

## **THE COWTOWN HUMANIST      SEPTEMBER 2005**

"PATRIOT ACT" VIDEO FEATURED AT AUGUST MEETING

"MAKING A WILL" SUBJECT OF SEPTEMBER 14 SESSION

GWEN GIPSON TO SPEAK ON "ROE" ON OCTOBER 12

### **SACRIFICING OUR LIBERTIES IN THE NAME OF SECURITY**

At our August 10 meeting we watched a video produced by the American Civil Liberties Union on the creation and working of the "Patriot Act." It is a shaming reflection on the docility of our lawmakers in rushing a 345-page piece of legislation through the Congress and the meekness of the American public in failing to voice stronger opposition to the more egregious features of the Act. Few if any of our legislators had read the Act in its entirety—they had only one weekend to do so before it came to a vote in the House—and not many more were thoroughly familiar with all of its provisions. Gripped by fear, the public by-and-large flaccidly accepted whatever those in power in Washington claimed was necessary to safeguard the nation. Critics were branded as unpatriotic; public input, as conservative former congressman Bob Barr (R-GA) has noted, was nonexistent in the legislative process.

Given the circumstances, it is not surprising that enforcement of the Act has been accompanied by the violation of constitutional rights of many citizens and non-citizens alike. (The Constitution provides that no *person*, not just citizen, shall be deprived of his liberty without due process.) In the aftermath of 9/11 Pakistanis, allegedly here improperly documented, were rounded up and airlifted to their home country; local law enforcement officers were commandeered to enforce the immigration laws; American citizens were detained indefinitely as

enemy combatants. The Inspector General of the Department of Justice has characterized many of his department's actions as having been conducted "haphazardly and indiscriminately." The administration's heavy-handed tactics have doubtlessly been counterproductive. Foreign opinion, as tracked by the Pew Research Institute, has decisively moved against the United States during the past 3 1/2 years after an initial outpouring of support in the wake of 9/11.

This has been particularly true in the Muslim world, which has watched in dismay at the treatment many of their co-religionists have undergone at the hands of the U.S. government over the past four years. The sorry violation of Geneva agreements and of basic human rights at Guantanamo Bay and at Abu Ghraib and other military prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan has tarnished the U.S. image perhaps beyond repair.

An early order of business for the post-Labor Day session of Congress will be a conference committee to reauthorize key provisions of the Patriot Act. Both houses have passed bills similar in broad strokes. Both would give the administration what it most wants, reauthorizing permanently key law-enforcement and intelligence provisions that were enacted temporarily in the original Act and are set to expire at the end of the year. Both bills, however, refrained from giving the FBI sweeping powers to issue administrative demands for documents. The bills would also require reporting by the administration on its use of Patriot Act provisions.

In an interview with editors and reporters of the *Washington Post* on August 29, Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez came out in favor of the House version, which places fewer constraints on the government. The Senate legislation includes tighter restrictions on the FBI's power to seize business records and would place a four-year limit on two of the law's most controversial provisions. Gonzales said the Senate bill's tighter provisions would make it too difficult for investigators to conduct secret searches or obtain "roving wiretaps" in terrorist investigations. He also said that the threshold for obtaining business records, including those held by libraries, would be set too high by the Senate bill.

[For those who didn't watch "Night Line" on August 24 and 25, I will briefly recapitulate what happened to an American documentary filmmaker in Iraq earlier this summer. Cyrus Kar, an Iran-born American citizen who was filming a

documentary on Cyrus the Great in Iraq with the permission of the relevant authorities, was detained with his cameraman and driver by the American military in the Iraqi desert in May. Washing machine timers in the vehicle they were using being found when searched by U.S. military personnel, all three were put in solitary confinement. Kar was interviewed by the FBI shortly after his incarceration. His full cooperation allowed the FBI to check out his credentials and to clear him of any imputation of terrorist associations within days. All this notwithstanding, the American military kept him an additional three weeks in solitary confinement. His efforts to obtain a lawyer and to speak to an Embassy Officer were obfuscated. After 52 days of confinement he was released, but without any apology for his illegal detention. In fact, he received a letter from an officer who reviewed his case that pointedly praised the military's handling of the matter. Except for the intervention of family, associates and the ACLU he might still be languishing in an American military prison in Iraq.]

## **HoFW NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**SEPTEMBER MEEETING:** This month's meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 14, 7:00 p.m., at Friends of the Fort Worth PublicLibrary Bookstore, 5332 Trail Lake Drive, located in the Wedgworth Shopping Center just off Wedgmont Circle North. From I-20 take Granbury Road South to Wedgmont Circle North. Make a left-turn onto Wedgmont Circle North. You will see a CITGO station on your left. Turn left there again into the Wedgworth Shopping Center.

**SEPTEMBER PROGRAM:** Our September speaker will be attorney Alan Bowling who will speak on "Living Wills, Powers of Attorney and the Right to Die with Dignity."

Interest in living wills has surged in the aftermath of the battle over the fate of Terri Schiavo, lawyers and other experts on all sides of the issue say. Many people are filling out the forms for the first time. Others are taking a look at forms they filled out some time ago. Most living wills describe the conditions for withdrawing life support, but others demand the fullest extent of treatment. The results of Ms. Schiavo's autopsy underscores the need to make one's wishes known. Politicians were eager to intervene in her case even though her brain was irredeemably damaged. "This movement to say, 'you've got to have Tom Delay act as a third-party surrogate witness before you can have medical treatment stopped' seemed to be irrefutably silenced by the autopsy report" commented Dr. Arthur Caplan, director of the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania. But don't count on the quiescence of the Tom Delays and the Jeb Bushes for long. If you don't document your wishes unambiguously some politician may yet try and thwart them.

There are two main types of forms known broadly as advance directives. Living wills describe kinds of medical treatment, including life support measures like machine-assisted breathing and feeding tubes, and allow people to say what they find acceptable or unacceptable. The second

form, the durable power of attorney for health care appoints a family member or friend as a proxy to make medical decisions if the patient cannot. Because one cannot anticipate every situation, experts say the proxy is more important than the power of attorney. (NYT)

Here's your chance to find out what you need to do sooner rather than later.

**RECOMMENDED READING:** *Final Exit: The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying*, by Derek Humphrey. Third Edition, Dec. 2002. A concise and well-written guide to ending one's life with dignity.

**OCTOBER PROGRAM:** Our October speaker will be Gwen Gipson who will speak on "The Constitutionality of *Roe v. Wade*." The nomination of John Roberts to replace Chief Justice Rehnquist and presumably the nomination of a new candidate to replace Justice O'Connor before our October meeting make for an exceptionally topical discussion.

**PRE-MEETING DINNER:** Our pre-meeting dinner will be held at Jason's Deli at 5000 Overton Ridge Road (near Costco's). Turn right off S. Hulen St. (going south) and continue a couple of blocks. Jason's will be on your right. Dinner time: 5:30 p.m.

**REMINDERS:** Dues are owing since March (if you haven't already caught up on them): \$18 for individual memberships, \$24 for persons receiving the Newsletter by regular mail; \$30 for couples receiving the Newsletter by e-mail, \$36 for couples receiving the Newsletter by regular mail.

Please remember to bring a can of food for the needy. Dolores will see to its delivery to West Aid for distribution.

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER:** We welcome contributions and any suggestions for making the Newsletter more useful to the membership.

## YOUR OFFICERS AND HOW TO REACH THEM

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## LEGAL FRONT

*The wall of separation between church and state is a metaphor based on bad history. It should be*

*frankly and explicitly abandoned. –the late William Rehnquist, Chief Justice*

## WHY HE SHOULD NOT BE CONFIRMED

Roberts has been a loyal foot soldier in the far right political revolution all of his adult life. ...During his White House stints, Roberts showed a consistent hostility toward civil liberties and never failed to align with the far right. In 1991, he co-authored a legal brief asking the Supreme Court to toss out years of precedent governing church-state relations. This was no recommendation that the court take a baby step away from Jefferson's church-state wall. It was a radical attempt to dramatically recast church-state relations. Under the legal theory championed by Roberts, his boss Ken Starr and other attorneys in the Solicitor General's Office, officially sponsored prayer at public school events, government display of the Ten Commandments and other mixes of religion and government would be declared acceptable practices because of their alleged historical nature. ...Roberts has also championed court stripping in the past—the radical notion that Congress can deny the federal courts the ability to hear certain types of cases, such as challenges to school prayer or anti-abortion laws. ...With so much at stake, it would be foolish to think Bush and his Religious Right allies have not thoroughly vetted Roberts for ideological purity. ...Americans deserve a Supreme Court justice who will respect our country's great tradition of religious liberty undergirded by the separation of church and state. So far, nothing Roberts has said or done persuades us he is that justice. (C&S editorial)

## GAY RIGHTS GROUPS URGE DEFEAT OF ROBERTS

Leading gay rights groups on August 25 dismissed as inconsequential Judge John Robert's *pro bono* work on a gay rights case in the 1990s and came out in strong opposition to his nomination to the Supreme Court. "For his entire adult life, John Roberts has been a disciple of and promoted a political and legislative ideology that is antithetical to an America that embraces all, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people," Matt Foreman, executive director of the

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force said in a statement. "I have no doubt that he's an accomplished lawyer and an affable dinner companion, but that doesn't make him any less a mortal danger to equal rights for gay people, reproductive freedom and affirmative action." In highlighting their concern, the groups pointed to *Lawrence v. Texas*, in which the high court ruled in favor of legal and privacy protections for gays, overriding the state legislature. In recently released memos, Roberts has raised questions about courts' intrusion into areas where legislatures should rule. (WP)

## LAWYERS OPPOSE ROBERTS

A group of lawyers added their voices September 1 to complaints of various advocacy organizations about the nomination of John Roberts to the Supreme Court, alleging in a joint letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee that Roberts lacks appreciation for "the important role that an independent judiciary plays in safeguarding individual rights and enforcing legal protections. The signers included 16 professors from four law schools in the Washington area and one professor from Harvard Law School, Roberts' alma mater. They argue that he has sought to expand the powers of the president and law enforcement authorities while weakening protection for individual rights. (WL)

## MORE OPPOSITION TO ROBERTS

The Alliance for Justice, a coalition of 71 women rights, environmental and other liberal advocacy groups, issued a 103-page report August 30 attacking John G. Roberts Junior's record and announced formal opposition to his Supreme Court nomination. "Judge Roberts has advocated diminishing the role the courts play in enforcing individual rights and freedoms," Alliance president Nan Aron said at a news conference. She contended that Roberts has "expressed strong objections to the courts' long-standing recognition of the right to privacy," the right that underpins the Supreme Court's 1973 decision on abortion, *Roe v. Wade*. Five other liberal groups were expected to join the Alliance: The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund; the NAACP, the NCAAP Legal Defense and Education Fund, the National Partnership for Women and Families, and the National Women's Law Center. Collectively, these organizations intend to intensify pressure on Senate Democrats to fight President Bush's first Supreme Court nominee. (WP)

## LET MORE LIGHT BE SHED ON JUDGE ROBERTS' RECORD

...Like the President this page worries about activist judges who might use the Constitution as a cloak for their desires to remake society in the mold of their own political preferences. Unlike Mr. Bush, we believe the record now shows that most of those jurists are conservatives who strike down laws that do not fit their political philosophy or their extremely narrow view of government power. The Senate has a duty to find out whether Judge Roberts has that kind of mind-set. There are troubling hints that he may. ...The Bush administration could make the Senate's job easier by handing over all the documents Mr. Roberts prepared when he worked for the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. And when he is questioned at his confirmation hearing, he should speak candidly and at some length about his views on important

legal issues and precedents. [To wit, his view on *stare decisis*. Have decisions such as *Roe v. Wade* acquired a place in the American legal framework as to render them not subject to being overturned by subsequent courts?] It is also important to know the president's plans for filling the seat held by the more moderate Justice O'Connor [before the Senate takes up Roberts' nomination]. (NYT editorial)

## HANDS OFF HABEAS

Proponents of the so-called Streamlined Procedures Act [that would accelerate the judicial review of death sentences] justify this radical piece of legislation by citing the supposed intrusive scrutiny of federal courts of state capital convictions and the delays that ensue. So it is particularly instructive that chief justices of the state court systems have voted overwhelmingly to urge Congress to slow down. The chief justices would be, after all, the apparent beneficiaries of the bill, which would gut federal review of the convictions they oversee. Yet in a strongly worded resolution by the Conference of Chief Justices—with only the chief justice of death-happy Texas voting no—the heads of state judicial systems said in essence, "Thanks, but no thanks." Cooler heads in Congress ought to listen. (WP editorial)

## JUSTICE JOHN PAUL STEVENS ON THE DEATH PENALTY

In a recent speech in Chicago Justice Stevens unveiled some of his thinking on how the death penalty is imposed in this country. Justice Stevens began by rejecting the notion that poor quality of counsel explains the rash of wrongful convictions in capital cases. "There are other features of death penalty litigation that create special risks of unfairness. The brutal facts of many capital cases cry out for retribution," he argued, making it extremely difficult for jurors to resolve doubts in favor of permitting a possible perpetrator of a heinous crime to go free." Most judges who preside at capital trials are elected, creating a "subtle bias in favor of death" since it's hard to face re-election having given a break to a killer. The jury selection does the same. Prosecutors create an atmosphere "in which jurors are likely to assume that their primary task is to determine the penalty for a presumptive guilty defendant." Finally, he pointed to the role of statements by victims on the impact of crime—statements that "shed absolutely no light on either the issue of guilt or innocence or the moral culpability of the defendant" yet can sway jurors "on the basis of their emotions rather than their reason." (WP)

## CALIFORNIA SENATE PASSES GAY MARRIAGE BILL

The California legislature has approved a bill permitting same-sex marriages. A spokesman for Governor Schwarzenegger told the press on Sept. 6 that the governor will veto the bill, on the grounds that the voters or the courts should be the ones to decide the issue, not the legislature. (WP)

## CHURCH & STATE

## SURVEY SHOWS AMERICANS ENDORSE CREATIONISM

A Pew Research Center poll finds that 42 percent of the American public holds "creationist" views, agreeing that "living things have existed in their present form since the beginning of time." In contrast, 48 percent said they believed humans had evolved over time. But of those, 18 percent said that evolution was guided by a supreme being, and 26 percent said that evolution occurred through natural selection. In all 64 percent said they were open to the idea of teaching creationism in addition to evolution, while 38 percent favored replacing evolution with creationism. [Presumably the two options are not mutually exclusive since they add up to 102.] (NYT)

## GEORGIA SCHOOL DISTRICT APPEALS EVOLUTION DECISION

The Cobb County (suburban Atlanta) school district has appealed a federal judge's order to remove anti-evolution stickers from its science textbooks. Americans United has filed a friend-of-the-court brief with the 11<sup>th</sup> U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals arguing that the federal judge's order should be upheld. The sticker maintains that, "Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding living things." [Might it hold for dead things?]

(C&S)

## AU WARNS AGAINST MILITARY SUPPORT FOR FRANKLIN GRAHAM EVENT

Americans United has warned U.S. military officials not to promote a Christian evangelistic rally for military personnel sponsored by Billy Graham's ministry. According to promotional literature sent to base commanders, the event "will spiritually refresh you and equip you to share your faith in Jesus Christ with your brothers and sisters in arms." Invitees include chaplains, non-chaplain officers and enlisted personnel. Promotional material for the event says other speakers will include U.S. Army General Officer Robert Van Antwerp addressing a plenary session on how "to lead and influence others with the character and life of Jesus Christ." Navigators Area Representative David Coffield, a former Special Forces medic, is scheduled to speak at a workshop on "practical and appropriate ways to share Christ in the military." Protesting the prospect of military endorsement of an evangelism training event, Barry Lynn, AU executive director, said, "The military must never favor one faith over others. The Graham Ministries' event is intended to teach Christian evangelism, and that's not something the military should be involved in." In an Aug. 5 letter to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Lynn pointed out that the Constitution forbids government to promote religion. (C&S)

## AIR FORCE BANS LEADERS' PROMOTION OF RELIGION



The Air Force has issued new religious guidelines to its commanders that caution against promoting any particular faith in official communications or functions. This follows a flap at the Air Force Academy where teachers and students were accused of foisting their brand of Christian fundamentalism on students of other or no faith. Time will tell whether the new regulations are enforced and achieve their presumed purpose of a more tolerant ambience in Air Force institutions. (NYT)

## FLAG DESECRATION AMENDMENT IS JUST THE BEGINNING

An activist leading the charge for a constitutional amendment barring flag desecration has admitted that the proposal will be just the first of several changes to the Bill of Rights. In a July 18 letter to the *Washington Times*, Patrick H. Brady, chairman of the Citizens Flag Alliance, tied the flag burning amendment to a series of other long-sought Religious Right goals. "But this is about rights: the right of the majority to rule, the right of the people to define their Constitution. And beyond the flag, the issue spills over into the right to protect our children from pornography, the right to own property, to pray, to post the Ten Commandments and to say the Pledge of Allegiance. ...If we recapture our flag, we will have begun a march to recapture our Constitution." Thus, Brady and his cohorts admit to a much broader agenda than just sacralizing the flag. (C&S)

## AMERICA IS NOT A 'CHRISTIAN NATION,' SAYS BISHOP JAKES

The United States is not an officially Christian nation and was not intended to be, says Bishop T.D. Jakes of Potter's House, Dallas. "I don't think we are a Christian nation," Jakes told Atlanta *Journal-Constitution* religion reporter Gayle White, "And I don't think we were meant to be." Jakes was in Atlanta in August for a meeting of the National Association of Black Journalists. (C&S)

## LUTHERANS AFFIRM BAN ON GAY CLERGY

A national meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America rejected an August 11 proposal that would have allowed gays in committed relationships to serve as clergy under certain conditions. The measure would have affirmed the church ban on ordaining sexually active gays and lesbians, but it would have allowed bishops and church districts, or synods, to seek an exception for a particular candidate—if that person was in a long-term relationship and met other restrictions. Delegates voted against the measure 502 to 490. The proposal needed a two-thirds majority to pass.

Last month the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada voted against allowing local pastors to bless same-sex couples. The other major U.S. Lutheran body, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, is staunchly conservative on gay issues. (WP)

## POTTY PAT

What Pat Robertson prays for can come to pass. He prayed for a vacancy on the Supreme Court and—lo!—Sandra Day O'Connor retired. [Presumably the second vacancy to open up for Bush was not the one Pat had in mind.] But the decreasingly popular televangelist seems to notch up more misses than hits. His fulminations against oral-sex do not seem to have nipped the practice in the bud (or so we are told). And his warning that "earthquakes, tornadoes and possibly a meteor" would strike Disney World for hosting a "Gay Day" came, alas, to naught. [Or could it be that the Lord's aim is growing rusty?] So Hugo Chavez, Venezuela's populist president, can probably sleep easy, despite Mr. Robertson's suggestion that he be assassinated for defying America. ...Mr. Robertson's relations with strong-arm dictators have not always been so unfriendly. He was rather chummy with Mobutu Sese Seko, the pink-champagne-gargling robber-despot of Zaire. And the erstwhile Republican presidential candidate gnashed his teeth when America helped depose Charles Taylor, the tyrant of Liberia, whose men carried out abortions with machetes, killing the mother as well, for fun. [Perhaps Pat is being so hard on Chavez because he knows, or at least suspects, there are no lucrative mining ventures waiting for him in Venezuela.]

## N.C. LAWSUIT SEEKS TO WIN APPROVAL FOR COURT OATHS ON KORAN

The North Carolina branch of the ACLU has filed a case in state court after a Superior Court judge refused to allow swearing in oaths to be taken on a Koran. State law specifies that the oath be taken on "Holy Scriptures" but does not specify the Bible. The issue came to a head in Greensboro when a Muslim group donated copies of the Koran to local courthouses. A Superior Court judge ruled that an oath said on the Koran would not be considered lawful. (C&S)

## TOP OF THE NEWS

### POLITICIZING THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION

Over a year ago the FDA rejected Barr Laboratory Inc.'s proposal to sell the emergency contraceptive Plan B over the counter. Acting on FDA's suggestions Barr then submitted a new application, offering to sell its drug over the counter to adults but to require prescriptions for girls younger than 17. In his March 2005 confirmation hearings, FDA commissioner Lester M. Crawford implied that a decision was imminent. Then on August 26 Crawford said that the agency would delay approval once again citing "novel regulatory issues" and "profound" policy questions. Comments the *Washington Post*: Whatever the legal arguments taking place, this unexpected delay at this stage of the approval process makes the FDA—long admired around the world for its neutrality and professionalism—look like an easily manipulated political tool.

### FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EVER MORE SECRETIVE

The government is withholding more information than ever and expanding ways of shrouding data, a coalition of watchdog groups reported Sept. 3. The government spent \$7.2 billion in 2004 stamping 15.6 million documents "top secret," "secret" or "confidential." There were 8.6 million new classified documents as recently as 2001. The number of pages declassified last year declined for the fourth straight year to 28.4 million in 2004; the record was 204 million pages in 1997. [Would one expect otherwise of an administration as obsessed as this one is with controlling every aspect of public policy?] (AP)

## ACCESS TO ABORTION PARED AT STATE LEVEL

State legislatures have produced a near record number of laws imposing new restriction on women's access to abortion or contraception this year. Since January, governors have signed several dozen anti-abortion measures ranging from parental consent requirements to an outright ban looming in South Dakota. Not since 1999, when a wave of laws banning late term abortions swept the legislatures, have states imposed so many and so varied a menu of regulations on reproductive health care. (WP)

## U.N. ACCUSED OF DISTORTING U.S. AID COMMITMENT

The Bush administration has accused senior U.N. officials of "manipulating the truth" by suggesting that the U.S. is backsliding on commitments made over the past five years to increase foreign aid to the world's poor. U.S. spokesman Ric Grenell complained that a recent U.N. press statements indicating that President Bush had endorsed a list of aid targets, known as the Millennium Development Goals, reflected a "bias" against the U.S. But Bush and U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton have expressed support for the 2000 Millennium Declaration, a document that included specific goals, i.a., setting aside 0.7 percent of Gross National Product to finance development. Secretary General Kofi Annan's special advisor, Jeffrey Sachs, accused the administration of trying to "wiggle out" of its commitments. (WP)

## AMERICANS BELIEF IN THE PARANORMAL PERSISTS

Despite the best efforts of skeptical organizations, the results of a poll conducted June 6 through 8, 2005, by the Gallup Organization show that very nearly three quarters of Americans continue to believe in the paranormal. Participants were presented with a list of ten potential paranormal beliefs: extrasensory perception; ghosts, telepathy, clairvoyance, astrology, communication with the dead, witches, reincarnation, and channeling spiritual entities. Almost three quarters of those polled believe in at least one of the ten items that were presented to them. Data from similar polls going back to 1990 indicate a steady, if slow, rise in belief in a number of the items listed. (Skeptical Inquirer)

## U.S. POVERTY RATE RISES TO 12.7 PERCENT IN 2004

The U.S. poverty rate rose for the fourth consecutive year to 12.7 percent in 2004, according to the Census Bureau. The number of Americans who fell into poverty rose to 37 million—up 1.1 million from 2003. The Census Bureau also said household income remained flat, and the number of people without health insurance edged up by about 800,000 to 45.8 million people. (AP)

## ACADEMIC BILLS OF RIGHTS ASSAULT EDUCATION

I commend to your attention an op-ed article by David Gabbard in the current issue of *Free Inquiry* regarding the efforts of neoconservative ideologues to force a thinly veiled affirmative action program for “conservative scholars” on state-supported universities. State legislatures in as many as 20 states have begun considering passage of “Academic Bill of Rights” legislation, modeled on a proposal developed by David Horowitz’s Students for Academic Freedom. (Georgia has already passed its version of the bill, and it virtually mirrors the one developed by Horowitz.) The intent is to open up teaching slots in the universities for some of the current occupants of right-wing think tanks who could not qualify on their academic achievements for university teaching jobs.

## STYLE AND SUBSTANCE

In a tribute to Peter Jennings, the Economist magazine wrote the following: Mr. Jennings’ success at ABC was set against the decline not just of network news (the average age of ABC’s audience is now 60) but also of the journalism he enjoyed. Impartiality has given way to the stridency of Fox News and the internet bloggers. Meanwhile, foreign coverage is dwindling: last year, NBC’s evening news show devoted just five minutes to the genocide in Darfur, CBS a mere three and ABC, thanks in part to Mr. Jennings, 18. By contrast, they together devoted 130 minutes to the plight of Martha Stewart.

## BOOK SHELF

*Understanding Iraq: The Whole Sweep of Iraqi History, from Genghis Khan’s Mongols to the Ottoman Turks to the British Mandate to the American Occupation.* By William R. Polk. HarperCollins Publishers (2005)

Actually, the author covers a lot more history than implied by the title. For he begins his story with the first known settlers of Mesopotamia some 8,000 years ago and continues it through the later inhabitants, most notably, the Sumerians, the Akkadians, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Arabs (bringing their religion but not imposing it) and the Seljuk Turks. Iraq was also to undergo countless other invasions, among them, the Greeks, the Romans and the Parthians. Arguably the most destructive were those of Ghenghis Khan who reputedly killed 80 percent of Baghdad's population of 1,000,000, and of Tamerlane who was left with fewer possibilities for destruction. Baghdad's two centuries of greatness came to an end and Mesopotamia slid into provincial obscurity under Ottoman auspices until the arrival of the British in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Except for oil, and its use for propelling motor driven watercraft, the area known today as Iraq would in all probability have remained a hot, dusty, largely known to archaeologists only part of the world. The British presence in lower Iraq became substantial only in about 1910 with the discovery of black gold in adjacent Persia (as Iran was then known). German and Russian government were not inattentive of the possibilities opened up for economic and strategic gains. Iraq's and Iran's oil were to become crucial to Great Britain in maintaining its hold on the Indian subcontinent during World War I. Turkey's entry into the war on the side of Germany induced a large British military presence that was to grow after Germany's defeat as Great Britain attempted to extend its dominion over all of Mesopotamia. At one point the British had about 130,000 (a familiar sounding number?) soldiers there to subdue a stubborn resistance to still another foreign conqueror. The British more or less prevailed and put into place a royal government and a power structure that became the template for Iraq's subsequent political life. To strengthen its political hold on Iraq, the British undertook economic reforms that were to remain largely in place for many decades. Among them was a land reform program, however, not one that redistributed from the large to the small landholders and the landless, but one that took communal land—a large part of total arable land in Iraq at the time—and placed it in the hands of the tribal chiefs and the Baghdad merchant class. They were to become bulwarks of a "Western-friendly" government for the next several decades. Another fateful British decision was to favor the Sunnis over the Shia, even then much disadvantaged economically and politically.

Iraq became "democratic" after a style, but not in a way that resonated widely with the Iraqi public. The military was virtually the sole institution that encompassed a "national" interest, at least until the rise of the Baath Party in the mid-1950s. In 1958 the Army overthrew the monarchy murdering both the king and his long-time prime minister. From about this time the British role in Iraq and neighboring countries was to be supplanted by the U.S. with its much more ample resources. The C.I.A. was to play as meddlesome a role in Iraqi politics as Britain's M-16 had in past half century. In 1961 President and General Qasim was assassinated after he attempted to take control of Iraq's oil production from Western oil companies. An unstable mixture of military and Baathists was to dominate Iraqi politics until Saddam Hussein outmaneuvered other aspirants for leadership in the early 1970s.

The rest of the story is largely well-known to all who take a minimal interest in foreign affairs. Perhaps the Bush *filis* administration has been singularly inept, as well as mendacious, in conducting U.S. policy towards Iraq. But the Reagan, Bush *pere* and Clinton administrations didn't show a great deal of finesse or perspicacity either. Polk is scathing in his criticism of the

way in which policy was hijacked by the so-called neoconservatives who were guided by ideological concerns rather than by any great knowledge of the Middle East and what was possible to do there. He offers his own prescription for an exit strategy that emphasizes not suppressing the insurgency through the use of ever more American firepower and the building up of a large Iraqi military but rather for a political solution that would engage a U.N. peacekeeping force to replace American and British forces and turn over forthwith responsibility for the Iraqi economy to an Iraqi government that enjoyed the assistance of the World Bank in a reconstruction program and the management of its oil wealth until such time Iraq could manage on its own. To do otherwise, he warns, will cause Iraq to "suffer grievously and the society that survives will be wounded, distorted, and far less than now likely to achieve a reasonably free and peaceful future." The second consequence will be an American society "dispirited, and less democratic than today while internationally it will have lost much of the moral force that throughout its history, from the very Declaration of Independence, has been its most valued and most potent asset."

William R. Polk holds a B.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Harvard and B.A. and M.A. degrees in Arabic and Turkish studies from Oxford. He lived in Iraq for two years during the early 1950s. He served on the State Department's Policy Planning Council during the mid-1960s. Since then he has taught at Harvard and the University of Chicago and lectured extensively both in the U.S. and abroad. At 216 pages *Understanding Iraq* is commendably concise yet contains enough meat to convey a clear understanding of what Iraq and American policy in the Middle East are about.