

Stickers and Such

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Frontispiece:

West elevation, Chicago Tribune Tower, Michigan Avenue, 1925,

Howells and Hood, Architects:

Inscription below the stone from the Parthenon:

From John Milton, 1608-1674:

Give me liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to my conscience,
above all other liberties.

The quote was no doubt chosen by the "Trib" because it embraces Milton's passion for freedom of the press. Inside the building is the brand new McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum, which explores the evolution of liberty in the United States through wars, voting rights, and cultural clashes. A central theme is the marketplace of ideas. I shall toss a few shares into the market.

Bumper Sticker, Berkeley, California, 1968:

Make Love Not War! Not War!

Ah the possibilities-- a summer of love, a lifetime of peace, and more.

Banner in window, Madison, Wisconsin, 1969:

Hell No, I Won't Go! , --to die.

To go or not, a man's decision, when slings and arrows -and bullets fly.

Bumper Sticker: Durham, New Hampshire, 2002:

War is not the answer. --Life is too dear.

In times of conspiracy and conflict, the path ahead is never clear.

Exclamation, Virginia, Patrick Henry: 1775

If not Liberty, death I choose.

"Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose" (Janis Joplin, 1975)

Farewell address, George Washington, May 19, 1796

"I ...warn against mischief of foreign intrigue and impostors of pretended patriotism."

Today we would accuse father George of isolationism.

Act of Congress September 15 1940

for Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and surely wars to come.

Yard sign, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2006:

Peace is patriotic. Does that fit the body politic?

Bumper Sticker: Cincinnati, Ohio, 2006:

Four out of five cannibals prefer vegetarians-nothing to do with the paper,
but a little levity before too much heaviness.

Bumper sticker, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 2006:

Read your bible!

So let's do, let's do.

2700 years ago, give or take, Isaiah, with great optimism spoke:

Lay down your arms, swords into plowshares make.

What a dreamer he, that men would stop war from sea to sea.

In Ancient Greece, seemingly more war than peace.

So Aristophanes, master of wry comedies, cast Lysistrata with clever remedies.

No more trysts 'til warriors cease and desist.

But even wives could not resist.

Joan of Lorraine tasted purifying flames,

helping inept Charles beat the Goddamns (G.B. Shaw's term.)

So much for serving King and Country.

About God --who knows his or her preferred company?

and Another Joan, Chittister, OSB, asked God to save us from our perfidy,

And the vengeance in our hearts,

And the acid in our souls -

The need to terrorize --as we have been terrorized.

1588, exuberant English tars tricked the might Armada.

Then most perished without a drachma.

They allowed Elizabethans a grand new age,

then moldered away in forgotten graves

Wars are waged by the rich and powerful; fought, endured by the poor and sorrowful.

Wars destroy cities, buildings, wealth,

And plague combatants and non-, with eroding health.

While men march off with trumpets blaring, women and children share loss and caring.

Since Isaiah's admonition, a thousand wars of all descriptions.

There have been French Wars, Indian Wars, and French and Indian Wars.

There have been four-month wars, seven years wars, 30 years wars 100 years wars.

Wars bring out the best, courage, bravery, marching, on 'gainst despots and slavery.

But also make us seem like knaves, My Lai, Abu Ghraib, many thousand unmarked graves.

War brings literature, great epic poems, requiems, symphonies, anxious letters home. Literarians march south seeking glory,

defend the Union, come Wars of conquest and liberation, civil wars, Punic wars, then thankful celebration.

back home with many a story.

We get slogans, Damn the Torpedoes, Full Speed Ahead,

Praise the Lord, lets count the dead.

We have met the enemy and they are ours. We have met the enemy and he is us, (Pogo, Kelly).

By now my position should be seen. Wars are wasteful, murderous, obscene.

Not a pacifist, defense is wise, good preparation can prevent surprise.

Not a rant, no street demonstration. Simply support negotiation.

Understanding adversaries is not weakness,

when it can stop deadly bleakness.

Lest you think me unpatriotic, once I accepted the national politic.

Family all, we flew the flag, marched in parades, spirits n'ere lagged.

My country right or wrong, but my country ever strong.

Think me now simply a worrier? Indulge my boast of family warriors.

Father, France, 1918. Brothers to war 1940s, sister, Nam, multiple sorties.

Take the Cold War with its thrusts and parries, if Soviets strike, we will not tarry.
Thus conflagration did not arrive, much money spent but the world survived.

Here are some views on what happened, --and might have.
Only American wars will we ponder, first these shores than over yonder.

The French and Indian War in the 1760s was America's segment of the Seven Year's War, during which France and Great Britain contested to rule the globe. It was epic imperialism, a huge game to the determined dominion over vast tracts of land, trade routes, and the fates of hapless millions who got in the way of the tyrannical nations. North America, India, Africa and the slave trade were prizes for which Red Coats were asked to do and die and Normans and Burgundians were exhorted to fight with élan.

The British assumed the divine right of administering the world, and those pesky French, as the Spanish before, would need to be put in their proper place. Britain, of course, won out through superior strategy, courage, resources and training -and trickery, deceit and misinformation, always the tools of war. The indigenous Americans were caught up in the war and suffered terribly-and contributed some deceit of their own. The Iroquois Nation, a well-established quasi-democracy, was one of the victims of the wasteful conflict.

I won't suggest that Americans could have avoided this war. There was no national government, only individual colonial assemblies. But there were prospects of war avoidance when some colonies refused to fund the conflict. An early lesson -wars are expensive and always cause increased taxation or soaring deficits.

With the history of the French and Indian War fresh in mind, how should the colonists have avoided the coming conflict with Mother Britain? This is a classic example of a determined minority seeking conflict largely for personal gain, and intemperate parties on both side avoiding useful diplomacy. What we call the Revolutionary War, and Britain calls the American Colonial War, might also be called the War of the Georges. King George the Third was determined to teach the ingrates in America a lesson, without, of course, really understanding what was going on here as two Centuries later, the United States did not really understand what was going on in Southeast Asia, or now in the Middle East. He should have paid a visit to the colonies to understand the energies here, unlike those of his more docile domestic subjects.

The other George, Washington, was still smarting from King George's edict preserving lands beyond the Alleghenies for the American Indians, thus thwarting plans of Washington and other Virginians to exploit the bounty of the Ohio Valley. Washington was also still annoyed about never having gotten a commission in the British Army, which he sought while serving against the French. Ironically had General Braddock his commanding officer not been killed in

If Washington may have had some misgivings about the war, who then was really in favor of it? Certainly not the loyalists who made up about a third of the colonial population. Many of them correctly foresaw what happens to those on the wrong side of conflicts, certainly knowing what happened to the Acadians when the British took what became Nova Scotia. As with the displacement of 120,000 Japanese, mostly citizens, in World War II, Loyalists were to lose property, sovereignty and lives as the result of intemperate, grasping decisions. Another group, those living on the frontier, had little interest in the notion of independence being urged in Boston, Philadelphia, and Virginia. They saw themselves as being already independent and more concerned with marauding Indians than lusty Redcoats.

The roughly half-million slaves (20% of the population) spread throughout the Colonies had little opportunity for opinions or advocacy, though some freedman served in the colonial army after Washington could not recruit enough of his preferred Caucasians. As in all wars, many were simply undecided. Thus, about twenty-five percent (25%) of the population actually favored the war, and less so if you discount women, who historically are instinctively against war but who are expected to follow their "betters.

The advocates of war were strange bedfellows. Slave holders, north and south, were concerned about the growing abolition movement in England led by William Wilberforce. Some of that sentiment was seeping across the Atlantic, and would lead eventually to a ban on slavery in the Empire. Southern planters also wanted unfettered access to western lands as they gradually wore out the seacoast plantations. The growing mercantile class wanted unchallenged trading rights without British interference, regulation, and taxation, although the taxes were minimal compared to what we have accepted from the government that grew out of the Revolution. The Stamp Act was an annoyance, and derivatives of it are now used routinely on these shores.

Regarding the slavery issue, indeed when war broke out, thousands of slaves, with British encouragement, did abandon their owners, seeking freedom under British authority. Some fought for the British, but most became pawns in the cynical game of human bondage.

Yankee clergy, riding the wave of religious zeal following the Great Awakening, preached against British presence in towns and homes; their arrogance, drinking and debauchery, which they saw as hallmarks of a rotten intolerant monarchy that their Puritan forebears had fled. The preachers also warned of schemes to thwart land ownership, a really important new-found freedom.

What if cooler heads had prevailed on both sides of the Atlantic? In simple terms, the colonies would have remained part of the British Empire -at least for a time. Would that have been all bad? I am an Anglophile only in love of the language, certainly not the embrace of king or empire, particularly the Irish half of me. Nonetheless much good could have come from avoiding war. The Loyalists, some of the colonies' best-educated people, would have continued

An argument for the Revolutionary War is that it caused Britain to take a more conciliatory stance toward her other colonies. A definite maybe. Try that one on Indians and Pakistanis! I believe that in the absence of war, the restless adolescent character of the colonies could have caused king and Parliament to rethink lots of positions and thus improve the lives of subjects around the globe.

A costly war? By the best figures available, approximately 11,000 members of the Continental Army were killed or wounded in the eight year conflict, and, as in all war, many died of disease. Overall, not large numbers for such an epic outcome, but about one-half percent (.5%) of the population of 2.8 million. In relative numbers, it was the costliest war in our history- until the 1860s. British and French casualties are difficult to determine. Let's not forget our allies the French, without whose aid, victory would not have been achieved.

In the sweep of history each war breeds new ones. If we had avoided the Revolution, Mr. Madison's war would not have happened. As it turned out the War of 1812 was one of the least sensible wars in our history. It was about trade disputes, boycotts, and impressing of American seamen, all resolvable without going to war. Fortunately for the U.S., Britain was preoccupied with Bonaparte and did not give full attention to America, resulting in a draw. The Treaty of Ghent found matters much as before the war. Yet the conflict did demonstrate growing American naval power, solidified the U.S. hold on the Northwest Territory, spurred westward expansion to get better control of our "sphere of influence," and gave us the "Star-Spangled Banner." But foolish excursions into Canada should have illustrated the military limits of the young country. Nevertheless, one outcome was the growth of American hubris and a sort of divine right or manifest destiny to control the Western Hemisphere --the Monroe Doctrine and all that. The American tally for the War of 1812 was 6,765 killed or wounded, and an untold number dead of disease.

That machismo-fed hubris, in time, made it perfectly logical to invade Mexico, multi-hued Mexico, peasant Mexico, Catholic Mexico, 'ignoring a culture that had produced hundreds of college educated professionals before Harvard even existed. The direct cause was a border dispute in 1846, but ill-feeling had seethed since the U.S. support of Texas independence a decade earlier. Minor skirmishes touched off the war, which President Polk, of polka dot tie fame, was happy to escalate. The strikingly successful invasion by Winfield Scott's forces, with such impressive junior officers as Robert E. Lee and U.S. Grant, brought fear and loathing to those south of the border. This, and later arrogant activity in the Caribbean and Panama, gave reason to this day for people to be suspicious of El Norte. As the spoils of war, we got most of the present day American southwest, including California, so perhaps it was worthwhile in imperial terms. All of which raises the further question about today's immigration crisis. Are Latinos simply trying to take back what is rightfully theirs? The U.S. dead and wounded equaled

marvelous document, if only we followed it, particularly in regard to entering wars, was carefully hammered out, recognizing significant regional differences and desires. Obviously slavery was one of those differences. Others, included the role of government in peoples' lives, the balance between local differences and central authority, and the fairness of taxation and tariffs? Let us also remember that slavery, a recognized evil today, had been a tradition throughout much of the country and had only relatively recently been outlawed in some northern states after vigorous debate. In New York, once a leading slave trading state, slavery was not outlawed until 1827 . Despite the abolition movement and Uncle Tom's Cabin, the country was not prepared to go to war over slavery. Preserving the Union had to be the rallying cry of Daniel Webster, William Seward and then Lincoln. Interestingly, William Lloyd Garrison, a leading abolitionist, saw a split of the Union as the only answer to the problem of slavery.

Many in the South were skeptical of secession and, of course, relatively few were slave owners. But they believed that Northern moralists and industrialists, and Lincoln, wished to punish them for their culture. That restiveness had been brewing for years. Recall that South Carolina had threatened secession over tariffs in 1832 but was dissuaded by native son, Andrew Jackson. By the 1850s, amidst all the civic turmoil, there was heightened concern that the growing central government could impose its will on their agrarian society. These fears were realized a few years later when Lincoln used excessive powers to suspend chunks of the Bill of Rights and imprison his detractors in the North. And, of course the Confederacy would do much the same. Nonetheless, there was ample opportunity to avoid war. Weeks went by after Lincoln's election, while state legislatures weighed the pros and cons of secession. Border states such as Kentucky did not secede. Had Lincoln and others in the North been more willing to negotiate differences, war could have been avoided, or, at least, postponed. Postponing fights gives both sides time to prepare, but also to reconsider.

If leaders on both sides could have foreseen the horrors of that war, think what could have been avoided -the senseless bloodbaths of Fredericksburg and Gettysburg, the inhumanity of Andersonville and Sherman's March. True, the Ohio boys became pretty good generals, but the war proved once again that conflicts bring out the best -- and the worst.

Had the confederacy been allowed to go its way, would that have been an epic disappointment? It would have been interesting to have two side by side countries with more similarities than differences, going separate ways in history, one toward an ever stronger central government-The United States of America; the other a looser form, the Confederate States of America. What an intriguing experiment in political science and sociology. Could the loose confederation prosper? What would be its foreign policy? The questions are endless.

And what about slavery? Would it have endured? Probably not. It was already becoming uneconomical. Midwestern farmers were more productive without slaves and the industrial

government? But to ignore those rules has harsh outcomes. Therefore, we gradually learn to live with big government as long as it takes care of us.

Would the Confederacy have been different? At first, yes, but probably over time as it struggled with uncertain economics in the transformation from a rural to a more urban society, it would have turned in the same direction as its northern neighbor, and, while I'm broadly conjecturing here, --as I have been all evening-- probably would have seen the advantage of rejoining the Union--without war, the bloodiest in our country's history, nearly a million dead, wounded, victims of disease, or unaccounted for --and marked by hatred for generations. Remember that about 50,000 prisoners of war died on both sides --a gruesome and disturbing number by any measure. To put all these figures in perspective, today's population is ten times that of 1860. Ten times the total casualties of the Civil War would be nearly 10 million, including those dying in prison camps --a half million. Would the nation accept this today? Would we accept imprisonment of newspaper editors who criticize the president?

Interesting remnants of the Civil War are re-enactments, complete with period uniforms, drills, camp outs and cannonades --ultimate romanticism. Mercifully, the actual blood, gore, dysentery, fear, and homesickness are absent. And there are no re-enactments of prison camps.

On to the Spanish American War, the splendid little war as nicknamed by Secretary of State, John Hay. "Remember the Maine" and all that nonsense. It's now clear that explosions in the battleship in Havana Harbor were accidental; not caused by anti-American activists. The question remains regarding the legitimacy of the ship in a foreign port. But it gave the adventurous U.S., which hadn't had a serious war in thirty-three years, a reason to have a burst of patriotism and advance on the world stage. The lesson, that should have been learned, is that empires all have limited time horizons. Three hundred years after the ascendancy of Spain, it was a hollow shell, a pushover for the new hyper kid on the international block.

So, now we had an empire, but also even greater animosity of Spanish speakers. We applauded our own magnanimity in bringing reforms to Hawaii and the Philippines. Literarian, William Howard Taft went to Manila as governor of his "Little Brown Brothers" and, while indeed he was a well meaning administrator, the U.S. Army, sent to put down indigenous rebellions, was brutal, treating the natives as rank inferiors as well as enemies of progress. It should have been a foretaste of Vietnam. The Filipinos saw the Americans as substitutes for the Spanish, just as the Vietnamese saw our invasion as replacing the French.

Many of the rebellious tribes were Moslems, Malayan Moors, in the southern islands, across the Celebes Sea from today's Indonesia, now the most populous Moslem nation in the world. Any historical harbingers here? The Philippines are now seen as a moderately reliable ally but does that have to do with loyalty or simply money? The U.S. tally for the Spanish

Presbyterian minister, he had the stamp and bearing of a superior person. He also carried the southern philosophy on racial issues.

Wilson rarely traveled west except to campaign for the presidency and showed little interest in what non-Easterners were thinking. He had narrowly defeated the incumbent, our Big Bill Taft, in 1912 after Theodore Roosevelt had split the Republican party. In 1916, Wilson campaigned for re-election on a promise to keep the U.S. out of the European conflict. However, in early 1917, increased German U-boat activity gave him enough support in Congress to declare war. His big ambition was to improve the post-war world with his fourteen points and then to establish the League of Nations.

While there was lots of healthy skepticism about the war, particularly in the heavily German Midwest, -- (why should Ohio farm boys bailout New York and London bankers?) -- the Eastern internationalists won out, and the English language was the "tipping point". (Wow, I'm surprised that I used that trendy term! But I'll use it again.) The U.S. forces, including my father, provided the tipping point and allowed an allied victory. Despite Lloyd George's dismissing the American effort, the Allies could not have won without the Americans. It's quite ironic that Britain with its world empire had to rely on a former colony. The vast Royal Navy could not keep sea lanes open to receive supplies. It was German U-boat intervention in these lanes, which triggered American intervention. But, of course, it was that intervention that Britain wanted.

What would have happened had the U.S. stayed out? Two possible outcomes; the sides would have fought to a stalemate, or the Austro Germans would have won. The French were already in near rebellion and the British populace was growing more restive. Had the Germans had more freedom of expression, they, too, would have pushed for a secession of hostilities.

In any case, a negotiated truce would have allowed both sides a chance to save .face. There would not have been the awful reparations, occupation and denigration of Germany, which set the stage for World War II. If Germany had been able to get back on its feet economically, there would not have been fertile ground for the growth of National Socialism and all the problems that the Nazi ideology brought to the world.

The Allies would not have had the opportunity to carve up eastern Europe and the Near East. And look what failures they became. Patchwork Yugoslavia came apart at the seams, and Iraq, cobbled together from three disparate cultural groups, remains an obvious problem.

The American tallies for WWI were 53,513 killed, 204,002 wounded and 63,195 "other", primarily deaths from influenza that scourged America and Europe ~d which was transported back and forth across the Atlantic by troopships.

American disillusionment with the war in Europe led to a new feeling of isolation, which doomed the League of Nations. Nonetheless, a short two decades later, we were shocked into a

the way to White Hall, where it disappeared into the fog of war. Churchill must have breathed a deep sigh of relief, even danced a little jig, when news of Pearl Harbor reached him.

My memories of that period are vivid. With two older brothers in the military, I devoured Life Magazine and memorized battle zones, generals' names, and armament types, particularly aircraft, since one brother was a flyer, another a paratrooper. Patriotism was unrestrained. My father commanded the local American Legion Post. We marched in parades and sold poppies for Memorial Day. It was all quite heady, dampened only by casualty lists and gold stars in widows. Yes, it was the "good war", but it could have been avoided by better preparation and learning from the past. The price was high - 292,131 dead, 671,846 wounded, and 115,185 lost to disease and other causes, relatively small figures compared to other countries, such as the USSR, which lost twenty million people. The heroes were abundant, but who among the victims might have been the scientists to develop substitutes for petroleum or the true statesmen to avoid the Vietnam War?

Had we used better diplomacy and preparation in 1939 through 1941, might we have avoided WW II? Probably not. When FDR campaigned for a third term on a promise to stay out of war, the U.S. citizenry should have remembered Wilson in 1916 and prepared themselves for conflict.

Thus the United States became policemen of the world, and, for a time, we did a pretty good job of it. Europe and Japan were rebuilt. Communism was kept at bay and a Pax Americana seemed at hand. Policemen have to use force occasionally and we had Korea and other necessary actions to enforce our ideology over theirs. I am not necessarily defending the Korean War, but it was better to have a semi-showdown there than to set the world ablaze in the nuclear conflict that many people expected. Indeed, I believe that this period in history supports my thesis. If you keep postponing the big fight -with "what if" scenarios --you can negotiate smaller ones. So the US and USSR thrust and parried -and negotiated-- but did not have the "big one." The Korean War caused 33,667 deaths, 153,363 wounded, and 3,249 dead of other causes.

And then, Ah, Vietnam. Need more be said about this mighty mistake? It was a classic case of leaders imagining conditions of the previous war. After national cohesion during World War II and at least acquiescence regarding Korea, the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations- Nixon too, thought that the country would blindly follow their commands. But the country had changed. There was no more cohesion and finally rejection of the venture. As many suspected, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was phony, as was most of the information fed to the American people. And -we had the longest and most discouraging war in our history to date.

Did we learn anything? Were the 47,393 dead, 153,363 wounded, and 10,800 other deaths worth it? Those casualty numbers mark the high survival rate of the wounded. Perhaps a tolerable aspect of war is the tremendous improvement in combat medicine -which later leads to

just too sprawling for anyone to grasp. As a result, we seek vengeance and go to war with further faulty intelligence.

The last letter that I had published in a local newspaper, just prior to the current Iraq invasion, advised that wars rarely turn out as expected. I wasn't prescient, just realistic. So far, we know several outcomes:

- A loss of friends and prestige for the U.S. around the globe,
 - Reduced freedom at home,
 - Huge budget deficits that cannot be sustained, and that carry serious future risks,
 - And a nation blithely cruising interstates singing "Happy days are here to stay."
- And, there are cells of people considering the next war with -Iran? --China? a long twilight struggle (JFK's words) -with World Islam?

The first Gulf War cost 148 American deaths, 467 wounded and 151 other. The current struggle has claimed over 2300 U.S. lives; hundreds more wounded; --the numbers grow every day, and the end is nowhere in sight.

But, how about a dose of the Big O for optimism? America has always been resilient. Our vision and generosity helped stabilize the world for two-thirds of a century. Let's recover the lost good will and strive for an equitable peace. Easy? -Of course not. It requires enlightened leadership.

Let's also learn a little humility. All empires have drowned in a sea of arrogance and overextension. Let's focus on what we do well, help those in need, with no strings attached. Send doctors and medical supplies as recently afforded for Pakistan. Strive to preserve the environment. Many good private initiatives are underway; governments need to catch up. Continue to be a truly great nation without becoming a continuously warlike one. Defend ourselves --obviously, but explore all avenues before engaging future quagmires.

Do I fly the flag with pride most days? Yes! Do I support the troops who are in Iraq and Afghanistan? --As individuals doing dangerous dirty jobs? --Absolutely! Do I hope all have safe passage home? No doubt. Do I have a yellow ribbon or a red, white and blue decal on my car? No.

I don't do stickers and such.

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