

WHY SO MUCH CONFLICT?

BY RICHARD JOHNSON

What is at the source of human conflict? Is it discord, disconnect, divisiveness, misunderstanding, plain old human pride? What is the source of these conditions we all seem to experience in varying degrees? Is it the bad ego (is there a good ego)? Is it basic human insecurity? Is it unbridled selfishness and insensitivity to our fellow humans?

What is at the core of human conflict? Maybe it's a lack of skillful communication skills, or sheer laziness and lack of commitment to sufficient quality communication among ourselves... do we even care enough?

Maybe it's generally a lack of collective personal development, an inability to understand and know our essential selves, our divine selves, and therefor humans not relating well to themselves, let alone to others.

Are we consistently failing to ask productive and constructive questions of one another? Do we get caught up in human dynamics of "right wrong good bad" and become unable to get out of those modes, and think and act outside the horribly destructive box we put ourselves into?

So, are we stupid? Maybe we just get what we deserve.

How do we transcend our collective propensity to human conflict? How do we effectively challenge this notion of war as part of the human condition?

What if we took some of the Pentagon budget and applied ourselves and our resources to developing the collective 'human kind' on a grander scale than has ever been envisioned? Rather than dreaming up every conceivable way of degrading and destroying it. What would our enemy base look like if we imagined and worked harder for a world more in these terms?

What would it be like if this country had a President thinking and talking these thoughts and supporting deeds and action of true human values?

Without the conversation Richard Johnson ardently asks for us to engage in, the future is wan and bleak indeed. Perhaps a start might be to teach everyone of us the principles of debate and argument so that we do not feel so threatened by diverse opinions and ideas and strike out wrathfully against them. After all, a nation that claims to prize open discussion ought to know how to do it. Richard's concerns are local as well as universal; he lives in Astoria. ~MPMc

WINTER SOLDIERS

I didn't serve with John Kerry in Vietnam, but I was with him when Vietnam Veterans Against the War hurled their war medals at Congress in Washington, D.C. in the spring of 1971. He spoke to the Senate about why Vietnam veterans from all over the United States were in Washington to oppose the war while I said similar things to the House of Representatives. He had been a Navy officer, I was a USMC sergeant, but the VVAW traversed military rank and thousands of the war's veterans hoped the American people would heed our protest because nobody knows about a war better than those who have been in it.

In my opinion, John Kerry, three times wounded and holder of the Silver Star, demonstrated the same courage and respect for American values when he acted against the war that he had at war. Now that he just might be the next President of the United States, his political adversaries are hinting he was a traitor for protesting against Vietnam; a quickly discredited photograph circulating all over the country pairs him with the rightwing's favorite apostate pinup "Hanoi" Jane Fonda in the same type of odious smear campaign George Bush Sr. fabricated with the black felon Willie Horton in 1988.

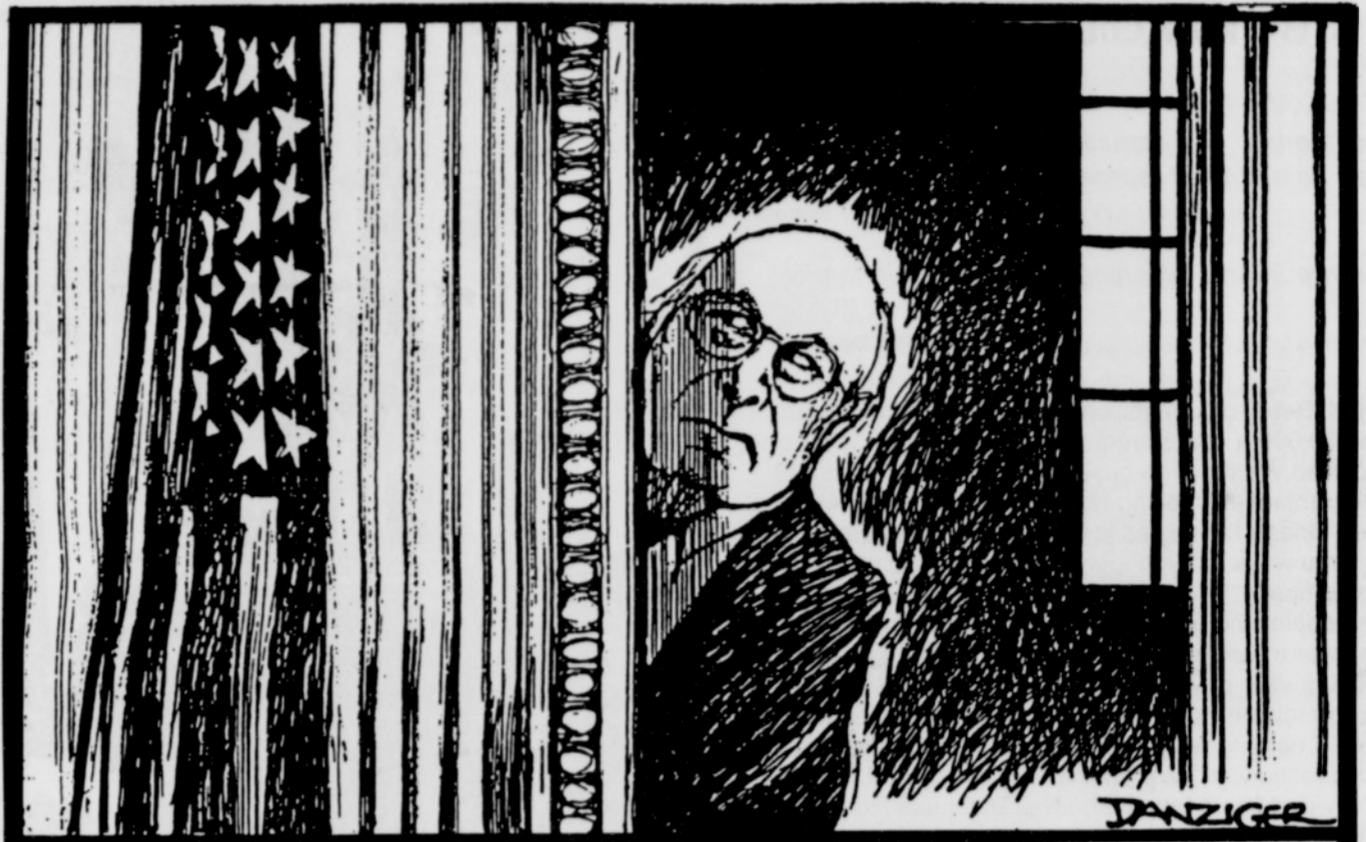
It might be remembered that the nation's original patriots were traitors (and, heaven forbid, revolutionaries!); our first President, the "Father of Our Country," was the greatest traitor of them all. Today's 'Sunshine Patriots' act as if they have forgotten our history. In particular, those who are impugning Kerry are quite likely the same people who call foul when George Bush Jr.'s dereliction of military duty during Vietnam is made a campaign issue — yet he boasts he is the nation's "War President," which makes his military service a fair inquiry. (Bush claims he supported the Vietnam war but was apparently willing to let others fight it.) By implication, not only Kerry but all who dissented against Vietnam — especially we who are its veterans (as well as Jane Fonda) — are traitors, an insinuation conferred upon present-day dissenters to the Iraq War and to Bush administration policies in general.

The issues about Vietnam and Iraq are in many respects similar: in both wars the nation was committed to attacking another country by deliberate deceptions by leaders callous to everything but their own agendas. It is the same argument now as it was then: Do we continue to send American troops to kill and die for questionable purposes or do we best support them by ceasing fire and bringing them back home alive?

We in the VVAW called ourselves 'Winter Soldiers' (in contrast to Sunshine Patriots) because we bitterly opposed the war we fought in and defied the omnipotence of the Presidency and the Pentagon we had previously served.

Bush wants everybody to think he's the Sword of God and that any dissent is unpatriotic heresy. John Kerry disagrees. So do I. Jane Fonda probably does too. Perhaps that makes us traitors. November might reveal that a majority of Americans are.

~Michael McCusker



SHADOWY GUY

BY ROBERT BRAKE

I fondly remember that great radio show *The Shadow* broadcast from 1937-1954. The "Shadow" was Lamont Cranston, who could cloud men's minds so that they couldn't see him — and solve crimes in the process. The only way to detect the Shadow's presence was to shine a light on him so that he became visible.

I'd like to shine some light on a present-day Shadow among us, the Vice President of the United States Dick Cheney. The difference is that Cheney doesn't solve crimes; he seems to hide, inspire, or commit them.

I'm astonished at our shadowy Vice President's history — especially as Bush Sr.'s Secretary of Defense and Halliburton CEO. Recently accused of bilking the U.S. government for reconstruction projects in Iraq, Halliburton denied that former CEO Cheney had anything to do with it. Right.

This man has always seemed shadowy. As Chief of Staff for President Gerald Ford, Cheney earned the nickname, "Backseat."

Later, after he stepped down as GHWB's Secretary of Defense, he became the Halliburton CEO, earning a \$36 million salary in 2000, while running for Vice President. (His current "deferred salary" is only \$150,000 a year.)

Between 1995 and 2000, CEO Cheney helped increase government contracts issued to Halliburton by a whopping 91%. Revolving door?

Then there's that strange Energy Plan fiasco.

Immediately after the disputed 2000 election, Cheney conducted secret meetings with Halliburton, Enron's Ken Lay, and his oil, gas and nuclear pals to discuss a national energy plan. Problem was — Cheney resisted GAO attempts to discover who attended the meeting and when they met.

Corporate-friendly Cheney refused to turn over 13,500 pages of energy plans developed principally by his energy pals. Probably a national security issue.

Immediately after 9/11, Cheney retreated to an extremely low profile, appearing on CNN on rare occasions to deny wrongdoing. Cheney said he preferred a "secure location" — safe from terrorists or truth-seekers.

When Cheney did resurface he used his basso profundo voice — like the voice of a dean of boys at a strict private school. Cheney speaks sparsely in a low hypnotic monotone, with his lower jaw tilted to the side in a self-assured, "I only talk out of one side of my mouth" kind of way.

Listeners at the tables of power have no real choice but to listen. Cheney's the one who must be obeyed. Cheney's dry Wyoming voice has the same effect as a high-pitched whistle on a dog.

If the Pentagon is largely responsible for mishandling the occupation in Iraq, it's Cheney's voice that is responsible for the paranoid vision — the with-us-or-against-us biceps flex against the world — that got us into this long Iraq slog.

Cheney's clandestine world is a Bizarro world where no doubts exist. Cheney indulges in extremes of judgment, over-pessimistic about our ability to contain Saddam Hussein and over-optimistic about the gratitude he claimed we would encounter as "liberators" in Iraq.

In Cheneyworld, the invasion of Iraq made the world a "safer" place, WMD are still concealed in Iraqi basements, every Iraqi insurgent is a card-carrying member of Al Qaida, and the increase in attacks on Americans reflects the guerrillas' desperation, not their strengths.

Sadly, President Bush seems seduced by the siren call of that deep Cheney voice and lugubrious Cheney worldview. The President leaves himself open to manipulation by Cheney because, by his own admission, Bush doesn't read the newspapers and relies on his inner circle to filter information to him. Dangerous — since Cheney sees the world as a dangerous place, war as mankind's natural state, and enemies lurking everywhere.

Yes, this Shadow does have the power to cloud men's minds so they cannot see him. But if we shine the light on him, this Shadow becomes visible.

Remember those famous opening lines of *The Shadow* program? "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows." But does Cheney know?

Cheney also resembles another famous character — the Wizard of Oz. There he is, hiding behind curtains of secrecy, issuing that scary, threatening voice.

Near the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wizard agrees to help Dorothy return to Kansas — but on one condition. He says to her: "You have no right to expect me to send you back to Kansas unless you do something for me in return. In this country (Emerald City) everyone must pay for everything he gets. Help me and I will help you."

Sound like Cheney? Let's all "shine some light" on Cheney's pals in Washington.

Robert Brake lives in Ocean Park, Washington. He writes a column regularly for the *Chinook Observer*, 'Ear To The Ground.' He sent this example, which was published January 21. "I think Cheney and all those Washington, D.C. spooky guys in suits are the real WMD," he wrote.

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