imperialist wars when waged in the fig-leaf name of humanitarian ideals.

One wonders: Did the fellow travelers-souls of political practicality-really swallow the soothing bromides that men like Bush "grow in office," or "rise to the occasion," or some other outright miracle? Or were they intimidated into their display of stunted, smarmy patriotism? What motivated these new cheerleaders? Was it really a "theocratic fascist" threat to the world's mightiest superpower, always the innocent, which scared them? Or did a yen for protective coloration play a role? There was indeed a reasonable case for disagreement on the left, as earlier over the bombing of Serbia, or with regard to the need for a powerful response against

the *crimes* of 9/11 by Osama bin Laden and the Taliban who were protecting him and his Islamo-fascist thugs. But there is no sane reason why support for the attack on Afghanistan had to turn into what amounted to unqualified support for a war without end and "pre-emptive strikes" against any nation defined as an enemy by a whim of the Bush administration.18 Instead of promoting an alternative foreign policy to punish the criminal act by concentrating on capturing Osama bin Laden and re-building Afghanistan, alerting the public to the insidious dangers of the Patriot Act and the looming unification of all intelligence agencies under one virtually autonomous political appointment, or even how the war in Iraq was the second front in the war against the welfare state, our fellow travelers rubber stamped the set of basic beliefs underpinning a neo-conservative foreign policy.

Christopher Hitchens is the most spectacular case. He is also the least apologetic. The former secretary of the Oxford University Labor Club, who grew up amid the sectarian strife on the British Left, humbly insists that history is on always on his side. A terrific essayist and a remarkably intelligent man, a writer who took on Kissinger and Mother Teresa, one still nurses a faint hope that he'll snap out of it. One of us watched Hitchens in Chicago, just prior to the invasion, skillfully fencing with various dreary sectarian interrogators in the audience. Fair enough and well-deserved, but Hitchens dealt just as viciously with plainly "civilian" questioners. Some folks, like over-trained "killing machine" soldiers, just can't turn it off. Their own acuity gets in the way of reality.

Maybe that is the problem. Hitchens, in an essay on Whittaker Chambers, chidingly wrote: "The Cold War was fought just as hard in France or Germany or England, but without the same grotesque paranoia or the chilling readiness to surrender liberty and believe the absurd [as in the United States during the McCarthy era]."19 Hey, no kidding? Chambers' tragedy is that he ultimately lent "himself to the most depraved right-wing circles, whose real objective is the undoing of the New Deal and the imposition of a politically conformist America." One fervently hopes that Hitchens rereads his earlier works: they might spark some curative self-reflection.

For sure: he can still sling it with the best and worst of them. Hitchens' *Long Short War* rails at those today who "do not think that Saddam Hussein is a bad guy at all." It notes how those who protested the war were nothing but "blithering ex-flower child[ren] or ranting neo-Stalinist[s]." All the critics are beneath contempt: the need for an Iraqi invasion was self-evident and, if the policy hasn't worked, well then- surely-"history" will, sometime or other, make it turn out right. Just after 9/11, Hitchens wrote in *The Nation* that the reluctance by U.S. forces to carpet bomb Afghanistan showed "an almost pedantic policy of avoiding collateral damage.'" Maybe the warping began then. Oh, yes, and any effort to understand the sources of terrorism can only "rationalize" it. What sort of intellectual tells other people what is fit to think about? While one wonders at times whether Hitchens has literally lost his mind, it is still in many respects one to reckon with.

We keep remembering the old Hitchens. Take his zesty essay on Isaiah Berlin, which undermines Michael Ignatieff's reverential take on the crusty old boy, a vain if exceptionally erudite fellow given to justifying Zionism and hanging around during the Vietnam War with the

likes of the Bundys, William and McGeorge, perhaps because Sir Isaiah liked playing tough guy.20 It is the same with his acolyte. There are plenty of times to be tough: but the question is when to put up those fists. Ignatieff endorsed Bush's escapades on the fantastic notion that "liberal interventionism"-led by the virtuous United States, whether or not in conformity with international law and with, or without, backing from the United Nations-would save the world from itself.21 In *The New York Times*, reflecting the febrile verities of Rudyard Kipling, Ignatieff stated that the Persian Gulf is "the empire's center of gravity" where the United States must take up "the burden of empire."22 Now, of course, he too is "sorry": the war apparently was not carried out properly to his strategic satisfaction.

Let's not forget Paul Berman. For this decorated veteran of the 1960s, who has turned into a solid citizen while fighting for space in *The New York Times*, it seems that-following 9/11-the "entire situation had the look of Europe in 1939." When in doubt, follow the demagogue, and drag in Hitler: it may be a red herring but, what the hell, the tactic always works. Anyway, upon sagacious reflection, Berman, despite calling Bush "the worst president the US ever had," undauntedly reached the conclusion that the new imperialism "is not a pure power grab; it is not designed to control territory." After all, in spite of America's ostentatiously mixed motives, there are "many peoples who owe their freedom to an exercise of American military power."

Well, perhaps Bush really invaded Iraq to save its museums and libraries from the loutish locals. Ignatieff likewise says that, whatever the impure intentions and the mistakes of the United States, it would be so unfair to "discredit its humanitarian ideals."23 The fact remains that there are "many peoples who owe their freedom to an exercise of American military power." But, of course, there are also mass graves dotted around the planet, from El Salvador to Indonesia, which wouldn't need to have been dug except for American interference. Or have they simply, pardon the expression, disappeared? In any event, under the banner of "a liberal's war of liberation," the intrepid radical Berman let no opportunity slip to deride those prissy leftists who "worried about America's imperial motives, about the greed of big corporations, and their influence in white house policy; and could not get beyond their worries."24 How narrow their thinking was. How, by the way, did things turn out?

What on earth were these high-IQ dupes thinking? That a Bush-led "crusade" would stamp out religious fundamentalism around the world, and maybe even at Bob Jones University too? A pervasive plight, or ploy, is the same that John Kerry got himself into with his waffling reply that, knowing what he does now, he would have authorized Bush's war, but not necessarily Bush's actions. This dense mix of stubbornness and slyness is hard to penetrate. Everyone makes mistakes. But the difference is that when managers and coaches make them, and their teams suffer losses, they get fired while our unctuous pseudo left-wing pundits get another gig to explain why-if just those fools in office had done it differently-everything would be all right and justify a set of explanations that made no sense then and even less sense now.

"Few things are more dangerous," as Eric Hobsbawm observed, "than empires pursuing their own interest in the belief that they are doing humanity a favour." Or, for that matter, are as preposterous as liberal and leftist intellectuals who ride media shotgun for them. And in the

name of what: belief in a “just war”? Time to recall that by now, in October of 2004, more than 1000 American soldiers have died, 7000 have been crippled for life, and 20,000 have been wounded. More than 30,000 bombs were dropped on Baghdad in the first week of the war, somewhere around 50,000 Iraqis have probably been killed, and no one really knows-or, in the heartland, probably cares-how many more have been crippled and wounded.25 Hundreds of billions of dollars have been wasted, the ecological damage to the region is incalculable, an infrastructure has been destroyed, and a nation-perhaps even a region-stands on the brink of implosion. It was all obviously “necessary” say those who are now comfortably sitting in their offices and-while forgetting the famous dictum of Karl Rove, “if you want to win then *mobilize the base*“-pontificating about the need for young people to be *mature, responsible, and patriotic* so as not to piss off the “undecided” vote that may be slipping away in any case.

Nice to see that our fellow travelers have not shied away from taking a strong stand-and on such intelligent grounds. Seriously, though, it is precisely they who could have had a positive impact on the left and the Democratic Party. Almost all of the fellow travelers are well known public intellectuals associated with venerable journals like *Dissent* and *The New Republic* that, traditionally, acted as gadflies among the more left-wing elements of the political mainstream. But that time is now long past. Our fellow travelers aren’t interested in building a critical consciousness anymore. Quite the contrary. They actually helped create the ideological climate in which the Bush Administration could thrive and, in the process, gave its policies the type of intellectual cachet they did not deserve. This hindered the development of an alternative agenda. Looking down on the people in the streets, while sniffing the butts of the Democrats in office or grasping for it, the fellow travelers remain content to justify the compromises and vacillations of what Arthur Schlesinger, completely blind to the coming ideological onslaught of the right, termed “the vital center.” It is pathetic how far removed they are from the reality they claim to judge with such arrogance and authority. With their platitudes and cheap realism, indeed, they contribute to the further decline of what was once an estimable political culture of the left.

Notes

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1. Michael Walzer, “Can There Be a Decent Left?” in *Dissent* Vol. 49, No. 2 (Spring, 2002) After a Hitchens article on 28 September 2001 suggested journalist John Pilger and playwright Harold Pinter were inclined to express just such glee, *The Guardian* the next month apologized to both men, who suggested nothing of the sort.

2. Michael Tomasky, “Between Cheney and Chomsky: Making a Domestic Case for a New Liberal Foreign Policy” in *The Fight is For Democracy: Winning the War of Ideas in America and the World* ed. George Packer (New York, Perennial: 2003), pgs. 21ff. Note the stinging critique–that highlights the ignorance and prejudices of Paul Berman and other prominent contributors when it comes to the Middle East–by Anatol Lieven, “Liberal Hawk Down” in *The Nation* (October 25, 2004), pp. 29-34.

3. Adam Shatz “The Left and 9/11” in *The Nation* (September 23, 2002) and the searing response by Lawrence McGuire, “Eight Ways to Smear Noam Chomsky” in *Counterpunch* (October 9, 2002).

4. Todd Gitlin, “Varieties of Patriotic Experience” in *The Fight is For Democracy*, pp. 109, 110, 126.

5. Susie Linfield, “The Treason of the Intellectuals (Again)” in *The Fight is for Democracy*, pg. 166.

6. The Manifesto has been published as the “Appendix” to Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Just War Against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (New York, Basic Books, 2003), pgs. 182-207.

7. Ibid.1ff.

8. Michael Walzer, ““Justice and Injustice in the Gulf War” in *But Was It Just?: Reflections on the Morality of the Persian Gulf War* ed. David E. Decosse (New York: Doubleday, 1992), pgs. 1ff. Note also the essay by Jean Bethke Elshtain who, though she never explicitly took a position, warned us against triumphalism and cautioned that judging the conflict is “complex” in “Just War as Politics: What the Gulf War Told Us About Contemporary American Life,” in Ibid. pgs. 43ff.

9. Because he was defending an authoritarian and aggressive regime, “Saddam’s war is unjust, even though he didn’t start the fighting.” By the same token, since other “measures short of full-scale war were possible .. . America’s war is [also] unjust.” What to do? What to do? “Now that we are fighting [the war], I hope that we win it and the Iraqi regime collapses quickly. I will not march to stop the war while Saddam is still standing . . .” Michael Walzer, *Arguing War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pg. 160-1.

10. Ibid., pp.162-8.

11. Clarity is achieved, or so the author believes, once a sense of tradition and community is introduced. That will apparently help in interpreting the degree of peril posed by the perilous situation since “the license of supreme emergency can only be claimed by political leaders whose people have already risked everything and who know how much they have at risk.” Ibid. pg. 44.

12. Ibid. pgs. 138-142. See Ori Lev’s review of Walzer’s *Arguing for War* in this issue of *Logos*.

13. This is the condensed version of an article that appeared in the Winter, 2003 issue of *Dissent*. It appeared originally in an on-line symposium entitled “Writers, Artists, and Civic Leaders on the War sponsored by *openDemocracy.net*

14. UN bashing is mostly disingenuous or ignorant. There is usually little the UN can do

independently of the Security Council, where the US wields its veto and its overwhelming influence. See the fine account by Linda Polman, *We Did Nothing: Why the Truth Does Not Always Go Out When the UN Goes In* (London: Viking, 2003).

15. This can be found on the web under "Iraq on Death Row: A Status Report."

16. Check the four issues of *Logos* comprising volume 2, 2003.

17. Michael Lind, *Vietnam: The Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America's Most Disastrous Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 2002).

18. Note the discussion by Stephen Eric Bronner in "Gandhi: Non-Violence and the Violence of Our Times" in *Logos* Vol. 1, No.1 (November, 2001), pgs. (?). *www: logosjournal.com*

19. Christopher Hitchens, *Unacknowledged Legislation: Writer in the Public Sphere* (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 102, 105.

20. Hitchens, "Goodbye to Berlin," in *Unacknowledged Legislation,* pp. 138-139.

21. Of his Vietnam antiwar days marching with distasteful pacifists, Ignatieff says, Since I was anti-communist, I actually had more in common with the liberal hawks who thought they were defending south Vietnam against advancing communist tyranny. But I believed that nothing could save the weak and corrupt South Vietnamese government." See his "Friends Disunited," *The Guardian* 24 March 2003. There's principles for you.

22. Michael Ignatieff, "The American Empire (Get Used to It)" *New York Times Magazine*, 5 January 2003.

23. Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite* (New York: Minerva, 2003), p. 23. See Michael Neuman's scorching essay "The Apostle of He-manitarianism,' C*ounterpunch* 8 December 2003. www.counterpunch.org/neumann12082003.html

24. Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 2002), p. 192.

25. The casualty figures too are sources of controversy. Even by lowball" estimates the toll is shocking. See, for example, www.iraqbodycount.net. On the dubious use of numbers from the start see, for example, David Walsh Washington Conceals US Casualties in Iraq,' 4 February 2004, http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/feb2004/woun-f04.shtml

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Election 2004: The War For The White House And Media Spectacle

By | 2004: Vol. 3, No. 4

During a media age, image and spectacle are of crucial importance in presidential campaigns. Media events like party conventions and daily photo opportunities are concocted to project positive images of the candidates and to construct daily messages to sell the candidate to the public. These events are supplemented by a full range of media advertising that often attempts both to project negative images of the oppositional candidate and positive images for the presidential aspirant that the ads seek to support. In an era of media spectacle, competing parties work hard to produce a presidential image and brand that can be successfully marketed to the public. In this article, I sketch out some of the key structural elements of the media campaign spectacle, discussing primaries and conventions, advertising and spin, and the presidential debates, illustrating them with examples from the 2004 which is emerging as one of the most highly contested and media-mediated in recent history.1

Spectacles of the Primary Season and the Democratic Convention

The primary season requires that candidates raise tremendous amounts of money to finance travel through key campaign states, organize support groups in the area, and purchase television ads.2 While the primaries involve numerous debates, media events, advertising, and then state-wide votes for delegates, usually a few definitive images emerge that define the various candidates, such as the negative image in 1972 of Democratic party candidate and frontrunner Edmund Muskie crying on the New Hampshire state capital steps while responding to a nasty newspaper attack on his wife, or front runner Gary Hart hitting the front pages with a sex scandal, replete with pictures, in the 1984 primaries. Michael Dukakis was arguably done in by images of him riding a tank and looking silly in an oversize helmet in the 1988 election, as well as being the subject of negative television ads that made him appear too liberal and soft on crime and defense. Bush senior, however, was undermined during the 1992 election with repeated images of his convention pledge, “Read my lips. No new taxes” after he had raised taxes and doubled the national deficit.

Beyond political primaries, spectacles can make or break campaigns for the presidency as well. In 1980, Ronald Reagan’s decisive seizing of a microphone in the New Hampshire debates and insistence that since he was paying for the debate, he would decide who would participate produced an oft-repeated image of Reagan as a strong leader; in 1984, his zinging of Walter Mondale during their presidential debates (“There you go again!”) and making light of his age arguably assured his re-election. By contrast, Al Gore’s sighs and swinging from aggressive to passive and back to aggressive behavior in the 2000 presidential debates probably lost support that might have been crucial to his election and have prevented the Bush Gang from stealing

it.3

In the 2004, Democratic Party primary season, Howard Dean was for some time positively portrayed as the surprise insurgent candidate. An energetic Dean was shown nightly on television and he received affirmative publicity as front-runner in cover stories in the major national news magazines. Dean raised a record amount of money from Internet contributions and mobilized an army of young volunteers. As the time approached for the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries, however, images of an angry Dean increased and intemperate remarks, or critical positions taken out of context, made Dean look like a fire-breathing radical.4 While he received significantly more media coverage than any other Democratic Party candidate in 2003, Dean received almost totally negative coverage in 2004 and his campaign came to an abrupt halt the night of the Iowa primary. Coming in a distant third, Dean tried to energize his screaming, young supporters and to catch the crowd's attention when he emitted a loud vocal utterance, that followed an energetic recitation of the states he would campaign in. Dean's "scream" was perhaps the most-played image of the campaign season and effectively ended his campaign.

Howard Dean was the first to energize the Democratic Party base with fierce attacks on George W. Bush and his Iraq intervention and it was clear that the base was fired up and fervently wanted Bush out of the White House and retired to Crawford Texas. Hence, the issue of "electability" became the key issue for Democratic Party voters as the primaries began and John Kerry benefited from this concern and won primary after primary, capturing the nomination well before the convention.

Presidential elections always generate convention spectacles to sell candidate to a broader public, energize their respective party faithful, and to provide the rituals of democratic inauguration for the would-be president. The Democratic Party convention at Boston in late July 2004, attempted to present a spectacle of diversity and unity, using speakers from a variety of different ethnicities, genders, ages, social groups, and positions, all strongly affirming the candidacy of John Kerry.

During the third night of the convention, the theme switched to national security and "making America stronger," as a bevy of former military commanders took center stage to criticize Bush administration military and national security policy and to praise the virtues of John Kerry. In recent elections, it has become increasingly important to sell the personality and biography of a candidate, so much of the final night of the convention leading up to Kerry's acceptance speech featured Kerry's family and friends telling his personal story and affirming his strong leadership qualities and bedrock American values.

Presenting a spectacle of the triumphant warrior, Kerry staged an event in Boston Harbor where he arrived in a boat with his "band of brothers" who had served with him in Vietnam. The nam vets came on stage just before Kerry's speech and he was introduced by Vietnam vet, former Georgia senator Max Cleland, a three-limb amputee who had been the recipient of one of the nastiest campaigns in recent US history as the Karl Rove-led Republican Political Hit

Squad ran ads in the 2002 Georgia Senate race associating the highly decent and admirable Cleland with Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. The mudslinging media barrage insinuated that the war veteran Cleland was "soft" on terrorism, and helped enable a mediocre Republican, Saxby Chambliss, to pull off an upset victory defeat him.

Senator Cleland rose to the occasion, making a rousing speech about his personal trust in the strength and abilities of John Kerry and offering strong arguments that America would be safer and stronger with a Kerry presidency. The usually stiff and often lugubrious Kerry was limbered up for the occasion, beamed genuine smiles, and gave a vigorous, if sometimes too rapid, critique of Bush administration policies and articulations of his own policies on national security and domestic politics.

I generally watched the conventions on C-Span which gave unfiltered presentation of the Democratic convention spectacle, but when I did turn to the big four or news cable networks, I was generally appalled by the biased negative framing of the speeches and event. In the words of *Washington Post* media critic Howard Kurtz:

I was going to talk about Fox News's coverage of Al Gore's speech, but the fair-and-balanced network blew off the former veep's speech in favor of Bill O'Reilly. O'Reilly interrupted his segment to toss to the Gore address for about 40 seconds, then started to rebut Gore. When Jimmy Carter took the podium, Fox joined it late and got out way early. Instead, viewers were treated to an interview with Republican activist Bill Bennett. While Carter was talking, Sean Hannity told Bennett: "I call this the reinvention convention. One of the things the Democrats want to do is create a false perception of who they are." How would Fox fans know, since they weren't able to hear Gore (the man who won the popular vote last time) or former president Carter? What happened to "we report, you decide"? While Carter continued, Hannity played the video of Teresa Heinz Kerry telling a reporter to "shove it."

This is the kind of thing that makes critics question whether Fox has a Republican agenda. I've long argued that people should separate Fox's straight reporters from its opinionated talking heads. … But virtually pulling the plug on live coverage of Gore and Carter? How about letting them speak and then ripping them, or critiquing them, or whatever. The network is supposed to be covering the convention, not just using it as a backdrop.5

Obviously, the empty media spectacle of the conventions which turned them into political campaign ads has turned many viewers off and a July 28, 2004, *Reuters* report indicated that "Bare-Bones DNC Coverage Draws Lower Ratings." The four major TV networks (ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox) limited coverage to one-hour of prime time television viewing and audiences declined from 2000. While viewing was up for the three cable news networks' coverage, cumulative coverage of the entire convention was down. The second night the networks did not even offer an hour to the convention and the third night network hour that presented John Edwards' speech received 11% fewer network viewers then the Monday broadcast. Overall, in comparison to the 2000 Democratic convention viewing was down sharply on the networks, up for cable networks and down slightly as a whole compared to 2000.6

The one hour prime-time limitation meant that viewers of Network television did not get to see former Vice President Al Gore's opening night speech, or many other Democratic Party luminaries including Ted Kennedy, Wesley Clarke, Howard Dean, or Jessie Jackson. Shockingly, none of the networks run late night reprise of the highlights of the speeches of the day (with the partial exception of ABC's Nightline.

Of course, it is ultimately the responsibility of viewers and citizens to choose their own sources of information, and obviously US network television is one of the poorest sources of news and information. To be sure, there are alternatives: one of the novelties of the 2004 conventions was the presence of bloggers who presented moment-by-moment, or highly detailed, Internet coverage of the convention. Moreover, those seeking to see speeches neglected by television could often go to websites that collected the speeches, or transcripts of talks also readily found on many Internet sites. US network television is simply a national disgrace when it comes to covering US politics and a well-informed citizen cannot rely on corporate television to present the news and information needed to be a responsible citizen.

Another problem with network television coverage of US politics is what Paul Krugman calls "The Triumph of the Trivial" (*New York Times*, July 30, 2004). Krugman points out that study of transcripts of the major cable and broadcast TV networks reveals almost no coverage of John Kerry's plan "to roll back high-income tax cuts and use the money to cover most of the uninsured." Yet there was saturation coverage of Teresa Heinz Kerry's telling a newspaper reporter to "shove it." Tellingly, there was little attempt to contextualize even this event as few noted that the newspaper writer in question was a rightwing hatchet-man for Richard Mellon Scaife, who funded the attempts to smear the Clintons, and that the paper in question had repeatedly published personal attacks on Heinz-Kerry's previous husband Senator, John Heinz (R-Penn), and continually attacked her own activities, especially after she married Senator John Kerry.

Krugman also cites the frequent framing of John Edwards and John Kerry as "millionaires," a label rarely applied to Dick Cheney and George W. Bush, although they not only are multimillionaires, but push through economic policies that benefit the economic elite. By contrast, Kerry and Edward at least claim to represent the interests of the middle class and working people. Also important, Krugman notes, are stories that are not covered at all such as the Florida Republican party call to supporters to send in absentee write-in ballots because the new voting machines lack a paper trail and cannot "verify your vote," a position that flew in the face of Jeb Bush's contention that the new Florida voting machines were safe and reliable.

Perhaps the most irritating and recurrent scandal of US corporate media coverage of important elections concerns the focus on the horse-race dimension and the saturation coverage of polling. In 2000, the polls were wildly off which showed George W. Bush constantly ahead of Al Gore in the popular vote whereas Gore received more than a half a million more votes than Bush. Indeed, I would like to see all national polls downplayed significantly by media coverage: the key data are figures for states in the Electoral College, so national polls tell little about where the race is really going. In summer 2004, for instance, national polls generally showed a

dead-heat, and even Bush ahead on occasions, whereas the most in-depth state polls showed Kerry with a healthy lead in the necessary number of states to win the electoral college.

Framing Kerry and Bush

While the Democrats were battling it out for the presidency in the primaries and then inaugurating Kerry at their convention, the Republicans were using a record amount of money raised to purchase an unprecedented number of negative TV advertisements against John Kerry. The Bush ads highlighted Kerry's alleged flip-flopping, as he took opposed positions over the years on Iraq, national security, and other issues. In one irresponsible set of ads, Kerry was associated with Adolph Hitler, a highly ironic juxtaposition given that the Bush family earned its first major stash of money from selling its shares in Union National Bank which managed the major German firms which supported National Socialism since his grandfather Prescott Bush and great-uncle Herbert Walker, after whom Bush senior (41) and junior (43) were named, had managed businesses and financial interests for major supporters of German fascism.7

The first set of ads promoting the Bush presidency in early 2004 featured 9/11 imagery and a resolute war-time leader in George W. Bush, insisting that the country was "Stronger, Safer," words obviously chosen to be the mantra of Bush's re-election campaign. There was an immediate outcry against Republican exploitation of 9/11 in a political campaign and at this time Richard Clarke, former terrorism Czar in the Clinton and Bush administration, released a book, widely publicized TV interviews, and an appearance before the 9/11 commission arguing that pre-9/11 the Bush administration had completely ignored terrorism and that Clarke had not even been able to meet with George W. Bush.8

Moreover, Iraq became a featured Horror Show on the nightly news as its insurgency movement intensified, the deaths of American troops and Iraqis and others working for the US-imposed government escalated, and embarrassments emerged like the Abu Ghraib Iraqi prisoner abuse and torture scandals. Reports also came out that far from being safer, the number of terror attacks globally was on the rise and major studies of the effects of Bush's foreign policy on terrorism indicated that anti-Americanism had significantly increased and terrorists were recruiting large numbers of potentially deadly killers. Hence, the Bush administration was forced for the time being to find some new slogans to campaign for.

Meanwhile, the mainstream US corporate media had been presenting the same sort of negative framings of John Kerry that undermined Al Gore in the 2000 election. Several cable networks, including the Fox and NBC networks, seemed to trumpet daily whatever Republican National Committee talking points and negative Kerry ads were being produced. Hence, the rightwing pundits who dominate network news were parroting the Republican claim that Kerry had voted "against every major weapons system we now use in our military" (Sean Hannity, *Fox News*, 3/1/04) and Republicans liked to list thirteen to twenty-seven weapons systems that Kerry allegedly voted against. Later, it came out that in one single vote on the Pentagon's 1991 appropriations bill Kerry voted, along with many other Republican and Democratic Senators, to

cut a series of weapons systems, ones deemed obsolete or defective by then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney (see Peter Hart in the August 2004 *EXTRA!*).

The Republican attack machine also claimed that Kerry had tried to cut $1.5 billion from the intelligence budget without noting, as documented in a March 12 *Washington Post* story, that Kerry's proposed cut was smaller than the eventual $3.8 billion cut passed by the Republican Congress that wanted to eliminate mismanaged intelligence programs that wasted excessive funds. And in an ad called "Pessimism," Bush himself declared that "I'm optimistic about America because I believe in the people of America," while the ad tried to evoke an image of Kerry and the Democrats as "pessimistic" because of their negative spin on the economy. The Kerry team countered with an ad titled "Optimists," asserting that Kerry is bullish on America, which showed that both sides could engage in foolish and empty demagoguery.

But the major Republican spin after the Democratic convention was that in nominating John Kerry and John Edwards as the candidates for their party, the Democrats were putting forth the most liberal and fourth most liberal senators of their party. The numbers were plucked from a *National Journal* article on 2003 voting records. Although it was quickly revealed that the reason for the ratings was that Kerry and Edwards had missed a number of votes while out campaigning and thus scored atypically high on the liberal scale for 2003, overall, they did not score in the top ten for life-time vote ratings put forth by the same group. This intrusive little fact did not stop a bevy of Republican spinners from repeating over and over that the Democrats were advancing candidates more liberal than Hilary Clinton and Ted Kennedy.

The strategy of Big Lies was evident in the Republican convention that savaged John Kerry and promoted the Bush administration as the tough guy protectors against terrorism and compassionate conservatives who would take care of the country. Preparing for their opening night activities, the Republicans leaked that former NY Mayor Rudy Giuliani would try to assimilate Bush to Churchill, intoning: "Winston Churchill saw the dangers of Hitler, when his opponents and much of the press characterized him as a warmongering gadfly." While it is easy to see Bush as a warmonger it is hard to view him as Churchillian-or even as a gadfly. Giuliani presented a long, droning speech that constantly evoked 9/11 and Bush, defended Bush's Iraq policy as part of the war on terror, and generally presented Bush as a great wartime leader a la Churchill.9 The theme for the night was "A Nation of Courage" and 9/11 was evoked by speaker after speaker, a large choir sang a medley of Armed Forces theme songs, accompanied by a video of soaring jets, weapons, and US military forces, all exploited for Bush's re-election. In a mantra-like incantation, Giuliani intoned "9/11" over and over, making for great satirical footage the next day on Jon Stewart's *Daily Show*. Less humorous were the nasty Giuliani's attacks on John Kerry, repeating the often refuted claim that Kerry flip-flopped on the war and went from being pro-war to anti-war.

In a lackluster and surprisingly flat speech, John McCain claimed that September 11 had created a new world and that Bush had risen to the occasion as a great leader. There were incessant references, footage, and evocations of Bush and 9/11, as if Bush's mere connection with the moment should qualify him for re-election. While McCain tried to evoke

remembrances of American unity after September 11 and tried to convey that Bush had helped unify the country, the protestors outside and the large segment of the country that absolutely oppose Bush and his administration belied McCain's banal and dishonest rhetoric. But the highlight of McCain's speech was a reference to a "disingenuous filmmaker" who tried "to make Saddam's Iraq look like an oasis." Michael Moore was in the audience with a *USA Today* press pass and the delighted filmmaker stood up smiling and waving as the crowd turned to him chanting "Four more years!" Moore held up two fingers to signal that they only had two more months, and then held up his index finger and thumb in an L, a sign for loser by which Moore meant Bush, but it is doubtful that the semiotically-challenged Republican crowd got it.

Macho masculinity served as an undercurrent of the Republican convention, trying to evoke the image that Republicans are more manly than wimpy and Frenchified cosmopolitan Democrats, as war hero John McCain and tough-guy Rudy Giuliani stood center stage during Day 1 of the convention, while action-hero-turned-California-governor Arnold Schwarzenegger stood in the wings ready to swagger into the keynote position the following night. Not by accident these macho men are also among the few moderate Republicans with the party keeping its hardright power-cadre out of sight.

As Bush campaigned around the country and hit the top media venues in preparation for his triumphant entrance into the Republican convention, an NBC interviewer caught him admitting that "I don't think you can win" the war on terror. This statement led Democrats to run for the cameras to criticize Bush for being defeatist and flip-flopping from previous predictions of victory. But after realistically conceding that the war on terror does not have an end-point and is not a conventional war, Bush flip-flopped again the next day in a speech to veterans, thumping his chest and saying "We Will Win!" to get back on the macho track that the Republican convention is promoting. It is interesting that Bush often says impolitic things off the cuff, admitting, for example, that Iraq is a "catastrophic success" and that "miscalculations" were made in his Iraq policy. The part about Iraq as "catastrophic" is certainly true and one hopes that during the campaign Bush will be Bush and the public can see him as a dangerous incompetent and rightwing ideologue.

The motif for the second night of the Republican convention was "People of Compassion" with Karen Hughes and Karl Rove trying to orchestrate a spectacle that would resell "compassionate conservatism," a product that had perhaps produced some votes in 2000, but which had been roundly undercut by the Bush administration hardright extremism and militarism. Speakers included Education Secretary Rod Paige (whose Houston School District had been revealed to have fix numbers of students taking tests to illicitly boost their scores), and Senators Bill Frist (Tenn) and Elizabeth Dole (NC) to defend the Republican platforms on (severely limiting) stem-cell research, opposing gay marriage, and other not so palatable aspects of the Republican platform that had been approved earlier in the evening. Elizabeth Dole's husband had disgraced himself that week by brazenly smearing Kerry's war record and the president's father, the former president had said he trusted Bob Dole's word, even though Dole had misspoken in attacking Kerry. As noted, Dole and Bush senior's intervention made it clear that the smear campaign against Kerry was orchestrated and supported by the top

echelons of the Republican Party.

Oddly, for the second night in a row the main speakers provided no reasons whatsoever to vote for George W. Bush. While during the first night, speakers such as McCain and Giuliani stressed Bush's determination, resolve, and what Kerry calls his "stubbornness," evoking incessantly Bush's alleged "leadership" after 9/11, during the second night Arnold Schwarzenegger reprised the manly evocations of the previous night of how Bush was a great leader, while Bush's daughters and wife tried to project a more compassionate side of "Bushie." Many praised Arnold Schwarzenegger's speech as the best of the convention so far, but, like the other speakers, he did not have one positive thing to say about anything specific that Bush had accomplished or anything specific that he would do, except keep fighting terrorists. With Arnold generally puffing himself, extolling how great America is, and zapping Democrats as "Girlie Men" whose convention should have been called "True Lies," the only thing he managed to say about Bush sounded like a Nazi speech for Hitler, as Arnold gushed about Bush's vision, will, courage, perseverance, steadfastness, and capacity for action, gushing "He's a man of inner strength. He is a leader who doesn't flinch, doesn't waver, and does not back down." Heil Bush!

Watching the ecstatic Republican audiences eating up Arnold's empty banalities indeed looked like a fascist rally. After Arnold's entertainment, the Republicans turned to comedy and soft-selling promotion of Bush with the highly anticipated convention debut of his twins Jenna and Barbara. The twins joked how they have been working hard to say out of the headlines (i.e. out of jail for their drinking and wild partying) and then put on a failed stand-up comic routine, telling jokes about popular culture, sex and Barbara Bush senior, how their parents call each other Bushie, and other silly irrelevancies. A *Los Angeles Times* commentator wrote: "The Bush daughters, fresh from their booing this week at the MTV Video Music Awards in Miami, came onstage at the Republican National Convention on Tuesday night and introduced a new strategy in the war on terrorism: giggling. The strategy Tuesday, apparently, was to have sisters Jenna and Barbara humanize and soften the grim-faced Politburo image that dogs the Bush-Cheney campaign, which hasn't made much of an effort to court those young Americans who call it a good day if they've remembered to TiVo 'The Simple Life.' So here they were, girlie and giggly and glammed-up (Jenna in some kind of Juicy couture-looking track suit top over white pants, Barbara in a black cocktail dress)."10

The twins then introduced their father who was attending a local softball game in the boonies of Pennsylvania and as the game proceeded behind him, George introduced his wife Laura and the crowd went wild. Bush's wife Laura is believed to be one of his strongest campaign assets and she took center stage to tell the world how wonderful her husband was, to defend the war in Iraq for liberating women, and to advocate a "compassionate stem-cell research" that maintained "respect for life."

While the "compassionate conservative" Republicans had their love-fest in Madison Square Garden, the mean streets of Manhattan were occupied by militarist police who had arrested hundreds and were desperately trying to keep mobs of young protesters from harassing

Republicans on the way to Madison Square Garden, occupying hotels where Republican delegates were in residence, or attacking rightwing Bush-Cheney-connected corporations like Halliburton, the Carlyle Group, and Fox TV. A loose coalition of groups calling themselves A31 had promised a day of activism and non-violent protests on August 31. By the end of the day, over 1000 had been arrested, bringing the total arrests to over 1,600.

One group, the pacifist War Resisters League, planned for a "day of action" against Bush's war policies, including a march from Ground Zero to Madison Square and then a planned "die-in" to demonstrate the effects of Bush's wars. Accompanied by the newly formed Iraq Veterans Against the War, antiwar protesters were a prime target for the police, and 200 were arrested before the march even started. When another protest group was ordered away from Union Square, they were threatened with arrest by a policeman in front of a phalanx of shield-bearing officers. The crowd chanted "Go Arrest Bush" and then switched to "the police deserve a raise!" The group then marched 1,000 strong toward Madison Square Garden and police swarmed in and arrested 200 who refused to move when police surrounded them and blocked their entry. As Republicans entered the convention site, police helicopters flew overhead, cadres of cops with helmets and sticks stood ready for action, troopers on horseback paraded around the Garden, and NY looked like a police state.

In addition to having police in armed phalanxes of storm-troopers, formations on horseback, and squads of cars, buses, and motorcycles, there were plainclothesmen within the protest groups, some of whom had been police infiltrators and had the groups targeted for arrest. Wags speculated that the tens of thousands of armed police constituted the fourth largest military force in the world. Police deployed hi-tech surveillance cameras that provided panoptic views of every street and site in the protest area and had cadres of armed and dangerous forces sweeping upon the demonstrators when deemed appropriate, providing a show of overwhelming force as if New York were Baghdad. Using giant nets to literally scoop up protestors, the nets also captured many seniors who were just out on the streets observing the spectacle, as well as catching reporters, and tourists, who the police released if they so choose to do so, or often not.

Indeed, the Republican convention had been preceded by some of the biggest demonstrations in US history with as many as half a million protestors demonstrating against the Bush administration in a march before the convention started. Throughout the week, there were daily protests and arrests, infiltrations of the protestors into the convention and more protests and arrests. Perhaps never before had so many people in a city been so hostile to a political party having a convention in its metropolis and never before had such widespread and continuous demonstrations been seen at a US political convention, testifying to the utter hatred of the Bush administration and opposition to its policies. NY was like an armed camp and delegates were forced to travel through the city with police escorts.

The speeches by Bush and Cheney were anticlimactic and contained the same attacks they'd been mounting for weeks against Kerry. They could not really justify their Iraq war except by making it a main pillar of the "war on terror." September 11 was evoked constantly and Kerry's

comment on the Iraq policy in the presidential debate probably summed up most concisely the thrust of the Republican plan for the second Bush administration: “more of the same.”

The Debates

In a US presidential election, the debates are often the crucial determinant of an election. Although both parties work to forge messages and consensus during the primaries, present their candidate and program in a convention spectacle, bombard the airwaves with ads, organize daily media events, deluge the press and public with daily messages, and put together support groups who telephone, write, email, and text-message to try to win voters, the debates have focused national attention more than any other element in recent US presidential elections.

In the lead up to the debate, there had been a major media spectacle when CBS broadcast a segment of *60 Minutes* that produced documents which suggested the George W. Bush had indeed gone AWOL during his Texas National Air Guard service, had been disciplined by superior officers, and was given an honorable discharge under intense pressure. It soon appeared, however, that the documents were forged and media focus was on the CBS report rather than the facts of Bush’s military service.

The long-awaited moment of the Presidential debates finally came on October 1 in Coral Gables, Florida and it turned out to be one of the major spectacles of recent presidential politics. An eager-beaver Bushie strode out first and went on the offensive, walking so fast that he met Kerry beyond the midpoint of the stage, in front of Mr. Kerry’s lectern. Kerry then seized the moment, leaned over to chitchat with Bush, with his 6′4″ frame overwhelming the 5′ 10″ Bush. Kerry managed to grab Little George’s hand and hold on and continue bantering, as a flustered Bush tried to break away and return to his lectern.

John Kerry proved that he is one of the best debaters in the world, scoring point after point against the highly mediocre George W. Bush. Kerry was forceful, articulate and presidential, while Bush was defensive, confused, petulant, pouty, peevish, whiney, and inarticulate. While Kerry criticized Bush’s “colossal mistake” on Iraq and other blunders, the split-screen revealed the president to be frowning, shaking his head, blinking, squirming, angry, nervously scoffing water, and confused, obviously knocked off stride while hearing criticisms that somehow his handlers appeared to have previously protected him from. Overwhelmed by Kerry’s continual critique of Bush’s record and proposal of far more intelligent policies, Bush just didn’t know how to deal with it. A couple of times Bush interrupted as if he was going to make a killer point and then blanked out with his characteristic deer in the headlights empty look, and after painful silences sputtered out his “message” of the night, “I’m firm, resolute,” [Kerry] “changes his position,” “shouldn’t send mixed messages” (Bush used this about ten times), “stay on course,” and so on.

More than ten times, Bush emphasized how much “work” Iraq is and, by extension the presidency, and by the end of the debate it was obvious that forming sentences defending his

policies and communicating coherent positions was too much for the slacker president, who looked like he was ready for another long vacation in Crawford, Texas. It was clear from his debate performance that Bush does not speak in the form of argument or even sentences, but sputters code words to his base. Often, he would hunch up his shoulders, lean over the lectern, and try to speak directly to the camera, but usually repeated his set "message" lines and didn't really communicate anything of particular substance or interest, instead looking rather smallish in a scrunched-up and desperate attempt to say something memorable.

Hence, on the issue of style vs. substance that is often the focus of pundit discussion, Bush was terrible on style and weak on substance, whereas Kerry scored big on both. While there was worry that the rigid debate format and 32-pages of rules would inhibit spontaneous exchange and lead both candidates to simply regurgitate their standard stump speeches, in fact the exchanges were often dramatic, the differences in position and style were striking, and both candidates clearly revealed their opposed positions and personalities. Most observers found the debate to be an interesting and engrossing affair (although for Bush fans it must have been rather painful as the magisterial Kerry dominated the scene and Bush appeared not at all ready for prime time, much less the presidency).

Iraq dominated the debate and from the beginning Kerry put Bush on the defensive. Kerry rattled off all the high-level military officers who supported him, and soon after was asked by the moderator to indicate what "colossal errors of judgment" President Bush made. Kerry hit his stride, criticizing Bush's failure to get UN approval and significant allies involved in the Iraq venture, only going to the UN after his father's top advisors insisted on it, promising to go to war only as a "last resort," and rushing to battle without a plan to win.

As commentary on the debates began rapidly circulating in the media, most pundits admitted that Bush had a bad night and Kerry a good one, although some of the more mendacious Republican spinners just couldn't help not telling Big, Bold, and Brazen Lies. Fox News host Sean Hannity said of Bush, "I've never seen him more passionate, more on message, more articulate." And in Chris Sullentrop's summary: "Karl Rove must have known things didn't go well when the *New York Post* asked him whether this was the worst debate of President Bush's life. No, Rove insisted. This was one of the president's best debates, and one of John Kerry's worst. "Really?" asked the reporter, Vince Morris. "You can say that with a straight face?"

In fact, it had been Bush's worse debate ever and while many had thought that Gore had beaten Bush on debating points and substance in the first presidential debate in Election 2000, but that Bush had won on style and likeability, it would be hard to make this claim in the opening 2004 debate. Bush was whiney, petulant, and not particularly likeable. The Democratic National Committee released a tape the next day showing Bush's reaction shots and never before has a presidential candidate looked so — unpresidential.

Of course, the Republican spin machine was working overtime to marshal arguments against Kerry and to insist that Bush had made the stronger case. Yet the extent of Bush's poor performance was striking and noted in the media the next day, even by Bush supporters. It was

astonishing that Bush was not better prepared and had no memorable lines to zing at Kerry and that he had performed so poorly, arguably the worst performance in a recorded presidential debate in memory. Sidney Blumental argued the next day that Kerry effectively deconstructed Bush's epistemology of certainty and put on display Bush's intellectual vacuity and rigidity. As Kerry hammered Bush on position after position, he would stammer and say "I am certain that…," "I know that…," and other phrases of absolutism, while Kerry zinged him by arguing that "It's one thing to be certain, but you can be certain and be wrong." In Blumenthal's words, "For Bush, certainty equals strength. Kerry responded with a devastating deconstruction of Bush's epistemology. Nothing like this critique of pure reason has ever been heard in a presidential debate."

The first Vice-Presidential debate took place in Coral Cables, Florida on October 5 and, once again, it was a major spectacle with the old and wizened Dick Cheney attacking the young and vigorous Democratic candidate John Edwards' lack of experience and poor record, as well as fiercely assaulting the qualifications and record of John Kerry. Edwards retorted with a passionate defense of Kerry, sharp attacks on Bush administration policy in Iraq and the war on terror, and advocacy of Kerry-Edwards administration solutions to the domestic and foreign policy problems generated by the Cheney-Bush administration. There had not been in recent times in a presidential campaign debate such acrid personal attacks, sharp articulations of policy differences, and yield-no-quarter attacks on opponents. Both candidates fought so fiercely, however, that both seemed out of energy and arguments in the last thirty minutes or so of the debate. Hence, it was not a decisive victory for one side or another as most considered the first debate to be for Kerry.

Concluding Comments

The media have been a major determinant of the 2004 election campaign so far. Negative media coverage of the Bush administration during the 9/11 commission hearings, the Abu Ghraib scandal, and daily disasters in Iraq had created negative media images of the Bush administration that the Kerry campaign exploited to maintain a lead in most polls until the period leading up to the Republican convention in August when Kerry was hit by a wave of negative ads in the Swift Boat Veterans for Bush attacks and the Republican convention that savaged Kerry for an entire week. Kerry regained momentum with what was considered a major victory in the presidential debate and as I conclude this study in early October, most polls have the candidates in a statistical dead heat. So far, the momentum of the campaign has been media driven and it remains to be seen if major media spectacles intervene to decisively tip the election one way or another, or if the nitty-gritty work of political organization and efforts to get out the vote will be decisive.

Notes

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1. This text extracts from a forthcoming book to be published by Paradigm Press, *Media*

Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy: Terrorism, War, and Election Battles. Thanks to Dean Birkenkamp for support with this project, to Rhonda Hammer and Richard Kahn for discussion and editing of the text, and Steve Bronner for encouraging me to produce a text for *Logos*.

2. By August 2004, a record billion dollars had been raised by both candidates, double the amount for the previous year. See Thomas B. Edsall, "Fundraising Doubles the Pace of 2000." *Washington Post*, August 21, 2004: A01.

3. For details, see Douglas Kellner, *Grand Theft 2000*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001.

4. Many media pundits were cool for Dean from the beginning although he got much good press when the long-shot contender became a surprise front-runner. On the very negative coverage of the Dean campaign by the media punditry and corporate networks, see Peter Hart, "Target Dean. Re-establishing the establishment." *Extra!* (March-April 2004: 13-18).

5. See Howard Kurtz at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/nation/columns/kurtzhoward/.

6. See *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 2004: E23.

7. For documentation of Bush family support for key businesses involved with financing German fascism, see John Loftus and Daniel Aarons, *The Secret War Against the Jews*. New York: Saint Martins Griffin, 1994, 356-360, and Kevin Philips, *American Dynasty. Aristocracy, Fortune, and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush*. New York: Viking, 2004.

8. See Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies*. New York: Free Press, 2004.

9. **Adam Nagourney,** Giuliani Lauds Bush's Leadership on Terror as Convention Opens," *New York Times*, 31, 2004. http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/31/politics/campaign/31convene.html

10. Paul Brownfield, "No Joke, Twins' Act Needs Work," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 2004: A24.

Beyond The Vote: The Crisis Of American Liberalism

By | 2004: Vol. 3, No. 4

It almost goes without saying that one experiences a profound sense of bewilderment with each reading of the polls for the 2004 Presidential election. The statistical dead heat may have come as little surprise to some, but the unshakable anxiety that it invokes in those on the left is unquestionable, and the reasons are obvious. Here we have perhaps the most ruthlessly conservative and, indeed, most radically right wing administration of the 20th century. But even after the endless war against the environment and public assistance programs, the implementation of regressive tax cuts and a ballooning national debt, and finally the morass in Iraq with its endless errors-whether it be the invasion itself, Abu Ghraib, or its gradual descent into social chaos under the American occupation-the numbers have remained stubbornly fixed.

Even if the Democrats win, however, the result will reflect a sentiment that is less pro-Kerry than anti-Bush. Amazing is not simply the radical nature of the current administration, but the inability of the Kerry campaign-and the Democrats in general-to embrace more progressive, liberal themes and, in the end, respond to what are the most obvious needs of most Americans from jobs, social programs, the environment and international affairs. Critique exists in abundance, but the Democratic Party's paucity of vision, its ideological bankruptcy and inability to develop dearly needed political alternatives, is cause for genuine concern and exasperation. Claims that the American people are simply too populist, too disinterested and even too stupid are not really sufficient, even if there are partial truths to each of the charges. The problem is that the ideas that dominated American liberalism during the Progressive and New Deal eras-and which were decisively defeated by Ronald Reagan in 1980-have been abandoned by the Democratic Party. This has led to a kind of ideological and political paralysis: Democrats have found themselves courting not merely the middle class, but a five to ten percent sliver of undecided voters.

The Kerry campaign, in this sense, is suffering from a problem similar to that of the Gore campaign in 2000: namely, the inability to counter the political momentum of the neoconservative shock troops and, although they are not completely distinct, the wizards of economic neoliberalism. This inability has sprung from a crisis in American liberalism; from the degeneration of liberal political ideas into little more than mere market relationships and the worst forms of consumptive individualism. This revision of the liberal ethos has eroded the foundations upon which the Democratic Party once stood. No longer is it willing to emphasize social welfare, confront inequality through the state, or stave off anti-democratic threats to civil liberties. The result has been an abandonment of progressive social policy at a time when it is needed most.

Writers such as Thomas Frank in his recent book *What's the Matter with Kansas*, have drawn attention to this phenomenon. They speak of a "Great Backlash," a conservative-populist revolt against liberal culture which goes against the most basic economic and political interests of the people who support it most. But the real cause lies in the political unwillingness to renew and reinvigorate the vision of the Democratic Party and its fear of a politics of confrontation. Reversing this trend of unpragmatic pragmatism, in the first instance, requires a look back to the way that liberalism was understood in the early part of the 20th century so as to ground a renewed project of social democracy in American politics.

Transforming Liberalism

The most salient aspect of the modern crisis of political life in America has been a gradual shift from liberalism to populism. What writers such as Robert Putnam have described as a society suffering from a lack of "social capital" quite simply misses the larger context of the problem. The disappearance of the political, the erosion of civil society and the degradation of the public sphere all spring from the gradual colonization of society by what has been called "possessive individualism" and the logic of the market.

The Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács, as far back as 1923, called the phenomenon "reification." The insight was that as market capitalism continued to develop, and deepen its impact, its mathematical, instrumental, and egoistic logic would increasingly shape all elements of culture and society. Relations between people would become akin to market relationships; the entire way that individuals approached their world would be caste in market form, defined by the matter-of-factness of the cash nexus. The individual would increasingly turn his or her back on political or moral obligations and concerns, and would be recast as a consumer facing an endless fabric of commodities in a world without meaning or spirit. Reification has in this way come to define American culture and politics and it has had a serious effect in transforming our current understandings of liberalism as well.

In America, the transformation of liberalism began in the 20th century with the attempt to redefine liberalism wholly in economic terms. It placed emphasis on libertarian ideas of individualism and market coordination, something that would effect a reversal in the understanding of American liberalism as a political doctrine and the political self-consciousness of American political culture. Influential thinkers during the 20th century such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, among others, gave voice to the idea-one that would become central in American political life-that economic freedom was a precondition for political freedom. Society was no longer seen as an entity in itself-as prominent thinkers of the 19th century such as Emile Durkheim had argued-it was now considered little more than an assemblage of individuals, tied together by contract enforced by the laws of a minimal government. But the main aim of thinkers ranging from Hayek to Friedman was, essentially, to redefine what American democratic culture and politics had, by the time of the end of the Second World War, become: not a democracy that was privileging individualism and liberty but, rather, what these thinkers saw as a society bent upon "collectivism," socialism, and, in time, totalitarian communism. The future was a road to serfdom.

Understanding the conservative attack on these older themes of American liberalism is crucial for comprehending the current state of American politics and its drift rightward. This sustained attack has not only been political in nature, but ideological as well. It has been against what I will call here, after John Dewey, the "social liberalism" of the first several decades of American political thought and policy which emphasized a new conception of political and economic life and steered American democratic ideas down the path of social democracy.

What the contemporary manifestation of liberalism has been unable to provide is an ethical foundation for fighting the unrestrained dynamics of the market that have fragmented and reified the public life, alienated whole swaths of the middle class and working people from their most salient political interests, and contributed to an overwhelming breakdown of the public sphere. Social liberalism was the response to this same tendency in American life in the early 20th century, and looking back is useful. One thinks of the influential figures of the Progressive and New Deal eras-now sadly forgotten but, without doubt, just as relevant as ever in the current context-such as Herbert Croly, Walter Weyl, Thurman Arnold, Rexford Tugwell and Nathan Straus, to name only a few. The new interpretation of democracy and liberalism they set out to construct was one that emphasized the social nature of individual and political life as opposed to the laissez faire individualism of the 19th century. Placing emphasis on the social dimensions of political life and the mythology of laissez faire capitalism meant that what Marx had called man's "communal essence" became for thinkers like Dewey "social liberalism": individuals were not autonomous entities, they were socially constituted; each of us relied on complex systems-from the division of labor to bureaucracy-to survive and flourish under the conditions of modernity and especially under capitalism. This was set against all previous understandings of liberalism, of "classical liberalism" specifically, which saw individualism in simplistic, atomistic terms more akin to Newtonian physics than to the complex realities of modern life.

As a major shift in the understanding of American political, social, economic and cultural life social liberalism was a vigorous assault on the destructive laissez faire ideology and politics of its time. It reoriented the political discourse and changed, deepened the understanding of democracy. It responded to the needs of huge segments of the population-specifically working people-and allowed the Democratic Party of the time to advance an alternative political vision against the provincial views of America firsters and the authoritarian racism of figures like Huey Long. And, indeed, it was seen at the time that this reorientation of political ideology possessed an *evolutionary* character: the social ills of the 19th century with its massive social disorder, disastrous levels of unemployment, and massive economic inequality would all be overcome. For this new generation of thinkers and social scientists, liberalism had evolved; it had shed the skin of crude individualism and now faced the complexities of the modern world with a new, progressive outlook toward social integration, material equality and distributive justice.

But what we have seen in the last two and a half decades is the degeneration of social liberalism and, as a consequence, its gradual inability to provide vigorous alternatives to the current neoconservative project, which itself has appropriated the old individualistic and Social

Darwinist version of economic liberalism. It is an interpretation of liberalism that emphasizes the rights to property and economic liberty and conservatives have been successful in meshing this with populist concerns about big government-one can think of the political potency of tax cuts in this regard. This transformation of liberalism has led to the timidity of the Democratic Party, the rightward drift of organizations such as the DLC and the inability of Democratic candidates at all levels to connect the interests of the majority of Americans with their own agenda. Democrats have seen the erosion of their traditional political base and it has been unable to respond to the neoconservative attack on its traditional policy aims and prescriptions.

A post-industrial context has indeed eroded the older forms of class organization and labor politics; but it is absurd to think that the fundamental interests of working people and the economic issues of everyday life are no longer relevant to the Democratic Party; but there has been the dual effect of a cultural movement toward consumptive individualism and, at the same time, the formation of libertarian liberalism. The social democratic tradition that was emerging in the early decades of the 20th century therefore constituted the beginnings of a new political tradition in American politics, one that the Democratic Party had been instrumental in translating into practice. It is a matter of refashioning this tradition, adapting it to contemporary needs and problems that requires attention lest the neoconservative vision continue to rearrange our institutions and reorient the ends of social policy.

The importance of social liberalism should therefore be seen for what it is. The Democratic Party's move away from these older themes and commitments is only in part the result of an ideological shift. There can be little doubt that what Thurman Arnold had called the "folklore of American capitalism" in 1937 has now become a resurgent religion that has overtaken American political and cultural life. Since American liberalism has been largely stripped of its previous political content and has returned to the atomistic understanding of individualism of the past, it has undermined what Walter Weyl-as far back as 1912 in his book *The New Democracy*-called America's "socialized democracy": a kind of democracy that would place public interest over that of the individual; use the state to harness economic means for human ends; and end the long drift toward social atomism and political fragmentation that the 19th century had witnessed.

Although it is important to discuss ideology, there is also a material component to the story. The ideological transformation of liberalism has found fertile soil in the sociological shifts of the last several decades in American capitalism. From the decline of the industrial working class, the dissipation of unions, the rise of a post-industrial working culture-all have eroded the former political base of the Democratic Party. It has also effected a move away from collectivist approaches to solving economic and social problems. This should be seen in tandem with the gentrification of huge segments of working people-almost entirely the result of the policies that social liberalism had made possible-and the overall erosion of class consciousness. This has allowed a situation to emerge where Republicans and their conservative project have been able to merge the interests of capital with a market populism that uncritically accepts the consequences of markets and which has legitimized the market as the most rational,

democratic and fair institution to distribute the “fruits of labor.”

Indeed, the New Deal may have been able to translate many of these ideas to the needs of a workers’ movement that was on the move and organized, but both are situations that have eroded leaving what we could call “establishmentarian” liberalism with little more than moderation in the face of the relentless onslaught of a renewed conservative political, economic and cultural agenda, and there should be no mistaking that it is precisely this radical project which has gained support from this redefinition of the majority of liberal ideas and values. The culture of consumption-the real basis of American capitalism-could only become possible once reification had set in to present levels. Once individuals were transformed from political citizens to citizen-consumers, the public square transformed into the shopping mall, only then did this older, atomistic form of liberalism resurface and finally colonize the mindset of American thought.

The Resilience of Reaction

Every revolution produces its own counter-revolution; each progressive move toward embracing a more just social order suffers from reaction. In this respect, the virtues of social liberalism still need to be understood in order to understand the nature of the backlash and what this means for American politics. Indeed, social liberalism was able to merge the concerns of economic inequality as well as the assimilation of ethnic minorities and cultural difference. It did not see liberalism as a doctrine of simple toleration, but of the dissemination of civic education and public values. Universalism was privileged over particularism, and the ideal of “social liberalism” was to promote individualism in thought but solidarity through rational laws and universally recognized moral ends. Indeed, religion and ethnic identity in America were never small parts of everyday life, but the religious populism that has underpinned Republican elections since the ascendancy of groups like the Christian Coalition in the early 1990s, has not been the only evidence of the return to religion and its more pernicious effects. The decay of social liberalism-which began with the white backlash against the civil rights movement-has also seen an increased tribalism among religious and ethnic minorities and groups, given rise to a renewed white backlash, called the value of diversity into question, and has made social bonds between different groups and individuals more tenuous, more distant and less conducive to the universalistic dimensions of democratic political life.

We have become accustomed to seeing politics in broad geographic terms. The 2000 election saw the emergence of a new pattern of political geographic voting patterns: a division not simply between red and blue states alone but between urban and metropolitan areas on the one hand and suburban and rural ones on the other. This was a reflection of an emerging split that had been decades in the making. Whereas Kevin Phillips had seen an “emerging Republican majority” rising out the Southern and Southwestern “Sunbelt,” the economic shifts toward mass suburbanization and the cultural divides that this shift entailed made the split between conservatives and liberals ever more acute. It was a shift that began to move the geographical and cultural hegemony of the Northeast to the South and Southwest where everything from labor laws to attitudes toward religion and secularism were in radical contrast.

It was with this shift in the early 1970s that the liberal consensus began to break apart. Unleashed by the populist white backlash to the Civil Rights movement-as well as the shift of economic dominance from the Northeast to the South and Southwest-conservative politics also fused the imperatives of pro-business entities to form the pivotal turn in American politics and ideology since the end of the 19th century. The terrain for this political conflict has been regional and widespread. It has sparked a clash of cultures in America: a serious divide between the interests and cultures of two different Americas, largely divided between urban, liberal, cosmopolitan and metropolitan areas and the massive suburbs and rural areas that dominate the periphery and, in some states, the very heartland of America. This is not simply the classic opposition between what Marx called "the town and the country"; the significance of this divide is meaningful since it reinforced a spatial, racial and ideological divide between working people, severing their common interests.

But it is only by linking the concerns of working people together in class terms that a kind of social liberalism can once again reemerge. And this requires an emphasis on class interests: on the inability for working people of all kinds-from the working poor to those solidly within the middle class-to afford basic healthcare, to afford housing, have access to quality education, and so on. Only by remaking the kind of anti-aristocratic discourse that has dominated American political thought and rhetoric can Democrats steer a conservative populism to the social democratic ends and universal themes of economic citizenship and more robust forms of democratic politics. Without question, the radical critique of capitalism and inequality was moderated by the New Deal, but there is no questioning its progressive implications. Only by emphasizing the flaws of the market, the asymmetrical relationships of power it has created, and the various ways that the interests of capital have shattered the foundations of modern democracy and the lineaments of the American social contract can the Democratic Party hope to regain its previous political commitments and begin forming a renewed political base.

Ideology-banished to the periphery of America's "pragmatic" politics-therefore needs to be brought back into the spotlight. A renewal of politics can come only from the renewal of vision, albeit one grounded in material interests and concerns. And no matter how we choose to characterize the politics of the present, the need to transform American political culture has as its centerpiece the need to confront and reorient the contemporary liberal discourse. As Louis Hartz acutely pointed out in the 1950s, America's political culture was wholly defined by the doctrine of liberalism. Irrespective of this is, America has also been able in the past to transform its liberal doctrine into something more progressive and more deeply democratic, "socialized," than what we know at present as "liberalism." Without an alternative understanding of American political life, the commitments of government, and the articulation of the moral needs of society over that of rampant individualism, the Democratic Party will scarcely be able to do more than work in the shadow of the machinations of the Republican Party. And the Democrats cannot spark renewal without themselves looking to the rational left, to the social democratic tradition that was itself emerging with the influential ideas of the New Deal and the Progressives and reformulating and rebuilding the one true intellectual and political movements in American political history that would bring any semblance of real equality and social justice to fruition.

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What John Kerry Won't Say About The "two Americas"

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Campaigning with a running mate who has made his lament about the existence of "two America's" his political trademark, John Kerry promises to create real opportunities for ordinary Americans. But a careful reading of the 2004 platform suggests just how much further the Democratic Party has to go before it has a credible response to the economic forces ripping America apart. Certainly, any imaginable Democratic president would do less harm to the average American than the Bush administration already has – even if that Democrat did nothing at all. But even were Kerry's exceedingly modest proposals to be fully implemented (itself a rather unlikely prospect), they would do very little to bridge the growing gap between the rich and nearly everyone else.

The Growing Gap

To fully gauge the limits of Kerry's proposals, we need first to understand the depth of the problem.[1] There are a variety of ways to measure economic inequality, but the simplest is to consider what the Census Bureau calls the "quintile" share of aggregate income, in other words how much of what all Americans earn goes to people in various positions on the income ladder. This methodology is straightforward: line up the approximately 109,000,000 American households in income size places; divide into five equal (in terms of the number of households) groups (i.e., quintiles); add up the total household income in each quintile; compare that total to the total income earned by all households. (A household consists of all people occupying a single housing unit, whether or not they are related.)

Do this simple statistical operation and several things jump out. First, upper-income households take home a wildly disproportionate share of what Americans earn. The top fifth of households get fully half (50.1%) of the total, while the bottom fifth are left with a very measly 3.5%. The affluent (the top 5% of households) are doing especially well. This narrow slice of America took home nearly one-quarter of all household income in 2001. That America is a class society should shock no one. The U.S. has always tolerated far more economic inequality than conservative ideologues would ever admit. But things are getting worse fast. Since 1978, the share of the best-off households has increased nearly 15% while the bottom fifth's share dropped by nearly 19%. The top 5% have been especially fortunate. Their share has surged by 38%.

This is about more than Bill Gates and Donald Trump. Because most Americans actually earn very little, It takes less than many imagine to make it into the golden circle. A household income of just $83,500 was enough to make it into the top 20% in 2001. Put another way, four out of five American households earn less than $83,500 at a time when the costs of everything from housing to education to health care are skyrocketing.

When we do focus on the share of the very rich, the chasm between rich and poor is startling. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), as the most robust economic expansion in decades was peaking in the late 1990s, the average after-tax income of the top 1% of American households ($677,900), was 63 times the average after-tax income ($10,800) of the poorest fifth. This top 1% took home almost as large a share of total income as did the bottom 40%. In other words, the richest 2.6 million Americans earned almost as much as the least well-off 100 million.[2]

But what about the leveling effect of those nasty federal taxes? This CBO report looked at *after-tax* income, in other words what people had left over *after* the progressive income tax had supposedly done so much harm to the overtaxed rich. When we take into account the distribution of wealth another very good measure of who has what we see an even wider gap: the wealthiest 1% of American households now own nearly 40% of *all* of the nation's wealth.[3]

This is not just a matter of statistics. Economic inequality strips people of real opportunity. It restricts access to health care and social services. It affects who's most likely to be a victim of a violent crime. It leaves workers and the poor saddled with consumer debt that they will struggle all of their lives to pay off. It results in residential segregation by class which, in turn, makes for unequal schools and vocational opportunities. It leads people to take jobs that they hate, that expose them to serious risks, that might even kill them.

Nor is this just the fate of a small subset of unfortunate Americans who happen to find themselves at the very bottom of the income scale. Thirty six million people live below the official poverty line, and that line is exceedingly low: about $14,500 for a family of three (single parent and two children), $18,300 for a family of four (two parents and two children). But even these numbers underestimate the problem: by almost any measure, the bottom 40 percent-the 44 million households that make less than $33,314 a year-is struggling. The middle class is suffering too. In fact, every quintile's share of total income *except the top fifth* has declined since 1978.

Meanwhile, the people who run corporate America have fared quite nicely. In 2002, the median compensation of the CEO's of the largest 100 companies was $33.4 million. And nearly one-third of these honchos got $50 million or more. This was at a time when the mean annual wage in the United States was just $35,560 and many of the corporations that these CEOs were running were struggling just to turn a profit. Some would suggest that it's the nature of the beast, but It wasn't always this way: between 1970 and 2002, the ratio of the average compensation of top CEO's to the average worker's pay increased five fold.[4]

When we factor race and gender into the equation, things look even bleaker. People of color are far more likely than whites to be poor: the poverty rates of blacks and Hispanics are nearly twice as high as the white poverty rate. The poverty rate for black and Hispanic *children* is *more* than twice as high. Black and Hispanic median incomes are also substantially lower (around 2/3) than white median incomes, while black and Hispanic families have far fewer assets. The asset gap is especially striking: the median net worth of white families in 2001 was $120,900-not in and of itself very impressive since it's mostly equity in houses and cars-while the median net worth of non-white families was a meager $17,100. Women are also more likely than men to be poor, whether they live alone, or head single-parent families.

Why Inequality is Getting Worse

The limits of Mssrs. Kerry and Edwards vision is clear when we consider what's behind these trends and what it might take to reverse them. The bad news is that rising economic inequality in the U.S. is the result of some very powerful forces that are ripping societies apart worldwide. This is not to absolve the U.S. of responsibility for what is, in comparative perspective, a particularly harsh and unforgiving brand of capitalism. As is well known, there is a bigger gap between rich and poor here than in other Western democracies. The U.S. also has an exceptionally high poverty rate, particularly among children. In the mid-1990s, among members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), only Mexico's was higher the U.S. even beat out Turkey for this singular honor. Only America refuses to extend health insurance to all citizens as a matter of right, leaving 45 million people without coverage.

Certainly, the failure to spend more on social purposes is one reason why inequality is greater here. Capitalism is everywhere a class society of course. But governments that spend more have a greater chance of equalizing income and opportunity because government programs can shield individuals from the play of free market forces-the very same forces that are the ultimate source of economic inequality. At 35.3%, the share of government in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is less than in any other advanced capitalist society and less than three-quarters of the European average.

Some have suggested that the U.S. government is smaller because America shares with other English speaking nations an "Anglo-Saxon" cultural preference for markets and individual initiative, and a corresponding antipathy to collective action. To be fair, the U.S. is more like the other English speaking democracies on these measures. But *even among this group*, it is at the low end of the spectrum.

The U.S. also spends a far smaller proportion of its GDP on specifically social purposes-the real test of whether government intends to do anything about inequality. The GDP share spent by the U.S. government on social programs is less than half of Sweden's; just slightly more than half of Germany's; less than 60% of Great Britain's; just 80% of Canada's-the only rich OECD country that even comes close on this measure. By spending so much less on social programs, the U.S. makes sure that markets have the final say about who gets what.

Recent conservative policies have obviously made things worse. In particular, changes in marginal income tax rates in the U.S. in the last two decades combined with cuts in programs targeted on the most needy have reduced the tax burden of the very wealthy while leaving the poor more vulnerable.

But it's important to note that the U.S. is not the only capitalist society under siege and that recent tax and spending policies cannot entirely account for the rapid increase in inequality. The rich countries of the West have all been rocked by similar economic and political forces in the last few decades.

The economic problem is, no surprise, capitalism. Inequality is built into the structure of this system-only some people can own and run the economic behemoths that dominate a capitalist economy; most of the rest of us end up working for them. But today's hyper free-market version has made things much worse. Increased international trade (and the concomitant competition that comes in its wake) and the worldwide spread of new technologies have put enormous pressure on the wages and benefits of low-skill, blue collar and service sector workers. At the same time, people with scarce skills, or money to invest, have seen their incomes soar. Returns to education are especially important in the "new" economy. College graduates earn more and are less likely to be unemployed than people who've never been to college, and both groups are doing far better than people who've never graduated from high school. And compared to waged work, the returns to both capital and self employment have been rising considerably.

The political part has to do with changes that have made it nearly impossible to sustain the kind of reformist commitment that defined democratic politics for nearly a hundred years. From the late 19th century to the end of the 20th, liberal and social democratic governments sought to impose limits on the inequality resulting from unequal market incomes. That's what the welfare state was about. Even the U.S. adopted spending and taxing programs to mitigate capitalism's worst effects.

But in the late 20th century, just as the problem got worse, the political will to challenge inequality began to wane. Political analysts have suggested all sorts of reasons for this ground shift, including the impact of heightened global competition on export-oriented economies, the aging of the population, sharper racial, ethnic, and language conflicts, increased immigration, and the political mobilization of corporate interests and the affluent against the taxes that fund costly social reform.

But whatever the precise mix of political causes, the effect is incontrovertible. As the political spectrum has shifted to the right, few governments have been willing to sustain, let alone renew, the effort to make capitalism more equal. To the contrary, in combination, these forces have ripped apart the political compacts between capital and labor that were forged in the aftermath of World War Two, putting enormous strains on government budgets and welfare state programs. Everywhere in the West, including in the social-democratic states of Northern Europe, efforts to equalize opportunity have faltered. Data collected by the OECD show the

impact quite clearly. Throughout the West, upper-income groups typically receive a greater percentage of household income than they did thirty years ago. Not every country has suffered equally. Canada and Finland seem to have bucked this trend, while Denmark, Germany, and France have avoided the worst of it. But egalitarians are fighting an uphill battle everywhere.

What Can Be Done Now and Later

Because politics is also at play here, we still have political choices to make-even in the U.S. What then would a progressive approach to inequality look like in America and what would it take to make it happen? The short answer is that it will require major changes on both the political and institutional fronts to stop, let alone reverse, the economic trends outlined above.

For one, the U.S. needs to spend more, not less, on the welfare state. This flies in the face of accepted wisdom in Washington, but as long as the fiscal instruments available to government (the various taxing and spending programs) remain even mildly progressive (because most benefit programs are means tested, they do), growing government is a good thing. Leaving markets alone to address people's needs will only drive incomes further apart. That doesn't always mean that New Deal or Great Society versions of "big" government are preferable; as a rule, it makes more sense to see government as a "partner," allowing grass-roots and other participatory movements to join with public authorities to make needed social changes. But in many cases, from education to job training, more spending *is* the answer. This is especially true if the U.S. is to finally have some form of national health insurance, or, equally important, real "welfare reform"-a welfare system that would provide poor parents who take jobs the income and support services they need to keep them and their children out of poverty.

The labor movement will also need to change. Without more workers in stronger and more militant unions, employees (organized and unorganized) will not be able to capture whatever productivity gains emerge from the new economy. Strong unions are not a panacea. For one thing, labor will have to take more seriously the fight for social programs, like universal health insurance, that matter more to non-unionized than to unionized workers. And even if labor were to grow stronger, it would still face an uphill battle. European unions, typically stronger than American unions, have also found it hard to resist these economic trends. But a more powerful American labor movement would be better able to fight against the growing dispersion of wages among workers and, equally important, fight for a more generous welfare state. If the labor movement is to grow, the U.S. also needs serious labor law reform, if only to make sure that the millions of workers who say that they want to join a union have the opportunity to do so.

In order to help the poor, the minimum wage must be increased substantially. The scandalous decline in the minimum wage's real value – from $7.10 in 1970 to $5.15 in 2000 (in 2000 dollars) is one important reason that so many working families are poor. It's a simple problem with a straightforward remedy: a "living" not a "minimum" wage; $12.00 an hour, not $7.00.

To help the working and middle classes, the tax "reforms" of the last two decades must be

reversed. The shameful redistribution of the tax burden downward must be a top priority of any progressive movement; it's especially important to raise rates on upper income groups who have benefited mightily from three decades of economic growth but are no longer paying their fair share of the government's bills. The left should also work for aggressive tax enforcement, closing loopholes that cost the federal government billions of dollars. Without real tax reform, expanding welfare state spending will not have the equalizing impact it once did. In turn, tax reform should be joined to a frontal assault on "corporate welfare" as well as a very hard look at military spending, which is too often just another public subsidy to the defense industry.

To deal with the impact of global trade on wages, the U.S. must coordinate "fair" trade policies with its trading partners, including less developed nations, in order to establish real labor and environmental standards. This would involve more than Kerry's rhetorical assault on "outsourcing" and "Benedict Arnold" corporations. It would mean a substantial commitment to helping poorer countries develop their own economies and to support reform movements in those societies that are fighting to improve living standards for those workers too. Progress on this front would reduce pressure on everyone's wages.

From this perspective, the Republican and Democratic contributions to the debate about economic inequality seem either willfully ignorant of the underlying reality or too ready to downplay what really needs to be done.

Not surprisingly, Republicans ignore the problem, arguing that more business investment will make everyone richer. Occasionally, one or another conservative will add some bromide about making this an "opportunity society"-Bush's hauled this tired trope out again at the 2004 Republican National Convention to remind voters of his populist pretensions. But given what is happening in America today, the idea that sheltering investment income and corporate profits, partially privatizing social security, and creating Medical Savings Accounts will create greater opportunity for the poor and working class is laughable; these "reforms" will only worsen the class divide because the affluent will benefit disproportionately from them.

Even were the economy to grow as rapidly as the right promises it will, it would not in and of itself produce greater equality. Ignored is the fact that while the American GDP has tripled in real dollars since 1960, real wages have only risen about 50%.[5] The gap between the average household income in the top 1% and the average household income in the middle fifth more than doubled between the late 1970s and the late 1990s.[6] So much for free market miracles.

In fact, the right's job growth policies make matters worse. Bush's pro-investment tax cuts have made public spending in the U.S. less, not more, progressive by heavily skewing the pay out to the very wealthy: the top 1% of households are getting one third of the benefits.[7] Bush's cuts have also created a fiscal nightmare in which any future effort to reduce the burgeoning deficit will lead inexorably to demands to increase taxes on the working and middle classes (through, for example, a national sales tax) and/or to cut the safety programs that the average American depends upon (e.g., Social Security and Medicare).

Kerry is more forthright about the problem of inequality and has some good suggestions. Unlike Bush, he's willing to admit that "Americans are working harder, earning less, and paying more for health care, college, and taxes." Many of his proposals are also sensible.

To create good jobs and prepare Americans for them, Kerry offers a number of perfectly reasonable suggestions. He wants stricter enforcement of the environmental and labors standards found in existing trade agreements; an expansion of the Trade Adjustment Assistance program to help displaced workers; federal subsidies to increase research and development in new technologies and manufacturing; increased funding for K-12 schools and for day care; and a moderate increase in the minimum wage (to $7.00). He also supports "card check" unionization to make it easier for workers to join unions.

To provide "affordable, high quality health care," Kerry proposes a number of incremental proposals that would expand coverage and maybe even lower some costs. He proposes to extend Medicaid coverage to all children; to allow re-importation of drugs from Canada; to allow HHS to negotiate drug prices with drug companies; to provide tax credits to help small businesses pay for health insurance; and to relieve employers of responsibility for catastrophic health care (costing more than $50,000) if they extend health care coverage to their employees.

To pay for all of this, Kerry proposes to repeal the tax cuts that Bush showered on families earning more than $200,000 a year. The problem is that even taken together, these ideas are a modest response to a very large crisis. There is no suggestion that under Kerry the U.S. would alter its basic approach to economic growth, job creation, or income distribution. Rather, these proposals refocus, expand, better fund or otherwise adjust existing programs despite very little evidence that any of these program, or even all of them in combination, could do much to close the growing gap between rich and poor. At best, we might hope to staunch the bleeding, but a real cure is not in the offing.

Making matters worse, Kerry also throws some rather bad ideas into the mix. To create "good paying" jobs, he wants to cut corporate income taxes. To help pay for new programs, he wants to adopt "pay as you go" rules on federal spending-budget rules that, if implemented, would likely force cuts in other equally deserving programs serving other equally vulnerable constituencies.

Corporate conservatives argue that even these modest proposals are foolish: any effort by labor or government to increase American wages will put American employers at a competitive disadvantage, resulting in further job losses. Higher wages and higher taxes are, they say, the reason why European unemployment rates are so much higher than those in the U.S.

But were America to take this high wage, high benefit path, other countries, both rich and poor, that compete with the U.S. might be able to avoid the ruinous wage competition that now threatens standards of living everywhere. In concert, "fair traders" might even be able to alter the rules of international trade in ways that could allow all countries to act more humanely, to

take labor standards seriously, and to protect the environment.

Still, it is worth asking whether anything bolder than Kerry's modest proposals are politically feasible at this time. Everywhere in the West, even in political systems where the left is far stronger, movements advocating serious social reform are clearly on the defensive. No one in or near the U.S. government is prepared to take multinational corporations on directly. Cuts in defense are especially problematic in the midst of what is likely to be a never-ending and politically opportune War on Terror.

Nonetheless, the left should raise these issues every time someone talks about the "two Americas." It's not enough to empathize with the working poor or worry about shrinking opportunity for the middle class. We need to make clear the political-economic roots of this crisis and the impossibility of addressing it without structural reforms.

One place to start would be with the political institutions themselves. Unless the U.S. seriously limits the role of private money in politics, rolls back media concentration, and institutionalizes authentic, grass-roots participation in political decision making, no one in power is going to feel the need to do much more than talk about the two Americas.

Notes

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all data on income inequality by quintile, income shares of the top 5%, and changes in income inequality over time are taken from the U.S. Census Bureau series "Historical Income Tables Households," found at http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/inchhtoc.html. Data on poverty in the U.S. are from the Current Population Reports series, "Poverty in the United States" and found at http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p60-222.pdf. Data on income and poverty rates by race, gender, and education are taken from the *2003 Statistical Abstract of the United States*, found at http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/03statab/income.pdf. Comparative data on income inequality and poverty in the West are from Timothy M. Smeeding. "Globalization, Inequality and the Rich Countries of the G-20: Evidence from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS)." Prepared for the G-20 Meeting, Globalization, Living Standards And Inequality: Recent Progress and Continuing Challenges, Sydney Australia, May 26 28, 2002; Michael Forster and Mark Pearson. "Income Distribution and Poverty in the OECD Area: Trends and Driving Forces." OECD Economic Studies no. 34, 2002/1: 7-39. Data on GDP shares are from data collected by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development at http://www.oecd.org/statsportal/0,2639,en_2825_293564_1_1_1_1_1,00.html.

[2] I. Shapiro, R. Greenstein, and W. Primus. 2001." Pathbreaking CBO study shows dramatic increases in income disparities in 1980s and 1990s: An analysis of the CBO data." Retrieved September 26 2002 from LexisNexis Database (Current Issues Universe, R010-39) on the World Wide Web: http://www.lexisnexis.com/ciuniv.

[3] Edward N. Wolff. 1995. *Top Heavy: A Study of the Increasing Inequality of Wealth in America*. New York: The Twentieth Century Fund Press. P. 11; Charles E. Lindblom. 2001. T*he Market System*. New Haven: Yale University Press. p. 122.

[4]http://www.usatoday.com/money/companies/management/2003-03-31-ceopay2_x.htm. Accessed October 11, 2004; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: 2002 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates – All Occupations. http://www.bls.gov/oes/2002/oes_00Al.htm. The ratio increased from 100 to almost 500. http://www.newsbatch.com/econ-ceopay.html.

[5] http://www.newsbatch.com/econwagegdp.html

[6] Measured as a ratio, which increased from 7.8/1 to 18.2/1. Shapiro, Greenstein, and Primus."Pathbreaking CBO study."

[7] Edmund L. Andrews. "Report Finds Tax Cuts Heavily Favor the Wealthy." *The New York Times*. August 13, 2004. http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/13/politics/campaign/13tax.html?hp

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Bush And Kerry In Baghdad And Jerusalem: Is There A Difference?

By | 2004: Vol. 3, No. 4

When the smoke from the 2004 election clears many Americans hope John Kerry will be president and big foreign policy changes will result. Unfortunately these hopes are not likely and here are two reasons why: first, the interest group generated pressures that set broad parameters for policy tend to remain constant no matter who occupies the White House; and second, because this is so, policy formulation is not simply a function of the personal preferences of political leaders. Policy goals are set largely on the basis of which domestic subgroups an elected official and his or her party seeks to satisfy. On the other hand, the choice of tactics used to implement policy can be influenced by individual preference.

What follows is a comparison of foreign policy goals and tactics pursued in the cases of Iraq and Israel/Palestine, first under President Bush, and then under a projected Kerry administration. While there is overlap in the interest groups the two men respond to on these issues, they are not exactly the same. And, as we will see, their lobby alliances are contributing factors to what differences we will find between them.

President Bush and his "Forward Strategy of Freedom"

In the history of the United States, foreign policy promoting economic expansion abroad is a constant theme. These economic pursuits, in turn, are overlain by claims of mythic altruism and idealism. For many citizens, foreign policies facilitating economic interests go hand in hand with the notions of America as a purveyor of freedom and democracy, a builder of prosperity and modernity. Or, as George W. Bush puts it, we aim to bring God's gift of liberty

to “every human being in the world.” Of course, this popular idealism hides the contradictions that exist between itself and the tactics of exploitation inherent in much of American foreign policy.

When it comes to such tactics there is a continuum that runs from diplomacy and the use of various non-military pressure tactics all the way to the marines extolling victory in the “Halls of Montezuma.” As long as the Soviet Union was a competitor for world wide influence, conditions were such that an informal American preference existed for the relatively low risk end of the tactical spectrum. Coups, invasions and the like were second tier options undertaken only after consideration of their impact on important variables: Soviet reaction had to be taken into account, alliances existed that had to be paid attention to, treaties were to be adhered to, and international law was to be respected at least to the point where it could be used in the propaganda wars that labeled the Communists horrible and our side all goodness and light.

Now the Soviet Union is no more. And when it went the way of the Dodo, so it seems did America’s preference for low risk tactics. Those who had always favored the muscular end of the tactical spectrum now felt liberated. A thousand years of Pax Americana seemed possible if only the country could find the will to sustain a “forward strategy of freedom” (a.k.a. send in the marines). The world could thus be made safe for the interests of all those influential American subgroups “doing business” abroad.

This is no fairy tale. One can find a strategy for this interventionist posture on the website of the now infamous *Project for the New American Century*. The neo-conservative ideologues who put forth this strategy are one of the major lobby groups President Bush is allied with and, as a consequence, they now command the country’s foreign policy from their offices in the Bush administration. Their ambitions were greatly enhanced by the tragedy of September 11, 2001. The 9/11 attacks were themselves the result of American interventionist policies in the Middle East and support for Israeli colonialism, but any recognition of this connection was a direct challenge to the interests that had shaped those policies. Within weeks of the attack, such questions as “why do they hate us?” which suggested the need for national self-reflection and a thorough policy review, were dismissed as “blame the victim” sentiment on the part of the unpatriotic. Thus, instead of being taken as a warning that intervention in the Arab world and the subsidization of Israeli expansion had dangerous “blowback” potential, the attacks were used by the neo-conservatives as an excuse to implement extremist foreign policy tactics which relied on military aggression. And what have been the results? Let us take a look at the Bush administration’s “forward strategy of freedom” in the two important cases of Iraq and Israel/Palestine.

I. War on Terror Equals War on Iraq

The attacks of September 11 did not occur because Islamists hate American freedoms. In truth, they do not care how we behave in our own country. They do, however, care about how Americans behave in their countries. And we have not behaved well in the last 50 or so years. Americans are oblivious to this fact. Most believe that U.S. foreign policy is a selfless, if overly

expensive, effort to project outward our own idealized domestic freedoms. That is why most Americans believe that we are in Iraq to give the ungrateful locals democracy among other wonderful things. The true history and consequences of U.S. support for countless dictators (including Saddam Hussein), and our support for an Israel that most of the world sees as a wretched apartheid state, is absent from the mind and media of America.

Soon after the September 11 attacks the Bush administration declared the War on Terror and, following a brief diversionary move in the direction of Osama bin Laden, the president began portraying Saddam's Iraq as the main enemy. To establish this connection the Bush administration lied to the American people, and the press uncritically swallowed the ruse. So successful was this warmongering propaganda that by September 2003, 70% of the American people falsely believed that Saddam Hussein was behind the September 11 attacks (that was up from 3% right after the 2001 tragedy).

This lie and others, such as the false claim about weapons of mass destruction, were used to create popular fear of Iraq, and thus support for the subsequent U.S. invasion. Once the invasion was under way, other lies, such as our alleged desire to bring democracy to Iraq, were put forward. This latter claim is hardly believable if one has insight into the attitudes of the voting public in that country (or most of the Middle East for that matter). A free and fair election in Iraq would certainly bring to power a popular *anti-American* government. The problem is that the Americans know nothing about Arab or Muslim perceptions or the causes of them. Thus they can be deluded into thinking that a puppet government in Iraq whose main purpose is to facilitate our exploitation of their resources and maintain a friendly attitude toward Israel, is meant to be a step toward democracy. The consequence of this deceitful policy, and the heavy handed tactics being used to carry it out, is the fiasco that is now American occupied Iraq.

II. A Roadmap to Hell

What about the on-going strife in Israel and Palestine? In 2002 President George W. Bush offered his "peace plan" for this conflict. He did so in response to mainstream Jewish and Christian expectations. However, the plan was carefully crafted not to interfere with the ambitions of more hardline Zionist lobbies. Dubbed the Roadmap, it put forth a three phase program for the creation of a "Palestinian state" existing in peace alongside Israel. As it turns out, a state for Palestine has about as much meaningfulness as democracy for Iraq.

In Phase One the Palestinians were to declare a unilateral cease fire. The logic operating here is that the occupying Israeli forces are the ones in need of relief, and the Palestinians resisting occupation are the aggressors. Thus the Roadmap stipulates that the best way to begin any "peace process" is to end resistance to a harsh and illegal occupation.

In addition, Phase One demanded that the Palestinians "immediately undertake a comprehensive political reform in preparation for statehood including…free, fair, and open elections." Again, the assumption is that the Palestinian Authority, with its infrastructure

systematically undermined by Israel, is corrupt and needs to prove itself capable of holding open elections and governing competently. The PA does have problems with corruption the cause of which, at least in part, is the breakdown of order that accompanies occupation. On the face of it, to demand that honest and efficient government be demonstrated, and open elections held, all in the midst of Israeli sponsored chaos, is absurd.

In the unlikely case that the Palestinians did all of this, Israel was to pull its forces back to where they were in September 2000 (not to the Green line), freeze settlement activity (but remove only "outposts" and not settlements) and cease its slaughter of civilians and the destruction of their property. But again, the Roadmap requires this of the Israelis only after the Palestinians perform what is, for all intents and purposes, a self-inflicted castration. And that is just Phase One.

In Phase Two the Palestinian Authority was to "act decisively against terror." In other words, having talked Hamas and others into a cease fire, the PA was now to wage civil war to destroy these resistance movements. If they succeeded in doing so they would be rewarded with a state with "provisional borders." Given the extensive illegal colonization that Israel has engaged in, this could only mean a series of tenuously connected bantustans on approximately 43 percent of the occupied territories. In this rump state, surrounded by Israeli walls, tanks and soldiers, disarmed and economically dominated, subject to periodic incursions at the discretion of their enemy, the Palestinians were to demonstrate a "willingness and ability to build a practicing democracy.

It was only in Phase Three, after the Palestinian resistance was eliminated, that "permanent status" talks were to be held. Here, according to the Roadmap, the problems of borders, Jerusalem, settlements, and refugees were to be dealt with. Symbolic of the Phase Three environment, however, was the fact that Israel's prime minister has already declared that a precondition of any talks on refugees is a Palestinian renunciation of the right of return.

As a pseudo peace plan the Roadmap has historical precedents. All came in the form of dictates such as the U.S. dealings with the native Indians and Mexico in the 19th century, and the German and Russian dealings with Poland in the 20th. These are what the Bush plan resembles. It is dressed up like a plan for reform and democracy in Palestine leading to peace with Israel, but that is just sleight of hand. Like so much else that the Bush administration does, this bit of foreign policy is built on lies.

John Kerry: Our Next Diplomat and Chief?

If George W. Bush is an ideologue whose belief system (largely fashioned by the notions of Christian Fundamentalism) resonates with neo-conservative triumphalism, John Kerry is more a mainstream politician of Clintonesque style. His connections to lobbies with interests in the Middle East are not, in all but one case, as pronounced as Mr. Bush's. The Bush family has well known links to the oil cartels that seek control of Iraqi oil. Kerry and the Democrats also pay attention to these interests, but are not beholden to them in such an incestuous way. Vice

President Cheney is “embedded” with the arms manufacturers, construction firms, and mercenary security firms now playing a major role in Iraq. Again, the Democrats want to keep most of these elements relatively satisfied but do not have the profligate connections of the present administration. And Bush himself is a devotee of the interests of Jewish and Christian Zionists who insist that the U.S. government lend uncritical support to Israel. Here, as we shall see, Kerry and the Democrats are, for different reasons, as ensnared as is Bush. With these differences in mind, what can we expect of a Kerry administration when it comes to Iraq, Israel and Palestine?

I. War on Iraq “I don’t believe in a cut and run philosophy”

Mr. Kerry, unlike George W. Bush, is not a “chicken hawk.” He is a veteran of combat in Viet Nam. He served there without question but, upon discharge, came home and raised concerns about the war’s efficacy. This may seem a bit backwards but it does indicate that Mr. Kerry is capable of changing his mind, once he has “done his duty.”

However, it is a mistake to think that Kerry as president will bring the Iraq war to a quick end. Kerry is a professional politician and thus, like Richard Nixon seeking “peace with honor” in Viet Nam, he feels it would be political suicide and a dereliction of duty to “cut and run.” Despite connections to a broad range of interest groups, Kerry has, rightly or wrongly, decided that the voting public *he needs to be elected president* wants the war in Iraq to continue, though with less overall risk to Americans. Thus, he will not pull out of that country until he has appeared to have “done his duty” and a more broad-based anti-war sentiment than exists at present gives him political cover. On the other hand, not being a neo-conservative ideologue, he is more flexible than George Bush when it comes to tactics.

It is likely then that Kerry will initially restrict changes in Iraq to the tactical level. He favors a multilateral approach and will try to involve the United Nations and NATO more deeply in Iraq. He will accomplish this by being a “hands-on, engaged, diplomat-in-chief” who “knows how to bring these [hoped for allied] countries to the table.” To achieve this goal he is ready to throw overboard the Bush administration’s arrogant demeanor. As a result, he predicts that at the end of his first term “foreign forces” will have replaced most of America’s 140,000 troops now in Iraq. It is to be noted that Kerry’s hidden assumption is that a simple change in approach will obligate others to join us in the mayhem we have created in Iraq. However, there seems no obvious reason why other countries should rush to our aid in Iraq, only to risk their own public facilities being attacked (a la Spain), their nationals kidnapped and beheaded, and perhaps their governments voted out of office. Within two or three years of his election, Kerry’s new strategy will probably prove a failure. At that point, having “done his duty” and drawing on the support of interest groups pushing for more resources for domestic programs, he may prove willing and capable of winding down the Iraq war.

What is absent from the Kerry orientation (as it is from that of Mr. Bush) is any questioning of the war’s justice or necessity. Kerry seems uninterested in the fact that the war was started on the basis of lies and deceptions, and has publicly declared that he would have voted to give

Bush war authority even if he had known there were no WMDs in Saddam's arsenal. He talks of withdrawal coming only after achieving stability in Iraq which is really impossible since it is the American led occupation that is the source of instability. He says little about the corrupt practices of American profiteers in Iraq. And, he certainly does not admit to the need for a thorough review of those past American policies in the Middle East that have brought us to this sorry position.

The bottom line in any comparison of Bush and Kerry on Iraq, is that with either man becoming the next president, the people of Iraq are going to continue to die, be maimed, lose their property and their livelihoods. The real difference between the two lies in how long such madness is likely to last. To some extent this difference reflects the interest groups the two men respond to. With Mr. Bush's reelection war will become open-ended. For Bush and his backers the War on Terror is a war between good and evil. Evil must be conquered not only in Iraq, but also in lands beyond. Bush shares the perceptions of Christian fundamentalists, Likud Zionists, and neo-conservative aspirants to empire, as well as avaricious elements of big business such as Haliburton, Bechtel, the arms producers and mercenary security firms. These, along with the oil companies, are the lobby groups that urge on his muscular, neo-Prussian tactics. Thus blinkered, he and his associates will soldier on forever if given the opportunity. Mr. Kerry's lobby connections are broader: small as well as big business, labor unions, professional organizations and other interests that prioritize resources for domestic use rather than foreign warfare. On the other hand, Kerry also responds to the Jewish (though not the Christian) Zionists. The fact that Mr. Kerry responds to a broader mix of interest groups suggests that, as president, he is less likely to wage open-ended war. That may mean less Americans, Iraqis and other Arabs suffer and die in the long run. It does not mean that they will stop suffering and dying in the short run.

II. Israel-Palestine "What is important, obviously, is the security of the state of Israel"

There is one area where Mr. Kerry completely supports the murderous tactics of Mr. Bush, and that is in his uncritical support of Israel. Kerry does not do so because, like Bush, he thinks God gave Palestine to the Israelites and we must support Zionist expansionism to hasten the second coming of Christ or, like the neo-cons, because of a perverse admiration for Israeli aggressiveness. Mr. Kerry's surrender of American interests (that is, sacrificing of the good will of almost all Arabs and Muslims) to the interests of Israeli colonists is simply a recognition of the power of the Jewish Zionist lobbya recognition that it is one of the most formidable interest groups to now walk the marbled halls of American government. And, indeed, this Zionist lobby has for decades bought and bullied the Democratic Party to an even greater extent than its Republican rival. So it should come as no surprise to hear John Kerry competing with the Bush administration for Zionist favor by making the following public pronouncements:

A) *"I will never force Israel to make concessions that cost or compromise any of Israel's security."* Since 1967 Israeli governments have insisted that controlling the occupied territories is important to their security. In truth the Israelis are using the security argument as a cover for illegal colonization, for the fact is that occupation is demonstratively the source of

their insecurity. However, in American politics, there is great political risk in saying this publicly, while there is political benefit in adhering to the Israeli line.

B) *"We will never expect Israel to negotiate without a credible partner,"* and "*Palestinians must stop the violencethis is the fundamental building block of the peace process.*" As we have seen with the Roadmap, which Kerry sees as "an acceptable approach for reinvigorating the peace process," the notion of a "credible partner" means a Palestinian Quisling who will destroy resistance to Israel's destruction of Palestinian society. As the game of American politics is now played, if the destruction of Palestinian society is a desire of dominant interest groups, it will be facilitated and rationalized by our government. That is what has been happening since 1967 and it will continue to happen when and if Kerry replaces Bush in the White House.

C) *Israel's security fence is a legitimate act of self-defense."* Back in October of 2003, in a rare moment of clarity and frankness, John Kerry told an audience at the Arab-American Institute that the "security fence" was a "provocative and counterproductive measure." It did not take long for the America's Zionist lobbies to make clear the political costs of maintaining such a "radical" position. Kerry quickly reversed himself. There are some Arab Americans, such as James Zogby, who believe that Kerry's real beliefs are expressed in his statement to the Arab Americans, and that his eventual Middle East policy will reflect this. While this hope is understandable, it is also wishful thinking. The same political pressures which persuaded John Kerry to kowtow to the Zionists for the sake of his election campaign, will still exist when and if he becomes president. As president he will face a Congress that continues to be rabidly pro-Zionist, leaders of his own party who are on the Zionist political payroll and a State Department purged of all Arabists. Mr. Kerry, remember, is a professional politician. Real peace for him is maintaining a domestic climate that allows for his reelection.

D) *"Israel is our ally, the only true democracy in this troubled region, and we know that Israel as a partner is fundamental to our security."* Both statements are propaganda pieces designed to create a sense of pseudo-reality simply by being repeated ad nauseam. Israel is a democracy in the same way that America's southern states were democracies prior to the civil rights movement. In Israel today, as in the American South in the 1940s and 1950s, minorities (in this case non-Jews) are systematically discriminated against both in law and custom. And, in what sense is Israel "fundamental to our security?" Support for Israel over the decades, which Mr. Kerry (just like Bush) asserts is "a central keystone of American foreign policy," has helped create a security crisis for the United States by unnecessarily alienating billions of Muslims and creating hatred toward the U.S. throughout the Arab world.

E) *"In the first days of a Kerry administration, I will appoint a presidential ambassador to the peace process."* Kerry's spokesmen have also told us he "would never send anyone [as a Middle East envoy] who doesn't have the confidence of Israel and the Jewish community." And, given the fact that Kerry initially suggested Jimmy Carter for this post but withdrew the idea immediately upon drawing Zionist ire, we can only assume that the Zionists will have a veto on who his "presidential ambassador" will be. As Catherine Cook, a senior analyst at the

Washington based Middle East Information and Research Project, has observed "John Kerry could appoint Desmond Tutu as the U.S. envoy, but unless his mandate differed from that allowed by current U.S. policy, Tutu would fail."

F) *"I've always felt that the right of return is contrary to the viability of a Jewish state, and that's what Israel is*." In other words, Kerry has put Israel's right to maintain its discriminatory ethnocentric nature above the rights of millions of Palestinians held under international law. He agrees with President Bush that Israel must be allowed to keep its major West Bank colonies. He has labeled Yasser Arafat a "failed leader" and said he would not deal with him. And, he has written that we must "reaffirm our belief that the cause of Israel is the cause of America." So, just what, beyond Palestinian surrender, is Mr. Kerry's "presidential ambassador to the peace process" going to negotiate?

The bottom line in any comparison of Bush and Kerry on Israel and Palestine, is that with either man becoming the next president, their will be no pressure put on Israel to cease its barbaric behavior in Palestine. Thus, as is the case with Iraqis, Palestinians are going to continue to die, be maimed, lose their property and their livelihoods. And, unfortunately, in this case Kerry will not shorten the time span of this horror any more than Bush. On this issue Kerry is simply someone who will replace Bush's relatively hands-off, biblically inspired support for Israel, with renewed diplomatic shuffling that has already been proven a failure. No leader, Republican or Democrat, can make a positive difference in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict until the Gordian knot connecting this issue to US domestic politics is cut. In other words, the power of the Zionist lobbies (both Jewish and Christian) has to be broken. Neither Kerry nor Bush has any desire to take on this task.

Conclusions: The Costs of Disinterest and Ignorance

Given the way American foreign policy is made there really is no such thing as "national interests." There are only the interests of lobby groups with goals that lie outside the country. Achieving sufficient influence, these lobbies can have their own interests portrayed as "the national interest." The Zionist lobbies and Israel is a case in point. Support for Israel has been a major theme in U.S. foreign policy because the Jewish Zionist lobby, now allied to the Christian Zionists, has been sufficiently well organized and financed to successfully demand such a policy. *As a result American national security is now actually at greater risk*. Yet both Bush and Kerry, as well as numerous other politicians, persist in speaking of Israel's interests as if they were identical to the American national interest.

It is important to note that the power of the Zionist lobbies has been facilitated by popular disinterest in foreign policy as well as ignorance of the Middle East and American activities in that region. The void created by this ignorance has been filled by myths and rationalizations. The tragic events of September 11 presented an opportunity for the American people to take an interest in what their government does abroad and question the popular assumptions that those activities are always altruistic. For a moment such an examination seemed possible as the question was raised, "why do they hate us?" But the politicians and interest groups

responsible for the behavior that bred the attacks understood the danger of such soul searching and shut down that avenue of investigation. Instead the American people were lied to yet again and, because they know no better, swallowed whole the notion that the September 11 attacks were the products of fanatical Islam (assisted by Saddam's Iraq) gone crazy with ancient hatred of the West and its "freedoms." Both Kerry and Bush continue to talk in this misleading way.

The same ignorance allowed the Bush administration to galvanize fear of Iraq based on false assertions. However, the prospect of war and the lose of American lives did provoke a certain level of debate and not all interested parties agreed. However, with Bush in the White House the debate was automatically won by a clique of neo-conservative politicians and intellectuals who shifted the means by which American foreign policy goals are pursued to the extreme aggressive end of the tactical spectrum. If the Democrats had won in 2000, the neo-cons would not be in power and still restricted to misinterpreting history on their web sites. American tactics would have followed a different course. Following September 11th the U.S. still would have gone after Osama bin Laden (perhaps more persistently than under Bush) and might even have attacked Afghanistan to get to him. But, given the interest group mix Democrats traditionally respond to, neo-conservative ideas would not have triumphed and Iraq would have been controlled by means other than invasion.

This scenario represents a debate over tactics. And, as important as it certainly is, it should not be mistaken for a difference over policy goals. Be it Clinton, Gore, Kerry, Bush the elder or the younger, the policy goals are the same-to promote American political and economic dominance in a world wherein she is the sole superpower. All the major interest groups referencing foreign policy adhere to this end. The present debate between Democrats and Republicans is a matter of how you want to go about achieving that end-where your preferences lie along the tactical spectrum.

The problem is that whatever your tactical preferences, the end-the pursuit of American dominance and its accompanying practices of exploitation-is sustained by the myth that both means and ends are altruistic. It is this distorted world view that politicians like Bush and Kerry promote and that the mainstream media successfully fosters. Therefore, no matter which man wins in November, no matter which party rules, there will be no self-reflection, no self-criticism, no reexamination of the history of American foreign policy in the Middle East, and no revival of that seminal question, "why do they hate us?" Thus, ignorance will continue with the consequence that, sooner or later, more 9/11s will occur.

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The Prospect Before Us: Second Thoughts On Humanitarian Intervention

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Why second thoughts on intervention now? As we shall argue, the prospect of regime change in the U.S. does not just raise hopes for a different way of thinking about American policies toward the rest of the world; it also could affect, and ought to affect, the entire way we think about the nature and conditions of humanitarian intervention in the affairs of other nations.

First thoughts about intervention, as occasioned by the war in Iraq, have tended to be more or less the same, and by now are commonplace in intellectual and academic circles. Intervention is "humanitarian," or it's more destructive than it's worth. It prevents the depredations of "rogue states," or it's simply a cover for American imperialism, the excuses for it serving the same purpose as parliaments (according to Lenin) do for capitalism. It would be acceptable if truly multi-lateral, but the same actions are unacceptable if unilateral (read, "American," or "American" with a British cover). To foreswear it entirely would be "neo-isolationist;" to endorse it in principle is to try to become a "world policeman." And so on. We argued strongly against unilateral action by the United States (see *Logos*, spring 2003) and we still hold to that position. But given the grotesqueness of recent events, we want to stress our own need for second thoughts about the question of humanitarian intervention in general.

As we wrote before, principles of international cooperation and mutual respect, such as multilateralism, are crucially important, indeed now more so than ever, when they are being systematically undermined by those who argue that any such principles are simply out of date in the war on terror. Still, to be a more effective guide to policy, multilateralism needs an amendment. The disasters of genocide, mass slaughter, famine, and so forth, will sometimes seem to outstrip the capacity of international agencies or coalitions to act in a timely fashion, and calls will arise (as in the Sudan today) for the faster action that only a great military power-the United States, most obviously-can undertake. How should we respond to those calls? Are there any principles that we can apply to the call for unilateral action, that might differentiate legitimate from illegitimate responses to those disasters?

We do not intend to offer a general theory of humanitarian intervention, let alone of international relations. Rather, we want to suggest two considerations that have often been neglected in mainstream discussions. The first of these is that the apparent human need for intervention, even the demand for it from some of the parties whose lives are at stake, does not by itself justify any particular response. It sets the stage, but the stage now has to be populated with the actual actors who propose to do the intervening, and whose prospective policies, motives, and capacities have to be analyzed. This sort of serious analysis was almost totally lacking among supporters of the invasion of Iraq, as though the existence of tyranny, or

oppression, or potential threat, had only to be recognized to generate action. This is simply wrong; wishful thinking is not a policy, and cannot justify mass killing. That is why most foreign policy "realists" opposed the invasion: its proponents paid hardly any attention to such essential aspects of policy-making as the need to consider its likely short- and long-run costs to the Iraqi (and American) people, the credibility of the intervening power (i.e., the US), and the policy-makers' understandings of the region in which they plan to intervene (in this case quite obviously almost nil).

Here, however, we want to add a second consideration that goes beyond both moralistic invocations of what is right, and realistic considerations of what is possible. On the ground, where people live and die, what matters is not simply the ostensible content of principles and policies. It is equally important, in our view, to understand the full moral and legal significance of *who puts those principles and policies into action.* With that amendment we may, at least on some occasions, be able to get beyond the seemingly insoluble dilemmas of the competing positions that we described above.

As applied to Iraq, the dilemmas are seemingly insoluble in the sense that the opposite of what appears to be a true proposition seems always and equally true, and so we intellectuals flailed futilely around us, trying to persuade each other with concessions that were not only rhetorically meaningless but empirically empty. How can you measure one destruction against another? how can you honestly say that the U.S. is not an imperial power? how can you honestly say that American policy has never been based on anything but nakedly imperial self-interest? how can you oppose the spread of a democracy you argue for so ardently at home? how can you be so naive as to believe that democracy can be imposed on others by force? how can *you* be so elitist as to doubt that others want democracy as much as you do?

In this array of not-quite-satisfying principles that seem to demand their own refutation as soon as they are stated, there may often in fact be no firm ground to stand on except historical outcomes that always arrive too late to be of any use. As Hegel wrote, History will be the judge, but that's of help only to the authors of history books. If the Thomas Friedmans and Michael Ignatieffs and Bill Kellers of the world have changed their view of the War on Iraq, it's because the only excuse for the War as they imagined it in the privacy of their imaginations was a particular kind of victory, and that War has already been lost. And if somehow it were to seem as though it might be "won," they would change their minds again. But all the while the real "war," the war of invasion and conquest mobilized by the U.S. against a non-belligerent Iraq, was begun and goes on as though they had never written, or even existed-if they never had, nothing would have been changed.

How do we explain this total disconnection between the educated intelligence and the obvious reality that it was failing to observe? We believe the explanation is that many of us, for or against, were asking only part of the right question. We needed to focus more on who was implementing interventionist principles as part of a matter the question of principle itself. From that perspective we can see that the invasion needed to be opposed even if in some sense it might be said to have "worked." We needed to understand that in international affairs, it is

not only the course of action undertaken but also *the nature and quality of the regime* undertaking it that helps to distinguish "right" from "wrong." And the nature or quality of a regime have nothing to do with its stated purposes; with its intentions. It is misleading, or even false, to say that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." The road to hell is paved with *stated intentions of any kind*, and we set foot on it when we take them too seriously; when we start believing what people say instead of paying attention to what they are and what they do. Thus intellectuals such as Christopher Hitchens and Paul Berman parroted phrases about "democracy" and "ending tyranny" and "Saddam the torturer" on behalf of a regime that was and is visibly not pro- but anti-democratic; that had and has not the faintest interest in preserving anyone's individual liberties; and that has lied about every one of its actions, domestic and foreign, as a matter of course. When in the minority, its representatives in Congress attempted a constitutional *coup d'etat* against a democratically elected president; when that failed they stole the 2000 election with a *coup de main* in Florida.

No one in their right mind would trust this regime to "bring democracy" to the United States, let alone Iraq; or should have trusted it to have humanitarian values deeper than those of a thug; or to have any interest in replacing destructive violence anywhere with non-violent stability. On the plain record, the bedrock goals of the Bush regime and its various factions are and were manifest: to install and perpetuate plutocratic, one-party rule long enough to enrich its friends and punish its enemies; to secure a *cordon sanitaire* around Iran, in order to prop up a faltering oil-based economy long enough to maintain the nationalist delusions of empire that could sustain one-party rule; to make the mid-East safe for Israeli dominance; to cement its alliance with a neo-totalitarian Christian fundamentalism. To forget all this while talking about "America" and "its" "democratic" goals, as though a "nation" were some imaginary ideal, were anything more than the real people who manage to commit real atrocities in its name for their own visible purposes, was and is a verbal swindle. It is the same swindle that the Commander-In-Chief of Abu Ghraib's MP's attempted to foist on the world by saying that "they" didn't represent the real "us," as though a real "we" are out there somewhere else, unnoticed by the rest of the world, creating a peaceful "democracy." (Although since this commander-in-chief governs on behalf of a minority of voters, he might have a point.) In short, the intellectuals, journalists, and prime ministers who promoted the policies of this regime deserve the epithet that Joseph Stalin bestowed on Western fellow-travelers who thought Communism was about a new world of human equality and pretended the gulag didn't exist: "useful idiots."

This corrective emphasis on the nature of the regime that sets out to engage in "humanitarian interventions," or to "promote democracy," casts a different light on some arguments about both the long-run nature of American foreign policy, and the role of the United Nations in this kind of venture. As to the first, criticisms of the Clinton administration's (and Colin Powell's) reluctance to intervene in the Balkan wars without NATO's support, and of its half-hearted, ill-conceived responses to terrorism, point precisely to the strength of what might be called in retrospect the "Clinton Doctrine" (and the "Powell corollary"): a desire, compared to the present regime, to do as little as possible on behalf of American empire, even while promoting and extending it. The reason for this reluctance was that in its day-to-day behavior the Clinton regime was everything the Bush regime is not: an inward-turning activist and sometime

reformist regime (even if we disagreed with some of its reforms), committed to at least preserving if not extending many traditional constitutional protections as well as the social safety-net, and above all being quite open about what it was doing and why it was doing it. In this respect, it is significant that the Clinton administration contemplated action against Iraq, but did not follow through: not necessarily because the leadership had moral qualms, but in part at least because excessive overseas commitments would have undermined its domestic priorities (and been undertaken by a discredited president as well). Aggrandizing power to itself and overturning existing world order were not its primary goals. Contrarily, these were and are clearly the primary goals of the Bush regime, and therefore to have given it credence was to have been, as we have said, an idiot.

As for the United Nations, anti-war but pro-UN commentators such as ourselves have sometimes appeared uneasily to advocate a double standard, or a single standard that seems bound to produce disastrous inaction, as in Rwanda-Burundi or the Sudan today. Against this position unilateralists point to the UN's incapacities: its institutionalized inertia; its numerical domination by nations that are only marginally interested in the strengthening of what "we" consider democracy; its tendency toward the usual corruptions of a sclerotic bureaucracy, as supposedly evidenced in the oil-for-food scandal. This last, though, is actually a particularly salient example of the need for regime analysis, as the scandal-mongers (William Safire most notably) peddle their anti-UN wares while the administration they support sells Iraqi assets off to its corporate friends and allies on a rigged market where the highest bidder wins. Nor is it a minor matter that the oil-for-food scandal is hardly a blip on the fiscal radar compared to even the minor taxation and expenditures record of the Bush administration, or the theft of Iraqi oil that is going on at this very moment.

That is merely a negative argument, though. More crucially, the pro-UN argument is in one important respect at least correct, despite its highlighted difficulties: for in a sense these are precisely what make it a *more appropriate "world policeman" than the United States*. Here too regime analysis is essential. As regimes go, the UN is so minimalist it barely qualifies. Its dangers are entirely of a negative kind-that it won't do anything. It's no danger to world peace or regional stability; it won't attempt to take over anybody or anything; it has no black helicopters at all; and it is not at all clear that the things it won't do would be better done by the US or any other military power. It surely ought to be strengthened, but at ten times its current possibilities for armed intervention it would hardly be competing with France, or Germany, let alone the United States.

Not simply what the U.S. should do in the world, then, but under what circumstances it might legitimately engage in unilateral intervention; what it ought to do on behalf of or in concert with the United Nations; and how such cooperative, multilateral, action could be arranged, is the question that all of us who believe that humanitarian intervention may on occasions be necessary ought to discuss. But it follows from what we have said that *this discussion can not even begin to take place in a serious way until and unless regime change has take place in the United States*. If a pro-democratic rather than anti-democratic regime were in power here, we could attempt to link its political direction with arguments, directed at conventional American

nationalists such as John Kerry, about the usefulness of the UN, prospective limits on the US's imperial sway and economic power, the validity of multilateral interventions, and so on. But if George W. Bush is elected in 2004, there is not a single imaginable foreign regime, anywhere, of any kind whatsoever, that will be better off for being the object of America's attentions. Rather, the United States will be among those nations in dire need of humanitarian intervention.

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Bush, Kerry And The Politics Of Empire

By | 2004: Vol. 3, No. 4

It is hard to imagine a worse, more reactionary and destructive, Presidency than that of George W. Bush, whose nearly four years in office has been marred by one failure after another. The Iraq debacle, costing (as of mid-September 2004) more than 1000 American and up to 30,000 Iraqi lives and proving more bloody by the day, is alone enough to destroy Bush's legitimate claim to govern. Justified by the most brazen lies and myths, the invasion and occupation must be regarded as one of most reckless uses of political power in U.S. history, bringing misery and chaos to Iraq and the Middle East, draining taxpayers of more than 200 billion dollars and counting, giving rise to weekly reports of atrocities and scandals, and carried out with the most arrogant disrespect for the United Nations, international law, and the voices of other nations.

Shamefully playing on the horrors of 9/11, this administration conducts its "war on terrorism" while also doing everything possible to aggravate the sources of terror and diverting vital resources *away* from the needs of homeland security. The White House is occupied by a ruthless, scheming elite that presides over increasing global disorder, a record federal budget deficit, corporate scandals, spreading poverty, a stagnant economy, Medicare "reform" that augments the already outrageous windfall profits to giant pharmaceutical companies, and erosion of civil liberties. All this from a candidate who ran in 2000 as a "compassionate" conservative, pretending humility in foreign affairs, and who again is covering himself with a phony veneer of political moderation, now coupled with the toughness of a warrior leader.

Even the Nixon and Reagan years now appear relatively benign in the wake of Bush junior's frightening record. No doubt a Bush reelection would bring further disasters-most likely new military ventures in world politics combined with emboldened rightwing assaults on social programs in the domestic arena. Bush is surely no Hitler, as some on the left have charged, but his capacity to do unfathomable harm to American society, the environment, and the global system should not be underestimated. There would be much cause for rejoicing should the President be sent unceremoniously back to his Texas ranch. The danger is heightened by the fact that Bush comes from a well-entrenched labyrinth of interests defined by corporate privilege, oil, weapons production and arms trade, and intelligence networks-part of a dynasty going back several decades.

From Senator Prescott Bush through George Bush the elder and his son, the family has been deeply involved in the military-industrial complex, active in more than 20 securities firms, banks, brokerage houses, investment companies, arms-trading businesses, pharmaceutical corporations, and Middle East oil ventures. It has enjoyed a cozy relationship with the scandal-ridden Enron corporation and some of its subsidiaries-a relationship that, as in the oil business, extends to Vice-President Richard Cheney and others in the administration. Michael Moore's skillful treatment of this legacy in *Fahrenheit 9/11* actually comes across as something of an

understatement. In any event, the disastrous policies that Bush and the neocon crowd have unleashed on the world do not amount to a radical or shocking departure when viewed against this larger backdrop; legitimated in part by the terrorist attacks, they did not come out of an historical vacuum. If scary talk about Bush's Christian fundamentalism explains little in this context, references to his supposed moronic intelligence are even less helpful.

As the 2004 Presidential election approaches, we confront a paradox: how could someone regarded by many as the worst-ever occupant of the White House stand even a remote chance of being reelected, much less enter the home stretch of the campaign with a comfortable lead in the polls? Despite everything, the smirk on Bush's face remains in full view. As of early September, both *Time* and *Newsweek* showed the incumbent ahead of John Kerry by an astonishing eleven percentage points. Contrary to all logic, it was the Democrats and not the failed President who were reeling, forced onto the defensive, strategically confused, looking as if their campaign were on life-support systems. How can we make sense of such a seemingly inexplicable turn of events?

One plausible explanation lies in the hegemonic and still broadening power of the corporate media which, as David Brock shows in *The Republican Noise Machine,* is the locus of a well-orchestrated right wing ideological shift over the past two decades or so. There is little doubt that political discourse has moved dramatically rightward-visible in the TV networks, talk radio, the print media, even the Internet-to the point where "liberalism" has become something of a terrible stigma avoided by all but the most bold-spirited of politicians. It is easy enough to see that the media have cravenly accommodated the Bush clique in its lies, ineptness, and warmongering, cheerfully presenting the Iraq war as a crusade for the "liberation" of an oppressed people, another episode in U.S. global benevolence. All the bogus claims used to market an illegal and immoral war-imminent military threat, doomsday weapons, terrorist links, overthrowing a tyrant-went unchallenged while the actual reasons, openly and repeatedly spelled out by neocons and others in the administration, were economic and geopolitical.

The media has also been quick to repeat the familiar litany of myths, including the fiction that Republicans stand for small government and a free market. The reality is just the opposite: astronomical levels of federal spending for the military, the Iraq operation, law enforcement, intelligence and surveillance, and a growing prison system, made even more lopsided by Bush's massive tax cuts for the rich and the corporations. The result is unsurpassed growth in the *coercive* side of big government. Small government and reduced bureaucracy? This Republican administration cherishes huge federal programs, so long as they fit priorities established by the Pentagon and the rest of the military-industrial complex. Free market? Everything about this system, extending to the corporate boondoggles in Iraq and elsewhere, is channeled through institutions marked by highly-concentrated economic, military, and political power. Bush's love affair with old-crony capitalism, moreover, has nothing to do with free market values, any more than does the modus operandi of military contractors, big drug companies, financial interests, and usual complex of transnational corporations that escape the reaches of democratic governance. Since the popular media repeats these myths and deceits on a daily basis, and since the American public gets most of its "news" and information from these very sources, the

paradox of Bush's surprising advantage in the polls becomes a little less mystifying.

But there is more to the story. The Democrats, above all the Kerry campaign, must share responsibility for their own predicament. In fact most of Bush's harmful policies, including the Iraq crusade, have enjoyed "bipartisan" support from leading Democrats as well as the media. With few exceptions, the Democrats have responded in silence to just about every Bush fiasco. Handed one major issue after another, Kerry strategists have backtracked, seemingly frightened of being attacked as too liberal, too unpatriotic, too soft on terrorism, too unsettling to the legions of undecided voters. The Kerry campaign has echoed many of the Bush refrains, endorsing the Iraq war as a noble cause, promising deployment of tens of thousands *more* troops, hoping to "stay the course," while pressing to internationalize (that is, further legitimate) the occupation that has already become a Vietnam-sized failure. In September 2003 Kerry endorsed Order 39 for Iraq, intended to open the doors to U.S. and other Western corporate investment-a fundamental restructuring of the Iraqi economy that violates international law. If one can identify such a thing as a "Bush Doctrine," Kerry's thinking seems confined to its discursive limits. Should he somehow manage to win the November election, the American public will likely remain clueless as to how he might set about reversing the course of events.

The Republicans gained some momentum after their New York convention, but the Kerry trajectory remained flat after the comparatively lifeless Democratic National Convention in Boston, where the familiar DNC-style "centrism" was rigidly enforced: nothing beyond the mildest criticism of the Iraq occupation or the war against terrorism, general platitudes on the economy, jobs, and healthcare. No Bush-bashing was permitted. Fearful of alienating middle-of-the-road voters, the Democrats organized one of the most boring national conventions in memory: nearly four years of a reactionary Bush presidency went almost forgotten, as if calling attention to them would backfire, even though polls indicated a broad discontent with Bush's policies among the electorate. Thus, on the question of terrorism, with Bush's "war" having accomplished little, the Democratic platform reads: "Victory in the war on terrorism requires a combination of American determination and international cooperation on all fronts." Kerry and Edwards could easily have blasted the Bush administration for its failed counterterrorism strategy, beginning with Iraq, but they politely desisted. As Richard Clarke, Bush's former leading terrorist expert, observed: "I find it outrageous that the President is running for reelection on the grounds he's done such great things about terrorism. He ignored it." Bush not only ignored it, his actions in the Middle East have surely helped spread it. Taking a page from Clarke's book and using it to frame their own anti-terror strategy, the Democrats might well have gotten a boost after Boston, but they chose silence. Meanwhile, Kerry moved at the DNC was to set himself up as the preferred warrior candidate, a Vietnam combat hero, patriot, and leader best able to rise to the challenges of Empire, that is, to carry out effective military action-a stratagem likely to backfire given Kerry's history of anti-Vietnam war activism not to mention the Democrats' own otherwise tepid campaign.

More than three decades after his famous antiwar testimony, Senator Kerry has emerged as something of a military hawk, insisting that the U.S. must occupy Iraq until "the job is done,"

calling for more troops there, opposing Bush's plan to demobilize American forces in Europe and Korea, championing "humanitarian intervention", calling for elevated Pentagon spending. Anyone following Kerry's career since the early 1980s will not be astonished by any of this, whatever his supposed liberal reputation. His views on foreign and military policy are concisely laid out in his 2003 "vision" book, *A Call to Service,* where he argues for a more vigilant and aggressive U.S. global military power. Relatively progressive as a young senator, he has since worked patiently and effectively to make himself politically safe, "electable" to the White House-his overriding goal for the past two decades. He supported every conservative domestic initiative during the Clinton years, was a lead cheerleader for the bombing of Yugoslavia, and beginning in 2001 has endorsed Bush's actions full-tilt, going out of his way to blister politicians in his own party who questioned the fraudulent pretexts for war. Why liberals and progressives might expect any bold departure within the Kerry camp, now or later, would be difficult to explain on the basis of past actions or statements.

Of course Kerry was indeed a combat hero during Vietnam-a war he came to denounce as barbaric and immoral during the 1971 Winter Soldier hearings. He served four months as a Navy lieutenant aboard a patrol boat, being awarded the Bronze Star and three Purple Hearts. Knowing as he did at the time, and presumably has not forgotten today, that the Vietnam war was a prolonged, bloody nightmare-and seeing a disastrous replay of that same nightmare in Iraq-Kerry's decision to dress up his candidacy in military heroism linked to the Vietnam era only makes sense as an opportunistic move to outflank Bush as a hard-line military leader. He has wound up trapped not only in the logic of militarism but in his own incapacity to mount a challenge to Bush's neocon strategy rooted in superpatriotism and U.S. exceptionalism. Like the neocons, he fails to see that this kind of militarism-recognizing few limits to U.S. power-can only be self-defeating, that efforts to occupy Iraq *for any purpose* cannot possibly gain legitimacy. Much like Robert McNamara in *The Fog of War,* Kerry says that both he and the U.S. have learned from the Vietnam catastrophe, that is it time to "get beyond" that horrible memory, but from all indications he seems to have learned absolutely nothing-indeed probably less than McNamara. Further, in establishing himself as bearer of warrior politics, and drawing on his own (conflicted) Vietnam experience, he places himself at great disadvantage when running against a sitting (at war) president with his mantle "commander-in-chief," even if that mantle is quite tainted. This tells us a good deal about why Kerry has been thrown on the defensive at a time when he has every opportunity to mount a strong offensive campaign.

This recycling of the Vietnam era in the 2004 Presidential contest, fully 30 years after that war ended, furnishes yet another sad commentary on the state of American political culture. On the one side Kerry is commonly known to have protested the war-joining with millions of citizens in and out of the military-but he had also been amply decorated and now apparently wants to be embraced as a war hero straight out of the Hollywood combat genre. How this starkly dual involvement in an extremely unpopular war bolsters his Presidential cache is anyone's guess; it doesn't seem to have worked with the electorate, and it has made him a rather easy target for the Republicans. On the other side we have Bush, recipient of preferential treatment owing to family connections who was safely confined to Air National Guard duty instead of being sent to Vietnam, now going on the attack through a well-financed Republican group, the Swift Boat

Veterans, who charge Kerry with lying about his wartime service and his medals. These charges are doubly scurrilous-bogus according to the evidence, but also scarcely germaine to the tasks of Presidential governance at hand. As the Republican campaign descends into a crude marketing effort based on sleazy personal attacks, more lies, and fear-mongering, the infamous Vietnam Syndrome in yet another one of its bizarre incarnations lives on to haunt American politics. That it should hover over the landscape at the very moment another "Vietnam" is unfolding before a cynical American public simply feeds into the political bankruptcy.

In the midst of such absurdity the entire Presidential campaign ends up sidestepping all that really matters: how to exit the Iraq morass as quickly and viably as possible, how to forge efficacious strategies (domestic and global) to fight terrorism, how to solve the healthcare crisis, how to stabilize the economy, how to do *anything* to reverse global warming, and so forth. In the lead-up to arguably one of the most critical elections in U.S. history, a political haze has settled over everything. Aside from the usual posturing and name-calling, neither Bush nor Kerry have had much to say about the most pressing challenges, a situation reflective of ongoing trends toward ideological convergence of the two major parties and its corollary, growing corporate colonization of American politics. For Bush, the 2004 campaign seems to be about honing an image of moderation, a return to compassionate conservatism, while for Kerry it is an equally fanciful "centrism" that rarely goes beyond refinements in the Republican program. Here we have yet another rendering of the term "bipartisanship," operative in foreign policy since the end of World War II but now increasingly visible on the *domestic* front.

If the Presidential contest has deteriorated into pointless squabbles about what Lt. Kerry did in the Mekong Delta in 1969, then-even leaving aside the scandalous favoritism granted Bush and his Vice-President Cheney at that very time-where does this leave a restless public in facing what should be a leading priority of any U.S. President-checking terrorism and getting the country returned to a sound condition of national security? The Democratic platform is so filled with vague generalities as to be useless. If Bush has won a few victories, such as routing (temporarily) Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan, his overall record has been dismal, with worldwide terrorist actions on the increase since 9/11. Neither candidate is about to rethink those aspects of U.S. foreign policy (massive troop deployments in the Middle East, occupation of Iraq, support for Israel) that only help worsen the problem. Kerry says that American troops should remain in Iraq for *at least* another four years, a recipe for even more chaos, violence, and blowback against the superpower and its "coalition partners." Since Kerry has already voted for Bush's policies and is ideologically locked into the same geopolitical objectives, his capacity to provide fresh alternatives is severely undermined. We know that Bush initially dismissed the problem of terrorism out of hand, then refused to follow up intelligence reports in summer 2001 warning of imminent major Al Qaeda operations, then moved against Iraq on the false pretext that the Hussein regime was linked to terrorism-all of which reveals a failed Presidency and more. Most egregiously, the Bush administration has steadily deflected resources away from homeland security-for example, leaving airport, seaport, and nuclear protection woefully inadequate-largely because of the Iraq obsession.

Once in the White House, Bush and his reactionary clique had three main international priorities: Iraq, Star Wars, and Pentagon restructuring. These priorities have remained fully in place, although 9/11 meant they would have to be reframed. Contrary to myth, Bush's hapless record in the war on terrorism has nothing to do with "intelligence failures" and everything to do with politics; it was willful negligence born of irrational ideological agendas. We now know that reports from the CIA, NSA, FBI, and other agencies were routinely ignored or downplayed. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld at one point dismissed the terrorism threat as a normal "law-enforcement problem." In the case of Iraq, on the other hand, intelligence "data" was actually created or exaggerated to support phony claims about WMD, military threats, and terrorist connections, so that Bush could maintain that the invasion and occupation of Iraq is an ongoing, integral part of the war on terrorism.

Unfortunately, the report of the independent *National Commission on 9/11,* while detailing the many political, intelligence, and law-enforcement calamities leading up to the terrorist attacks, refuses to hold anyone responsible, stating "our aim was not to assign individual blame." The report seems to conclude that because the whole system was so terribly flawed, with so many institutions and agencies implicated, no particular leader or official is culpable. Yet as supreme office holder Bush *must* be held accountable, just as he now tries to take credit for all the supposed achievements in the war on terrorism. In fact Bush can be viewed as *triply* culpable: he ignored the first warnings, failed after 9/11 to invest sufficient resources in homeland security, and then aggravated the conditions of blowback by invading Iraq. Further, Bush's personal ineptitude and painfully slow response in learning of the terrorist attacks is tellingly depicted in Moore's documentary. At the RNP, conveniently staged in New York, the Bush-Cheney campaign shamelessly used the 9/11 events to market the war in Iraq as a great blow against Al Qaeda and the forces of darkness, when of course the war has given rise to just the opposite. Leading Republicans like Rudy Giuliani and John McCain came to the podium to trumpet this message while exploiting popular fears of future terrorist attacks. The Kerry-Edwards campaign has done little to call attention to the complete mendacity of these discourses.

Still, the Republicans appear to have the political upper hand and the electoral momentum, utilizing every advantage of incumbency, a culture of imperial hubris, and a fully-compliant corporate media. Another, perhaps deeper conundrum is that Kerry, like most every leading Democrat going back to Carter, is essentially running as a moderate Republican, another connotation of "centrism" in the electoral parlance. All too often they have managed little more than a me-too campaigns on both domestic and international policy, differences surfacing mostly over methods, style, personality, and social issues like the death penalty. Carter was able to win in the aftermath of Watergate and Vietnam, but Mondale and Dukakis went down to humiliating defeat. Clinton's DLC-inspired conservatism, meant to defeat the Republicans on their own turf, never would have prevailed in 1992 without Ross Perot winning 19 percent of the vote, and Clinton eventually governed the way he campaigned. Al Gore's failure to carve out positions to the left of Bush in 2000 are too well known to require elaboration here. It might be argued that Kerry has moved even to the right of his Democratic predecessors. By mid-September, his election prospects languishing, he started moving forcefully on domestic

issues, lashing out at Bush's record on civil rights, poverty, and healthcare-easy enough targets-hoping to narrow the gap, which he did judging by a minor surge in the polls. In foreign policy, however, and especially on Iraq, Kerry's positions remained guarded and muted.

The predicament here is not Kerry's alone, but has deeper historical origins stemming in part from the postwar legacy of "bipartisanship" in U.S. foreign policy with Democrats and Republicans equally wedded to a strategy of American global power. Both have supported the Pentagon system and its labyrinthine network of corporate, governmental, and military interests, first during the phase of Cold War liberalism and then in the current period of unchallenged U.S. superpower hegemony and the war on terrorism. Before the Bush interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, it was mostly Democratic presidents who resorted to military power: Truman in Korea, Kennedy and Johnson in Vietnam, Carter in Central America, Clinton in Yugoslavia. The "global liberalism" first laid out by Woodrow Wilson and later championed by JFK as the basis of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in the Third World remains today a crucial rationale for advancing American economic and geopolitical interests. Moreover, during the 2000 Presidential election Al Gore pressed for a more aggressive foreign policy than did Bush, calling for augmented Pentagon spending, increased deployment of military forces, and a vigilant policy of "humanitarian intervention". Having stressed "humility" in foreign affairs, Bush's did not make his pronounced neocon turn until after the traumas of 9/11. Viewed thusly, one cannot be too surprised to find Bush justifying his militarism with reference to the early postwar Truman Doctrine, in which America was "called on to lead the cause of freedom and democracy around the world." The strategy of "preemptive war" actually has its origins in Truman, who with the onset of the Cold War defended the U.S. right of military intervention anywhere national interests were deemed threatened.

In terms of both history and logic, therefore, we have little reason to believe that Kerry's larger view of revived Pax Americana will differ markedly from Bush's, whatever the possible variations in style and tactics. No doubt a Kerry Presidency would dispense with the ideological rigidity, imperial arrogance, and self-defeating exceptionalism typical of the neocons. On the other hand a Bush victory would surely further embolden the neocons, ever anxious to press forward on other fronts such as Iran, but the costly and bloody Iraq catastrophe promises to negate such initiatives, at least for the near future. Whatever the outcome in November, at the start of the twenty-first century any U.S. leader will be obligated to work within the imperatives of Empire: global military presence, an expanded Pentagon system, anti-terrorist initiatives, security state, the militarization of space, ongoing resource wars. Such imperatives, undoubtedly stronger today than ever, will inevitably enter into the decision-making of Democrats and Republicans alike. Kerry's inability to carve out an alternative to the Bush disaster must be understood in this historical and geopolitical context. Such a momentous eclipse of political discourse, fateful not only to American society but to the rest of the world, is ultimately located within a more crucial, underlying problem-the decay of American politics in the midst of widening Empire.

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The Federal Marriage Amendment And The Attack On American Democracy

By | 2004: Vol. 3, No. 4

"For centuries there have been powerful voices to condemn homosexual conduct as immoral, but this Court's obligation is to define the liberty of all, not to mandate its own moral code."

Supreme Court, Lawrence v. Texas (2003)

"Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."Proposed "Federal MarriageAmendment" (2004)

The American constitution created a secular government that acts to protect the civil rights and liberties of individuals rather than imposing a particular vision of the "good life" on its citizens. Freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state are central to the political philosophy of liberal democracy. These principles, enshrined in our founding documents, have become almost universally accepted norms in U.S. society today. Nevertheless, conservative religious organizations are currently mobilizing their supporters across the country to undermine these basic principles, appealing to popular prejudice against an unpopular minority. Claiming to speak for the People, they seek to deny lesbians and gay men legal equality and the right to civil marriage through the passage of the Federal Marriage Amendment, which would impose a religiously rooted definition of marriage as the law of the land. While conservative Americans are free to practice their religious beliefs and live their personal lives however they choose, neither federal nor state government in the United States can legitimately generate public policy imposing a particular religious worldview on all Americans. Nor can it let the beliefs of some even a majority violate the civil rights of other individuals in society or deny equality before the law to certain groups of citizens.

Liberal Democracy or Christian Nation?

Liberal political theory constitutes the most important founding tradition of American democracy. Both liberal Democrats and neoliberal Republicans endorse its basic principles individual freedom, religious liberty, equal rights, constitutional government and impartial laws although they interpret these concepts in different ways. According to the liberal founding myth of "social contract," self-interested individuals left the state of nature in order to better secure their natural rights and liberties. Consequently, they established a constitutional government of impartial laws that would protect all citizens equally. The Declaration of Independence states the basic values of liberal political theory "all men are created equal and .

. . are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" while the U.S. Constitution created a secular government that would not discriminate against those who do not practice the dominant religion or who espouse unpopular beliefs.

Despite the First Amendment's prohibition against the establishment of religion by government, Christian conservatives often insist that America is really a "Christian nation." They argue that the American founders believed that democratic political institutions would only work if grounded on religious mores within civil society, emphasizing a comment made by John Adams: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." William Bennett has contributed greatly to this right-wing project of revisionist historiography with Our Sacred Honor: Words of Advice from the Founders, a volume that catalogues stories, letters, poems, and speeches that emphasize the religious beliefs that animated many in the founding generation (among other things). The Christian Right hopes that once the religious beliefs of the American Founders are established, a theory of constitutional interpretation that privileges "original intent" will authorize the imposition of Christian moral precepts on American society at large.

While the relationship between religion and democracy in the American context is a complicated one, the fact remains that the Founding generation intentionally took the extremely radical step of constructing a secular government, constitutionally required to remain neutral toward religion. As Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore rightly stress in The Godless Constitution, "God is nowhere to be found in the Constitution, which also has nothing to say about the social value of Christian belief or about the importance of religion for a moral public life." Indeed the fact that the American constitution institutionalized a secular state was both revolutionary and controversial. While conservatives are certainly correct that the Bill of Rights protected states' rights not individual rights, leaving the states free to establish religion, in fact only five states actually permitted the establishment of religion. Thus, the conservative attempt to redefine America as a Christian nation completely ignores the fact that this country was remarkable for its intentionally secular Constitution.

The Logic of Liberalism

In principle, the Bill of Rights has protected individual rights from the tyranny of federal and state governments and majoritarianism ever since ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment after the Civil War. This important amendment extended the liberal principle of legal equality by mandating "equal protection" of the laws for all U.S. citizens. While never fully actualized in practice, the principle of legal equality has been successfully used to justify progressive change. African-Americans utilized this principle during the Civil Rights Movement in their struggle to end segregation. While the Right violently opposed legal equality at the time, contemporary conservatives have largely accepted the principle of colorblind law. At the same time, however, colorblindness in law is completely compatible with the New Right's "new racism," wherein de jure legal equality is used to challenge affirmative action and other remedial measures that seek to address institutional racism.

The struggle for genderblind law has also been largely successful. Although feminists lost the battle for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) during the 1970s, since that time the principle of legal equality for women has been largely implemented through the Courts, which are charged with following the logic of liberalism as they apply the principles of the Constitution to new areas. While historical custom and reactionary political agendas have resulted in some unfortunate constitutional rulings, overall the level of legal equality within American society has increased over time.

A consistent application of the philosophical principles of liberalism justifies same-sex marriage: A secular state committed to legal equality cannot legitimately deny civil marriage with all its benefits to particular citizens on the basis of gender or sexual orientation. To do so would be to violate the basic principles of the United States as a liberal democracy. While I would argue that the Christian Right is losing its battle to prevent the extension of civil rights to lesbians and gay men, there is no guarantee that politically-appointed judges will rule in a principled way. The Courts are, however, slowly beginning to recognize this logic. The Massachusetts Supreme Court has actually legalized same-sex marriage. Societal attitudes are also changing. 58 percent of first year college students now "think gay and lesbian couples should have the right to equal marital status,' i.e., civil marriage"-including "half" who identify as "middle-of-the-road" or "conservative."[1]

Illiberal Reaction

Despite the compelling logic of philosophical liberalism, traditionalists on the Right have always actively opposed increasing levels of legal equality first for African Americans, then for women, and now for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people. The Old Right explicitly supported white supremacy at a time when it was socially acceptable to publicly denigrate African-Americans and claimed that racial equality would destroy the American way of life. It vehemently opposed the Supreme Court's principled ruling in Brown v. Board of Education, accused the justices of legislating from the bench, and mobilized one of the largest grassroots campaigns in U.S. history to attack all attempts to enact racial equality.

Opposition to racial equality included a ban on interracial marriage including an attempt in 1912 to amend the U.S. Constitution to that effect. State bans on interracial marriage continued until 1967 when the Supreme Court ruled anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional in Loving v. Virginia, stating "the freedom to marry has long been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness . . . one of the basic civil rights of man' . . . and cannot be infringed by the State."

The Republican Party was able to become competitive in the historically democratic South by capturing the racist vote, attracting southerners who came to reject the Democratic Party, when it started backing civil rights legislation under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. In 1964 the Republican Party supported Barry Goldwater for president, one of the few northern senators opposed to the Civil Rights Act; he wanted the states to decide for themselves how to

deal with racial issues.

With the landslide defeat of Goldwater and the acceptability of explicit racism on the decline in the general public, right-wing leaders began repackaging their message to make it more appealing to mainstream Americans. The conservative mobilization against feminism and in particular the ERA and abortion right helped solidify this “New Right” during the 1970s and played a very important role in its success, the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, and the rightward shift in U.S. politics. Anti-feminism provided a link with evangelical Christian churches, mobilized traditional homemakers who felt their position threatened by changing laws and mores, and focused the reaction against cultural and political change. Remarkably, Reagan inaugurated his 1980 election campaign by promoting “states’ rights”-a southern code word for segregation-in Philadelphia, Mississippi, scene of the murder of three civil rights workers 16 years before.

Feminism and the LGBTQ civil rights movement are linked theoretically through the political philosophy of liberalism and politically through common struggle. While unprincipled liberals sometimes try to deny this connection out of political expediency, the Right quickly recognized the logic of liberalism that provided the potential for unity between women and LGBTQ individuals, and used it to their advantage. In its rise to power, the New Right successfully manipulated homophobia to increase opposition to gender equality as well as explicitly condemning all attempts to accord non-heterosexuals the equal protection of the law.

Christian-Right Theology and the

Attack on Religious Freedom

Current right-wing opposition to gay marriage not only constitutes another example of the Right’s fundamentally anti-democratic, anti-liberal politics, but also forms a central part of the Christian Right’s larger agenda that seeks to reverse the progress of feminism, reinforce male dominance, and restore the patriarchal family with its traditional gender roles as the hegemonic family form in America. Because many Americans balk at the prospect of disconnecting marriage from its traditional heterosexual moorings, the Christian Right hopes the gay marriage issue will help galvanize support for their larger agenda, just as opposition to the ERA helped them consolidate their base during the 1970s.

While Christian Right organizations claim to speak for the American people when they oppose civil marriage for lesbians and gays, they are actually trying to impose their own particular religious worldview on U.S. society in direct violation of the separation of Church and State. They define marriage as a sacred religious institution and homosexuality as a sin. According to the Family Research Council marriage is “the work of heaven and every major religion and culture throughout world history.” Concerned Women for America proclaims marriage “a covenant established by God wherein one man and one woman, united for life, are licensed by the state for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family.” For Focus on the Family,

“marriage is a sacred union, ordained by God to be a life-long, sexually exclusive relationship between one man and one woman.” Indeed because of this religious worldview, all three groups have made opposition to same-sex civil marriage a centerpiece of their political agenda.

The Christian Right’s vision of heterosexual marriage directly relates to its understanding of gender difference, which it bases on its particular interpretation of the Bible. To justify male dominance, the Christian Right privileges the second version of the creation story in Genesis, in which God created Eve out of Adam’s rib to be his “helper” and declared that the man and his wife would become “one flesh” (Gen. 2: 18-24), rather than on the first story in which “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:26-27, emphasis added). Additionally, instead of reading the latter version as establishing gender equality at the origin, as some religious scholars do, the Christian Right interprets it to mean “God’s purpose for man was that there should be two sexes, male and female. Every person is either a he’ or a she.’ God did not divide mankind into three or four or five sexes.”[2] Right-wing Christians bolster their selective reading of the “Old Testament” with a few “New Testament” verses, such as woman is the “weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7), “man was not made from woman, but woman from man” (1 Cor. 11:8), “the head of a woman is her husband” (I Cor. 11:3), “wives be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord,” and “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church” (Eph. 5:22-23).

The Christian Right’s selectively literalist interpretation of the Bible not only emphasizes the natural authority of husbands over their wives but also condemns homosexuality as a particularly grave sin. This condemnation relies on just a few passages in the entire Bible. For example, they interpret God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16 19:29) as punishment for homosexuality. Yet religious scholars vigorously disagree about the meaning of that story. The dominant contemporary interpretation is that the city was destroyed for the sin of inhospitality considered a “sacred obligation” in ancient times not for homosexuality.

In addition, the Christian Right stresses the two sentences in Leviticus that proclaim “you shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Lev. 18:22) and “if a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death” (Lev. 20:13), completely ignoring the fact that the Ten Commandments does not prohibit homosexuality. At the same time, the Christian Right disregards the wide array of other practices prohibited in Leviticus, such as eating pork, touching a football made of pigskin (Lev. 11: 7-8), wearing cotton/poly blends (Lev. 19:19), and trimming the hair on the side of the face (Lev. 19: 27). “Ex-gay” Stephen Bennett stresses that Leviticus refers to male homosexuality as an “abomination” but fails to mention that it also refers to eating shellfish as an “abomination” (Lev. 11:10).

While the Right makes much of the English term “abomination,” the original Hebrew word to’evah comes from to’eh ata ba which means “you go astray because of it.” Rebecca Alpert argues that the original meaning of the word implies that engaging in homosexual acts is not intrinsically evil but simply has negative consequences, which in ancient or medieval times might be not reproducing or abandoning your wife.

My point here is not to establish any one reading of the Bible as definitive, but rather to complicate the Christian Right's claim that the meaning of Scripture is self-evident. Not all religious people agree that homosexuality is a sin or that same-sex couples should be denied the right to civil marriage. In fact, some religious denominations not only support civil marriage but also perform religious marriages or some comparable form of union for lesbian and gay couples Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism, some Episcopal congregations, the Metropolitan Community Church, and the Unitarian Universalists, for example. Moreover, no consensus exists among religious folks, even when it comes to the definition and meaning of heterosexual marriage. For example, while Christianity restricts marriage to one man and one woman, Islam allows polygamy. While Catholics consider marriage a sacrament, Protestants do not.

Nevertheless, despite the diversity of beliefs and interpretations within a religiously pluralistic society such as the United States, the Federal Marriage Amendment, if passed, would impose one particular, religiously rooted definition of marriage on all the citizens of the United States, Christian or not. The Amendment directly violates the separation of church and state, and so it undermines the principles of liberal democracy upon which the U.S. was founded. In a liberal society, conservative Christian churches certainly have the religious liberty to define marriage for their parishioners in any way they see fit, however, the liberal democratic state cannot legitimately make one particular interpretation of revealed religion the law of the land.

Phony Populism on the Right

Right-wing opponents of gay marriage claim that they stand for the interests of ordinary people when they oppose legal equality for all. This rhetorical strategy worked well during the 1970s, when opponents of the ERA portrayed feminism as advancing the interests of elite career women at the expense of housewives and working-class women. In reality, however, according to a 1994 study by Sara Diamond, it was middle-class women who performed the daily activist tasks essential to the anti-ERA movement.

In fact, Lisa McGirr's recent study of the origins of the New Right reveals its mass base to be comprised of, not the farmers and blue-collar working folks of George Wallace's segregationist South, or even the lower-middle-class, white ethnics who became "Reagan democrats," but rather the educated, affluent, upwardly mobile, white suburbanites, who reap material benefits from tax cuts and reduced government spending, from real estate development and the military-industrial complex, and from the traditional entitlements of white Christian America.

In its attack on same-sex marriage, the Right continues its pseudo-populist pose, claiming to speak for the interests of ordinary people who are supposedly being attacked by an elite "homosexual lobby." As Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons have argued, Christian Right propaganda frequently portrays gay men, like feminists, as a wealthy, privileged elite that wants to impose its immoral, self-serving agenda on American society. For example, a Family Research Council fundraiser says, "the Human Rights Campaign [HRC] and the other groups in the homosexual lobby have very deep pockets. Big corporations, elite foundations, and

Hollywood celebrities underwrite the homosexual lobby with tens of millions of dollars every year." Similarly, the Executive Director of the Traditional Values Coalition calls HRC "the wealthiest extremists of the left." In reality, however, anti-gay groups outspend LGBTQ groups "by at least a four-to-one ratio." Moreover, contrary to myth, gay men actually earn twenty to twenty-five percent less income than do heterosexual men. "Lesbians appear to earn about the same as heterosexual women, but lesbian couples earn less than straight couples because women, on average, earn less than men." Finally, many state and local anti-gay marriage groups that promote themselves as "grassroots" are actually funded by wealthy national organizations.[3]

Does Same-Sex Marriage Really Harm Men, Women, and Children?

While the Christian Right claims to speak for the good of society, it actually seeks to reconsolidate male dominance and reestablish the patriarchal family as the dominant family form in the United States, despite "extensive feminist analysis and empirical evidence" documenting the ways in which "gender role differentiation in families is connected to stratification in economic, political and social life" in a way that harms women.[4] Because no evidence exists that same-sex couples are less functional than heterosexual ones, or that their children are more likely to suffer negative effects, allowing same-sex couples to marry and have children would clearly undermine the myth that the patriarchal heterosexual family is the superior family form.

The conservative "fatherhood movement" blames feminism and single mothers for the social problems caused by men and teenaged boys. While the packaging of their arguments varies slightly, advocates generally make a similar claim: Refusing to respect natural gender differences, feminists have pathologized masculinity and futilely attempted to change the behavior of men and boys. They have undermined the rightful authority of men as the head of the household, attempted to change the natural division of labor between mothers and fathers, and propagated the idea that a woman can fulfill the role traditionally played by a man, thus rendering fathers superfluous to family life. Consequently, men have lost interest in fulfilling their traditional family responsibilities, and boys have no one to teach them how to become responsible men. Detached from the civilizing influence of the traditional patriarchal family, males increasingly cause a wide array of social problems, and everybody suffers.

Focus on the Family president James Dobson makes this argument from a Christian Right perspective. In Bringing Up Boys, he argues that traditional gender roles are natural and cannot be changed. He points to the continued power of men in society as evidence of their natural, "biochemical and anatomical," dominance. Dobson strongly opposes attempts to change the gender socialization of children and explicitly links this "unisex" idea to "the powerful gay and lesbian agenda," whose propagandists are teaching a revolutionary view of

sexuality called gender feminism,' which insists that sex assignment is irrelevant. While Dobson sees this as dangerous for both sexes, it is particularly harmful for boys: "Protect the masculinity of your boys, who will be under increasing political pressure in years to come."

Dobson believes that a breakdown of traditional gender roles within the family fosters homosexuality in children. The prevention of homosexuality among boys requires the involvement of a properly masculine heterosexual father, especially during the early years. Dobson relies on the work of Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, a leading proponent of the Christian Right's "ex-gay" movement, who urges parents to monitor their children for signs of "prehomosexuality," so professionals can step in before it is too late. While "feminine behavior in boyhood" is clearly a sign, so is "nonmasculinity" defined as not fitting in with male peers. "The father," Nicolosi asserts, "plays an essential role in a boy's normal development as a man. The truth is, Dad is more important than Mom." In order to ensure heterosexuality, the father "needs to mirror and affirm his son's maleness. He can play rough-and-tumble games with his son, in ways that are decidedly different from the games he would play with a little girl. He can help his son learn to throw and catch a ball. . . . . He can even take his son with him into the shower, where the boy cannot help but notice that Dad has a penis, just like his, only bigger."

Based solely on the work of Nicolosi, Dobson concludes, "if you as a parent have an effeminate boy or a masculinized girl, I urge you to get a copy [of Nicolosi's book] and then seek immediate professional help." Beware, however, of "secular" mental health professionals who will most certainly "take the wrong approach telling your child that he is homosexual and needs to accept that fact." Instead, Dobson recommends a referral from either Exodus International, the leading organization of the ex-gay ministries, or the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, founded to oppose the 1973 decision by the American Psychological Association to stop classifying homosexuality as an emotional or mental disorder.

While Dobson and the burgeoning "fatherhood movement" stress the harm the feminist and the LGBTQ movements have supposedly done to men and boys, the Right also insists that these movements for gender equality harm women as well. Concerned Women for America, which claims to be the largest women's group in the country, blames feminism in particular its support for legal equality, reproductive freedom, female sexual pleasure, and no-fault divorce for eroding the "protections" supposedly provided women by traditional marriage and family law, making it easier for men to renounce their familial responsibilities, and causing the feminization of poverty. In their view the LGBTQ movement continues these allegedly destructive trends by further undermining traditional gender roles, advocating diverse family forms, and reinforcing the disconnection between sexual pleasure and reproduction.

Some on the Right insist that with the important role played by women in the traditional family already undermined by feminism, the specter of same-sex marriage threatens to render women completely useless. For example, William Mattox, a USA Today columnist and Alliance for Marriage supporter, argues that "in the same way that polygamy teaches that women are inferior to men, gay marriage' implicitly teaches that women are superfluous to men, that women make no unique and irreplaceable contribution to family life. Indeed, gay marriage'

teaches that the most basic unit of human society marriage does not need a woman to be complete."

Despite this interesting rhetorical strategy, however, same-sex marriage does not actually undermine the position of women. In fact, the majority of same-sex couples seeking marriage are women 57 percent of same-sex couples who wed in San Francisco between February 12 and March 11, 2004, 71 percent of those who wed in Portland between March 3 and April 20, 2004, and 66 percent of first-day applicants in Massachusetts were women, as are two-thirds of Vermont civil unions. Since access to the civil benefits of marriage will help these women take care of each other and any dependent children they may have, gay marriage clearly helps rather than hurts the position of women by making it easier for them to survive outside the bounds of patriarchal marriage which is exactly what that Right opposes.

The Christian Right wants to continue portraying lesbians and gay men as inordinately driven by sexual desire and so unable to form long-term relationships. The visibility of committed same-sex couples illustrates the ordinariness of most lesbian and gay people's lives and demonstrates an alternative to the Christian Right's rigid view of proper gender roles and narrow definition of what constitutes a family. Because of their particular theological beliefs, right-wing Christians insist that men and women are fundamentally different beings that come together to reproduce and must remain coupled in order to rear their children. Because homosexuality disconnects sex from reproduction, they reason, homosexual relationships must be fleeting, driven by sexual gratification alone. As CWA founder Beverly LaHaye puts it, "it is the compulsive desire for sexual gratification without lasting commitment, the high rate of promiscuity, and the self-defined morality among homosexuals that sap the vitality of the family structure, making it something less than it was, is, and should be." Consequently, "homosexual relationships are not only the antithesis to family, but also threaten its very core."

Clearly the desire of many same-sex couples to marry and to raise children demonstrates that lesbians and gay men are not primarily seeking hedonistic gratification. In fact, the first same-sex couple to receive a marriage license in San Francisco has been together for fifty years, whereas half of all heterosexual marriages end in divorce. Most lesbians and gay men want the same types of relationships that straight people do. In fact, an estimated "64 to 80 percent of lesbians and 46 to 60 percent of gay men report that they are in committed partner relationships," and "studies show that gay and lesbian relationships are comparable to opposite-sex relationships in terms of quality of the relationship and satisfaction in the relationship." Furthermore, according to 2000 census data, "lesbian couples . . . parent at about three quarters of the rate of married straight couples, and gay male couples parent at about half the rate as married straight couples" and this only includes couples with at least one child living with them.[5] Nevertheless, despite empirical evidence, Christian Right groups purposely disseminate misinformation in an attempt to bolster their political agenda of marginalizing lesbians and gay men and reconsolidating the tradition of male dominance.

Conclusion

In their fight against legal equality for lesbians and gay men, the Christian Right appeals to the religious assumptions, historical customs, social anxieties and unexamined prejudices of many Americans, yet their overarching agenda actually undermines American democracy's most precious political principles, including the separation of Church and State, legal equality and personal liberty. While liberal democracy has its limitations, its virtue is that it maximizes the freedom of all by allowing individuals to organize their personal lives as they see fit. While the government may respond to the will of its citizens by providing a default set of legal entanglements that make it easier for individuals to establish families (i.e., civil marriage), it may not legitimately deny equal protection of the laws to unpopular minorities or enshrine a particular religious definition of marriage as the law of the land. Consequently, the State should ensure equal access to civil marriage and leave religious marriage where it belongs in the synagogues, churches, and mosques.

Notes

[1] Paul Varnell, "College Freshmen Support Gay Marriage," Chicago Free Press, January 30, 2002. <http://www.indegayforum.org/articles/varnell85.html> (4/17/02).

[2] Stephen Bennett, "Homosexuality and the Bible: What Does God Say?" (Stephen Bennett Ministries, Huntington, CT), 3. For an alternative view see Anne Fausto-Sterling, Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

[3] Quotes and statistics cited in Sean Cahill, Same-Sex Marriage in the United States: Focus on the Facts (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).

[4] Jyl J. Josephson and Cynthia Burack, "The Political Ideology of the Neo-Traditional Family," Journal of Political Ideologies 3, no. 2 (1998), 213-231, 224-225.

[5] Cahill, Same-Sex Marriage, 55, 57.

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The Future Of The Democratic Party

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The future of the Democratic Party depends on our ability to see into the future. We are going to win this presidential election. We will win the White House; we are going to take back the House of Representatives. Let us think about the future. Once we win, then what? That is one of the problems of the Democratic Party.

During Bill Clinton's presidency, the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) had the majority of both the Senate and the House of Representatives. But the philosophical strategy of the Democratic Leadership Council was to be more conservative and to become more like the Republicans. This has, in my opinion, almost destroyed the Democratic Party and it tore us away from the very thinking that allowed us to win the White House in the first place.

As Democrats, we can win on the basis of our ideology and our philosophy. The DLC made it appear that it was their ideology, their philosophy, their style that brought us into power- therefore they felt that they should dictate what Clinton's policy would be for the next 8 years. So, we had some monumental errors in terms of Clinton's public decisions and his philosophy and views on social policy.

Don't get me wrong; Bill Clinton was a great President. Hilary Clinton was a great First Lady. It was a very difficult period, a very nasty period, and the fascism of the Republicans was really beginning to show its teeth. I would congratulate him for being able to withstand many of these pressures.

We were putting too much stress on the DLC's philosophy, its style, and ideology. We were constantly looking to the Right to make decisions. Unfortunately, there was no strong Left that could be practical and command Clinton's attention. So he was always looking to the Right. He looked to the Left for small bodies of support, but we could not compete with the DLC in terms of cohesive vision and style.

Our future as the Democratic Party lies in our ability to understand that we are at a stage in America's history when the two parties are engaged in a kind of permanent war, and in such a situation, we must have the mechanical and logistical apparatus to survive.

The Democrats registered some 600,000 Congressional voters by the Internet. That number was completely demolished by Bush's 6,000,000 e-mails to constituents. This is just to give an idea of how logistically, mechanically, and technically speaking the Republicans have mastered their ability to compete. Perhaps this is the easy part, and I can say that the Democrats are on their way to dealing with this deficiency. That is why now, Democrats give anyone running for office the addresses of all the democratic residents in the country. This is an impressive achievement in the area of logistics and technology, but one that must be expanded and developed even further.

The next issue for the Left Democrats is the general terms of style and approach needed to understand our basic constituency. On this issue, the DLC must be broken away from. This may not be an optimistic view, yet we must understand that our fate does not lie in dividing up the 51% of people in America who vote while forgetting about the remaining 49%.

The area that is most critical is the area of ideology and philosophy. We need to have a clearer fix on where the future of the Democratic Party is. I think this lies in the 49% of people who do not come out and vote. Overwhelmingly, these people are the natural constituency of the Democratic Party ever since the party went back to being the party of Roosevelt. The party of Lyndon B. Johnson, when the Democrats were willing to reach out to the populace in massive ways, used the federal government to bring direct relief to the people, to really deal with basic problems-you'll remember that Johnson received overwhelming support for Medicare and Medicaid. Now, however, most people take these programs for granted, and most Republicans use Medicare and Medicaid to their advantage. Medicare is about to be block-granted to the states and the people who are recipients of it-parents in nursing homes and so forth-are voting Republican.

There are a lot of things we take for granted in the ideology and philosophy of Roosevelt, Johnson, and Truman. Some would agree that they clearly saw themselves as the party with the constituency that constantly needed to be reached out to and the party of big spending. And yet they did not worry about the charges of big government and big spending. It is only when Newt Gingrich came on the scene and screamed at us nearly every day for being the big-spending party that we took the charge, hook, line and sinker.

To be sure, during the Clinton years, we lost sight of reaching out to those people and groups who needed assistance from the federal government, such as schools. Rather than reaching out to the schools that needed construction and repair, or even giving support for local and state government salaries, the Democrats went into office with the perception that the American people believed that Democrats were the more important and greater supporters of education that the Republicans. This unilateral belief blinded the Democrats' sense of purpose. And there was also a statistical gap where 32% of the people felt that the Democrats were more inclined

to help education and local government.

Yet, when Clinton left office, the Democrats were losing their edge over the Republicans in regards to social education issues. In the public's eye, when Clinton left office, education was no longer the Democrats' issue: the Democrats and Republicans were basically tied on this issue.

Now, the Republicans are pulling ahead of us. How did that happen? The Republicans were vying for education. We Democrats did little more than nickel and dime things, and grants were done on proposal basis. There was a need for millions to participate, and yet we would receive a mere few thousand proposals. This was simply not enough to impress the education community. In this area, where we should have taken clear support and maintained our devoted constituency, the Republicans took over and moved ahead of us, particularly in the realm of perception.

Furthermore, we lost the senior citizens. After Jesse Clark Pepper left, in terms of the internal Democratic Party, there was nobody banging away at the leadership about what we had to do to be certain that we take good care of the senior citizens. One of the mistakes that the DLC made was putting a tax on Social Security. The damage that this measure has done in terms of the Democratic Party's image is immeasurable. In the tax package of 1993, we could have forgone taxing Social Security. This was the beginning of the erosion of Democratic support from senior citizens. So I was not shocked when the AARP came out and supported the Republicans' phony Medicare prescriptions. Republicans have done that before-taken it over with a coup, and won. We can slowly see senior citizens drifting away from us every time there is an election. In the case of the House of Representatives' members, this is especially true. It has to be admitted that senior citizens are drifting away from the Democrats toward the Republicans. This may not be total and complete at the present, but we have lost them.

How many more constituencies can we lose before we go out of business? The labor union constituency generally feels that we do not fight hard enough for them, and they are right; we do not fight hard enough for them. It is true that in the present atmosphere of a Republican president, a Republican Senate, and a Republican House, there are few things we Democrats can do.

I sit on the sub-committee for work force protection. I am right in the middle of it and I know how very little help we receive from the DLC when it comes to fighting that fight, and the labor unions can sense that. So naturally they are lukewarm about helping any one of us to stay in the House, and it has to be admitted that they have become lukewarm about the Democratic Party as a whole. Moreover, certain members of the democratic leadership have made the assumption that there is nowhere to go.

The Democrats must understand what Newt Gingrich's point was-despite his rampant yelling over and over again that we must balance a budget and what a great thing it is for the country-because he understood better than anyone else that this was a potent form of propaganda.

For example, the Republicans took a beating on an education issue in which Bill Clinton called their bluff-when they were complaining that the Democrats did not “fund education.” Although the Republicans lost the battle, they still managed-in terms of public opinion-to come back strong. They ended up passing, in the dead of night, an appropriation bill.

They talked at great lengths about standards and about testing, but nobody discussed standards that would make every state have certification measures for teachers, decent libraries, decent student centers and laboratories, and the plethora of details that must be figured into the equation of a good education bill. Then at night, without proper legislation, the Republicans took that section out, traded it out to Clinton’s people, and what they put in was very impressive adding in the biggest fiscal increase in education history: six billion dollars.

This increase marked the Republicans’ signature that education was no longer a Democratic issue. The Republicans were not worried about balancing the budget when it came to making a political point. And George Bush has taken this even further because balancing the budget is not a great concern of the voters. But the Democrats swallowed it; while Clinton was concerned with balancing the budget, we still gave money for education, school construction, and a number of other things that needed to be funded. We came out with a surplus. We turned around the deficit. But big deal. Then Bush enters and says that 26% to 27% of the electorate is the Republicans’ constituency, and that they are going to take care of that 26% to 27%.

Now, it is silly to give as much as we can to that 26% or 27% that will undoubtedly vote Republican. Big tax cuts and huge farm sustenance programs are programs for red states, states that historically vote Republican anyway. Clinton made it a crusade to reform welfare to no end and the whole thing erupted and backfired, becoming a horrible scene in the Clinton administration.

The red states that receive farm subsidies still turned away Clinton’s tariff programs and that just reinforces the idea that red states will be Republican as voters. Also, while we were doing that, the farm subsidies were going up, and keep in mind that the farming population is about 2% of the total population of the nation-they are less than 2% of the population and yet they walk off with a $520,000,000 per-five-year subsidiary bill, a pure giveaway. This is the same subsidy that the welfare families get, yet they are not getting nearly enough of it.

Now, the quotas which the government gave to individual farmers and families have been forged into the hands of corporations. We were bold last time and said that no corporation could get more than a $275,000 minimum balance while no one subsidy should be more than $275,000.

This is they type of initiative that the Democrats keep supporting, even though it clearly represents the Republicans’ constituency. If one was to look at a map of the United States during election night, they would find that the states which overwhelmingly support Republicans are the states which receive more subsidies, per capita, than any other state in the union. Studies are released yearly that reinforce the fact that the southern states, as well as

Arizona and New Mexico, get more, per capita, than any of the northern states. So it's no surprise that on election night we see that the red states are overwhelmingly the farm states.

New York, on the other hand, gets nothing. New York is the state that gives money away; at one point about 9 years ago, New York had about $9 billion more flowing out as tax money to the federal office than it had coming back in, in terms of benefits and programs for our constituency. Yet the state has the biggest defense operations and terror alerts. The Democrats allow money to flow out of New York, and constantly fail to make the big spending, the label Democrats have been synonymous with, on their very own constituency. If our constituency is the working families and the working poor, then bringing them back into the fold is absolutely necessary. This means fighting for them in terms of spending, clearly.

The Democrats have not even begun to make sense of their style. In order to promote ourselves, much like Newt Gingrich understood, the Democrats must be able reach out, rally, and organize our very constituency. It is so essential a point that without this crucial aspect, we will simply not survive.

Newt Gingrich understands it. Newt Gingrich is probably the most brilliant politician since Machiavelli. He understands the law and how to create a fund system. He did not just come into power because he raised a lot of money. He had a fund system down at the city council level where there are moves and publicists, then at the state level, and from there they began quietly taking over the state houses across the country. Tip O'Neill used to say that "all politics is local." All politics begins local, but as you go, a lot of the system has to be integrated from the top to the bottom.

For example, he made a reform that is still intact. Republicans entering Congress do not have to wait forever to become a chairman or a sub-committee chairman. In 6 years, they can turn over. They change the chairmanships every 6 years, and that means kicking out the old roles. The Republicans then arrange ways in which the freshman can be highlighted on the floor, immediately. My guys, on the other hand, are told that if they hang around for two years and if they stay in their respective communities for most of the time, then they can talk about being integrated into the system.

That which is free makes full use of very talented people. The truth is, there are no dumb people in Congress; evil people, perhaps, but they are not dumb. They all have something to offer. This is part of the advantage of the Republicans' mentality. They may do terrible things, but they do them with great guile and genius, and this is what Democrats must understand.

We have to revamp the party. There is much more than can said about our style and approach. But most important is that ideologically and philosophically we return to dedicating ourselves to the folks who are left out of the system, who remain powerless. We must dedicate ourselves to empowering them, for we will not and cannot survive otherwise. The future of the Democratic Party as a force is one that works on trying to do exactly that.

Howard Dean gave us a great boost forward. I am very supportive of Dean simply because he

jumped up there and just said it. It shook up many of our colleagues and Congressmen and that was good because it demonstrated the fact that he was not beholden to just a handful of contributors. The future of his organization and the future of the Democrats are now seen as a broadening innovation of contributions. We must get beyond the fact that the fat cats control everything; there are this set of corporate puppeteers and puppet masters or that set of corporate puppeteers and puppet masters…the Democrats control one set and the Republicans control the other…we have to break out of that in order to reach a new era of the Democratic Left. Dean has shown us how to break out of it.

I think a win by Kerry will certainly demonstrate a return to Democratic values. The Bush agenda may include a whole host of changes that could include the draft and even more ludicrous measures. If the Republicans manage to get re-elected after all they have done, the unthinkable really may come. The first item that must be on our agenda is making sure America remains hopeful and that there is still hope for the Democratic Party to survive.

This article was adapted by Michal Shmulovich from a talk given in New York City in the spring of 2004.

America’s Friend: Reflections On Tony Blair

By | 2004: Vol. 3, No. 4

The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, may not be an enigmatic figure, but his relationship with President George W. Bush is seemingly one of the great political riddles of our time. To understand it, and the reverence Blair is shown by the Bush administration-so much so that Tory Opposition leader, Michael Howard was recently curtly informed by Karl Rove that his presence would not be welcome in the White House-it is necessary to go to first base. What is it that motivates and informs the Prime Minister, how was he drawn into politics-and more precisely, why did he settle on the Labor Party?

Mr. Blair is the product of an atypical small “c” Conservative family. His father Leo even stood as a Conservative candidate. The young Tony’s right of political passage might, in common with generations of middle class children who found their home in the Labor Party, have been expected to have been defined by rebelliousness and an early attraction to Left wing politics. In fact the young Tony appears to have shown little interest in politics or the Left-he never joined any political party or club at university, instead confined himself to a youthful enthusiasm for Rock, and his band “Ugly Rumours.” While many of his compatriots now in the British Cabinet spent their formative years in the Communist Party, the International Marxist Group, the Socialist Workers Party or Militant, Tony Blair remained the political virgin. That is until he met his wife to be Cherie Booth, who was a young radical lawyer from a Labor supporting family. Blair’s induction into Labor politics was swift, but not deep. His new wife stood as a Labor candidate in the hopeless Tory seat of Thanet in Kent, and perhaps it was her experience that led Tony to stand in an equally hopeless seat in Buckinghamshire.

In 1983, Blair was selected on the casting vote of the local party chairman to stand as the Labor candidate in the rock solid mining seat of Sedgefield in County Durham. Young, protean and eminently presentable, Labor chieftains helped ensure that this last minute selection before the 1983 General Election produced the nomination for Blair. In 1983, Tony Blair described himself as a supporter of *Tribune*, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Michael Foot. His election manifesto called for Britain to “leave the Common Market” (now the European Union). Once in Parliament, Blair showed the political dexterity that was to propel him to the top of the Labor Party a decade later. He formed an early working and close friendship with the future Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. He still claimed he was a supporter of Tribune, but signed up to the Right wing Solidarity Group of Labor MPs (many Solidarity Group MPs whose politics haven’t changed in the intervening decade now see themselves on the Left as the Labor Party has moved steadily to the Right).

Blair’s rise inside the Opposition Labor Party was inexorable. An effective communicator,

young and good-looking, he was soon promoted to the Front Bench. His political partnership with Brown was cemented, and as a Shadow Employment Minister, Blair used his legal training to champion the Minimum Wage. Behind the scenes however, Blair and Brown were becoming increasingly impatient at Labor's failure to "modernize." The loss of the 1992 General Election reinforced their view that Labor would have to distance itself from the trade unions and Socialism. What had begun as a campaign to improve the image and communications arm of an increasingly sclerotic party, had, by the time that John Smith became leader in 1992 become a covet campaign to break with Labor traditional Democratic Socialist ideology. The campaign's apotheosis was Blair's attack on Labor's Clause 4 constitution, which promised to "Secure for the Workers, by hand or by brain the full fruits of their Labor, based on the common ownership of the means of distribution and exchange."

In those early years of the Blair hegemony of the Labor Party-his partner, Gordon Brown had meanwhile secured "ownership" of Labor's domestic economic policy-it soon became apparent that "modernization" was simply a means to an end. That end was power-something most Labor people welcomed after decades in opposition-but the means were opaque. Labor's Socialism, in practice a Laborist social democracy, was not to be replaced with a Scandinavian style social democracy. Instead Blair and Brown drew their inspiration from Bill Clinton and the "New" Democrats. Brown had, and remains a regular visitor to the United States; one of his oldest American friends is the veteran Democrat campaigner, Bob Shrum. Where Brown was fascinated by the new policy direction adopted by Clinton and the New Democrats-their attempt to secure the middle ground, and the tailoring of economic policy to assist the working poor, Blair was more taken with the Clinton teams' tailoring of the message with the media in mind. Brown borrowed "workfare" while Blair adopted the very New Democrat slogan, "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime." His obsession with "triangulating" the opposition continues to this day. Typically, Blair's approach is to poach from the right before the Right has had a chance to popularise what it has thought up.

As an electoral strategy, "Triangulation" brought huge dividends. But it never occurred to Blair that by shifting Labor onto Tory territory, it would be much more difficult to challenge popular prejudices. Nor did it occur to him that each time he inched further into enemy territory, others on the Right would goad him further. In time, Blair's political positioning meant that he would automatically define himself by standing against much of what Labor and the union movement believed. To earn the plaudits he so craved from the Right wing media, Blair invariably set out to antagonise the Labor Party. In so far as there was no where else for Labor voters to go, and that there was tremendous goodwill to a politician who was clearly an electoral asset, the Blair New Labor Project carried all before it. With the help of the unions, who Blair clearly disliked, the new leader transformed the Labor Party from a federal grass roots voluntary association, to a "command and control" top down institution.

Blair and Brown are fundamentally "faith based" politicians, and in a party that historically owed more to Methodism than Marx did, to begin with Brown's Calvinist zeal and Blair's Anglo-Catholicism didn't seem out of place. Socialism was replaced with Blair's "socialism," the new political dispensation often seemed to be based on missionary zeal, the management

consultant's love of the market and the happy clappy encomiums of a series of gurus. And so New Labor could be the party of Amitai Etzioni's Communitarianism, or it might be Professor Anthony Giddens' Third Way. "What matters" said Blair once "is what works."

Blair shared his love of gurus, celebrities and the new wealthy media class with Bill Clinton. Very much the junior intellectual partner, Blair revelled in his friendship with the equally dextrous and popular American President. In common with Clinton again, Blair shared the view that "globalization," or old-fashioned unregulated capitalism, would solve the ills of the world. The collapse of the Soviet Empire, and the resultant unipolar world, meant that America and her junior partner, Britain, would help determine a new World Order built primarily on market fundamentalism.

Clinton's involvement in the successful Irish peace process encouraged Blair to believe that this new partnership could intervene successfully elsewhere. And following the failure of the United Nations-and the European Union-in the disintegrating Yugoslavia, it was to American and Bill Clinton that Blair turned. The Prime Minister was genuinely outraged at the pogroms being conducted on European soil, barely fifty years after the defeat of Hitler's Germany. He was angered as the UN was held back from intervening in Srebrenica, where hundreds of innocents were slaughtered by Serb militias. Clinton's decision to send US troops to Europe for the first time since the end of the Second World War cemented that bond. And out of it came a by-product of "globalization"-"humanitarian interventionism." Blair's speech to the Labor Party Conference three years ago was redolent of the old Socialist Internationalism that once saw volunteers from Britain sign up to fight in the International Brigades against Fascism in Spain. His speech dwelt heavily on the failure of the international community to halt the genocide in Rwanda-a failure that was to be repeated despite the gravitation from "humanitarian interventionism" to pre-emptive strikes, in Darfur, Sudan, today.

To many on the Left, Blair's "humanitarian interventionism" was also rooted in his Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook's, new ethical foreign policy. So when the British Government's early attempt to help end the civil war in the former West African colony of Sierra Leone became mixed up with an unsavoury mercenary outfit, few cried foul. But closer attention to Blair's Labor Conference speech reveals more than an iron fist behind the velvet. Not for the first time, Blair had deliberately managed to fuse a traditional Left wing internationalism, with an old imperialism. When I left the conference hall, I told a waiting BBC reporter that "Tony Blair has just donned the cloak of imperial purple."

So if Blair was shaken by the election of the most Right wing American President in living memory, he didn't show it. Blair had won two landslide elections. In his book, the "old" Europe, led by Germany and France was failing to appreciate the new global order of liberal economics and fast buck capitalism. The "old" Europe often appeared reluctant to sign up to military adventures; its caution was out of step with the new dispensation. In truth Britain's most non-ideological and footloose Prime Minister simply did not comprehend or appreciate just how ideological Messrs Cheney, Rove, Rice and others were. In truth, Tony Blair genuinely had no idea what the "neo-cons" were all about.

And so to Blair's eventual nemesis-Iraq. Blair's studied confusion as to why Britain joined forces with the US in invading Iraq demonstrates his inability to comprehend the post Sept 11th shift from "humanitarian interventionism" to the doctrine of the pre-emptive strike. On the one hand, Blair cited the "clear and present danger" of Saddam's non-existent WDM. On the other hand, Blair wanted to rid Iraq of a vile dictator who had massacred thousands of his own people. Had Blair even managed to call the old protagonists of Cold War containment, such as Henry Kissinger, he might have discovered that the man behind the carpet bombing of Cambodia and the Ho Chi Minh trail balked at the idea of pre-emption. Unlike the relationship with Clinton, Blair's relationship with Bush was more one of equals. Post September 11th, Blair hoped to use Britain's influence-and support for the Iraq invasion-as a lever to get Bush to back the Israel/Palestine Roadmap. Blair's unconditional support for Bush not only led the British Prime Minister to embellish faulty intelligence in support of war, but to the largest peace time demonstration in modern British history. Liberal Britain began to turn its back on Blair, and when the Prime Minister's impotence ignorance of the neo cons uncritical support of Israel, led to the Road Map being unofficially abandoned, Blair was left without a fig leaf as cover.

From Labor to New Labor, from humanitarian interventionism to pre-emption, from Democrat to Republican, Tony Blair has presided over the collapse of Labor's grass roots, five wars, and the truly remarkable scenario that has a nominal Labor leader identified more with Bush than John Kerry.

Ranged against him is the outrage of Liberal Britain, the impotence of the disenfranchised working class and a political opposition that is splintered. The official Opposition, in the shape of Michael Howard's Conservative Party supported the war on Iraq and therefore cannot capitalise on Blair's strategic blunder. Blair, himself, has no exit strategy from Iraq-and prefers to escape to break bread with those struggling to help Sub Saharan Africa escape from kleptocracy, corruption, poverty and military coups. Conferences and photocalls in Khartoum and Addis Ababa are more congenial than the roll call of casualties from Basra and the fury of Mothers who have lost their sons in what Kofi Annan has described as "an illegal war."

If John Kerry wins, Blair will be more isolated than ever. True he will do his best to "Triangulate" towards the new American dispensation-but even this very British Houdini may find it difficult to wriggle free from a new Senate Inquiry into the War ordered by President Kerry.

Having declared that he will stay on for a Third full term of four or five years if re-elected in the spring, I give Tony Blair a year maximum.

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currently writing a book Dear Leader *a dissenter's tale from within New Labor. His e-mail is* Seddonzq1@aol.com

A Conversation With Benjamin Barber

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Benjamin Barber is the Gershon and Carol Kekst Professor of Civil Society at University of Maryland, College Park and the Principal and Director of the Democracy Collaborative. His most recent work is Fear's Empire *(Norton, 2003). For more information on his writings and activities, see his website www.benjaminbarber.org.*
Q: Professor Barber, perhaps you can give us a bit of information about your background and your consequent engagement in politics. And how do you see your current role?

Barber: Well I started out as an academic political philosopher, but because my parents were both in the theater professionally, and because as a young man I often directed and wrote for the theater, I already had a sense of the world well beyond the academy. I actually went into political philosophy out of a deep concern for and commitment to politics. My work as a political philosopher focused, from my early days, on democracy. My dissertation was on the Swiss political system and the way it contrasted with the American political system. My focus was on citizen democracy and communal freedom in Switzerland and its differences even with western political regimes. So early on I learned a lesson, which has stayed with me ever since, which is that there is no such thing as democracy, only democracies in the plural. There are many roads to democracy and many forms of democracy and the Swiss system is certainly an example of that. So when in later years I became more politically active and politically engaged, it was not a departure from my academic work, but a natural expression of my ongoing interest in not just democratic theory, but also democratic practice.

Q: You know, you're one of the few political scientists, who has actually explored the connection between politics and culture. So perhaps I can ask for some reflections on the current state of political culture in the United States?

Barber: The sad thing is that, historically, while the arts don't need democracy, democracy needs the arts. I mean, ironically, sometimes the arts flourish better in oppressive cultures where they appear as radical, dissident elements and where artists find their voice in resistance. It has always been a problem for the arts to exist in the kind of marshmallow culture of a bourgeois, materialist, relatively open society, say like the United States. Even more to the point, there is a tendency in America to avoid demanding funding for the arts and support for the arts by the government. The fear of censorship from above has led to subordinating the arts to the marketplace where a very different kind of narrowness from below occurs as a consequence of imposing the profit motive and a marketplace mentality on the arts. So, in the United States today, rather than being a centerpiece of a vital and robust civic culture, the arts exist as a diminutive piece of a capitalist market culture: artists being subordinated to profits, innovation being subordinated to what entertains and what sells in ways that have had a devastating effect not just on artists and the arts but also on democracy

because the erosion of the arts, I think, has also damaged the civil culture at large and made for a less robust democracy. By the way my wife is a choreographer and dancer who runs a dance company so I know whereof I speak.

Q: It's interesting, isn't it, that this crucial issue which you raise is barely ever discussed in any campaign at all. How do you explain that?

Barber: I think that's the sign in our culture of marginalization; not oppression, but invisibility, and the fact that the arts don't exist, as you say, even as a topic, let alone as a subject of real controversy or debate of what their role should be suggests how completely marginalized they have become. We know that every time there is a cut in the school budget, the very first thing to go is the arts.

My daughter, when she went to public school in New Jersey, had Art in the form of what was euphemistically called, "Art in a cart" which meant there was no homeroom, no classroom for the arts, but rather a little cart came around with a set of paints or a flute or a recorder and that was "arts" for the school. That's a sad commentary on the peripheralization and the marginalization of the arts in our culture. You're right, when was the last time in any presidential debate, in any discussion of political leadership or legislative leadership we've has a serious discussion about the role of the arts?

By the way, unfortunately America is leading the way for the West in this respect, because until recently, of course, we would always contrast the American approach with the European approach, which involved serious governmental and civic support for the arts. But in the new European market economy, increasingly, we're seeing the arts also marginalized. Berlin, which used to support the arts so well, has had budgetary crises that have put a lot of pressure on those arts budgets. In fact, rather than the United States learning from more enlightened civic cultures in Europe, Europe seems to be unlearning its own lessons by following the American example.

Q: You were a principal advisor to Howard Dean during his campaign. Now, when you look back on it, do you feel it had any affect on the American political culture? What did it accomplish and why do you think it failed?

Barber: Well two things: its achievements, its short-term achievements, can be seen in the irony of a campaign in which for the first six months, the Democratic Party was screaming "we need a centrist candidate," "we need a compromiser, we need somebody who doesn't scare America, we need somebody who looks like the Republicans." And then, it was warning "look at this man, he is out there saying what he believes bluntly: he defends freedom of the press, he says he's against the war-we can't have a candidate like that!"

That was the first six months. Then, after Kerry got nominated, for the next six months Democrats were yelling "Oh my God! Why don't we have a candidate who says what he believes? Why don't we have somebody against the war? Why don't we have somebody who speaks his mind?" Of course, they had that person and in effect, undid his campaign. In fact,

Howard Dean certainly represented qualities that the Democratic Party needs, not radical qualities, (he was hardly on the far left) but a willingness to speak honestly to the differences, to speak bluntly, to tell it like it is, to speak honestly, as he did about the ways in which the media and news have been subordinated to entertainment and profit, the large international conglomerates that now control all of the media, he talked about those things. He spoke about such things bluntly, he spoke his mind and I think that that was an extraordinary thing.

Ironically, in the first presidential debate, people breathed a sigh of relief because John Kerry sounded a little more like Howard Dean and perhaps regained a little edge in his faltering presidential campaign. As a consequence, we all hope it's going to revive the campaign.

Q: You know, Governor Dean said himself that he failed in making the transition from being a candidate of resistance to being a front-runner. What do you think about that?

Barber: Well I think that's not quite fair because, of course, he was the front-runner and I would argue that he didn't lose from inside. His campaign was hit from three sides-all from the outside. The Republicans were certainly afraid of him. He was the candidate I think they most feared and they went after him. The Democrats, particularly the Democratic Leadership Council, the sort of centrist Democrats who think that the way to beat Bush is to look more like Bush than Bush looks like Bush, were against him and, most importantly, the media were offended by him. They didn't like what he represented and were particularly offended by his attacks on the [mainstream] media, that he told the truth about who controls them and what they do…and so the "Iowa Scream" as it's been called. It was completely manufactured by the media.

Q: What do you mean?

Barber: What actually happened-Peter Jennings finally exposed it about ten days afterwards-Howard Dean was in a room with about 3,000 disappointed, raucous young supporters and they were yelling and crying and singing. He was trying to get their attention and trying to make his speech. What Dean did has often been done by candidates during campaign rallies. The report from the room was that nobody could hear what he was saying, but television isolated him on camera and in voice. He was made to sound like he was speaking to a still room and you know, yelling at the top of his lungs like a maniac. Ten days later, Peter Jennings actually ran a tape in which the background noise of the room and the ambience of the room were present and at that point it was a completely different tape. You could hear a man trying to regain control of a room full of noise and yelling and out of control and it made for a completely different impression.

So you might say that, in fact, the media set up Howard Dean and manufactured what seemed like aberrant behavior that, in the actual context of what was happening, was entirely normal. Everyone who saw him at the event couldn't possibly have seen it as anything but a heroic effort by a candidate to rally the troops, which is what it was.

But let me just finish about Howard Dean because you started asking what was a really good

question, which was: is there a long-term effect? The short term effect was that he made it clear that the party was capable of speaking bluntly and honestly, which Kerry is finally beginning to do, to his advantage. But the long term thing Howard Dean did, I think, was to show the larger public that there are a great many young people, disenfranchised voters, who are cynical, who can be energized and brought into the political process by a prudent combination of an honest, blunt candidate and a brilliant use of the new technologies. And of course, Howard Dean's use, following his advisor Joe Trippi, of the new technologies, the web and the internet, his use of virtual town meetings and get-togethers ("meet-ups") was a powerful lesson both in the importance of the new technologies to electoral politics, but also in the ability of a candidate willing to reach out beyond the normal bounds of electoral politics to people outside the political arena and actually draw them into the arena. In that sense, he's continuing: "Dean for America" has actually become "Democracy for America." Howard Dean is trying to take responsibility for trying to keep new and younger and alienated voters in the political system and for that, we both owe him a debt and ought to draw some useful lessons from his experience.

Q: Your classic work of political theory, Strong Democracy*, argued that we shouldn't simply view democracy in institutional terms, but rather with an eye on the actual participation of people in the process. Now, I would imagine, you see Howard Dean as having made a positive move, a positive contribution to that kind of development.*

Barber: I do. *Strong Democracy* was published in 1984 and just republished in a 20th Anniversary Edition. It has been continuously in print since 1984. The new introduction actually discusses exactly this question.

Q: Very interesting

Barber: And there's no question. The argument I try to make in *Strong Democracy* is that while it's true that we live in a large scale representative democracy where electoral institutions have to be, to some extent, representative, there are opportunities for participation and civic engagement both at the national, the state and the local level of many, many different kinds. Voting is only one of the many things that citizens can do and civic participation and civic engagement must spread across the borders, spread across every sector of society. John Dewey said: "Democracy is not a form of government, it's a way of life." And that's a powerful way to describe what I mean when I speak about strong democracy.

The first time I went up to Burlington to visit with Dean and Joe Trippi, *Strong Democracy* was sitting on Trippi's desk and they said that a number of people in the campaign had been aware of that book. I don't mean to say that this was anything more than one among many, many sources, but I'm happy to say that it is a book that I think has had an impact beyond the academy on people who do participatory politics. What I first said in 1984 is that despite the fact that we live in a rather alienated, electorally representative society, there are ample opportunities for those who are thoughtful and use their ingenuity to extend participation in many different ways. Howard Dean has certainly shown that even the electoral process and the

nomination process in the primaries can become a site for what he calls meet-ups and people coming together and citizens coming into touch with one another. One of the arguments I make in *Strong Democracy* is that vertical integration and vertical communication, which is the strength of representative democracy, disallows to a large extent the forms of horizontal and lateral communication that are essential to participatory or strong democracy. One of the brilliant things that the Dean Campaign did was to afford citizens new opportunities through these meet-ups and these virtual meetings and the get-togethers to forge new forms of lateral communication with one another — citizen to citizen communication, not just citizen to candidate communication. This supplemented representative democracy in ways that really did strengthen at the base the possibilities for participation. In that sense I think that the Howard Dean campaign is a powerful instance of the possibilities of participation in strong democracy, even in the larger setting of representative democracy.

Q: I just heard Howard Dean call President Clinton, the greatest politician of our age and I know that in your book, The Truth of Power*, you reflected upon your experience as an advisor to Clinton. How do you see Clinton's legacy for this election?*

Barber: This goes to the heart of one of the great American tragedies because there's no question that Bill Clinton had the capacity to be one of the great American presidents. He was a natural politician, a natural leader, he electrified people, he had personal contact with people and could speak to a wide variety of people across America. People always felt he was somebody who embodied who they were. I mean, people said (not altogether just as a metaphor) that he was the first Black president, the first gay president; even women, even feminists-despite his shenanigans-would say in some ways he was the first woman president, the first feminist president. He seemed able to capture and embody the spirit of people who had been on the margins of American politics and in recent decades had come to the center of American politics.

As we know, not just because of his legacy, his alcoholic father and the inner psychological tumult that he had constantly to deal with, but for other reasons too, he seemed finally unable to put his political personality and his political leadership to the purposes of a great political vision. My conclusion in *The Truth of Power*, my memoir about that time with Clinton, was that the real tragedy was not just how he squandered his leadership in the sexual scandals and so forth, but his inability really to develop a great vision. So that he was a would be great vision politician who conducted a mundane, detail-oriented presidency. That was the Dick Morris influence too. You know, Clinton would have these extraordinary weekends with Skip Gates and with Bob Putnam, Harry Boyte and Jenny Mansbridge, with me and Sam Beer, with a remarkable group of advisors and friends and intellectuals, who saw him really as an equal in debate and discussion. We would talk for the weekend and we'd all come away saying "Oh my God, here is a truly visionary president"! But later on we found out, on Monday mornings he'd go back to the White House and call his triangulating Rasputin (today a right-wing zealot) Dick Morris and ask what he should do next. So there was this kind of extraordinary gap between his capacity and potential as a visionary leader and what he actually envisioned as a politician sitting in the White House.

As a consequence, I think, Clinton was always a radical underachiever in terms of what I think people expected of him and expected of what his political skills could have made possible. You know also, these extraordinary political skills he had to lead, he never used them. He didn't set his sights very far out on the horizon. I mean everybody from Newt Gingrich to the most conservative Republicans said "My God, you gotta watch out for this guy, he can charm the bark off of a tree;" Newt Gingrich would say. "You know, he can get anything he wants." He was a president who could get anything he wanted from the American people and he never asked very much.

Q: Let me cut to the chase: if it's true as you suggest, and I think that what you say is very much on target, the specter of President Clinton still looms over our era. Do you think that the Democratic Party really can act as anything more than a brake on the neo-conservative project?

Barber: There's some chance that Kerry will be able to do that. I think really curtailing and undermining and as you put it, putting the brakes on the neo-conservatives and not just the neo-conservatives, but perhaps just as important, also the neo-liberals. Because the neo-conservative project has spoken with a forked tongue: On the one hand it's culturally conservative, Christian conservative, it wants government to intervene and ban gay marriage and abortion and tell people how to live virtuous lives. But on the other hand, it's deeply neo-liberal. It wants to dismantle government, it sees government as the oppressor, it wants to leave the marketplace free of any democratic constraints, which puts the profit incentive at the very center of human affairs in a way that deeply distorts those affairs. The Christian conservative agenda and the neo-liberal, anti-government agenda are, I think, corrosive of democracy. Putting the brakes on that joint project is a vital and important thing to do.

The question is whether the Democratic Party can do it without some vision of its own, without an alternative vision of its own. If I were to describe my current sense of what our project needs to be as public intellectuals, what the project of *Logos*, and those who are trying to provide an alternative, it is to try to help construct an alternative vision of the world that will match the neo-conservative, neo-liberal vision of it. The fact is that people like Irving Kristol, Gertrude Himmelfarb-about whom Steve Bronner wrote a very interesting and useful piece about their use of the Enlightenment in pursuing the neo-conservative project1-did the hard work of constructing a vision. They earned, as it were, the political success they had with Ronald Reagan and with the two Bush's.

The Democratic Party has not done similar political work. It's kind of running on empty. On the one hand it's got the New Deal and on the other side, it's got the New Democrats, and you know, the New Deal is part of a 19th Century class-war model of politics that clearly doesn't work anymore, but the New Democrats seem to think that all we have to do is be kind Republicans and do business with business and we're in business. Neither of those two visions really gets the hard conceptual work done. Another way to put it is that the neo-conservatives and the neo-liberals have all come to terms with globalization. They're very comfortable with market globalization while, for the most part, progressives are still afraid of and hostile to

globalization.

Q: That was exactly what I was going to ask next. Especially given the impact of what I guess is your most popular book, Jihad vs. McWorld*, how do you see the connection between shall we say "the war on terror" and globalization?*

Barber: Globalization is about anarchy; globalization is about the erosion of sovereign states, the erosion of sovereignty, the erosion of national frontiers and the emergence of an anarchic, international world without governance, without civic structure, without regulation-and there are two powerful manifestations of such anarchy of the world. One is global markets, predatory capital, capital jobs and whole industries hemorrhaging abroad which no sovereign state can stop, which is a violent ideology in an anarchic global world unregulated by global law, global police, or global cooperation. So in a sense you might say that predatory capital on the one hand and terrorism on the other are two very different sides-I don't want to in any other way analogize them any other way-of the same coin. As I said, the neo-liberals have come to terms with globalization by embracing the anarchy of markets although they are struck and damaged and frightened by the anarchy of terrorism. Some people are beginning to see that there is some connection between the anarchy that allows markets to spread and capital to spread where they will, and the anarchy that allows drugs and weapons of mass destruction and terrorism to spread where it will.

Q: Taking your analysis here a step further: so many Americans still believe that Saddam Hussein was behind the attacks of September 11th that there seems to me some kind of, I don't know how to put it, anarchy of judgment. Do you see what I mean?

Barber: That's there, of course, though it's interesting because, over and over again, even the Bush administration has admitted there is no connection between Saddam and the attacks of 9/11. Yet again, in the debate on September 30th, Bush had to be corrected by Kerry because, while talking about the war in Iraq, Bush said "well they attacked us and we need a president who when they attack us, retaliates" and Kerry said, "Excuse me, but they didn't attack us. Iraq didn't attack us, Al Qaeda attacked us." So that kind of mythology goes on. I really want to come back to the essential issue here, which I think is the inability of the Democrats to develop a vision that accepts the reality of globalization and deals with it. We'll say the Republicans have done it by embracing anarchy on the market side and trying to challenge anarchy through the war on terrorism, but the Democrats and progressives generally appear to think that anti-globalization, arresting and stopping globalization, is the only way to go which is why they're soft protectionists, that is to say, they want to kind of curtail free-trade and weaken NAFTA without eliminating them.

The unions have not really got a position on globalization other than to say it's a bad thing. Yet that's simplistic, ahistorical, anachronistic, and politically useless. What's really needed is a way for progressives to embrace and understand the inevitable realities of globalization and interdependence without simply accepting the anarchy that goes with them. My formula for that, of course, highlights the need to democratize globalization. What we're faced with is a

malevolent form of interdependence and what we need to find is an architecture of benevolent, civic interdependence. We are never going to put the genie of those global forces that today anarchically control the world back into the nationalist bottle. What we need to do, in other words, is globalize democratization or democratize globalization, not try to arrest globalization. The democratic vision long-term — one that Clinton never developed and the DLC certainly hasn't developed and I think we need to work on asks the Democratic Party and other progressives to take responsibility for finding new ways to democratize globalization. We've got doctors without frontiers, we've got criminals without frontiers, we have capitalists without frontiers, and we have terrorists without frontiers. The one thing we're missing is: citizens without frontiers. The Democratic project, I believe, should rest on finding ways to create citizens without frontiers.

Q: This kind of vision, this cosmopolitan vision is something that Logos *has certainly stood for since its inception. And yet it's clear that this type of vision challenges the provincial values that so many of us have grown up with. In your last work,* Fear's Empire*, you center on this pervasive anxiety and its connection with empire. Do you want to talk a bit about that? How do you see its impact on present policy and culture?*

Barber: Well yes, because the reality is that we live in a world today, specifically in the United States, which has been dominated by fear. It's a fear that was originally inspired by terrorism-but it's also a fear that, in a sense, we ourselves have spread. If you think about terrorists for a minute, you realize that terrorists are men and women without power. They're not CEO's, they're not authors, they don't have armies and navies, and they don't control economies. They're men and women without power. Their powerlessness is what makes them terrorists. If they had a stock portfolio or a presidency or an army under their command, they wouldn't be terrorists. The only power they have is the power to instill fear in others (hence the term terrorists). They terrify. They terrorize. But the interesting thing about fear is that other people can't actually make you afraid. You can only make yourself afraid. *We* are in control of the fear factor.

If you think of 9/11, it was a horrendous and tragic event, but it was like a cataclysmic earthquake or the Titanic going down. It was a terrible tragedy, but with respect to the actual power of the United States, it was as a fleabite on a grizzly bear. Hijackers used box cutters to hijack four planes, but we closed down the air transport system. The hijackers hit the World Trade Center, the symbol of capitalism, but we closed the stock market for a week and anxious investors have kept it in difficulty for three years. Osama bin Laden wanted to strike at American democracy, but he couldn't begin to do that. But in response to Osama bin Laden, we ourselves have damaged our democracy through the Patriot Act and Guantanamo Bay and by constricting our liberties and closing down our open borders. We have done damage to ourselves through the politics of fear that Osama himself never could have done.

Q: So let me ask you then, what do you see as the most important impact on democracy if Bush and his agenda win in November?

Barber: To have chosen the wrong turf to fight terrorism. Bush has chosen the turf of fear and that is the terrorists own turf. Even if we beat the terrorists and Al Qaeda, they win if our democracy succumbs to a politics of fear. I am not one of those who cynically thinks the president is just using fear to accomplish the agendas of Haliburton and big oil and so on. I think Bush is a genuine religious zealot in his pursuit of American safety, and I think he's good-willed in thinking that he can shock and awe the terrorists and win their own game against them. The problem is he doesn't seem to understand that he is actually doing the terrorists' work for them inadvertently.

The terrorist alert code is a perfect example. Those codes go from yellow to orange and red and orange, they've gone up and down six or seven times already and they are accompanied by anonymous threats to some bridge, some school, or some mall in some city, this week or maybe next week. The changing of codes does nothing to help us prepare to ward off terrorist attacks, but it does a lot to create permanent anxiety and fear among the American people. Al Qaeda needn't ever attack America again if we constantly transmit their anonymous threats and frighten ourselves into a kind of civic paralysis. Part of what this electoral campaign should be about is a choice between not just unilateralism and multilateralism, which is certainly what John Kerry has made it, but a choice between the *politics of fear*, which is being purveyed by this administration, and a *politics of the open society*.

The real response to fear is civic engagement and participation. People who are engaged in the work of democracy are not frightened. After 9/11, the least fearful Americans were the rescue workers at Ground Zero. They were actually exposed to the most risks, but because they were engaged in the work of rescue, the work of finding survivors and of finding bodies and consecrating the ground, they were spared the fear that the rest of us as spectators felt. Spectatorship is a recipe for fear. Engagement is a recipe for dispelling fear. And yet this president since 9/11 has insisted that we should go shopping and let him and his administration and the professional army take care of the problems. Bush has been handing out tax rebates to rich spectators while leaving it to a poorer class of America, the volunteer army, to pay the real price of fighting terrorism. He should instead be engaging the whole population in a civic reconstruction of America that reaffirms the open society, our multiculturalism and our open boundaries and says to the terrorists nothing you can do will frighten us out of our liberties. Nothing you can do will frighten us out of our democracy. You can't win by making us frighten ourselves.

Q: Now I have one last question for you. You've been so prolific over the years, so let me ask: which of your books do you consider the most salient for people in the current context and why?

Barber: I have a friend who is a prolific composer who told me he's actually written only one work over and over and over again. A symphony one time, a chamber quartet another, a solo for violin a third. Artists and writers tend to have a single theme, one book, one symphony, which they compose in many different forms. I wrote one book about democracy; "the democracy book"-but in many forms; the Swiss democracy book, the "strong" democracy book;

the “Jihad and McWorld” vs. democracy book; the “fear” eats democracy book. So while *Strong Democracy* is a classic, and *Jihad vs. McWorld* is a perennial best-seller, my favorite book is simply “the democracy book”-the one I never quite wrote but published in two dozen different versions over the last thirty five years.

Notes

1. Stephen Eric Bronner, “Neo-Cons and Philosophes” in *The Washington Post* (September 12, 2004).

The Election Of 2004: A Conversation With Frances Fox Piven

By | 2004: Vol. 3, No. 4

Frances Fox Piven is Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology at The Graduate Center, CUNY. A member of the executive board of Logos, her most recent book is The War at Home *(New Press, 2004).*

Q: Prof. Piven, you were one of the most prominent supporters of Ralph Nader's last campaign. What do you think of him now and how do you explain his stubborn perseverance during this election?

Piven: Well, I'm disappointed. I don't understand it. It's completely puzzling, especially since I also think he's a great man. I thought at the beginning of this campaign that he would pull out if the race was close, as he himself implied. But he hasn't. Similarly, early in the 2000 campaign he said that he would withdraw in the contested states, and he didn't. So I suspect that the explanation is in some aspects of his personality that are not transparent to me. I was a member of a large group of his more prominent supporters who joined together in a public statement asking him to withdraw.

Q: What would it mean for American social movements if, either Kerry or Bush were to win in November?

Piven: Well, some people think that if Bush wins it will energize social movements because his policies are so provocative and they're so transgressive. They violate so many American values and they violate so many groups of the American public. I think that that's wrong-that it's too simplistic. It's a version of the theory that says the worse things are, the more likely people are to rise up in anger and defiance. I think that people rise up when they have hope and a sense that they can have influence. If things are very bad people become despairing and fatalistic and they withdraw.

I think that American history provides ample evidence of that. So, one of the reasons, not the *only* reason, but one of the reasons that I really do hope Kerry wins-although I don't think it looks good-is that he will create a political environment which will encourage social movements. And not so much because he shares the goals of the movements, because he doesn't, although he's not as distant from their goals as is Bush. But people are likely to understand-women, poor people, blacks, gays, workers-will all understand that the Kerry coalition is vulnerable to their appeals. Groups in the Kerry coalition will respond to the issues that they raise.

Q: Even though the Democratic Party is seemingly drifting to the right?

Piven: Yeah, but it's drifting to the right, I think, partly because there are no social movements pulling it back to the left and Democratic politicians try to suppress social movements just because they will pull the party to the left. Bill Clinton was very skillful at this, making people feel like he was going to be nice to them and charming them but not really championing their issues. But the fact of the matter is that if Bill Clinton had confronted a vigorous, defiant, noisy, troublesome, ungovernable social movement he would have had to change his policy. And I think the same will be true of Kerry, and people are more likely to figure that out with Kerry than with Bill Clinton.

Q: So what social movements do you think right now would be best positioned to put pressure on a Kerry administration if Kerry were to win?

Piven: Well, we haven't heard very much, for a long time, from low-wage workers. They may organize under different identities. They may organize as people of color, for instance. A lot of the labor activism of the last ten or fifteen years, has been, under these dual identities. They've been workers, but they were clearly minorities and immigrant minorities. I think that's one promising possibility and one that is desperately needed because these people have fallen so far behind in the last thirty years or so. I also think that the peace movement has huge possibilities. Kerry is not going to get out of Iraq, if he can help it, because that would just make too many waves. He won't even exert himself to try to create the international authority that would permit the United States to withdraw from Iraq. But he *will* if there's a vigorous peace movement. And the Kerry administration would be vulnerable to a vigorous movement or low wage workers, or a peace movement because it's voter coalition would likely respond to the issues raised by these movements. They could activate women voters, for example, around the old feminist issues as well as the economic issues that affect women so much because women are a big chunk of that low-wage, working class strata. Kerry would also be vulnerable to a feminist movement to restore reproductive rights, for example.

Q: So, you'd see almost a shadowing of the concerns and movements of the 60's, the minority low-wage workers, women, and the peace movement.

Piven: Yes, the peace movement, and also the global justice movement. Although, I think it's hard now to disentangle the peace movement from the global justice movement because there's so much overlap between them. But global justice issues themselves could also become an arena for activism, targeting trade policy for example, and also American agricultural subsidy policies that are so outrageous-policies that are starving the cotton-producing countries of the Southern hemisphere, for example.

Q: And how do you see the difference between Kerry and Bush with respect to the welfare state?

Piven: There's a big difference. It's not as big a difference as I'd like, but it's a big difference. The Bush administration has been almost incomprehensibly mean-spirited in a lot of its regulatory initiatives. For example, in the area of social policy: the Bush administration has

slashed programs, small programs, for the most vulnerable groups.. It's a little nutty almost, a little "Texas," as when they cut after school programs for the kids of incarcerated people. Kerry would never do this kind of thing Or take the Medicare Prescription Drug Act of 2003. At the time it was passed it wasn't easy to figure out just how bad a policy it was. Now, only been a year or so since it was passed, and the official federal agencies, the General Accounting Office, has begun to reveal what is happening as a result of the privatization that the Act encourages, as well as the true costs of the legislation.

Or another example. The Bush administration actually took funds from a program called C.H.I.P., which is the Child Health Insurance Program. It has a kind of pathetic, ironic history because it was initiated under Clinton and it was Clinton's way of trying to make up for what he had done in welfare reform. So, he expanded Medicaid for poor children and Bush has actually taken those funds and re-directed them. His welfare reform proposals would put women on welfare who worked for a full 40 hours a week, without increasing any funds for child care, to say nothing of the marriage madness that is part of that proposal.

Another thing the Bush administration is doing that is ominous is channeling funds to faith-based organizations for the delivery of social services. They are basically trying to create a big patronage operation at the heart of the American left. Many of these service-giving organizations-in other words, the churches that are going to get the money-are going to be in the Black and Spanish communities. But this initiative speaks to a kind of larger politics that they're trying to construct, and, with some success. They're moving in the direction of authoritarian populism. The evidence is in the large role of the church in their political appeals, in the religious theatrics that they're so good at. And then also, there is the tricksterism they practice, at the very center of American politics. Everybody knows that the charges in the CBS memoranda were true, but they were embedded in fake documents. Well, who did that, Karl Rove perhaps? And they will work hard to steal the election I think.

Q: So Bush is more draconian, but is one simply more draconian than the other or is this a broader agenda?

Piven: Well, in the first place, more draconian is a difference. Being harsher, meaner, more cruel, creating more inequality, those are real differences. I'm always in favor of the lesser evil instead of the greater evil. I think there are other substantive differences that really matter. One is that Kerry will restore multi-lateral relations internationally and what Bush has done to destroy them is very, very dangerous.

Q: Alright, well let's start with the lesser evil.

Piven: Well, all right, look, multi-lateral relations. That's clearly important. It's not that the United States wasn't an imperial power when we had decent relations with other countries. But, this kind of militaristic intervention is a more destructive and more dangerous form of imperialism. There was American military intervention before Bush too, but not on as big a scale, not blowing up thousands and thousands of people, at least not since Vietnam.

Also, if Bush wins, they will have succeeded in eradicating the so-called Vietnam syndrome.

Q: Which is…

Piven: Which is what the right has been very distressed about. The unwillingness of either the American army or the American people to go to war because the war in Vietnam turned out so badly. The American army was willing to go into Grenada but that wasn't exactly a big test of military power. And even now there's a lot of disagreement in the military about this war. So they want to stamp out the reluctance to go to war with a great military victory over a middling sized country. The Vietnam syndrome is simply the unwillingness of Americans to use military power against peoples elsewhere. I would like to see the Vietnam syndrome revived. That is in a way what is at stake here. Because if the syndrome is revived, it's going to be very hard for future American governments to use this scale of military power abroad.

Then also the civil liberties issues are real. It's going to get much, much worse if Bush wins. The Bush administration and the Congressional Republicans have responded to the 9/11 report's recommendations with another Patriot Act, and making this one much more draconian. This kind of stuff is very serious

Q: So would it be too much to characterize all of this-as some others on the left have of late-as a kind of neo-fascism emerging on the horizon?

Piven: Well, I prefer the term "authoritarian populism," because I think fascist regimes are really total institutions where everything is monitored. I would predict that you and I would be able to jabber on through a second Bush administration. You'll be able to publish *Logos*, I'll be able to teach my classes, we'll be indignant, dadadadada, because it's the kind of regime that can tolerate a fair amount of insignificant dissent.

I think the neo-cons are in trouble if Kerry wins. The neo-cons are actually in trouble already because their fervent arguments for aggression were stupid, so I think that people like Richard Perle have lost standing. But on the other hand, the neo-cons have been serving an important function for the American military. They justify military aggression, and that is the basis of their political importance.

Q: Let's talk about social movements again for a minute. Do you see any kind of new strategies for social movements? Are the movements of the 1960s still the model of today? If not what are the new strategies?

Piven: Well, there is a huge difference, and I think it's clearest in the infrastructure of the movement. The internal organization of the movement is completely different. To be sure, some of what we see now was beginning in the 1960s but people didn't recognize it, and they often argued against it, even scorned it. The difference is that the movements are much more horizontal, laterally organized, and only roughly coordinated. Some of that was beginning to happen in some of the movements in the 1960s, but people still thought in terms of an earlier model of hierarchical and bureaucratic organizations.. But now, none of the movements,

excepting the ones that are really just organizations, none of the movements employ that model. I think that this is a huge advantage, this flexibility and the methods of horizontal coordination that have thrived alongside, of course, with the new mode of communication, which is the internet. But the idea that movements should be organized this way preceded the Internet. A lot of what was going on in SDS where people would sit around talking for hours, nights, days, reflected this search for a new model. They didn't want a hierarchical decision making process. People trying to figure out new organizational models for the movement. But the arrival of the Internet gave it a really big boost.

Q: So what do you see as the most important salient issues that the left has to put on the table after this election, irrespective of the way this works out. What are the most important things that the left in general, not just social movements, but intellectuals and activists, what are the most important things confronting the left?

Piven: American militarism; or you can put it another way, saying there needs to be a restoration of some kind of legal world order. And inequality in the United States, and in the world. I think those are the two big, overarching issues.

Q: What do you see as being the most important issue when it comes to the domestic impact of the war on terror and its seemingly unending status?

Piven: Well, people are afraid and their fears are being played upon, so they're voting for this cowboy who says grunt-like things and it's a very serious problem.

Q: Well this brings us to another question, which is that Karl Rove has said that, he's changing strategies with the Bush campaign: he has said that they will not reach out for the middle five percent but rather mobilize the conservative base. If that's what the Right is doing, what are the democrats doing to mobilize their base?

Piven: Well, the Democrats are saying that too-or some Democrats are anyway-that we're going to mobilize the base. And maybe they are, it's very hard to tell. They've said it before, and the Republicans have said it before. The Republicans are talking about mobilizing their base. But for twenty-five years they have been claiming that they have mobilized their base, That they have done voter registration in every fundamentalist church, and every little church has their voter guides. They've been saying that they've done this already and now they're saying that they're going do it, which suggests that they didn't do it so well before.

The Democrats also have have also worked to mobilize their base before. This was not so much the Democratic Party, But the broader left. In 1984 there was a big voter registration effort and it did have a definite impact on turnout. But although turnout was up in 1984, it was not up by nearly as much as you would have thought if you listened to the claims of all of the different groups that were working in the effort. The *New York Times* reported recently that voter registration is really surging, especially in battleground states. Their report is based on statewide voter databases. So, probably, something is happening. That's very encouraging. If Kerry wins by the way, that's how he's going to win. He is not going to win with the swing

voters. The Bush people, I think will succeed with the swing voters-they're much more skilled at propaganda, at dirty propaganda, than the Democrats are and the Bush people I think will succeed with the swing voters. But in the contest for the base it's possible that Kerry could win.

Q: But is the Democratic base mobilized at all?

Piven: Well if they've been registered to vote, that's one level of mobilization. It's not very intense, which is what your question implies. I think they'll probably go out to vote though, especially because the voter registration efforts are always partnered with "get out the vote" efforts. But you know in Florida, in 2000, the surge in black turnout was enormous because African Americans were so angry at Jeb Bush because of the affirmative action positions that he took. And the Republican machine really did keep them away from the polls, in every which way, the felon list, but also the roadblocks.

Q: Will Ohio become another Florida, will they do that there this time around too?

Piven: They can do it anywhere. There are a number of other states in which Republican Secretaries of State have assumed positions in the Bush campaign as Katherine Harris did in Florida. We have a tendency to push all this to one side. Political scientists do this, but I think a lot of other people do this as well. We know that there are a lot of problems in the electoral process, but nobody likes the uncertainty and disorientating confusion that acknowledging all of those flaws in the electoral process creates. So we tend to treat these flaws as always marginal. But of course they are not necessarily marginal. In a closely divided electorate such as we have today, these multiple forms of fraud against voters can decide an election. We shouldn't be call it "voter fraud" by the way, because almost no voters want to commit fraud. They don't even want to vote once, much less twice. But fraud against voters by election officials can really matter; they can really turn an election. And the fact that we now have computer voting without any verifiable audit makes it worse.

Q: I want to ask you a question about something that came up before when you spoke about Republicans mobilizing their base. And I'm thinking of people like Richard Viguerie here-were there right wing social movements of this grassroots type that were reacting to liberalism or the left legacy of the 60s and what was their significance?

Piven: Yes, I think there were a series of right wing movements. There were a series of left movements in the 1960s. It's more illuminating to refer to the anti-war movement and the black movement, and the poverty movement, and the women's movement. In a similar way, I think you can distinguish between the different movements that energized the right, including the sex movements that are always so important in American politics. And so, the Pro-Life movement, and the anti-gay movement, and the movements to bring God into American life in a very close way, directing what we do. The anti-black movement which has subsided, but remember proposition 187, and then there's going to be-I suppose there really already is-a lot of prowar popular agitation, to defend our troops, defend our boys, defend our flag, and their

crusade to stamp out evil.

So, although the insignia of the right is its pro-business orientation, it really does have a popular base, and that's why I call it "authoritarian populism." German fascism was like this too. The German cartels were very, very, important and very, very influential; they always got what they wanted from the Nazi regime. But the Nazis didn't mobilize popular enthusiasm around the cartels; they mobilized popular enthusiasm around the flag, and against all the different "deviants" in German society.

Q: So is there an emerging or ever present culture war between these populist, nationalist, conservative social movements and their ideas and beliefs and those on the left? They've definitely won a lot in American cultural and political life.

Piven: Oh, an enormous amount, and you know when you asked what's the big problem in the United States, I said inequality and militarism and the international problem, but I shouldn't have skipped over the environmental threat that the Bush administration has accelerated. Their environmental initiatives, most of them under the radar, most of them not in the form of legislation, are enormously significant. They are also puzzling, in a way. A ruling class usually wants to survive and to see a life for it's children and it's grandchildren. But these guys seem to have no consciousness of the future. It's very strange.

I mean the ruling class usually wants to live and have it's children live and have it's grandchildren live; but these guys are very predatory but with no consciousness of the future. It's very strange.

As for the culture war, I think it will calm down too. It's been said that it's wrong to think that what the Nazis did was mobilize people by looking backward. What they really did was mobilize people who actually were living in the 19th century, the peasants and artisans, for example. But Americans are simultaneously susceptible to appeals based on cultural and racial purity, yet also capable of remarkable tolerance. Just watch people on the New York City subways. And elsewhere, too. White Americans have gotten remarkably accustomed to having black actors sell them detergent or rental cars, it's really okay. And they are watching Queer Eye for the Straight Guy.

Q: So from your perspective, let me ask you the classic question: what is to be done?

Piven: Well, you know, from now until November 2nd we work on the election. I think people are doing that. At least my friends are doing that. They're going into Pennsylvania and wherever. But then I think that we don't work with Kerry if he wins. We work with the social movements to put pressure on Kerry. Because there never has been political leadership in the United States that could be relied on to work for its mass constituency. Unless that constituency creates real threats, unless groups in the constituency generate the threat of ungovernability. So until the election we work with Kerry, and after the election we work with the movements.

Cornel West In Conversation With Eduardo Mendieta

By | 2004: Vol. 3, No. 4

Q: Is the United States a republic or an empire?

A: It's both. We're in the moment where the American empire is devouring American democracy and we have to fight it. But it's both. The United States has 650 military facilities in 132 countries, a ship in every major ocean, a presence on every major continent other than Antarctica, and 1,450,000 soldiers around the globe. It is the uncontested military power and the cultural mover in terms of shaping people's utopian desires and ideals and so on. Starbucks and Wal-Mart and McDonalds, you go right across the board because the dollar is the currency other nations invest their financial resources in for security. It is an uncontested empire and yet, at the same time, domestically, there are democratic procedures and processes that are not dead. They've been deeply assaulted, but they're not dead. And so we've got this simultaneity: Democratic practices constituting still a kind of republic representative government and at the same time this empire. And they're in deep tension—both creative and destructive tension—right now the Bush administration of course is the deep imperialist strain that is claiming to be the defender of democracy.

Q: Do you think that the present Bush administration is an example of very bad political luck, or is it indicative of something much more endemic to America?

A: Oh, no, it's endemic because America has always had this deep battle between imperialist strands and democratic strands. America was born as an empire on indigenous people's lands and on indigenous people's backs, with the use of African labor constituting a slave, not just class, but a slave foundation—an economic foundation of the nation. The same would be true for Mexican laborers with the moving border. There is the American manifest destiny, which is nothing but imperialist ideology to justify expansionism for resources and for land and so forth. The same would be true for Asian workers being brought in and ordered to perform certain kinds of cheap labor and then sent out. So you have this long history of American imperial expansion and alongside that you have what I call a deep democratic tradition.

Q: But don't you think that the hard power is going to overwhelm the so-called soft power, when you have an annual 400 billion dollar investment in the world's largest military-industrial complex?

A: Here I think Sheldon Wolin is very important. Democracy is always a matter of ordinary people taking back their powers and targeting consolidated elite power. And no matter how much money and how many cannons or missiles the elites might have, they still have to, in the end, deal with the incorporation of the demos, of we plebeians, as it were. And so in an ironic

way, what appears to be weak can turn out to be very strong, which has to do with democratic energy from below. The question is how long it can be contained. How long it can be amused and mischanneled and so forth. And that deep democratic tradition, really, that goes all the way from both the founding fathers who had a revolutionary energy that was quite impressive against the British as just as many were fearful of unruly demos once they pushed the British out. But that's part of a deep tradition. And I think when you look at Emerson, when you look at Melville, when you look at Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, when you look at the best of the populace, the best of the progressivist movement, the best of the feminist movement, and, most importantly for me, the struggles against white supremacy.

Q: Is there a relationship between pragmatism as a philosophical spirit of the United States and U.S. imperialism?

A: Well, again, pragmatism here, I think, is a very complicated intellectual tradition because there is no one-to-one correspondence between pragmatist views on truth, knowledge, and so forth, and pragmatist politics. You can be left, center, or right and that's very important. One has to be very Gramscian about this in terms of what the context is, in terms of what the temperament is of the particular pragmatic philosopher. But pragmatism, I think, is on the one hand very much a part of the democratic spirit in terms of its deep suspicion of authority, in terms of its preoccupation with preserving individuality—very different than "possessive individualism," now—but which is a democratic individuality, self-interrogation, self-scrutiny, and so on. The problem with pragmatism has always been that it has no significant understanding of the role of structures and institutions, not just within nations but across nations. So that even William James's exemplary anti-imperialist critiques were moralistic critiques, you see. There's nothing wrong with moralism; we want to be certain kinds of persons. Paidea does matter. But there's no understanding of the structural, institutional practices linked to these imperial projects. Especially of his day. Especially of our day. So that pragmatism can actually end up being used by elites to contain democratic energies, even though it does embody in its own views of the world deeply democratic sensibilities. It's a fascinating kind of juxtaposition there and I've always felt that about pragmatism—years ago and I see that now.

Q: A parallel question: Do you think pragmatism was, is, a nationalistic philosophy in the ways that Hegel and Kant and in the 20th century Scheler and Heidegger's philosophies were nationalistic? Was Dewey nationalistic? Was James nationalistic?

A: Well, you know it's interesting. I think that in the great pragmatists Pierce, James, Dewey, you have a cosmopolitanism there. Now, it is a cosmopolitanism that often times is Eurocentric. It's like Goethe, it's like Matthew Arnold, it's like Wieland, who were the creators of a notion of this world literature. And by world literature they still meant the best of Europe across national boundaries in Europe, for the most part—with a few exceptions of maybe Persia, and one or two poets in the East or something, you know what I mean. But what's fascinating about James and Dewey is that James's preoccupation with the democratic individuality and Dewey's preoccupation with democratic community led them to an allegiance to democratic ideals that

could easily have taken them beyond national boundaries. That's what I love about them. That's part of my own internationalism as a democrat—that you can tease that out of there. And in some ways, it goes back to Emerson, really. I think Stanley Cavell is probably right that Emerson is American in terms of his roots, but he's international in terms of his routes. They take him out, you see. And I think Dewey and James, especially in their essays on Emerson, had this sense of democracy, of individuality. That cuts across. And so, again, there is an ambivalence there, I think, when it comes to the national character.

Q: Do you think that a judicial pragmatism, of the kind espoused by Richard Posner and Justice Stephen Breyer, is a liability or an asset in the Supreme Court?

A: In the Supreme Court itself?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, I think Breyer is a very brave man, a very decent man. I thank God he's on the court, but that's a relative judgment. You measure him against Scalia and you want to have a party, right? [laughter] At the same time, I think that when it comes to the larger issues regarding the philosophy of law and so on and so forth, I've always viewed pragmatism in its relation to the law, going all the way back to Holmes, as [on the one hand] liberating—in terms of getting beyond certain narrow forms of legal positivism, and trying to take history and experience seriously, and the dynamism of the law I like. But [on the other hand] I always thought there was a certain parochialism to pragmatic thinkers reflecting on the law, because, you see, [when it comes to] the relation of the law to economic structures, the relation of the law to power dynamics in the nation-state, in foreign policy as well as domestic policy—there is very little talk about that when it comes to pragmatism and law. They carve out their little domestic space, criticize their positivist interlocutors, and so forth, and you get the feeling "thank God they're doing that kind of thing," but in the end it's just so limited. When I think of people who think seriously about the law, in that broader sense of Roberto Unger—people who have a vision of the complex relation between legal practices and economic structures, and foreign policy as it's linked to the nation-state and it's bureaucracy (State Department, Pentagon, and CIA). These are very important kinds of issues that we ought not leave to journalists and there's a sense in which a lot of philosophers of law left it to journalists to tell those stories.

Q: Do you think there is anything worth preserving in patriotism?

A: Oh sure!

Q: Is patriotism a form of virtue?

A: Absolutely. I believe that piety is an appropriate virtue.

Q: So patriotism is a form of piety?

A: Oh absolutely, absolutely. We have to pay debt to the sources of our being. That includes

mom and dad. That includes the community that shaped you. That includes the nation that both protects you as well as gives you some sense of possibility. And for religious folk, of course, it includes God. Now, the problem is there has to be some Socratic energy in one's piety. Piety ought to be inseparable from critical thinking, but the critical thinking is parasitic on who one is and where one starts. And who one is and where one starts has to do with what has shaped you from womb to tomb. Part of the hollowness and shallowness of some of modern thinking is to think that somehow one gives birth to oneself and therefore one has no debt to anybody who came before—as if you can have a language all by itself, as if you could actually raise yourself from zero to five, and so forth and so on. So that I look at my beautiful daughter and I give her all the love that I can and as she gets older, she is going to feel a certain kind of relation to me. In the end, she may characterize that as a debt that she feels to me because of the love that I gave her. I think that's appropriate. I don't do it for that reason, but I think that's appropriate. I certainly feel that with my parents and I feel that with my neighborhood. I feel that with my Black church. I feel that with the nation and I also feel that with my intellectual ancestors. I think I have a deep debt to Chekhov and a deep debt to Coltrane. I have a deep debt to Hilary Putnam and Stanley Cavell, and these people who were so very kind to me. That doesn't mean I uncritically accept what they have to say. I wrestle with them, but I'm thinking of a kind of critical, Socratic patriotism. Let's call it that.

Q: What's the difference between patriotism and nationalism?

A: I think patriotism works at that psychic, existential level in terms of debt. I think nationalism is a particular ideology that was forged as the European empires began disintegrating. You needed different units to be constituted to deal with the dynamics of power, so you ended up with these nation-states with their institutions of administration and their control over the instrumentalities of violence. And it has become the most powerful modern ideology in some ways. As the empires underwent metamorphosis, some of them collapsed, some of them reconstituted and so on. A very powerful ideology.

Q: Is there a link between Black Nationalism and U.S. nationalism?

A: Absolutely. Absolutely. It's ironic because nationalism itself is a European construct, and we get Black folk—who are victimized mainly by Europeans tied to vicious notions and practices of white supremacy—using a European ideology to counter. I can understand that; we have to use any weapon we can, but we have to be cognizant of its limitations, how tainted it is, and especially how morally tainted it is in terms of not allowing our internationalism and universalism to become more pronounced. But, of course, the problem has always been that the Black Nationalist movement has no land, no territory, and so it becomes symbolic. A way of trying to organize…

Q: Cultural?

A: A cultural nationalism or a kind of psychic nationalism. A control over community in terms of the flow of capital, as opposed to having one's own nation-state that you can control the

boundaries and borders and so forth. People like Elijah Mohammed—I have great respect for him in terms of his willingness to live and die for Black people. I have a devastating critique of him in terms of the limitedness of his vision: the xenophobia, the uncritical appropriation of a nationalist ideology that has wreaked havoc on so many other peoples. And similarly with Louis Farrakhan—I have a great love for him in terms of his love for Black people and his willingness to live and die for Black people and yet at the same time—and he's still alive, thank God, so we can argue about these things, about my critiques of his nationalist projects and the patriarchy and the homophobia that often go with nationalist ideology: You need some other human to be, if not demeaned, then certainly to be defined over against. You see, as a radical democrat I am very suspicious of it.

Q: Are you suggesting that Black Nationalism has become historically obsolete?

A: No.

Q: Is there a role for it still?

A: Absolutely. As long as white supremacy is around, there will be Black Nationalism—and progressive Black Nationalism will be more common. I think that's true for any kind of nationalism. I'm critical of a Zionist project because it is a form of nationalism of oppressed people just like Black Nationalism is a form of nationalism of oppressed people. But progressive Zionists are my comrades, because as long as racist forms of anti-Semitism are around, then you're going to have nationalist responses to it. Zionist responses vis-à-vis anti-Semitism, Black Nationalist responses vis-à-vis white supremacy, and so forth and so on. When I said "progressive" what I mean is those particular nationalists who accent the democratic dimensions of their projects—and there are significant democratic dimensions of the Zionist project, of the Black Nationalist project, of the American nationalist project. Ralph Ellison, I'm going to lecture on him today. This man is a thoroughgoing American nationalist—patriot to the core. You know, one of the great geniuses of the American literary tradition—much too nationalist for me. But the democratic dimension of his American nationalism is very rich.

Q: Do you think that the African-American reaction to 9/11 was different from that of Anglo-Americans, or does it make any sense to talk about this split?

A: It was very different. It was very different. To be a nigger in America meant to be unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence, and hated. America experienced that as a nation for the first time on 9/11, so the whole nation was niggarized. Black people began to say "you beginning to get the sense now what it is I have to deal with"—this terrorized condition, you see. And I think that Black folk, therefore, were less likely to engage in an adolescent lust for revenge, because they've got long traditions of overcoming that kind of spiritual immaturity. Well, you say, revenge is an instinct when you're terrorized. But when you come out of a people who have been terrorized, over time you recognize that your survival will not be procured by revenge. If we had the voice of a Martin King or the voice of a [?], as the dominant responses to American terrorism, you wouldn't get the Lone Ranger, cowboy-like attitude of George Bush

and others.

Q: Do you think, notwithstanding that difference, that African-American intellectuals and spokespersons have been cowered into silence and acquiescence for fear that they might be called unpatriotic?

A: Early on that was the case, absolutely. Barbara Lee, my dear sister, stood up—all by herself and under death threats for weeks—before congress to vote against Bush pushing that through immediately after 9/11. Part of the problem is that the market-driven media is just not interested in some of the more significant truth-tellers coming out of the Black community. So if you actually look at the Black press, the Black radio, or even Tavis Smiley's C-SPAN show on the Black response to 9/11: You probably had more truth-telling on that show about America than you had on any other show. And it's mainly because Black people been dealing with American terrorism for hundreds of years. So we could trash, call into question, all forms of terrorists—be they American, be they Islamic, be they Christian, be they Jewish, be they whatever. Whereas America became so obsessed with this particular terrorist attack, which was vicious and wrong and cowardly, but didn't want to look at itself, and therefore fell into that typically adolescent pure victim/impure victimizer, us versus them—the Manichean vision that we hear Bush articulating day-in and day-out.

Q: We'll come back to that Manicheanism later on. Do you think there's a continuum between the slave plantation, Jim Crow the ghetto, the ethno-racial prison and the present use of the death penalty as a form of "legalized lynching," as Jesse Jackson calls it?

A: Yeah, I think Angela Davis and others have been quite brilliant on this issue. What we're talking about is the excessive use of repression and violence to contain and control significant slices of the Black community, especially, more and more these days, the poor Black community. And that Black encounter with the violent face, with the repressive face of the American state has played a crucial role in shaping Black people's perception of America. And it goes from the whip on the plantation, to the lynching of the lynching tree, to the trigger-happy policing, on to the death penalty and the criminal justice system and the prison-industrial complex. Absolutely. Absolutely. A number of mediations: shifts in space from rural to urban, shifts in class location from pre-industrial labor to industrial labor to post-industrial labor, shifts in educational sites and so on. But the progress goes hand in hand with the underside of the progress, which is what you're actually…

Q: Right. Now you might know these lectures from 1976, which I think you actually anticipated in Prophecy and Deliverance, on the genealogy of racism: Foucault's lectures of 1976, which are called Society Must Be Defended. There he talked about racism for the first time very explicitly. He talks about racism as a racial war against a biological or social threat. That's why society must be defended. Now, if we keep that in mind, can we say that in fact if we look at these institutions—the plantation, the ghetto, the lynching, Jim Crow, and today the death penalty—what we're facing is a racial war against African-Americans?

A: The problem with the metaphor of war, and this goes back to Clausewitz, is that it tends to put a premium on the point at which contestation is accented, whereas Black people's labor, Black people's bodies, Black people's styles are preconditioned for the American project. So the given impression that is first and foremost of war is that they want to annihilate Black people. They can't annihilate Black people. If they had annihilated 22% of the inhabitants of the 13 colonies who are keeping the thing economically afloat, they would've undermined themselves. If they had annihilated Black people during Jim Crow, who was going to do the labor? And if they had annihilated Black people in the 1960s? We're in too many crucial places. So, you see, there is a war-like dimension, but there are these other dimensions that those, from Clausowitz to Foucault, that invoke these kinds of metaphors might easily downplay. Now, I do believe that in the end we are on a battlefield, but the battlefield is not one in which you're at that point of contention primarily or exclusively. You've got a life to live, labor to render, songs to sing, people to love, and that's as important and as much a part of our talk about living a life in which white supremacy, male supremacy, and others are coming at us. So it's like Lefebvre, my dear brother, I don't want everyday life to be slighted by these metaphors of war, though in the end there is certainly a war-like quality to what we're dealing with.

Q: If we include all the people in the prison system and those under the control of the penitentiary and correctional institutions, which is almost 4 million people, and we know that one of the largest industries in the United States is the prison-industrial complex—California's largest industry, for instance—don't you think we have become a carceral society, a nation of prisons?

A: Well, look at your question here in terms of industry. The biggest industry in California is the entertainment industry. I think that's bigger than the prison industry.

Q: Okay.

A: See what I mean? Aerospace is major industry. That is to say that we'd have to examine the scope and scale and breadth and depth, so that the carceral industry, which has been expanding exponentially, every 5 years it seems, but it is not as central as the entertainment industry. Now of course the irony is that many of the top performers in the entertainment industry are the same color as those in the carceral industry, you know what I mean? But one's international, it's global. Hip-hop is one slice and that's billions and billions of dollars, right? We're not even talking about music as a whole, or TV and sports. My God, this country couldn't survive without Negroes and sports. They'd go crazy—wouldn't know what to do on the weekends. So you get the Black presence in all these different instances, but back to your question: the carceral industry certainly is an industry. It's a growing industry, but it's primarily one that tries to target the working poor and very poor, given the fact that the society finds it difficult to find spaces for them, some significant value and use for them. And of course many make bad choices and decisions in the context in which they find themselves. And I think for me, again, the issue of linking struggles in everyday life to the various kinds of industries, structures, institutions, and the economy, especially, looms large here. There is a backlash right now. I mentioned Angela Davis. You can talk about the anti-death penalty movement. You

can talk about the courage of the ex-republican governor of Illinois recognizing just how unfair and racist the death penalty was. That kind of movement is significant. I think we are going to see more of it.

Q: In fact, that is where my next question was going. In light of the Rehnquist Court, which is against the equal application of rights, what should we do about the death penalty, this mechanism for legalized lynching?

A: We have got to reshape public opinion, and I give a lot of fellow citizens credit for that. They've helped reshape the climate of public opinion. Hugo Bedau, who is my dear friend and a philosophy professor down at Tufts for many years. He has been struggling against the death penalty for almost 30 years. We would have gatherings 20 years ago and there would be seven people. We'd have gatherings 10 years ago and we'd have 70. Now we have a gathering and there are 400. He is the same person, same view, and part of the same movement, but it's expanding. He is one among many and I give a lot of credit for that.

Q: What do you think of the new abolitionist movement?

A: You know, I listen carefully and I learn much. I don't think I have fundamentally reached their conclusions yet. I'd love to see more education, rehabilitation, and what I call Paideia. I've taught in prisons now for 19 years and some of my best examples of Paideia—that kind of formation of attention on crucial issues, cultivation of the self, self-criticism, and maturation of the soul that really comes to terms with reality and history and mortality—I've seen in prisons and that's part of the rehabilitation that ought to take place. Whether in fact you end up abolishing is something that I've yet to be fully persuaded on.

Q: Now shifting to the question of religion. You have been particularly preoccupied with the problem of evil. In fact you think that prophetic pragmatism is distinctively concerned with questions of evil and the tragic. Do you think that the events of 9/11 should be talked about in terms of evil?

A: Oh, sure, because evil for me is unjustified suffering. It's unwarranted misery and that's certainly what it was. Now, of course, that also means you have to talk about what's going on in Colombia and Guatemala and El Salvador and Iraq also in terms of unjustified suffering and unnecessary social misery as evil. The question then becomes: What is our response to it? How do we understand where and why it emerges? How do we try to wrestle with it and overcome it? And that's a very complicated process. That has to do with both structures of institutions as well as the choices and decisions that agents make, that particular people make. There's a dialectical interplay between structure and agency here that we must never lose sight of. But to be preoccupied with evil is really, to me, just the attempt to be a decent and compassionate person who is concerned about other people's suffering and also trying to find some joy in the world. In some ways that is the best of a humanist tradition that goes from Amos to Socrates to W.E.B. DuBois, and yet we also know that the same tradition can hide and conceal certain forms of unjustified suffering. There is evil shot through all of our traditions.

Q: Following up on this question, I know that you have been teaching a freshman seminar called "The Tragic, the Comic and the Political." Now let me ask you, the word evil doesn't form part of the title there, but what is the linkage that you're trying to make between evil and the tragic? If we think of evil in the Augustinian sense, it's about human will—it is the human will that is the cause of evil in the world. Whereas the tragic is about the forces beyond the human will, so you're bringing together two philosophemes, which seem to be anathematic to each other.

A: That's a very good question. Now, I do believe, following Dewey, that we are acculturated organisms in transaction with our environment and there are natural forces that can be stronger. When the cancer hit me, linked to a genetic inheritance that goes all the way back to whatever, I had to respond to it. There is no way that I can completely extricate it. I might get lucky and control it for a while, but there are forces that are far beyond human will. When a planet clashes with this planet sooner or later, there's not a whole lot human beings can do about that. You know what I mean? When you talk about human suffering being caused by something greater than human beings, we got natural evil. The Lisbon earthquake that Voltaire and Kant and others were so shaken by. That's very real, but on the other hand there are things we can do a hell of a lot about—like trying to understand the comet when it's coming, or trying to get some sense of when the earthquake's coming given that we can't control it and so on. We've done a better job now than we were able to do in Lisbon, no doubt, and you've lived in California, so you understand that better than most people. But there are some other forms of suffering that we can do a hell of a lot about: suffering that has to do with corporate power, that has to do with narrow interests among elites in the nation-states, that has to do with xenophobic citizens attacking other citizens, especially our gay brothers and lesbian sisters these days. Those we can do a lot about, so that you're actually right, the comic tries to understand what it is that we acculturated organisms that transact with our environment can bring to minimize and alleviate the suffering, knowing that we will never have full control over it.

The comic allows us to look at those limitations and all the incongruities and hypocrisies of who we are, what our society is, and still smile through the darkness. The tragic fights all it can and then it runs up against the [?], the limits, the constraints, and goes down gloriously, but also recognizing a certain hubris, a certain kind of defective self-knowledge that may have been in part responsible for running up against that limit, the Oedipus, but there are different forms of the tragic and different forms of the comic and as somebody like Chekhov, who other than Shakespeare, I think, has the most profound conception of the tragic-comic. And it's interesting because there is no real philosopher that constitutes an analogue to Chekhov. I think the greatest comic philosopher was David Hume, who was preoccupied with the incongruities and limitations of not just human reason, but human beings and yet still trying to get us to proceed in post-skeptical space, as it were.

But his sense of the tragic, I think, was in part underdeveloped. The tragic-comic go hand in hand—some of the deep passion, the willingness to be moved by the difficulty of walking that tightrope. You know, when Hume goes back to play backgammon, you get the sense that he is

really suppressing all of this anxiety, which he is, since he is neoclassical figure in that sense: It's about stoic self-mastery and so on. Whereas Chekhov is a bit more—he is so moved by the heartbreak and the heartache of humankind that he can't be restrained like Hume in a neoclassical way. He is the grandson of a slave. Yet he knows he needs to have some self-control as the medical doctor that he was and the great liberator figure that he was, reading philosophy all the time but also concerned about science—and agnostic, like Hume. Hume was probably agnostic too. So there is no easy religious solution for Chekhov. For me, you see, that's the real challenge: how do you keep the Socratic, critical energy flowing and the prophetic witness linked to compassion and the tragic-comic hope all intertwined for radical democracy.

Q: This is what you're discussing in Democracy Matters*…*

A: Yes, in my book, *Democracy Matters*, I lay all this out.

Q: What do you make of President Bush's apocalyptic and messianic rhetoric?

A: There is a long tradition of such rhetoric in American history and Bush is just an instant in that tradition. He does view America in a Manichean way, as this pure city on the hill. It's an "us against them" stance. He finds it very difficult to ever be critical of America, not just publicly, but I think also in his own private space. He is part of this sense of America as being this land of Edenic innocence, which has very deep roots in the country. There are other roots in the country that are more mature and more critically engaging of the complex reality of America's past and present, but he is part of the Manichean impulse in the tradition of innocence.

Q: And this messianic role of carrying the banner of democracy even if requires the use of military violence, torture, and repression?

A: Of Christianity and democracy in the vulgar sense of both. Absolutely, but he is the exemplar of Constantinian Christianity and imperial America. Constantinian Christianity has deep roots in America and so does imperialism. There is also a prophetic Christianity and a deep democratic tradition in America that cut against both of these, but they have always been in some ways weaker even though they made a difference in the making of the country.

Q: Now I don't want to give any credence to Samuel Huntington's idea that we are facing a clash of civilizations, but one could say that there are conflicts today, conflicts of religions. Against this background, what would you say about the role of religious talk today? Does it complicate or does it help when we talk about a confrontation of religions?

A: Well, I think that any time you have religious conflict you also have something else going on in addition to the clash of religion. There's always a social dimension, an economic dimension, and a personal dimension going on. I think right now we're experiencing a profound crisis of Christian identity in the country. There has always been a strong fundamentalist evangelical presence in the country that was highly suspicious of modern modes of skepticism, secularism,

and criticism. Ironically, since Martin Luther King Jr., the Christian right began to learn lessons in terms of political organization and using their clout to bring power and pressure to bear because they saw the Civil Rights movement doing it on the other side of the ideological line. So they actually learned from brother Martin, the Jerry Farwells, and others and then received, of course, unbelievable economic support from many corporate elites. And it became clear that if there was going to be a realignment of American politics—a kind of Southernization of American politics using racially loaded terms, from busing to crime to welfare to prisons and so forth, to realign the American public—then the Christian right could be a major organized pillar for this. They were, in fact, brought in in a significant way to do that, and not simply because the elites themselves were Christians. Sometimes it was outright manipulation because you've got Machiavellian calculations going on at the highest levels of certain deeply conservative circles.

So you end up with not just Constantinian Christianity, but the Christian Right being a fundamental pillar for imperial America. Look at the relation of the Christian Right and conservative Jews in America. This is what is intriguing about the Mel Gibson film, you see, because you get the erosion of that. People know that anti-Semitism has always been part and parcel of the Christian right's perspective and all of a sudden you get an alliance with conservative Jews defending Israel, based almost on blind faith, and now they discover, my god, our allies are anti-Semites! You don't say. I could have told you that a long time ago. Pat Robertson has publicly said things far more Anti-Semitic than most. How is he going to be your ally? Well, because he supports Israel! Well, I thought that coalitions had something more substantive to them than merely a stance. The same is true with cutting back on domestic policy when it comes to social services, healthcare, jobs, education and so on. No, it's pro-defense, no it's pro-imperial expansion. The Christian Right, right now, is both powerful and dangerous and yet we know—and this is something we don't like talking about in the academy—that if 72% of Americans view themselves as not just Christians, but believe in Jesus Christ son of God, then the fight for democracy in America is partly a fight for democratic possibilities in the American Christian tradition. If you lose the latter, you can forget the former. You can come up with the most sophisticated theories of democracy in the world, but if you're not affecting the climate on the ground in such a way that certain Christians can think dem-o-cra-tic-ly and proceed politically under a radical democratic vision, then we're not going to get anywhere. In fact, you end up just giving more and more over to the Christian Right and Christian centrists.

Q: Many liberal intellectuals have argued that the war on terrorism is a just war—and this relates to the other question because just war theory emerges from Christianity, Augustine, Aquinas—liberals like Jean Bethke Elshtain, Paul Berman, and to a certain extent Michael Walzer. Do you think these wars against Iraq and, of course, Afghanistan were just wars?

A: No, not at all. They were illegal, unjustified, and I think unnecessary. I think there are ways of trying to gain access, to hunt down gangsters and terrorists, without invading countries. This plundering of the livelihoods of thousands and thousands and thousands of innocent people, with very little regard for their welfare and well-being, has symbolic purposes—getting

back to issue of the lust for revenge—letting the country know we're not going to take this; to let the country know we're macho and we're tough and so on. And the result is what? More instability and more insecurity, because that's what that kind of posing and posturing of a macho identity does. It just reinforces the whole cycle of anxiety and insecurity that is tied to all the bigotry and hatred and revenge and resentment that fan and fuel the worst of who we are as human beings. I think on the international front you've got to deal with multilateral institutions and international law: I don't think international law can justify it.

Then there is a deeper, moral question in terms of what kinds of costs there are and who is bearing them. When you have an invasion and you're unwilling to even count the number of innocent civilians you kill—I don't understand how any of these people can conclude that this is a just war. I mean, the Catholic tradition and others always talk about their caution and their preoccupation with not just minimizing, but keeping track of what the costs are, so you can argue ex post facto what happened. They don't even want to show the bodies of the American soldiers; that's cost too on the American side. So it pains me to see a lot of fellow philosophers, social theorists, and what have you, caught within the legitimation machine of the larger imperial project. They may not share all of the imperial ambitions, but they can be easily used and deployed by those who are running that machine. That gross kind of seduction, I think, is highly unfortunate. I've seen some very decent and brilliant people who were easily used in that way.

Q: So do you think terrorism is the largest threat the United States faces in the 21st century or…

A: No, the largest thing America faces in the 21st century is internal decay and decline, with us turning on each other unable to generate the web of trust requisite to keep the democratic experiment alive. Very much like the communists in the 1940s and 50s, who constituted a kind of external foe to hold America together, I think the Bush people are trying to constitute Islamic terrorists as an external foe to hold us together. But America has always had high levels of violence: from cars, to everyday violence, to domestic violence, to violence against workers, to violence against black people, brown people, and so on. And we're not even talking about genocidal attacks on indigenous people. As important as it is for the United States to do all that it can, in terms of not being attacked externally by gangsters from wherever, we've got so many everyday attacks that are taking place in this country that…

Q: Forms of state terrorism, economic terrorism…

A: Well it's hard to even come up with a category, because there are so many different forms. Just look at the healthcare system. We spend more money than any other country, any other developed country, and yet we've got thousands and thousands of people who die because they don't have access. That's a kind of killing that is taking place. You've got workers who don't have access to safety who die. There's no talk about them, but that's a kind of killing. That can be avoided just like we would have liked to avoid 9/11. You've got young kids in poor communities whose souls are murdered, who don't have access to any quality education, no

sense of significant safety, and so forth. They're dying all the time. Those are deaths too, and a lot of that stuff can be avoided. So that when I look at the obsession with this particular attack, which was vicious, I see the downplaying of all these other deaths that are taking place. I say something's wrong. I take the tears of George Bush seriously when he cries for the victims of 9/11, as I take my own tears seriously, but then I wonder why he does not cry for Louimo, when he is shot down by police as an innocent civilian? And I say to myself, if you cannot connect the tears for Louimo with the victims of 9/11, then you're missing something. I cried for both. Bush only cried for one. Guiliani cried for one—you know what I mean? Something is wrong. Something is missing there. And then I began to wonder: well wait a minute, are these tears highly circumscribed? Are they forced? And again the Socratic, prophetic tells me if I can't be morally consistent, I need to check myself. I think that's the kind of challenge we need as thinkers, philosophers, citizens, and human beings put forth to each other.

Q: I have one last question and it's a question that I think we should always be asking. I ask myself this question as a Latino. It's been 101 years since W.E. B. DuBois said that the problem of the 20th century would be the problem of the color line. By 2050, about 25% of U.S. citizens will be Latino. We're talking about the browning of United States: What will happen to the problem of the color line in the 21st century?

A: That's a good question. That's a very good question.

Q: It worries me that the so-called "browning" of America might submerge the question of the African-American, the black…

A: You know, I think that because we deal with the legacy of white supremacy that affects brown and black and yellow and red and, in the end, it actually affects whites—they're all race concepts—as long as we keep the focus on the institutional and personal manifestations of that particular evil, then I'm not so sure that the numbers will make as big a difference. I think when DuBois talked about the color line he was really taking about this legacy of white supremacy. He goes on to say the way in which it affects Asian and Latin Americans and so forth. You can have a legacy of white supremacy at work with no white people around—just between blacks and browns. If we draw each other through that white supremacy's lens, then that legacy is still very much alive and we can't relate to each other's humanity. So it's not going be so much a matter of numbers, I think. It's going to be how we respond to that legacy in such a way that we can begin to dismantle some of the stereotypes, some of the prejudices, some of the institutional discriminations, some of the xenophobic perceptions, and so forth.

I think in the end, though, the major battle of the next 100 years is going be the battle between the deepening of democracy and the dismantling of empire. The degree to which blacks and browns decide to go, as a large majority, one way as opposed to another—those coalitions will probably be more important than simply how we divide up a particular pie within the domestic context, you see. And I think the brown brothers and sisters bring a depth and wisdom and experience of what it's really like to be colonized—in Texas and California and what is now New Mexico. That history is something that is very rich and that is different than black folk.

Black folk being enslaved and Jim Crowed is different than being colonized, having your border moved by soldiers by force, and so on. Coming from Mexico, coming from El Salvador, coming from another country and seeing America from the outside, gives one a cosmopolitan view—for Puerto Ricans the same way as for Dominicans. That gives a cosmopolitan view that a lot of Black Americans don't have. From Alabama? Well, that's part of the country… well, most of the time. From Mississippi? Georgia? California? Yes, that's still within continental imperial U.S.A. You look at America from Mexico, from El Salvador, from Puerto Rico—it's like C.R.L James and Stokey Carmichael, who are supposed to come from the Caribbean: They've got very different views of this country and a lot of Black people in America miss that.

Q: It's another form of double vision.

A: Yes! Absolutely, but linked to this battle between the deepening of democracy and the dismantling of empire.

This interview with Cornel West was conducted by Eduardo Mendieta at Cornel West's Office at Princeton University on April 6, 2004.

Poetry – Fall 2004

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ALLEN GINSBERG

Open Letter (Sept. 30, 1972)

In this open letter from the Fall of 1972, Allen Ginsberg urged people to work hard to help defeat Richard Nixon in the upcoming election, and warned of the dangers of continuing along the same failed path of war and violence. Logos thanks Bill Morgan, Allen Ginsberg’s longtime archivist, for contributing this previously unpublished letter and the Allen Ginsberg Trust for permission to publish it.

Allen Ginsberg [n.p.] to Open Letter/Statement [n.p.] [Sept. 30, 1972]
Letter currently found at: Private collection

Instant Karma: Alarm! Alarm! Election war issue clear, Vietnam bathed in blood pain, Indochina covered with millions of bomb-craters, U.S. $72 Billion military Tower of Babel disordering American household, illegal State violence corrupting American street & culture, Youth counter-culture paralyzed missing chance McGovern & Indochina Peace Campaign, fresh consciousness would dissolve Nixon sleepwalk hypnosis victory! Don’t be crazy! Don’t let Nixon get back in the White House & assassinate Indochina another half-generation with Automated Electronic Battlefield war, make McGovern win, everyone help do it, Pray ring doorbells all folk register vote McGovern, Ah!

30 September ’72
Allen Ginsberg

ANNE WALDMAN

BURY THE SKULL OF A YAK

Poetry is the enemy of chance
Poetry is the daughter of chance.
-Italo Calvino

that we cede our fear to love

This was one meditation one night. Starry.

Return of all creeps from Contra
(North, Poindexter) building their dangerous house
Ernesto in his cups tonight, what’s poetry’s edge?
The memoir continues in the hope for future revolutionaries
That they be assuaged of fear

Prince Abdullah lifts his palms in prayer
It is the fifth cycle of night
& he resembles a mosque in his thinking
& he resembles a prayer rug for his hands to link above

Going back to pre June 1967 borders
Going back to the line of demarcation
When architecture turned to weaponry
The lines of scrimmage in heavy late Islamic Capitalism
“Talks?” “Talks?” “Who talks anymore?”

West Bank. Gaza. Who talks anymore?
Blood does not talk. What is lost by blood?

A truce is a contiguous stretch
It will be it will have to be over when the oil runs down
When the sand gets in your eyes. Pitch your tent over there.

When “they” carve up the Middle East where will it be?
Palestine in Saudi Arabia? Pitch a tent just over there.

This an old Hebraic thought through dread, through suffering:
What the second class citizen said to me in 1963 Aegypt.

That she wanted her own passport as we crossed the border to Wadi Haffa

& from Palestine, the note: You have to be here to see it, believe it.
I want my identity back…

To broker, to go broke, to be broken, to make do with less

The second night she did not sleep

Everyone below 14th Street Neuva York on Ambien. Ambien is in the palace shoes tonight. I'll try some, little Power Puff girl, hand it over. Modest cushion against nightmare and dream. (It was the totalitarian nightmare again – the part with a huge pit for the body sifters). William Blake did not tell me to be gloomy to be morbid, William Blake was not a doll or set-up in this dream. And was never on pills you betcha. Towers spoke of William Blake and of William Butler Yeats and of William Shakespeare. The Williams were all telephone booths in this vision and they did not let me down. It was 1950 something in a little newspaper shack, the streets were narrower then, we were all smaller the old war wasn't far behind us. Night mares ride in on voluble tides: stick-in-the-gut kind. Shriek or impasse, well what is it? To make you laugh, then ride on. Gesar of Ling with a whiff of enlightenment's crystalline mirror in which to see the phenomenal world clearer, see it un-fragmented, reflected back as neurotic as you happen to be. Armour is his scent tonight. Rubble is a mushroom cloud. Detritus of my fairest city. The hidden sanctuary. Protect the way I see you. Read: steed. Read: speed. Read: need. Read: creed. Reade: bleed. Read Tantrick space and time. Wake up on the spot. That spot is glowing. Don't tray, don't tarry. Hurry, hurry. Bury the remnants of the dead, bury the skull of a yak.

Third night

What are my henchmen up to?

After I saw the movie I wondered what is "control" to the higher authority of meager mortal enemies? Could it be artistic?

A beautiful world order, I see the elements dancing in place.

I see it is not the lover, not personality, not the parent identified with, not the angel in hiding behind the screen of idolatry. I see it is not the proto-type for a new world order yet. A New World Order yet. Yet trembling. I see it is not charisma, I see it is not about "safety", I see you are not invested in a new world order yet. These are not interesting to you have had hopes in a woman's world for world leadership. Leadership means landscapes, leadership accomplishes maps, leadership moves the building blocks, the aminos around and such. And such is a night of scheming.

You came back to it, say it: the question of troubled "beauty", one more time. They outside could hear it as a miniature cry, an echo. There was so much struggle on the asphalt, on the jungle turf, on the screens where they watch the prisoners from, high in their towers that beauty went mute.

Four nights in a row you think like this

A candle
A gun
A cell phone

For one entrapped authority over a trundle all you've got in a bundle, our wunderkind one weary Lord Randall of poisoned asps and retaliation. Amble handle brindle signaled his thoughts on death and survival. So he, this guy, this prince, this balladic lord, sits down with many men to follow. Men to feed and mouths to follow in subsurvient cry. To cross a moat. To signal with lanterns and hollers. He, our character, has been anxious all long morning. Something – a message – a treasure? has not yet arrived. Send to the other port, the other bridge. He has been living in an artificial atmosphere brought on by an early twentieth century maker of maps. Navigational instruments important to the new territories also abound. Out on the ocean now – having the qualities of restless storm and dream –rocked or rollicked amidst by waves. His people always had a boat or sea-faring mentality. You would judge a man by his seaworthiness. You would indulge his capacity for stomaching salt. And the women?

Night five was spent in a listing of powers (listen)

Freedom is meaningless without responsibility
Find a place that engenders reverie
Moon = flame

Our facets inform each other
Integuments of dream and chance
The witchy stew brews here

Build a temple
"Galaxy upon galaxy
of cow parsley"

Desire of a roof to discuss under:

My power is my dream cord
My power is my old siren song
My power is my taste of you
My power is melodrama of change

Dice in the hand of the Maiden

The leader was in his gray-dawn doldrums
It was nearing the winter solstice
The land was in disarray
No one could agree

Children did not listen to their parents' words

It was a mutable form, this planet's heydey
Yet the war was on hold for one more stretched day

Did you sleep
Did you not sleep
The totalitarian nightmare gripped the imagination of
A very young person: that was a start
& all about drowning

& then it all got started up again—swim, escape
move to higher ground.

From THE PROTEST DIARIES

August 27th – Macdougal & Houston:
Notice the surveillance blimp hovering over the critical mass bike riders.
A swoop, helicopters circling, the swift cop cars 250 arrested…

August 29 / Hot weather, exuberant friendly energy, inter-generational, diverse, you got half a million folk more or less on the same agenda, say No to that Other Death Wish Agenda. It got a little heavy passing Madison Square Garden where the anarchists set their dragon afire & 3 beefy cops shoved me & others east on 33rd Street. Keep it moving. Some pummeling, panic, arrests. Over-reaction surely, a "paper dragon" fire but cause for cop harassment, & yeah, check it out anarchists! small children, some babes in arms just a few inches away from smoke. Interesting minute karmic reaction to reaction to reaction and it felt like a Bardo state – that consciousness, after death, that scary travel without reference point, separated from the other beings -one's lover, child, friends, the poets contingent scattered. Mental sensations heightened. Keep The World Safe for Poetry (& everything else). Then back to the body.

August 30 / Full Moon

When you thought about it what were the stakes? The end of Nature, the end of Civilization, a truly inhumane Dark Age if this keeps up on the horizon…

How many moons (now moving at the fast clip of an inch and a half per year away from planet Earth) witnessed Fascism, watched people "rounded up", "snagged", "set up"…

August 31st –

The big arrest night. Let's keep the Republicans from going shopping!
& commiserating with Eliot Katz why we weren't ready to go lie down on the
street tho we wanted to. His back trouble, & me nervous about getting
out of the country for the job in Japan. And wanting to keep witness here…be
the eyes & ears (if you only could) of all the streets in the world…

Haiku

coptors in the sky

cops on the ground

captured (we) in between

Sept 1 – St Marks Church
Reminiscent of the old Hippie, Black Panther, Motherfucker, Anti
Vietnam/American War Days – Soup kitchen in the graveyard –
Huge crowd in the steamy church hearing the poets belt it out for change &
"strangle" Rumsfeld, Cheney etc). Voices beyond euphemism, how sweet they
are…

***Anne Waldman**, co-founder with Allen Ginsberg of The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University (www.naropa.edu) and Chair of the celebrated Summer Writing Program, is the author of over 30 books of poetry. Recent titles include IN THE ROOM OF NEVER GRIEVE (Coffee House Press, in which "Bury the Skull of a Yak" appeared), STRUCTURE OF THE WORLD COMPARED TO A BUBBLE (Penguin), and the activist anthology she co-edited with Lisa Birman, CIVIL DISOBEDIENCES: Poetics & Politics in Action (Coffee House Press 2004) (See www.coffeehousepress.org). She makes her home in Boulder, Colorado & New York City and travels to other poetry zones around the world.*

WANDA COLEMAN

THE WAR OF WARS

the twin plagues poverty and hate endure century upon
century upon century. hope crumbles like the twin Buddhas
of Bamiyan, or the great horns of Satan in the light of rapture

the faithful are shackled by apathy & cowardice, the brave
neutralized by shadow malignancies, and the learned cowed
by authorities who enlist religious tenets to serve oppression

our cities are sugar-combed with de facto boneyards
citizen worth taxed then interred in acid earth/the dismissed
history of slavery-based racial dislocations and lynchings.

when will the beneficiaries abandon gluttony? the corporations
empty their vaults to the needy? the converted wed amens, candles
& hymns to bone sacrifice? when will the armchair poets rise?

Johnny, your gun for whose freedom to do what to whom?
Johnny, your gun in exchange for citizenship & scholarship?
Johnny, your heart for the invalidation of your being.

where is the flag-deep apology for slavery?
where are the reparations in culture & coin?
how, then, can the mending of our nation take place?

grandstand rhetoric and flaccid protest do not a power make.
there is a never. there is a too late

Wanda Coleman *has transformed 4500+ rejection slips into Guggenheim & NEA fellowships, and 17 books including Bathwater Wine, awarded the 1999 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, a 2001 National Book Award bronze medal for Mercurochrome (www.godine.com) , Ostinato Vamps (Pitt Poetry Series 2003-2004) and Wanda Coleman's Greatest Hits–1966 to 2004, Pudding House Press.*

ELIOT KATZ

CAN WE HAVE SOME PEACE AND QUIET PLEASE?

The belligerent voices are yelling in the streets
& on the radios calling for the big bombs of peace
to fall, the smart bombs, the bombs that have passed
their college entrance exams. It's Orwellian the way
everyone claims Orwell for their side–these days
everyone is fighting on behalf of Orwell and God.
Years ago Don Rumsfeld & Saddam Hussein met in
the corner & exchanged secret diplomatic handshakes–
it is only after peaceful gestures like these that the missiles
can fly. In the meantime, the time between the world
mean as is and the world we mean to become,
the endless rains are Yehuda Amichai's tears watching men
still violently beating their swords into plowshares and back
into rifles & remote-control fighter planes. On the corner
of Spring & Broadway, a taxicab driver threw a baby lamb
out the passenger-side window–everyone in a two-block radius
ran away screaming. In New York City the yelling is
so loud and the quiet so quiet that everyone I know, just below
the surface, is scared out their wits, knowing the violence
these days that can follow an apparent peace. They are calling

Senators with empathetic American voices, urging earthly
generosity and kindness, which the media & our elected leaders
interpret as a vote for pre-emptive strikes. The next century's
gods have not yet been born and the last century's are no longer
able to show a child the simple magic trick of pulling
its fingers away from a newly lit flame.

THE CAKEWALK

The cakewalk
has become a bit sticky

some Iraqis have turned
their daisies

into rifles
& hand grenades

seems many
don't like tyrant Saddam

nor foreign invaders
dropping cruise missiles

and cluster bombs
In Basra the water supply

has been cut off
and we are seeing

the possibility
of humanitarian disaster

war should never
have been viewed

as a latenight poker game
initiated by those

too zealous
to send their own kids

into urban combat
It'll take millions of patriots

& internationalists

(truthfully the same folks)

to throw the lunatics
out the White House

Until then we are facing
more weekends from hell

as well more spring days
filled with thousands

marching down Broadway
for a democratic peace

This is one of the two
oldest stories on the planet

(both originating here)
Let the battle for ideas

replace those young corpses
growing cold under desert moons

BROKEN EGGSHELLS AND NO MAPS

They have captured Saddam in the bottom of a spider hole
unshaven & sedated, broken eggshells & poetry books
littering his lair. On the TV news networks they are
pretending that it no longer makes sense to have taken
an antiwar position, as if the capture of Saddam can
bring back 10,000 lives, can cure the broken eyesockets,
can eliminate the uranium cancer threat, can put the torn
pages back into international law books. It's a good
thing one more tyrannical leader is behind bars, but now
it's unknown whether the violence will slow or grow,
perhaps more Iraqis eager to resist the occupation
knowing the risk of Saddam climbing back on his throne
has ceased. Or maybe the Americans will be more
widely loved, I think it's unlikely but maybe the next
elected body will request being made the 51st state? It's really
unknown, there are no maps made for this part of the new
century, the monuments are being shaped, but no one can agree
on the best material to fill the mold. Vivian, we are doing
our best to love each other in an imperfect world. If we wait
for perfection I will be 1,000 pounds heavier and the dust

from our bookcases will have long since learned to read
for itself. So we go ahead and try to improve our own
government, get one that will not suck up the healthcare,
welfare, housing, world hunger, and clean water money
into a vacuum pump of tax cuts & pulse-emitting, flesh-burning
weapons that won't work or should never be used. There is no
set formula sure to work every time. We set the temperature
to a "beat Bush" setting and then leave the room and go
to a few meetings and readings and rallies. When we return
home, we check to see whether the cake has arisen.

Eliot Katz *is the poetry editor of Logos. He is also the author of three books of poetry, including Unlocking the Exits (Coffee House Press, www.coffeehousepress.org), and the guest-editor of the recent"Beat Bush issue" of Long Shot literary journal (www.longshot.org).*

Bush On The Couch

By | 2004: Vol. 3, No. 4

Critics suggest that G. W. Bush's presidency may well be the most important fact misshaping the 21st century; the long-term consequences may endure for generations. His less than compassionate conservatism has seen massive retrenchments from already niggardly social programs, and his disregard of the environment accelerated global warming. His economic policies created the largest budget deficit ever. His unilateral invasion of Iraq has not only been a disaster for the people of that already hobbled country, but eroded alliances with Europe and earned the enmity of Muslims throughout the world. He is the perfect poster boy for recruiting terrorists. And his response to criticism has been his swagger, cocky smirk, and the (supposedly) affable disarming of critics. A spate of behind-the-scenes books has come out, showing Dubya determined to pursue a bellicose course yet blind to contravening evidence. According to Paul O'Niell and Richard Clarke, Dubya brushes aside critiques. He claims he is doing what God ordained. Does it sounds a bit scary when folks hear voices that bid them do battle? I always thought Joan of Arc was a bit schizy, but she at least seemed willing personally to fight for what she believed.

Some hail the good Christian warrior fighting God's battles against those who "are not with us," meaning (1) the evil external enemies such as Osama Bin Laden and his terrorists who "hate our values", (2) and those East Coast liberals who drink lattes, sip Chablis, drive Volvos, and support the murder of unborn babies. These "high falutin elites", a.k.a. liberal Democrats, would keep prayers out of the schools, support gay marriages, and worst of all, they look down their noses at "real Americans". The "real Americans" are down home working folks who take care of their families, take the boys hunting and the girls to skating lessons, go to Church in pickups with gun racks, and don't much care for fancy intellectual stuff. The other bunch of "real Americans" are those who mostly inherited a privileged position, took advantages of government supported schools and technological development, and worked hard to augment those advantages; they are now the rich and super rich that W calls his base.

Many people, as Thomas Franks (2004) has shown, vote for conservative social issues, but suffer small farm and business failures, job losses, privatization of public services, deteriorating schools and environmental damage. They lose health benefits and pensions but never their faith. They don't make the connection between their plight and the real policies of those they support. There seems to be a powerful psychological confluence between their hidebound values and Dubya's persona. Others, myself included, despise W for both his policies and his personality in which his arrogant anti-intellectualism joins with a basic sadism. Behind the swagger and the smirk, behind the fundamentalism and malapropisms, who really is George W. Bush the person, and how did he get to be that way? While there are many biographies, and revelations from members of his administration, sooner or later we expected a more psychological analysis. And indeed this is the goal of Franks' *Bush on the Couch*. But

Dubya was never on his couch, or perhaps anyone else's, so what instead we have is a collection of informed observations and clinical hypotheses rooted in psychoanalytic theory.

Although I am a sociologist, I also attended the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. Thus I am leery about using public statements to make inferences about a person's psychodynamics. For psychoanalysis, the basic data are usually found in transference and countertransference, the often unconscious feelings expressed to the analyst and his or her feelings toward the patient within the analytic situation. Here, however, we behold "psychoanalysis at distance." But Freud and his followers ventured into such territory when analyzing Moses, Leonardo and others.

Psychoanalytical jargon often denigrates while appearing scientific and neutral. It is not a great leap from noting W's anal-sadistic tendencies, to saying he is really a shit. Thus, it is easy to move from reasoned analysis to psychobabble. While I have serious reservations about this kind of work, Frank does present provocative interpretations. I regard this book as a very serious effort to make "informed guesses" about W's character. When Franks makes inferences about W having ADHD, dyslexia, and perhaps some neurological consequences of heavy drinking. I would want better evidence. That said, even if Franks' appraisal of W, like Freud's tale of the "primal horde" it is a "just so story," it remains informative. And to those who already detest W, his family and his Nazi sympathizer grandfather Preston, it is entertaining.

Like father like son, Dubya got "legacied" into Andover, Yale and Harvard Business School. Along the way he was a cheerleader (how appropriate), member of Skull and Crossbones and racked up a less than stellar his academic record. He lived fast and loose, admittedly doing a lot of drinking, and evidence suggests a joint here and there, and a line of blow or two, or more. On occasion, he was behind the wheel while over the limit and was arrested. Then he found God, changed his "evil" ways, and proceeded to run for the president since God "had a special mission for him."

He proudly shuns book learning' but while he may not have the test scores to get in Texas, Law School, Dubya seems shrewd and charming. In the 2000 campaign, Bush appeared to a lot of people to be likeable; Yet Dubya seems lacking in "emotional intelligence" and incapable of introspection. Nor we do not get the impression of real warmth. He has a mean streak, often disguised by a thin smile. This is seen in his quick temper that he struggles to control in public. Empathy is not exactly a strong point. Perhaps the quality most irritating to his critics is his sheer obliviousness to the consequences of his decisions, whether his cruel fiscal policies or his sending people to be killed or kill. He appears decisive and determined, yet is easily flustered. His speech style tends to be succinct, without nuance and often without meaning. He resorts to clichés or bumper sticker logic. Further, there is the outpouring of malapropisms and neologisms that have come to be called "Bushisms."

Even, and perhaps especially, where the subject is repugnant, we have to look at a character in light of the totality of circumstances and it is only within this larger gestalt that individual qualities can be understood. With such understanding, Frank, as if presenting the case of W in

grand rounds, describes Dubya's character, spells out the symptoms, suggests an etiology, and a treatment program. He begins by noting the contradiction between W's "compassion" and his cutting programs for the poor and needy. How does a religious man kill with such alacrity and find joy in the deaths of others he obviously considers beneath him? How can he send men to die to stop mythical WMD, and then joke about looking for them in the Oval office? How can he sound confused and act so decisively, mixing fact and fantasy?

I was saddened to learn about a little boy who was repeatedly struck by a cold authoritarian mother nicknamed "The Enforcer". His father was rarely home. Never having an empathic "good mother" nor compensatory parenting, he could never have empathize or imagine the consequences of his actions on others. Franks suggests that one salient moment was the death of a younger sister when he was seven. The family had not told him of her illness (leukemia). The parents went golfing the next day. He never learned to mourn nor feel remorse. Franks surmises that Barbara Bush did get depressed, a difficult situation for a young child. Thus he tried to cheer her up, acting like a clown. And so to deal with his own loneliness, his coping strategy was to be the joker.

Affability can be genuine human warmt, typically a refection of how the person was lovingly treated as a young child. Yet it can also be a manipulative strategy. be it a seduction, a sale, or a swindle. In such cases "affability" is a way to gloss over and deny a fundamental deficit in oneself. Frank further suggests that maternal coldness fosters a splitting of the world into good and evil. In normal development, with nurturance and love, the person learns to integrate these primitive notions. Dubya never did learn to see shades of gray or anything untoward within himself. So his destructive impulses become projected to convenient enemies such as those who hate our freedom But perhaps it is Dubya who really hates our freedom. This lack of empathy, coupled with his assertive style, becomes the ground from which bullies spring, and we have been able to observe the havoc wrought.

Franks suggests Dubya may have been hyperactive, complicated by dyslexia, which, in the context of a cold family, impairs complex thought and stirs up anxiety when confronted with same. Mark Crispin Miller (2002) discussed W's difficulty with using language. But W's deep anxiety that not only leads to disdain for intellectual complexity but fosters decisions on the basis of "gut feelings"-snap judgments that cannot be modified on the basis of further experience. Given his simplistic view of Others, combined with impulsive decisions, Bush has indulged in drastic social policies.

While young boys need their father's for a number of reasons, not the least of which is to work through their aggression to the father and internalize him as a role model, Bush 41's absence made it difficult for Dubya to separate from his depressed mother and find another source of nurturance. Given these dynamics, he sought to "impress, emulate and outperform" his father. Yet as a real combat pilot, good student, successful businessman, ambassador to the UN, CIA director and even president, George Herbert Walker Bush, was a tough act to follow, though Dubya surely tried. To impress his father, and indeed do him one better, he would get Saddam, who tried to hurt his Dad. Dad, however, understood the problem of occupying Iraq and how it

would be doomed. That he would eventually reject his father's Northeast culture and embrace the shit kicker style of rural Texas says much about his ambivalent attitude to his father.

While not as dumb as some would charge, he seemed to have impaired capacities for learning and was happy enough to just get by. Nor was he much of an athlete, so in turn, to cover his anxieties and the shame of limited abilities, he focused on frivolity, glad handing, and attempting – sometimes subtly, sometimes not-to dominate others. Dubya denied being an alcoholic but denial is characteristic of people with alcohol problems. Those who abstain without treatment are prone to "grandiosity, judgmentalism, intolerance, detachment, denial of responsibility, overreaction and an aversion to introspection". This seems applicable to a man who denies having made any mistakes or ever being ashamed. Moreover, a history of drinking has adverse long-term consequences on memory, processing speed, attention, executive functions and balance. He endlessly repeats mantras of "freedom," "justice," "progress," strung together in ways that make little sense except perhaps to Fox News and the "true believers." They, of course, do not all have the excuse of being former alcoholics.

For a "dry drunk" religion is a way of blocking out his wild past and providing a structure of impulse control. Indeed it may provide an inner peace, recall Marx called it an opiate. But this kind of conversion leaves one prone to what Freud called illusions and magical thinking, such as swallowing Creationism as science whilst global warming or the snowball's chance in hell of an anti-missile system working are dismissed as liberal hokum. These illusions shade into grandiosity, perhaps as when his "mission" was "accomplished," replete with his appearance in a tailored flight suit. The phallic aggressive narcissism would transform him into the Top Gun action figure who kicked Saddam's ass. *But we know the mission was not accomplished*. As to phallic grandiosity, I guess only Laura knows

Despite embracing a hyper-moralistic religion Dubya never seemed averse to violating laws, whether DWI, looting Iraq, or tolerating criminal acts in his administration from illegal contracts to outing Virginia Plame. Given such duplicity, there is an obsession with secrets and any questioning is seen as hostile. W has said, I don't owe anyone explanations. He takes liberties with the truth and seemingly is unaware of his dissimilitude. Being surrounded by enablers called the press corps helps sustain the emperor's new armor. Dubya's anal sadism makes him indifferent to human suffering as when he made fun of Karla Faye Tucker, pleading for her life. From branding pledges at Skull and Bones ("only cigarette burns") to his denigrating nicknames for everyone, his sadism flourished. Psychologically, there is subconscious communication from the psyche of the leader to the follower, and I suggest W was the enabler of the sadistic practices at Abu Ghraib. And I would suggest that his sadism is most evident in the tightly drawn smile, the glee of seeing others in pain from the time he blew up frogs as a young child.

He distorts events to conform to his view of reality and that of his inner circle in ways that disavow and project his sadistic tendencies. He seems incapable of accepting information that might interfere with his sadism, for example, despite information from weapons inspectors reporting no WMD, he ignored doubts. The aggressive intent of Hussein, seemed far more a

projection of W's own aggression, to justify his attacks on Iraq. No matter what, he remains resolute. Frank recalls Miller's observation that W never falters when he struts, thumps his chest and speaks about violence and punishment, but when speaking of compassion, altruism or idealism, he makes hilarious mistakes. He has little of the charisma of a Clinton or Reagan. Yet W has the ability of a used car salesman to size people up and evoke powerful loyalties. Indeed, his speech problems and superficial self-effacement make his seem almost endearing.

Still, rather than look at psychodynamics alone, I suggest we take a more sociological tack. Dubya embodies qualities that have long been part of American culture, beginning with its Puritanical moralism. Frank himself suggested, "George W Bush behaves like a modern version of the preachers during the witch-hunting days of Cotton Mather. As many noted from the times of Crèvecoeur and De Toqueville, to recent studies of American character several themes stand out: religiosity, affability, individualism and violence and toughness, that in turn dispose anti-intellectualism and a paranoid style.

One aspect of American "exceptionalism" has been the persistence of religion. As De Toqueville noted, in a vast land without a pre-existing social structure, where people were ever on the move, religion was the primary basis of community life and social solidarity. In no other modern nation might the religious convictions of a leader be subject to scrutiny. Today it is not possible to run as Republican without gaining the trust of conservative Christians. Even if they lose businesses, jobs, benefits, pensions and even sons and daughters, they still support republicans. In the US fundamentalist religion is not so much the opiate of the people, its is more like a hallucinogenic form of hegemony that enables to ruling economic classes to amass vast profits.

According to earliest observations, in America, unlike aristocratic Europe, there was a free and easy casual intercourse between people. While such relationships may have been a bit superficial, it would again seem W is the master of superficial relationships. De Toqueville also noted that the American democracy, with its more fragile social bonds, people were reluctant to stand out on the basis of intellectual ability; as a result, as Hofstadter (1962) argued, a strong anti-intellectualism arose. Whether or not his radical anti-intellectualism is a manifestation of W's inner deficiencies, his interpersonal style resonates with a large number of Americans, especially in the more rural, culturally isolated places we call the red states, firm in their religious convictions, and firm in their isolation from the life of the mind, nuance and complexity. But one consequence was the tendency to reduce complex social issues so that the adversities of the world were seen as the consequences of individuals-and deviant individuals would do us harm. There is a paranoid style in American life stretching from witchcraft in Salem to viewing Saddam Hussein as an imminent threat. For W this may well be the product of projection of his own aggression, but there is a frightfully strong synergy between W's cognitive style and long standing American patterns.

The same historical conditions composed a culture of coarseness and toughness, guns and violence (Wilkinson, 1984), and enshrined in our popular culture (Slotkin, 1992). From the Deerslayer to Davy Crockett, to Sam Spade, Shane, Rambo or Dirty Harry, the tough loner

skilled in the tools of violence, and willing to use that violence to insure good, has long been an element of American character, and has been clearly evident in the buck-skin Dubya persona who was gonna smoke Usama out. And while this makes for good film, even great films like Shane or the Wild One, it makes for imbecilic international policy.

The extent to which Frank flits among sound clinical judgments, informed inferences, and outright speculation is not always clear. Just as Freud's theory of the origin of civilization beginning with the son's slaying of the father has little factual basis, it nevertheless is a powerful story of how the demands of civilization require the suppression of desires to insure social harmony, and their sublimations into work, order, beauty and cleanliness. So *Bush on the Couch* is an interesting story of the relationships of capitalism to character, and how the legacy of early Puritan morality, mediated through the Barbara and George Herbert Bush, gave rise to W. Franks does present supporting information and reasonably convincing explanations. But what is more important is not what Frank tells us about W, but what W reveals about our nation. At the time of this writing, four more years of "primary process" thinking portends endless crises, and if my analysis of American character has any value, such crises would enable completing the moves to fascism that W has started. I strongly support Frank's suggested treatment program. Dubya should leave office, period. If you don't like W, you'll love this book. And if you do like W, then perhaps a few years of analysis might do you some good. But then again, if you like W, psychotherapy may not help, lobotomies are still an option.

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Noblesse N’oblige Pas: President Bush And The Ethic Of Privilege A Review Of The President Of Good And Evil By Peter Singer

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Conservative commentators howled when, in 1998, Princeton University named Peter Singer DeCamp Professor in its Center for Human Values. This bioethicist takes nothing as sacred or tabooed-not the distinction of humans and animals or the sacredness of all forms of human life. He examines our assumptions about such matters and disturbs their unchallenged roots. Singer holds outrageously disturbing views on the nature of human life, his critics protested, that threaten the moral values of our young. Harry T. Shapiro, then Princeton’s president, took time to defend Singer’s appointment to head off those who were preparing hemlock or worse to withhold gifts to Princeton. Steve Forbes, for example, promised to do the latter in order to prove his conservative credentials during the 2000 Republican presidential primaries.

In *The President of Good and Evil*, Peter Singer once again takes a very controversial view. He posits that President George W. Bush is sincere in the ethical values underpinning his decisions. He then conducts a thorough and thoughtful examination of those ethics. He begins with ground very familiar for him-the nature of human life-to examine the President’s decision on stem cell research, perhaps his best research and thought out one. Singer expands that examination to a broader look at the President’s pursuit of a culture of life. Other chapters similarly take four or five specific policy initiatives and then examine the ethical basis of each initiative and a thread uniting those initiatives around broad areas-justice and opportunity, freedom, faith, war, international relations, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the US world dominance.

Bush, Singer concludes, is not consistent within any ethical framework. He defends individual rights on stem cell research but denies *habeas corpus* for “enemy combatants.” His utilitarian principles are in play in promises to increased funds to fight AIDS in Africa but absent in his opposition to physician-assisted suicide or the medical use of marijuana. Ostensibly, this born-again Christian could claim Christian ethics. He certainly speaks often about the sacredness of human life and God-given rights. However, his invasion of Afghanistan does not meet the Christian criteria of a just war and the doctrine of preventive war, such as the invasion of Iraq, flatly contradicts them. To be fair, however, inconsistency is not a terribly telling criticism; few of us are consistent in our beliefs and often hold conflicting views.

Far more disturbing than some inconsistency, Singer warns, is the President’s consistent

reliance on his instinctive or intuitive sense of right and wrong in making policy decisions. This is very troubling for Singer because he believes that President Bush's ethics come not from a set of well-considered principles based on self-reflection and serious thought but from the clarity of an adolescent. President Bush, Singer contends, does not reach simplicity by navigating the whitewater of complexity but by never entering them.

Singer's strongest criticism of the President's ethic goes to what Singer considers the heart of being human-reflective self-awareness. However, "Reflection and critical thought are…not something that Bush relishes" (p. 211). His lack of these features permits the President strong convictions and misplaced values, just as many adolescents. He may insist on truthfulness in small matters but show a "gross misunderstanding of the moral requirements of honesty," Singer argues (p. 217). The now infamous sixteen words of the 2003 State of the Union Message, "the British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa," represent, for Singer, the art of putting the literal truth in the service of dishonesty.

Those who view the President's moral development in this arrested manner will welcome a thorough examination and refutation of Bush's apparently principled positions. For them, Singer will be more than an academic Michael Moore but just as satisfying. Likewise, readers of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* will find familiar evidence carefully marshaled to make a convincing, scholarly case that there is no unifying or even substantial set of values shoring up the President's ethics or policies.

Is this enough, however? Why even bother to pretend that the President is thoughtful and principled just to refute that assertion? Singer pegged this perspective in his description of the "cynical view" of the President's ethics, which he rejected but with which I began. "To take Bush's ethical views seriously, to subject them to a reasoned critique and try to fit them into a coherent ethical framework, is…to treat them more seriously than they deserve" (p. 219).

After reading the book, I remain cynical. Why take President Bush's ethics seriously? We have had previous presidents who could parse the truth at the cost of honesty depending on what the meaning of "is" is. Certainly, Presidents Clinton and Kennedy behaved like immature adolescents in their sexual affairs. Like them, President Bush's views would not merit serious attention at all except for his position.

Their consequences make a president's ethics a serious matter. Consequences go to the heart of politics as a vocation according to Max Weber, whom Singer does not mention, unfortunately. The ethical shortcomings of Bush's policies are clearest not for their inconsistency or their place on Lawrence Kohlberg's scale of moral development but when measured by Weber's ethic of responsibility.

In his World War I essay, "Politics as a Vocation," Weber argues that an ethic of ultimate ends "just does not *ask* for consequences." "The believer in an ethic of ultimate ends feels responsible' only for seeing to it that the flame of pure intentions is not quelched." He dealt

with the complexity of Christian pacificism and rejected it. The ethic of responsibility requires "one has to give an account of the foreseeable results of one's actions." Thus it prohibits blind allegiance to radical Christian pacificism, or any ultimate end, because of its foreseeable adverse consequences. Responding to aggression by turning the other cheek would abrogate the ethic of responsibility for the ethic of ultimate ends. Intentions cannot outweigh the consideration of the foreseeable consequences of our actions in the vocation of politics.

There is a counterpart to this mix of intention and consequences in the ethic of everyday life. The strictest ethical test is to judge our actions for their consequence on others and to judge others' actions towards us by their intentions. In contrast, the laxest is the opposite-a stress on good intentions and denial of the consequences of our actions.

By the consistent avoidance of the consequences of his actions and invoking good intentions despite bad outcomes, President Bush falls on the laxer side of this measure of moral development. Again, George W. Bush's avoidance of consequences and insistence on intentions would be of little importance except that as President of the United States, they have much more disturbing shortcomings than conventional pubescent misjudgment.

Singer sets up the contrast of intentions and consequences, well. Whether or not President Bush intends to bankrupt the US so that it can no longer afford social and regulatory programs, the consequences of record deficits and increased military spending make cuts in these programs a logical and foreseeable consequence. Similarly, while it may be the intention of the President to defend the United States against terrorist attacks, the consequence of policies of incarceration without due process undermines the U.S. heritage of a civil liberties upheld by an independent judiciary (p. 88). The consequence of preventive war doctrine, whatever its intent, restores the "might makes right" principle of international relations. The consequence of unilateral military action undermines international efforts at peace and nonproliferation of weapons. The consequence of invoking God on our side against evil puts us in the mindset of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists. The consequences of withdrawing from international agreements prolong the inequitable squandering of the earth's resources on an unsustainable pattern of economic activity and consumption; and so on and so on.

Obviously, it would be hard to win an election on a platform of these consequences. Thus, the consequences of policies, and here other administrations share some blame, are denied or ignored. (As I write, Republicans at their national convention are celebrating the liberation of Afghanistan and Iraq and the prospect of their stable, democratic development. As I revise, news emerged of a report to the President, at the time of the convention, that the best that the best hope for Iraq in the near future is unsteady stability and the worst outcome civil war.) When consequences cannot be denied or ignored, intentions are substituted for them. No matter what the evidence of torture at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad-events that came to light too late for inclusion in Singer's book-the White House and Pentagon never intended them and are thus not responsible for them.

This brings us to a central question: Are we to believe that President Bush's denial of

foreseeable consequences comes from his effort to deceive the American people or from genuine innocence-an unwillingness or inability to accept the consequences of failed policies. Singer ducks this question. “Sincerely held or not, Bush’s ethic is woefully inadequate” (p. 225). One gets a little further with Paul Krugman’s judgment. In *The Great Unraveling,* Krugman argues that President Bush is simply a good CEO for a board that understands and wants many undesirable consequences such as an impoverished national government and the cessation of almost all social programs and policies. His neoconservative advisors and their supporters understand and welcome their intended consequences of the President’s policies. Their ethic of ultimate ends includes their vision of a radical restructuring of US social and foreign policies that serves as their ethic of responsibility. Singer cites Krugman’s work often and seems sympathetic with his view.

But, if we are concerned with the ethics of President Bush, this begs the question: What responsibility do CEOs have for the consequences of policy whether their own or others? May President Bush insist sincerely that he has no responsibility for the bad consequences of the policies of his administration?

I believe that he can make these claims sincerely. He can be truthful in denying foreseeable consequences, if he does not have the honesty to inquire about them, one of Singer’s most telling comments about the President’s morality. His lack of reflection keeps him safe from the complexity of matters beyond his interest and thus from some of the responsibility for the foreseeable consequence of his decisions. Illustratively, the President’s religious views incline to the simplicity of Manichaeanism, a Christian heresy that polarizes the world into good and evil, rather than the complexity of the Sermon on the Mount and the commandment to turn the other cheek, with which Weber grappled.

This brings us beyond Singer’s assertion of an underdeveloped morality to a highly developed and consistent ethic. The President seems to combine the ethic of ultimate ends with a total lack of ethic of responsibility into an ethic of privilege-the ability, based on selective perception and wishful thinking, to define matters as one wants to see them and then to ignore the consequences of one’s actions. This ethic marks his youth and career-admission to prestigious universities despite mediocre academic achievement; a cavalier National Air Guard duty; acquisition of wealth despite business failures; failed and deficit-ridden policies in Texas; as well as the events that Singer portrays so well. Simply put, a highly developed ethic of privilege implies that privilege does not oblige. The privileged have no obligation for the deleterious consequences of their actions or beliefs, including of course the implications of this one. At its highest stages of development, this ethic of privilege permits the President to be sincere and irresponsible.

At the end of these considerations, we come face to face with two questions: How did this poorly-principled man become president? If the serious negative consequences of his poorly principled policies are so obvious, why does he have an excellent chance to be re-elected? The answers have to do with those who share, enthusiastically or reluctantly, the ethic of privilege with the President.

A five to four majority of the US Supreme Court embraced that ethic enthusiastically in its decision that made George W. Bush president. The Court took the equal protection clause designed to establish and protect the voting rights of African-Americans, applied it to hinder a true account of voting results, and then refused to accept its own decision as a precedent for other cases.

The recount process, in its features here described, is inconsistent with the minimum procedures necessary to protect the fundamental right of each voter in the special instance of a statewide recount under the authority of a single state judicial officer. Our consideration is limited to the present circumstances, for the problem of equal protection in election processes generally presents many complexities.

Behind the legal language is the clear statement of an ethic of privilege: things are as we say they are, we will stay on the simple side of the complexity of the equal protection of rights, and the consequence of our action is not binding on us.

The ethic of privilege got George W. Bush into the White House but can it keep him there? Perhaps so. There are those of real privilege who also abide by the ethic and will support the President. However, few Americans have such a highly developed ethic of privilege as President Bush because his degree of privilege is beyond the ordinary experience of Americans. Why then might these ordinary voters join him in the ethic of privilege?

The simplicity of action based on firm, common sense convictions has appeal to ordinary people. If President Bush does not have a high degree of moral judgment, as Singer argues, he resembles a conventional degree of development, that is the ordinary stage of development His penchant for simplicity without reflection and a world of stark rights and wrongs has appeal to some, who may also prefer matters to be uncomplicated.

This simplicity has less appeal to those who understand there is responsibility for foreseeable consequences in a world with grey as well as black and white. Even among them, however, the President may find some support because a well-developed ethic of privilege gives him a great degree of self-confidence expressed primarily in affability. Fred Greenstein, a political scientist and scholar on presidents, points to the President's "aptitude for the personal side of politics." Greenstein compares President Bush to Lyndon Johnson and terms him "congenitally gregarious" with hallmarks of "exceptional sociability" and a "bantering manner." He just seems too nice to be so wrong. The President has unshakeable conviction in the ethic of privilege. His own life is an embodied narrative that selective perception and wishful thinking-sincere irresponsibility-do not impede one from becoming president of the United States.

His uncomplicated views and sociability permit President Bush to embody exceedingly well a narrative of other American values that obviously appeal to a great many voters. Leadership scholars such as Howard Gardner and Ronald Heifetz help us understand that the ordinary narrative of the Bush presidency-including the ethic of privilege-saves us the task of bringing our values into line with our practices. The ordinary narrative does not ask the consequences of

our actions for our values. What happens when you leave programs unfunded or under funded and program funds unspent? Rather, it explains our actions in terms of the highest esteem we hold for ourselves. Our intentions-to leave no child behind, to achieve clean skies, to fight poverty through a special millennium fund, to reconstruct Iraq, or to combat AIDS in Africa with record amounts of assistance-suffice. We have to go no further than our intentions in the ordinary narrative of American actions. In his interview with Arab television stations, for example, President Bush found the torture in Abu Ghraib prison abhorrent. But assured the people of the Arab nations, "the actions of these few people do not reflect the hearts of the American people…This is not America."

Yet what America is the President describing? Certainly, it could not be found in Texas when the then-Governor George Bush executed 152 inmates including juvenile offenders and a mentally retarded man. That America is in the company of China, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The America that George Bush offers is one where our intentions shield us from the consequences of our actions. He assures us that bad things do not happen but if they do, they happen only because bad people did them or only to people-such as the Texas 152-who had it coming to them. This is a very comforting narrative.

George Bush enjoys his electoral prospects because he exudes the ethic of privilege and entices us to join him there. We are invited to think wishfully that government services can improve and increase with less taxes; that today's debt will never come due or impinge on our children's welfare; that the growing inequalities of income have no negative consequences for democracy or the middle class; that military might can order the world the way we want it; that disturbing evidence of environmental damage can be safely ignored; that social problems have their origins in the people with them and not in social conditions; that racist policies may be overcome with race blind policies; etc. Within an ethic of privilege, selective perception means that we don't have to examine or reflect on our actions. In Weber's terms, the ethic of privilege's ultimate end is to keep us free from an ethic of responsibility.

A variant of the ethic of privilege may be necessary for many Americans to support the President The presidency, being the primary elected office of our national government, serves as a national symbol. Ordinary Americans may privilege President Bush as they would any president as the occupant of the highest office of their government. Their perception may become selective, or selected from them, when President Bush cannot find his way to the end of a sentence. As when he embarrassingly bemoaned that "Too many OB-GYNs aren't able to practice their love with women all across this country" because of medical malpractice suits. Understandably, ordinary Americans may prefer to think that we have invested the power of our nation in a man with greater clarity of thought than expression. Likewise, they may prefer to think wishfully that the President had meaning other than the clear articulation of the ethic of privilege when he argued against John Kerry's plan to roll back the tax cuts for the most wealthy Americans because "real rich people figure out how to dodge taxes."

The ethic of privilege has special appeal now, a time of fear. People are less inclined to aspire to higher forms of moral reflection, argument or action, when they fear physical violence. In

such a time, there is some comfort to live in a world of stark contrasts-good and evil, right and wrong-and its simplicity. The foreseeable consequences of President Bush's policies make running for reelection difficult except for the extraordinary willingness of ordinary people, afraid for their safety, to make their safety an ultimate end with less regard for the ethic of responsibility. Preventing terrorist attacks may outweigh considerations of other policies-education, environment, civil liberties-and their outcomes.

Part of the substantial appeal of President Bush may be the appeal of the ethic of privilege in a frightening world whose terror exceeds our understanding. At such time, an us/them world may be reassuring. Likewise, it may be comforting to invoke the privilege of exceptionalism, which the Supreme Court used to make him President. We can use force against others without assuming that we have established an example for others to follow against us. The ethic of privilege violates Kant's ethical imperative "act always as if the maxim of your actions were to be a universal law" (p. 213) but it also makes the world a simpler place if you do not look beyond the intentions of our actions.

Peter Singer's thoughtful consideration can yield some disturbing insights. In this case, the President's instinctive ethical judgments yield an unreflective ethic of privilege-ultimate values sincerely held but insufficiently thought out and without responsibility for the consequences of actions taken on their behalf. The ethic of privilege offers a truly disturbing invitation to escape from the freedom to reflect on the consequences of our actions in the presidential election of 2004 and from the responsibility for our actions.

Unfortunately, the ethic of privilege is what it is because it is not available to ordinary people. The only parts of the ethic of privilege that ordinary people share are the opportunities to distinguish themselves from others-including gays and lesbians-in terms of good and evil and not to ask or reflect on the foreseeable consequences of that action. President Bush's ethic of privilege permits us, ordinary Americans, to become privileged by defending a freedom that, ironically, we dare not use less we become one of "them" or the victims of those who envy our too-risky-to-use freedoms. It is easier, of course, to dismiss disturbing thoughts like these than to consider them. That was the advice Singer's conservative critics gave to Princeton. That consideration is the safeguard of democracy and, Singer would remind us, the expression of reflective self-awareness that makes us fully human. Ultimately then, the election of 2004 entails the ethics of responsibility of ordinary Americans as much if not more than the ethics of George W. Bush.

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How Class Works

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“Who is middle class?” I ask. Ninety-five percent of all my students-undergraduate and graduate-inevitably raise their hands high in the air.

“Who works?” They stay raised.

“Who carries credit card or other kinds of dept?” Hands, unanimously, reach for the heavens.

“Who has control over her/his work and her/his workplace?” Every arm goes limp, mirroring the impotency that characterizes the powerlessness of so many in today’s neoliberal workforce.

In his most recent book, *How Class Works*, Stanley Aronowitz’s breadth of historical knowledge can at times be overwhelming. Rewriting, revising, and interrogating the history of unions and unionization; economic and social policy; social, political and cultural theory; and the affects of individuals and organizations in the long-ago erased historical events that have helped shape our present condition as well as condition the shape of our future, Aronowitz situates himself in the tradition of other organic oppositional intellectuals. Along with C. Wright Mills, Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Audrey Lourde, Herbert Marcuse, and Cornell West, among others, he does the kind of work oppositional intellectuals should do: “The intellectual opposition contests the main narrative on several planes: for one, it proposes a past different from that promulgated by the leading institutions of collective memory, chiefly, the book, the school, and popular media. For another, it elaborates a cultural and social imagination that contradicts prevailing common sense” (p. 200).

Thinking against the grain of commonsense in which income determines one’s place on the grid of social class, Aronowitz argues persuasively that the working class is distinguished neither by what it earns nor by its power to consume material goods, but rather by “its lack of relative power over the terms and conditions of employment, relative power because unions do make a difference” (p. 26). The importance of rewriting the narrative of class from the perspective of working class and democratic interests in our current conjunction is to disrupt the hegemonic narrative that on one hand erases class struggle and class formation as important social, political, and historical actors while on the other positions the interests of global finance as the same as working class and democratic interests. Rewriting historical narratives effectively decouples truth from the operations of power, making knowledge more than an instrument of ideology and myth. Radicalizing historical memory, in this context, is intimately connected to resurrecting the buried and erased “crude struggle” for material things that animates class struggle (p. 199). History for Aronowitz, like knowledge for Michele Foucault, is about cutting; cutting open and cutting through the veil of power.

Aronowitz begins with a radical theoretical reconceptualization of class theory. He argues that

neo-Marxist and other functionalist theories of class formation failed to consider the historicity of social class. As such, social class was described and understood as the stratification of economic and social indicators. The actors of social class might (or might not) move around the board, but in all cases, whether Karl Marx's notorious two, Talcott Parson's "income grid", or even Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of cultural capital, social class has been fixed theoretically in a pre-determined spatial reality, thereby ignoring the historicity of class formation and "class power":

Many from marxist and nonmarxist persuasions stipulate the power of the ruling class over economic, political, and ideological relations, but, in their practical activity engage in the same work of social cartography-their work is making maps-even if their maps differ in details. What is often supposedly marxist or radical about these maps is that, unlike mainstream sociology, interlocking networks between the political and economic directorates are revealed, which explicitly or tacitly constitute a critique of the traditional liberal separation of corporate power and the state. But both become classifications and draw up charts that show where social groups are placed in atemporal social grids (p 48-49).

In contrast, Aronowitz's radical theory of class suggests that time should no longer be considered a function of space but instead "presupposes that space is produced by the activity of social formations and as a function of time" (p. 52). This simple, yet important intervention into how class is theorized situates history as the embodiment of class struggle and fractured class interests. Time, or more accurately the movement of time, signals not only the dynamic condition of historical memory, but the futurity of change as well. Beyond a politics of hope, Aronowitz's "diachronic" framing of class formation situates the activities of social movements as modalities of class struggle and class formation. The activity of these social formations, made up of the combined activity of social movements as they struggle over class formation, have historically shaped political and cultural life through direct action, such as strikes, sit-ins, rallies, and, in extreme cases, violent uprising.

Additionally, Aronowitz argues for "sundering the traditional sociological distinction between class and social movement…" (p. 52). As such "genuine social movements are struggles over class formation when they pose new questions concerning the conduct of institutional and everyday life and entail new arrangements" (p. 52). From this perspective, groups that attempt to gain access and acquire social power within existing social structures should not be considered social movements. Only when "a new configuration of the power situation" is established through direct action can the entities be considered a genuine social movement (p. 53).

Aronowitz is aware of the legacy of Leftist exclusions, pointing explicitly to the racism, homophobia, and misogyny that animated much of the worker discourse of the 20th century. By arguing that genuine social movements are struggles over class formations he is not ignoring the fact that many social movements are born out of our "bio-identities". Rather, quoting Stuart Hall, he argues that "social movements are the modality in which class politics are enacted" (p. 141). Both worker and bio-identity movements, according to Aronowitz, "insist on their

absolute separation from class politics" (p. 141). "Lacking the concept of the unity of social and cultural divisions around the axis of power, they cannot grasp the notion of modality and must present difference in terms of irreconcilable binaries" (p. 141). Binary thinking, of course, reinforces exclusionary thinking, just as it oversimplifies the complexity of class struggle and identity formation. To illustrate his point, Aronowitz argues that women's suffrage was the result of labor recognizing that voting rights for women were, in fact, a class issue. "It was only when these apparently separate movements of labor and women joined, took to the streets, and, through intense direct action as a public discussion, captured public opinion that sections of the liberal middle class and intelligentsia became convinced it was in their interest to support these demands and the ruling bourgeoisie yielded" (p. 143).

Directly critiquing Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, as well as Judith Butler and Joan Scott for dismissing the categories of class and labor in their "postmodern" theories of bio-identity and social movements Aronowitz writes,

…the effect of their postmodern theory was to provide a new version of political liberalism. For by affirming the primacy of human rights and by their renunciation of class formation and class struggle they had deprived themselves and the movements they extolled of the levers of power, except those of incremental reform. Moreover, by renouncing class analysis and substituting the indeterminate plurality of struggles based largely on bio-identities, they were unable to answer the question, What issues are worth fighting for? (p. 159).

Aronowitz also expresses dismay at labor's hostility to feminist movement, black liberation struggles, and the gay and lesbian fight for sexual justice. Arguing that labor's union with America's global expansion seriously corrupted its institutional culture, he writes that "the mainstream of American Labor either sat out the 1960s or actively sided with the government and corporations in promoting war aims and, in consequence, fought against protestors. Equally important organized Labor remained a bastion of conventional morality in the face of the emergence of the visible demands for sexual freedom by women and gays" (p. 160).

Taken together, these critical interventions into Labor ideology and the ideology of postmodern theories of social movements suggests the need to take a more complex accounting of the relationship among and between class struggles and movements of identification. The fact is bio-identity movements have "succeeded, to a degree, in changing the lives of millions…," while they simultaneously have left millions behind. Aronowitz notes that with all the success of feminist movement and civil rights,

joblessness among women remains higher than that of men; their living and working conditions tend, in growing numbers, to veer toward economic and social disaster…Similarly, legal rights to education and employment notwithstanding, the most basic program of the black freedom movement remains a distant shore even as the black professional, managerial, and technical fractions have grown…Unemployment among blacks remains twice that of whites, millions are stuck in deindustrialized urban areas where wages revolving around federal minimum wage still predominate and schools have become the institutional sites of the stigmata to ensure that

most black youth will remain poor (p. 169-170).

These fractions of the bio-identity movements will be forever left behind, he argues, unless "movements struggle on a class basis-which invariably entails playing the zero sum game…" (p. 170).

The second axiom that frames Aronowitz's reconceptualization of class theory "is that social integration is the result of a process of struggle and presupposes disintegration of the prior social arrangements, a process that is theoretical as much as an empirical question" (p. 56). Here Aronowitz questions the myth of consensus, bringing to light the reality that what appears to be an "unstable truce" brought on by the ruling formation's granting of "substantial concessions to the subordinate classes" might be no more than an articulation of fear and repression. The myth of consensus makes invisible asymmetrical relations of power and thus narrates a story of "social peace", the ruling formation of capitalist relations being the benefactor of "social integration" (p. 57).

In order for subordinated groups to challenge the hegemony of ruling formations of capitalist relations they are required, according to Aronowitz who draws significantly from Marx here, to "enter into manifold relations with one another' and that they have the means of communication to form a unity'" (p. 57). Class formation, in this context, is made manifest when social formations become self-organizing and self-representing. Moreover, it must operate at the level of culture and community.

The third and final organizing axiom of Aronowitz's thesis on class formation has to do with theory itself. In short, "class theory must account for itself" (p. 62). In other words, theory generally and class theory specifically is, itself, historical. "Ideas," writes Aronowitz "do not have an independent history" (p. 62). Ideas are more than intellectual articulations of a past, present, and future; they are "feelings structured" around the brutal specificities of time/space. As such, "the political and cultural unconscious can be articulated only retrospectively" (p. 53).

A significant part of *How Class Works* is comprised of a trenchant historical accounting of class struggle and class formations throughout the 20th century. The challenge of reviewing a book like this is making a decision as to what part of this historical narrative I should bring attention to. Inevitably, what I think is of import will not necessarily be of note to other readers of this review. But more than a challenge of subjectivity or import, reviewing Aronowitz's historical narrative is challenging because it is organic. As such, one action is explicitly tied to many others, and vice versa. To dissect this type of historical account is to sever history into parts; people, events, sayings, documents, wars, moments, etc. Severing history into separate and distinct parts is a tool of domination, perpetuating social myths through exclusion and celebration. Aronowitz's organic narrative resists such a method, offering a nuanced and specific temporal map that is, nevertheless, incapable of telling the whole story. But the story he does tell is compelling, complex, and, quite often, against the grain of official knowledge. At the risk of doing what I just warned against, I have chosen a few "events" that I believe hold some significance if for only the reason that they were instrumental in helping establish our

current ruling formation of class relations.

Aronowitz describes the 1920s as the beginning of consumer society, which, of course, coincided with Fordism (p.67-69). According to Aronowitz, Fordism was “perhaps the most effective deterrent to the development of class politics in the 1920s” (p. 67). The Ford Motor Company, as is well known, developed the self moving assembly line which made work unbearably repetitive, but maybe more importantly, wrenched away control from the workers over the pace of their work. The assembly line also made mass production a reality of capital relations. “Mass production entailed mass consumption” (p. 68). So Ford, according to Aronowitz, convinced banks to extend credit to consumers.

The extension of credit was no less than revolutionary in how it shifted emphasis from production to consumption. As such,

…work was seen as a means to the end of buying more goods, as activity that came to fill up workers’ free time. The wheels for the shift were greased by the expansion of the credit system, once reserved for business and professional people who could put up property as collateral to secure their loans…With the mass automobile and the one-family home came a vastly expanded highway system that enabled millions of Americans to spend more time on the road (p. 69).

Along with mass production and the emergence of a consumer society, the 1920s introduced “a new industrial bureaucracy of managers, engineers, and administrative and clerical employees in large and medium corporations” (p. 69). Arising from this new credit system and production technologies were banks, consumer finance corporations, and retail establishments. In combination with the steady flow of new immigrants and rising minimum wages, there was a boom in educational jobs (p. 69). Aronowitz marks these developments as the impetus for the creation of a “new class of white collar employee tied closely to corporations and to local governments” (p. 69).

During this time, Fascism in Germany was beginning to take hold of the political imagination. Aronowitz argues that because the German Left “disdained and feared the new middle class of salaried employees” that the new white collar, without real ideological alternatives, fell prey to “right wing demagogues who exhorted them to rise from their situation of anonymity and victimization and enter history by joining the fascist revolt” (p. 70). Fascism offered this new political class “hope for dignity through the components of fascist ideology: populism, racial purity, and national pride” (p. 71).

Unfortunately, the discourses of Marxist and liberal thought fell back on the belief that fascism was the antithesis of liberal democratic capitalism instead of its exaggeration. This prevented a way of understanding the effects of integration of the working and middle class into mass society “whose two essential elements were consumerism and the triumph of irrationalism in forms such as mass hysteria, anti-Semitism, and patriotism” (p. 71-72). Traditional spatial maps were insufficient, according to Horkeimer and Adorno, to account for this process of

integration. They insisted

that studies which focused on fixing the social location of intermediate strata within the established social structure had missed the forest for the trees: the problem was whether the traditional paradigm of a society arranged by a class grid was adequate to understand the contemporary transformation of capitalism (p. 72).

We might ask the same questions now regarding how class paradigms within neoliberal discourse positions the notion of class struggle and class formation as well as class oppression as the shadowy articulations of the remnants of Soviet style communism or China's version of totalitarianism instead of the rational outcome of market-based systems on one hand and representative democracies on the other. This articulation creates not only the possibility of a growing disparity between the impoverished and the powerful, but turns "revolutionary futurity, the best moment of utopian thought…into its opposite: communism is no longer identified with freedom, but with scarcity and even slavery, economic and social equality with totalitarianism" (p. 75).

The New Deal is the other historical referent in the long chain of correlates that I will discuss. Aronowitz rewrites the official history of the New Deal by showing, in incredible detail, the undeniable tenacity of labor to fight for "industrial democracy" in spite of caustic governmental resistance, AFL concessions on proportional representation, and the establishment of the National Labor Relations Act, the Wagner Act and Social Security. Instead of reading the Wagner Act and Social Security as productive concessions to labor, Aronowitz sees these concessions as articulations of authoritarian political structures. These initiatives, from this perspective, restricted "labor's ability to employ a wide array of weapons to advance its interests…" (p. 80). The power of Aronowitz's narrative is not found in the success or failure of these struggles, but rather in the animation and "rememory" of class struggle and class formation. Aronowitz writes,

At the turn of the decade [1930], the state of the opposition offered few grounds for hope that corporate capital's domination of the workplace and the political culture could be effectively challenged. Unions were on the defensive, and many had been reduced to shells. In response to increased pressure from southern employers to increase productivity in order to buttress sagging profits, textile strikes in 1929 at the large Loray mill in Gastonia, North Carolina, in Marion, North Carolina, and in Elizabethton, Tennessee, displayed a high degree of courage and militancy by southern textile workers, whom both experts and many union officials had believed to be docile and antiunion. The Marion and Gastonia strikes were assisted by Socialist and Communist organizers, respectively, and this gave employers, as they sought government assistance to defeat the strikes, the excuse to brand the walkouts a red conspiracy. Plagued by an avalanche of court injunctions, jailing of strike leaders, ruthless firings of union activists, the deployment of local and state police, and lack of support from the official labor movement, the resistance was overwhelmed (p. 76).

Both Hoover and Roosevelt were guilty of ignoring mass protests and Hoover went as far as

firing, under the direction of Gen. Douglas McArthur, on protestors. One year later, in March 1930, in two dozen cities, Aronowitz reports that "more than a million unemployed rallied and marched for unemployment insurance, immediate relief, and public funds for job creation; and in 1932 the Ex-Serviceman's League marched on Washington demanding the federal government make good on its pledge to pay a veteran's bonus that had been deferred since 1918" (p. 77). Incredibly, these veterans-who fought for the U.S., were fired upon by U.S. troops for demanding what was rightly theirs. Equally troubling is the fact that this history is rarely, if ever, invoked in our children's history books or in the national discourse about freedom and patriotism.

In response to labor's insurgency, the Wagner Act, introduced by Sen. Robert F. Wagner, and supported by the AFL leadership and Roosevelt, established a "framework for labor peace" (p. 79). It effectively created a juridical framework from which labor, corporate ownership, and government could negotiate differences. Hoping to quell the recent acts of mass insurgency, the Wagner Act imposed a kind of administrative rationality on class struggle, thereby neutering what had become labor's most important weapon in fighting for industrial democracy, namely direct action outside the formal and acceptable parameters of juridical restraint. Aronowitz writes,

AFL president William Green hailed the Wagner Act as "labor's magna carta"…While it would take more than two years for the Supreme Court to dispose of constitutional challenges to the law…the fact that the events of 1933-37 that shaped labor relations for the most of the remainder of the century occurred outside the framework of the law remains a hidden story save for a few radical labor activists, historians, and legal experts…[Green's] declaration about the significance of the law became the main story that was repeated by many of his industrial union adversaries, by the leading text books, and by historians of the New Deal. The workers themselves got little credit for the wave of organizing that preceded and followed the act. Despite widespread strikes and factory occupations in almost every major industrial center, the accepted narrative was that labor was flat on its back before the law's administration and unions grew only within the frame of the Roosevelt coalition and the New Deal. (p. 80-81).

Against the hegemony of neoliberal ideologists and end of ideology prophets and profiteers, understanding class formation and class struggle in theoretical, historical and practical terms, according to Aronowitz, is the interpretive key to comprehending "the truly climatic changes in the shape of global societies since the early 1970s" (p. 27). For it is through class formation and class struggle that history *becomes* historical; the reclamation of history's historicity is about no less than the ability to imagine a future that is significantly different from its present incarnation. This is not to say, in resurrecting the discourse of class struggle and class formation from the ashes of modernity, that Aronowitz reduces social change to the function of economies nor is it true that he erases the power of social movements, such as those based on race, gender, sexuality, and disability to challenge and transform dominant social formations. But in the end, Aronowitz believes that modern societies are experiencing a "crisis of the intellect" in which we are collectively unable to think beyond the ideological parameters of acceptable possibilities (p. 224). As a globalized society we are marked by a conflation of time

and space; the future too often looks and feels exactly like the present. Consequently, what *is* has taken on the burden of futurity and has become what shall be. This dystopian condition should not be read as a permanent condition. On the contrary, it

is a time for analysis and speculation as much as organization and protest, a time when people have a chance to theorize the new situations, to identify the coming agents of change without entertaining the illusion that they can predict with any certainty either what will occur or who the actors will be. It is a time to speak out about the future that is not yet probable, although eminently possible (p. 230).

As Aronowitz points out, "Capital and other powerful forces are not fated to win…The ability of ruling groups to impose their domination depends to a large degree on whether an alliance of differentially situated social groups emerges to oppose them" (p. 61).

The pedagogical implications of his diachronic theory of class are three-fold. First, class consciousness should be developed around the axis of power and not salary, job title, or job skills/responsibilities. When power/powerlessness over the conditions of work is the referent for social class, solidarities can be formed across our bio-identities and work spaces and in the service of class interest. At the university, for example, faculty might be taught to see themselves in solidarity with physical plant workers and secretarial staff. Instead of positioning themselves against people who struggle to democratize their industrial space, faculty, in terms of the power they have over administrators, governmental officials, and/or alumni, should begin to see the similarities between their situations and those who might occupy a different economic level. If my "middle-class" students were taught to evaluate their class position in terms of their power to control their work and mode of production as opposed to how much they consumed, they might begin to feel a sense of connection with others who struggle with similar levels of powerlessness. As it stands, they feel connected to people who do, in fact, have control over many aspects of their working lives. This leads them to form alliances-if only at the affective level-with people whose interests might be antithetical to their own.

Second, history should be taught not only across disciplines, but must be reclaimed and rewritten by those marginalized and victimized by the prerogative of the victorious. Historical memory, in its official guise, is the clearest articulation of hegemony. Rewriting, reclaiming, revising, and interrogating should become the pedagogical tools of historical excavation. We need to be leery of those who would encourage our consent to give up these democratic practices in light of the attack on the World Trade Towers on September 11, 2001. Quoting Walter Benjamin, Aronowitz writes, "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception, but the rule. We must attain a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight" (p. 224). History, as I said earlier, should be about cutting, not covering; it should be resurrected as a form of critical consciousness, where the past is realigned to a future that we can imagine, feel, and anticipate with great excitement and hope.

Lastly, we should be increasingly concerned about and pedagogically responsive to the

imaginative inertia that characterizes much thinking today, both by students, teachers, politicians, scholars, and intellectuals. If we cannot think radically, then we assuredly will be unable to radically act. I would suggest that the imagination be thought of as a tool of both reflection and projection. Through creative reflection, the possibility exists to examine where we have been, who we are, and why we have evolved as we have. In the context of projection, imagination plays a role in reaching toward an unknown. Although improbable in their realization, projecting ideas about what should be gives us a goal to fight towards. Freedom, in this sense, is not a retreat from responsibility, but is rather its goal.

Although Aronowitz's last chapter argues that utopia is on hold, his book represents an attempt to resurrect utopian thinking in a way that avoids overly romantic gestures to revolution or abstract narratives of hope and possibility. For him, utopian thinking is imaginative thinking that has practical implications for structural transformation. While his ideas are not a blueprint for structural change, class struggle or class formation, they do provide a new history and theory of class upon which to build a more humane and ecologically sustainable future.

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Michael Walzer’s Arguing About War

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Michael Walzer’s new book assembles eleven articles published over the last 25 years, the latest in November 2003. The philosophical stances he devised and defended in Just and Unjust Wars are applied to the first Gulf War, Kosovo, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, 9/11, the “war on terror” and the Iraq War. His consistency is, to say the least, helpful in assessing his arguments and there is no better time to do so.

Walzer, in hot pursuit of a sustainable ethical framework, is quite willing to confront different and even hostile approaches, such as the “realist” one (The Triumph of Just War Theory (and the Dangers of Success).” His opening essay even argues that ethics already is ingrained in military and political thinking insofar as politicians and military men try to justify their actions through moral argument. Walzer suggests this is an important step, regardless of sincerity. As evident throughout his book, moral justifications for war and terror are a messy, deceptive and easily exploited business. Politicians and terrorists are prone to justify whatever actions they please. As a philosopher Walzer strives to prevent any cynical abuse of moral reasoning but his arguments, alas, are far too vague and plastic to avoid corruption.

In “Emergency Ethics” Walzer examines the use of moral theory to judge what we should do when we face terror or extreme cruelty. He contends that when we are in grave danger we can dilute or suspend ordinary moral standards: “there are moments when the rules can be and perhaps have to be overridden.” (pp. 34). When? He elects as such an edifying instance the bombing of residential areas in German cities during World War II. Mass slaughter was a necessity even though it happens to violate a prior principle of war requiring that civilians be spared (and, according to a post-war strategic bombing survey, the mass slaughter contributed little to the Nazi defeat). Emergency ethics permits such actions because extreme circumstances, as the old saying goes, demand extreme action. Do we need a Princeton University philosopher to tell us that? Isn’t such a carefree stance a gift to politicians and military strategists-not to mention, our external enemies? All they need to argue is that we all are in extreme danger and therefore, anything goes.

Walzer is well aware of this rather enormous problem and cautions that we must appeal to emergency ethics only when we must (pp. 40, pp. 48). When is that? Walzer provides no clears criteria to decide when emergency ethics apply. The case of Nazism is supposed to help clarify groping intuitions; however, it does not help much in the cases of the attack on the twin towers and the pentagon or the suicide bombings in Israel. Are these horrors severe enough to justify emergency ethics which looks like no ethics at all? They do not pose nearly the magnitude of threat that Nazism did. So does the war that Bush is fighting against terrorism really qualify as a case for emergency ethics? Even if we assume something must be done to prevent attacks, is the Patriot Act the right answer? Is it wise to deny arbitrarily defined enemy combatants’

access to the justice system? Walzer does not offer any means to help us decide. Yet, in the event, such criteria would be absolutely crucial to prevent domestic demagogues, and foreign enemies, from exploiting a crisis. It seems to me that one cannot simply reject emergency ethics under any situation, so I accept that such a theory of justification is needed and it must be soundly formulated to prevent highly imaginable misuse.

In “After 9/11: Five Questions About Terrorism” Walzer approves of the controversial Patriot Act because: “If we can’t make the case, then we have to be ready to consider modifying the constraints. It isn’t a betrayal of liberal or American values to do that; it is in fact the right thing to do, because the first obligation of the state is to protect the lives of its citizens (that’s what states are for), and American lives are now visibly and certainly at risk.” (pp. 139). Walzer even commends the use of military courts in the war on terror. (pp. 138) “Emergency ethics” is always intuitively appealing to some people (and almost all authorities) but on closer scrutiny the notion turn out to be very dubious. The sketchy views that Walzer presents in these articles do a great disservice to the importance of these topics. His vague formulations of justification enable anyone to exploit these “ethics” to justify their preferred course of actions, thereby making Walzer’s theory ironically counterproductive.

Walzer addresses the question of how best to conduct such war. Is all fair, according to the eminent ethics professor, in love and war? Shall we blithely blackmail innocent people to infiltrate enemy organizations? Shall we bribe them? Let’s assume we know that a high ranking terrorist might be fingered by a person whose son needs a crucial operation available in only the West, should we use that leverage to force him to talk? Why not threaten to kill his loved ones too? These are, once you take the first dirty step, extraordinarily complicated questions. In a brief caveat Walzer sanely says the war on terror “must not become an excuse for indefensible policies.” (pp. 142) What then are the principles that should guide us? Walzer’s arguments are ultimately obscure, and perhaps worse than useless.

Let me address another point. Walzer suggests that the US should not change its policies in the Middle East and elsewhere because of 9/11. Such changes, he (like Bush) believes, would be a sign of weakness and so encourage rampant terrorism. (pp. 142) But is this macho ethical stance really sound? US policies in the Middle East cannot be used to justify the 9/11 attacks but once they occurred shouldn’t the US reexamine some aggravating factors that might have made the attacks more probable? Would pressure on Israel to end its occupation send the wrong message to terrorists? It might, but it will also show the Islamic world that the US is a concerned friend. One cannot go on as if nothing happened.

Walzer’s position is, at core, inconsistent. On the one hand, he claims new tough policies should be implemented in light of new threats (military courts, constraints on civil liberties), but on the other hand he suggests that policies in the Middle East should not change. Why the double standard?

Walzer’s explicit reflections on the war in Iraq are five pieces written between September 2002 and November 2003. He regards the war in Iraq as unjust because there were numerous other

courses of action to achieve the goal of disarming Iraq (assuming there were WMDs). Moreover, the Bush administration never offered sufficient evidence to prove that Iraq was a threat, or would become one. It is not enough to assert that someone is developing weapons, indeed most countries develop weapons, to justify a preemptive or a preventive war, we must show that such development would highly likely endanger “us.” (pp. 146-147)

Walzer argued that the war in Iraq cannot be justified on the grounds that the Bush administration proposed. Since then the justification that officials invoke is liberating the Iraqi people or else crushing Saddam’s ability to produce dangerous weapons. This shift in justification, Walzer agrees, is an illegitimate one. Citizens through their representatives approved the invasion on specific grounds and if these grounds were wrong then in order to restore legitimacy the administration must either withdraw the military forces or ask for another authorization based on this new argument. This point is worth stressing. Legitimacy of government actions is of utmost importance. The funds that Congress authorizes should fulfill the aims for which they were intended. For example, it would be illegitimate for the government to use funds earmarked to fight particular kinds of crime for other purposes (as noble as they might be). Only new legislation could make such a reallocation. In the same way, the funds allocated to Iraq should be reauthorized.

Yet Walzer argues that the US should do everything to win the war and that thevictors are obliged to reconstruct Iraq. (pp. 164) To justify this view Walzer introduces a new turn in his ethical theory of war, namely postwar justice. (pp. 18-22, pp. 162-168) That is, in some cases the winning side has an obligation to help the loser rebuild itself, construct legitimate institutions and secure stability. Not every war requires it. Walzer argues that World War II required it and so does this war. An obligation to help the losing country could be more valid when unjust wars are concerned. The aggressor, one might argue, should enhance the well-being of those who suffered from its actions. Yet, the notion of postwar justice is more vexing than Walzer suggests. In the case of World War II the winners had no legal or moral obligation to reconstruct Germany and Japan. Those nations were responsible for their actions and should accept the consequences. It was probably was very wise to help rebuild them but the ethical obligation was weak. The wars of Israel, with exception to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, would similarly have no obligation of postwar justice (another exception would be the obligation to return conquered lands, i.e., the Golan Heights, Sinai). The Iraq case is different mostly because it is an unjust war and the losing nation could not be held responsible for the consequences of the war. This notion of postwar justice is important yet it requires much far more detail than Walzer devotes to it.

Contrary to Walzer, it may well be that “postwar justice” in Iraq does not entail that US forces remain. Indeed, it could be the case that a quick withdrawal would be more conducive to postwar justice. The US occupation of Iraq is causing more instability than would presumably obtain if these forces left. They are, after all, the focus of all the fighting. It is possible that once that US forces leave a period of violent instability would persist but such a period could well be shorter and less bloody than if the US “sticks it out.” Once the occupation ends the different factions would likely have to sit down and negotiate. The presence of an occupying

force is no help. This does not mean that the US should not help rebuild Iraq, rather the contrary; it has an obligation to do so. Yet, to do that it must first withdraw from Iraq.

To conclude, Walzer's book examines a wide variety of pertinent issues. It is especially helpful in covering the main moral arguments about how war can or cannot be justified, the "proper" conduct of warfare, and its aftermath. Walzer addresses the big ethical issues regarding the fight against terror. However, his book in most cases presents very sketchy and dubious arguments. In light of the stature of Walzer as a major moral philosopher such sketchiness can do more harm than good since his arguments could be exploited by those who he would probably be first to regard as enemies of justice, democracy and freedom.

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How To Get Stupid White Men Out Of Office: The Anti-Politics, Un-Boring Guide to Power

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If two books constitute a trend, then these two announce a shift toward a new political style on the American left: a style that is simultaneously lively and lonely, furious and vacuous. This style has precedents, but it is unique in the way it synthesizes existing themes, and it marks a break with the approaches to political action that have previously characterized the best parts of the democratic left in the United States. This new style matters because of all this year's campaign-season books, these two might very well have the deepest long-term significance. Unlike the piles of political eye-candy at the front tables of every Barnes & Noble in the country, How To Get Stupid White Men Out of Office and MoveOn's 50 Ways To Love Your Country (hereafter How To and 50 Ways) are being distributed primarily through networks of liberal and radical activists. Their impact will be concentrated where it matters: among the fraction of the country that is already struggling to make sense out of what forms of political action make sense today, and what those forms of action mean.

The new style rests on three ideas.
1. Political action is to be seen as an individual pursuit, akin to a hobby: something you, on your own, at a time convenient to you, drop in and out of. A "movement," if we can even use that term anymore, is the sum of the actions of a wide scattering of individuals who may or may not ever interact with each other.
2. Politics must cease to be boring and routine, and must become a venue for creativity and self-expression.
3. Political activists need technical advice, but norms and theories of society need little or no explanation.
The authors and editors of *How To* and *50 Ways* are optimistic. Wasting no time appealing to undecided voters, they aim to galvanize the vast millions of Bush-leery but politically disconnected potential voters and activists. To that end, the editors of these books have compiled advice (generally smart) and anecdotes (almost monotonously inspiring) about political participation by regular folks.
How To's case studies include election campaigns, voter registration drives, issue initiatives, and new political uses of the internet pioneered by or starring young people, especially people of color. Its authors display occasional interest in the details of doorknocking plans, phonebank statistics, and fundraising levels, but the focus of the twenty-odd stories they relate is just how *cool* politics can be. *How To* claims to be the register of an explosive new youth movement: a multi-racial, radical-flavored young left with a list of successes ranging from Jason West's mayorship in New Paltz, NY to a Senate race in South Dakota swung by young Native American

activists to the politicization of the hip-hop and rave scenes. The book is scattered with relentlessly this-minute slang, instant-message lingo, and hip-hop culture references; the authors never let us forget that they are down with everything one is supposed to be down with these days.

50 Ways is less hip and more earnest, offering encouragement to "average citizens" who want to "make a difference." The editors group the testimonials they have collected into sections on the internet, voter registration and elections, mass media, the personal motivations behind political involvement, and "creative" action. Most of the tactics suggested here are conventional and fairly reliable: GOTV phone calls, letters to the editor or to elected officials, petitions, fundraising houseparties. The authors recommend rather than describe these methods of political influence; we read one-page stories by MoveOn members who have successfully used these tactics, but get only bits of advice little about how to put them into practice ourselves. The heart of the book is its upbeat insistence that you-yes, you-can "do big things."

Both books define themselves by defining their audiences. Although *How To* aims itself at hip left-leaning youth and *50 Ways* at their suburban parents' next-door neighbors, there is an important set of similarities underneath these niche-marketing differences. Besides the common traits of political inactivity and antipathy toward the Bush administration, the most striking commonality among the books' intended readers is that they see electoral politics as alien, unethical, and boring. These readers are people who, along with one *How To* contributor, would be surprised to walk into a campaign office and feel "a general vibe of really actually caring about who was going to be put into office." *50 Ways* bemoans the scorn leveled by "insiders" at candidates with "integrity;" another *How To* contributor relates his group's struggle with the need to "to dirty' ourselves with politics if we were going to have any chance of winning." The key conceptual distinction for these readers seems to be that between "inside" and "outside." For them, this distinction maps perfectly onto those between manipulative and honest or professional and amateur.

The strongest point of both books-especially *How To*-is that they challenge this dichotomy, urging their readers to understand the interplay of electoral and pressure-group tactics. Despite calls to bridge the inside-outside divide, however, both *How To* and *50 Ways* retain one of that its tropes: the obsession with the presumed gulf between the fun, entrepreneurial activism of the novice and the numb conventionalism of the expert. *How To*, for instance, expresses distaste for those "within the system": "They may wear suits, they may hold lots of boring meetings, they may have rules and justifications that don't make any sense, but they're in charge." The alternative? *How To* recommends voter reg at the local dance club, promises to assign you only "fun homework," and calls for artwork and talent shows to promote voting. *50 Ways* gets excited about "expressing political views through art or fashion" or through "new media" such as public access TV, and calls on you to "advertise your political vision" through billboards, banner-toting airplanes, or homemade T-shirts.

There is nothing wrong with smart new campaign tactics, or with the proposal that we have as much fun as we can on the way to political victories. But *How To* and *50 Ways* stretch toward another standard: a politics that fulfills our restless dreams of community and that is the arena for social re-imagining. For *50 Ways*, this wish is expressed through the frequent use of words

like “connecting,” “sharing,” and “inspiration;” as the book’s editors put it: “Engagement in the political dialogue-large or small-breathes life into us all.” Even online petitions yield “a sense of community and connection,” and less-virtual political involvements are plugged in terms of their potential to help you “reach out to others,” make friends, and perhaps even find a husband. For *How To*, the desire is still more urgent. Organizing should be “sexy”; politics based on “vision.” One contributor captures the mood concisely: “It’s the sense of celebration and joy, and the opportunity for people to be connected and be together-that’s the missing piece in the U.S.” It is the mood of these suggestions, rather than their content, that is so striking: both books strain with desire for a public sphere that is rich and accessible, full of opportunities to develop and realize new ideas and to expand social relationships beyond the sphere of private affections.

If the authors of *How To* and *50 Ways* really mean their call for a politics of imagination and community, they are being more radical than they acknowledge. This is a utopian demand, one that cannot be fulfilled in a society remotely like our own. Television-dominated, corporate-financed elections in a constitutional system that prevents the development of programmatic parties and allows little room for direct citizen participation; a class-divided, hyper-marketized society riven by hierarchies of race, gender and sexuality and criss-crossed with irrationalist and fundamentalist currents: it is silly to think that politics under these conditions can have room for self-expression and human connection except at its margins. We have too few interests in common and too few opportunities to discover more, and as citizens we hold far too small a share of power to allow us to re-design society as we might wish to. Absent an analysis of those conditions, to ask that political action be a vehicle for the exercise of creative capacities and an antidote to isolation is either to ignore the nature of contemporary politics, or to admit to only the mildest of creative urges and the faintest of solidaristic impulses. Whether modest hopes might be more appropriate is beside the point: the authors of *How To* and *50 Ways* gesture toward an ideal they cannot help us reach, and they leave themselves no way to recognize either the utopian glow or the strategic shallowness of their agendas.

A less wide-eyed approach to political action would accept Max Weber’s dictum that politics is a “slow boring of hard boards.” At their wiser moments, *How To* and *50 Ways* admit this, and I suspect that many of the people who contributed to the books have better understandings of this point than they reveal here. Each book’s authors occasionally rattle off a set of daunting figures: the number of voters it takes to swing an election, the hours of doorknocking required to canvass a precinct, the length a petition signature list had to reach before officials took notice. The lesson of these instances might seem to be that effective power-seeking is a matter of patient organization at least as much, if not more, than it is about cleverness or innovation. This is not an insight that the authors of *How To* and *50 Ways* seem to have taken to heart, however, or at least not one that they choose to impress upon their readers. Here, the gulf between the new political style and its predecessors yawns wide.

Take, for example, the central concerns of older political action manuals, such as *Organizing* by Si Kahn and *Organizing for Social Change* by Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max. Kahn, Bobo, Kendall, and Max write about the tasks of groups that seek to pursue power together. Both books emphasize the mechanics of meetings, coalition-building, goal-setting, member recruitment, and leadership development. This is a view of left politics as *organizing,* as a craft that must be learned through experience and mentorship and that must be practiced in and by

collectivities that meet regularly, strategize for the long term, and act in concert. It is a view of politics that has developed out of the experiences of generations of labor, community, and civil rights organizers, and that has played a central role in winning that scattering of precious and precarious victories that the US left has been able to leverage. Organizing works. It is not a form of entertainment, it takes time and commitment, and it cannot, by itself, explain *why* social change is needed, but there is no better method available for the construction of insurgent democratic movements.

Where Kahn, Bobo, Kendall, and Max wrote their books as supplements to in-the-field organizer training, *How To* and *50 Ways* present themselves as replacements for apprenticeship in political action. For *How To* and *50 Ways*, meetings and mentorship fade from view. "You," for these authors, is always singular: their audience is a universe of individuals who take action alone. While neither book offers an explicit critique of organizations, the implications are clear: organizations are inconvenient intrusions into your busy life, and they leave you less room for doing things your own way. *50 Ways* lauds actions that you can take "at home, in [your] spare time," preferably on the internet. Classic community organizing techniques, for at least one *How To* contributor, are "time-consuming bullshit." Once they get around to recommending specific "slick moves to swing the election," the closest *How To*'s authors come to telling their readers to organize is to gently recommend starting "an informal group" or "an unofficial or official…local voting block." The words "informal" and "unofficial," here, seem to add no meaning, but they do add reassurance: We're not too serious about this, y'all, so just chill. We won't place serious demands on you.

With its rejection of the organizing model of political action, the new political style announced by *How To* and *50 Ways* is missing a realistic appraisal of what books can do. Since organizing must be learned through practice and with guidance, books can only do so much to teach us political skills. However, books can help us understand *why* we engage in political action. This is a question that *How To* and *50 Ways* disdain. Ideals toward which we might aspire do not require discussion, they insist, nor do accounts of how our society fits together. The unstated thesis of both *How To* and *50 Ways* is that the real problems of the US left are a lack of enthusiasm and a dearth of technical know-how. The first is to be remedied by cheery success stories and an insistence that political action need not be boring, and the second by collections of what *50 Ways* calls "tips and resources."

What if this is not what we need? I am not sure how to prove what the US left today does or does not lack, so I will simply propose an alternative to the view presented in *How To* and *50 Ways:* We have plenty of technical skill around, and finding sources from which to learn it is not difficult. Numerous unions, community organizations, and political groups have internships and organizer training programs. As for cheer: in a world of contradictions and disappointments, it is not the most reliable source of motivation. On the other hand, the work of figuring out what we want is not as easily dispensed with as the *How To* and *50 Ways* authors presume. Once, left activists understood this. The Port Huron Statement charged: "All around us there is an astute grasp of method, technique-the committee, the ad hoc group, the lobbyist, the hard and soft sell, the make, the projected image-but, if pressed critically, such expertise is incompetent to explain its implicit ideals." This is our problem, too.

How To and *50 Ways* burst with unexplained implicit ideals. *How To* drops jokes about what we'll all do after the revolution, but the "Vision" it expounds is fluffy despite the capital V,

veering between conservative-tinged communitarianism and ho-hum liberalism:

> We believe in creating social support to strengthen families.
> We believe in fostering a spirit of shared responsibility and community.
> We believe in bringing all voices into the public dialogue.
> We believe in protecting our right to privacy and our freedom of choice.
> We believe in making real opportunities available to all.
> We believe in using government to invest in the public good.

…and so forth. *50 Ways* is even more averse to discussing goals and principles, aside from whatever agenda might be implied by the notoriously unhelpful label "progressive", or by friendly offhand mentions of organizations such as the AFL-CIO, Sierra Club, NOW, Working Assets, and other usual suspects. *How To*'s authors make clear that their immediate goal is to defeat George W. Bush this November, and the anti-Bush stance of *50 Ways* is only a nudge and a wink away from being explicit. (Perhaps MoveOn has some tax-status reason for remaining noncommittal in print?) But neither book shows interest in a serious discussion of what we might hope to gain from a Democratic victory this year, or what we might want to achieve afterwards. It is not that *How To* and *50 Ways* never get around to addressing these questions: rather, they reject normative and theoretical questions as unnecessary.

In his dialog *Gorgias*, Plato argued that politics is not simply an *empeiria*-a skill or knack that can be discussed apart from its goals. Rather, it should be understood as a *techne*-a craft that entails both capabilities learned through practice and an account of the ends toward which those capabilities will be applied. *How To* and *50 Ways* treat politics as *empeiria,* as a mere bag of tricks whose goals are so obvious-or perhaps unimportant-that they require little or no discussion. I want to suggest that Plato's notion of politics as *techne* is as relevant to our situation as Weber's realism. What we need most is not books that try to tell us how to do politics, but organizations that can show us how to organize, and engagement with political theory to help us determine why we want to organize and what we should expect from our organizing.

By conceiving of politics as *empeiria* rather than *techne*, insisting on immediate pleasure, and taking the individual as their cosmos, *How To* and *50 Ways* surrender to the ideology of consumerism. This is evident in the simpering userfriendliness of *50 Ways,* but it reaches a sickening level of self-consciousness in *How To,* with its calls for a "marketing model of organizing," its recommendation that activists take "lessons from hip hop, mass media, and corporate marketing," and its identification with the generational consciousness that "brought jazz, rock n' roll, hip hop, jeans, sneakers, and the Internet to power." In the end, this reduction of left politics to consumerism is what distinguishes the political style shared by *How To* and *50 Ways*. That their acceptance of this ideology might be at odds with their own deeper hopes is a possibility that the authors have not equipped themselves to discern. *How To* and *50 Ways* may be fueled by a sound rage against social injustice, but it is a rage that, since it is merely expressed and never explained, remains just as private as any other consumer preference. The creativity they exhibit never rises above the level of the clever advertiser, the solidarities they offer go no deeper than our identifications with our favorite brands, and they leave us with a conception of politics that has little room for either the mundane and disciplined action required for effectiveness or the critical intellectual edge that is a prerequisite for radicalism.

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