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POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

On the Thrill of the Kill

In "The 99th's Last Mission" (*Correspondence*, October 2002), Brian Kirkpatrick discusses his father's attitude toward service in World War II. I was born in 1920, a close contemporary of Dr. Kirkpatrick's father. I served in six major battles of World War II, from before the beginning until after the end, and while one man's experience cannot be representative of a group, I must say that Dr. Kirkpatrick seems to be talking about a different war. His father fought in Europe, whereas I served in the Pacific, and the 99th Division featured in the article was composed mainly of draftees, whereas my associates were U.S. Marines. While I do not discount these memoirs, they should not be taken as a measure of the attitudes of American servicemen in World War II.

In various reunions, my friends have often addressed the question of why men fight, and they have reached the conclusion that *men like to fight*. No one likes heat, cold, thirst, exhaustion, and pain, but when blows begin to be exchanged, the pervading emotion is one of exhilaration. None of my comrades, however, noticed any feeling of guilt.

In war, you kill because it is your duty but also, undeniably, because of the visceral thrill. I spent several days in a hospital bunk adjoining that of a very prominent Marine, who later retired as a three-star general. In those long, boring hours, he once told me that the thing that he enjoyed most in life was killing Japs. (That is the word he used.) His view was not unusual, and I am quite sure that vast numbers of young men who faced us in the Pacific felt the same way about killing *Gaijin*.

I do not mean to disparage Dr. Kirkpatrick or his father, but not all American fighting men are Ferdinands. It may well be that U.S. Marines are a different breed from civilian draftees. They may not be better fighters (though we would like to think so), but they certainly enjoy it more.

As we head into a really bad war now, America needs all the warriors she can get. Let us not pretend that they are an endangered species.

—Jeff Cooper

Editor-at-large, *Guns & Ammo*
Paulden, AZ

Dr. Kirkpatrick Replies:

Mr. Cooper is correct in stating, as others have done at length, that the nature of the war in the Pacific was quite different from that in Europe. No doubt, in addition, a group of volunteers is often very different from a group of draftees, even if the draftees thought that they should fight, as the men of the 99th largely did. That difference is likely to be especially marked when the volunteers have a culture like that of the Marines.

A bit of the Marine's age-old contempt for the U.S. Army comes through in Mr. Cooper's letter. In the case of World War II, this is based on a misperception, for the reluctant warrior may be, nevertheless, a very effective one. To think otherwise is to make the mistake that the South made about the North in our own Civil War and the Germans and Japanese made about the Americans in World War II. Perhaps the Spartans underestimated the Thebans as well.

I also concede the point that there are men who love to kill, for whom, "when blows begin to be exchanged, the pervading emotion is one of exhilaration." They run such places as Iraq, and, perhaps, we need them in this world. However, I for one do not want them to make decisions for the rest of us.

On Evangelism

I find it hard to share Doug Bandow's enthusiasm for the minimal religious freedom allowed Christians in Kuwait ("Letter From Kuwait: Religious Freedom in the Gulf," *Correspondence*, November 2002).

While Kuwait does allow Christian clergymen to minister to their flocks, it is those who have never heard the Gospel who primarily need the evangelist. Is it right to celebrate when Christians are forbidden to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19,20) by an Islamic state? Saint Paul's concern applies here: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14).

The best instruction conservatives can derive from Mr. Bandow's letter involves

how a country can prevent its predominant religion from being displaced. While the U.S. government continues to allow almost every conceivable religious group to enter America to do all the proselytizing it wants, nearly all Muslim countries forbid such immigration. This may be extremist and oppressive, but it does show the great contrast between the Muslim world—fiercely devoted to preserving its religious culture and heritage—and the post-Christian, secular West, whose governments not only allow but encourage mass Islamic immigration, which hastens the death of the Christendom that has undergirded European civilization for millennia.

—Kenneth Reynolds
The Bronx, NY

Mr. Bandow Replies:

Obviously, no Christian can celebrate the strictures, formal or informal, against evangelism in Kuwait. But the context is important: As I noted, “it is rare to find a Muslim country where Christians are not routinely discriminated against, oppressed, and even killed.” Moreover, freely operating churches offer a public witness to Christianity; tens of thousands of Christians, working in various homes and businesses, act as informal ambassadors for Christ. Thus, Kuwait is, as I reported, “a relative oasis of freedom” in the Muslim world.

On Globalist TV

Let me take issue with one aspect of the recent and inspired E. Michael Jones piece, “The Family Against the Globalists” (*Views*, November 2002). Dr. Jones suggests that television is supplanting the virtues that are central to families with the values central to the global marketplace and includes a call to action, something frequently lacking in *Chronicles*.

Where I would differ is over the source of television’s adverse impact. The effective force enabling television to destroy *ethnos* is its inherent nature as an advertising medium in an economy fueled by useless consumer goods. The point is suggested by George Garrett in *The Sorrows of Fat City*, where he relates that, as a young CBS writer, he was made to understand that, for the masters of televi-

sion, what mattered most were the commercials. The medium, Garrett argues, was conceived and is managed primarily to advertise, not to entertain, and what fills the gaps between commercials scarcely matters, as long as it is produced cheaply and does not cause the ordinary viewer to change the channel.

Regardless of the programming content, the ultimate message of television as advertising medium is that we should seek fulfillment in the acquisition of consumer goods. The image reflected back to everyone gazing at the tube is of a person who needs only the latest dross in fashions, gadgets, or junk food to be happy, complete, and accepted. By telling us that we are what we buy, television seeks to supplant our relationship to family and locale with a relationship to the global market. Through advertising, television insidiously and unopposedly attacks our identities as members of a family, a neighborhood, a town, and a region—an attack that wears away at the *ethnos* Dr. Jones rightly wishes to protect.

Chronicles should explore whether mainstream media, and television in particular, can ever bear messages favoring values other than those of consumerism—whether they could, in any circumstances, be used or even coopted in support of other values.

—Kevin R. Davis
Nashville, TN

Dr. Jones Replies:

I completely agree with what Mr. Davis says about television. It is an instrument of control that serves the interests of those who own the networks, not those who own the TV sets. *Ethnos* is the first casualty of television, as the late Fritz Wilhelmson points out in his brilliant (if uneven) book *Telepolitics*. His account of what happened to Spain and Quebec after the arrival of television is the best analysis yet of the effects this machine has on local cultures. The second casu-

ality of television is family life, as Mr. Davis rightly points out.

My only quarrel with Mr. Davis’s analysis is that it doesn’t go far enough. As with pornography, which has already made its way onto European TV and will be here sooner or later, certain groups are allowed to profit from something because it serves a political purpose. Economic benefits, while important, are not the whole story. They are like military tactics, whereas political benefits are like strategy. So certain people make money off the fact that television creates a passive and isolated populace, but other groups benefit from that fact politically. They are the ones who enable it to be what it is.

The rich and powerful control television for their benefit. However, as Wilhelmson points out when he critiques the classic Catholic misunderstanding of TV as a neutral tool, the medium itself creates passivity, regardless of its content. Try to hold an intelligent conversation in a sports bar. Try to hold any conversation. Try not to be distracted by the TV screen. Except for a three-year period in Germany when we lived in a furnished apartment, we have never had a TV in the 33 years we have been married, yet, while attending my wife in labor at the local hospital, I found it impossible not to watch the TV screen, even though I was fully aware that the birth of my children was more important than whatever soap opera was playing at the time.

I cite these examples to make a simple point: The medium is more powerful and more pernicious than any possible content it might convey. Even if TV were programmed by saints, the net result over the long haul would be an increase of passivity and stupidity. It should be obvious by now that television is manifestly not being run by saints, and so any “good” programming will invariably function as a Trojan horse. It will act as a justification for bringing the TV into the house and have the same effect on *oikos* and *ethnos* as the eponymous Greek gift had on Troy.



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Furnishing the War

“War is the health of the state,” said Randolph Bourne; it is also a bonanza for political intellectuals and for the mariottes who are put through their paces on FOX and CNN. At the outbreak of World War I, Bourne saw the same phenomenon, though admittedly on a higher scale (Paul Begala and Chris Matthews had not yet been invented):

it has been a bitter experience to see the unanimity with which the American intellectuals have thrown their support to the use of war-technique in the crisis in which America found herself. Socialists, college professors, publicists, new-republicans, practitioners of literature, have vied with each other in confirming with their intellectual faith the collapse of neutrality and the riveting of the war-mind on a hundred million more of the world's people.

News-talk ratings go up during every international crisis, but, despite the thousands of hours devoted to the looming war with Iraq, Americans are no better informed about the goals and prospects of this war than they were in 1898, when William Randolph Hearst told the artist Fredrick Remington, whom he had sent to Cuba, “You furnish the pictures, I’ll furnish the war.” Hearst did not care one way or the other about Cuba, but he did want to beat his rival newspaper, Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*, in the 19th-century precursor of the ratings game. In 1898, the yellow press instructed Americans that the evil Spanish Empire had blown up the battleship *Maine* in order to provoke the United States into a war that Spain could not, in fact, hope to win. In 2002, the yellow press is telling Americans that Saddam Hussein wants to provoke the United States into a war that will inevitably destroy his country and, what is more important to him, his regime.

The press, as obedient and uninformed today as they were during previous wars, dutifully repeat the phrases “weapons of mass destruction” and “links with Al Qaeda terrorists.” Instead of citing evidence, they refer to official British reports (as if

Tony Blair did not lie throughout the war against Yugoslavia) and unnamed administration sources. The announcement of links to terrorism is always front-page news above the fold; the retractions, a few months later, are buried and forgotten. Some commentators still refer to the debunked story of a meeting in Prague between Muhammad Atta and Iraqi officials.

In early December, the *Washington Post* headlined the usual story by Barton Gellman “U.S. Suspects Al Qaeda Got Nerve Agent From Iraqis.” Gellman, true to the great traditions of the *Post*’s Bob Woodward and Janet Cooke, simply passed on the official story without checking any details. This goes on every day, on every story.

In earlier times, once the rulers had decided upon a course of action, the peasants had only to obey, supplying food, money, and clothing to the king’s army and their sons as cannon fodder for the campaign. Under self-proclaimed democracies, power supposedly resides with the people, who send their representatives to Washington or to Paris; for the people to have any say in the political process, however, they would have to have access to accurate information, and if such information was ever available in the history of the United States, it is not available now. Ignorant people, subjected to an educational process that now consists exclusively of indoctrination, cannot make informed decisions. In this sense, Americans are less free than the medieval peasant who knew he was not free and might, therefore, when the king’s officers came around, take steps to hide his money in the well or his son in the woods.

In a modern state, democracy (in the loose sense in which we use the word) depends on an honest and free press. Such a press exists nowhere, least of all in the United States. There are, of course, honest specialists who are occasionally allowed to share their expertise in the newspapers, and there are even honest commentators, such as Pat Buchanan and Alex Cockburn, who usually say what they believe. For the most part, however, the gatherers and spinners of news, either from fear and ambition or from laziness

and ignorance, do not do their job, which is to inform the public.

In the case of Iraq, many of the key questions are simply not being asked. What, for example, is the role being played by international oil interests? To what extent is our legitimate concern for the security of Israel taking precedence over the security and interests of the American people? How important is it, in this connection, to shift the balance of power in the Middle East, by eliminating one of Israel’s few obstacles to regional hegemony? It seems strange that the press cannot discuss the fact that the administration’s policies in the Middle East are being set by Richard Perle, who is also a political activist in Israel on behalf of the bellicose Benjamin Netanyahu.

The press tells us every day that Saddam possesses weapons of mass destruction. He probably does, because, during the Iran-Iraq war, he acquired such weapons, with the blessing of the U.S. government, from France, Russia, and the United States itself. A recent report in the German press lists Siemens, along with unnamed American multinationalists, among Saddam’s major suppliers. The fact that the United States is the largest producer and possessor and seller of such weapons cannot be discussed, and if it is mentioned (*e.g.*, on a call-in show like *Talk of the Nation*), the host cuts off discussion by repeating the Bush administration’s highly improbable denial.

A war with Iraq, justified or not, may well accomplish some good things: the overthrow of a regime of thugs, increased U.S. control of the world’s oil supply, enhanced security for Israel (which may then find herself in a stronger position to resolve the question of Palestinian statehood). In the long run, however, the war might turn out to be a disaster. Ideally, it is up to Congress to debate such questions, but Congress follows public opinion as measured by polls, and public opinion is manufactured by the media. We cannot expect the government to share its secrets with us, but we should demand that the press do its job. 

