

# The Day "America" Changed for the World

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*[This was originally delivered at a daylong "Teach-In" on the lawn in front of Bachman Hall, the main administration building of the University of Hawaii, on March 20, 2003, the day after the American attack on Iraq began. Thus it was intended to be part of a series of individually very brief explanations of and reactions to the attack and its consequences by UH faculty and members of the Hawaii community, primarily for UH students.]*

In my day job as a "futurist" I am, among other things, supposed to help people look ahead—to try to see the unforeseen consequences of their behavior as well as the unforeseen opportunities that might exist in the futures that they might grasp and apply to solving current problems.

Well, one does not have to be much of a futurist to anticipate some very likely and utterly undesirable consequences of America's unprovoked and outrageous attack on Iraq.

Like many of you, my email inbox was full this morning of messages from around the world—messages of outrage, of sympathy, of anger and frustration, of incomprehension: "How in the world could America do this? Has the entire country collectively gone mad? Have you taken leave of whatever senses you had? Have you no ability to understand what you are doing, forever, whatever the outcome of this specific attack might be?"

Everybody here during this Teach In has been asking the same thing. Indeed, those of us who have opposed the war from the beginning have been increasingly frustrated by the public's ignorance of the situation and especially its willingness to link the events of 9/11 to Saddam Hussein, and thus to justify our attack on Iraq as just retribution for 9/11. There is of course no link whatsoever, and even if there were, the kind of bloody, all-out attack currently underway against a "sovereign nation" is

no just retribution for a terrorists' attack whatsoever.

No, if September 11, 2001 can be said to be the day "the world" changed for America, then March 19, 2003 can be called the day "America" changed for the world.

While the US has engaged in many bloody acts before, as the original inhabitants of these Islands well know, Americans have also generally done many kind and generous things. Certainly, in the period from the Second World War until now, it has been good to be an "American" in the eyes of most of the rest of the world.

I have had many opportunities to be overseas, especially during the time the Soviet Empire was dissolving, and "America" was indeed the vision of the future most of the world had in mind.

No more. Now and forever, if we continue on down this road, we will be seen as an arrogant, ignorant, self-righteous, and utterly brutal madman intent on having his own way, through killing, regardless of the desires of anyone else.

Of course, some loyal spearbearers, hoping to get some small special favors from the Emperor, will fall behind America, and support its rapes and pillages, but most of the rest of the world will live in fear, and come to seethe in hatred and revenge.

How did we come to this point, from a beacon of hope to a hellbent evil empire, in such a short span of

time?

First of all we must blame the media--television, certainly--and especially Fox followed by the cable news networks, who have whipped Americans into a senseless fury in order to increase their viewers. But our print media are similarly craven, slavishly following the party line without any serious consideration of the consequences or alternatives to where the unelected President and his cronies are taking us. While of course there are notable exceptions among small magazines or writers, the jingoistic role of all of America's major media in a country that flaunts a "free press" is beneath contempt.

The difference between the way the American media and the media of all the rest of the world portray these events is stunning. If it weren't for overseas trips, online news, and personal correspondence via the internet, many of us would never be able to understand what is going on if all we had was American news and publications to guide us.

But secondly, and more profoundly, our system of "national" and "international" government is to blame. First of all, the concept of the "sovereign nation-state" is woefully obsolete. More than obsolete, the combination of the concept of "sovereignty" with the belief that it is permissible, indeed right, for the sovereign state to use deadly force against, as well as in defense, of its citizens is the fundamental cause of our problems. UH Prof. Glenn Paige has devoted his life to helping us understand this. I am sure he will do so again today.

Nonviolent political systems led by a nonviolent political science are both necessary and possible, and achieving them (while rejecting the legitimacy of the current national and international system) should be a goal for all of us. (Paige 2002)

But there is more, as UH Prof. Fred Riggs also pointed out long ago, the American Presidentialist system of governance leads naturally and inevitably to military dictatorship. ALL of the thirty countries that adopted the American form of government between the conclusion of the Second World War and that of the Cold War ended up in military dictatorships. ALL of them. It was only a matter of time before the US did as

well. And now is the time. (Riggs, 1994)

In the twinkling of an eye "America" has transformed from the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave to the land of the willingly-repressed and the home of the cravenly-afraid.

Thirdly, we our to blame. And by "we" I specifically mean the American educational system overall, the American higher educational system, and the University of Hawaii.

I literally blame myself and my colleagues directly--it is we faculty who are to blame. Indeed, we have had Presidents and other leaders in the administration of the University of Hawaii--President Albert Simone, Vice President Tony Marsella, and now Vice President Wicke Sloane and others--who have understood that peace is not merely the absence of war. It is a condition that needs as much care, resources, and intellectual attention as does war and the preparation for war. Simone, Marsella, and Sloane in their time and way each called on the faculty to turn the University of Hawaii into the University for Peace, but we faculty would not do it. Even though the Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace was eventually created at the University of Hawaii, our faculty rejected Paige's bold vision, squabbled among ourselves, and thus let the old *de facto pro-war status quo* continue to dominate the University curriculum and its research.

So ultimately this war is my fault, my failure, and your fault too. All our talking here won't change that. We need to go back to our classrooms and our curriculum committees, and recreate the University of Hawaii as the University for Peace.

We need to do that, but we won't. We will continue to focus on our own narrow specialties and historical concerns while "America" transforms into a hated evil empire.

I will conclude with three poems, all of which focus on the pathology of the "sovereign nation-state":

The first also picks up the theme I just ended on--the complicity of the educational system in the transformation of the America Empire.

It is called *1940*, and it is by Bertoldt Brecht:

Out of the libraries come the killers.  
Mothers stand despondently waiting,  
Hugging their children and searching the sky,  
Looking for the latest inventions of professors.  
Engineers sit hunched over their drawings:  
One figure wrong, and the enemy's cities remain undestroyed!

The second is by e e cummings:

why must itself up every of a park  
anus stick some quote statue unquote to  
prove that a hero equals any jerk  
who was afraid to dare to answer "no"?  
quote citizens unquote might otherwise  
forget(to err is human: to forgive  
divine)that if the quote state unquote says  
"kill" killing is an act of christian love.  
"Nothing" in 1944 AD  
"can stand against the argument of mil  
itary necessity" (generalissimo e)  
and echo answers "there is no appeal  
from reason" (freud) -- you pays your money and  
you doesn't take your choice. Ain't freedom grand

Finally, one of the most famous poems of the Second World War, by Randall Jarrell, called *The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner*:

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State.  
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.  
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,  
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.  
When I died, they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

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Fred Riggs, "Conceptual Homogenization of a Heterogeneous Field: Presidentialism in Comparative Perspective," in Mattei Dogan and Ali Kazancigil, eds. *Comparing Nations: Concepts, Strategies, Substance*. Blackwell, 1994. pp. 72-152.

### References

Glenn D. Paige *Nonkilling global political science*. XLIBRIS, 2002. It is significant also in contemplation of America's vaunted "free press" that no "serious" American publisher would accept Paige's manuscript for publication since the basic premise--the possibility of a nonviolent political system--was too threatening and nonconventional for them.