

US, Britain have short memories in terms of political histories

By Stan Nelson
Of the Emerald

The United States and Great Britain are both preoccupied with their histories, yet they represent their histories in entirely different ways in the media, said Daniel Snowman, chief producer of the British Broadcasting Corporation's educational radio documentaries and features.

Snowman is on a three-week speaking engagement in Washington D.C. and Oregon, and he spoke at the University on Monday.

People have very short memories in both the United States and Britain and talk about recent political events, such as Reagan and the Iran arms dealings, as though there were no long historical background, Snowman said. The geographic area of interest also is very limited, he said.

"(American) history is very much more based on the great innovators, the spectacular changes," Snowman said. Great emphasis is placed on the nation's independence and Constitution dates, as well as the revolutionary figures who participated in the change, he said.

"(America) is the land where change is much valued," Snowman said.

The British also are preoccupied with history, though their history is much longer.

"A lot of the emphasis is on the great continuities. There isn't a moment of revolution; there isn't a moment the British body policy began; there isn't a single document in which the British Constitution was invented," Snowman said.

"The great figures are very often those who managed to beat off invasion of one kind or another," he added.

A shortfall of both the British and U.S. media is the lack of reportage in certain parts of the world, notably the war between Iran and Iraq.

"That is a vast, horrendous war that has gone on for seven years. Very little (has been) reported because I suppose even the most horrific wars are not of interest unless you are actually losing your own fellows in them," he said. More often than not, particular regions are reported as a result of current political controversy and international relations than actually what is going on in that nation, he said.

"The nature of our politics, both Reaganite and Thatcherite politics, is the world is seen in East/West terms largely, and free world/communist terms," he said.

British and U.S. leaders, both re-elected to office, represent a state of mind their constituents support, Snowman said. While media representatives are not always supportive of the government's actions, they still follow the government's agenda, he said.

The media give attention to the Third World, yet it is the catastrophies and disasters that are reported, Snowman said. There are geographical and historical reasons for some nation's poverty, and this is what needs to be included in the reportage of the situation, he said.



Photo by Bobbie Lo

Daniel Snowman of the BBC discusses the role of media and differences in British and American histories.

"I do not think the job of the mass media is constantly to make people feel guilty or bringing up things they do not know about — they are not the pulpit, they are not the sermonizers; they are in part reflecting and writing the agenda society considers important," he said.

While the U.S.'s history is much shorter than Britain's, it depends upon how the term history is defined, Snowman said.

The United States holds the longest continuous constitutional system in the world. U.S. history is long by those standards, he said.

"Because the history is shorter, things, not very long ago by British standards, can be very exciting in American terms," he said. The United States is a relatively young nation, and the early pioneers are not too long gone to be directly contacted, Snowman said.

The British have the royal family as a link to the past, and "it gives a sense of continuity with the past to an era of radical and rather frightening change," Snowman said.

In his work, Snowman selects high-interest topics for BBC educational programs and then probes behind what is being covered in an attempt to broaden the audience's perspective as much as possible, he said.

The BBC is Britain's largest broadcast network with 26,000 employees and an annual budget of \$1.5 billion.

The relative independence between the BBC and the government, coupled with the fact that the BBC receives no income from advertising, gives the corporation a large degree of editorial freedom, he said.

The American Studies program, Honors College and International Services sponsored Snowman's visit with additional support from the Visiting Scholars fund.

Report shows expenditures for weapons still growing

By Shawn Wirtz
Of the Emerald

With Associated Press reports

World military expenditures for weapons of \$900 billion in 1986 contradict the spirit of the United Nation's International Year of Peace, according to local peace groups.

Military expenditures have risen from \$810 billion last year, according to an independent report released Monday by Ruth Leger Sivard, former chief of the economics division of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

"That means peace is on the minds of many but not in the minds of leaders," said John Exline of Citizens' Action for Lasting Security. "It tells the activist community they have a lot more work to be done."

Part of that work will be to continue efforts aimed at eliminating nuclear power, Exline said. "The nuclear power movement is directly tied to the nuclear weapons industry. By attacking one you're attacking the other," he said.

The U.S. spent approximately \$268 billion for weapons while the Soviet Union spent approximately \$237 billion, according to the report. The U.S. also ranks first in arms exports, military technology, military bases world-wide, nuclear reactors, and nuclear warheads and bombs.

"There's no way we can ever achieve peace and continuously build up more and more weapons," said Steve Kasner, spokesman for the Student Campaign for Disarmament.

But Harry Hance of the Defense Education Committee said the increase in military expenditures is not incompatible with peace.

"A stronger defense posture and preparedness posture will promote peace," Hance said.

"During the Carter administration we didn't spend very much of our national income on defense. We're just catching up now," he said.

A logical cause-effect relationship can be determined between the increase in military expenditures and world hostilities, "considering we're building Star Wars, and considering the war in Central America is being escalated, and considering we still have a president in office who hasn't got an arms control agreement," Kasner said.

"If you look at the areas of the world most torn by war, those are the areas where money is being spent on weapons," Kasner said.

The \$900 billion represents about 6 percent of world gross national product. Some of that money should be rechanneled into health, education and employment opportunities, said Leslie Brockelbank.

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spokeswoman for Clergy and Laity Concerned.

"We have to ask for that back. It needs to come out of the money planned for these destructive forces," she said.

The report was sponsored by the Arms Control Association, The Rockefeller Foundation and other private groups.

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