



'In a dark time the eye begins to see'

~THEODORE ROETHKE

DELUSIONS OF ADEQUACY

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

"A democracy can disappear at any time, if it ignores the truth about itself."

~BILL MOYERS

"Go out into the world and fight against poverty, racism and militarism," Martin Luther King, Jr., said forty years ago at Riverside Church in New York City (April 4, 1967).*

We have instead done the opposite. Poverty is not only widespread but endemic, part of a plan for a two-tiered society of the extremely affluent and powerful, with everybody else forced to struggle to survive. Racism is the pillar upon which the new American aristocracy affixes to grasp and maintain power. And militarism is its method, domestically and abroad.

Of course, none of this is unusual. The founders were very aware of this sort of imperial behavior, and after their own bloody struggle with it, propagated a Constitution with a Bill of Rights to curtail the worst excesses of greed, injustice and the grasp for supreme power.

The past five years have nearly reversed all that — although the threat has always been apparent and nurtured before the ink was dry on the Constitution.

George W. Bush has about a year and a half to complete his destruction of American constitutional democracy. Count the days! On the one hand, each day passed is one day less for his Presidency, on the other, each day engulfs us further into the strangling morass of deceit, corruption, war, and the sinister erosion of civil rights and liberties of average Americans.

It will take a long time to repair the damage to democracy by the Bush seizure of neo-dictatorial power, yet everyone should be aware of the chilling future without constitutional democracy, imperfect though it is and susceptible to zealotry, corruption, discriminations of every sort, and of course by latent tyranny.

We might after all be a dying democracy, a bloated red dwarf star that rose too quickly and consumed itself with careless and misguided hubris. Whatever greatness we have possessed, which was our quest for liberty and justice for ordinary people, seems to be swiftly disintegrating, and at least from a vantage of things as they are, the torch is threatened with extinguishing, signified by Bush's refusal to comply with last November's electoral majority. If indeed we succumb to tyranny by schoolyard bullies, it might be hoped that a future people will successfully struggle against similar despotism and oppression and redefine liberty, equality and justice.

About George W. Bush, Walter Kerr might have had his measure when he said of someone else, "He had delusions of adequacy." Or Paul Keating: "He is simply a shiver for a spine to run up."

His swaggering venality has affected us all: a corrupt, compulsively dishonest unelected President whose arrogant seizure of power has spread deceit, avarice and corruption all through American society (not that it wasn't already there). An egregious local example would be the imposition without public involvement of LNG into lower Columbia River culture, denying the citizenry a right to choose.

It would seem ironic, even sardonic, that a psychopathic liar claims he is chosen by God to lead America to Rapture. That he shamelessly proclaims himself war leader when he shirked the war of his generation (enabled by his privileged birth, which is so anti-democracy). That he demands the *noblesse oblige* of a King when he is only a President, and a fraudulent one at that. And that he seems belligerently unconcerned about the human costs of his misbegotten war. He accuses the growing majority who are turning against him as they see his true character as not only disloyal but lacking courage — a fine thing for him to say who has never demonstrated any valor except a swaggering big-mouth bellicosity unmatched by deed or action. He is still a barroom bully although he apparently quit alcohol and other drugs (a sniff of former cocaine use); and he probably ran out on any fights his mouth initiated.

Bush contemptuously disregards opposition, pontificating that he is fighting evil as God's right-hand man. But contrary to such radical (and willful) ignorance, neither evil nor its good twin exist in this world, or universe for that matter. Good and evil are human constructs. Other than human interpretation, the rest of the world operates daily in what might be considered a "relativist" cosmology. Nor is evil committed by agents of Satan, but by satanically-articulated human beings who impose their own peculiar evil purposes upon other humans or humanity at large.

The problem with evil is that nearly everyone suspects nearly everyone else of being evil, which presupposes everybody who thinks that way of being good. That has led to a great deal of mischief over history, mostly of a malevolent and tragic kind. Millennial madness only complicates these constructs (and heightens anxiety). It would seem that every nation chooses hard-line fundamentalists for leaders; the new Catholic Pope is



MARGARET SCOTT

former Hitler Youth. We Americans have George Bush, who cloaks his evils with psalms of good.

It is certainly past time to dethrone him. Or defrock him, given his penchant for self-anointed sanctity. Impeachment is the right to trial for a President who is under scrutiny. More importantly, it is the right to bring a President to trial.

Bush's first impeachable offense was taking the Presidential oath because his "selection" was fraudulent: his second offense might be the fact he has disregarded his oath to defend the Constitution, which he has more or less scrapped in favor of autocracy (or the "unitary executive", a preposterous claim of no merit and cloudy definition), aided by his very autocratic Vice President.

Ron Betts of Waldport, a decorated Vietnam veteran, thinks the next two years ought to be spent getting evidence on the President and Vice President, and at 12:20 p.m., January 20, 2009, the moment after the new President has taken the oath of office, federal officers handcuff common citizens Bush and Cheney and perp-walk them to jail for all sorts of crimes against democracy and humanity.

Bush and Cheney, for all their political machinations, forget that politics is war without the killing. It is perpetual war, always in crisis and about crises, real and imagined, yet its real purpose is to alleviate the worst aspect of crisis, which is war.

For that alone they should be impeached and removed from power.

IRAQNAM

BY ANNA MYERS

It is beginning to look like Vietnam because the death toll keeps rising each day of U.S. troops, Iraq police officers and innocent civilians.

In Vietnam they had foliage to hide from the enemy, but in Iraq there is no place to hide from the enemy. So U.S. troops, Iraq police officers and innocent civilians are caught in the crossfire, sometimes resulting in death or injury.

The veterans hospitals cannot handle the numbers of wounded troops coming back from Iraq. It was the same during the Vietnam War. The number of wounded American troops in Iraq is nearly 25,000. The total number of American wounded in the Vietnam War was 60,000.

I feel that we have been in Iraq too long and that it is time to get out while we still can.

Anna Myers is 22 years old and has been genetically affected by Agent Orange all of her life. Her father handled the herbicide extensively when he was in Vietnam, and died from his exposure when Anna was 18 months old. She is a graduate of Astoria High School, and lives in Astoria.

LIES & DAMNED LIES

I recently found a picture of my face with a caption that claims I am a pretend war veteran. The caption has me saying, "No, I wasn't in Vietnam, but sometimes I like to pretend I was."

It was taped to a microwave oven behind the counter of an Astoria bookstore, where I work a few days a week steaming espressos and arguing with patrons who now and then buy a book. Probably only two or three persons saw it, my coworkers obviously. Yet it was posted in a public place.

I knew instantly whose work it was, a Rush Limbaugh clone who worships Ann Coulter. I realized he was not making a joke but a mean-spirited lying smear.

I can't say he and I argue, because true argument is a civil and civilizing process. We shout at each other, or more truthfully, I shout back because anyone who disputes him is shouted at. His self-appointed mission is to shout down and denounce liberalism wherever it lurks. Disagreement with his menacing and darkly violent vision is equivalent to unpatriotism and Bush hating.

I have been asked by a number of regular patrons to ban him from the bookstore, and they are impatient with my reasoning that he has 1st Amendment rights equal to mine and theirs. Some refuse to come into the bookstore when he is there, or leave when he comes in.

He seldom names an ideological enemy (liberals and leftists, whether they are or are not) without a blatant slur: every other woman columnist aside from Coulter (as well as liberal political women) are "sluts" or "bimbos." He calls Barack Obama "Osama Bama" and the entire Democratic Party is, in his sneering words, the "Treason Obstructionist Party" (or "TOP").

So when I saw public display of what I think amounts to a heavyhanded smear of me as a phony vet, I began to wonder if this was the start of the usual type of slander and innuendo he wholeheartedly approves of against ideological enemies.

I asked him if he was responsible for the slander, and he proudly as well as loudly said "damn right" he was.

I showed him a copy of my "honorable" (without "good conduct" medal) discharge from the USMC (DD-214), and specifically pointed to the reference to my service in Vietnam as a "combat correspondent." (My job incountry was to accompany infantry and reconnaissance troops to record and photograph whatever trouble they made or got into.)

The Limbaugh/Coulter parrot was irritated when I said that he and his "ilk" (a word he usually uses to deride liberals and Democrats) smeared John Kerry in the same manner when he campaigned against Bush in 2004 (despite three purple hearts and a silver star) while shouting down any reference to Bush's military record during Vietnam (Bush went AWOL from his silk-stocking Texas Air National Guard unit for a year, which technically makes our war leader a war deserter).

My personal comparison to Kerry's defamation, which contributed to his loss of the Presidency, is pertinent because he and I were associated with each other as members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The local Limbaughtista has called me a coward and traitor because of my involvement with VVAW, and he berates me for "betraying" American soldiers. He was a Navy enlistee during the Korean War but never left North America. Like most viciously loudmouthed warhawks, he never saw a second of combat. He defines supporting the troops as keeping them at war and considers wartime dissent a treasonable act worthy of incarceration and/or execution (certainly torture, which he countenances) rather than a fundamental freedom and obligation.

He was particularly piqued when I said I had talked to a couple of friends who are attorneys. I asked them if the bad joke was a slander because it was posted in a public place. Their replies were a hesitant assent, but not worth the court costs. A letter of cease and desist addressed to him from an attorney would probably spike further proliferation of at least that form of character assassination; and one offered to write it.

"I'm never going to talk to you again," my Bush-loving nemesis said, indignant that I had threatened him with the law.

I said I was not going to tolerate him doing to me the same as he and ilk did to smear Kerry.

"If you slander somebody as a joke you should not be surprised if the subject of your humor is displeased," I said as he left the bookstore about an hour later, during which we ignored each other.

Friends say the vow of silence is the best thing that could happen, although they seem to think he will be unable to keep his bellicose, xenophobic mouth shut for long. They believe his only purpose for being in the bookstore is to torment me.

I am probably a hypocrite about this. My portrait of him as a Limbaugh/Coulter i-pod is nearly as offensive as his name calling defamation of anyone he is in dispute with.

~MICHAEL McCUSKER