

CENTER FOR PUBLIC CONSCIENCE

P.O. Box 220722
WEST PALM BEACH, FL 33422-0722

Bromwell Ault, Founder/Editor
Phone (561) 697-2233
Fax (561) 242-9264

www.CenterforPublicConscience.org
Email: moconscience@aol.com

Sandra Beck, Publisher
Phone (561) 784-9444
Fax (561) 784-9052

MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE ©

Issue No.10

November 2005

OUR NEXT ISSUE

Will consist of comment on several matters that we consider of interest and importance, but to which we do not want to devote an entire issue. Among those are the new heat being generated in Congress over the immigration problem, the prospect of “rebuilding” New Orleans in a way that eschews political hype in favor of some elemental economic and environmental truths, some incumbency reelection figures and a curious possible loss of property rights in AZ.

INTRODUCTION

In our last issue we indicated that this issue might serve as a summing up of some of our prior messages. Somehow, to “sum up” seems to us to deliver a measure of meaningful finality and, perhaps, some hope.

We think these elements, and others that have comprised our heritage for two centuries, are now in short supply in our government’s policies and actions here and abroad. Given the unique circumstances of our country’s birth, there is every reason to expect that it might be marked by its super character rather than its super power. Today, if you strip away our self-serving rhetoric, such an assumption is revealed as fantasy.

In this issue, then, we will investigate “The Case of the Four I’s” — Innocence, Integrity, Identity and Iraq— three of which are missing while the last is present, but not accounted for.

* * *

INNOCENCE

Our country today stands alone as the world’s controlling superpower, its economic and military dominance having first been achieved during WW II and then extended throughout the Cold War’s decades of competition with the USSR.

More recently China has shown signs of intentions to replace Russia in the global power scale and, perhaps, to challenge our ascendancy. However this competition plays out, the position of sole superpower carries with

it responsibilities and consequences that in a representative form of government must be clearly articulated and understood by both government and the people.

We feel that this articulation must go far beyond generalities, such as “spreading democracy”, which often serve as a type of short-hand for other unspecified values. As we view our rise to superpower status, we regret that it was mostly achieved without the degree of shared internal and external analysis between government and the public that creates legitimate authority to propose and apply our political will.

Parenthetically, in this and our previous issues we are not concerned with affixing “right” or “wrong” labels to our two political parties. We are very much concerned, however, with the actions taken by our government and the policies that produce them.

Our system is based on checks and balances designed to spread responsibility and power throughout our branches of government. Naturally, in times when one party controls all branches, such as presently, it is assigned greater responsibility than the other party for policy failure or success.

“... the power that we project around the globe is American, not Republican or Democrat.”

But our government is made up of both parties and the judgment, will and power that we project around the globe is American, not Republican or Democrat.

We were not born a superpower. Nor, until recent times, did we harbor such inclinations. As a matter of fact, our founders and the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution which they wrote gave warning of any such course. Looking backward to our origins and then to where we are today, we could easily say “you can’t get here from there”. But we did!

The first question is how and the next is whether, in the course of our passage, we have remained true to our founding principles.

* * *

OUR LOSS OF POLITICAL INNOCENCE

Having emerged from our constitutional convention in 1789 as a nation, we embarked on a brief, but significant, period of political innocence which lasted for approximately 60 years.

The significance lay in the fact that during this period our country enjoyed a somewhat unique sense of cohesion. This does not mean that there weren’t real differences over social, economic and political matters. There were, and they were the cause for spirited debate both in Congress and the press.

But two circumstances overrode these differences. The first was the country’s total commitment to extending its territorial reach westward to the Pacific. The second, and somewhat opposite, was that the country’s population, economic, commercial and political center was located in the 500 mile Boston – NYC – Philadelphia – Washington strip.

With the discovery of gold in California in 1849, however, all this changed. The pace and numbers of our western expansion exploded while ships from Europe, Asia and Latin America disgorged a continuing stream of hopeful immigrants.

The Gold Rush’s most active years lasted about a decade during which large amounts of gold and silver were mined, states were created out of federal territory, population

increased and service industries bloomed.

In short, the frenzied development of the Gold Rush created in California a political and economic asset base that could compete on equal terms in many ways with the older Northeast. And, separated from Eastern power by 3000 miles, our Pacific coast acquired a healthy independence that it might not have come by had gold been discovered east of the Mississippi.

Gold in California became an instant energizer for our west coast, but it also had less spectacular, perhaps, but no less significant long term consequences in that it paved the way for important investments by Scottish venture capitalists and wealthy European families in our vast cattle ranches and burgeoning railroads.

However, this did not come without a price, and the price was the loss of our political innocence and the cohesion that had enabled it. Our far west became a discrete region that developed its own laws concerning matters such as open range, water resources and mineral rights. Its location and origin separated it in more than geography from the older America in the east.

In 1861 whatever remained of our political innocence/unity was shattered by the Civil War which added North/South lines of difference to the East/West ones. Perhaps the cost of these regional differences was the price we had to pay to settle the American continent. Eventually they would be absorbed or reduced to manageable proportions, but, even so, innocence was of the past.

* * *

Other issues would arise, leave their mark and then either disappear or fade into lesser significance. A notable example is the trade union movement which grew out of our late 19th century industrialization. In the 1890s, Samuel Gompers organized the American Federation of Labor, the first effective trade union designed to bring the right to bargain, with attendant social and economic

benefits, to American workers.

These goals are accepted today without question and, yet, they ran rivers of blood through America in the first half of the twentieth century. In the 30s, 40s and 50s of the last century the labor issue dominated the discussion of our society as America undertook, sometimes consciously and sometimes not, to transform itself into a form of government that in the twentieth century could support the promises of our Declaration of Independence and Constitution. No easy job!

Union membership and power grew steadily from 1900 to about 1970. In the post-war 40s and 50s, the strength of the major unions and their leaders, such as John L. Lewis and Walter Reuther, was unquestioned, and political candidacy, whether local or national, in most areas of the country was not viable unless it addressed the labor/management issue. It was a constant.

Today, the labor movement is a remnant of its former self, having suffered the fate dispensed by technology, globalization and work place changes.

* * *

Another example of how unforeseen consequences can impact our country is the adoption of the income tax in 1913 and the founding of the IRS to administer it. Prior to 1913 by far the greater part of our national revenues had been obtained from trade tariffs which, of course, had their counterparts in other countries around the world.

“... greater fiscal discipline and less accuracy in revenue forecasting.”

This was not the most efficient basis for international trade, as it raised the costs for all who participated, but it was generally accepted and did raise revenues. It was somewhat unwieldy, however, in that revenue could only be raised after the fact of an underlying trade transaction. This requirement

resulted in greater fiscal discipline and less accuracy in revenue forecasting.

With the establishment of the income tax, albeit initially at a modest 2% rate, the enabling trade transactions were no longer necessary and the nation's funding process became a matter of a simple congressional vote.

The transforming nature of this action is evident today. We have a massive tax code of close to forty thousand pages and a continually growing industry dedicated to their interpretation, avoidance, modification, observance, etc. And the 2% rate is only a dim memory.

* * *

These three events, the Gold Rush, the rise of trade unions and the creation of our national income tax, have several things in common. First, they were all beyond the imagination of our founding fathers. They had to emerge from their own specific times and places.

Secondly, they drew deep lines across the structure of our society which are still clearly visible today, although perhaps modified somewhat in degree and form.

“... a few shiny flakes in a streambed.”

The Gold Rush created enormous private wealth and political presence for the Pacific coast region. And, quite literally, all from nothing — a few shiny flakes in a streambed.

The trade unions provided a language, coarse and irreverent as it was, that enabled management and labor to talk to each other and be heard across the divide of different and unequal circumstances which separated them.

And the income tax redefined the citizen/nation relationship. We are joined to government in a powerful and often reluctant embrace, moving through political time/space like a binary star that exists because of its ability to simultaneously attract and repel its parts.

We have no argument with an income tax. It can serve as an efficient source of funds and a valuable link between the people and government. The problem is that our present link is a parochial, greedy and self-serving Congress largely unable to distinguish between its obligations to voters or interests. It is hard to conceive of lines more deeply drawn upon our society than those by Congress via the exercise of its taxing authority.

And, thirdly, all three of the events we have selected deal with, and have resulted in, the creation of great money and power, again in ways, forms and amounts that our founders could not have envisioned. There is no shortage of these examples. Pick your own. The way may differ, but not the end.

“... the only means by which we can cleanse the governments stables.”

* * *

In looking back across our history we cannot help but be struck by how much of it has evolved from thought or action that has run counter to the stated principles and intention of those who founded our government. It is not just events that carve lines across our society. Principles, customs, intentions, and vision — which are now often deprecatingly referred to as “values” — have equal cutting capability, but have fallen into disfavor in Washington. In many political quarters they are viewed as impedimenta. And yet, they may well be the only means by which we can cleanse the government's stables.

Innocence, once lost, is not recoverable; and that's as true politically as in any other area of life. The transforming events of the last one hundred fifty years blew away our innocence and, with the exception of the WW I and II years, shattered our national unity which was replaced by a “winner take all” pursuit of money and power.

We have nothing against either,

but feel that their real value is determined by how they are applied, especially in democracies where restrictions tend to be fewer and opportunities greater than more controlled societies.

As the nation grew stronger and richer and the prize greater, the competition intensified and led us to our present polarized state. We can neither undo technology, nor rewrite history, nor replicate the circumstances of our very fortunate birth, but it is within our power to recall the spirit of that time and attempt to apply it to current conflicts.

* * *

We should also be aware that internal, as well as external, forces have been applied to our Congress and have changed both the institution and our electoral control of it.

In our media-driven age that emerged following WW II, congressional interviews, photo-ops, reports and appearances serve the dual purposes of filling broadcast hours while at the same time providing members of Congress with free exposure to reach constituents and engage in self-promotion.

In the process our elected representatives in Washington have come to see themselves as celebrities. They frequently confuse their importance with that of the work they were elected to do. And, again in a turn our framers could never have imagined, they have become full-time, professional employees.

Today members of Congress receive a salary of about \$162,000 plus numerous perks and a very rich retirement package. As presently legislated, on Jan 1, 2006, and every year thereafter, this figure will be increased by about \$5,000. No one has to vote for this increase. No one has to show up to receive it. The only action that a member of Congress could take to avoid this annual largesse would be to vote against it.

No such constituency exists. Nor can we expect it to develop under our present culture. But if you do the math, the results of compounding a base figure and subsequent

increments will provide rich rewards for everyone on Capitol Hill. And, as salaries increase, so will retirement benefits.

* * *

INTEGRITY

FINDERS KEEPERS; LOSER WEEPERS

The second “I” of our three missing ones is our national integrity. This can be viewed as a general failure on the part of the public, which is partially true, but more importantly as the embrace by our government of policies and actions totally antithetical to our founding principles. While our loss of innocence may be seen as mostly a continuous, or cumulative, process beyond the role of government, the loss of our national integrity is just the opposite, as it violates the standards and legislation which we have created and claimed as distinguishing features of our form of government.

Our public disgrace is evident in the scandals over recent years that have surfaced in the nation’s media¹, the Roman Catholic Church, corporate America and, of course, government, itself.

Far more damaging to our and others’ view of our country are those more consequential failures which our government has initiated and pursued.

Contrary to our prior history when such violations of our stated national code occurred sporadically, the years commencing with the first Reagan administration have produced a steady stream — the sale of WMD to Iraq, Iran-Contra, the savings and loan debacle, the Boeing aircraft lease contract, and our continuing political and financial support of numerous dictator-led governments in SE Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean, many of which were deeply involved in the sale of illicit arms and drugs.

Over an extended period we were responsible for the creation of a wealthy expatriate community of

third world officials that can now move between the financial and pleasure centers of Europe by courtesy of the American taxpayer. Should you find this a cynical use of our national wealth, we would agree with you. And consider, for example, the circumstances of our involvement with Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

In the Reagan administration we provided missiles and chemical WMD for him to use against Iran. We also made available anthrax which he claimed he wanted for research purposes. Then we decided he was a threat and undertook the very substantial costs of our share of two wars, the last of which included the occupation and attempted political/economic reformation of Iraq.

In the course of the latter we had to offer large sums of money to capture Hussein and his sons. In time they were located and captured or killed, and payments estimated at between \$50 and \$100 million were made.

If the government thought that these payments would end, or even shorten, the war, they were, as with many other things in Iraq, misguided. The informers have their new money (lots of it) and identities, and are able to live in luxury in Monaco, Biarritz, Switzerland, Paris, etc.

The \$100 million we have paid to capture Saddam Hussein’s family and henchmen is not a large amount compared to the Iraq war’s total cost, but to a middle-class American taxpayer, who must provide these funds it is an enormous amount. And yet, the question arises whether it was well spent. A year after taking Hussein into custody and killing his sons we are fighting the same war that we fought the year before his arrest.

It is easy to understand how Joe Taxpayer might regard the government’s use of his funds in this manner with cynicism. And cynicism to some degree, fills the space that’s left after innocence has been lost.

* * *

IDENTITY

Perhaps nowhere has America’s transformation been more pronounced than in its altered social and cultural identity.

Consider our film industry which, under pressure from the Roman Catholic Church and other civic organizations, undertook to regulate itself and sanitize the content of its films by establishing the Hays office in the early 1930s. Industry codes for subject matter, dialogue and photography were developed and a seal of approval, without which mass distribution was impossible, was issued to conforming films.

“... the industry’s leaders withdrew their support.”

This system was successful because it served the economic interest of the industry. It remained in place for about twenty-five years when, faced with the collapse of the studio system and increasing competition from foreign and independently produced films, the industry’s leaders withdrew their support.

Today they regard nudity, sex, violence and smut as in their economic interest, and offer a rating system that is little more than an indicator as to whether a film is “soft” or “hard” pornography.

The film industry today is firmly joined at the hip to the TV medium by common ownership and lack of any interest in decency standards. Between them they have created a culture of extreme physical violence and moral mayhem which they promote through celebrities, mass media of all types and marketers of products for consumers of all ages.

“... our second generation of this shame.”

It is a filthy system. It offers nothing intellectually better than the worst. It has become increasingly loud, persistent and compelling in its claims upon those who expect

nothing better. We are now embarked upon our second generation of this shame.

* * *

Music is a key element in any culture and the composition, rhythms and lyrics of our “pop” music today offer no more hope to our society than the film/TV industry. As a matter of fact, music, film and TV have been economically and artistically combined into one mammoth entertainment grouping in which the high volume and low creativity of rap and rock complement what appears on our large and small screens. The passage in only two generations from Cole Porter to Cold Play has been downhill all the way.

As with every other area of our lives today, technology has played its part and, indeed, has taken us over a line previously uncrossed.

In the two decades following WW I the pace of industrialization in Europe and America accelerated greatly and many artists attempted to portray the presence of this new force in their work.

All across Europe, and to a lesser degree in this country, in the two decades between the wars the avant-garde in the arts attempted to deal with the new relationship between man and machinery. It examined the effect of the modern, twentieth century technology upon our lives and tried to understand and explain the new world we had created out of the ashes of the pre-war order.

But historically art was art, and machinery was machinery; and the difference was one that had endured for centuries. In the post WW II era with the invention of the Moog synthesizer this line was crossed. Music became part of the machine and vice-versa. Other distinctions were similarly blown away in art, dance, sculpture and literature in attempts to unify art and science. As with any new cultural direction, the results have been mixed, but it’s probably safe to conclude that in twentieth century America the machine was a better tool than a muse.

Any mention of our altered identity must include the multiple examples of prisoner abuse that have taken place in Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantanamo and perhaps other places. The most telling aspect of these revelations has been how contrary they are to both our founding beliefs and those that we state by voice and treaty today.

And, closer to home, here’s a truly startling statistic. Around the world fifty-one nations recognize English as their official language². We are not one of them, although twenty-seven of our states have passed official English laws.

Pressure for a constitutional amendment to extend this status to the national level continues, but strong resistance is offered by multiculturalists and foreign language publishers. This should be a “slam dunk” for English. Perhaps some day it will.

In the meantime we are still subject to Executive Order 13166 issued by Bill Clinton as his term of office ended. This requires state and local governments and companies that do business with the federal government to translate documents into any language requested. At present our various levels of government have provided licenses, ballots, tax forms, contracts, regulations, etc in 231 languages³.

We seem to have just let loss of identity happen, but it’s out of control now unless we make a real effort to reverse course.

* * *

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

THE MONKEY ON OUR BACK

The loss of identity that we have suffered in our culture of entertainment is as nothing compared to the massive transformation of our society that has resulted from our embrace of political correctness (PC).

PC’s origins seem to lie in a sense of fairness that extended our society’s

tolerance in its dealings with the increasing number of races and cultures which were drawn to our country after WW II.

“... a political weapon to be wielded at will.”

This process was, of course, greatly accelerated by our revision of our immigration laws in 1965 after which PC was applied to many more people in many more ways. It became, more or less, a code, and then a practical philosophy for minority interaction, and finally a political weapon to be wielded at will.

The progress to this last stage was a quantum leap for which there is no evidence of overwhelming public support. Rather, it was allowed to take place because our political structure lacked the will to either ignore or oppose it. Consequently, those who employed it were able to apply strong and effective political leverage.

Today many politicians ride the PC bandwagon, especially at campaign time, and are disproportionately swayed by it in their attitudes towards legislation, appropriations, enforcement, etc.

What is PC? We think of it as primarily a representational effort to reflect minority interests in applicable circumstances. It may have begun with something as simple and sensible as the appointment of minority members to a civic board in a community possessed of an active minority element.

But it now resonates throughout our society from a far broader base. It is grounded in the belief that all lives are created equal and, by some dubious extension, that the products and cultures of those lives are also equal. In some cases this may be true; in others, not. The determinant, however, is more likely to be history, chance, nature, genetics or a combination thereof rather than philosophy.

PC makes a judgment that many of the advanced societies in our world engage in multiple activities that are

“incorrect” because they fail to equate less developed with more advanced societies.

Preference plays a large part in the way PC presents itself. It has a stated preference for minority interests, achievements and goals; and an equally strong preference against the accomplishments of today’s first world societies.

The label “politically correct” is not, however, exactly correct itself. Today it embraces far more than politics and exerts a strong influence on our lives through its presence in the UN, the military, the corporate world, the arts and our educational system.

It is the latter where the most damage is being done. In our public schools, courses are being revised in many instances not merely to include, but to distort, minority contributions; and in our universities new departments have been established with curricula to present minority views and causes in order to satisfy the demands of PC. On many campuses the results have been politicization of the academic structure, departmental competition for funds and faculty and an intellectual division that, while usually stifled by PC’s proponents, can be reflected in both student and faculty bodies.

In twenty-first century America, and elsewhere around the world, PC rests its claims on its opposition to the racism that it believes lies at the root of ethnic differences, and to its espousal of the validity of multiculturalism whereby each culture/society must be deemed the equal of all others.

We should make no mistake about it. PC is a cunning trap baited with intellectual poison. The mere threat of its use overpowers any but the most independent of our politicians, and there are few enough of them.

PC’s logic and deception bring to mind George Orwell’s 1984 which, when it was published after WW II, we tended to view as a satiric exaggeration and has since become a brilliant prophecy.

PC began its life as an argument for fairness which informed our

directions and policy in some matters. It was enthusiastically received by a variety of activist advocacy groups and hijacked by them and their political supporters.

Over time, the informed argument disappeared under political pressure and PC became both policy and direction. The PC monkey is on our back with its arms clasped strongly around our necks and will not easily be dislodged.

* * *

IRAQ

“PRESENT; BUT NOT ACCOUNTED FOR.”

Iraq, sadly, is still with us, and will be, whether we remove our troops or not, for a long time, as our intervention there has destabilized the country in ways that may spread to its neighbors and to other regional states.

The military phrase “all present and accounted for” is used to verify physical presence, but “account for” can also mean to analyze or confirm. We choose to apply these latter meanings as they project a somewhat broader application.

In our republic of three hundred million people about 600 of them are charged with the responsibility of exercising the government’s vast power to function. Of this 600, 535 make up the Congress. Add the president and vice-president, the nine Supreme Court judges (who can strike down legislation they deem unconstitutional) and the number rises to 546. Add the members of the president’s cabinet, the heads of non-cabinet level government agencies, White House staff and other political advisors to arrive at 600.

Our system assigns to citizens the right and obligation to determine the nation’s leadership and the directions it will follow. Unfortunately, the mechanism through which the public exercises its right is the election of members of Congress at which point the vox populi is reduced in volume

from 300 million to 535.

As we write this in October our military’s death toll exceeds 2000 and our number of wounded 15,000. These results seem to have been completely unexpected by our policy makers (Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell & Rice), although less so by some members of our military high command.

The compelling question is ‘why’? We will attempt to throw some light into this dark corner by asking a series of other questions that should have been asked by government, the media and the public long before we commenced the planning for a military incursion.

These questions would have formed the basis for an informed debate that could have included many sources within our society and from which government policy and public opinion would have benefited.

There are multiple differences between Vietnam and Iraq – no oil/oil; jungle/open terrain; communists/no communists; secular/religious leadership; and lengthy/sudden military commitment. This last is probably the most significant politically because it allowed the domestic debate over Vietnam to build, something that our policy in Iraq seemed to want to avoid.

“... a quick and favorable result that has eluded us”

The one overriding similarity between Vietnam and Iraq is that for the second time in less than half a century we have entered into a war with a second world country from which we expected a quick and favorable result that has eluded us. Why?

* * *

In formulating any policy there are two questions that must be asked in order to determine its viability. Does the policy have a basis in moral/legal law? Will it stand up to scrutiny in a court of law or public opinion?

And the second question is, quite

simply, will the policy work?

To answer these we must clarify what our policy was based on. As the initial claim re WMD was false and would have authorized us to take similar action against other antagonistic regimes with WMD, we must discount this reason. Similarly, we must discard removing Saddam Hussein because he was a despot. At any time the world seems to have its quota of despots in place, and new ones easily appear to replace the old.

Over the course of our military presence in Iraq its rationale has shifted to our bringing representative democracy, a free market economy and a secular government to the people of Iraq. And now the questions begin in earnest.

Although these three elements are critical components of our system of government, by what leap of faith, reason or imagination do we feel we should impose them by armed force on someone else?

The action we have taken in Iraq runs completely counter to the principles upon which our government was founded. In the past we have been called upon to be defenders of democracy, whereas in Iraq we have taken the offensive.

Can we blame this major shift in our policy and character on our position as the world's sole superpower? If so, we will relinquish both the moral and political authority of our status in short order. They are our real authority and without them our military power is weakened and its use limited.

In Iraq we have departed from our traditional role in world politics, and the consequences will reach well beyond the grasp of our present government.

Why could not this unusual role change have been given a true hearing with opinions sought and presented from the many knowledgeable areas outside of government? That seems the least that was due to the public and to the Congress so that it could arrive at an informed decision.

* * *

The second question that our

policy seems not to have asked is "Will it work?" It is here, long before any decision should have been made, that we blew through our second set of flashing red lights.

How is it that, having warnings, we did not ask questions? How is it that we knew the path went through quicksand, and yet we failed to feel its pull?

Islam is no secret sect. It has been one of the world's leading religions for over a thousand years during which time it has had frequent contact, sometimes violent and at other times peaceful, with the two other desert religions, Judaism and Christianity, with which it shares a common lineage. It has long been known, especially to the West, to be marked by its fervor and a volatility that often crosses the line into violence. This has been true for centuries and, again, is no secret.

Recently, the army's Lt. Gen. Boykin opined that we would prevail in Iraq because "our God is stronger than their God." The dimensions of personal faith are many and varied, but they do not translate easily into military campaign forecasting or broad religious comparisons.

General Boykin seemed to be saying that, as a nation, we have a greater spiritual strength and closeness to God than Muslims, but a look at present US and Iraqi societies suggests otherwise.

We, for instance, have banned both prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance containing the phrase "under God" in our schools. Much of Muslim teaching is based on the Quran and in the more conservative madrases students spend their whole day committing the Quran to memory. Religion is not restricted, but rather very much on display.

It is interesting to compare the TV coverage of two recent state funerals – those of Ronald Reagan and Yasser Arafat. Our mourning public without exception showed reverence, calm, grief and loss. In the Arafat scenes, the loss is expressed more as protest and anger by yelling masses carrying and shooting firearms.

The reason for this difference is that in Muslim countries politics and

religion are so joined that is impossible to have a political event without a religious component, and vice-versa. In a state funeral such as Arafat's the feelings for the leader are also those for the state, and the shouting and shooting mob carries, along with the casket and guns, their political frustrations and social anger.

General Boykin's view that we, as a people, are superior in religious faith and holy favor to Muslims misses at another level beyond the school years, for all during their adult lives Muslims are called to prayer five times a day.

". . . and Muslims have been at it longer than we have."

Westerners tend to accept this (and other visible aspects of the Muslim faith that demand strict adherence to dietary, dress and behavioral codes) without fully comprehending the means by which they are seamlessly woven into the entertainment, commercial and religious patterns of Muslim life. No matter what our personal faith might achieve, it is difficult today to imagine a suspension of activities and exodus for prayer taking place on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, in Congress or at Ford's River Rouge plant. It's an acquired skill and Muslims have been at it longer than we have.

* * *

And, then, we come to what must lie at the crux of our failure to promptly and peacefully accomplish the reformation of Iraq's political, economic and religious structure.

As the Muslim faith is the dominant social, political and spiritual element in Iraqi culture, we will use it as an example. The same arguments can be made, somewhat less forcefully perhaps, for other parts of Iraq's culture, but without religion's clarity.

For those who live far from the historical and religious sites of the near East it is necessary to be

reminded that for most of the past thousand years the followers of the three desert religions that trace their origins to Abraham have been engaged in bitter contention over a host of economic, social, spiritual and political issues.

It is quite possible that these three faiths worship the same God under different names, but they differ sharply as to His messenger — Mohammed, Moses or Jesus Christ. It is unlikely that, lacking divine proof, these differences will be resolved on earth.

The reason that this primary, spiritual struggle extends to political, social, legal and economic matters is that Islam has adhered for centuries to a legal code, Sharia, prescribed in the Quran that is considered the controlling authority in many areas of both civil and criminal law. What makes our understanding of Islam even more difficult is that Sharia can be interpreted in different ways by different clergy at different times. However, regardless of whether we comprehend Islamic law, it is clear that within its framework politics and religion are closely bound together.

“ . . . It is not our faith.
It is their faith. . . ”

At the center of our failure in Iraq to bring about a transformation to a more recognizably western way of life and government lies our government’s inability to experience the relationship between Islam’s faith and followers. It is not our faith. It is their faith and it commands their devotion and belief no less than Judaism or Christianity do here.

Like any other religious/state structure, Iraq’s contains elements both moderate and extreme over which only Iraqis will be able to exert effective control. The idea that we might chart the Iraqi future by applying a Judeo/Christian graft to Iraq’s Muslim culture seems to us extremely unrealistic.

Of course, it also defies our own beliefs. Admittedly, our military presence in Iraq came about wrapped

and ribboned with congressional (and, thereby, constitutional) authority. But the larger question remains whether we are permitted or encouraged by our history or principles to undertake military action against other nations in order to accomplish what we view as a desirable change in government.

If we accept that premise it becomes increasingly difficult for us to distinguish our actions from those of previous imperialistic superpowers.

* * *

We stated our original criteria for successful policy as having both legal/moral authority and the prospect of a prompt and peaceful success. Our actions appear to have been taken in the absence of these requisites.

Consider our expectations that we would be welcomed as liberators, and that, as soon as Saddam Hussein was deposed, a new Iraqi nation would emerge and serve as a regional pilot plant for democracy.

The fallacy in such an assumption is Iraq’s own history. For about 5,000 years a mixture of tribal peoples who fought over food, water, land, trade routes and religion populated the territory now called Iraq.

“ . . . let alone serve as a catalyst for regional transformation.”

Only in 1920, when the great powers redrew the map of the mideast to recognize the results of WW I and the location of oil deposits, did the present borders of Iraq appear on the world map as a British protectorate. In this brief period of less than a century, it has not been able to assemble the many and difficult qualifications of a modern nation, let alone serve as a catalyst for regional transformation.

There are no secrets here. Everything we have cited as contributory to our policy’s failure was known to our government and public. And yet, with only minor dissent, the approximately six

hundred people who form the decision making apparatus of our government embarked upon the course of war.

Recently, as anti-war sentiment has grown, some members of Congress have claimed they were duped into voting to invade Iraq. Misled? Yes. Duped? No; because congress has the sole authority to conduct and define the boundries of any relevant inquiry, and it failed to do so.

In Iraq today the cost of our choice in lives, money and misery increases every day. Figures that tally Iraqi deaths are never released, but the bombs take their daily toll in lives lost — 10 some days; 20, 50 or 100 on others — and in the hearts and minds of those who remain.

Our impression is that Iraq is moving closer to a civil war which could be ignited by any number of circumstances. There is hope in some quarters that the adoption of an Iraqi constitution by national vote will provide a magical counterforce that will restore calm and civil order.

We think this is an unlikely result, that destabilization and factional infighting will continue in a manner and at a pace of the insurgency’s choice after the constitutional referendum, whatever its outcome.

Nor will the departure of our forces bring instant peace. Iraq is divided into three groups each with different political/religious agendas and leaders. The exit of “coalition” troops would create a vacuum which all three elements would most likely accelerate and intensify their efforts to dominate.

Our actions have brought about unwanted results in Iraq and the larger region that surrounds it. The fabric of Iraqi society has suffered severely from decades of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship followed by our efforts to replace it.

Our withdrawal, whenever it takes place, will bring about a period of internal and external realignment. There is no way at present to judge the length of this period, but it is almost sure to be marked by continued insurgent opposition.

Again, these are no secrets. We

cannot help but ask what were the judgments on which our Congress based its decision to invade Iraq.

* * *

Foreign policy is a murky game at best. It is not unlike finding your way across a dark moor in dead of night. There is little vision and our senses are strained and, thereby, often deceived by what we cannot see and by unfamiliar sounds, scents and contacts.

Judgments are difficult because our knowledge is incomplete, but precisely because of this the knowledge that we have must be put to its best and fullest use.

Error is a constant which wisdom accepts. No foreign policy exists without error. The task is to keep it at acceptable, if unwanted, levels.

We think our policy in Iraq failed on a moral level because of the multiple and shifting reasons that were cited for it. This lack of accuracy in presenting our policy was further confused by our exaggerated belief in Iraq's willingness to accept our mission of transformation.

These were major flaws in our policy, but by far the most damaging to our country, both at home and abroad, was our failure to engage in a public debate based on the existing knowledge of Iraq's history, religion and people. Such a debate could have taken place in the Congress, in the media, on the internet and in public discourse.

At a time when technology has provided us with an unequalled mass communications capability an opportunity to put it to use to benefit government was lost. There was real knowledge available that could have been brought forward. It was not; instead we were given a few days of casual inquiry in Congress and at the U.N.

“We deserved better.”

It just wasn't enough for a matter of life and death. We deserved better.

We all did. We were possessed of knowledge from a variety of sources that could have widened and informed the national decision-making process. Sadly, it was never called upon.

* * *

“. . . This course is not a self-correcting one.”

Our comments about Iraq are not drawn along Republican/Democrat, hawk/dove, conservative/liberal, etc. lines. Rather, we see Iraq as a microcosm. It is the fourth I, a coming together against which our loss of the other three — innocence, identity and integrity — is playing out.

The more we distance ourselves from our founding's ideals, the more likely we are to suffer, in varying degrees both here and abroad, an alienation that could translate into political disfigurement and / or dysfunction. This course is not a self-correcting one.

If our values, and our future, are not to be further eroded and wasted, we will need much greater transparency in government, more responsibility from the public in selecting its representatives and less commitment from them to the sanctity of the money/power bond.

If you think this is beginning to sound like a crusade, you may be right. Crusades are, after all, only campaigns highly charged with moral purpose and fervor.

The way our system presently operates success would not come easily to the call of only the vox populi. But there is another force available, and that is the power of our media. If it could be harnessed and yoked with a popular movement, real change could occur. The reality is that our media are, to some degree, also “damaged goods” and have suffered many of the same value losses as those of government. And yet there is a chance and, if it presents itself, we must take it.

If we can do this, we can prove to ourselves and to the world that the words of our Declaration of Independence and Constitution can be as meaningful now, and in the future, as they were in 1776 and 1789.

* * *

A CAUTIONARY NOTE

It's evident from many of our government's acts and attitudes that it expects that we can transplant our success in creating a representative republic to other countries. This amounts to reading our own press clippings — a dangerous act of self-deception.

And it won't work. The circumstances we enjoyed when we established, first, our independence and, then, our government do not exist today.

We had extremely gifted and idealistic leaders and were provided with a new continent without, for the most part, owners or borders. We were a colony able to separate itself from its origins and then be protected from them by three thousand miles of open sea when the most advanced form of transportation and communication was the sailing ship.

WARNING: We should stop contemplating the replication of our government in foreign countries, as it will not succeed. If foreign countries want democracy, they must create it themselves and, by including some local flavor, increase their chances of success. We can be most helpful from a distance.

The Iraq war is the second in the last half century in which we, the sole super power, fought a less than developed country and failed to achieve our intended goal. That is a matter for contemplation. It calls attention to our fateful passage over the past two centuries — to who and what we have become, to the way we took to get here and to how our innocence, integrity and identity may have been altered in the process.

* * *

TAX DEDUCTIBILITY
STATUS

EDITOR'S BIO

POST SCRIPTS

In the matter of the investigation of who leaked Valerie Plame's identity as a CIA operative to print and broadcast journalist Robert Novak, NY Times reporter Judith Miller has been released from jail and has testified before a grand jury.

The special prosecutor in this case is Patrick Fitzgerald. He is known as a dedicated prosecutor not given to "soft landings" or "easy outs". We are told he has a staff of similarly motivated assistants who like their work. They are reported to be in for the long run, and not likely to choose the popular path of a few years of prosecution work, the same on the defense side and then a lucrative partnership in a cushy law firm.

It is our understanding that Fitzgerald has some other truly explosive investigations underway which could surface in the coming year. Unfortunately, his term of appointment expires in October and, if he is not reappointed, his successor may choose to pursue either a less vigorous course or other directions.



* * *

END NOTES

¹ We refer to the violations of editorial ethics at CBS, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Boston Globe, etc.

² Rep Tom Tancredo (R-CO) – 10/13/05

³ Citizens United for American Sovereignty – 10/15/05

We were disappointed to learn that our application to the IRS for 501(c)3 status, that would permit contributions to us to enjoy income tax deductibility, has been denied.

The reason given had nothing to do with our editorial content, but rather because the CPC had originally been established as an LLC (limited liability corporation) and LLCs are not eligible for Section 501(c)3's tax exemptions.

Our LLC was formed when we had no clear idea of what lay ahead in the future and how we would get there. We are now exploring how we might change our legal status. This would seem to have "slow" written all over it.

* * *

ANNUAL BILLING –
INVOICE ENCLOSED

It's the time of year to bill most of our subscribers for the year ahead 10/05 – 9/06 and we have enclosed an invoice. If you think you are being billed improperly, please let us know. This billing and records process is a tedious one and, to borrow from the political jargon, mistakes can be made.

Mr. Ault has a background in marketing of consumer products and financial services. He is a graduate of Yale University, a special limited partner of the Venture Capital Fund of America, NYC, NY of which he was a co-founder, and the author of A Retail Food Study (La Roche & Co. NYC, NY 1957) which described the emergence and growing dominance of the supermarket in American food retailing.

Note: The Center for Public Conscience has no affiliation with or loyalty to any particular political party or movement and none of its principals has ever held an elective or appointive political office; nor will they in the future. It receives no revenue from advertising or any source other than subscription income and voluntary contributions. At this writing these income sources are not tax deductible.

The contents of this report are protected by U.S. copyright law. However, reproduction for non-commercial purposes is permitted if full and prompt attribution of the source is included.