

It's All Greek to Me

Bringing Athens to Africa

By Victor Davis Hanson

The American Conservative *would like to apologize for the rough treatment we gave Victor Davis Hanson in our Dec. 19, 2005 issue, in which our reviewer panned his retelling of the Peloponnesian Wars as “confused,” “thoughtless,” and “a wild ego trip.” We now recognize that this is no way to treat one of America’s premier public intellectuals. To make amends, we have offered VDH space to record some recent insights.*

The *National Review* cruise up the Congo River is truly a voyage of discovery. Here is a flourishing society where the central government is not only small enough to drown in a bathtub—in fact, it already has been. A dozen years of constant warfare has led the Congolese to rediscover such timeworn customs of Attic Greece as warring city-states, a more traditional role for women, and chattel slavery. Though scoffed at in fashionable intellectual circles, the old virtues are coming back. To be sure, no American wishes to contemplate the idea of war, but if you just can’t resist, the Democratic Republic of the Congo makes a stupendous vacation getaway.

We Americans have strayed from our agrarian roots, losing contact with the grim facts of mortality and violence. Nowadays our educated youths prefer to “grill” their meat per the PC brainwashing of the universities until the flesh is, perhaps tellingly, “pink in the middle.”

Of course blue-collar communities throughout America, untainted by such squeamishness, commonly rip apart a

live animal in the town square on a Friday night, smear themselves with its blood, and devour the meat raw rather than forming minced patties called “hamburgers” to be tossed on a charcoal brazier, a practice pervasive among liberal-arts faculties. Growing up amid the small farms of Fresno, I had many a jolly evening tussling over a veal spleen, playing marbles with sheep eyeballs, skipping rope with the tripe, all to the martial strains of our local Bee Gees cover band.

What a marvelous cruise as we continue upriver. My nightly on-deck demonstrations of hoplite infantry tactics with the salad tongs and crudité platter have played to rapt audiences. And, *inter nos*, after challenging all males on board to pepper-grinder duels, VDH remains as undefeated as Alexander of Macedon. I am particularly proud of a lunging surprise attack against Norman Podhoretz in the middle of his after-dinner lecture last night, a gambit that successfully broke through the clustered ranks of Podhoretzes whom I then fought all the way back to the buffet table with short, jabbing strokes.

Watching “Rambo” in the galley last night, I was appalled at what a quisling the title character turns out to be. Admittedly, Rambo proves himself handy with the Kalashnikov and the hunting knife, with a not unimpressive kill count of 1,257 in 93 minutes. But what about scorching the earth, salting the rice paddies, and neutralizing the civilian population? Apparently this Italian-American Colin Powell finds dis-



tasteful the timeless advice given by Cleon of Athens during the Peloponnesian Wars to kill all the men and sell all the women and children into slavery. And just where is Mr. Rambo’s flag pin? No American wishes to contemplate the idea of war, but if Vietnam attacks us a second time, I hope we can muster more fortitude than this Jane Fonda wannabe with his quaint half-measures.

So impressed are the riverboat’s crew and passengers with my mastery of weaponry and tactics that they have enthusiastically suggested I disembark at the next port of call to give the annual lecture at the classics department of Mbandaka Polytechnic University—which, they tell me, is one of the most prestigious universities in the region. And the boat, they promise, will come right back to pick me up in just a few hours!

Have we forgotten the wisdom of the ancients? Do we even care? Apparently not: my recent attempt to sell a concept for a videogame based on the Battle of Gaugamela elicited only a generic rejection letter from Brainsplatter Entertainment Systems' back office. And to my follow-up query, offering to equip the Pan-Hellenic phalanxes with harquebuses, nunchucks, and Uzi-mounted Quidditch brooms, the tenured radicals at Brainsplatter did not respond at all.

No American wishes to contemplate the idea of war. But when we as a nation are obliged by fate to do battle in Kyrgyzstan, Acapulco, Carthage, and Nantucket, surely our youth will need an X-box game of the highest scholarly standards. By thwarting such an endeavor, the post-structuralists and feminists at Brainsplatter Entertainment Systems have played their own ignoble part in the intellectual degradation of America's youth.

Failing to locate the classics department in Mbandaka, I regale a group of young men lounging on the riverside with an impromptu lecture on the elephant cavalry tactics of Hannibal. The group's bluff commander gives me a hearty slap on the face with a rifle butt and asks if I know how to carry water. The next thing I know, we are all marching toward Katanga to do battle with the Mai-Mai militias. No Namibian mercenary wishes to contemplate the idea of war, but the struggle to vanquish the Mai-Mai is of vital strategic interest to the United States, if not the entire Free World.

Will freedom blink? ■

—as told to Chase Madar

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Cultivating Freedom

Joel Salatin practices ethical animal husbandry—no thanks to the feds.

By Lewis McCrary

JOEL SALATIN calls Abraham Lincoln our “worst president,” not because he destroyed states’ rights or Southern identity, but because he created the United States Department of Agriculture. “There is not another agency that has been so successful at annihilating its own constituency,” he says.

Since his star turn in Michael Pollan’s bestselling *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Salatin has become a celebrity of the local-food movement. Pollan’s book recounts a week spent at Polyface Farm, Salatin’s 500-acre plot outside Staunton, Virginia.

Despite his friendship with the Berkeley-based Pollan and identification with a movement primarily birthed of the Left, however, Salatin is unabashed about his conservative perspective. He calls himself a “Christian-libertarian-environmentalist-capitalist lunatic.”

At Polyface Farm, the owner jokes, the primary crop is grass. In gently rolling fields, set against a postcard backdrop of the Blue Ridge mountains, Salatin raises grass-fed “salad bar beef,” pastured poultry and eggs, and free-foraging pigs. The last were featured in a “Nightline” report about Salatin’s most famous customer, the fast-food chain Chipotle, which buys most of its pork from organic farms.

Salatin has become accustomed to media coverage. An offer to star in a TV series sits open on his desk, and last summer Polyface was a central tableau of the documentary “Food, Inc.,” which cast a critical eye over the industrial

food system. The film’s message was opaque, giving equal time to large-scale USDA-certified organic producers, mothers calling for more federal oversight, and anti-regulation, small-scale farmers represented by Salatin. While undoubtedly the most entertaining of the bunch, he is aware that he couldn’t win over all viewers, many of whom probably came away with the message that government intervention is the solution. “Our biggest fear is that ‘Food, Inc.’ will move heavy-handed food-safety regulations forward,” he admits.

Salatin is no stranger to skirmishes with state and federal regulators. In his self-published book *Everything I Want to Do Is Illegal*, he recounts, in epic fashion, battles over his on-site processing of poultry. Polyface chickens, which draw rave reviews and customers from hundreds of miles away, are washed and prepared for sale in an open-air environment that regulators found to be unsanitary. After a protracted fight with the bureaucracy and some assistance from local politicians, Salatin was able to retain his farm’s exemption from the regulations, which he insists are only appropriate for multinational corporations.

Because he refuses to abide by USDA rules for federal “organic” certification—Salatin calls it the “O-word”—Polyface relies on word-of-mouth and an open-door policy to encourage transparency, confident that this will draw customers genuinely concerned about the origin of their food and the method