

# "WHY DO THEY HATE US?"

BY MARY KING

**T**HE WORLD DOES NOT HATE THE American people. To anyone who travels extensively or lives outside the United States, that much is very clear. The US government, our military services, and some of our corporations are resented: our government is regarded as ruthless, arrogant, and biased. Since we Americans are not accustomed to differentiating between the American people and the United States as a political actor, nearly two years after the attacks in New York and Washington, many of us remain unaware of how we are regarded globally and why. Meanwhile, those who are not US citizens misunderstand the true source of our national ignorance about them. This compounds our mutual alienation.

What is the cause of Americans' global naïveté? We are ignorant about the outside world for more than one reason. The teaching of geography has essentially disappeared from US schools. Our domestic markets are huge, eliminating the pressure to become multilingual. The last time I checked, the State Department had not one single officer who was a speaker of Farsi, the language of Iran—when a Farsi speaker is needed, a contract is arranged for a consultant.

We do not prepare ourselves for our role as a superpower—or hyperpower, as French former foreign minister Hubert Vedrine put it. Everyone seems to know this except ourselves. Much of what we are told by our news media is little more than semi-official propaganda. Our political leaders portray the acts of what President Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex in the most glowing and favorable light. Our news media rarely ventilate challenges to self-serving declarations.

We believe that we as a people are warm, friendly, informal, and casual. This is how US citizens are often recognized. As a people, we do not stand on ceremony and tend to be highly egalitarian. An Arab government official once told me that what he found stunning about the Peace Corps was that the volunteers were willing to work where his own country's people were not. An African told me that it was not the technical assistance of the Peace Corps volunteers that was so important, but their attitude of equality—their behavior conveyed that they felt they were no better than anyone else and were willing to do anything.

Yet our government's policies are not seen as warm or friendly. Nor are we perceived to be a self-reflective nation.

Alexis de Tocqueville in the 1830s first noticed the curious coexistence of America's scramble for affluence alongside its deep civic impulses and concern for community. Today, our extraordinary collective wealth and unmatched military power create jealousy, the "axis of envy," as Josef Joffe, editor of *Die Zeit*, phrases it. Our wealth and power also feed self-complacency and hauteur. The so-called Washington consensus, or ideology of "free trade"—which often seems to me to be the only cause

championed by the US government—has actually had the effect of deepening the disparities in income between the rich and the poor in many nations. Insiders at the World Bank say that massive data substantiate this point.

While the United States is busy opening doors for American businesses to cultivate new markets, it dampens the efforts of developing countries to advance their own products and bars them from entering the US markets. We impose massive tariffs on certain agricultural items, which cost the poorest countries billions in lost foreign exchange earnings. Tariffs on less developed countries (agricultural and low-wage manufactured products) are four times higher than tariffs levied on goods from rich countries. US poli-

cies are seen as pursuing our interests at the expense of others—for example, policies designed to force down commodity prices in the developing nations. This is what Nelson Mandela meant when he told President Clinton that "free trade is never free." When the United States does not like a country's policies, we may impose unilateral sanctions as coercive measures. By 1998, our government had imposed sanctions on seventy-five countries, or approximately half the global population.

Our government thumbs its nose at painfully fought international agreements, which have themselves grown from a tradition emboldened by the American ethos and leadership of the early twentieth century and the period after World War II. Our government has violated, abrogated, or refused to sign half a dozen major international treaties. The Bush Administration has opposed draft agreements designed to enforce an international ban on biological weapons, dismaying allies who said the



United States was effectively killing the pact after seven years of arduous negotiations. It opposed the Kyoto Protocol on global warming (even though BP and Shell Oil have made voluntary contributions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, some more ambitious than the Kyoto agreement). The administration has violated the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, ignored proposals at the UN to curb international trade in small arms, refused to sign the landmines treaty, and rebuffed efforts to establish an international court for genocide and war crimes.

Americans pride themselves on being generous. The media conglomerates tell us that we are a uniquely charitable nation. Our politicians describe us as the most unselfish nation. In fact, Japan is the most generous nation in absolute terms. Denmark is the most generous on a proportional basis, if you consider the percentage of a country's gross domestic product that is donated to foreign assistance. The United States should not utter a word of self-praise: we rank twenty-second among the twenty-two most developed countries. As President Carter once observed, "we are the stingiest nation of all." Less than one tenth of one percent of US GDP goes to foreign assistance, or \$35 annually per citizen. Of this, \$11 goes to Israel, Egypt, and Pakistan, and less than \$5 per US citizen goes to the world's poor.

Would outsiders be more forgiving if they knew how little critical information we Americans receive? Most Americans have not studied their government's foreign policies, much less the impact that such policies have on the world's populations. Even sophisticated foreign observers don't appreciate how poorly served Americans are by our media, how wanting are our educational systems, how narrow is the scope of the information and debate. This is ironic, because we now have more, and better, means of getting information than ever before in the history of the human race.

We pride ourselves on having a free press, and push other nations to adopt this standard as the sine qua non of democracy. Officially, and rightly, the United States has for years advocated freedom of the press in the Arab world. Yet as soon as the Arab region got what some regard as its first free press, Qatar's Al-Jazeera, Secretary of State Colin Powell in October 2001 asked the new outlet to "tone down." We attacked it for broadcasting opinions we did not like.

Ours is not a government-controlled press. Far from it. In 1983, Ben Bagdikian published *The Media Monopoly*, which showed media ownership to be concentrated in the hands of fifty conglomerates. Today, *nine* transnational firms own the US and global media giants. News analysis has never been important in the United States compared to Britain, and now the news departments of the US networks have been moved under the control of the entertainment executives. News coverage has become part of the scramble for "market share," the game that dominates the US news media and in which the far right trash-talk outlets excel. More and more people get their news from targeted Internet circulars and listservs, in effect "catered news" that features one viewpoint, sidestepping the need for opposing points of view.

Overall, ours is a state-friendly press. Perhaps my greatest astonishment during the years that I was serving in the Carter Administration was to learn that the main preoccupation of journalists on the White House beat is protecting their access to sources close to the president. Forget the truth—access is what counts. The former head of the Washington bureau of one of this country's three most influential newspapers told me that the Bush White House is the most punitive in living memory toward White House correspondents who do not toe the line.

Thus, at the very moment when our news media should be asking questions about what the administration says, they merely parrot it. In this atmosphere of a new McCarthyism, it has been termed unpatriotic to ask questions. As the Columbia University historian Simon Schama put it, "a shroud has enveloped the nation and made secular debate about freedoms and liberty into an act of impropriety, irreverent to the dead and disloyal to the flag." I find myself logging onto the London newspapers for a more dispassionate treatment of what's coming from our own Department of Defense.

The United States has become, as Josef Joffe puts it, "both menace and seducer, both monster and model." We might as well be represented by Janus, the Roman god of gates and doorways, depicted with two faces looking in opposite directions. This duality, and the perception of hypocrisy, have given rise to a love/hate relationship between the US and the rest of the world.

Menace and seducer, monster and model? Let me explain.

Recently, I spent a week in Rwanda meeting with university professors. Approximately one million persons were hacked, slashed, or shot to death there during a few months in 1994. As the international community chose to remain silent about the injustices going on under the Habyarimana government, massive crimes went unpunished. According to Francois Regis of the Sixth Chamber of the Supreme Court of Rwanda, it was the repetitiveness of the phenomena, combined with the fact that no one was ever held to account, that created an atmosphere of impunity in which the genocide of 1994 could be carried out and participated in by so many. Organized killings, targeting persons along ethnic lines, had occurred in 1959, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1967, and 1973. Again, such killings occurred in 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1993. No one was ever punished. Again it happened in 1994, which is when the term "genocide" began to be used. The international community remained silent.

It subsequently became clear that President Clinton had detailed knowledge of the genocide being committed in Rwanda, yet the United States and the UN did not act. A friend of mine who is a retired Pentagon military strategist told me that articles had been appearing in the Paris newspapers *Le Monde* and *L'Express* well before the events of 1994, indicating a huge build-up of weapons and arms. The UN Security Council eventually passed a resolution condemning the killing, but omitted the word "genocide," because, had the term been used, the UN would have been legally obliged by its Charter to act to "prevent and punish" the perpetrators. Insiders say that



Clinton Administration officials explicitly forbade the use of the word "genocide."

Thus in today's Rwanda, eradicating a culture of impunity has become the top consideration. When a populace sees high crimes, rape, and murder go unpunished, the arguments of those who advocate political solutions, the rule of law, and nonviolent measures to fight for human rights are severely undermined. Individuals turn to violence to fight violence. Impunity—exemption from penalty—can thus be an extremely significant underlying cause of conflict. The foremost planners and strategists of the genocide are now being tried in an International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, especially established for that purpose in nearby Arusha, Tanzania.

You can count on two hands the number of persons so far tried and convicted by the ICTR, due to the laborious process of adversarial justice. Yet about 6,000 defendants have been tried in Rwandan courts, while more than 100,000 *genocidaire* (perpetrators of genocide) detainees still await trial. A traditional mechanism for dealing with disputes over land and other communal issues has been adapted to deal with the huge number of *genocidaire*. Called *gacaca* after the green grassy knoll on which the elders of pre-colonial times met to mete out justice, this procedure has been upgraded to meet international human rights standards and the requirements of a fair trial. For the Gacaca trials, now underway, more than 250,000 judges were elected, hired, and trained to preside. The Minister of Justice, Jean de Dieu Mucyo, explained that communities now demand that impunity no longer be tolerated. Mass participation in the killings had been encouraged partly as a way of making sure that nobody would be punished, the presumption being that huge numbers of perpetrators could not be held to account. The Gacaca Jurisdictions are proving the contrary. By making sure that justice is done, significant steps towards reconciliation may be accomplished.

In an ironic twist, it is Muslim leaders and families who are being honored in Rwanda for protecting and hiding those who were fleeing. "I know people in America think Muslims are terrorists, but for Rwandans they were our freedom fighters during the genocide," a thirty-seven-year-old Tutsi told the *Washington Post*. He had converted to Islam from Catholicism after his father and nine other members of his family were slaughtered. "I wanted to hide in a church, but that was the worst place to go. Instead, a Muslim family took me. They saved my life."

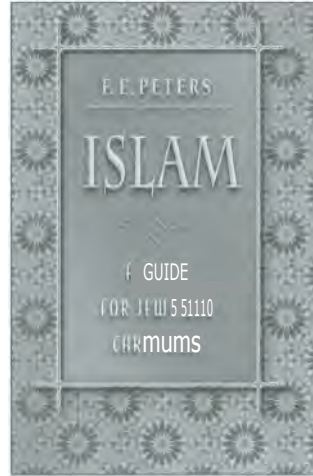
When I asked Judge Regis if anyone had offered help in documenting the immense Gacaca justice experiment, he responded, "the United States was the first to offer assistance." Our silence had given complicity to genocide. Yet afterwards, we stepped forward ahead of France and Belgium, with their historic interests and responsibilities, to help document the justice process. "Menace and seducer, monster and model."

As far as the American presence in the Middle East is concerned, the menace and the monster tend to predominate over the seducer and the model. Forget the American media: I log on to the Israeli newspapers to get a clearer picture and to find open debate. Last April, Michael Ben-Yair, attorney general of Israel in the mid-1980s, noted in *Ha'aretz*, "We [Israel] enthusiastically chose to become a colonial society, ignoring international treaties, expropriating lands, transferring settlers

# Ponder.

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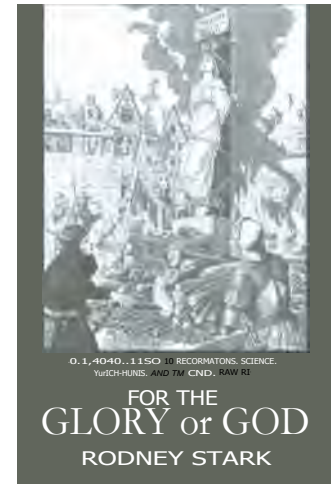
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from Israel to the occupied territories, engaging in theft, and finding justification for all these activities." Many Israelis realize that the US backing of the Israeli army's actions in the Occupied Territories has made their own situation worse. Yet for most of the life of this US administration, hard-line policies throughout the Middle East have replaced deterrence and containment, the previous foundations of US strategy.

Israel came into existence as an historical corrective. The existence of Israel is now accepted throughout the Middle East, but blind unquestioning support of Israeli governmental policies is distressing. During the past two years, US support for Israel has undergone a shift. Since the 11th of September attacks against the United States, the US position has often lined up with that of Israeli Likud Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who is acknowledged by his own fellow Israelis to have ordered the massacres at Sabra and Shatila twenty years ago. In this shift, the United States has taken positions that do not uphold international law and human rights. Whatever the evident faults and flaws of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian negotiating position is more consistent with international law and UN resolutions than that of the government of Israel. It is time for an historical corrective for the Palestinians. Yet in neither Palestine nor elsewhere in the region does the administration's position stem from a concern about corruption or for democracy, but rather rests on a bigger plan for re-defining the Middle East.

As the author Robert Wright notes, by lowering the threshold for pre-emptive attack with the Iraq invasion, President Bush has undermined the world consensus against unprovoked trans-border aggression—a vital central principle in international law. Ignored in Bush's security equation is the connection between passion and technology. Information technologies—satellite dishes, the World Wide Web, electronic mail, cellular phones—offer new efficiencies for transmitting outrage, bringing inflammatory reports directly to decentralized cells of extremism, any of which may decide to employ retributive weapons of mass destruction. Thus the more that communications technology is globalized, the more US policies can stimulate animosity that can lead to terrorism. The willingness of foreign governments to join in the fight against extremism will increasingly depend on public perceptions of the United States—precisely because of the technologically assisted democratization that the Bush Administration properly celebrates and encourages. Popular sentiment abroad and US national security are linked. Repeated incidents in the Middle East since the invasion have made the situation all too clear.

Use of force against the Taliban and Bin Laden may have been unavoidable, but on a long-term basis, reducing anti-Americanism must be achieved in other ways. As Professor Schama puts it, "never have the ordinary people of America, the decent, working stiff whose bodies lay in the hecatomb of Ground Zero, needed and deserved a great tribune more urgently. The greatest honor we could do them is to take back the voice of democracy from the plutocrats."



May I suggest some concrete positions that we, as Americans, could promote in the name of our own security:

- We need an imaginative and creative foreign policy. Foreign policy experts were polled last year and concluded almost unanimously that the greatest success of the past 100 years had been the Marshall Plan. Nearly half the world is still living on less than \$2 a day.
- We cannot ignore demands for transparency, and it is a sure recipe for failure if we do.
- We should monitor adherence to commitments. More sophistication in monitoring mechanisms is available today.
- We should respond to and support calls for broader popular participation. Foreign policy is the business of every citizen. Non-governmental organizations and civil society—women's groups, youth groups, human rights organizations—are volcanically exploding across the world. We should invest in civil society organizations. Women's and youth groups are leading the way to reform in the Islamic world. In 2002 I visited nearly forty universities in Africa where students are demanding—yes, clamoring—to be able to pursue peace and conflict studies.
- The fiction that repression prevents an upsurge of extremist and fanatical groups should be re-examined. Sometimes it feeds extremism. We must stop supporting repressive regimes.
- We should support freer and more open Middle Eastern governments. The United States might years ago have supported an Arabic-language media outlet similar to the BBC's.
- We should restore the cultural, educational, and exchange programs that have been slashed at the State Department and emphasize nonmilitary outreach. In the Kennedy Administration, the United States spent one percent of its GDP on nonmilitary aspects of promoting its influence abroad—the State Department, foreign aid, the Peace Corps, the United Nations, fellowships, exchanges, and information programs. Under the Bush presidency, the percentage has declined to two tenths of one percent. "It is difficult," as Professor Joseph Nye writes, "to be a superpower on the cheap—through military means alone."
- We should invest in efforts that bring about an understanding and appreciation of Islam's historical pluralism, and cease marginalizing Islamist groups.
- The absence of good news is an obstacle to peace, democracy, and human rights—and there's lots of good news. A discernible sweep to democracy and human rights is evident in many parts of the world, which can be broadened with US encouragement.

- We must recognize that there can be no lasting peace without human rights. Recognition of the basic underlying connection between peace and justice is growing.
- We must recognize that new ideas change peoples' minds through awakening and inspiration, not by force or threats.
- US leadership spearheaded many of the gains in international cooperation in the post-World War II period. It is tragic to leave the world now wondering if the United States has abandoned its fundamental commitment to international cooperation.
- Finally, the American writer on Israeli affairs M. J. Rosenberg reminds us that "the bottom line is that violence, no matter what the scale, transforms nothing. It does quite the opposite: it reinforces what is. Transformation, . . . what is needed, . . . come[s] through diplomacy."

For four years I worked at the heart of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, handling the national news corps from a small communications office that I shared with Julian Bond in Atlanta, Georgia; I did the same in Mississippi. At that time, the entire world could see that there was dissent in the United States. Even the televised news accounts of Bull Connor's snarling dogs and fire-hoses turned against demonstrators in Birmingham showed that there were oppositional movements in our country. Debate. Contestation. Sharecroppers speaking truth to power. People taking huge risks to organize nonviolently for racial justice, marching for social and political change.

In the international arena, the US civil rights movement still stands as a high-water mark for the United States. I am reporting to you from my work over the last twenty-five years, which has taken me to more than 100 developing countries. I have often had the experience exemplified most recently by seeing Indians crossing arms in a schoolyard in Tamil Nadu to sing "We Shall Overcome" in Hindi and Tamil. This anthem epitomizes the American spirit.

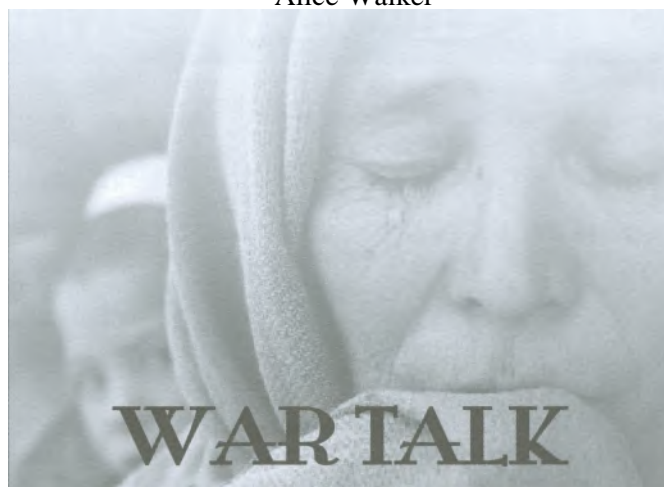
Yet today, what gets beamed internationally by the giant media conglomerates (and to US citizens over their breakfast cereal), is professed unity. Little dissent.

The United States is a child of the Enlightenment, and the case should be made by this country's leadership for tolerant, pluralistic respect for dissent and debate. US spokespersons should not sound like the princes and potentates of pre-Enlightenment Europe: let them eat cake. The Boston Tea Party, like "We Shall Overcome," is far closer to the essence of our nation than "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists." It is to this vital animating force—the pursuit of justice and freedom—that we must, as a nation, return.

*Mary Elizabeth King is Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies, University for Peace, Costa Rica, and Distinguished Scholar, American Center for Global Peace, Washington, DC. In 2004 she will also become Visiting Research Fellow, Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford, England. An earlier version of these remarks was presented to Rotary International and World Affairs Council on October 31, 2002, at Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

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