

WRONG FROM THE BEGINNING

As the editorial director of *Antiwar.com*, I have been in a good position to chart the failed predictions and laughable prognostications of the War Party—and, while it may be in somewhat bad taste to say, “I told you so,” as the latest news indicates that we have surpassed 3,000 American dead (not to mention 34,000 dead Iraqi civilians in 2006 alone), one cannot help but tote up the scorecard and note that the laptop bombardiers, who confidently projected a “cakewalk,” are batting zero. On the other hand, even as the “mainstream” media and the neocons were hailing our glorious victory in the first weeks of the war, my March 24, 2003, column—presciently titled “A No-Winner: The first disastrous week of war foretells a dire future”—pretty much hit the nail on the head: “For the first few days, we saw only sanitized images of a clean, hassle-free war, amid hints of a winged victory beckoning in the near future. But that is fast giving way to the gritty reality of the quagmire we are falling into. The ‘cakewalk’ that Richard Perle and his fellow chickenhawks confidently predicted is turning into a forced march into Hell.”

Not that you had to be Nostradamus to see what was coming. And that’s what gets me about this whole bloody episode: How could they *not* have known? I mean, the U.S. government employs a myriad of analysts, diplomats, spooks, and high muckety-mucks to shape policy and construct likely scenarios in the foreign-policy sphere, spending millions—nay, billions—to guide the U.S. ship of state through stormy international waters. So why didn’t they see the Iraq disaster coming?

It is utterly baffling to hear the expressions of shock and surprise from U.S.-government officials and their Amen Corner in the media now that Iraq is being torn apart by a sectarian civil war. All that highfalutin presidential rhetoric about how everyone yearns for freedom, and how we’re igniting a “fire in the mind” with our efforts, rings hollow when we behold what the current government of Iraq has wrought: Shiite death squads, hundreds of bodies stacked up in the morgues every week, and an emerging alliance with Iran that bodes ill for U.S. interests

in the region. Given the ethno-religious composition of Iraq, what did anyone expect? After all, they can’t say they weren’t warned. As I pointed out in my *Behind the Headlines* column of December 15, 2003, “Resistance to the American occupation is now shifting from the infamous ‘Sunni triangle’ to the Shi’ite south, where Iranian influence is spreading.” The party militias, I averred, would soon become a major problem: “Before the invasion, SCIRI officials predicted that they might one day fight the Americans just as they fought Saddam, and the hour may be fast approaching.”

As for the original rationale for going to war, we at *Antiwar.com* always knew this was a mere pretext to invade and conquer a country that had never attacked or threatened the United States. When Colin Powell supposedly “delivered the goods” in his now-infamous speech to the United Nations detailing Saddam’s alleged WMDs, my February 3, 2003, column couldn’t have been clearer or—in retrospect—more correct: “I don’t believe a word of it.” Powell lived to regret that farrago of lies, cherry-picked half-truths, and outright fabrications compiled by Scooter Libby and his neocon elves in the White House.

As far back as February 2001, we were warning that Iraq’s fabled nuclear-weapons program was a myth promulgated by war proponents: “The myth of the Saddam Bomb will never die. No matter how much UN nuclear inspectors praise Iraq—as the Associated Press headline put it—for its full cooperation, the War Party is determined to keep this one alive. The only problem for them is that, each time it is raised, and then dismissed as arrant nonsense, the myth of the Saddam Bomb seems less credible.”

Today, when the Vice President’s chief of staff is on trial for crimes committed in the course of pushing the lie that Iraq had or was about to acquire nuclear weapons, what seems incredible is that anyone believed the War Party’s transparent lies.

What seems particularly disturbing is the complete inability of the military establishment to foresee the rise of an insurgency against the occupation. For many months, Donald Rumsfeld was telling us that the increasing number of attacks were just the fading efforts of the

last remnants of resistance, the work of a few “dead-enders,” and one wonders why this huge mistake was made. Perhaps the administration judged the Iraqis by Western standards and assumed them to be just as decadent, and as unlikely to resist, as the typical 21st-century American—who is, after all, standing idly by as our constitutional liberties are dissolved in the all-consuming fires of the “War on Terror.”

—Justin Raimondo

DOMESTIC DISTRACTION

President George W. Bush’s sixth State of the Union Address was his best so far, rhetorically speaking. As befits a President in deep trouble, his body language was that of a beta male, and he smiled demurely. His tone was calm and conciliatory, at times to the point of pleading. To the uninitiated, Mr. Bush came across as a “regular guy.” Observed in isolation from the issues at stake, he remains more likable, and his presentation more ostensibly credible, than anything his Democratic detractors can offer.

Nonetheless, the oration Mr. Bush gave on January 23 was flawed, for three reasons: It was mendacious in its stated priorities; it was inaccurate in its proposed solutions; and it was fundamentally deceitful on the one issue that overshadows all others—Iraq.

To focus the speech on domestic issues at a time when the country is facing the worst foreign-policy disaster since Vietnam was eccentric at best. Yet the President chose to devote most of his time to traditionally Democratic issues: reducing gasoline consumption and expanding health-insurance coverage. He suggested solutions to both that seem tailor-made to resonate with the public at large and to gain the approval of congressional Democrats. Tax cuts, a balanced budget, energy conservation, and healthcare reform are all fine and dandy by themselves. Mr. Bush’s attempt to change the subject of Iraq, however, is pathetic.

In his speech, Mr. Bush failed on the domestic policy that is most worthy of our attention: immigration. Within weeks rather than months, he is likely to put together a bipartisan agenda for “immigration reform” (*i.e.*, amnesty for up to 18

million illegal immigrants from Mexico and other distinctly un-American places) that will gain support from his congressional opponents. He may not realize, however, that even opening the floodgates would not get him more than a pat on the back from the left.

No solution to the mess Bush created in Iraq will be supported by the people who dislike him with gusto—and there are at least as many of them today as there were those who hated Clinton's guts a decade ago. To put it succinctly, Bush haters want him to fail in Iraq more than they want America to succeed in disentangling herself. What Pelosi & Co. see as Bush's well-deserved comeuppance will come back to haunt all of us—Democrats included.

Bush paid polite respects to the new masters of both houses (particularly to Speaker Pelosi), but, when he finally came to Iraq, the message was far from bipartisan: There's a war to be won, and victory is possible. Victory is not probable, however, and the net effect of Mr. Bush's undermanned Surge in Baghdad and western Anbar will be to make the domestic playing field even more friendly to the Democrats.

Bush's proposals on Iraq are neither realistic nor strategically significant. A mere 20,000-strong reinforcement can alter the equation in a neighborhood or two in Baghdad or western Anbar. But to "win the war" in Mr. Bush's sense (leaving behind a democratic, pro-American, anti-jihadist, stable, unified Iraq), a million GIs would be needed for at least a decade.

The annual "State of the Union" address, as demonstrated by Mr. Bush's latest performance, is simply a highly publicized opportunity for an incumbent President to give a self-serving homily designed to improve his ratings. It should either be privatized and turned into a network special with a six-figure price tag or be abolished.

For many decades, the State of the Union Address has had little to do with the real condition of the Republic—her true economic and political strength, her culture, her faith—and everything to do with the agenda of the Duopoly of which Washington is the capital, and the world, the oyster. As theater and as a concept, it is reminiscent of the Supreme Soviet, circa 1937. As an institution, it is superfluous, embarrassing, and eminently worthy of extinction.

—Srdja Trifkovic

THE CONSERVATIVE STRIKES BACK

The Democrats picked Jim Webb to offer their response to the President's State of the Union Address for the same reason they anointed him to face Republican Sen. George Allen in the November 2006 election: his opposition to the war in Iraq, which is bolstered by his surpassing valor in Vietnam.

The risible aspect of Webb's sudden political ascendancy is that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans understood Webb during the campaign, and they don't understand him now. The Republicans tried to portray Webb as a leftist for the same reason Democrats think he is one: their obsession with the war in Iraq and their fantasy that anyone who opposes the war must favor "marriage" for homosexuals.

An Allen campaign advertisement suggested as much, but the fact remains that, in the race for Virginia senator, the visceral conservative won. Of the two men who addressed the nation on January 23, the liberal spoke from the House floor. The conservative replied.

More interesting than Webb's laconic answer, however, is Webb himself. In a campaign profile of Webb in the *Weekly Standard*, writer Andrew Ferguson called Webb a "blood-and-soil conservative," which no one seemed to grasp despite Webb's explaining himself in novels and his nonfiction history, *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America*. Observed Ferguson: "All his ideas are reactionary."

Indeed. *Born Fighting* is not only a paean to the Confederacy but an indictment of the cultural Marxists who declared war on middle-class, white Americans in the 1960's. Ferguson begins his piece with a quote from Webb's book: "The culture so dramatically symbolized by the Southern redneck [is] the greatest inhibitor of the plans of the activist Left and the cultural Marxists for a new kind of society altogether. . . . [Rednecks] are the greatest obstacles to what might be called the collectivist taming of America, symbolized by the edicts of political correctness. And for the last fifty years the Left has been doing everything in its power to sue them, legislate against their interests, mock them in the media, isolate them as idiosyncratic, and publicly humiliate their traditions in order to make them, at best, irrelevant to America's future growth."

To this, Ferguson replied, "Yowie."

At the end of *Born Fighting*, Webb dissects the political, cultural, and intellectual elites and their war against American culture in terms that would sound familiar to readers of *Chronicles*: "The most visible fault line between the people of this culture and those who so adamantly shape modern America's intellectual and political agenda began during the turmoil of the civil rights movement and continues today in a variety of related issues."

For Webb, *Born Fighting* was nothing new. In 1990, he gave an inspiring oration at the Confederate Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery. In 2000, he called affirmative action "a permeating state-sponsored racism that is as odious as the Jim Crow laws it sought to countermand." He even named his son after Robert E. Lee. One wonders why the Southern Poverty Law Center did not come out for Allen. Hilariously enough, Democrat activists smelled something but could only tell Ferguson they planned to "educate" Webb. A few Democrats understood Webb, but again, their chief concern was the war in Iraq. Webb opposed it; that was good enough.

The irony of it all is that Allen was the liberal. Granted, the Democrats roasted Allen for his Confederate sympathies, the "Macaca" remark, and allegedly playing pranks on blacks and using the "n-word" in his youth at the University of Virginia, but Webb escaped any serious condemnation for his views. Allen the legislator wanted the Yankee Leviathan to cure every imaginable societal ill, and he even sponsored the "Pool and Spa Safety Act" to protect kiddies from accidental drowning. He did nothing to return government to its constitutional mooring. He was known as a conservative only because he backed the Bush Imperium and opposed homosexual "marriage," hardly a radical position in Virginia.

Allen enlisted female Naval Academy grads and others to call Webb a misogynist because of his writings (for which Webb apologized) attacking the feminization of the military. In other words, the alleged conservative ran to the left of Webb on one of the most important cultural issues of our time: women in combat.

In delivering the Democratic response to President Bush, in which he spoke about overpaid corporate executives, lost jobs, and the reckless expenditure of American blood and treasure in Iraq, Webb touched on the political and cultural theme of *Born Fighting*. To Webb, it was personal, and not just because of

his book. Webb's son, unlike the Bush Twins, is fighting in Iraq.

The struggle of Webb's rednecks against the elites in *Born Fighting* foreshadowed his battle against Allen and Bush and their ilk—the rootless, plutocratic oligarchs who amass power and wealth by exploiting the fierce, proud patriotism of this country's Webbs in war, then dispossess them economically and culturally by advancing the interests of global corporate elites and by helping cultural leftists wage unremitting war against their children in school and their ancestors in history books.

No wonder Webb snubbed Bush when the President met with new legislators and inquired after Webb's son. "That's between me and my boy," the senator-elect grumbled. Columnist George Will, avatar of bespectacled, bow-tied "conservatives" everywhere, called him a "boor," which also harks back to Webb's cultural theme: Pasty-faced elitists like Will think guys like Webb are slack-jawed bumpkins. Maybe, but Webb began manhood by graduating from the Naval Academy and earning the Navy Cross. Will schlepped paste pots for Bill Buckley.

Given Webb's stardom, we have to wonder whether he contemplates higher

office. One hint? His *Born Fighting.com* website now represents his Born Fighting Political Action Committee, and everyone knows what those do: raise money. Once he measures Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, the latter being one of those cultural Marxists who have long tried to dispossess and delegitimize Webb's people, he may run for president. If he outwits the Democratic intellectual and cultural elites to win the nomination, the Republicans are doomed.

—R. Cort Kirkwood

OBITER DICTA

We are pleased to announce that, with this issue, **Catharine Savage Brosman**, professor *emerita* of French at Tulane University and honorary research professor at the University of Sheffield, has taken on the duties of poetry editor for *Chronicles*. She has published numerous works of poetry and prose, including her latest, *Range of Light*, which is due from LSU Press this month.

This year marks the bicentennial of the birth of **Robert E. Lee**, not long ago a hero to nearly all Americans. President Eisenhower sang Lee's praises, and Presi-

dent Truman had Lee's portrait in his library. Like so many other good American things, Lee has been subject more recently to trashing by the p.c. commissars. *Chronicles'* corresponding editor **Donald Livingston** and contributing editor **Clyde Wilson** are among the scheduled speakers at a program on April 28 in Arlington, Virginia, that will redress the balance: "Robert E. Lee: Hero or Traitor?" Lee's role in the issues of the Late Unpleasantness, as well as his military leadership, character, and Christianity, will be addressed by such writers as Kent Masterson Brown, Thomas DiLorenzo, John J. Dwyer, and Thomas Moore. Details are available in an advertisement in last month's issue of *Chronicles*.

Our poet this month is **Peter Hunt**, a widely published essayist and critic who sits on the editorial board of the *Chester-ton Review*. His poetry has appeared in various journals and magazines.

Our cover and interior art are provided by our designer, **Melanie Anderson**. Mrs. Anderson received her B.F.A. from Northern Illinois University.

Additional interior art is provided by **Nicholas Garrie**. Mr. Garrie, who works in a variety of media, hails from Rockford.

FIFTH ANNUAL ABBEVILLE INSTITUTE SUMMER SCHOOL

"Southern Identity and the Culture of the Old South" Camp St. Christopher, Seabrook Island, SC • June 11-15, 2007

What is Southern identity? When did people consciously think of themselves as Southerners? These questions will be explored in the context of the culture of the Old South: its literature, religion, architecture, and moral character. We will also examine the way Southern identity was sharpened by its resistance to an aggressive New England cultural imperialism that sought, after 1814, to define the whole of America in terms of itself.

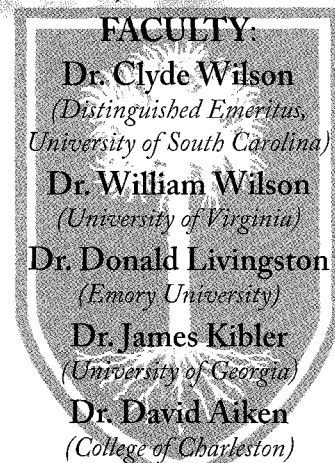
Beginning with the 17th century, we will examine contrasting Southern and New England character types to reveal the mind of these competing cultures: William Byrd *vs.* Cotton Mather; Jefferson *vs.* Franklin; Hayne *vs.* Webster; Randolph *vs.* Thoreau; Simms/Poe *vs.* Emerson.

PLACE:

Camp St. Christopher, on the beach of beautiful Seabrook Island, not far from Charleston, South Carolina, where we will spend a day of the conference exploring its antebellum history, architecture, gardens, and literary heritage.

COST AND SCHOLARSHIPS:

Tuition, room, and three meals per day is \$800 per person; sharing a room, \$700 each. Scholarships are available for college and graduate students who are encouraged to apply! Space is limited.



and invited speakers

HOW TO APPLY:

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If Pigs Could Fly

The day after Christmas 2006, the U.S.-military death toll in Iraq overtook and then surpassed the total number of Americans killed on September 11, 2001. Some Democrats, even before the symbolic number was reached, were calling for a withdrawal, either immediate or gradual, of U.S. forces. President Bush, although he had abandoned his signature tune "Stay the Course" for p.r. reasons, responded to criticism by promising a troop "surge," a metaphor apparently drawn from the hurricanes his administration responded to as effectively as it has waged war in Iraq. Having committed an additional 21,500 troops to the effort, the President continues to insist that, while we are facing "difficult choices and additional sacrifices," victory is, nonetheless, "achievable." What a long way we have come from the bold statements that accompanied his administration's buildup, throughout 2002, to the invasion of Iraq. In those exuberant days, President Bush and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld sounded like Stuart Tarleton at the Wilkes' barbecue. The South could lick the Yankees in a month! "Gentlemen always fight better than rabble. A month—why, one battle—"

Throughout 2002, the President and his advisors insisted that they had not made up their minds to go to war, and some Republicans pretended to believe them. Most of us at *Chronicles* put as much stock in the denials as we put in the tales of Saddam's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. It seemed perfectly clear that, whatever Saddam did or did not do and no matter what Chirac or Putin said, the President of the United States was going to invade Iraq. We symbolized our conclusion with the cover of the March 2003 issue: an illustrated map of ancient Mesopotamia, with crosshairs lined up on Baghdad. The title was simply "Iraq."

The issue was published in mid-February and, within a month, the bombs were dropping on Baghdad. Although there had been much discussion (and even more duplicity) about the Bush administration's intentions, we had concluded, back in the autumn of 2002, that March was the likeliest time for the invasion. George W. Bush's foreign-policy advisors had been planning since even before the election of November 2000. Some of our sources had suggested a much earlier date; others had revealed that Karl Rove was arguing for postponing the operation to avoid the mistake that cost George H.W. Bush his reelection: The victory had come too early, and, by Election Day, people were no longer dazzled by the news that the world's only superpower had defeated a Third World nation.

It was at a rare meeting of contributing editors that one of our colleagues made a convincing case for March. As it turned out, he not only thought the invasion was necessary but even resigned from the editorial board because of our foolish belief that Saddam did not have a vast arsenal of "weapons of mass destruction," that an invasion was as unwise as it was unjust, and that no crusade to build democracy in the Middle East could possibly succeed. He was very polite at the time and has con-

tinued to write for us, but I am still waiting for the letter saying: "I'm sorry, but you were right, and I was wrong."

In looking back at that March 2003 issue, I am struck by how "on target" we were. Thomas Ryba laid out the necessary conditions for a just war and concluded that even on the basis of the Bush administration's *propaganda*—in retrospect, the word is eminently fair—the war would not be just. Srdja Trifkovic made the case that the war had little to do with WMDs and a good deal to do with the oil industry and the Israel lobby. Right again. Wayne Allensworth, in an article too honest and too careful to make headway against invincible ignorance, laid bare Moscow's motives for abandoning Iraq.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect to our collective argument was the emphasis on the lessons of history. Several short pieces reminded our readers of such precedents as the Crusades and the War Between the States, and Michael Stenton provided a remarkably lucid account of the modern Iraqi state and the dangerous game played by Britain and soon to be imitated by the United States. His conclusion, on the prospects of imposing democratic capitalism on Iraq, is worth quoting:

Iraqis are the best-educated people in the region: If any Arab economy can succeed, theirs can. Implicit in an American protectorate, however, would be a gamble on an economic transformation so steep and radical that it would remake society. Once in Baghdad, only excess can succeed.

The chances of failure are more obvious than the prospect of success. The attempt, however, can run and run. As the British found, power in Jerusalem, Baghdad, and Cairo, and access to all of the oil, is a great lure. Since there is almost certainly no existing grand project, the empty minds will fill with something. At the heart of imperialism, new or old, is the dangerous partnership of cynicism and imagination.

Some readers and not a few colleagues were perplexed by my decision to draw some lessons from the history of ancient Mesopotamia. My decision was partly the not-entirely-accidental result of working on a similar article for our book on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but I was also immersed in revising a set of lectures on ancient history. In studying the "Fertile Crescent," I had come to two quite obvious conclusions about the region: first, that "Mesopotamia was the graveyard of empires," and that any great power foolish enough to involve itself had to be willing to shed more blood, American and Arab, than Americans could ever stomach; second, that "no one should have any il-

