



speak out

In which we ask a member of the Trinity community to speak out on important issues of the day. You are invited to respond with your opinions, which will be published in the next issue of the Reporter.

The Generation of IEDs and IPods

Vijay Prashad, George and Martha Kellner Chair of South Asian History

On September 3, 2006, the weekend before the fall term opened, two young boys from Connecticut were killed. Eighteen-year-old Private 1st Class Nicolas Madaras of Wilton died when a roadside bomb (an IED) exploded next to his humvee in Baqubah, Iraq. In Ramadi, on that same day, another bomb killed 19-year-old Lance Corporal Phillip Johnson of Enfield. Madaras, who had coached soccer, hoped to return to the U. S., go to college, and study nursing. Another college career squandered. Total U. S. fatalities in Iraq are now in excess of 3,000. (Editor's note: A Trinity alumnus, Schuyler B. Haynes '89, was killed in action in Iraq in November of 2006. His obituary appears elsewhere in this issue of the Reporter.)

That same day, 22 Iraqis died in eight separate incidents, from a suicide car bomb in Al-Kamarah to an explosion in New Baquba (in the latter, a father and his four children were killed

as they drove in their family car). Not long after, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health released a remarkable study. It found that 654,965 more Iraqis have died since 2003 than would have been expected under pre-war conditions. Shortly after the study appeared, the President said that it was "not credible," but "I do know that a lot of innocent people have died, and it troubles me and grieves me."

These events marked my first week of classes. Before me sat smart, eager students, most of whom are the same age as Madaras and Johnson, and of those Iraqis whose names I do not know. My students are eager to learn about the world, to find meaning in the chaos that greets them in the newspapers, on television, and from our political establishment. They were just about teenagers during the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and have since grown into young adults as war upon war has unfolded around them. The inconvenience of airports is routine for them, so too is the news about lives lost, cities devastated. For our students, the generation of IEDs and IPods, there is no comprehensive narrative that links together the contemporary histories of globalization and populist rage. If they do not have a

narrative or many narratives that try to explain why more than half the 275 "world opinion leaders" told the International Herald Tribune that "American policies or actions in the world were a major cause of the September 11 attacks," we will fail them. Our students see animosity against the U.S. government, and against U.S.-based corporations, but there is little attempt to parse carefully the arguments of the antagonized and learn from them. If we seek not to understand the complaints and address them in some fashion, the only solution is to kill anyone who has animosity against us. The military solution is predicated upon such thoughtlessness.

War is distant for our students, as for us. We read about it, see images from it: war is a spectacle for us, nothing corporeal.

Newsweek took a stab a month after 9/11. Its international editor, Mumbai-born Fareed Zakaria, wrote an engaging essay under the headline, "Why They Hate Us." On the cover of the issue (dated October 15, 2001) a young boy in a white turban held aloft a Kalashnikov. Zakaria claimed that 9/11 could be explained by "the sense of humiliation, decline and despair that sweeps the Arab world." Arabs,

he wrote, "feel that they are under siege from the modern world and that the United States symbolizes this world." A generation of social scientists had already walked down that path. As modernization theorists, they championed modernity as the antidote to tradition. The histories of colonialism and of the uneven integration of the formerly colonial world into the circuits of capitalism did not bother them. Secular education systems combined with the mass media propagation of new ideas would shatter traditional frameworks. Commerce and integration into world capitalism would finish the job. At least this was the view of W. W. Rostow in his 1960 classic, *The Stages of Economic Growth*. Zakaria's is a sophisticated variant of this, but for all its poise, it remains far too simplistic: Modernity (us) is the torment of tradition (them), and our freedoms and fun enrage them into un-freedom and fundamentalism.

Granta, founded at Cambridge University in 1889, dedicated the 77th issue of its new series to the proposition, "What We Think of America" (spring 2002). A series of well-regarded writers, including Lebanon's Hanan al-Shaykh, Chile's Ariel Dorfman, and Canada's Michael Ignatieff,

produced short reflections on America. Harold Pinter, the playwright who won the 2005 Nobel Prize for Literature, lamented the loss of life of those who had the temerity to challenge the way the world had been ordered. Why did the thousands of Indonesians, Chileans, Nicaraguans, and others die, Pinter asked? “They died because to one degree or another they dared to question the status quo, the endless plateau of poverty, disease, degradation and oppression which is their birthright. On behalf of the dead, we must regard the breathtaking discrepancy between U.S. government language and U.S. government action with the absolute contempt it merits.”

From Canada, in a widely circulated Internet statement, Sunera Thobani, who presided over the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, challenged the notion that the wars to come in revenge for 9/11 had a benign motive. She worried that the U.S. president’s rhetoric shortly after 9/11 invoked the U.S. people to seek blood (“they don’t care whose blood it is, they want blood”) in vengeance.

The peace marches, she wrote, contest this idea of the nation, but those who seek peace are politically weak, even if morally strong. Congresswoman Barbara Lee, the only member of Congress to oppose the open-ended declaration of war passed in September 2001, concurred with Thobani. “We have a chance to demonstrate to the world,” she wrote in a statement, “that great powers can choose to fight on the fronts of their choosing and that we can choose to avoid needless military action when other avenues to redress our rightful grievances and to protect our nation are available to us. We must respond, but the character of that response will determine for ourselves and for our children the world that they will inherit.” In addition, the character of the response will define the nation’s sense of itself and sense to the world.

In 1995, I read political scientist Benjamin Barber’s *Jihad Versus McWorld*. Barber retooled modernization theory, to argue that McWorld, the soulless corporation, meets its antithesis in Jihad, the fanatical fundamentalist.

Such an account allows us to believe that if there are more iPods in the world, there will be less IEDs. Globalization, in other words, will undermine the basis for all manner of atavism.

But, my own work, now coming to fruition in *The Darker Nations*, suggests that Jihad is actually the twin of McWorld. Take Pakistan as an example. The International Monetary Fund, the advance guard of corporate power, pushed the state to cut back on funding for educational and health-care services. Into the breach came the Islamic charities, many funded by the Saudi government, and some even enjoying the largess of the U.S. coffers (during the Afghan War of the 1980s). They educated and healed the lower middle class, drawing in vast numbers of people into their organizations. The growth of the Islamic Right in Pakistan is a product of McJihad, the unified effect of both globalization and fundamentalism.

Dulce bellum inexpertis: war is sweet to the inexperienced.

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South Asian History. Prashad has taught at Trinity for 10 years and is the director of the International Studies Program. He completed his Ph.D. in history at the University of Chicago, where he received various fellowships to support his graduate work. His dissertation on the social history of a Dalit community in India, *Untouchable Freedom*, was published by Oxford University Press in 1999. His subsequent title, *Karma of Brown Folk*, was published in 2000 and named one of the 25 best books by the Village Voice. His latest book, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*, is due out soon. The Kellner Chair of South Asian History was established in 1995 with a gift from George ‘64 and Martha Kellner.

Your turn to speak out.

Share your opinions on this essay with other Reporter readers. Send your letters or e-mails to Drew Sanborn, Office of Communications, Trinity College, 300 Summit Street, Hartford, CT 06106 or drew.sanborn@trincoll.edu. Responses will be published in the next issue of the Reporter.

Letters to the editor

Read responses to previous *Speak Out* columns on the Trinity Web site at www.trincoll.edu/AboutTrinity/News...Events/Reporter/

Trinity Reporter takes gold medal for design

The Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) has awarded the Trinity College *Reporter* its prestigious gold medal for best design for 2007 in the District 1 publications competition, which covers New England and eastern Canada. Officials of CASE, which is the premier association for educational advancement professionals in alumni relations, communications, marketing, and fund raising, said this year’s field of entries was especially competitive. Congratulations are due to James Baker Design for the editorial section and Rita Law for the class notes section.