

The Bush - Cheney Years

A Historians Against the War Roundtable
at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting
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**HISTORIANS
AGAINST
THE
WAR**

In fall 2008, anticipating a change in administrations, Historians Against the War (HAW) decided to use the January 2009 meeting of the American Historical Association in New York City to assess the past eight years. To that end we invited a range of seasoned historians and HAW supporters to bring their own engaged takes on the Bush-Cheney regime, and its long- and short-term effects in history. We are very pleased that Alice Kessler-Harris, David Montgomery, Vijay Prashad, Ellen Schrecker, and Barbara Weinstein accepted our invitation, and we believe that the resulting spirited exchange was worth preserving and disseminating. This pamphlet contains their presentations.

The founding of HAW was itself part of this narrative of these years of disaster. HAW came together at the AHA in January 2003 out of an urgent sense that historians needed to speak up to oppose the drift into a war of aggression against Iraq. Although we failed in that, we became part of a burgeoning antiwar movement that contributed to undermining public support for a “war of choice.” and ultimately repudiated the pro-war candidates McCain/Palin and elected Barack Obama. In our six years of existence, HAW has organized anti-war educational events on campuses across the country, published several pamphlets (all available at www.historiansagainstwar.org), participated in numerous anti-war demonstrations, and, in 2007, sponsored an anti-war resolution that the American Historical Association overwhelmingly passed, the first such political resolution the eminent organization passed in its 123 year history.

We recognize that our work is not over. We hope that the ideas expressed in this pamphlet encourage you to work against the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and to get involved in the anti-war movement. As the speakers eloquently point out, the Bush-Cheney years have wrought significant damage to wide sectors of U.S. society as well as much of the world. We now have increased opportunity to reverse this destruction and to work for a more just and peaceful society and world.

Special thanks go to Andor Skotnes for organizing transcriptions of the talks, Andor and Jim O’Brien for editing, Beth McKillen for the cartoon that accompanies David Montgomery’s talk, and Yadira Ornelas for an elegant design. Special thanks to Josh Brown for the original cartoon he produced for the cover, which condenses HAW’s reason for being and our historical verdict on George W. Bush and Richard Cheney into a single powerful, mordant image.

Van Gosse and Margaret Power, June 2009

Alice Kessler-Harris



We've each been given ten minutes for a presentation, but as I look around at my fellow panel members, I feel each of us could spend ten hours, not ten minutes, talking about the legacy of the Bush-Cheney administration. That legacy is something that all of us as historians and as professionals and as citizens have been thinking about at least since Barack Obama was elected president. I won't try to cover everything, which I think would be impossible, but to offer you a couple of suggestions—ways of thinking about the legacy of the Bush-Cheney administration—in the hope that we will all talk together after the presentations are all over.

Where to begin with this? Much of my work as a historian has had to do with the role of ideologies and ideas in shaping people's movements and people's actions, people's relationships to their lives and their politics. If we think about the Bush-Cheney administration of the last eight years in the same kinds of ideological terms, it might help us frame the kinds of things that have come out of the administration. I want to present to you three arenas in which ideology has functioned in ways that have left a legacy for us. Most of that legacy is, in my judgment, negative, although, perhaps out of it, in dialectical fashion, will grow some of the seeds of what might well be a positive response in the years to come.

The first ideological legacy: the idea and the practice of terror. I open up the subject of terror because I think that the construction of terrorism in the last eight years, and particularly since 9/11, has been a new and elusive concept. This concept has been wielded, deployed, used, manipulated, and ingrained in our consciences in the same way that the concept of communism—the idea of communism as a powerful enemy—was

ingrained in our consciences. Indeed I would agree with those who say that since the end of the cold war, terrorism has become the new communism.

The idea of a perpetual war against an unknown and unseen enemy called terrorism has made possible a range of behaviors that we will not soon shed. These include the doctrine of preemptive war, the resort to the military to solve problems without first attempting diplomatic strategies, and America's sense of itself as alone in a world where only unilateral military force can defend its interests. It has also, as my friend, the historian Sarah Shields has noted, enabled us to negate the human cost of war. Because, in the name of fighting terror, we are led to believe that we are fighting for the preservation of our most sacred values, we have permission to deny the human cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The idea of terror also fosters unending conflict in the form of a war that has neither a beginning nor an end, nor any locatable geographical source. So fearful is this idea that it can move people to accept almost any acts (including torture, rendition, and murder) as necessary to save the nation.

In the name of the war on terror we have created a monolith called "homeland security" which has justified extensive violations of civil liberties. The United States has suspended habeas corpus, collected reams of data on innocent civilians, and limited freedom of speech and association by idiosyncratically closing its borders to scholars from around the world. The United States has turned over what should be civilian prosecutions to the military. It has extended acts of secrecy to places they never belonged. It has created a category of secrets defined in ways that eliminate the possibility that government agents will be called to account for their activities. It has chal-

lenged access to the courts for hundreds if not thousands of people, among them American citizens. All this is in the name of the idea and the practice of homeland security, which is designed to fight an elusive and protean terrorism.

Finally the idea of terrorism has produced an evasion of accountability. I don't know a better way to say that except that it has led to a Kafkaesque situation where responsibility is neither claimed nor denied. Vice-President Cheney and President Bush evaded impeachment by citing the language of national security, and the effectiveness of a protective barrier that demanded attention.

The second ideological legacy of Bush-Cheney comes from the valorizing of free markets. This is not to say that the free market, in practice as well as in theory, was initiated in this administration. But in the 30 years or so that followed the start of the Reagan administration, it became a pervasive mantra widely exported to nations around the world. In the Bush-Cheney years, the ideology of market fundamentalism was put into practice with a new brutality that ignored poverty and fostered unprincipled wealth creation. The Bush notion that markets are best left on their own without regulation—its rejection of even the minimal kinds of order that George H.W Bush and William Jefferson Clinton retained-- has seen its denouement in the current financial turmoil. Yet the wish for an untrammelled free market has not yet subsided. The current financial catastrophe was prefigured by rising asset prices and an economy built on highly leveraged debt. Some still wish for a return to high housing prices and few economists imagine a return to prosperity without freeing bankers from the burden of regulation.

A less visible but equally dramatic consequence of the unrestrained idea of free

market fundamentalism is a noticeable shift in the language of class. The Bush administration fostered the idea of home ownership to magically create a middle class society. And to some extent this worked. In the last election nobody spoke about working-class people; nobody appealed to voters as “workers.” Rather we heard an appeal to middle-class dreams; middle class aspirations; and unity around middle class values. At the same time, the rising prices of homes and a downward spiral in real wages ensured that only a violation of prudent lending rules would provide even a temporary illusion of spreading wealth to the poor. This illusion has now been shattered by rising unemployment rates, and the credit debacle fostered by unregulated markets. As I speak, foreclosure rates continue to rise.

Despite the financial crisis, the ideology of the free market has taken such deep roots in American society that the Obama administration still finds it easier to bail out the banks than to rescue the automobile industry. So deeply rooted is the idea that it raises the question of whether we can ever overturn the idea that government is a negative force: one that will always act less responsibly than private interests. Will we, like the Scandinavians, ever be able to imagine government as a force for good?

Finally, I conclude with the shift that I see in what might be called the ideology of individualism—the increasing and creeping notion over the last thirty years (and particularly in the last eight) that the values of democracy which we used to think resided in at least some level of collective concern, of social consciousness, and of care for each other, reside instead in maximum liberty. The New Deal and post–New Deal coalitions agreed that democracy could be best preserved through such programs as Social Security, strong un-

employment insurance, and welfare programs that would care for the most vulnerable among us. But more recently democracy has come to reside in a reified individualism—a hands off, laissez faire attitude. This ideological shift permeated the recent presidential election, stifling genuine debate. For example, Candidate Obama disappointed many of us when he did not support a single-payer health care system, or advocate another kind of national insurance system. Instead, candidate Obama acknowledged the role and the property rights of insurance companies thus accommodating individualistic values.

I fear that such caution signals a continuation of faith in individualism and individual values as opposed to the collective and caring sense of community that reared its head during the New Deal. It suggests a continuation of the moral righteousness that negated political compromise over such issues as reproductive rights. And it denotes resistance to solving some of the larger problems facing all of us—problems such as climate change and environmental pollution. .

My view is not entirely negative. Perversely, perhaps, I hope that the collapse of the market, the sense that we are in more than a limited financial crisis, will force us, as a nation, to re-think our values, to ask once again, what we mean by words like liberty, democracy and equality. If that happens then the legacy of the Bush-Cheney years may yet be at least marginally positive.

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books include In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America (2001), Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States (1982); A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences (1990); and Women Have Always Worked: A Historical Overview (1981). She is co-editor of Protecting Women: Labor Legislation in Europe, Australia, and the United States, 1880-1920 (1995) and U.S. History as Women's History (1995). Her most recent book, Gendering Labor History (2007) contains her essays on women's work and social policy.

David Montgomery



Thank you, Alice, for covering so much of what I wanted to say. I agree that there are two essential ingredients of the Bush/Cheney legacy that are intimately related to each other and that both need to be reversed: the aggressive and unilateral “war on terror” and the celebration of the unrestrained market as the solution to all social problems. In the months since the November elections the expanded conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Israel’s armed assault on Gaza, and the deepening global economic crisis have only underscored the perils left us by that legacy.

But I do want to focus our attention on one crucial feature of the present situation. There is no question but that the Obama election opened up enormous hopes among the people in this country and elsewhere in the world. Hopes for exactly what, is often hard to say. Indeed, we must participate in defining paths to realize those hopes over the course of the years to come. But hopes, yes. Those hopes were evident at home in the appearance of the first sit-down strike in a long time. No sooner was Obama elected than, wham, workers in Chicago occupied a factory which was about to close, and the police made no move to throw them out. Obama said the strikers were right, and the workers soon expanded their protest to focus on the refusal of the Bank of America to extend credit to the company, despite the huge bailout the bank had obtained from Washington. The strikers soon won their demand for a severance package. The only thing wrong with that whole struggle was in the press reports, which said there had been no sit-down strikes in America since the 1930’s. I was involved in one in Brooklyn, New York, in 1953, also involving a plant closing! Same Union, though—the United Electrical Workers.

New hopes and new activism were

soon evident elsewhere in the land. The workers of Smithfield Ham won union certification after 15 years of struggle, first of all fought by the Latino workers, who were soon devastated by immigration service raids and firings of activists. Then the hopes were taken over by African American workers. When the NLRB actually issued a few good rulings reinstating a couple of the Latinos, the two groups began to act together. That made for this new hope and new atmosphere.



New Majority, 22 March 1919 p.6
Courtesy of the Newberry Library

This sense that popular action can still accomplish something was evident even in my new neighboring city of Philadelphia, in action that may seem far removed from the wars. The city government decreed the closing of eleven library branches, and in response there was a massive turnout of the population. Everybody from local African American inhabitants, to school teachers, to anarchists, to anyone

in between, all joining forces to say, "Our children deserve good neighborhood libraries." This kind of mobilization from below is something I think we are going to see much more of in the years to come. The very nature of Obama's election campaign encouraged it.

The common characteristics of these popular struggles and the hopes that inspired them are all related to the legacy of the Bush/Cheney administration. Three features of that legacy deserve emphasis. The first is the promise of "a thousand years of war" against "states harboring terrorism," as pledged by Bush in 2001. Military actions, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, far-flung operational bases and missile installations, and the so-called "coalition of the willing" unleashed under that banner, have dragged both our soldiers and the beleaguered peoples of the region into more than six years of carnage.

The second is the endlessly repeated doctrine that if government regulations of business practices are removed, "free markets" will somehow always work for everyone's best interests. Just how free are these markets Bush is talking about? Are they at all like, let's say the markets of a Mid-Eastern bazaar, where individuals sit down with a pot of tea and haggle over prices of wares? No, it is unrestrained corporate enterprise; this is what has been covered by this slogan of the beauty and infallibility of markets' decisions. The World Trade Organization, the International Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund have imposed this view on much of the world. It is in reaction against that pressure that the remarkably varied self-styled "socialist regimes" and "South-South" trade agreements have emerged in Latin America. They challenge the Obama administration to restructure thoroughly the international network of trade, investment, and credit relations.

The third element of the Bush/Cheney legacy is to be found in the new powers embodied in the administrative state—powers taken on by agencies above and beyond the enactments of elected legislatures. Though the enormous bumbling Homeland Security department has attracted the most public criticism, I would like to single out briefly the U.S. Department of Labor. For the first time in its history of almost one hundred years that department has been run by somebody explicitly and openly hostile to labor unions, Secretary Elaine Chao. She has used her office to virtually shut down the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and to cripple even the seeming impregnable Mine Safety and Health Administration, which not only the United Mine Workers of America but also major mining companies had supported and used extensively. Under Bush and Chao the government gutted those agencies enforcement work, so that we see mining disasters reappearing around the land. On the other hand, the Department of Labor has put about a thousand new agents to work, checking the books of every local union in the United States, while it has systematically eased or ignored regulations governing employers in the United States. Simultaneously newly appointed members of the National Labor Relations Board have required companies to post public notices informing employees how they may get rid of their union, while voting down proposals by the minority comprised of earlier appointees that companies be required to post notice of workers' rights under federal law to form a union. This kind of government by administrative decree I think is an essential part of the link between the promise of perpetual war and the promise of the "free market." President Obama's appointment of Hilda Solis as Secretary of Labor promises to turn a new

page -- or, if you will, to return the Department to its original purpose.

When we consider all three of those commitments (war against terror, free markets, and the administrative state) those of us here (especially the historians) always have to ask ourselves, just what is new? To plot our own course dealing with the Obama administration that has aroused such hopes, we must seriously ask ourselves to what extent everything the Bush administration has done is but an elaboration of tendencies implicit in our country's exercise of imperial power for more than a century. Sorting out especially what was being built since World War II from the new level of horror that has come with the Bush-Cheney administration, I think is an extremely important part for us to play. Take for example the glorification of free markets. We have already referred to the global powers exercised by World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. Especially since the early 1970s they have been devoted to forcing the privatization of industry, and the turning over of all resources to foreign investors, converting national economies into export economies—export of goods, and perhaps unintentionally, export of people on a massive scale around the world.

NAFTA stands out very much in our minds when we think of how major economic activities in Mexico were privatized in preparation for NAFTA. Fundamentally the treaty simply ratified what Mexico had already done and used internationally-enforceable provisions to block any future reversal of such policies. Such treaty rights have given local struggles international dimensions, as became dramatically evident in Bolivia's confrontation with foreign ownership of its water supplies.

The Mexican government, as part of its preparations for the North American Free

Trade Agreement had privatized the copper mines of Cananea. The new owners proceeded to lock out the unionized workers, and they have been on strike for more than two years now. As many of you know, the copper strike of 1906 has often been considered the opening battle of the Mexican Revolution, so that the very name Cananea has a special resonance. Last fall the United Steel Workers of America, which represents many copper workers in the U.S., voted to have each of its locals adopt some of the 3,000 Cananea strikers. Such tangible assistance across the border has seldom been witnessed in this country since the 1940s (and copper miners and smelter workers were prominently involved then too).

These considerations underscore crucial questions that we now must confront. First of all, on the war program, the phrase that Rumsfeld came up with, “shock and awe,” I think stands out as the crucial thing. Rumsfeld after all never wanted to increase the infantry very much. But he always wanted to have power to bomb, bomb anything into oblivion—a doctrine that is being repeated right before our eyes, of course, in the Gaza strip today. But here was the notion that the United States could and should singlehandedly bend anyone else to its will. Similarly Bush’s rhetoric glorified an “ownership society” in which private stock holding and home ownership would underwrite and provide political support for financial institutions that gambled with borrowed money. The consequences have been so disastrous that even Alan Greenspan has recently confessed his errors. The question with which we must all now engage our talents and our energies is to chart a path out of this crisis that will not lead ultimately to even more international conflict.

We in *Historians Against the War* have directed our attention above all to ending

the war in Iraq and the many wars that have come around it. Certainly our campaigning had a great deal to do with the large-scale mobilization that made Obama place ending the war in Iraq at the center of the few things he talked about explicitly in his campaign programs. But it also has meant that these great hopes that have emerged out of the fall of 2008, along with our suffering from the economic crisis and ever growing numbers of unemployed, have left us the task of not only building on these hopes among the American people to try and redefine the promise and perils of the world in which we find ourselves, but also of mobilizing to see to it that Obama keeps these promises. Indeed we must to help define those hopes more explicitly.

The question of health care that Alice Kessler-Harris talked about is right up at the top of the domestic agenda. But right behind it, we have a new secretary of labor friendly to immigrants—of all things, friendly to immigrants!—and indeed friendly to reconstructing the kind of Labor Department policies that Frances Perkins once stood for. A promising sign is the recent joint agreement between the AFL-CIO and its rival Change to Win to join hands in support of amnesty for all undocumented workers. But even the *New York Times* asks the question, how much support will she get from Obama? Because he has surrounded himself with people from the major banks who say the worst thing we can do in a crisis is to disturb workplace relations.

Clearly our role as an active citizenry is going to be crucial in helping to define the answers to these questions. What do we mean by bailed out? Who gets bailed out and under what terms? Do we do it by reducing everybody’s living standard, as was done in the Chrysler bailout? Or do we do it by building up purchasing power so that we can pull

ourselves out of this long-term crisis?

This means that a major task before all of us now is not only to keep open, but to extend the discussion of the kind of a world we want to get rid of, the one that Bush and Cheney have given us, to project the kind of a world we want to create. And as we think about this we can draw upon as many ideas on that as there are people here! All right, let's get together and exchange them and see what kind of joint activities we come up with. I think of the cartoon in the *New Majority*, the paper of the Chicago Federation of Labor, in 1919 with a door that says Versailles Conference, and outside of it are a bunch of workers banging on the door. They say "You couldn't make war without us; you can't make peace without us." That should be our slogan.

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Vijay Prashad



I feel quite humble to be here among you. This is of course an organization founded in anticipation of the war on Iraq, but as the war on Iraq was happening we were already at war, not just in Afghanistan, but in 182 places around the planet where we have located our military in anticipation of escalating hostilities wherever we feel the need. But perhaps when we formed in 2003, we should have sent a better Arabic translator to Washington, D.C., because apparently Fouad Ajami and Kanan Makiya had misunderstood the sentences that the Iraqis were intoning then, they were not saying you will be greeted with flowers, but you will be greeted with shoes. So perhaps it might be a good idea to give them better Arabic translations.

I'm going to be a bit of a damp squib. Although I agree that the door to hope has opened domestically, I think in terms of foreign policy and war policy it is quite a different scenario. The question of hope was on the table immediately on November 5 and right before then, but I think it seems to be narrowing once more. There is Gaza; there is relative silence. Now, the Bush administration would have cheered on the Israeli Government, and said "Bomb them more, bomb them harder." The Obama administration—yes, a better line: "We need to have a cease-fire." But, yet, the narrative is similar.

So I'm going to talk a little bit against the idea of presidential time—looking at U. S. history through the era of one president to the next—and suggest that even though we might be agreed on the personal stupidity of George Bush, the continuities between, say, Carter onward, are quite astounding on the level of foreign policy, though not domestic policy. So I would like to lay out a narrative of the continuity against the question of presidential time. I am going to rely a little bit on my

book, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (The New Press), quickly to frame that story, and then I am going to talk specifically about how I understand US foreign policy, and then the possibilities before us in this period to come.

The narrative first. A word about Fidel Castro, who must be thrilled—you know in Santiago just a few days ago, he celebrated the revolution after fifty years. Perhaps the single most important revolution after the Second World War, even much more important I would say than the Chinese revolution. But the Cuban revolution, what a historical achievement! And so little recognized. The *New York Times* had the indecency after Herbert Matthews's coverage at that time, to just report from Miami and to give no coverage from Havana or Santiago, anywhere in Cuba.

But nevertheless, in 1983 Castro comes to the Non-Aligned Meeting in New Delhi and says that it is time now for all us, 170-plus countries—we are under attack from the International Monetary Fund, we are under attack from the advanced capitalist countries, who are in the middle of a problem. They are entering a down slope, they are going now to get us into a debt crisis, he said. In Mexico it had already happened the previous year. He said we are all going to go under; we need to have an international strike against debt servicing payments. We need to use our own value that we are creating out of our hard work to build our national infrastructures to create mutual trade, and not to send debt servicing back to the advanced industrial countries to get them out of their slump.

Of course Castro lost the day. One of the great defeats in Castro's career was the Non-Aligned Meeting in 1983, because the money that flooded from South to North helped provide an early bubble, which then en-

tered the financial system. It's a very long and complicated story, and I wish we had time to enter the discussion of the long-term trajectory of this financial crisis. It's not just deregulation in the US domestic scene; it's also the way international imperialism was restructured in the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

While this was occurring, many of these countries, which had made commitments to their populations—social democratic commitments—these countries reneged on their commitments in the 1980's. In some cases national revolutionary, in some cases national democratic states, all lost their legitimacy. From the margins in each of these states came the fires of fury. Political organizations which had been marginalized up to the 1980's—organizations whose primary identification was religion or ethnicity—made dramatic and important emergences in the 1980's. For instance, what we now call political Islam, or in India the *Hindutva* movement, the right-wing Hindu movement, or indeed in Israel when Likud for the first time comes to office in the late 1970's, having been marginalized by Labor before then. This period saw the entry of the right, which put itself forward as the defender of the majority, either religious or ethnic—these forces emerged.

The United States' response to this is characteristic. Let's take the two ends of the spectrum: one the Gulf, the other Afghanistan. And it is true as Alice Kessler Harris very importantly pointed out, that terrorism begins to be the word, the idea that replaces the cold war or communism. But there's another word, which is oil. There are two important events that I want to put forward for our consideration from the late 1970's as these switches are occurring. The Carter doctrine enunciated in 1980, where Jimmy Carter eventually put forward the view that the security of Saudi

Arabia was the security of the United States. It's a very important doctrine. It has had catastrophic effects for the Middle East and of course for the ability of the United States to be the so-called "honest broker" in the region. The Carter Doctrine.

On the other end of that very large piece of land, the United States under Brzezinski's prodding and pushing starts to help finance the far right elements in Afghan society to fight against an internally combusting People's Democratic Revolution in Afghanistan. So people like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who makes his reputation by throwing acid in the faces of women students at the University of Kabul in the engineering faculty, gets funding from Brzezinski's minions to start a direct armed struggle against the People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. These are the two ends; these are the two responses. This begins in 1979 and 1980.

Now I want to just lay out some implications from these and then come to the present era. I would argue that between the 1970s and the present that there have been two separate, perhaps you might consider them tactical, approaches followed by the two major bourgeois parties in the United States. One is an approach which we might consider from the Bush-Cheney era of unilateral imperialism, where it's go-at-it-alone, screw everybody else, we're going to do it. This was also Reagan: screw everybody, we're going to do it. Bolton and that crowd, they fed on that doctrine in the Reagan administration: the United Nations is a hindrance, screw it, let's just go and bomb, we can do it, let's bomb Grenada, let's bomb in Beirut, let's just prop up and make really tight friends with the right wing in Israel. That was one line. And the Republicans mainly supported that line, although, by the way, so did lots of friendly Democrats

including, the mentor of Wolfowitz, Scoop Jackson. Friendly Democrats were there in Congress for this line.

The second line is multilateral imperialism. When they say multilateralism in this section of the Democratic Party foreign policy elite, they don't mean you listen to what people in Palestine or Malawi or Laos are saying. What they mean is Britain, Germany, France—all the old colonial powers, the members of the United Nations Security Council, and themselves—as long as everybody listens to America. It's basically the American line, but all these former colonial powers have to tag along. This is what they mean by multilateralism. In a sense it shuts out the 170, 175 other countries in the world. This is not genuine multilateralism. This is multilateral imperialism. Multilateral in name, but imperialism nonetheless. Still there are some differences, which I recognize. That's the kind of Tweedle-Dee, Tweedle-Dum that we see in foreign policy over this terrain.

One of the ways in which the US foreign policy is operated—we have to realize the structural role played by the right in societies like, say, Egypt or Pakistan or India. Take Pakistan as an example. Pakistan undergoes IMF restructuring in the 1970's, around the time the United States begins to write checks to Pakistan regularly. You know, this check-book thing starts in the 1950's. From the seventies, Pakistan cuts its spending by IMF diktat on health and education. Well, once you cut health and education, you open the door for all kinds of faith-based organizations to come in and start providing health and education, and this is what indeed happens. In other words, the right plays a structural role in these societies. It is not some kind of entity that can just be taken out by bombs, it is now playing the role of, genuinely, the opium of the

masses—not just ideologically but also in fact in practical terms—because we have decided through the IMF that health and education should not be a state function.

So, we must understand that first point, the structural role played by the right in these societies. Anybody who thinks about Hamas, for instance, or Hezbollah, and doesn't understand this is ignorant of the fundamental facts of the role of these organizations. Or indeed, Lashkar-e-Taiba, which just conducted the Mumbai attack—it's linked to health care provision. In Muridke, where they have the headquarters, they are the principle health care provider in the area. It's very difficult for the Pakistani state to close them down. You close them down, there's a health care emergency. The first thing then, is the structural role of these right-wing forces.

Secondly, there was a failure to demobilize the jihad, to struggle socially to demilitarize those who had been funded by the U. S., the Saudis and the Pakistanis to become professional jihadis. After the 1980's war in Afghanistan, when the civil war began to slowly give itself out to the Taliban, many of the veterans of the Afghan jihad had the erroneous idea that they were the ones that won the war against the Soviets. So they then went home. They went to Chechnya, they went to the Philippines, they went to Egypt, they went to Saudi Arabia. And those from Pakistan went into the struggle in Kashmir. That struggle begins again in 1992 in earnest, and it is taken over by this section. Lashkar-e-Taiba, for instance, is formed not in Pakistan but in the Kunar province of Afghanistan in 1991. The jihad was insufficiently demobilized. We have to understand that as well—that these are not some entities that have come from prehistory.

If the jihad carried on, we must also

understand that it is not the only political force in those countries. If you take that whole section of the Pathan region of Afghanistan-Pakistan, it has a glorious history of nonreligious activism, which can be glimpsed even now. The Awami Party won the last election in the Waziristan area. And by the way, Bangladesh, Henry Kissinger's basket case, on New Year's offered the greatest gift: the Awami party swamped the elections, and it won the largest plurality in Parliament. The Islamists won less than the socialist party in Bangladesh a few days ago—an incredible victory for secular forces in Bangladesh and in the borderlands of Pakistan in last year's election.

These are things that are not seen. Obama talks about Pakistan—he's the first American president who can actually pronounce Pakistan. But in the same sentence, he says I want to bomb Pakistan. He does not understand the contradictions in these societies, that there are elements that can be pushed and promoted and brought forward; that you cannot complete this crisis if you don't understand the cause. We have to demobilize the Jihad of the Afghan war, we have to go back and decontaminate that zone that we have created, that's the second thing.

The third thing is Washington has consistently disregarded its own rule by playing favorites in this process. One is our friend, another is our friend, and you see very quickly the friends Washington chooses are those without a mass base, or, whose mass base, because they become friends with Washington, is quickly denuded. Super example: you have a mass base, suddenly Washington is your pal, Washington wants you to win an election, you're going to lose the election. Why? Because everybody understands Washington's structural role in their social mal-development, and we have to recognize that.

So, very quickly, my feeling is that we as historians need to be making this point, because the bourgeois historians are going to say the era of Bush and Cheney is over, we are now in the era of Obama, and everything is great. Now we will be greeted with flowers when we send more troops to Afghanistan. It is our role to say NO! That this is a long-term trajectory. We have a long-term problem, we need to have long-term understanding for solutions, and that troops are not going to solve the problem. Troops are going to inflame the situation even more. Obama, very cleverly and very disappointingly to me, ran the election saying Afghanistan was the good war and Iraq was the wrong war. We cannot allow that to be doxa. We need to challenge that at every instance, and we need to demonstrate that Afghanistan is the long war, not the right war. If Iraq is the wrong war, Afghanistan is the long war, and we need to put a stop to both. Thanks very much.

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Ellen Schrecker



Because I've written so much about McCarthyism and civil liberties, I'm often asked whether the Bush administration's assault on civil liberties is worse than earlier ones. As a careful historian, I always give a nuanced reply: yes, and no. One element that is certainly consistent, and one that my colleague Vijay Prashad has noted, is the continuity with earlier episodes of political repression from the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 through the post-World War I Red Scare to the present. At every moment, we have seen the use and exploitation of a crisis as an opportunity to expand the government's power and silence its opponents. These instances of political repression almost invariably occur with the rationalization that the protection of national security during a major emergency requires the subordination of ordinary constitutional protections.

Significantly, not all the current violations of individual rights stem from 9/11. In 1996, for example, Congress and the Clinton administration gave us the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act that created a new crime of "material support" for a "foreign terrorist organization." That measure was so vaguely framed that if you had given money to Nelson Mandela's ANC, you might have gotten into trouble.

Even so, it's clear that 9/11 ramped up political repression in the United States. Before we describe it, however, we need to recognize the extraordinary level of panic that there was in Washington in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. Remember the anthrax scare? The Bush administration was terrified, just terrified. Its members feared a recurrence, and their gut reaction was to get tough. They sincerely believed—incorrectly, as seems the case—that coercion was the most effective means of response. They also took

advantage of this crisis to implement their own longstanding wish list of domestic and foreign ventures, including, of course, the invasion of Iraq, which the neoconservative hawks had been eager for.

The post-9/11 sense of crisis, for example, enabled the Bush administration to sign off on coercive measures that previously had been considered politically impossible. For example, it allowed the Department of Justice to roll back restrictions on government actions through the USA PATRIOT Act. That measure, which whisked through Congress without any serious debate, was embodied in 362 pages of totally unintelligible bureaucratic prose, most of which consisted of amendments to earlier laws. It took the ACLU's lawyers several weeks to figure out what the law actually contained.

The crisis also allowed the administration to implement its notion of what came to be called the unitary executive. This was a particular project of our beloved Vice President Cheney, who worked to restore and expand the powers of the executive branch that he believed had been seriously curtailed in the 1970's after Watergate. We see the DNA of this particular project in many of the measures that were taken by the Bush administration, above all in its assumption that it was somehow above the law, and in the many measures that it took to avoid accountability, mainly through secrecy. It was, after all, the most secretive administration in recent American history.

The Bush administration also acted on its notion of an expanded executive by refusing to acknowledge the power of other branches of the government. The White House has repeatedly defied Congress, most notably in the employment of "signing statements," in which the President signed a law

and then accompanied his signature with a weasely statement that he might not enforce it. A similar attempt to expand the power of the executive can be seen in the measures that were taken to circumvent the courts, especially with regard to surveillance and the detention of prisoners. All of these measures, I want to emphasize, rely on that invocation of national security and on the claim that their implementation is inherent in the president's power as commander in chief.

Besides its destruction of the system of checks and balances, the Bush administration's unaccountability and drive for power has led to serious depredations against the rights of individuals both at home and abroad. To begin with, there are the illegal detentions and interrogations of prisoners, which are clearly the most blatantly illegitimate assumptions of power by the Bush White House. Naturally, Bush, Cheney, and the rest justified all these measures as necessary to prevent "further terrorist attacks." And they began the illegitimate practice of holding people without charges in the United States almost immediately after 9/11 with the roundup and detention of thousands of immigrants, mainly Muslims and people from the Middle East and South Asia. Overseas, the C.I.A. and the military captured and incarcerated unknown numbers of people. In order to evade the Geneva Conventions that required the humane treatment of prisoners of war, the administration developed a new juridical category for the people it detained: they were "enemy combatants," a status that seemingly conveyed no rights at all. The government has also violated the Constitution by eliminating due process in a number of areas. Not only did it deny the writ of habeas corpus, which would allow these prisoners access to the courts, but it also sought to develop new types of military

commissions to try them without the normal constitutional requirements of due process of law. These captives have been held in Guantanamo, as well as at least eight so-called “black sites”—which were apparently in places like Morocco or Eastern Europe where the U.S. government was trying to ensure that American legal protections did not apply.

Worst of all has been the treatment of these detainees: the use of what has euphemistically been called “enhanced interrogation” practices—i.e., torture—and the practice of renditions, in which the government sends prisoners to third countries, where it obviously expects (and plans for) them to be tortured. There has also been an enormous increase in surveillance, of citizens and foreigners alike. Under the Patriot Act, for example, the FBI issued more than 200,000 national security letters to libraries, bookstores, and corporations, asking for information about all kinds of people. The National Security Agency, we know, has done a considerable amount of warrantless wiretapping that the administration authorized in order to avoid legal requirements for review by the so-called FISA or Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act courts. We have seen some successful, some unsuccessful attempts to collect data. The government has also been experimenting with data mining. We know, for example, that the Department of Defense has been collecting information under the rubric of terrorism on all forms of internal dissent.

Much of this has been secret, and I think this secrecy is really a key to the Bush administration’s methods of operation. After all, even before 9/11, if you recall, Cheney was trying to conceal the personnel of his energy task force from the public. That drive for unaccountability has only increased over time, intensified, of course, after 9/11. In the

months after 9/11, for example, the attorney general began to roll back the Freedom of Information Act, refusing to grant access to many government records that had previously been opened. The Patriot Act contained so-called gag orders, under which institutions that were asked for information on individuals and groups were not allowed to talk about those requests or even to reveal that they had occurred.

The government has also greatly increased the number of documents that have been classified. Roughly 50 percent of those documents, according to one expert, have been incorrectly classified. Particularly serious here has been the administration’s reliance on the notion of state secrets as a way of making it impossible to bring lawsuits against the government in the area of national security. There has also been—and I think this is just as serious—the use of confidential legal rulings by the administration, by the Department of Justice’s Office of Legal Counsel, like the notorious torture memo by the former Justice Department official and current University of California law professor John Yoo.

There has been outright repression of dissent as well, often as a result of collaboration between federal and local officials. This has resulted in the roundup of legal dissenters—for example, at the time of the 2004 Republican Convention in New York, and more recently at the 2008 Republican Convention in St. Paul, when the Department of Justice raided a number of dissenting groups and arrested peaceful protestors.

Barbara Weinstein, I know, is going to talk a little bit about some other measures that have limited academic freedom. So, I just want to conclude by asking what kind of generalizations we can make about this Bush and Cheney assault on our basic freedoms. One

that is very obvious is that it is counterproductive. It doesn't increase American security. We know very well that torture does not necessarily produce valid information, but only the information that the victims think the torturers would like them to give. Things like Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib have certainly alienated allies overseas that are needed for dealing with the issue. Furthermore, from a law-enforcement perspective, there is too much information. The FBI has been swamped by it. It does not have many Arabic interpreters and it simply cannot handle all the stuff that the NSA has been scooping up. More seriously, of course, the Bush administration's excessive secrecy and depredations against the constitution have dangerously undermined American democracy and the rule of law.

So what should Obama do? Close Guantanamo, end renditions, restore the rule of law, repeal most of the Patriot Act, restore open government, and end the surveillance of dissenters. It is a pretty obvious wish list. Unfortunately, it probably is not politically feasible to conduct war crimes trials of people like Bush and Cheney, although I have been convinced by the director of the Center for Constitutional Rights that, in the legal sense, these people really are war criminals.

So, what should we ask for? Maybe some kind of truth and reconciliation commission that would demonstrate that no one is above the law. Actually, I am not very optimistic about all of this nor about the possibility of avoiding similar violations of individual rights in the future. These violations seem to occur almost invariably in a time of crisis. And I think that unless we can see a greater degree of skepticism within the media, within Congress, and within the American population about the inevitable demand that we sacrifice our rights in the name of national security, I

think we will probably see a recurrence the next time a war or other crisis breaks out.

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Barbara Weinstein



Obviously, it is a little complicated to talk about the legacy of the Bush-Cheney regime—and I am going to use “regime” here, because we often refer, in the Latin American context, to the Vargas regime, etc., but we always refer to the Bush-Cheney administration. Yet we know that “regime” has a more pejorative implication, and “administration” is more neutral. So I would like to use “regime” today in the deliberately pejorative sense.

Talking about its legacy is not quite the same as talking about its impact or consequences, in part because the impact or consequences often are not necessarily in any direct way connected to the kinds of discourses, policies, ideologies promoted by a particular regime. So in some sense the impact of the Bush-Cheney regime is hard to talk about, because it is a regime that is already producing its own negation in many different areas. For example, hardly anyone right now is talking about cutting government spending. And imagine hearing the following phrase in public discourse: “Let’s privatize Social Security.” That is about as dead an idea as you can possibly imagine. So, there are all sorts of things, all sorts of consequences of this regime that clearly were not intended by the key actors, or the key ideologies, that motivated and activated this regime. For example, in Latin America, one of the jokes that circulates among my friends is that the indifference and hostility of this administration to Latin America generally, and certain Latin American issues in particular, helps to account for the revival of the left in many places in the region. But again we do not really want to talk about that as a legacy of the Bush-Cheney regime exactly, though it certainly may be a consequence of it.

I will try to focus briefly on a few issues that I think are legacies specifically of the Bush-Cheney regime, although certainly all

of these things emerge out of longer periods of shifts in US politics. In other words, I am not saying that these are issues that emerge *de novo* from the Bush-Cheney regime, but I think there are specific aspects of the Bush-Cheney years that have shifted the political landscape, and that will be particularly difficult to undo, even in the most optimistic interpretation of what the Obama administration (I won't call it the Obama regime) promises for the future.

One that I would like to talk about, something that I have written about in my AHA Perspectives columns, is the impact of the Patriot Act on the movement of scholars and others across international boundaries. As the academic world, as the intellectual community has become more and more globalized, more and more internationalized—as we have become more and more interested in transnational history—it has become more and more difficult for scholars to move, particularly across the boundaries of the United States. The case I talked about, Waskar Ari Chachaki, a Bolivian historian of indigenous descent, eventually had a happy ending; he finally got his visa after two years of struggling with Homeland Security. But under the terms of the Patriot Act he could have been continuously denied a visa without any explanation, either to him or to his current employer, the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

It is very possible that key features of the Patriot Act will be changed, but consular personnel are unlikely to be changed any time soon. Their enormous fear of letting somebody into the United States who will do something to harm someone in the United States won't go away anytime soon because they have been given such a sense that their career is over if they let anyone into the US who either might harm someone or talk about

harming someone—which let me say is not, as we know, quite the same thing. “Talking about harming someone” can be interpreted simply as giving support to some group that engages in any kind of armed struggle anywhere.

In addition to the likelihood that consular officials are almost certainly going to continue to give a hard time to anyone they consider to be ideologically unfriendly to the United States, it is very important to keep in mind that in many nations where there are scholars who, for one reason or another, want to come to the United States, to participate in conferences like this conference—that it is now required in places like India and Brazil that you do a personal, face-to-face interview with the counselor official in order to get a visa, even just to travel to the US as a tourist or conference participant, never mind to come and teach for six months to a year. In many parts of Latin America and Asia, these kinds of requirements are a significant monetary burden because there are only a few consular posts. So, it costs hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars just to get to the consular post and apply for a visa.

The system of screening out people from countries we regard either to be sources of illegal immigrants—people who will overstay their visa—or to be sources of scholars who might be critical or hostile to the United States—this apparatus will still keep out, either directly or indirectly, many people that we would want to come to the US—to have the right, if they choose, to come to a conference here, to teach here, or simply to visit here. Also let me say that these interviews can often be quite personally humiliating, including for very eminent scholars, such as the renowned Indian organic chemist, Goverdhan Mehta, who is something of a national hero and who

was repeatedly denied a visa after dozens of trips to the United States for scientific conventions.

I just want to make a few quick comments about the possible impact on Latin American policy of the Bush-Cheney regime. Among their “innovations”—which again continue things that preceded their years in office, but often intensified certain tendencies—you have, for example, the hardening of the embargo on Cuba. It is not as if the embargo is new—it has been going on since the early 1960’s, but it became even more rigid under the Bush-Cheney regime. It has become much more stringent, much more restrictive, making it difficult even to send medicines and emergency food stuffs to Cuba during the repeated natural disasters that have afflicted the island. One collateral effect of this is that I think they have succeeded in alienating many people, even in the Cuban-American community in Florida, particularly younger Cuban-Americans, who would like to be able to travel more freely to Cuba. I will make an optimistic prediction that the embargo will end while Obama is president. What kind of impact that will have on Cuba is another matter. But, again, I think here, we have to oppose the embargo, even if the ending of the embargo is not necessarily going to have all the implications we would like.

Funding of Plan Colombia has strengthened the right wing of the Colombian military, which some people might argue is the entire Colombian military, but perhaps not. It has certainly made the Colombian military much more willing to engage in severe human rights violations. Again, one small bright point is that I think that there will be at least some revision in US policy toward Colombia, but I suspect not a root and branch rethinking of Plan Colombia.

Free trade agreements were negotiated. Several are either still being negotiated, or were concluded under Bush-Cheney, with no labor and environmental protection provisions, with continuing stress on privatization of resources and the reducing of government spending—so you have a continuous line of these sorts of IMF-sponsored policies. I think those free trade agreements will be modified, but they will be hard to undo. One of the ironic reasons why they will be hard to undo is that so many Latin American economies are now really plugged into the North American economic network. In fact, there is a fear among people in Latin America—even people I talked to on, let’s say, the moderate left—that protectionism in the United States will have a very negative impact on their economies. What this shows is the way in which the whole landscape of the political economy has shifted in much of Latin America, in places like Brazil and Chile, so that they are really so plugged into a certain political economy that it is hard for them to imagine how to break free of it.

Let me just say very quickly a few things about the implications that the policies and the climate created by the Bush-Cheney regime have had for university life in the US. One, I think we are all very aware of, is that even public universities are now increasingly dependent upon corporate funding and tuition payments to survive. Even public universities get a smaller and smaller portion of their budget from the state. While on the one hand that might seem like a good thing at a moment of huge cuts in state spending, on the other hand it means that corporations, corporate representatives, corporate interests have more and more of an impact on the kinds of decisions that are made in both public, and certainly, in private universities. We will also continue to see attempts by groups outside of

the academy to intervene in the decision-making about hiring and tenuring and promoting in the academy. While I am certainly not opposed to outside groups having some sort of impact on academic life—I would not advocate the ivory tower approach—on the other hand, most of the mobilizations around issues of tenure and promotion have been campaigns to limit academic freedom and speech, rather than to promote it. And I think that trend will continue.

The business model of education that has been established at the university level has also expanded enormously at the K-12 level, and I think not only is that going to be hard to undo, but I think so far the signs are that there is no intention on the part of the Obama government to undo that business model, but rather to perhaps modify No Child Left Behind and that sort of learning outcomes discourse, but not necessarily to shift away from the idea that the reason we do not have better schools in the United States is because teachers do not work hard enough and have too many rights. There is still an underlying assumption that if we just take away their rights, take away their tenure, and force them to work even harder that somehow these schools will be better. And I suspect this will continue to have implications for higher education as well.

Clearly, another thing that has been intensified under Bush and Cheney is the tendency to spend on prisons, to privatize imprisonment, and also to extend prison sentences. It is not just that we imprison many more people per capita in this country than almost every other country in the world, but that the sentences handed down in our courts are much longer. And this will shift only very slowly because those lower-level courts are the ones where the personnel will change most slowly.

Finally, a comment on something

I was very struck by in the recent electoral campaign. We are all familiar with the repeated attempts to tarnish Obama's candidacy by associating him with Bill Ayers, on the premise that Ayers was involved with a terrorist group—that he was involved with people who at one time built bombs that might have hurt some people at some time if they had been used, etc, etc. We all know, in fact, that the Weathermen, those many years ago, mainly hurt themselves, not other people. Nonetheless, there were repeated references to Obama's relationship, however tenuous, to somebody who could have been involved in terrorist acts. What I found really striking is that I did not hear, certainly in a mainstream, but not even in a non-mainstream forum, any discussion of John McCain's wartime service, except to talk about how heroic he was and how much he suffered. Leaving the issue of suffering aside, this is a man who ran repeated bombing missions over North Vietnam and undoubtedly killed people who were not in any way involved in combat during those missions, in the context of a war that many US citizens now regard as unjust. But never once was that even mentioned as something to consider in thinking about him as a presidential candidate or as a human being. This is something that reflects the shift in political discourse, the constant refrain of "support our troops"—even if we oppose the war, "support our troops"—and never say anything about what Alice Kessler-Harris described very well, which is the human costs of war.

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Working Class in São Paulo, and is currently completing a book on race, gender and regional identity in Brazil. She is a member of the Editorial Collective of the Radical History Review and co-editor of the Duke University Press book series, Radical Perspectives.