

Commentary

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## Iraq and Bush

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(HOST) *Many Americans are weighing President Bush's credibility when he says that success in Iraq is critical to winning the War on Terror. This morning, we heard from Madeleine Kunin. This afternoon, we hear another perspective from commentator Frank Bryan.*

(BRYAN) H.L. Menken once said: "For every problem there is a solution - clear, simple and wrong."

My friend, author and teacher Bill Mayer says, "Maturity is living with ambiguity."

I was very young when Mrs. Brightling from across the street in Newbury sat in our living room and cried in my mother's arms through tears of anguish that give me chills to this very day. "He killed him, Jeanne," she sobbed. "He killed Todd. Damn Franklin Roosevelt and damn his war."

Todd Brightling, her only child, had died on the Bataan death march, defending American interests in Asia.

Roosevelt intentionally lead us into war, said the Republicans. And he lied about it.

And the Republicans continually reminded us of Roosevelt's pledge in the campaign of 1940: "American boys will not die in a foreign war."

Mrs. Brightling took him at his word.

While Mrs. Brightling is to be forgiven her hatred of Roosevelt, I believe the Republicans' criticism of Roosevelt was at best unfair.

Or how about Truman, another of my favorite Presidents?

Read the outrage and hateful press on "his" war, the Korean War, from Republicans and many Democrats in the early 1950's. It will sound familiar. Half way around the world we were losing tens of thousands of troops fighting on one side of a civil war.

Or Jack Kennedy. This President supported the training of a secret mercenary army in Central America and funded its attack on a sovereign nation (Cuba) at the Bay of Pigs. Worse, by the standards we now hold Presidents to, he lied about it.

Today, historians call these Presidents (correctly, I believe) great or near great.

Now, consider the first President Bush. After Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, Bush secured a UN resolution to throw him out. The allies were with us. The war was a remarkable success. Bush obeyed the UN resolution and did not invade Iraq itself. And he did all this openly. In other words he did all the things we now curse his son for not doing.

His fate? We fired him.

I admire all these Presidents. They made difficult decisions under problematic conditions. All underwent harsh criticism -- criticism with an eerie contemporary resonance. The bottom line?

As long as we insist on two-dollar gas and build trophy homes, as long as we continue to be (in comparison to the rest of the world) obscenely rich, we will be electing Presidents that have to make decisions to defend this cultural obesity.

Some of these decisions will be good ones. Some will not.

Either way, we will have to fight if we wish to horde the planet's wealth. And many of our children will die doing the fighting.

And Iraq? Many believe that it's all the President's fault.

Get rid of the Republicans and the problem will go away.

I say that's very simple, very clear and very, very wrong.

*Frank Bryan is a writer who teaches political science at the University of Vermont. This morning we heard a different perspective from Madeleine Kunin. Both commentaries can be found on line at VPR.net.*

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