SOCIETAL DUENDE

ANNA IROFF

Columbia University loves to promote diversity and points to the multitude of ethnic, religious, political, and other activist groups present on campus as evidence of its wide variety of students. I question, however, whether these clubs promote diversity in practice or actually lead to division between groups. My roommates and I recently attended a party at a local bar hosted by the Korean Student Association. Dates with members of the group were being auctioned to raise money to support local public schools. We are not members of the club, but Adam, our friend's brother, was being auctioned as a representative of Columbia's Student Council, and we went to watch and support him. Adam was the only non-Korean on the auction block. At least seventy-five percent of the audience was Korean; almost everyone else was just tagging along with friends. This scene is not unusual. The same organizations heralded as the foundation of campus diversity rarely attract a diverse group of members. Korean students join the Korean Student Association, Jewish students join campus Hillel, homosexuals join the Queer Alliance, and Republican voters join Columbia College Republicans. Our pride in having so many diverse groups fades when we realize that these groups are more homogeneous that we like to believe.

Richard Rodriguez sees the same trend involving the homosexual population in San Francisco. In his essay "Late Victorians," Rodriguez gives a personalized history of the gay community in California. He describes the attitude toward homosexuality in general, toward gay households and families, toward gay artists and interior designers, and the San Franciscan reaction to the AIDS epidemic. Rodriguez also understands and explains the cultural and socioeconomic boundaries that define the separate boroughs of San Francisco. He describes neighborhoods known as the "homosexual address in San Francisco" (126). Other neighborhoods are the "black and working-class parts of the city" (Rodriguez 122). Each neighborhood has its own identity, and its inhabitants rarely have close connections with people from outside areas. Vivian Gornick sees the same division between ethnicities in New York City. In "On the street: nobody watches, everyone performs," Gornick wanders through the city experiencing the rich variety of cultures. She recalls interactions with a writer on her block, two "tough old Jewish guys" on Greenwich Avenue, a black couple on Ninth Avenue, and many different kinds of people at various points along her journey (3). She is aware that individual "neighborhoods accumulate personalities" (18). She pins the fabulously wealthy to Park Avenue, the bourgeois to West End Avenue, and the remnants of bohemia to her area of Greenwich Village. Just like in San Francisco, New Yorkers stay within their neighborhoods and rarely venture out into relationships with people from other areas.

Human beings are by nature extremely xenophobic. People with a common trait or background tend to group together for support and comfort, and they rarely reach out to other groups. Each community is expected to take care of its own members. The Korean Student Association has its own parties for its members, and other clubs at Columbia have their own programs. Gornick seems to be the exception for her ability to blend in and involve herself with so many types of people. However, even she is shocked when she happens to spot "someone from [her] block . . . in another neighborhood and the first impulse of the brain is, What are you doing here?" (2) I had a similar reaction when I happened to see a classmate on my subway in the area outside Columbia campus. Both Gornick and I expressed our shock with surprised laughter and a friendly greeting before continuing on our way. Unfortunately, in other situations, this shock is more controversial and far less friendly.

Rodriguez experienced the transition of the San Franciscan homosexual community from a discreet lifestyle hidden in bars on Polk Street to a vibrant, flamboyant culture on Castro Street. As the population of gay men in California grew, the classic Victorian homes of the area were divided up into apartments for these non-traditional households. The growing population of homosexuals in San Francisco was not welcome in these areas. They were seen as "blockbusters" that were destroying "the discreet compromise" between the different neighborhoods of a "tolerant city" (Rodriguez 122, 126). As soon as a couple arrived and began to fix up their new home, the neighbors would express their shock at seeing gays outside their traditional neighborhood with an "anonymous reply . . . on the sidewalk out front: KILL FAGGOTS" (Rodriguez 123). This xenophobic response stems from common stereotypes and over-generalizations.

Rodriguez contends that "society's condemnation forced the homosexual to find his redemption outside nature"—namely, fashion and interior decorating. Homosexual interior decorators are attempting to "make up" for their sexual orientation by performing a useful service for the greater community. This is a prime example of Federico García Lorca's essay "Play and Theory of the Duende." Duende—the passion that appears in great art—is discovered only after great struggle and conflict. Art produced with duende reveals "the culture, the sensitivity of a people who discover man's best anger, bile, and weeping" (Lorca 58). The community of gay decorators, painters, dancers, and other artists described by Rodriguez has definitely seen the worst of human beings' anger and negativity. Finding and using duende to produce art is like "crying tears of blood" (Lorca 61). This is easily applicable to the artistic homosexual population of San Francisco, whose members have to bear people who pity them—"they don't seem real, poor darlings"—and dismiss them and their supporters as infantile "yuppies" (Rodriguez 127). At the same time, they have to deal with the terrors of the AIDS epidemic and the grief of losing their partners and friends to such a horrific death. All of this opposition has given the homosexual the duende

what they needed to succeed in the art world. This impulse to "challenge the rule of nature" is actually a pure expression of duende (Rodriguez 124).

Duende is not confined to interior decorating and visual art; "Duende is a power not a work" (Lorca 49). This power can be seen in the tremendous response of Californians to the AIDS crisis. The horrors of AIDS quickly spread throughout the entire city of San Francisco and enveloped the heterosexual as well as the homosexual community. In a united effort containing streaks of duende, the city came together to fight this evil. Rodriguez vividly defines the far-reaching effects of AIDS:

> [I]ts victims were as often black, Hispanic, straight. Neither were Charity and Mercy only white, only male, only gay. Others came. There were nurses and nuns and the couple from next door, co-workers, strangers, teenagers, corporations, pensioners. (133)

This type of communal duende appears whenever groups have each cried "tears of blood" and come together to fight a common evil (Lorca 61). Gornick relates several experiences that stand out for the deep connection formed between herself and inhabitants of different neighborhoods, both literal and figurative. One such example is the brief conversation she has with a "skinny, young, black" man in the middle of Times Square. A young boy had just committed suicide in front of them by lying down in the road in front of oncoming traffic. In emotional shock, Gornick turns to a member of the boy's community for support and explanation. This brief bond between the two worlds sprang up as a direct result of a common tragedy. Later, Gornick recalls the night that her neighbor's husband dies. Although they live in the same building, the two women never speak and appear to live in two different worlds. One night, Gornick sees the woman crying in the lobby in deep distress over the loss of her husband. In the face of such a crisis, the two very different women come together to support each other and to offer help and encouragement.

The Korean Student Association charity date auction showed duende on a smaller scale. Students from different groups all came together to raise money for public education. The current problems in the public school system affect everyone, and Columbia students rose above ethnic lines to support this worthy cause. In the face of a common enemy, divisions between clubs no longer mattered. My friends and I were welcome at the KSA party because it was supporting a mutual interest. Through our efforts to support public education, a community was formed that crossed cultural, religious, racial, and political boundaries. These new friendships, however brief, were filled with duende that will push the effects of our efforts higher than we could have hoped to achieve as individuals.

"Where is the duende?" asks Lorca (62). It is in the pure sense of community responsibility that drives all different types of people to overcome their xenophobia and learn "to love what is corruptible" (Rodriguez 134). It is what connects the people

walking with Gornick on the streets of New York and what pulls all the individual clubs at Columbia together to form a vivid diversity fair. It allows my roommates and me to feel accepted at the Korean Student Association's charity auction. And it drives the homosexual community in San Francisco to find its niche in the artistic sphere in California. Each community still maintains its own individual identity and territory, but a mutual bond of tolerance is formed whenever different groups face a common obstacle and put aside their disagreements to work together to produce a solution filled with societal duende.

WORKS CITED

Gornick, Vivian. *Approaching Eye Level*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996. 1-29.

Lorca, Federico Garcia. "Play and Theory of the Duende," *In Search of Duende*. New York: New Directions, 1995. 48-62.

Rodriguez, Richard. "Late Victorians." *The Best American Essays 1991*. Ed. Joyce Carol Oates. New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1991. 119-134.

LOOKING AT WAR, FISHING FOR COMMITMENT

JACOB RICHARDSON

On September 11, 2001, I was in math class, learning about polynomials. At approximately 9:30am, a student foreign to the class walked in and informed us that there was a national emergency and that a school meeting was to be held right at that moment. My teacher, an elderly man with large rectangular glasses, glared at the messenger and quickly announced that the rest of us were to stay in our seats until he finished his lecture. We were late for the meeting. Following the meeting and the infamous announcement, we spent the rest of the day with our eyes glued to the television, soaking in the latest information, watching the towers fall, over and over again. I had never been to New York City, so the images were just that: images. It was no different than watching *Independence Day* or *Terminator II*. The next day, we returned to our normal lives, to classes and books and sports and all of the other elements of boarding school life. I did not even call my mother. Certainly, the images of *9/11* were and remain highly disturbing, and I felt, along with the rest of the country, a mix of shock, horror, sadness, and sympathy for the victims. Yet life continued, and *9/11* became little more than a bad dream, a separate reality that did not require my participation or my commitment. Reactions such as mine to *9/11* have occasioned much thought among American critics. Leading intellectual Susan Sontag appraises this all-too-common phenomenon while postmodernist theorist Stanley Fish proposes a discourse within which we might analyze the effects of *9/11* and the war on terror.

In her essay, "Looking at War: Photography's view of devastation and death," Susan Sontag examines the effect of images of destruction upon non-combatants (in particular, the prosperous West), and argues against the use of images to interpret war. Images, she states, are too superficial and too easily altered: "Photographs of victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus" (Sontag 83). Though she criticizes the use of images, particularly in the media, Sontag also clearly discards the conservative view that horrible images desensitize, that "flooded with images of the sort that once used to shock and arouse indignation, we are losing our capacity to react" (97). If this is true, Sontag says, then the only solution is to limit the number of terrible images shown to the public, an answer that is both impractical and unethical. After all, she writes, "The horrors themselves are not going to abate" (97). However, while she criticizes the conservative view of media, Sontag also turns against the liberal left's argument that "public attention is steered by the attentions of the media . . . when there are photographs, the war becomes 'real'" (96). She pays special attention to the French: "This view is associated in particular with the writings of the late Guy Debord . . . and of Jean Baudrillard, who claims . . . that images, simulated realities, are all that exists

now; it seems to be something of a French specialty" (97). Carefully avoiding the word "postmodern," Sontag vigorously condemns the "French day-trippers," as well as the rest of the liberal intellectuals, for viewing horror without acting upon it. Having cast off the conservative and liberal views of the function of images of warfare, Sontag takes an alternate path. She believes that the "antidote to the perennial seductiveness of war" is "active mobilization," and that "a narrative seems likely to be more effective than an image" (97-98). Ultimately, she implies that the sympathy we feel when we listen to narratives necessitates a commitment, to take action either for or against the conflict. In the case of *9/11*, surely this would mean an intervention, and the intervention the United States has committed to, the highly debated war on terror, is undoubtedly a decisive action.

While Sontag argues against the simplification of warfare into simple images, Stanley Fish argues against the use of simple words as justification for war (particularly the war on terror) in his essays "Postmodern Warfare: the ignorance of our warrior intellectuals" and "Condemnation Without Absolutes." One of the immediate effects of *9/11* was the serious questioning of the tenets of postmodernism; several commentators, including Edward Rothstein, Julia Keller, and Roger Rosenblatt, complained that by denying the existence of objective truth, postmodernists "have weakened the country's resolve . . . [leaving] us with no firm basis for either condemning the terrorist attacks or fighting back" (Fish "Condemnation"). Fish's answer to such criticism is simple: the critics have misinterpreted postmodernism, and indeed, "postmodernists say no such thing" (Fish "Postmodern"). According to Fish, postmodernism does not prohibit a decisive response to the events of *9/11*; rather, it merely demands that such a response cannot be based on "a sense of right and wrong that no one would dispute and everyone accepts . . . [because] there are not such universally accepted values" (Fish "Postmodern"). Having established his defense of postmodernism, the usually controversial Fish readily takes a less radical tone, stating, "At times like these, the nation rightly falls back on the record of aspiration and accomplishment that makes up our collective understanding of what we live for" ("Condemnation"). However, Fish maintains his argument against absolutes of language, what Edward Said calls "false universals." According to Fish, "they stand in the way of useful thinking. . . . If we reduce the enemy to 'evil,' we conjure up . . . a wild-card moral anarchist beyond our comprehension and therefore beyond the reach of any counterstrategies" ("Condemnation"). Fish's solution lies in the postmodernist theory of cultural relativism; we must put ourselves in our enemies' shoes, "not in order to wear them as [our] own but . . . to have some understanding (far short of approval) of why someone else might want to wear them" ("Condemnation").

As one of postmodernism's leading literary theorists, Stanley Fish would indubitably fall into Sontag's category of the "French," the liberal left who "see war as a spectacle" (Sontag 97). Certainly, Fish, a pioneer of post-structuralist literary theory, is preoccupied with words, not actions. In a typically postmodernist fashion, Fish

dissects the language of his critics, particularly Rothstein's use of the words "objective" and "reliable." Indeed, by arguing that it is useless to justify actions with abstract words because there are no universal absolutes, Fish turns words into phantoms, language into a shadowy, ungraspable structure. He effectively impels the reader to participate in a purely postmodern practice: talking about how to talk about war. Even after posing the question, "What to do?" Fish remains as far removed from action as possible:

> You assert that your universal is the true one, even though your adversaries clearly do not accept it, and you do not attribute their recalcitrance to insanity or mere criminality . . . but to the fact . . . that they are in the grip of a set of beliefs that is false. And there you have to leave it, because the next step, the step of proving the falseness of their beliefs to everyone . . . is not a step available to us as finite situated human beings. ("Postmodern")

It is unclear how Fish's brand of theoretical practice can actually lead to any kind of real action (especially considering the global scope of war), and Sontag in particular would condemn Fish's passive discourse. For Sontag, pacifism is a moral failure.

However, Stanley Fish's analysis of words and insistence on avoiding simple and abstract concepts can easily be turned around to criticize Susan Sontag. When Sontag suggests that the sympathy one feels in reaction to war narrative is contingent upon ethical commitment, she uses surprisingly hedging language: "Could one be mobilized actively to oppose war by an image, as one might [by a narrative]? . . . Partly it is a question of the length of time one is obliged to look, and to feel" (98). By using the word "one," rather than "we" or "I," Sontag distances herself from her argument, making broad statements that do not require her involvement as she argues for personal engagement. Fish would likely urge Sontag to take her own advice and commit to her language. Sontag's final argument, that sympathy necessitates commitment, is surely a claim with which Fish would disagree; for him, there is no such thing as universal objectivity, and therefore, nothing is universally necessary or contingent upon something else. Ultimately, however, both writers urge their readers to see past simplistic statements, be they in language or photographs. Rather, they argue, when entering into a discourse on war, whether through images, narrative, events, or justifications, we need to maintain a rigorous engagement with ideas.

The question that remains, however, is whether or not sympathy necessitates commitment; why, in the aftermath of *9/11*, can I so easily sit back and watch the spectacle, engaging with the war on terror only through passive, meandering discussion with the likes of Stanley Fish? Susan Sontag would argue that my exposure to photographs and television is the reason. She states, "Memory freeze-frames; its basic unit is the single image" (87), and though they may be shocking and disturbing, memories engender no commitment. Since most of us saw only images of the falling

towers on television screens, Sontag would argue, we do not truly appreciate how real the events of *9/11* were to the people who experienced them first-hand; "We don't get it. We can't truly imagine what it was like. . . . Can't understand, can't imagine" (98). As a solution, Sontag promotes narrative as a means through which we can feel the appropriate sympathy that will necessarily demand action.

My work-study job as an audit-editor for Columbia University's Oral History Department's *9/11 Project* exposes me, almost daily, to the types of narratives Sontag advocates, the types of narratives that she states should necessitate an ethical commitment on my part. This, however, has yet to occur. Conversely, I find that even among the survivors and witnesses of *9/11*, commitment to or against the war on terror (the decisive action taken in response to the undoubtedly horrible event) is relatively uncommon. Interviews for the *9/11 Project* were made up of two sessions: the first session occurred within the first few months of *9/11*; the second took place approximately a year later. Though I am not legally allowed to quote from any of these interviews, the database will be functional and searchable within the year. Unsurprisingly, the immediate response to *9/11*—that is, the response of the survivors when they began to comprehend what had happened—was confusion and indecision, the exact opposite of the decisive commitment that Sontag states is contingent upon perceiving horrible events. Of course, we can attribute this reaction to shock, but even during the second session, a year later, most survivors state that they have been able to continue with the rest of their lives, that *9/11*'s effect upon them has lessened through time. Opinions on the war on terror are incredibly diverse: while some support it, others are decisively against it; still more remain either confused or apathetic. No one is necessarily, unavoidably moved towards a commitment or action, not the survivors nor those who witnessed the event first-hand.

As the memory of *9/11* fades, no matter how many photographs of dead soldiers, televised accounts of battles, or narratives from Iraq we are exposed to, commitment to the war on terror wanes as well. In her article, "Real Battles and Empty Metaphors," Susan Sontag confirms *9/11* as a past event, a memory that, if we follow her argument in "Looking at War," engenders no commitment. Sontag observes government's attempts to keep the memory of *9/11* (and therefore the support for the war on terror) fresh and alive:

> Ceremonies . . . are viewed as part of the continuing affirmation of American solidarity against the enemy. The comparison between Sept.11, 2001, and Dec. 7, 1941, has never been far from the mind. . . . However, I doubt that great commemorative ceremonies were felt to be needed to keep up morale and unite the country on Dec. 7, 1942. That was a real war, and one year later it was very much still going on. This is a phantom war and therefore in the need of an anniversary. ("Real Battles")

While Sontag attempts to explain poor attendance at *9/11* memorial services in the context of her proposal that the war on terror is not a real war, I heartily disagree with her reasoning. Sontag argues that the war on terror is a false war, a metaphorical campaign akin to wars on cancer, poverty, and drugs. "Real wars," states Sontag, "are not metaphors. And real wars have a beginning and an end. . . . This anti-terror war can never end" ("Real Battles"). While Sontag is accurate in her assessment of the war on terror, she admits, in her title, that the battles are real, and she can certainly not deny that real men and women, on both sides, are violently suffering and dying. As such, in accordance with her argument in "Looking At War," proper exposure to the suffering inherent in the war on terror should still engender our sympathy and necessitate our commitment. Returning to Sontag's example of poor attendance at *9/11* memorial ceremonies, I again disagree with Sontag's interpretation. Unquestionably, the government uses these services to create the illusion of overwhelmingly popular support for the war on terror. While these services (as well as early interventions such as the war in Afghanistan) were popular immediately after *9/11*, as time passed, people became skeptical of the commitment these types of ceremonies imply. This of course, does not mean that people have become any less sympathetic to the events of *9/11*, are any less upset, angry, and saddened at the memory of the events. Rather, though still sympathetic, citizens have become less and less willing to commit to a war that is still killing hundreds, even thousands. Ultimately, in the face of reality, of the first-hand experience that she so strongly advocates, Sontag's implication that sympathy absolutely necessitates commitment simply does not hold up.

Contrary to Susan Sontag's argument, sympathy does not absolutely necessitate commitment; however, remaining a passive spectator like Fish does not seem particularly palatable either. Indeed, if the relationship between sympathy and ethical commitment is not necessity, then what is it? Fish, of course, would argue that there is no relationship that can be universally understood. However, even Fish states that we are bound to our ethics, even if our moral code is not universal. In fact, in "Postmodern Warfare," he is careful to point out the legitimacy of ethics, arguing that it is possible to have ethical judgment and to assert moral truths, but we must also realize that these truths are impossible to prove and that our ethics are by no means universal. Fish writes, "Your belief or disbelief in postmodern tenets is independent of your beliefs and commitments in any other area of your life" ("Postmodern"). Certainly, this curious statement raises a significant question: Where, then, do these beliefs and commitments come from? Fish volunteers a simple answer that is unusually devoid of postmodernist theory: "The actor . . . begins in some context of practice, with its received authorities, sacred texts, exemplary achievements, and generally accepted benchmarks, and from within the perspective of that context judges something to be true or inaccurate" ("Postmodern"). Certainly, ethics come from increasingly varied sources; ultimately, however, as Fish sensibly argues, they should

always remain open to critical interpretation and collective debate among the community of action. However, once an ethical decision is reached, we must discard Fishian prevarication for Sontagian commitment. Though sympathy does not necessitate action, decisions are contingent upon commitment, and while it is all well and good to look sympathetically at war and fish passively for commitment, it is only by making decisions and following through with them that we can truly alter reality.

WORKS CITED

Fish, Stanley. "Condemnation Without Absolutes." *New York Times*. October 15, 2001. Leading Intellectuals Respond to Current Events. March 1, 2005. http://humanities.psydeshow.org/political/index.htm.

Fish, Stanley. "Postmodern Warfare: the ignorance of our warrior intellectuals." Harper's. July, 2002. *Find Articles*. March 1, 2005. http://www.findarticles.com

Sontag, Susan. "Looking at War: Photography's view of devastation and death." *New Yorker*. December 9, 2002: 82-98.

Sontag, Susan. "Real Battles and Empty Metaphors." *New York Times*. September 10, 2002. Leading Intellectuals Respond to Current Events. March 1, 2005. http://humanities.psydeshow.org/political/index.htm.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH MOVIES? MY GENERATION, CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND HIGHER EDUCATION

ALEX STERN

No one can deny that American culture has changed significantly over the last forty years. These cultural changes have been manifest in all arenas of American society, and there is no reason to expect that academia would be excluded. In each of their essays, Mark Edmundson, an English professor at the University of Virginia, and David Denby, a film critic for the New Yorker, address the impact of contemporary culture on the attitudes and behaviors of modern college students. Edmundson and Denby notice similar trends but come to conclusions that differ substantially in intensity and perspective.

In his essay "On the Uses of a Liberal Education: I. As Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students," Edmundson attacks the impact of modern consumer culture on the academic world. He believes students and teachers must resist this entertainment ethos and return to the concept of genius to overcome apathy. On the other hand, in "Homer I," David Denby writes from a different, perhaps more culturally revealing, perspective, having returned to Columbia University to retake the Core Curriculum. Denby too senses academic apathy in modern students, but he nevertheless points out similarities to his own experiences in college. More importantly, Denby's essay reveals a lot about cultural evolution through his discussion of his own progression from a heavy reader to a restless and fidgety one. As a current first-year college student, I can speak to the cultural motivations behind the behavior that my generation, as a whole, has exercised in academia. In a sense, the modern college student is taking off from the point where Denby has landed. We have grown up in the same culture that has turned him into a restless reader. It is not clear yet where we will go from here. And it is also not clear that our departure point is necessarily inferior to Denby's. Ultimately, it comes down to perspective. The authors differ significantly in perspective, but neither author views the issue from the perspective of the students themselves, and, as a result, all they can offer is speculation on our state of mind. My perspective, however, is not without its own flaws, being that I have an inherent desire to defend myself and my generation. Even so, I understand the positions of each author and do not find them wholly without merit.

In his essay, Edmundson represents the modern college student as an ironic, skeptical, laidback consumer, who never gets too excited about any intellectual idea and constantly looks to relate his studies to pop culture. Edmundson blames this degeneration on the "culture of consumption" that pervades the academic world (4). Edmundson writes how a university administration today can transform its campus into a "retirement spread for the young" in order to attract the most appealing students

(5). Furthermore, Edmundson contends that, contrary to the 1960s, when there was no doubt that the college, not the student, was in charge, now colleges market to students (6). Edmundson even goes so far as to call the current process "a buyer's market" (6). As a college freshman who very recently went through the college application process, I can confirm that it is anything but. While I understand that colleges are in constant competition for applications from the best students, the students are in a much fiercer competition to get into the best colleges. High school students don't stress over their class ranks, take SAT prep classes, and load up on AP classes and extracurricular activities because they want access to the finest gym equipment money can buy. Some of them are certainly so competitive because they think their financial future depends on the name written at the top of their college diploma. But the great majority of them are so competitive because they want access to the best academic resources and most distinguished professors. In short, they want an education.

Despite his bias, Edmundson aptly portrays the formation of the current culture and the indoctrination implemented on my generation. He admirably avoids the temptation to blame the students themselves for their perceived shortcomings, instead acknowledging the profound effect of his generation (which "let the counterculture search for pleasure devolve into a quest for commodities") on the current cultural outlook of modern college students—the children of Edmundson's generation (4). The idealism and radical enthusiasm of the baby-boomers, who constantly challenged the status quo, fizzled into cynical consumerism. The effect of this shift on my generation was both cultural and personal. Not only did it affect the culture that we were raised in—a culture that came to value material goods and the sound bite—but it also affected our view of cultural rebellion itself.

My parents went to Reed College, one of the most liberal and activist schools in the country, especially in the 1960s and '70s. I have heard every story about protests, marches, and students taking over college buildings. And that's great. The times certainly called for a response from the youth of America, and they delivered. But they didn't change the world. In the end, they came to accept the world that their parents had created. My dad is a federal prosecutor, and my mom is a college professor. Neither of them would be too happy to see any colleges taken over any time soon. My parents were part of a movement that was trying to change the system, and now they work for that system. What exactly does that say to me and my generation? It doesn't say you can't change anything so don't bother trying. But it does say be skeptical of radical ideas. So despite the stories they may hear, students now have no reason to challenge the culture, no reason as Edmundson puts it to "make a spectacle of themselves" (3).

Edmundson accurately describes how this culture was formed and how it has affected academic institutions, but I am not convinced that he understands the perspective of the student, and I find his conclusion, if it can be called that, about the

future of the university simplistic and inadequate. In his essay Edmundson covers one and only one aspect of the academic exchange at colleges—class discussion. He may be right that as a result of a culture that devalues brash comments, discussion has devolved from its heyday in the 1960s into "rebound teaching" in which the teacher takes a student's "weightless comment" and turns into a valid and interesting point about the subject (5). However, this in no way reflects a lack of intellectual curiosity. Cultural evolution may hinder full-fledged, highly enthusiastic discussion in class, but students still engage in the material through in class questions and comments (which may be timid but are nonetheless legitimate), papers, and individual reflection. As a result, I reject Edmundson's notion that the current academic atmosphere is molding nothing more than "one dimensional men and women . . . who live for easy pleasures" (11). Moreover, I find his assertion that "it is up to individuals and individual students in particular to make their own way against the current sludgy tide" (12) completely unrealistic. If Edmundson truly wants a return to the academic exuberance of the 1960s, he cannot expect it to come from a generation that was born twenty years later.

Edmundson's argument that something is wrong culminates in his discussion of the loss of the concept of genius. Edmundson believes that the idea of genius, which has been "denigrated" by the current academic culture, has the power to reverse the trends of intellectual apathy (11). He writes, "By embracing the works and lives of extraordinary people, you can adapt new ideals to revise those that came courtesy of your parents, your neighborhood, your clan—or the tube" (11). Edmundson seems to imply that what the current generation of college students lacks is ambition; in short, that we are resigned to a culture that values "the easy A," that we care only about making money without having to work too hard. Edmundson quotes Walter Jackson Bate in praising a concept of education in which we link ourselves to past geniuses "through what Keats calls an 'immortal free-masonry'" in order to be "what we most want and value" (11). I agree with Edmundson that connecting with and imitating the geniuses of the past can put us in a position to do great things, and I also agree that the modern college student may not embody this ideal, in large part, because of the skepticism our culture seems to have engrained in us. But rather than eliminating the pursuit of genius altogether, I think this skepticism has delayed our receptivity to the concept, forcing us to search harder and longer for it. It was Keats himself who said, "The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted." We are in that space between. We ought to be uncertain at this point in our lives. We ought to be skeptical. We ought to question those who we are told are geniuses. We should seek out that which inspires it and embrace it, but we're in no rush.

David Denby's contemporaries at Columbia in the early '60s were in a rush. Denby describes them as "preoccupied with Sartre and Kafka, Beethoven and Modern Jazz Quartet," creating a "snobbish version of Columbia" (40). As an undergraduate at

Columbia more than forty years lately, I can confirm that that era has passed. Denby raises some of the same issues as Edmundson when comparing his class to modern Columbia students. He describes something very similar to "rebound teaching" in his reference to "lockup" among the freshman in his Literature Humanities, or "Lit Hum" class (44). Denby talks about how the professor, Tayler, "would take what the student had said, however minimal, and play with it, enlarging it so it made some kind of sense, and then weave it together with the three or four intelligible words that someone else had said" (44). However, Denby is far less critical and even comments that he "often didn't know the answer" and felt anxious when he was in school (44). Moreover, Denby mentions the fact that Tayler's "rebound teaching" often gave students the confidence to participate in an actual full-fledged academic discussion (44). Denby's comments suggest that things aren't quite as bad as Edmundson's nearly apocalyptic position makes them out to be.

Of course, neither author argues from a precise or scientific standpoint. Both are bound by their highly subjective positions. Despite these obvious shortcomings and limitations, their perspectives do have unique advantages in analyzing academic and cultural changes. Both authors are well-educated, presumably in their forties or fifties, and highly attuned to the cultural changes they have witnessed in their lifetimes. However, they seem to have taken divergent career paths—Edmundson has stuck to his academic roots in becoming a professor, while Denby has seemingly launched himself into American pop culture by becoming a film critic. As a result, Edmundson is highly critical, sheltered by an academic, somewhat arrogant vantage point, while Denby has chosen a profession that allows him, in a way, to criticize the culture from within.

From this perspective, Denby offers an interesting account of the cultural evolution that has taken place in the last forty years and the impact it has had on the attitudes of the typical college student. Upon his return to Columbia University to retake Lit Hum and Contemporary Civilizations, Denby recounts the days of his youth and college years, when he "would fall into a novel for hours" sitting in bed in his dorm room (47). Now in his late forties, Denby describes his lack of "discipline for serious reading," his concentration wandering "after twenty pages" (36). Denby himself seems to have devolved in parallel with the culture. He explores the "culprit" of this descent, considering and then dismissing the notion that all the movies he's seen in the last thirty years have "broken the circuits" (47). Instead Denby suggests the theory that his "life had grown much more complex" to account for his daydreaming (47). I offer another theory. I would argue that Denby's lack of enthusiasm for reading has less to do with his own development into adulthood than with the development in culture that has occurred since his youth. In my opinion, Denby was on the right track when he contributed his literary downfall to movies. He grew up in a culture that valued literature and reading for hours. My generation has grown up in a different culture—

a culture where children and adults alike are sucked in by television and movies and have trouble truly delving into a book, especially when it's required reading.

Edmundson is right. In considering the question of why the modern college student is so different now than he or she was forty years ago, the answer is most definitely the culture. Culture has changed, as it inevitably does and will in the future. Many like Edmundson believe that it has changed for the worse, especially in the academic realm. Maybe Edmundson will prove prophetic. Maybe the skepticism and apparent indifference he describes do signify a serious problem with the academic future of our country. Maybe they are the beginning of the end. But maybe what's really coming to an end is not intellectual curiosity or genius, as Edmundson concludes. We still care about ideas. They're just different ideas. We may not be interested in revolution, but that doesn't mean we won't change the world. We may be more concerned with *Pulp Fiction*, Kurt Vonnegut, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers than with *Macbeth*, Aristotle, and Mozart, but is there anything wrong with that? Edmundson's utopian vision of an academic world where thirty passionate students develop a Freudian interpretation of *Survivor* is a fantasy. In its place sits a generation of individuals who are, at worst, jaded, cynical, and bored and, at best, intelligent, ambitious, and critical. It may take more for us truly to get excited about an idea, but when we do, we can be just as intense and passionate about it as our predecessors, though we may not show it. Maybe we haven't lost the concept of genius as Edmundson affirms; maybe we're just looking for it in different places and with a little more discretion.

WORKS CITED

Denby, David. *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996. 29-51.

Edmundson, Mark. "On the Uses of a Liberal Education: I. As Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students." *Harper's*. Sep. 1997: 39-49.

FROM SCUFFLING TO CHANNEL-SURFING: AMERICAN POLITICS IN THE TELEVISION AGE

JUDE WEBRE

In the final section of her essay "Insider Baseball," Joan Didion, after a wide-ranging discussion of the American political media, takes a curious detour to visit 544 Camp Street in New Orleans. Historically, the address was connected with Lee Harvey Oswald in the months before he assassinated President Kennedy, as well as being the site of numerous other subversive political activities. What seems at first like a non-sequitur in her narrative, however, upon closer examination develops into a carefully crafted image of the state of politics as Didion sees it. She asserts that the people who had gathered at 544 Camp Street, including and perhaps most of all Oswald, "had taken the American political narrative seriously. . . . They had argued about it, fallen out over it, had hit each other over the head with pistol butts over it" (85). These subversives represent a passionate and combative engagement in politics that Didion sees missing in the consensus narratives that she critiques in the rest of her essay. When she arrives at 544 Camp, however, the building is gone, replaced by a federal courthouse. Nevertheless, she lingers listening to two anti-abortion protesters, described like grotesques of an old political type, the soapbox orator. A young man on a makeshift platform describes "unwanted babies being put down the Disposal and 'clogging the main sewer drains of New Orleans,'" while the woman with him lip-syncs to a tape, singing "Satan–you're the liar" (85).

Into this eerie scene enters a presidential motorcade on its way to the nearby Republican convention. With the image of Lee Harvey Oswald still lingering in our minds, the scene as Didion describes it has seemingly deliberate overtones of the Kennedy assassination. With Didion on the corner watching, police and Secret Service line the streets, while she notices "a man in uniform on a roof" (86). As the "entirely and perfectly insulated" motorcade passes, Didion reflects on the moment, expressing the central theme of her essay:

> I stood for a while on Camp Street, on this corner that might be construed as one of those occasional accidental intersections where the remote narrative had collided with the actual life of the country, and waited until the motorcade itself . . . a mechanism dedicated like the process for which it stood only to the maintenance of itself, had passed. (86)

Unlike Kennedy's motorcade in Dallas, this motorcade passes safely, and obliviously. The political process, and the media which aid and abet it, are perfectly insulated from both the combative, subversive elements and the ideological grotesques that linger past and present in the "melancholy of Camp Street" (Didion 86). This is Didion's central

critique of what has become of presidential politics at the time of her writing in 1988. The democratic process, which she defines in the ideal as "the general mechanism affording citizens of a state a voice in its affairs" (49), has been replaced by a profoundly disconnected process in which media professionals, complicit with those in power, craft a political narrative remote "from the actual life of the country" (Didion 49-50). Her essay demonstrates in rich detail how this narrative is constructed and controlled, but I find myself wondering what for Didion is the "actual life of the country," and why the mechanisms of democracy have become less combative and more disconnected from those outside of the political class.

The actual life of the country, or the empirical as Didion formulates it elsewhere, is in fact largely absent in her essay. The outsiders whom she describes are in one place quintessentially romantic outsiders whom Didion knew in her youth, "the people with whom I had preferred to spend time in high school" (47). Instead of attending elite schools and pursuing careers in Washington, these people "hung out in gas stations" (47), were drafted, ran off to Carson City to get married, and lived in tract houses on the social and economic edge of America. At other points in the essay, the actual America is a motley collection of types who appear at the fringe of political events Didion attends on the campaign trail. These include a slightly unhinged man at a Dukakis rally, some kids contrarily shouting for Jesse Jackson at another Dukakis event, and the aforementioned anti-abortion protesters. Didion also cites a few statistics to demonstrate the level of apathy among citizens. She notes that "only slightly more than half of those eligible to vote in the United States did vote in the 1984 presidential election" (50). She also points out the lack of viewership of political conventions, as eighty percent of television households did not watch these conventions in 1988. Besides these meager examples, though some are evocative and colorful to be sure, it is hard to locate in her essay a substantive picture of what the empirical realities of America look like. They are largely assumed to be familiar to the reader, or are invoked rhetorically in contrast to the insiders of the political class. In a sense, her outsiders remain in the rhetorical realm of "out there," without any evident reporting or research to bring them into better focus.

But if we allow for Didion's broad-stroke portrait of the disaffected citizenry, how does she account for the change in the process? As she sees it, the defining moment when combative politics began the movement towards consensus centrist politics was the Democratic Convention of 1968, when street protests outside the convention disrupted the attempt at order going on within. This event exists in the same realm as the Camp Street brawlers: a time when "the process was put to a popular vote on the streets of Chicago" (72). Rather than feeling apathetic, she implies, people outside of the political class were engaged and active in having their say. As a result, "it was decided that what had occurred could not be allowed to recur" (Didion 72). The power and motive behind this change is described thus by Didion:

> David S. Broder, in *The Washington Post*, offered this compelling analysis of the power these "reforms" in the nominating procedure had vested not in the party leadership, which is where the power of choice ultimately resides, but in "the existing communication system," by which he meant the press, the medium through which the party leadership sells its choice. (72)

Broder's analysis describes the multiplication of party primaries, and a resulting proliferation in coverage of those primaries, which leads to the state of affairs Didion portrays: vapid, ceremonial political conventions devoid of any real contention. Didion implies in the phrase "it was decided" that the powers-that-be, presumably the party leaders, decided to complicate the primary process in order to prevent unrest like that at the '68 Convention. In so doing, they invested the media with the power to dumb down debate to the point that the leaders' choice is the only choice. But it is difficult here to identify how much of this change was intended or planned by those leaders, and how much was a larger evolution of politics and technology taking place beyond specific agency. Did the party leaders and the complicit media create this new process, or did they adapt to a new technological landscape?

Susan Sontag, in her 2002 essay "Looking at War," proposes two theories about the impact of the media in general, and television specifically, on the viewing public. In several ways, Sontag corroborates Didion's thesis of a pervasive media narrative leading to a disconnected citizenry. On the one hand, Sontag argues, "public attention is steered by the attentions of the media" (96). Wherever the media tell us to look becomes the reality we know. But simultaneously, the sheer saturation of these images leads to a deadening effect. So while an event is made more real by its coverage, the overall glut of images leads to a lesser impact. Sontag further defines the nature of this image-glut as an integral aspect of the medium of television: "television is organized to arouse and to satiate, by its surfeit of images. Image-glut keeps attention light, mobile, relatively indifferent to content" (96). Thus, in relation to Didion's subject, the political media craft their banal narrative, creating "reality" for the public. But the narrative is banal, lacking "a more reflective engagement with content" as Sontag puts it, precisely because of television's tendency to glide over meaningful content (96). This state of affairs is news as entertainment, what Sontag calls "a mature style of viewing . . . and a prerequisite for dismantling traditional forms of party-based politics that offer real disagreement and debate" (97). In her mind, a reality does exist independent of the images, but the "sense of reality" has been eroded, and the public has been increasingly reduced to mere spectators.

In general, Didion and Sontag would seem to agree on the general nature of the change in political engagement. With the rise of television coverage of politics, there has been a movement away from the scuffling and disagreement of earlier forms of party politicking. The public are increasingly spectators of a process that has been leached of real issues by television's tendency to gloss. While Sontag's emphasis is

more on the technological effect of television, Didion details the specific construction of narratives. But for both writers, the change in medium has been decisive in the change in political engagement. However, on either side of the medium are the powerful and the public. Their roles in the transformation of politics since 1968—in crafting and consuming the narrative—are vague and hard to locate in Didion's essay, but I would argue they are far more decisive than Didion's emphasis on the banal narrative.

Another way to consider the issue is to see that politics is ultimately about winning—as much as in sports or the competition of brands. Whoever crafts the more successful or evocative message will convince the most voters to support them and confer the power of governance. In her own nostalgia for the battles of conventions past, Didion misses this larger dynamic—the dynamic of politicians doing what it takes to convince voters through the media. Those disaffected figures of the other America she portrays are not as important as mildly or passionately engaged voters, many of whom might hang out in gas stations and live on the fringes. Successful politics might require successful propaganda.

In "Slavery, Ideology, and Race in the United States of America," Barbara Fields proposes a critical and useful definition of propaganda, as defined in relation to her central theme of ideology. For Fields, ideology is "the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence, through which people make rough sense of the social reality they live and create from day-to-day" (110). Ideologies are embedded in social relations, and are used by people to interpret their positions in collective bodies such as towns, churches, the military, or political parties. Fields makes the key point that while an ideology is integral to a particular group and thoroughly plausible to those inside the group, to outsiders the same ideology might seem irrational or implausible. Propaganda then is an argument, often political, directed at a group's ideology to achieve a certain end. Fields argues that "the most successful propagandist is one who thoroughly understands the ideology of those to be propagandized" (111). She provides the example of Southern secessionists in the Civil War, who appealed to non-slave-owners' ideology of self-determination and independence in order to rally their support to fight for slavery in the name of protecting the Southern way of life. In the world of presidential politics that Didion describes, Fields' definition of propaganda offers another way to read the tactics behind the images in the banal narrative.

The crux of Didion's critique of the banal narrative is that while America faces a whole range of real issues and problems—the empirical reality of the country—the political class creates and debates a set of issues that nostalgically refer to an America that no longer exists. She describes Dukakis' use of a snowblower to symbolize an "amusing frugality and . . . admirable husbandry of resources . . . derived from some half-remembered idea of what citizens of this vanished America had laughed at and admired" (78). Similarly, George Bush obscures his wealthy Connecticut upbringing by invoking the struggle of his young idyllic family to establish itself in 1950's small-

town Texas. Both candidates are crafting paeans to a gentler and safer time in an America of simple, homespun values. For Didion, "what was at work here seemed on the one hand a grave, although in many ways a comfortable, miscalculation of what people in America might have as their deepest concerns in 1988" (78). I would argue that rather than a miscalculation, grave or otherwise, this imagery is specifically calculated to capture a maximum of votes.

In using nostalgic imagery, the campaigns create propaganda that attempts to capture some important ideologies among the voting population: a desire for safety among a suburban middle class that feels threatened by crime; a belief by union laborers that hard work and honesty are duly rewarded; or a longing among churchgoers for a return to a moral world before pornography and hedonism were rampant. One could analyze the campaign narratives as specifically directed at particular groups with strong ideologies, and the groups given preference would likely correspond to those who are most organized to vote, such as churches, unions, and the elderly. The fact that Didion finds these narratives so disingenuous and empty might also reflect her position as an outsider to the ideologies at which the narratives are directed. Within her social sphere, represented by the well-heeled liberal Californians who support Jesse Jackson in her essay—or perhaps the readers to whom she directs her assumptions about outsiders—these ideologies seem foolish and disconnected from present circumstances. But for the calculations of political strategy, where every vote is equal regardless of logical consistency, in these ideologies lies the power to move voter blocs in order to win election.

Didion's essay overstates the influence of a callow political media in draining the democratic process of citizen participation and substantive issues. As Sontag's essay demonstrates, the shallow nature of the television medium and the accelerated glut of images over the last thirty-five years have led to a spectator public with far more interest in affecting images than substantive engagement and debate. Equally, Didion, for all of her beautifully crafted images and architectural sentences, fails to explore what is a vital element in any discussion of political campaigns: the game of politicians trying to move voters by any possible means to vote for them. Central to that process is ideology, as Fields defines it, embedded in social groups. While I personally agree with many of Didion's democratic ideals and her desire for a more substantive political process, I think that her arguments reflect her own kind of nostalgia for a by-gone era: the street politics of the Sixties. Moreover, her lack of in-depth reporting about the outsiders she mythologizes reveals the romantic assumptions about the public of her own liberal intellectual milieu. The 1968 Democratic Convention was indeed a profound rupture in American political history, but its implications are not so simple as Didion's dissent portrays it.

WORKS CITED

Didion, Joan. "Insider Baseball." *After Henry*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992. 47-86.

Fields, Barbara Jeanne. "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America." *New Left Review* 181 (May-June 1990): 95-118.

Sontag, Susan. "Looking At War." *New Yorker*. 9 Dec. 2002: 82-98.

RETURNING TO BOSTON

GEOFF AUNG

As I emerged from the T station, the year's first snowfall greeted my face. I was back in Harvard Square, where I had lived the preceding summer while interning at the Democratic National Convention. I was pleased to return, but I knew it was to a different place. Out of Town News, Harvard Yard, the Quad, Felipe's Taqueria: none of them were the same—the landscape had changed. The musicians had left the streets to find a lonely coffeehouse mic. The LaRouche proselytizers had left to hibernate for another four years. The tee shirts and sandals of summer sun had retreated in the face of winter's austere countenance. My political innocence was gone, as well. Two weeks ago, the election had fallen upon me with all the heavy weight of reality. Challenged by the outcome, I was a changed person looking at a changed landscape: over everything, an inch of fresh snow.

I walked slowly to my friend's dorm where I would be spending the weekend. Quiet lingered in the air. I could hear the soft crunch of New Balance on slush. It was as if the election had hastened the arrival of winter, as if the capitol of liberal politics was eager to retreat to the safety of the fireside. There, in oak-paneled studies with bookcases, thinking citizens would insulate themselves from the anti-intellectual New America, thumbing endlessly through back copies of the *New Yorker*, mourning past evocations of hope and possibility. I peered through the humble Puritan windowpanes along Dunster Street, convinced that those citizens were in each room. I watched my breath disappear in the falling snow, wondering where American borders really lie.

Byron E. Shafer opens his book *Bifurcated Politics* by admitting, "Even in an era when it is widely viewed as an institution in decline, the national party convention retains a certain immediate, raw, and visceral fascination" (1). I can sympathize. As a young politico working the convention, being in such a high-level political environment was exciting. I spoke to Jesse Jackson and James Carville on the phone. Terry McAuliffe (T-Mac to those in the know) was constantly in my midst. I shook hands with Barack Obama and Larry David, and I took a picture with George McGovern. Teresa Heinz Kerry signed my poster. I patiently awaited my CNN interview with cellphone in hand and credentials around my neck.

What I was less apt to recognize was the "institution in decline" part of the experience. We the convention committee (in order to form a more perfect union), perched atop a skyscraper looking down on the Old State House, would hear about Mayor Menino's problems with the police union. We would hear that Boston was going to lose—rather than gain, as was originally believed—significant sums of money on the convention. We would hear the complaints of Bostonians: too much traffic, altered public transportation, increased terrorist threat. We would hear, but we weren't

really listening. After all, they, the complainers, were on the outside. They couldn't understand that it was all necessary. What did they know?

In her essay "Insider Baseball," Joan Didion speaks to my experience. Writing about the Dukakis campaign of 1988, she considers the "assumption" of people within politics that "the narrative should be not just written only by its own specialists but also legible only to its own specialists" (50). Part of me thought that since I had an ID card that said DNC 2004 on it, I was more qualified to assess the convention. Those on the other side of the glass didn't really know what they were talking about.

Didion also details a scene in which Dukakis plays catch with one of his campaign aides on an airport tarmac. Didion writes:

> What we had in the tarmac arrival with ball tossing, then, was an understanding: a repeated moment witnessed by many people, all of whom believed it to be a setup and yet most of whom believed that only an outsider, only someone too "naïve" to know the rules of the game, would so describe it. (65)

Damned if I would be naïve. A friend of mine who had worked on the Dean campaign in New Hampshire (and was now in Vietnam on a fellowship) complained about the unnecessary level of control and choreography that he saw going into the convention. I told him it was all necessary: the lighting cues, the careful choice of music, the placement of the delegations on the floor, the speakers' obligation to submit speeches beforehand for approval. "We can't risk a disorganized appearance," I insisted, "there is too much at stake." What we needed, I believed (not uniquely, I might add), was to project an image of unified professionalism that would dispel, among other things, notions of a party torn by an extraordinarily divisive primary season. John Kerry was our man, and he would deliver us from George W. Bush's dark presidency. Any calls for a more natural political forum misunderstood political strategy. Those who made those calls were, by definition, "outsiders."

The narrative of insiderism that the convention unwittingly created proved to be destructive to its appeal. A bubble—dreaded in theory, embraced in practice—surrounded all things DNC. I remember on Thursday night, the last night of the whole spectacle, my friend Eric, who was interning for CNN, was able to get me into a party at the Roxy. Maroon 5 played the event. In the middle of the set, John Edwards—sleeves rolled up, tie loosened, mic in hand—appeared onstage in front of a dramatic green light as a fog machine did its thing. He looked heroic, almost godlike. He engaged the crowd: "This may look like a concert, this may feel like a concert, and this may sound like a concert." The crowd quieted. We waited for his words. "But this is a movement." We erupted. We were, of course, ready to cheer.

Even this memory—one I recall so fondly—has paled since the election. Whereas I originally experienced it in terms of Shafer's raw, visceral fascination, now I can't help but see the shadow of decay about it, evidence of a declining institution. There I

stood with two different credentials (one for the Fleet, one for the Roxy) in the plastic sleeve on my "Democrats Win It in the Field" lanyard, supposedly affirming some sort of "movement." Was this the field? Was this where we were supposed to win it? After leaving one closed event, I was now at another closed event, both of which had further levels of exclusivity within them. Even worse, we—supposedly the party of the First Amendment—feared protests so much that we restricted peaceful demonstrations to an aptly named "Free Speech Zone" festooned with nets to "protect the delegates." On the closing night of the convention, I stared as hundreds of police donned storm trooper riot gear and clogged the surrounding streets.

We assumed the movement Edwards referred to must have been some sort of popular uprising against the Republicans. But surely velvet ropes and nightsticks do not comprise a popular movement. In Boston, Massachusetts, the seat of leftist American politics, America's foremost liberal party managed to hold a convention detested by the city's citizens. Having always believed the Democrats to be a populist alternative to the stodgy GOP, I associated them with popular appeal. After all, Jules Witcover calls his history of the Democrats *Party of the People*. But the character of their convention—our convention, as it were—denied any such claim. In the end, far from anything I could have imagined earlier, exclusion may have been the name of the game. It certainly was at all of the satellite events: the Media Party in south Boston, the Rock the Vote party at the Avalon, the delegate parties throughout the week, the closing party at the Roxy. A prevailing insiderism dominated what was supposed to be our chance to show the country we were not a party of distant intellectual elites. It reminds me of my high school history teacher's favorite phrase: "Lost opportunity."

The parties, the symposiums, the caucuses, the book signings, the balloons, the music, the traffic, the t-shirts: all this, and for what? Conventions simply boost a general election season by approving a candidate already chosen. In reality, the DNC is little more than an extravagantly expensive gas station on the campaign trail. How expensive? The *Boston Globe* set the estimated cost of the convention at $95 million (Klein). Is it really justifiable to put that much money into such a weak institution, an institution whose own biographer considers it to be declining? If the convention were to serve a more pivotal purpose, such funding might be excusable; but to throw so much money at ratifying a foregone conclusion seems downright irresponsible.

The convention as an institution has not always been so weak. It was not always like today's incarnation, essentially a well-dressed figurehead strutting around with a practiced air of self-importance. In fact, political conventions began in 1832 as a reaction against the same elite class that today's conventions serve to propel. It was the nation's first third party of note, the Anti-Masons, which introduced the concept of a national political convention. In *Party of the People*, Witcover writes:

> [The Anti-Mason convention] was born of a case of the suspected murder of one William Morgan, of Batavia, New York, a former member of the secret Society of

> Freemasons who disappeared as he was about to publish an exposé of the society. Attempts to block its publication created demands for an investigation and ultimately a clamor against Masons in public office, culminating in a call for a convention to nominate a presidential candidate. (143)

Ironically, that convention nominated William Wirt, a rather uninteresting candidate who specifically stated his indifference to Masonry, to stand against Masons Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay (143). However, much like today's third parties, the Anti-Masons were less interested in a viable campaign than in national attention to their issues of import. As Shafer writes, "The quickest route to national stature was a presidential campaign, but the new party could hardly launch such a campaign with the dominant nominating device to that date, a caucus of party members in the U.S. Congress, because it possessed none" (9). From that point on, the national convention would replace the party caucus as the primary theater of presidential nomination. How strange it would be for the Anti-Masons to see the national convention, this child of theirs, existing today on the lifeblood of exclusivity and police security.

In terms of power, 1832 marked the beginning of a period that would last until 1952, at which point the convention began to look quite like the current ones. Within this period, the convention exhibited great power, deposing numerous sitting presidents, including John Tyler, Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, and Chester Arthur. It also chose dark-horse candidates like James K. Polk (Shafer 15). Convention discourse centered mostly around the nominee in question, with some conventions featuring extended debate on whom to choose. But the decline of local political parties, as exemplified by New Deal legislation, had prepared the original convention character for its last hurrah in 1952. Shafer writes, "The Democratic convention of 1952 was the last of the classic old-style party gatherings and featured behavior which in its essence would have been familiar to convention participants a hundred years before" (33). He continues: "The product of this politicking, the candidate, had entered no primaries and engaged in no direct campaigning prior to his nomination" (33). Every convention thereafter demonstrated the shift of the nomination away from the convention itself and into the primary season, creating a movement towards today's condition in which the convention serves only to approve a decision already made.

That shift accelerated in 1968 due to the tumultuous Democratic convention in Chicago, at which tens of thousands of protestors took their dissent to the streets. Their calls for bringing the political process nearer to the people ushered in an era of reform politics that saw the proliferation of the primary season, one perceived solution to the problem of high-level political bureaucracy. As a result, the convention evolved into the weakened form it holds to this day (Shafer 42). Stripped of its original nominating function, the convention began to look more like a risk than an opportunity. The two election cycles of the 1970's demonstrated this idea. Shafer writes:

> In 1972, a Democratic convention featuring deep divisions between the nominee and his challengers and between the nominee and some of his own delegates was paired with a Republican convention featuring little evident conflict in either area. Yet only four years later, it was the Republican convention which manifested the major candidate conflict, along with exacerbating issue divisions, while the Democratic convention escaped candidate splits entirely and surfaced only minor issue conflicts to fuel its limited struggles. (150)

In both 1972 and 1976, the party that presented a more unified convention won the general election. This contrast between unity and disunity, unity triumphing each time, proved to be a lesson politicians would not soon forget. With the potential for a divisive primary season constantly threatening to produce an image of a party in conflict, conventions began to focus energy on polished appearance rather than honest debate. Disunity, an ominous sign of weakness, took on the characteristics of a risk to avoid at all costs.

For better or for worse, it seems the Democrats know their history. The 1970s conventions set a precedent—unity at all costs—that the national parties emulate to this day. One can imagine T-Mac and convention CEO Rod O'Connor sitting in a well-lit office late at night pondering the official convention slogan. America 2004: The Democratic Convention, or America 2004: A Stronger America? The differences are subtle, even aesthetic. But by July 26, the message had changed from the former to the latter. There could be nothing weak about this convention; history warns as much. "Strong" necessarily conjures images of unity, for strength is predicated on organized support. At the expense of a real political forum, we proceed with this historically fortified notion of strength, for we have learned the lessons of the '70s. Certainly "unschooled" has never been an accusation leveled at Democrats. Nevertheless, the Golden Age of conventions is dead, and even the current age declines. Surely Swinburne waxed rhetorical when he asked, "Is not Precedent a king of men?"

Now that the post-election pall had descended and winter had frozen over Harvard Square, I began to reevaluate my memories. After all, "we" had lost. This summer, good little Democrat that I was, I probably would have described the color of the convention as some sort of fluorescent blue. Now I might side with the dreaded gray. Neither red nor blue, Republican nor Democratic, just—gray. Perhaps my experience of disillusionment is simply a function of election depression. Or perhaps the election has been my apple, and I have eaten of it. Either way, I recall feeling like we had something—whether it was momentum, passion, or truth on our side, I'm not sure. But there was something that has faded now.

The November issue of *Harper's*, which was released before the election, aptly demonstrates the Democrats' obsession with presenting a united front. Ironically, it is

Luke Mitchell's essay about the Republican convention that accomplishes this, even as he lets the Democrats off the hook. He writes, "Whereas Kerry had struggled to create meaning—no matter how stupid, dishonest, or clichéd that meaning was—Bush's team seemed actively to be plotting its demise" (67). Mitchell treats Kerry kindly, keenly aware of the approaching Tuesday. Mitchell continues, considering the discussion that took place in the Garden:

> These were half-narratives, made up of questions so preposterous as to end discussion and possibly even subvert our understanding of what it means to mean something. . . . The real message, radiating from the podium and echoing through the rafters, was that there was no message" (67).

It is not difficult to imagine a covert Luke Mitchell marooned in The Red Sea, subconsciously holding his nose while straining his ears to catch the words between the echoes. The fact that he couldn't decipher any message suggests that the Republicans know their historical precedents, too: Organization at the expense of meaning.

But now that the election is over and all may speak freely, one must wonder if Mitchell would still excuse Kerry. Perhaps not—I, for one, with hindsight shaded by the election, find his appraisal of the Republicans quite applicable to the Democrats. The Dems' platform professes "a profound optimism about our future—an optimism that springs from our great faith in America" (Strong 1). In terms of gritty policy-talk that one might expect from a political platform, the document sounds more like a stump speech. It avoids confronting Iraq, turning that question instead into a section called "Strengthening Our Military." It says, "We will add 40,000 new soldiers—not to increase the number of soldiers in Iraq, but to sustain our overseas deployments and prevent and prepare for other possible conflicts" (13). Worse, the title of the platform, the overall message, amounts to more of a non-message: "Strong at Home, Respected in the World." Who can argue with such a stance? Is it a stance? The statement is eternally malleable: Anyone could mold it to his or her particular ideology. It is both isolationist and internationalist. It is both militant and gradualist. In essence, it is both liberal and conservative. It draws no lines, because it comes down on the side of no one. Even as the Dems tried to learn from history's convenient lessons, they came up short. The Democratic message tried to be all things to all people—and still the electoral map bleeds endlessly. Perhaps we spoke directly to no one. Such is the risk of a politics of caution. In my own words, "There is too much at stake."

Mitchell realizes that risk. In a later passage in his essay, he discusses the effort of the Republican convention to appear completely inoffensive, an effort I found similar to the Democrats'. He tries to recount the atmosphere of the Garden to a friend, who refers him to E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. "It's the Marabar Caves," his friend tells him. Mitchell notes, "He was almost impossibly right." Forster describes the caves:

> Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. "Boum" is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or "bou-oum," or "ou-boum," utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce "boum." (68)

In a literal sense, the Marabar Caves recall to me the first night of the convention, when I was sitting very high up in the Fleet Center, straining my ears to hear the Clintons. The echoes were definitely overwhelming at times, and I missed much of what was said. But Mitchell cites Forster to get at something deeper. What Mitchell is concerned about is the conscious decision to sterilize discourse, to the extent that blowing one's nose and expressions of hope both sound like "boum." Both parties are guilty of this transgression; most likely the Republicans just play the game better. Forster realizes this, too. In the same passage, he writes, "Echoes generate echoes." Today, echoes generate elections.

As I approached Kirkland House, my friend's Harvard dorm, I took my earbuds out so I could concentrate on the directions he had given me. First gate on the right, proceed into the courtyard, turn left, look for the dining hall. No one had shoveled the walkway in the courtyard yet; I left footprints in the snow as I walked towards the door. Through the tall windows, I could see chandeliers and crowded tables. It looked warm inside.

Months before, we had visited this building, often late at night, so that my friend (who also interned with me) could show me where he would be living for the next three years of college. Another friend of his was spending the summer in the next house over, Eliot House, so we would go there, too, and we would have long political discussions in the night. We were like the "pink-cheeked young aides" Didion recalls in her essay, thinking of ourselves, "innocent of irony and therefore history, as 'the best and the brightest'" (56). It rarely—if ever—occurred to me that the next time I would return, winter's cold winds would have swooped down on the wings of the election to clear the landscape. There was an air of immortality about our convention work that summer. I assumed victory and the concomitant vindication would have taken place by now. From the heights of the Fleet Center, defeat looked impossible.

In *The Politics of National Party Conventions*, David, Goldman and Bain write: "Convention decisions cut close to the great political concerns of any society: the allocation of political power, the purposes for which political power shall be used, and the further evolution of the political system" (2). As a representative institution, as a symbol of a larger political process, the convention does not bode well for the future of politics. If the characteristics of this summer's Democratic convention were to continue—the tendency towards insiderism, the construction of the "boum"—American politics would have some work to do before it could once again call itself a worthwhile organ of a government that pretends to democracy.

Even now, in the wake of a disastrous election, the Democrats' discussion of the future seems less interested in lasting change than more of the same. Take, for example, the theater in which a recent discussion took place. The *New York Times* reports that "Most of the party's biggest names headed to former Clinton campaign adviser James Carville's party at the old Arkansas Gazette Building, which served as the headquarters of Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign. Some partied at Doe's Eat Place, an old Democratic hangout" (Democrats 1). That gathering sounds like a smaller version of this summer's convention: elite figures discussing the nation's future over cocktails. The words "old Democratic hangout" fall harshly upon my ears. But even the discourse itself comes up short. Governor Bill Richardson says, "I remember being on a trip with him in New Mexico: I put a cowboy hat on Senator Kerry and someone on his staff shuddered and asked me to stop. This is I think an example of the East Coast not connecting with the West Coast and with the rest of the country" (Nagourney 2). If Governor Richardson is right, this country is in a sad place: he believes it is more effective to pander to the "rest of the country" through empty props than actually to address issues they care about. Surely it's less—not more—of Richardson's theatrics that the political process needs.

Perhaps I am simply unschooled in politics' dark arts. Surely there are mysteries I cannot comprehend. After all, I am merely a has-been pink-cheeked young aide, stepping softly through the snow to meet up with my friend. If I was an insider before, by now I am a definite outsider. Apparently, you need not be one or the other to care. As for those thinking citizens, hibernating with stacks of the *New Yorker*, I found them in the Kirkland dining hall, discussing the Warren Court for a paper due in three days. Outside, on the trees and in the gardens, across the lawns and in the sky, the falling snow cleansed the canvas, painting over everything with a broad white stroke. Preparation for rebirth had already begun, for the winter always precedes the spring.

WORKS CITED

David, Paul T., Ralph M. Goldman, and Richard C. Bain. *The Politics of National Party Conventions*. Washington: Brookings Institution, 1960.

"Democrats Discuss How to Reset Agenda." *New York Times* 20 Nov. 2004.

Didion, Joan. "Insider Baseball." *After Henry*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992. 47-86.

Klein, Rick. "Convention Estimates hit $95M Projection Nearly Twice Original Tab." *Boston Globe* 19 Jun. 2004: A1.

Mitchell, Luke. "Grand Old Inquisitor." *Harper's* Nov. 2004: 67-69.

Nagourney, Adam. "Baffled in Loss, Democrats Seek Road Forward." *New York Times* 7 Nov. 2004.

Shafer, Byron E. *Bifurcated Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

"Strong at Home, Respected in the World: The 2004 Democratic National Platform for America." *America 2004: The Democratic Convention*. 2004. 27 Jul. 2004. http://www.dems2004.org/site/pp.asp?c=luI2LaPYG&b=97933
Witcover, Jules. *Party of the People*. New York: Random House, 2003.

EMBRACING THE WARPLANE: ROMANTICISM'S ROLE IN THE RISE OF AIR POWER

DAVID KOHN

> "It was my place, at that time in space, and the jet was mine for those moments. Though it was a place where I could quickly die, the cockpit was a place where I truly lived."
>
> —Brian Shul, "Sled Driver; Flying The World's Fastest Jet," 1992

In the early stages of aviation technology, the duration of World War I and the decade to follow, the United States Army Air Service played but a minor role in both America's military strategy and budget; aircraft were severely overshadowed by the mighty battleship, the "backbone of the [naval] fleet and the bulwark of the nation's sea defense" (CR 8625). But several factors shifted the country's perspective of the warplane into a more appealing and popular light: Brigadier General Billy Mitchell's compelling arguments; the aerial bombing tests of 1921; and the successful sinking of the German battleship SMS *Ostfriesland*.

Mitchell primarily anchored the success of his experiments to the warplane's efficiency. "There are no conditions in which seacraft can operate efficiently in which aircraft cannot operate efficiently," Mitchell claimed, firmly grounding his argument for a change in military spending in logic and reasoning; "Air forces . . . can find and destroy all classes of seacraft" (U.S. 1828-1829). And when asked if he could prove his position, he replied, "Give us the warships to attack and come out and watch it" (Davis 71).

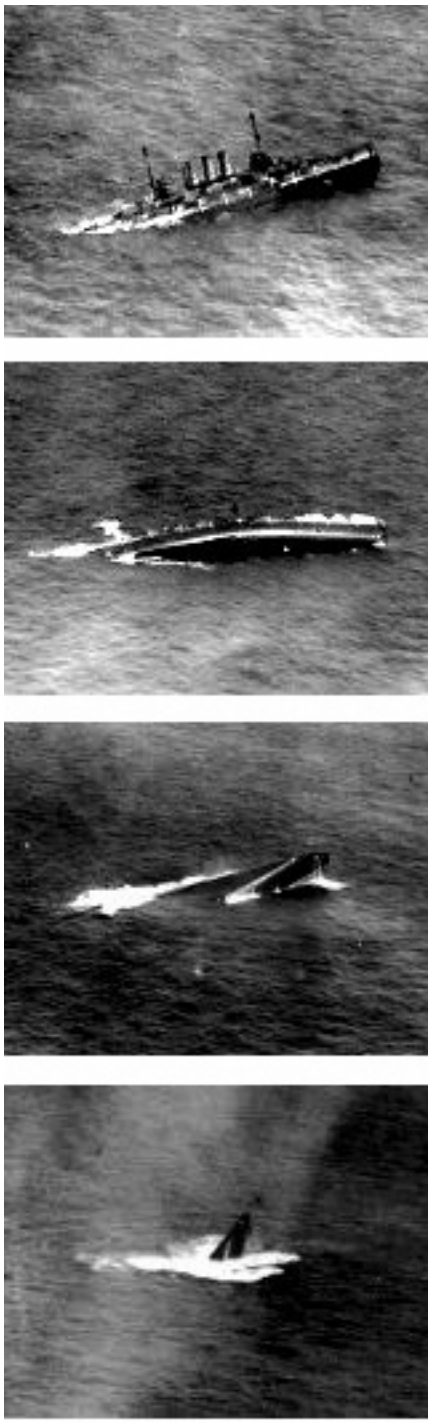
The emphasis of efficiency within Mitchell's campaign, however, is quite perplexing, for while the overwhelming factor in the military's approval of aerial warfare was the warplane's efficiency, there was a much more immediate concern surrounding early aviation. In the early 1920s, only a few days ever went by without the report of yet another warplane crash, another grotesque disaster in the skies. June 1921 alone yielded eight horrid tragedies, from "Lightning Bolt Felled Big Plane" to "Planes Crash in Air and Pilots Go to Death;" even movie star Jimmie Callahan's fingers were cut off by a propeller in the process of filming a stunt (Film 10). Yet less than a month later, the military seemed ready to embrace the menacing warplane. Perhaps even more astounding was the public's stance. Mitchell's aerial tests sought the nation's approval as well, and somehow his arguments compelled the press to endorse the warplane despite all the nightmarish articles they constantly published about the dangers and insecurities of aviation. Where did this appeal come from? What could possibly influence the nation to act so myopically, to embrace unflinchingly such a deadly machine?

By identifying the warplane as a "vehicle of romance," H. Bruce Franklin argues that the warplane's appeal stemmed from something very contrary to efficiency (55). Franklin observes the vast appeal of the plane in the "warplane models assembled by millions of boys and young men during World War II, the thousands of warplane magazines filled with glossy photographs that some find as stimulating as those in men's magazines," and even the movie *Strategic Air Command*, "in which Jimmy Stewart's response to his first sight of a B-47 nuclear bomber is, 'She's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life'" (Franklin 54). It is this evidence, as well, that suggests that the romance generated is only a product of warplanes and not ordinary planes. Ordinary planes are useful and efficient, but load an automatic gun and a two-ton bomb aboard and the vehicle takes on a whole new persona. However, planes had already been used as bombers as early as 1915, in the midst of WWI. Mitchell wasn't even the first to romanticize the warplane; an article with the headline "Briton Drops Bombs at Zeebrugge Despite Heavy German Fire" reads,

> Thursday night, an English warplane hovered over Zeebrugge, and, defying the concentrated fire, made a sudden dive to within 300 feet. . . . The airman coolly dropped his bombs at short range on the submarine. . . . There was a terrific explosion, and the submarine was sunk. The aviator got away safely ("Aviator" 1).

The title suggests struggle and conflict, but the report itself lends the aviator a cool and casual air. Within this short wire, we can already see the romanticizing of both the warplane and its suave maverick cowboy-like pilot. Through his examination of various military and media transcripts, Harry H. Ransom concludes that the test bombings of 1921 were "the most significant events of the period, even more important than the total experiences of the Air Service in the [first] World War," like the one above (27). But how could simulations carry a stronger effect than a real wartime skirmish?

Because all the bombings of 1915 were overseas, we salvaged but a few stories and no pictures; Mitchell recognized that he could not romanticize the warplane nearly as effectively through imaginative words as he could through actual images. Mitchell's plan was far more complex than a simple test of the aircraft's capability; aside from the designing of the largest bombs ever made and new instruments to calculate the trajectory of his new weapons, Mitchell also hired George Goddard, a young and innovative photographer, to handle public relations. "I want newsreels of those sinking ships in every theater in the country, just as soon as we can get them there," Mitchell ordered (Davis 79). Soon Goddard's films began screening nationwide, and the country was beginning to picture the warplane as never before.



U.S. Air Force, 1921

Mitchell invited several distinguished international delegates to witness the sinking of the *Ostfriesland* from a naval ship stationed nearby, the Henderson, but his greatest concern was the flock of reporters present for the event (Davis 101). Members from all the major papers, including representatives from England, Italy, France, Spain,

Portugal, and Brazil, were on hand to observe and report the results. It is through the eyes of these observers and their firsthand reports that we can get a taste of the warplane's true character.

Interestingly, the reporters invariably refer to the *Ostfriesland*, like all ships of its time, as female; they describe how the two-thousand-pound bombs "rupture her plates and bulkheads" (Hicks 36), "open her seams and make a sinking bulk of her" ("Sinking" 5). The personification of the battleship echoes a strong familiarity with her, a century-long history. In striking contrast, these journalists never attribute a gender to the plane; it was a mysterious stranger whose audience had not yet established a familiarity with it. This was not a mere test run but the dramatic introduction of a new character into the complex storyline that was naval warfare.

Mitchell actually found his two-thousand-pound bombs to be more useful when they did not directly hit his target but rather land nearby; the detonation, magnified by the pressure underwater, could rip the ship's hull apart. But the "hammer effect," as it came to be known, was not only an efficient and useful strategy; it also left a powerful impression upon the reporters present. The underwater detonation sent a fierce shockwave through the water, causing the Henderson and its crew to shake violently and rumble (Davis 107). The terrifying effects of the ton-heavy bombs suddenly transformed the warplane from a stranger—an unfamiliar piece of machinery—into something much more awesome. The roles had been reversed; now the skies were a location of control, and the ground seemed not so safe. The association and familiarity the battleship carried also helped to intensify the drama and romanticism of the moment. While the sinking of the *Ostfriesland* undoubtedly proved the efficiency of the warplane—the ship sunk rather quickly, in under eight minutes—what caught its audience's eyes was the manner in which she went down: "[I]in the few moments of the final plunge [the *Ostfriesland*] assumed a perpendicular position. . . . Turning completely over, the vessel sank bottom up, the keel being the part of the ship last seen" (Hicks 36). Not much unlike another practice target, U.S. Air Force, 1921 the *Frankfurt*, which "was lifted bodily several feet by the blast and at once began to settle forward… [and] as she went down, her rudders and propeller rose clearly out of the water" (Hicks 36), there was an element of grace to the *Ostfriesland's*—and any warship's—destruction. It clutched from the forceful blow delivered by the plane and rolled over on its side. And just before it permanently went down, it stood itself upright in the air. One last breath, one final gasp of air, and then it slowly withered to its subterranean burial ground. The *Ostfriesland* didn't just sink; it died dramatically. The bomb's terrifying shockwaves, the battleship's familiarity, and the *Ostfriesland's* graceful burial all leant a certain drama to the spectacle and all contributed to its romanticism, but Franklin argues that they accomplished even more. By contrasting the aerial bombings to Herman Melville's "Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Flight," the depiction of technology as "plain mechanic power," Franklin suggests that these bombings not only glorified the warplane but also gave it life (Franklin 48, 54). The

warplane, now infused with a soul, not only became easy to embrace, but even became easy to relate to on a personal level, as was perfectly demonstrated by Jimmy Stewart's remarks. This personification, by no means an insignificant factor, tremendously swayed the public both to favor and trust the warplane and its aviary capabilities.

One is left to wonder, however, what kind of argument romanticism should provide for the approval of aerial combat. If the warplane truly were a danger to fly, wouldn't our ability to relate to it like a person spur our caution and concerns and dissuade us from admiring its military capabilities? If we are truly weighing the existing dangers against our emotional investment, how can we come to pick and choose, to love the machine's awesome and terrifying bombs and yet look away from all the imminent tragedy? Mitchell's tests, however, did not only romantically recreate the warplane's nature; they directly countered any previous images that may have been associated with it, like endless smoke and blazing fires from midair crashes, lightning bolts, and many other freakish disasters. On July 10, 1921, a mere eleven days prior to Mitchell's tests, a bombing plane spun out of control and crashed full force into Langin Field, a crowded auto field with thousands of people, killing six and injuring fifty. The *Washington Post* and many other papers printed a very gruesome—and very real—photo of the ghastly wreck in the next day's paper; thick black smoke poured from the melee, the scorching fires added to the hellishness of the scene. These images added a complication to Mitchell's project. It would no longer suffice for Mitchell's planes to functionally perform their task; somehow, Goddard's films would have to not only avert the association between smoke, fire, and the warplane from people's thoughts, but also negate that very association.

Perhaps what made Goddard's movies so effective and romantic was neither the birth of the plane nor the graceful death of the battleship. For many logical reasons the relative difficulty of hitting a floating target compared to a stationary land base, and the comparatively common presence of heavy gale winds and fog at sea—General Mitchell conducted his experiments on the water, but the ocean setting had an advantageous effect as well. By relying on the hammer effect to rip open the hulls of victim ships, the bombings that very next week negated the effects of the nightmarish scene at Langin Field, recreating the identity of the plane as a much quieter destructive force. Smoke was replaced with steam, fire with water. The battleship didn't smolder; it quietly sank. Most importantly, the test left no mess behind; the surface of the water returned to its peaceful and calm state. On water, the plane didn't just defeat the warship; it erased it from existence. On water, the plane didn't just cause massive destruction; it also wiped it from our memories.

This disparity between the effects of aerial bombing on land and on sea actually played a clear role in the Navy's decision how they would employ the use of warplanes. Captain William S. Pye, the Navy's assistant director of their War Plans Division, argued that "if the people of the United States had seriously considered this question of international morality, they would reject the idea of strategic bombing," thereby

decreasing the need of warplanes (Ransom 28). Pye, in conclusion, felt comfortable only in using aircraft on the sea, where the civilian casualties would be reduced. However, the question here wasn't over the efficiency of TNT as a destructive agent; all Pye debated was the proper method of delivery, by air or by sea (Goodrich 10). Perhaps the comfort Pye felt, the comfort Pye predicted Americans would feel, was the clean quiet and efficient death the warplane could administer with its mammoth, menacing, and yet relatively silent bombs. Without thick black smoke or traces of rubble, with a more graceful and romantic image to feed the nation, Mitchell had the perfect footage to deliver to its audience; the "questions of morality" had been masterfully offset.

It was not until 1964 that Stanley Kubrick's cinematic satire *Dr. Strangelove* forced the world to consider this crime, humanity's crime of unjustly falling in love with warfare. The movie was released at the height of the Cold War and blatantly parodied the international anxieties of pending doom, the fear that our "nuclear deterrents" could accidentally—and ironically—result in the thorough annihilation of life on Earth. But "what Kubrick's Cold War satire showed was not men at the mercy of machines, but machines at the mercy of men," the flawless deterrents being misused by a few flawed individuals (Ebert).

The paranoid and mentally unstable General Jack Ripper initiates a nuclear strike on the Soviet Union. In his state of paranoia, he assumes the "Commies" will try to capture and torture him for the nuclear strike recall codes; valiantly, though foolishly, Ripper commits suicide. U.S. President Merkin Muffley contacts the Soviet Premier to discuss the urgency of the matter and devise a strategy to bring down the dispatched B-52s, but the 'serious' phone call ("Dimitri, one of our generals, well, he went and did a silly thing. . . . No, don't say you're more sorry, I'm capable of being as sorry as you") reduces the social conflict of nuclear war to nothing more than a children's quarrel. When the Russians complete the Doomsday Device, the ultimate nuclear deterrent incapable of being deactivated, the Premier neglects to inform the world, waiting for just the right moment to break the news; "You know how much the Premier likes surprises," the Soviet ambassador reasons to the President. The message seems clear. Virtually every character in this film is portrayed as insane—though to different degrees—suggesting that the modern perspective of war is the product of a mental illness, one that began decades—if not centuries—ago and slowly, permanently, conditioned its way into the human mind.

Kubrick's machines are more than just innocent bystanders. The Soviet Doomsday Device is treated like a real character of the movie; like the giant boards of flashing lights in the American War Room, it is capable of functioning entirely on its own. However, the Device is mistreated by mankind and forced to destroy the world. Similarly, when a soldier shoots a coke machine to take its coinage by force, the machine reacts by not only spitting out quarters but also a steady stream of cola right

at its aggressor's face. Kubrick's audience is compelled to sympathize and rally around these mistreated machines, to love them despite all the trouble they ultimately cause.

Romanticism, again, is the central tool used to create affection towards these machines. From the soothing introductory music accompanied by footage of a bomber squadron to the movie's closing montage of mushroom clouds as Vera Lynn sings "We'll Meet Again," Kubrick's choice of beautiful music helps to emphasize the beauty of his wartime footage. In "one of the most famous moments in modern film" (Ebert), Major "King" Kong, a B-52 pilot in uniform but a wild western cowboy at heart, is feverishly attempting to force open the jammed hatch underneath his plane to release the hydrogen bomb. Accidentally, he is dropped out of the plane along with the bomb as soon as the hatch is opened. Caught in the excitement of the moment, he begins to hoot and holler, waving his oversized cowboy hat in every direction, like a rugged cowboy riding a bucking bronco. Again, the romanticism is perfectly captured in Major Kong's display, and the nuclear weapons directly responsible for nuking the Soviets, triggering the Doomsday Device, and rendering all life on Earth extinct, are seen as the misused tools of an overly malicious bombardier. Furthermore, Maj. Kong's character is masterfully employed to offset any similarity his ride may have to Japan's kamikaze warfare; the Japanese are remembered as evil and Kong, heroic.

Dr. Strangelove, 1964

However, Kubrik's characters are much deeper than the superficial insanity they display. If the movie were meant to criticize the social and political atmosphere of its time for falling in love with warfare, then we would expect the dangerously malicious Major Kong to at least make his audience flinch, yet even in this movie's darkest moment, as Major Kong unknowingly destroys the world, the audience can't help but laugh at his cowboy-like antics. The characters are not remembered as villains, mass murderers, or future embodiments of Adolf Hitler (the title character, Dr Strangelove, constantly represses his mechanical arm from performing the Nazi salute). Instead, they are remembered as loveable—though hapless and ignorant—heroes.

Perhaps the film argues that the only thing that could cause thorough annihilation is if the entire world were to go insane at exactly the same time, like the coincidence that Russian scientists build a Doomsday Device the very week an American general

psychologically breaks down. In which case, we have little to fear. We can love Major Kong for his noble intentions, and we can laugh with the president and his loony generals as they fumblingly try to save the world, though they sometimes forget that the Communists aren't the most immediate threat anymore ("Boy, I've got to get me one of those Doomsday Devices!").

Dr. Strangelove is much deeper than a warning of the dangers of falling in love with war. Machines alone, Jackson Burgess concludes in his essay on Kubrick's film, may be "beautiful, functional, and absolutely reliable, but mindless and heartless" (11). The American nuclear strike protocol and the Russian Doomsday Device function exactly as planned, and neither beauty nor efficiency necessarily translates into successful military strategy. The only thing that holds the reality of a nuclear holocaust at fair distance is "Man—sloppy, incompetent, unreliable, but full of hope and courage" (11). Machines, such as atomic bombs or warplanes, are dangerous when left to function on their own; but when partnered with a courageous and caring person, the weapon can assume a new and virtuous persona, much like John Wayne's righteous pistols.

Perhaps what transforms the most deadly war machines into "vehicles of romance" is not only the subjective beauty of aesthetic destruction, like the perfectly rounded mushroom clouds of the atomic bomb, but also the recognition of something potentially upright and just. Perhaps what makes these personified warplanes "vehicles" is not just their ability to transport two-thousand-pound bombs to battleships or submarines, but rather to serve, as living soldiers do, as the efficient and practical manifestations of our most noble desires. So long as the warplane's awesome power is not misused, but rather thoughtfully harnessed, it can truly embody and relate to Man's most honorable aspirations on a very personal level, thus rendering the danger of disaster and midair malfunctions an ultimately cause worthy risk. Captain William Pye's proposal was eventually rejected, and warplanes served a primary role on both sea and land in America's triumph over Nazism, fascism, and the Axis regime in World War II.

WORKS CITED

"6 Killed, 50 Hurt As Plane Crashes in Field of Autos." *New York Times* 11 Jul. 1921: 1. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times. Butler Lib., Columbia U, New York, NY.

"Aviator Sinks Submarine: Briton Drops Bombs at Zeebrugge Despite Heavy German Fire." *New York Times* 7 Feb. 1915: 1. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times. Butler Lib., Columbia U, New York, NY.

Burgess, Jackson. "The "Anti-Militarism" of Stanley Kubrick." *Film Quarterly*. Vol 18, No. 1 (Autumn 1964). 4-11.

Congressional Record, 67th Congress, 1st Session, LXI Report of the Joint Board of the Results of Aviation and Ordinance Tests Held During June and July, 1921. 20 Aug. 1921. 8625.

Davis, Burke. *The Billy Mitchell Affair*. Toronto: Random House, 1967.

Dr. Strangelove (or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb). Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Perf. Peter Sellers, George C. Scott, Slim Pickens. Columbia, 1964.

Ebert, Roger. "Dr. Strangelove (or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb)." Rev. of *Dr. Strangelove (or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb)*. dir. Stanley Kubrick.

"Film Star Crippled." *New York Times* 24 Jun. 1921: 10. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times. Butler Lib., Columbia U, New York, NY.

Franklin, H. Bruce. "From Realism to Virtual Reality: Images of America's Wars." *Georgia Review*. Spring 1994. 47-64.

Goodrich, Marcus A. "Airship and Battleship." *New York Times* 26 Jul. 1921: 10. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times. Butler Lib., Columbia U, New York, NY.

Hicks, Frederick C. "Case of the Airplane Against the Battleship." *New York Times* 28 Aug. 1921: 35. Proquest Historical Newspapers The New York Times. Butler Lib., Columbia U, New York, NY.

Ransom, Harry H. "The Battleship Meets the Airplane." *Military Affairs*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring 1959). 21-27.

"Sinking the Ostfriesland." *New York Times* 23 Jul. 1921: 5. Proquest Historical. Newspapers The New York Times. Butler Lib., Columbia U, New York, NY. .

U.S. Navy Dept. U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, XLVII. Nov. 1921.

SAID'S POST-SEPTEMBER 11TH MEDIA PRESENCE

JEDIDIAH MICKA

Edward W. Said left such a strong impression on Mid-East politics that even his critics defined him as "a familiar face on the network news—an urbane, articulate man, invariably dressed in an elegant suit and tie, who could always be counted on to provide polished, unaccented, pro-Palestinian (or, more generally, pro-Arab or pro-Moslem) spin on recent Mideast developments" (Bawer 620). Yet this "urbane, articulate man" shunned U.S. Media attention after Saudi Arabian nationals hijacked two passenger airlines and used them as guided missiles in a fatal attack on U.S. soil the morning of September 11th, 2001. If this character, Said, "could always be counted on to provide" his interpretations, or his "spin on recent Mideast developments," then what were his reasons for withdrawing from the media attention he had previously enjoyed?

Although Said did publish a piece in the *Observer* (a U.K.-based paper) five days after the terror attacks, its somewhat sympathetic stance towards the terrorists was blasted by Bruce Bawer, an independent critic who has written articles for (among others) the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, and the *New York Times Magazine* and whose book reviews have appeared in the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*. Bawer claimed that after reading Said's piece in the *Observer*,

> One no longer wonders why it appeared in a British newspaper rather than on the op-ed page of Said's usual high-profile outlet, the *New York Times*—whose readers, many of them ordinarily receptive to Professor Said's critiques of Western democracy and whitewashing of Islamic tyranny and terror, were perhaps too busy that week trying to recover from the violent assault on their city to be able to profit from his wisdom.

Bawer's insinuation is that New York City, once the bastion of Said's liberal pro-Muslim ideals, could no longer afford the luxury of self-criticisms, and thus, had no use for Said's radical opinions. Could this be why Said avoided U.S. media interviews after the *9/11* attacks?

Perhaps an understanding of Said's tumultuous life could shed light on this question. Said, as he narrates in his memoir *Out of Place*, was born in 1935 as a Protestant Arab Palestinian in Jerusalem, Palestine. His father was a very successful businessman, giving Said a privileged upbringing from which he could observe the events that shaped the modern-day Middle East. He was raised in Cairo, Egypt, where he experienced the direct effects of British, and then American, imperialism. He was able to enjoy summers in Lebanon, where he began to notice the undercurrents of

cultural divisiveness that still affect the region. He experienced first-hand the controversial declaration of Israel as a state and the subsequent displacement of countless Palestinians. In 1951, Said began his studies in America at a private New England High School. He continued his American education by attending Princeton, and later Harvard, en route to a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature. Said remained apolitical until the 1967 war, when a second wave of Palestinian refugees was triggered during a six-day conflict between Israel and the combined states of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. This event, and its dire consequences, generated the intense interest in politics, specifically in the creation of a Palestinian state, which Said maintained throughout the remainder of his life.

But the question remains, why would Said refuse media attention in the days (and years) following *9/11*? Why would he pass up such an ideal opportunity to speak to an American public about an issue very dear to his heart? Could Bawer be correct in that Said no longer had a receptive audience?

Said's own voice indicates otherwise. Several comments made after *9/11* indicate that he withdrew because he feared being presented as a definitive subject matter expert. It was this notion of a subject expert, or a single person who could classify and explain a vast group of cultures, that Said definitively condemned in *Orientalism*, a book first published in 1976. In fact, one might say that Said's refusal of media attention was the direct extension of his main argument in *Orientalism*.

Said summarizes this argument as the issue of "whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer" (*Orientalism* 272). Said argues in *Orientalism* that constructs such as the Orient contain inaccuracies because they are created by individuals: individuals with their own political, career, and personal agendas. He feels that these simplified identities (such as the East and the West) involve "the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'" (*Orientalism* 332). In other words, the East and West cannot be pointed to as physical entities. Instead, they exist as constructs that allow one group of people to differentiate themselves from another.

Said criticizes the people who forge on without admitting these subjective interpretations. He observes that within the field of Oriental Studies (whose practitioners are labeled orientalists) there is a predominant view that "such things as an Islamic society, an Arab mind, an Oriental psyche" do exist (*Orientalism* 301). Said counters this view by claiming that "cultures and civilizations are so interrelated and interdependent as to beggar any unitary or simply delineated description of their individuality" (*Orientalism* 347). Throughout *Orientalism* Said argues against broad stereotypes and against "the notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically 'different' inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion,

culture, or racial essence proper to that geographical space" (Orientalism 322). Although Said makes extensive use of western generalizations of "the East" he explicitly states in the Afterword (written in 1994) that he is not solely criticizing Western imperialism. Rather, he is using specific examples to rebuke the notion that any large group of people can be adequately defined by their religion, geographic location, or ethnicity.

One of Said's post-*9/11* fears was that the American public might begin to equate Osama bin Laden (or other extremist figures) with the entirety of the Islamic religion ("Fears"). While bin Laden is certainly representative of a very small subset of Islamic fundamentalists, he does not represent the larger Muslim community. But who would be qualified to speak about the Muslim community? Perhaps a Muslim academic, or better yet, perhaps the Muslim philosopher Akeel Bilgrami, whom Said praised in "Impossible Histories." Bilgrami is a Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University and has extensively explored the philosophical aspects of how people identify themselves and others. As someone who was raised within the "Eastern" country of India he can shed light on how he regards the Muslim community. In an article titled "The Clash Within Civilizations," he contends that the majority of Muslims

> have no particular desire to perpetrate atrocious (and self-defeating) acts of terrorist violence in Islam's name, no particular desire to live lives observant in the last detail of Shariah laws, no particular desires to live under the tyrannies of oppressive governments that impose the strictest of Islamic ideologies upon them, such as for instance in Saudi Arabia or Iran. (Bilgrami, "Clash" 88)

Bilgrami offers a historical, social, and economic perspective to the problem instead of broadly categorizing the East with sweeping statements. He explains that "most Muslims are not absolutists [his term for fundamentalists] at all, and are in fact deeply opposed to the absolutists in their midst. This is evident in the fact that whenever there have been elections, the 'fundamentalist' parties have failed to gain power, whether in Iran or in Pakistan" (Bilgrami, "Lessons" 32). He further interprets the animosity many Muslims feel towards the West as not being directed at freedom or modernity, but rather, at the "naked, corporate-driven wrongs of American and Western dominance of their regions" (Bilgrami, "Lessons" 32). By way of comparison, Said's critic Bawer claims that "a substantial percentage of Moslems are in fact religious fundamentalists who despise individual liberty and sexual equality, who believe profoundly that all sorts of things should be punished by death, and who readily cheer acts of violence directed against innocent civilians in the West" (Bawer 622).

Bawer relies on heavily unsupported generalizations. He claims that "a substantial percentage of Moslems" are fundamentalists without ever citing a figure or where that figure was drawn from. Bilgrami, by contrast, offers a clear account of fundamentalist support by referring to specific elections in Pakistan where fundamentalist groups have

consistently received less than ten percent of the popular vote (Bilgrami, "Clash" 90). Bawer, through his broad generalization of Muslims, represents a striking example of the mentality Said condemned in *Orientalism*. Bilgrami's approach, however, of carefully examining the conditions surrounding a group, of acknowledging the motivations for their actions, and of treating them as a diverse group represents the tactic that Said supported. But, the distinction between Bawer and Bilgrami is more subtle than it first appears.

From the surface it appears that Bilgrami, because he was raised in a Muslim country, can offer valid assertions about Muslims, while Bawer, because he is an outsider, is doomed to hopelessly inadequate generalizations. This misses a fine point of Said's, that any identity (such as "Muslim," "Arab," or "American") is a constructed image that generalizes a broad group of people. Even though Bilgrami was raised in a Muslim country, his definition of "Muslim" is no more accurate than Bawer's is. Or rather, his definition is just as hopelessly inaccurate as Bawer's is. Where Bilgrami does succeed, however, is by attempting to understand that "Muslim" is a man-made term that refers to a large disparate group of people. Bilgrami recognizes that the beliefs held by individuals within this group will vary wildly while Bawer attempts to polarize the group into a black-or-white, either-or, extremist vs. liberal perspective. Said hoped that a humanist understanding such as Bilgrami's would help prevent "the terrible conflicts that herd people under falsely unifying rubrics such as 'America', 'the West', or 'Islam' and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse" ("Window").

But what does this tell us about our original question? Why did Said choose to avoid post-*9/11* U.S. media contact? With a solid understanding of Said's historical perspective on the bipolar constructs of East and West we can now investigate this question using his own voice.

In an article published in *Harper's* magazine in July 2002, titled "Impossible Histories," Said assaults the implication that he might have some insight into the events of *9/11*. Through a rhetorical question he exclaims "what could I know about the crazed fanatics who committed suicide in the slaughter of innocents" ("Impossible Histories" 69). This is very telling, because it sets up a very clear distinction between Said's area of knowledge, and the area of knowledge required to understand "the smoldering twin towers" ("Impossible Histories" 69). Said had always proclaimed himself a secularist, so from his perspective he had no insights into the people who flew airplanes into buildings in the name of religious fervor. While he did feel that he had contextual information about the socio-political conditions that might lead a person to attack the United States, he felt that such information was not welcomed by the American populace. Two months after the attacks Said addressed this in an article for the *Arab American News*. In the article he claimed that "any attempt to place the horrors of what occurred on *9/11* in a context that includes US actions and rhetoric is either attacked or dismissed as somehow condoning the terrorist bombardment"

("Fears"). So although Said felt that he could provide contextual information about the events leading to the *9/11* attacks, he sensed that this was not what the U.S. media wanted.

Instead, he observes,

> bookstores in the US are filled with shabby screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror, the Arab threat and the Muslim menace, all of them written by political polemicists pretending to knowledge imparted by experts who have supposedly penetrated to the heart of these strange oriental peoples. ("Window")

He further criticizes the media as assigning "itself the role of producing so-called 'experts'" who then support "the kind of simplified view of the world" that U.S. political strategists have provided ("Window"). Small wonder, then, that Said might not "want to be tokenized or made to represent the 'other' point of view" ("Impossible Histories" 69).

But Said's refusal to interview with the U.S. media stretches beyond avoiding the label of "other." His refusal was directed instead at the U.S. notion of providing "experts" to aggregate and summarize disparate regions of the world. Said's rebellion, then, was not against being labeled as pro-Muslim, but instead it was against the thought that the East could be labeled, and further, that it could actually be objectively described by any one person without understanding the historical, social, and economic context. The U.S. media criticized his contextual information as "condoning terrorism," yet they still asked him for information. Why? So that they could produce a sensational headline that would drive Americans, out of fear, to purchase more papers, to view more news media, and to further the development of the "us" versus "them" divide. Yet, as was illustrated above, this type of bipolar classification is exactly what Said argued against in *Orientalism*. So is it any surprise that Said refused U.S. media attention following the *9/11* terrorist attacks? Of course not! The only way for Said to maintain his beliefs, as described in *Orientalism*, was to refuse media attention.

But how is this knowledge helpful? Said refused to cater to the desires of the U.S. media, and in so doing illustrated that the U.S. media still operates under the assumption that large numbers of people can be grouped together under a single name. This is evident when the media refers to a "Chinese" identity, or a "Muslim" identity. The assumption, then, is that a subject expert can accurately define the attributes of these identities. This categorization, as was explained above, risks oversimplifying many of today's current events. Said recognized this, and claimed these so-called objective identities were no more than a subjective means of distinguishing one group of people from another as "us" versus "them." He argued instead that we should investigate the social and economic context in which events occur, and thereby arrive at a more accurate understanding of those events. But, as was illustrated by Said's dilemma above, the U.S. media does not take this approach. Therefore Said's legacy,

and challenge, to us is to force the media to provide us with the contextual information necessary for a broad understanding of their issues.

WORKS CITED

Bawer, Bruce. "Edward W. Said, intellectual." *Hudson Review*. 54.4 (2002): 620.

Bilgrami, Akeel. "The clash within civilizations." *Daedalus*. 132.3 (2003): 88.

---."Lessons in Islam from India." *Nation*. 24 Dec. 2001: 31+.

Said, Edward W. "Fears of erosion of civil liberties." 23 Nov. 2001 ProQuest. 18 Apr. 2005

---. "Impossible Histories." *Harper's*. Jul. 2002: 69.

---. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1994

---. *Out of Place*. New York: Vintage, 999

---. "Saturday Review: Essay: A window on the world" 2 Aug. 2003. ProQuest. 18 Apr. 2005

Twair, Paul McDonnell. "Edward Said addresses 9/11 issues at Chapman University." *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*. 21.4 (2002): 51+.