

[DISSENT]

## PRIMARY REASON FOR GOP LOSSES

Wayne Gilchrest, a nine-term incumbent and one of a handful of antiwar House Republicans, lost his primary to state senator Andy Harris. The closely watched Maryland race tested whether the GOP, after the electoral “thumping” of 2006, would rather risk losing seats to Democrats than allow Republicans who reject Bush’s democracy project to remain in office. Gilchrest’s fall is an ominous sign for GOP dissenters like Walter Jones and even Ron Paul.

In 2008, Republicans already face the challenge of replacing over two dozen retiring House members and fending off political realignment in states like Illinois and Virginia. And just two years ago, when Republicans challenged the centrist war opponent Sen. Lincoln Chafee in Rhode Island, they helped ensure the demise of their majority in the upper chamber.

Gilchrest, a moderate on taxes and the environment, embodied the political divisions of his district, where the number of registered Democrats and Republicans is nearly even. When he opposed the surge and called for a deadline for withdrawal, hawks flew in for the kill, and 527 groups like the Club for Growth piled on, hoping to run up their score against a weakened opponent. It is a foolish electoral strategy to demand tests of loyalty to a president and war effort that have such abysmal approval ratings. But the “Stupid Party” always learns the hard way. In 2008, the lesson will surely be that endless wars are not only bad policy but bad politics.

[ELECTION]

## CAMPAIGNING WHERE THE VOTERS AREN'T

As we covered Mike Huckabee’s unconventional campaign, *TAC* found a candidate willing to differ from the neocon

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consensus. But his Super Tuesday strategy left us perplexed. Publishing an op-ed in the *Jerusalem Post* suggests some confusion about which country he’s bidding to lead.

The man who in December courageously suggested that Bush’s foreign policy had been “arrogant” and stated that containment was the most sensible way to deal with Iran lost his bearings. He promised to stay in Iraq until the war is “won,” claiming those who don’t understand that the occupation is a “critical part of the war on terror don’t get it.”

The most charitable thing one can say about this fealty to the occupy-Iraq-for-ever crowd is that it is geopolitically illiterate. The American occupation of Iraq is a gift that keeps on giving to Muslim extremists. The more Iraqis we kill, the more Islamist propaganda resonates throughout the Muslim world.

Huckabee went on to claim that nobody was “more steadfastly committed to Israel’s security” than he, making us wonder where America’s security falls in his calculus. He promised the “military option” against Iran would remain on the table, then veered off into boilerplate about “Islamofascism,” the neoconservative agitprop word that suggests all Muslims are potential Hitlerites.

We don’t know what lay behind Huckabee’s turn from his realism of a few months ago. But this rant strips much

shine from a candidacy that had shown promise and saddened many who hoped that Huckabee would help Republicans turn the page from a failed Bush foreign policy.

[EDUCATION]

## LEWIS AND WHO?

*USA Today* reports on whom American teenagers select as the “most famous Americans in history,” presidents not included. Topping the list, naturally, is Martin Luther King Jr., the only American with his own national holiday. Close behind are Rosa Parks and Harriet Tubman. Benjamin Franklin, the first white male, comes in at number five. Oprah Winfrey beats out Thomas Edison for the seventh spot.

The Stanford professor who did the study remarks that it shows a profound change in how Americans view history—an understatement indeed. The national story has shifted from emphasis on the founders and builders of the nation to the narrative of “expanding rights.” Forgotten along with the Marshalls and Henrys and Paines are those who forged the American West, built the country’s industrial strength, and fought its wars—not to mention inventors, authors, and scientists.

The Tubman choice is emblematic. She is African American and a woman and surely exemplary—which makes

her an ideal choice for “self-esteem” instruction under the guise of history lessons. A generation ago, William F. Buckley wondered who in the world Harriet Tubman was and, if she was more important than Stalin, why he had never heard of her.

Today’s students wouldn’t suffer that knowledge gap. Whether they have heard of Stalin is another matter.

[CULTURE]

## DUTCH RETREAT

Lent has never been an easy sell. Ashes don’t rate in the glamour department and fasting doesn’t exactly suit the mass palate. But the Netherlands is making a novel bid to popularize the season of penitence: Why not call it Ramadan instead?

No need to worry that a generation of Dutch tots will be confused when Easter preparation is rechristened after a month in the Islamic calendar. “Ramadan is a better-known concept among young people than Lent,” according to Martin Can der Kuil, director of the Dutch Catholic charity Vastenactie. The theological implications don’t trouble him either: “The agreements are more striking than the differences.” He seems oblivious to the fact that the Netherlands isn’t a Muslim country.

Not yet anyway—though the long surrender is well underway: the Netherlands is now home to one million Muslims. More accurately, it’s where they live. According to a recent poll, only 9 percent of Dutchmen think “Muslims do enough to integrate into Dutch society.”

But perhaps this failure isn’t entirely the fault of Islamic immigrants. A country that lacks the confidence to maintain its cultural markers offers nothing to assimilate into. Indeed, Westerners might take a lesson from the tenacity with which these newcomers cling to their traditions. We clearly place little value on our own.

“And the wind shall say ‘Here were decent godless people...’”

[WAR]

## KNOWN UNKNOWN

In 2004, the Army asked the quasi-official RAND Corporation for an analysis of lessons learned in the Iraq War. After 18 months, researchers produced a report called “Rebuilding Iraq” in both unclassified and secret versions.

It was understandably critical of Iraq planning at every level and unsparing of the Defense Department, key generals, President Bush, and Condoleezza Rice. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Army took immediate steps to squelch the work, giving the anodyne comment that “some of the RAND findings were determined to be outside the purview of the Army.”

The *New York Times* got a summary of the suppressed document, which not only documents the interagency squabbling and poor co-ordination that preceded the war, but reveals something akin to a conscious effort on the part of planners to avoid exploring anticipated difficulties because they might not like the answers they would find: “Building public support for any pre-emptive or preventive war is inherently challenging since by definition action is being taken before the threat has fully manifested itself. Any serious discussion of the cost and challenges of reconstruction might undermine efforts to build that support.”

Simple translation: the Bush team didn’t want to find out in advance how difficult occupying Iraq would be because it feared the American people then wouldn’t support the invasion. It wasn’t a matter of mistaken intelligence or poor planning but a conscious decision not to know what it would be like for Americans to invade and occupy a major Arab country.

This goes beyond simple negligence. Given the cost of the war in lives lost and wrecked, the damage done to Iraq and to America’s good name, even calling it criminal understates the matter. ■

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[heralding the hawk]

# Make the World Safe for Hope

Can Barack Obama, who campaigns as an icon of peace, actually be more bellicose than Bush? Yes, he can.

**By Brendan O'Neill**

OBAMA-MANIA is getting out of hand. Full-grown and well-educated men—from swooning Andrew Sullivan to the entire staff of *GQ* magazine—are developing “man crushes” on Barack Obama, going weak in the knees for his immaculately pressed suits, oratorical skills, and shameless hope-mongering.

“I’ve never wanted anyone more than I want you,” warbles Obama Girl in a song called “I Got a Crush on Obama,” which has been viewed over 6 million times on YouTube. Celebs are queuing up to fall at his feet. “My heart belongs to Barack,” says Scarlett Johansson. There’s a palpable whiff of semi-religious hysteria at Obama rallies. As Joel Stein wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Obamaphilia has gotten creepy,” and its “fanatical” adherents are starting to embarrass themselves.

Actually, it’s worse than that: they are deluding themselves. Many Democrats have become so goggle-eyed, so insanely convinced that Obama is the savior of American politics (potentially rescuing both the Democratic Party from political ruin and America herself from the decadence and violence of the Bush era), that they are beginning to suffer political hallucinations. They fantasize that he is pure and righteous, a miracle-worker who, in a pique of rage, will overturn the conventions of neocon-ruled America.

The blind hope in Obama-as-messiah is most clearly expressed in the widespread delusion that he would be a “president of peace,” welcomed by a world eager to bury the warmongering ways of the office’s former occupant and renew its respect for America. Columnist Michael Kinsley praised Obama’s “valuable experience ... as what you might call a ‘world man’—Kenyan father, American mother, four formative years living in Indonesia, more years in the ethnic stew of Hawaii, middle name of Hussein, and so on—in an increasingly globalized world.” But from my sedate Obamarama-free home in London, I’m not cheered by the prospect of this “world man” in the White House. Rather, I see him for what he is—or for what he threatens to become. Having never been stirred by the sight of Obama giving an MLK-style speech on the need for change, I can only take the candidates at their words. And Obama’s words are ominous indeed.

President Obama would be a war-monger. He would be a wide-eyed, zealous interventionist who would not think twice about using America’s “military muscle” (his words) to overthrow “rogue states” and to suppress America’s enemies, real and imagined. He would go farther even than President Bush in transforming the globe into

America’s backyard and staffing it with spies and soldiers. He would relish the “American mission” to police the world and topple tyrannical regimes.

After eight years of Bush’s military meddling in the Middle East, if you want more war, vote Obama.

Two myths must be exploded: first, that Barack Obama was a principled and passionate opponent of the war in Iraq; second, that if he were installed in the White House he would resist the temptation to launch new wars and would instead usher in an era of peace.

Iraq is the Obamabots’ favorite fault-line in the clash of the two Democrat contenders: Clinton supported the invasion and Obama opposed it. An open-and-shut case of one candidate being “for the war” and the other being “against the war,” right? Not quite. Obama’s position over the past five years has been strikingly similar to Clinton’s. And that ought to be an issue of serious concern for Obama’s army of acolytes and the peace protesters who have latched on to his campaign because, as Jeff Taylor pointed out in *Counterpunch*, “Clinton herself provides no substantive alternative to the neoconservative philosophy of the Bush administration.” Obama is little different from Clinton, and Clinton is little different from Bush.