

commentary

from our viewpoint...

Talking about a war, not how you start one

War with Iraq? Probably not. You don't start a war by talking about it. This administration has shown that, when it thinks it necessary, it will strike hard and fast. There's no jawbone in the modern arsenal to go with the smart bombs, night-vision gear and other high-tech goodies our warriors carry around.

No, if W, Rummy and the gang wanted to waste Saddam Hussein, they'd have moved the troops into place and started screwing bombs onto airplanes.

From here, it looks like they are running a high-stakes bluff against the Middle East's least-popular strongman. It's hard to say who will blink first, but we're not going to bet against Bush.

There's no doubt Iraq is a threat to world security or that Saddam could be building nuclear or chemical weapons. There's a great likely hood Iraq is in league with al-Qaida and other Arab extremists, but that's not enough so far to convince Americans to launch an invasion.

Nuclear weapons and other "weapons of mass destruction" are frightening enough in the hands of a half crazed dictator, though, and the idea that terrorists might get a hold of them is worse.

But our guess is Bush and his team are doing all this talking because they want to push Iraq onto the straight and narrow. The issue may not be weapons inspections, because those could be fixed, but simply showing Saddam it's in his best interest to behave. Or to show his underlings that loyalty could be bad for their health.

If he thinks Uncle Sugar might just pounce on him for giving aid and comfort to the extremists, or offering them the Bomb, he might just see the light. Pressure on other countries to isolate him can only help the American cause. Maybe there will be a coup.

There is one problem with running a bluff, of course. Eventually, unless the other guy folds, you have to show your cards.

That means that W has to be willing to invade Iraq if, at some point, it becomes obvious that his gambit is not working.

At this point, there are some signs that it is, in fact, working. Iraq has made noises about allowing U.N. inspectors back inside its borders. U.S. officials are talking with Saddam's minions.

It's far too soon yet to tell what's going to happen. We hope, for everyone's sake, the Bush bluff works.

But if it doesn't, don't expect Condeezza Rice to announce the war on "Face the Nation."

The Air Force and Navy will do that. And Saddam will be the first to get the news. — *Steve Haynes*



From my files: How did we look 30 years ago?

I don't know about you, but every now and then I have to clean out my files.

This spurt of ridding out brought to my attention an article I'd saved from 1970. Remember back then? Viet Nam war protests and flower children?

With all the 9-11 remembering that's been going on, I thought I'd share what was irritating us thirty years ago.

It somehow puts some things in perspective: there's always something to gripe and worry about and life does go on even when we're halfway convinced that it won't. Here's part of this article by an unknown author:

"There are those who claim that ours is a 'sick society;' that our country is sick; that we are sick. Well, maybe they're right.

"I submit that I am sick...and maybe you are, too.

"I'm sick of: (I'll summarize the list) — having policemen called 'pigs' while cop-killers are heroes; being told religion is the 'opiate of the people' while people want marijuana legalized; seeing 'anarchists, revolutionaries and criminal rapists canonized by commentators and having law enforcement condemned when those criminals are brought to justice'; being told pornography is free



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press while the Bible can't be read on school grounds; paying excessive taxes to build schools while students are tearing them down; having the courts turn criminals loose on technicalities while taking away my rights to defend my home and family; seeing entertainers extol pot-smoking while making fun of my moral standards; being told criminals should be 'understood and helped back to society;' being told that using napalm is wrong in Viet Nam but "I should understand the provocations" when Molotov cocktails are used in the USA; having my children exposed to nudity, homosexuality and drugs in movies; mob mentality.

"I am sick of those who say I owe them this or that because of the sins of my forefathers — when I have looked down both ends of a gun barrel to defend their rights, their liberties, and their families. I am sick of permissiveness. I am sick of the dirty, foul-mouthed, the unwashed. I am sick of the

decline of personal honesty, personal integrity, and human sincerity. Most of all, though, I'm sick of being told my country is sick when we have the greatest nation that man has ever brought forth on the face of the earth. Fully 50 per cent of the people on earth would willingly trade places with the most deprived, the most underprivileged among us.

"Yes, I may be sick, but if I am only sick, I can get well. I can also help my society get well — and help my country get well. You will find me at work, paying taxes, serving in the community where I live, expressing my anger and indignation to elected officials and speaking out in support of those officials, institutions and personalities who contribute to the elevation of society and not its destruction. You will find me contributing my time, money, and personal influence to helping churches, hospitals, charities... which have shown the true spirit of this country's determination to ease pain, suffering, eliminate hunger and generate brotherhood. But most of all, you'll find me at the polling place...to cast (my vote) for an America where people can walk the streets without fear."

How would this author feel today? Are we getting better, or are we still permissive while continuing to gripe and complain?

where to write

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Misunderstanding American values

In Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking Glass," Alice is sternly told by Humpty Dumpty, "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less."

Alice objected: "The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things." Humpty Dumpty corrected her: "The question is, which is the master — that's all."

On Sept. 11, Attorney General John Ashcroft, during an interview on National Public Radio with Juan Williams, responded to charges by many Americans concerned with civil liberties that he is violating the Bill of Rights.

"We're not sacrificing civil liberties," said Ashcroft. "We're securing civil liberties."

The usually trenchant Williams let that one pass. What would have been illuminating would have been to hear Ashcroft respond to Federal District Judge Robert Doumar, who has before him the case of American citizen Yaser Hamdi, who was taken into custody in Afghanistan and is currently being held in a military brig in Virginia.

"This case appears to be the first in American jurisprudence where an American citizen has been held incommunicado and subjected to an indefinite detention in the continental United States without charges... and without access to a lawyer," said Judge Doumar, a Ronald Reagan appointee.

Hamdi is being held, the Justice Department said, so that he can be interrogated about any information he may have about terrorists. Judge Doumar asked a Justice Department lawyer, "How long does it take to question a man? A year? Two years? A lifetime? How long?"

All that the man from the Justice Department said in response was: "The present detention is lawful."

This is securing civil liberties?

On the PBS's "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," Deputy Attorney General Larry Thomson answered a charge that many of the Justice



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Department's legal proceedings have been held in secret.

"Nothing that we have done has been enacted in secret. Every measure that we have undertaken is out in the open," said Thomson.

On Aug. 26, the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit unanimously ruled that the administration has illegally held hundreds of deportation hearings in secret.

Wrote Judge Damon Keith: "The executive branch seeks to uproot people's lives, outside the public eye, and behind a closed door. Democracies die behind closed doors. ... When government begins closing doors, it selectively controls information rightfully belonging to the people. Selective information is misinformation."

On Sept. 8, The Journal-Gazette in Fort Wayne, Ind., published, for the first time in nearly 20 years, a full-page editorial, Attacks on Liberty. In five long columns, the newspaper charged, "In the name of national security, President Bush, Attorney General John Ashcroft and even Congress have pulled strand after strand out of the constitutional fabric that distinguishes the United States from other nations.

"Actions taken over the past year are eerily reminiscent of tyranny portrayed in the most nightmarish works of fiction. The power to demand reading lists from libraries could have been drawn from the pages of Ray Bradbury's 'Fahrenheit 451.' ... The sudden suspension of due process for immigrants rounded up into jails is familiar to readers of Sinclair Lewis' 'It Can't Happen Here.'"

Is the word "tyranny" excessive with regard to

Bush and Ashcroft taking liberties with the Constitution? The Journal Gazette's editorial includes this quotation from James Madison in the Federalist Papers No. 47, "The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many... may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny."

The editorial also quotes — with regard to our government's executive branch accumulating more and more powers (shoving aside the separation of powers) — what Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis said in 1928:

"The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding."

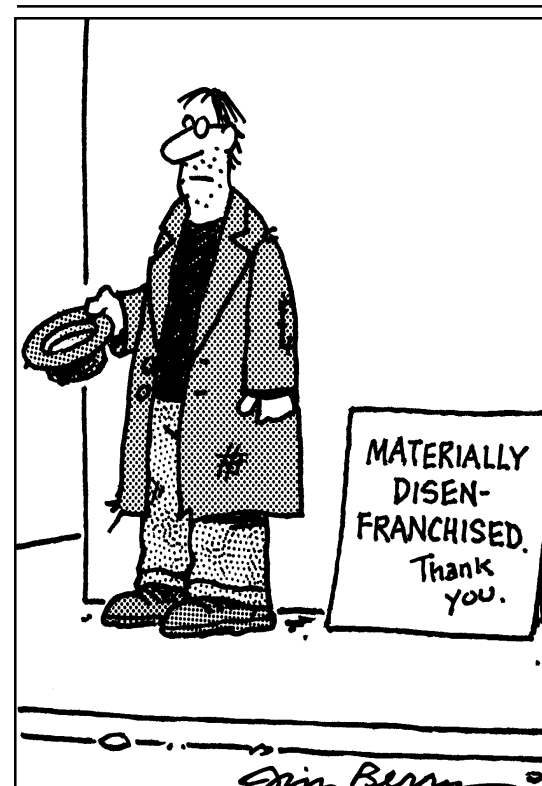
I hope the teachers in Fort Wayne open this editorial for discussion and debate in their civics classes, also bringing in the many vigorous assurances by the president, the defense secretary and the attorney general that everything they are doing to protect us is "within the bounds of the Constitution."

These days, it may take some courage for teachers to openly discuss whether we're preserving the actual liberties that we are fighting for against terrorists. The president did say on Sept. 12, 2001: "We will not allow this enemy to win the war by changing our way of life or restricting our freedoms."

I'm sure he meant that on Sept. 12, but I wish he would read that editorial in the Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette as to what's been happening since.

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.

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