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An Iraq Critique and More

by Jonathan Wilson

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The *USA Today* editorial [January 12, 2007], after acknowledging the legitimacy of expressed reservations over Bush’s Iraq war strategy, challenged anyone who shares those reservations to come up with a better alternative. It was as if criticism lacks credence if the critic fails to articulate a better course. That should not be a condition for expressing valid criticism, particularly when Bush’s track record for prosecuting the war is so abysmal. The dilemma in which we find ourselves in Iraq has less to do with poor pre-war intelligence and more to do with a lack of intelligence in the White House since the war began. Not that it’s my job, and without claiming any special expertise, I think even I can figure out a better approach militarily and a supporting rationale. The military dimension, including troop redeployment, is only one part of a much larger strategy fittingly identified by the Iraq Study Group. Its recommendations make the most sense, including getting our troops out of there. That can and should be done sooner rather than later.

“Get an American in old fashioned rifle range and they can draw American blood.”

Lest we forget, the war began with “shock and awe,” regardless of the innocent civilian casualties it would doubtless cause. And as a pure spectator, it was indeed shocking and awesome. No doubt more so for those on the receiving end. It was made possible by one thing: unchallenged control of the air. In the face of that onslaught, the Iraqi military had no choice but to fade, to retreat, to disperse. That easily toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein and certainly accomplished the mission as Bush apparently understood it. That obviously hasn’t been the end of the matter.

After accomplishing his original mission, Bush was left with potential chaos and an inevitable occupation of the country to fill the power void and avoid complete anarchy. The occupation of the country has not enjoyed similar success militarily for a reason that should be obvious. Occupying a hostile country requires boots on the ground—lots of them. Lots more than

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CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, May 4 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Our guest speaker will be Richard Leopold, Director, Iowa Department of Natural Resources.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, May 1 to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com or 288-2500 by phone.

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we have ever committed to the effort. Certainly lots more than contemplated by the current “surge.”

The shortage of sufficient troops on the ground means that the ones who are there lack the necessary, overwhelming numbers to provide reliable security nationwide, and they are reduced to a more nearly level playing field with the enemy. They have largely forfeited the advantage of the overwhelming air superiority that brought the early military success. On the ground and without that advantage, one combatant is on a more

“Bush has given American enemies the opportunity to kill Americans without even leaving home.”

nearly equal footing with any other. Get an American in old-fashioned rifle range and they can draw American blood.

Insufficient troops on the ground without some offsetting advantage like was enjoyed during the initial assault just won't work. Those “boots on the ground” become little more than targets on the ground. Bush has given American enemies the opportunity to kill Americans without even leaving home.

It was recently reported that Bush was asked for his Plan B if the “surge” proves unsuccessful. It was reported as “news” that he had no Plan B. Duh. One of his spokesmen said Plan B is to make Plan A work. The question itself erroneously assumed that the “surge” is Plan A. In reality, the “surge” Plan is well down the alphabet from A and actually represents a repetition of a previously unsuccessful surge or two. Hoping for a different outcome with the current surge is like betting for a different result while watching an instant replay. Pure and simple, it won't work, and Bush is buying time, not freedom and democracy, with young American lives. No American's patriotism should be abused with orders to sacrifice life or limb for the ego of a commander-in-chief. But that's what's happening.

The sensible solution militarily is to regain the advantage of our incomparable air superiority and the agility of smaller strike forces. Our forces should be redeployed to bases in places such as Kuwait, away

from being picked off by snipers, IEDs, and suicide bombers. All of Iraq could be kept a no-fly-zone. In the event of apparent acts of genocide, or detected terrorist encampments, air strikes and rapid force deployment could be accomplished with ease, as we so recently demonstrated by our incursion into Somalia, and with far fewer casualties. Such a strategy would not achieve the level of stability needed to preserve reliable access to Iraqi oil reserves, but that wasn't the reason for this war, or so we've been told. If that's what it's come to, I say oil isn't worth the blood of straight and closeted American soldiers.


And that brings me to one more suggestion. Bush should change the “Don't ask; don't tell” policy; should stop discharging gay Arabic linguists from our armed forces, as he has been doing; and should let every American join in defending this country who is able and willing, and be thankful for every one of them.

—Jonathan Wilson

Is it Vietnam yet?

Gronstal Stresses Civil Equality at April Meeting

by Bruce Carr

ur guest speaker in April was Senator Mike Gronstal, who represents District 50 in the Iowa Senate (the communities of Council Bluffs and Carter Lake). Senator Gronstal was elected Senate Majority Leader by his fellow Democratic senators after spearheading their efforts to capture 30 seats in the Iowa Senate in 2006. In addition to his position as Majority Leader, Senator Gronstal also serves as chair of the Rules & Administration Committee.

Gronstal began his presentation by wondering aloud whether this breakfast meeting was in fact a Roast—after being introduced by his fellow senator (and FFBC member) Matt McCoy, whose remarks included some joking reference to the Leader's recent sartorial updates and his (possibly fictitious)

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DNR Director to Address May Meeting

Rich became Director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in January 2007. Prior



Richard Leopold

to the DNR, Rich was the Executive Director of the Iowa Environmental Council since September of 2003. He has held a variety of biologist, naturalist, and administrative positions within the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the Minnesota and Iowa Departments of Natural Resources. From 1999-2002, Rich served as the coordinator for IOWATER, Iowa's statewide volunteer water-quality monitoring program. He also helped develop a new citizen advocacy program termed the Iowa Conservation Advocates' and Leaders' Link (I-CALL) for the Iowa Environmental Council. Rich holds an M.S. in Animal Ecology from Iowa State University. He obtained his B.S. in biology from Minnesota State University and an Associate degree in natural resources technology from Central Lakes College in Brainerd, Minnesota. Rich is active in many conservation organizations, is currently the chairperson of the Iowa Conservation Education Council, and is a past recipient of the Izaak Walton League of America's "National Honor Roll Award." ▼

What do people in China call their good plates?

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new-found fascination with Broadway show tunes. But anyone who doubts that Senator Gronstal is a real friend of our community need only view the video of his closing remarks www.iowasenedemocrats.org/media on Senate passage of the new Civil Rights bill (Senate File 427). It would guarantee what he called "full citizenship" to Iowans who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian or gay in their private lives. It would protect against discrimination in employment, accommodation and housing, education, and credit practices. Gronstal encapsulated some of what he said then for us: "It's time we did this," noting

that positive action in civil rights has never beaten a single Democrat in any statehouse election.

As a legislative priority, Senator Gronstal has worked extensively on the issue of renewable fuels and making Iowa the nation's leader in this field. Under his leadership, Iowa passed the nation's strongest ethanol legislation in 2006. Sena-

"But anyone who doubts that Senator Gronstal is a real friend of our community need only view the video of his closing remarks www.iowasenedemocrats.org/media on Senate passage of the new Civil Rights bill (Senate File 427)."

tor Gronstal has also been a leader in restoring funding to Iowa's community colleges and school districts. Moving Iowa to 25th in the nation in teacher pay and making community college affordable for all Iowa families will continue as priorities. Additionally, Gronstal has been recognized by his colleagues for his dedicated work and knowledge of complex issues in the insurance and utilities business.

Gronstal was first elected to the House in 1983 and has been in the Senate since 1985. He is a graduate of Council Bluffs St. Albert High School and Antioch College in Ohio. He and his wife, Connie, have two daughters: Kate, who is a civil engineer at Schemmer Associates in Council Bluffs; and Sara, who is currently working on her masters degree at Minnesota State University at Mankato.

—Bruce Carr

Why isn't phonetic spelled the way it sounds?

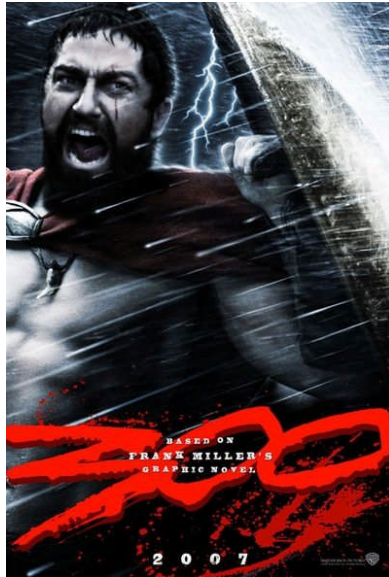
If you are driving at the speed of light and you turn your headlights on, what happens?

How does the guy who drives the snowplow get to work?

The nice thing about being senile is you can hide your own Easter eggs.

300

Starring
Gerard Butler,
Lena Headey,
Michael
Fassbender,
Vincent Regan,
Dominic West



& Rodrigo Santoro

Directed by Zack Snyder

1 Hr 56 Min

300

is a movie about the Battle of Thermopylae, where Spartan King Leonidas with 300 hand-picked Spartans fought to the death against Xerxes and his massive Persian armies in 481 B.C. The story is told from the viewpoint of a Spartan—the story of their heroic King and the story of Sparta itself. In Sparta, if a child was born malformed in any way, it would be discarded to die. At the age of 7, Spartan boys were taken from their families and entered into a world of violence. They were beaten, forced to steal, kill, and live in the wild. They were to come back Spartans or not at all. The men were all raised to be warriors, and their highest honor, they were told, would be to die in battle for Sparta. “Either return with your shield or on it,” was the farewell to a soldier heading off to battle. He was either to return with his shield, meaning victory, or on it, meaning he had died and was being returned for burial. Their law told them never to retreat and to conquer or die. These were the people the Greeks had to depend upon to defend their freedom.



Visually the movie is stunning. The 300

Spartans all have 6-pack abs, and wear little more than leather briefs and a red cape. Xerxes is not portrayed as the bearded leader as he is on ancient temple walls. Rather, he is shown with nary a hair on his enormous body which seems to have every possible body part either pierced or covered in chain, and nothing more. The Persian army was really an assembly of a hundred armies, featuring one with an enormous charging rhinoceros and another with three-story-tall elephants. The gory battle scenes are stylized Kung Fu where the opponents are all sepia-toned, and the only colors on the screen are the faded colors of the bodies of the Spartan men, the bright red of the Spartan capes, and the spurts of deep red blood flying from spears, knives, and severed body parts.

There are other scenes that have all the beauty of Asian shadow theater. There is a beautiful nude shot of Leonidas looking at the moon and then returning to his room to make love to his queen. The grotesque creatures that exist in this mythology are all beautifully put together into a high testosterone treat. Fighting for Freedom. Fighting for Glory. Fighting and holding off an enemy at impossible odds. The story of the 300 Spartans inspired the Greeks to unite and ultimately overthrow the Persians. The story can inspire us today. The story certainly inspired the creative energy of director Zack Snyder (whose only other film is **Dawn of the Dead** (2004)) to create a visual masterpiece. There is a dramatic scene of Leonidas and his men watching the Persian boats sinking off the coast that rivals the parting of the Red Sea in **The Ten Commandments**. There is scene after scene of such visual energy.

Another person with great energy in the film is Gerard Butler whose startling physique and strong deep voice make him a very dramatic King Leonidas. He relishes such lines as, “Spartans, for breakfast eat hearty, for tonight we dine in Hell!” You could not find a more dramatic leader.

But I also found a cautionary message in the film. At one point the Athenians made fun of the Spartans bringing so few warriors. The Spartan King Leonidas asked one of the Athenian warriors what is his profession. “I’m a potter,” said the one. “Sculptor,” said another. “A blacksmith,” said a third.

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King Leonidas asked, “Spartans, what is your profession!” They all responded in a warlike chant, “warriors.” King Leonidas concluded that it was the Spartans who brought the most warriors to the battle. But as warriors they only thought as warriors. It was the Athenians who decided that, when it was obvious they were going to be defeated, it was in their best interests to retreat. The Spartans stood their ground and died like warriors. It makes for a great historic story. The Athenians retreated, regrouped, and united with other Greeks so they were ultimately able to defeat the Persian invaders. We too, like the Athenians, used to rely upon an army derived from all Americans. But now we only have an all-professional army, warriors. Are we losing common sense in the military with the advent of

If flying is so safe, why do they call the airport the terminal?

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the May 4 meeting no later than Tuesday, May 1. Contact Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com or by phone at 288-2500. The May speaker will be Richard Leopold, Director, Iowa Department of Natural Resources.



Thanks to Matt McCoy for his introduction of State Senate Majority Leader Mike Gronstal at the April meeting.



With this issue, we are introducing “ponderables” throughout the newsletter. If you have any “ponderables,” send them to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com.



Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the FFBC Scholarship Fund. Send your check to Jonathan Wilson, 666 Walnut Street, Suite 2500, Des Moines, IA 50309. Make the check out to FFBC and write “Scholarship” on the memo line.

a warrior mentality?

Such things I wondered as I left the theater. But for those who want to see a visually dramatic rendition of a truly warrior society, see and enjoy **300**.

—Gary Kaufman

My memory's not as sharp as it used to be. Also, my memory's not as sharp as it used to be.

From the Editor (Continued from page 6)

consider how it writes its definition for this one. The word comes from the Low German meaning, “oblique, off-center.”

“Camp” as a noun has many definitions, but the one that applies here is “a group of people who think alike or share a cause.” In the gay world, the word is much more common as an adjective, but it is still listed as a noun in a secondary capacity as “an affectation or appreciation of manners and tastes commonly thought artificial, vulgar, or banal.” Its origin is unclear.

The word “invert” is rarely used nowadays. It was, up until a few decades ago, a scientific term used to describe a homosexual person. (I guess we have made some progress!—*ed.*)

“Uranian” (sometimes “uranist”) was not listed in any of my dictionaries, including **The Oxford English Dictionary**, (the granddaddy of all such publications—*ed.*). Even an Internet search didn’t provide much help. Aside from its obvious association to gay intercourse in its pronunciation, none of the three dictionaries listed the word. The closest I could find was, “Urania,” the Greek muse of astronomy and referred to as “the Heavenly One.” Somehow it just doesn’t seem kosher to tell people that you have met the uranian of your life.

The list of gay-related words goes on and on. Perhaps that says a lot about us or that people think about us more than they ever let on or that we suffer more discrimination than we thought. Hmmmmm.

—Steve Person



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Des Moines, Iowa

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From the Editor

You Don't Say

In the wake of the firing of a prominent national radio and television personality because of a racial slur he used on the air, I got to thinking about the words used against, by, and for gays. I discovered scores of words in my research. Many were familiar; some were arcane; and a few were inexplicable. I used as references **The American Heritage College Dictionary**, **Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary**, and **The Oxford English Dictionary**.

Perhaps the most-used word to describe a gay or gay-perceived man is "faggot." **The American Heritage** lists it as, "Offensive Slang," and says it is "used as a disparaging term for a gay or homosexual man." The word is a variation of "fagot" which means, "bundle, lump, or old woman." (As with most insulting terms, there is a grain of truth therein—*ed.*)

Frequently, those associated with the Christian Right (a contradiction in terms if there ever was one—*ed.*), will refer to a gay man as a "pederast." From the same dictionary listed above, the meaning of that term is, "A man who has sexual relations with a boy." The word comes from the Greek *paidēastes*, meaning, "child lover." The etymology is clearer than the definition. The word "sodomite" is also used by this same group. It has a much more complicated set of meanings according to **The American Heritage**: The first definition is "a male who has anal copulation with another." The second is "one who has anal or oral copulation with a member of the opposite sex." (Boy, those heterosexuals get all the advantages!—*ed.*) The third definition is "one who has copulation with an animal." (I must say, the mind reels at that one—*ed.*) The word's obvious origin is from the Hebrew.

I always wondered about the word "fruit" as it is applied to gays. The seventh definition in **The American Heritage** lists it, once again, as "Offensive Slang." The definition is the same as "faggot." The word history is much more interesting. It comes from the Middle English which derives from the Old French that evolved from the Latin, *fructus*, and that is from the past participle *frui*, meaning "to enjoy." (I guess it's not so bad to be referred to as "a fruit," since I now know it means enjoyment!—*ed.*)

The word "queer" is listed by **The American Heritage** as "Offensive Slang." (Do you see a pattern emerging here?—*ed.*) Many gays are not offended by the word, so the dictionary may want to re-

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