

Sins of Omission

by Roger D. McGrath

Clint Eastwood and Moral Equivalency

Since at least the late 60's, there has been an effort in academe and in Hollywood to make all cultures morally equivalent. More recently, there has been an effort to make "indigenous cultures" — whatever that means — morally superior to Western civilization. I was thinking of all this when I read an interview with Clint Eastwood that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. Eastwood was promoting his new movie, *Letters From Iwo Jima*, which, he claims, will portray the battle for the island from the Japanese perspective. Drawing a moral equivalency between the Americans and the Japanese, Eastwood emphasizes that Americans committed atrocities. "Well, that happened a lot," proclaims Eastwood. "I talked to so many Marines who were there, and I'd say: 'What did you do with the prisoners?' And they'd look at me and go: 'We didn't have any prisoners.' And I'd say: 'Oh. OK.'"

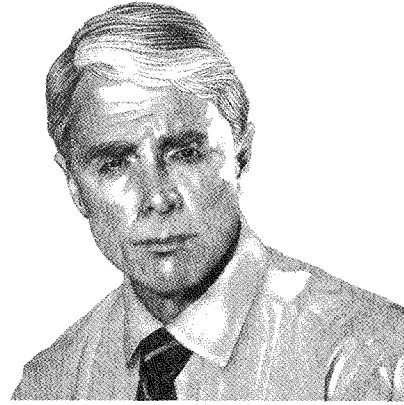
Hold on here, ol' Clint. Aren't you leaving something out? Japanese atrocities were standard operating procedure, following a policy that was promoted and endorsed by the government of Japan and ran through the ranks from generals to privates. On Guadalcanal, the beginning of the American island campaign in the Pacific, the Marines learned this the hard way. When unarmed U.S. Navy corpsmen, who are the Marines' equivalent of Army medics, ran to treat fallen Japanese soldiers screaming for aid, the wounded Japanese would detonate grenades. Japanese snipers used the red cross on the corpsmen's medical bags as targets. It was not long before there were no more red crosses on medical bags and no more unarmed corpsmen rushing to the aid of fallen Japanese. Similarly, the Japanese staged fake surrenders that initially lured Marines to their deaths. The Marines stopped attempting to take prisoners for good reason. The Japanese were fighting to die. The Americans were fighting to live.

Eastwood says *Letters From Iwo Jima* will depict Japanese soldiers extending kindness and aid to a captured American, another perversion of reality. Why not show what happened to a real Marine who was captured in the real battle for Iwo Jima? Ralph Ignatowski, a close buddy of

flag-raiser Jack Bradley and, like Bradley, a Wisconsin boy, was 17 when he joined the Marines and 18 when he landed on Iwo. "Iggy" was captured by the Japanese during the fighting, dragged into a cave, and tortured for three days. His teeth were hammered out, tongue cut out, ears cut off, eyes gouged out, limbs broken and nearly severed, and his penis sliced off and stuffed into his mouth. Perhaps, the Japanese had to evacuate the cave in a hurry — his head had not been decapitated, as was typical. This was all graphically described in the book *Flags of Our Fathers* but is almost entirely absent in Eastwood's movie of the same name. I don't expect to find it in *Letters From Iwo Jima*, either.

To include in his movies what the Japanese actually did to captured Americans would cause Eastwood problems with his moral-equivalency paradigm and destroy his box-office receipts in Japan. The latter is of no small concern. After three months in release, *Flags of Our Fathers*, which cost more than \$90 million to make, had grossed only some \$34 million domestically. American audiences apparently smelled a rat. Meanwhile, the movie had taken in \$21 million overseas, mostly in Japan. Eastwood is counting on Japan to make *Letters From Iwo Jima* a hit. He appears in publicity photos wearing the uniform cap of the Japanese army.


Suspecting that some will question his portrayal of the Japanese, Eastwood claims to have no illusions about the nature of the enemy in the Pacific and to have read Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking*. Nonetheless, he euphemistically says, "I'm not trying to make them all out as powder puffs. The Japanese were tough, a tough enemy to have." Tough, is it? At Nanking, the Japanese killed upward of 300,000 civilians, including raping and then decapitating and dismembering as many as 50,000 Chinese girls. Japanese soldiers received supplemental sword and bayonet training by tying thousands of Chinese to posts and practicing thrusts and slashes. Chinese babies were tossed into the air and, as their trajectory brought them back toward earth, caught on the ends of Japanese bayonets. The Japanese bet on the sex of babies in the wombs of pregnant Chinese and then split



open the women's bellies and pulled out the fetuses to see who won. Two Japanese sergeants engaged in a contest to see who could decapitate the most Chinese. Tokyo newspapers posted the numbers daily. There are photographs of all this with Japanese officers and enlisted personnel smiling and cheering. China claims the Japanese killed 30 million Chinese in World War II, mostly civilians.

The Bataan Death March demonstrated that decapitation was not reserved for Chinese. Riding in open cars by the long line of marching American prisoners, Japanese officers swung their swords at will and decapitated or dismembered those unlucky enough to be within range. A survivor of the Death March, Lt. Col. William Dyess, an Army Air Corps pilot, described the decapitation of a fellow American pilot:

Before we could grasp what was happening [the Japanese officer] had swung his sword. I remember how the sun flashed on it. There was a swish and a kind of chopping thud, like a cleaver going through beef. The captain's head seemed to jump off his shoulders. It hit the ground in front of him and went rolling crazily from side to side between lines of prisoners. The body fell forward. I have seen wounds, but never such a gush of blood as this. The heart continued to pump for a few seconds and at each beat there was another great spurt of blood. The white dust around our feet was turned into crimson mud. I saw the hands were opening and closing spasmodically. Then I looked away.

Evidently, Clint Eastwood has looked away also. 

It's the War, Stupid!

Election 2006 and Beyond

by Leon Hadar

Political analysts, consultants, and “scientists,” envious of the success of economists in turning the study of wealth creation into a scientific discipline and a lucrative profession, are always searching for rules and laws to explain and discover certain regular and logical structures in human efforts involved in winning, preserving, and expanding power. Elections provide a wonderful opportunity for the members of this “profession” or “industry” to win fame, fortune, and, yes, power. Consultants dispense advice to candidates; pollsters “measure” public opinion; academics think-tank about the recent debate between the candidates; journalists cover the horse race; and pundits produce sound bites for 24/7 cable-television news.

In addition to the hundreds of seminars, studies, articles, and books that result from each election campaign, there is the occasional theoretical model to be “discovered” by the clever political scientist or witty pundit. Couched in statistics and scientific mumbo-jumbo, the model then gives birth to the inevitable “rule” that tends to be recycled to death and transformed eventually into conventional wisdom or even a political axiom. For example: If it rains in southeast California on Election Day, you can expect that a majority of short white men between the ages of 27 and 38 who live in Upstate New York will vote for Republican candidates.

Those who “do politics” for a living tend to be concerned that they might be perceived by the general public as “elitists,” out of touch with the legendary Common Man. Hence academics, journalists, and pundits prefer to attach a certain folksy flavor to their pretentious chatter and, if possible, to recover some witticism attributed to a famous statesman, an entertaining author, or an infamous party boss and treat it as a political “rule of the thumb.” For example: “This election is about who’s going to be the next president of the United States” (Dan Quayle). Or, “Win or lose, we go shopping after the election” (Imelda Marcos). And then there is “All politics is local.”

So it was not surprising that, on the eve of the recent mid-term election, Republican pundits taking part in the infamous shouting matches on MSNBC’s *Hardball* were highlighting their political IQs as well as advancing their agenda, as they kept reminding Chris Matthews that his former boss, the late speaker of the house Tip O’Neill, once said that all politics is local. Insisting repeatedly that congressional elections tend to be decided on local issues and local personalities, the Republican party-liners predicted that the results of the vote on November 7 were going to prove that old rule of thumb made up by the consummate politician from Massachusetts.

As we know by now, that was not the way it turned out. Instead, the American people made their decision based on what

they felt about Washington, their country, and “the world”—which, in the Age of the American Empire, was coming to be known as “their world,” which they were supposed to “engage” and try to tame and remake. And contrary to the Republican pundits’ chatter on *Hardball*, nationalizing and globalizing the election campaign was very much part of the strategy of the political professionals in the White House and the Republican Party.

As Richard Viguerie—a leading political “professional,” longtime conservative, and the godfather of political direct mail—pointed out in an interview published on *rawstory.com* a few days before the election, “All politics is local” was a Democratic saying. Viguerie explained: “Democrats like elections to be local. Democrats are a deliverer of services. They pave the roads, they make sure that your social security checks arrive on time. Not so Republicans.” Republicans never win national elections unless the country is focused on a national agenda, argued Viguerie. Ronald Reagan’s victory at the polls in 1980 happened because “those elections were nationalized, people were focused on a national election.” In “1994, the country was focused on . . . Hillary care, the competence of Bill Clinton, a social agenda, gay rights, a tax increase where no Republican voted for it and that was a nationalized election.” And the Republicans also nationalized the 2002 election quite successfully. “Originally they were opposed to homeland security legislation, and then they flipped and came out for it,” Viguerie said. His advice to the Republicans was to continue advancing their original game plan—that is, to nationalize the elections in 2006 by focusing on national security and America’s place in the world.

Thanks to these efforts by Republicans, 2006 may be recalled as America’s third globalized election. After all, if the neoconservative ideologues have succeeded in persuading President George W. Bush and his aides that striving for U.S. global hegemony—and, in particular, for dominance in the broader Middle East—is a core U.S. national interest, the strategy of Bush’s top political aide, Karl “Boy Genius” Rove, was to exploit the neoconservative policies as a way of winning electoral victories, by creating in the minds of the American voters a nexus between Iraq (and Iran, Syria, and any other regime on the neocon “hit list”) and national defense. Hence, since September 11, 2001, Bush has campaigned in one presidential contest (2004) and two congressional races (2002 and 2004) as a victorious “war President.” Bush and his Republican allies in Congress chalked up one electoral victory after another by comparing the occupant of the White House to Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Bush was cast as a president supposedly leading America—and the Free World—in a global struggle against the terrorist network led by Osama bin Laden and (allegedly) Saddam Hussein. Thrown in for good measure were the Axis of Evil countries (Iraq, Iran,

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