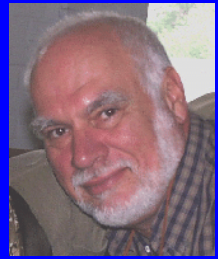


Bellicose Veins—the roots of violence in US culture

MANIFEST DESTINY—THE PROMISED LAND IS EVERYWHERE!

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THE BIBLE SAID SO...

The biblical account of the Exodus was an important part of the mindset of Protestant religious refugees and of many early settlers from Europe to the colonies of North America. This seminal story told of the escape of the Hebrews from slavery in pharaoh's Egypt, across the sea, and through the wilderness to the "promised land" of Canaan. Religious refugees saw a direct parallel in their persecution in Europe (their Egypt), in making the dangerous passage across the Atlantic (Red Sea), and in their need to carve a place for themselves out of the wilderness of the New World.

Following the biblical images they saw themselves as the righteous few, the inheritors, by divine promise, of a "land flowing with milk and honey," that was to belong to themselves and their descendants forever. Explicit in the bible was a God-given mandate to waste the native inhabitants of the land (Canaanites): "But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth, but thou shalt utterly destroy them..."

Though the Promised Land was a vision of finding a peaceful and prosperous place to live, and though the image itself may have lost its conscious religious relevance for many, it seems to have become a permanent fixture of the US cultural mentality, not for peace but for its value in undergirding a boundless sense of entitlement.

FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA AND BEYOND

This sense of entitlement has other roots as well. It certainly borrows from the expansionist and colonialist tendencies of European nations whose political, religious, and economic competition divided up the New World.

Following the success against the British in the War of 1812, many in the US were free to expand their dream of a promised land that stretched from "sea to shining sea" and beyond. The Monroe Doctrine in 1823 was a shot across the bow of Europe, a clear statement that the USA saw the entire hemisphere as its own and would brook no challenges to its hegemony.

Aggressive wars led to the defeat and seizure of Spanish colonies and the occupation and seizure of Texas and California, at which time the term "Manifest Destiny" became a popular way to describe this growing sense of national entitlement to territorial expansion. Thousands shouted "Westward ho!" and trailed across the continent to take possession of what they saw as their natural due.

Manifest Destiny did not end when the shores of the continent were reached. It went international. Alaska was purchased from the Russians and Hawai'i was seized from its native owners. Theodore Roosevelt expanded the Monroe Doctrine to the defense of US business in the hemisphere and reserved for the US the right to intervene in contracts that European

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nations might make with those in the hemisphere. Challenged US interests became the often used excuse for sending in the marines whose "defensive" force had already been deployed "from the halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli." It is interesting to observe that currently USMC histories are being rewritten as "wars against terrorism."

YELLOW PRESS AND YELLOW ART

Selective and exaggerated coverage of Cuba's conflict with Spain in 1895-98 brought US media into the service of Manifest Destiny. Newspapers competing for readership stoked US emotions much like the Fox news anchors and reporters do at present. They made US citizens ready for the "inevitable" war that President McKinley decided to wage on Spain in 1898. Correspondents not only sent daily reports but happily joined in the shooting.

Artist Frederic Remington was assigned the task of drawing inflammatory images for the Hearst newspapers and when he could find none was reputedly told by William R. Hearst, "You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war."

British poet Rudyard Kipling, part time US resident, encouraged the US to take the lead set by British colonialism and share the "White Man's Burden" of helping the world's inferior races to Christianity. He is echoed in the now secular version of "making the world safe for (our) democracy."

MORAL SUPERIORITY

This historical background makes what is occurring in the Middle East today less than surprising, as it taps into one of the important "bellicose veins" of our cultural consciousness. George W. Bush was not the first to claim US moral superiority as a reason for preemptive action against those peoples and governments seen as less moral.

Though the racial tones are no longer as explicit, Bush and Rumsfeld, in fact, echo Albert T. Beveridge, the Senator from Indiana, who remarked close to the turn of the century: "God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-admiration. No! He has made us the master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns... that we may administer government among savages and senile peoples."

Manifest Destiny was not without resisters then as now. In a 1837 letter to Henry Clay, William E. Channing, a founder of Unitarianism, wrote: "It is sometimes said, that nations are swayed by laws, as unfailling as those which govern matter; that they have their destinies; that their character and position carry them forward irresistibly to their goal; ... the Indians have melted before the white man, and the mixed, degraded race of Mexico must melt before the Anglo-Saxon. Away with this vile sophistry! There is no necessity for crime."

ANTIDOTES TO CEASELESS WARFARE?

George W. Bush has promised us an endless war on terror. History tells us we should believe him. US attempts to take possession of the Philippine islands resulted in the first Vietnam type conflict to divide US public sentiment. US treachery in abrogating its treaty with Filipino Muslims by invading their territory in 1903 was a direct cause of the continuing struggles in the Philippine Republic that still involve US personnel today, a century later. In 1906 US troops massacred 900 Muslim Filipinos, men, women and children, at Bud Dajo trapping them in a volcanic crater and firing at them from the rim until all were exterminated.

Such atrocities continued despite Theodore Roosevelt's attempt to declare the war over. Mark Twain might have been writing directly to the White House of the 60's and 70's and perhaps predicting our future in the Middle East when he remarked, "...we have got into a mess, a quagmire from which each fresh step renders the difficulty of extrication immensely greater." The Philippine massacre was repeated at Bud Bagsak in 1913...and, of course, in parallel fashion at Mi Lai in Vietnam again in 1968. At this moment in US history, Harvard philosopher George Santayana's words, too often cited, still ring very true, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Perhaps we should parallel these with, "Those who do not examine their cultural tendencies, are condemned to reinforce them."

Unexamined cultural values lead in the direction of "My country, right or wrong." Which is to say that the values themselves tend to say, "My country is right!" We all start in ethnocentricity and just as we need to break out of it to accept other cultures, we need to look at our own values to do that. Unfortunately, we have too few journalists today like Mark Twain to remind presidents and people of the truth of our situation then as now: "To be a patriot, one had to say, and keep on saying, 'Our Country, right or wrong,' and urge on the little war. Have you not perceived that that phrase is an insult to the nation?" And from the other side of the Atlantic Mr. Blair might listen to G.K. Chesterton's echo of the same quote, "'My country, right or wrong' is a thing that no patriot would think of saying except in a desperate case. It is like saying 'My mother, drunk or sober.'"