

25 Years of Chronicles

AMERICAN EMPIRE

Developed nations should assist poorer states by doing no harm. Washington should end government-to-government assistance, which has so often buttressed regimes dedicated to little more than maintaining power and has eased the economic pressure for needed reforms. The United States should stop meddling in foreign affairs which matter little to America; the result is usually to stir up conflict, raise expectations, and leave nations worse than before. At the same time, the United States should improve the access of poorer states to the international marketplace—including its own. Most importantly, it should clearly state that foreign countries, not the West, ultimately control their own destinies.

—from Doug Bandow, *“Down the Rathole: Where Foreign Aid Goes,”* June 2000

The Confederates had never sought to cause the Government of the United States to “perish from the earth.” It was the Union that was seeking to cause the Confederacy and the governments of the 11 Southern states to “perish.” Had the South wanted the government to “perish from the earth,” the Confederate army could have marched into Lincoln’s capital after the First Battle of Bull Run in June 1861, when the Union army had been sent up the road to Washington in wild retreat. The South did not want this; the South only wanted to be free.

—from Patrick J. Buchanan, *“Mr. Lincoln’s War: An Irrepressible Conflict?”* October 1997

So we end up with all the key political words turned inside out, and once that happens, as Confucius wisely noted, no state is governable since the people cannot understand their rulers and the rulers cannot understand themselves, much less the people. Meanwhile, we must preserve the free world (actually unfree; we have elections but no politics) from—let’s see, Kim Il Sung’s son and his atomic armada; and then there is Haiti, where we must restore order and justice and freedom as we did when Franklin Roosevelt invaded the island (he was in the Navy Department at the time, and one of the bizarre lies that he liked to tell ever after was how he, personally, had written the excellent constitution of Haiti). Perhaps Gulf War II might be useful, to justify the military budget and the taxes that now go almost entirely for “Defense” (Social Security income and outgo are separate from the budget, a fact that is kept permanently secret from the taxpayers who are supposed to respond in a Pavlovian way to “wasteful people programs”).

—from Gore Vidal, *“Cleaning Our Stables,”* June 1995

Is it too far-fetched to imagine a time when intervention might be justified if a country fails to provide three branches of gov-

ernment, along the American model, with a Supreme Court administering a plastic Constitution aided by Harvard and Yale professors? Could we justify armed intervention any time women have second-class status, as is still true in many Islamic and African nations? . . .

Statecraft has always required prudence, particularly where there are no clear abstract principles for guidance. If sovereignty is to be preserved, there will be a great need for such prudence, and a great need to resist the temptation to abuse our military power in the pursuit of chimerical and dangerous ends. We must learn that we cannot seek to overturn *every* injustice, that there are at least two sides to every argument, and that the opportunities for disinformation and falsehood have multiplied exponentially in our “information age.” Accordingly, we ought to proceed with extraordinary judgment, restraint, integrity, and an attention to our classic constitutional values, the most important of which are the protection of property and self-government. The risk of generating harmful precedents is horrific, and the costs of inconsistency are dreadful.

—from Stephen B. Presser, *“The Living Constitution and the Death of Sovereignty,”* July 1999

So it was on that most chaotic night of all nights of those years, August 4, 1964, when Washington decided to go to war officially. Just before midnight, I had been the eyewitness (with the best seat in the house) to an action that had been reported as an attack by North Vietnamese PT boats against the American destroyers *Maddox* and *Joy*. It was in fact a false alarm brought about by the destroyers’ phantom radar contacts and faulty sonar operation on a very dark, humid, and stormy night. This was realized during the event by the boss of the destroyers at the scene, and by me, the boss of the airplanes overhead. Corrective messages were sent instantly to Washington: “No PT boats.”

A few hours later, I was awakened to organize, brief, and lead



Anthony Harrigan (l) shares a drink with Adm. James Bond Stockdale.

the first air strike against North Vietnam, a reprisal for what I knew to be the false alarm. It was true that I had helped repulse an actual attack three days before and that I thought it likely that another real one would occur in the future. But what to do, knowing that hours before Washington had received the false-alarm messages and that it would be none other than I who would be launching a war under false pretenses.

I remember sitting on the side of my shipboard bed, all alone in those predawn minutes, fully conscious of the fact that history was taking a major turn, and that it was I, Jimmy Stockdale,

who happened to be in the Ferris-wheel seat that was just coming over the top and starting its descent. . . . There was no question of getting the truth of that night out: that truth had been out for hours. I was sure that there was nothing I could do to stop the "reprisal" juggernaut pouring out of Washington. My course was clear: to play well the part I had been given. The Author had cast me in a lead role of a Greek tragedy. Who else to lead my pilots into the heavy flak of the city of Vinh and blow the North Vietnamese oil storage tanks off the map?

—from James Stockdale, *"Epictetus in Uniform,"* March 1987

CHRISTENDOM

. . . [T]here is a fundamental point of intersection between the theory of a just government and much of the underpinning of what we know as Western civilization. Just as there is a necessary nonrational element in the former, so is there a powerful, ordering rational element in Christianity. The start of the Gospel of St. John reads, in English, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The blending of Platonic elements with Christianity is evident, but the process becomes much more so in the Greek text from which the translation is made. In the Greek, "beginning" is not *genesis* which means a start in time, as used in the first book of the Old Testament, but *arkhe*, which means the beginning not so much at a particular point in time at which things start, but as the foundation principle out of which being comes. "Word," of course, comes from the Greek *logos*, which includes the notion of reason, the inner essence of meaning. Thus, we have the idea that in the beginning, as the foundation principle of the universe, was meaningful reason, and the Word—*logos*—was with God, the Word was God. That is to say, the universe as conceived by this Gospel is not arbitrary, not a matter of chance or accident, but a reasonable world following a reasoned order with God.

It is this interpretation of the meaning of reality, taken from and developed from the Greek philosophers, that runs through the great tradition of Christianity. It is expressed once more by the greatest of all poets at the height of the Middle Ages, by Dante, when he writes, in *The Divine Comedy*, "In the great seas of being, all things preserve a mutual order and this it is that maketh the Universe like unto God."

—from James Burnham, *"To See the World and Man,"*
April 1984

Perhaps the best lesson that Americans can learn from Yugoslavia is that there is no such thing as a multicultural nation. Certainly what has made the United States a great nation is its cultural heritage. The talents which immigrants brought to America from various cultures blossomed in the context of our culture.

We are a product of Western civilization and Christianity, both of which evolved in Europe. Our own derivation of this civilization emphasizes individual rights and responsibility, strong family bonds, limited representative government, religion separated from state, a strong sense of community, free enterprise, private property, the rule of law and reason, and a common language with which we communicate this cultural heritage. To be an American citizen (or, as an immigrant, to aspire to be one) is to join these cultural bonds, not import alternatives. The only real alternative is the eventual dissolution of

America—which, if history is any guide, will likely occur under conditions of savage hostility.

—from David Hartman, *"Reflections on a Texan's Visit to Bosnia,"* January 1999

Perhaps there is another, more subtle form of colonialism with which the United States has not been reproached. West European countries have equally contributed to this cultural and spiritual colonialism in the name of a certain Marxism and technology. I'm speaking about Far Eastern countries that, having become Marxist, have broken their attachments to thousand-year-old spiritual traditions. In this way, the new cultural colonialism is contrary to that of the past, in which the Asian countries' cultures were left intact. For example, Indochina under French colonization was allowed a spiritual liberty because the colonizers did not tamper with their culture. Nowadays, China, Korea, and other countries, having forgotten their traditions so as to adopt technology and an excessive politicization, are no longer free, in spite of their political independence. National independence is not always synonymous with liberty, either physical or moral. Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, and Rumania are subjected to a single way of thought, to a cultural tyranny, which, far from being simply political, is above all an ideological tyranny.

—from Eugene Ionesco, *"Realism and the Spirit,"*
February 1986

All we need is to keep one important thing in mind: The United States, Europe, France, and a few other countries are by their very nature inseparable, as they are part of the same Western civilization. If it is still allowed to say so, without offending anyone, this Western civilization was made by the white race. It has even been called the white man's burden. This civilization was born out of the Greek and the Roman civilization, the Bible and the Gospels, Renaissance humanism, and most of the great scientific discoveries. The rights of man stem directly from Christianity, in which Western civilization is steeped. Our spiritual, moral, family, and aesthetic values have their sources in the ideas developed during the course of our long, shared history.

—from Jean Raspail, *"Defending Civilization,"* April 1998

But—and I can hear the question despite my disavowals—what are you suggesting? Are you suggesting that one must be a believing Jew or Christian to write good novels? Certainly not—though one is tempted to make the case and indeed present the evidence that the Jewish novelist, secular or religious, has a certain advantage, what with his unique placement in a strictly lin-