

GOP REP. DUNCAN DISSENTS ■ SAVING WESTERN CIV

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**Repetition Doesn't
Make It True...**

DON'T BLAME THE LEFT

I'm one of those "progressive peaceniks" referred to by Thomas E. Woods Jr. (Aug. 2). Though I agree with Mr. Woods that both Democratic and Republican administrations have engaged in imperialist behavior, the idea that "American imperialism is, at its roots, a left-wing disorder rather than a conservative impulse" is dubious at best. To demonstrate his theory, Mr. Woods properly begins his examination of American imperialism with the Spanish-American war and our occupation of the Philippines. However, he inexplicably leaves out the fact that the president who led us into that war was the Republican William McKinley.

I suppose one could argue that McKinley was not a true conservative, but was Lyndon Johnson a progressive? I don't think you would find many on the Left in sympathy with that idea. I marched against the wars in both Vietnam and Iraq and don't remember any conservative contingents in those marches. From Eugene Debs in World War I to Chomsky, Zinn, and other leftist thinkers today, progressives have generally been in front of the anti-imperialist campaigns in the past century.

The origin of the imperial impulse is not "conservative" or "liberal." The main drivers are power and material gain. The PNAC blueprint for U.S. global hegemony is unlikely to be praised by progressives (or true conservatives for that matter).

BOB KELLY

Jefferson, Maine

Thomas Woods replies:

Mr. Kelly's point that we should not neglect non-ideological motives for imperialism is well taken. The point of my essay was simply to insert a bit of nuance into the impression given by talk radio: that skepticism about the Iraq War is just another example of liberals' traditional squeamishness about war.

Not only does this simplistic scenario permit neoconservatives to avoid addressing conservative opponents of the Iraq War, I argued, but it isn't even historically accurate: the vast bulk of the American Left supported American entry into World War I, as well as many other American military adventures down to the present. In recent weeks we have heard more and more calls from liberals for American intervention in Sudan. What better confirmation of my thesis?

Part of the problem, as Mr. Kelly suggests, is the partly semantic and partly philosophical question of who is a "real" conservative or a "real" liberal. No doubt Lyndon Johnson was a political opportunist who had no principles, but if we cannot identify as a man of the Left someone who revolutionized American society with his civil-rights legislation and Great Society welfare programs, then words have lost their meaning.

GHOST TOWN

Being a good conservative, I felt quite "compassionate" while reading Bill Kauffman's Wal-Mart piece (Aug. 2). I was literally in tears. The same thing that happened to Carr's is happening to every store in our town. Shawano, Wis. is a town of about 7,900 people, most of whom now flock to the outer realms of town to imbibe "lower prices." When my children were smaller, we walked downtown, three blocks away, shopping, having a doughnut at the local bakery, reading the newspaper, talking, and saving the world with the senior members of the town. Now nearly all the stores are gone, replaced first by K-Mart and within a couple of years by Wal-Mart, then Super Wal-Mart. The businesses that these customers are bypassing for "falling" prices are the friends, former classmates, neighbors in this community. Pretty soon all America will be a strip mall of cheap products, poor working conditions, and owners who

transfer the daily take from our community by midnight everyday.

MART GRAMS

Shawano, Wis.

GOOD FORM

I do not consider myself conservative or liberal, just a citizen trying to stay informed. Some of your viewpoints I agree with and many I oppose. However, one thing I can say is I find you both informative and reliable, and your style pleasant and entertaining. In the truest sense of liberty and freedom, I thank you for being available. I find your non-debasing style a pleasant relief from the shrillness and personal attacks of most major publications and other supposedly open forums.

SCOTT R. RITENOUR

via e-mail

A WORLD AWAY

Fred Reed's "Innocents at Home" (July 19) perfectly illustrates the arrogance of the self-styled world traveler. Just what do you learn from a bunch of Europeans in an "unheated shack" in Bolivia? Do you learn about Bolivia or about fashionable Europeans?

Have some humility, Mr. Reed. Don't confuse entertainment with the serious gathering of knowledge. Maybe Bush, Rice, and "Rumsnamara" should have canned the CIA briefs and done their planning in "a remote bar on stilts," but understand that there are many ways of gaining usable insights, ephemeral though they are. And don't be so smug as to think that a vacation makes you ready for the cockpit. It is a childish conceit and nothing more.

BILL WINKLER

New Hope, Pa.

The American Conservative welcomes letters to the editor. Submit by e-mail to letters@amconmag.com, by fax to 703-875-3350, or by mail to 1300 Wilson Blvd., Suite 120, Arlington, VA 22209.