

## **The New American Empire: National Security, Governance and the Role of the Media**

Jim Dator

For The Honolulu Community-Media Council Meeting

Dave & Busters - Show Room 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

Victoria Ward Center - 1030 Auahi Street

Tuesday, October 21, 2003

The announcement for this talk said, "for almost 300 years 'America' has been 'a city built upon a hill' -- 'a beacon of hope for the world' -- 'the magnet for and of humanity.' Then, suddenly, in the blink of an eye, on September 11, 2001, the world changed for America. And as America reacted with fury internally as well as externally, culminating in its attack on Iraq on March 19, 2003, the perception of America was forever changed for the world. What might the future hold for this New American Empire?"

Before I take a look at several alternative futures for the American Empire, and of the role of the media in creating those alternatives, let me spend a few minutes commenting on the past.

American history has been a kind of dialectic waltz between three competing public philosophies: liberalism, (now called "neoliberalism"), populism, and progressivism.

Unfortunately, there is plenty of opportunity for confusion here, because what I mean by "liberalism" and "neoliberalism" is what many people call "conservatism" which in fact is something else. Liberalism refers to the philosophy formulated best by the 17<sup>th</sup> Century British philosopher, John Locke. It stresses the virtue of individual action within a large private sphere, guided ever so slightly by a tiny and restricted public sphere (or government). A century later, Adam Smith used Locke's ideas to invent modern capitalism, and those ideas informed many of the actions of the earliest Americans, and down to the present.

Neoliberalism is the current version which, usually linked to globalization, assumes that these ideas and practices are good everywhere in the world. The IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO more recently are among the many economic and political institutions furthering neoliberalism worldwide.

There is absolutely nothing "conservative" about neoliberalism. It is all for change of a certain kind, directed, it is often said, by the "invisible hand" that results from free individuals pursuing their own narrow self-interest, but actually more often directed by corporations using governmental policies enacted to enhance the interests of the corporations themselves.

But in addition to liberalism, and from the very beginning of American history, there has been populism which is opposed to individualistic and economically-oriented liberalism and in favor of local community (and more recently environmental) cultural values.

American history has largely been the story of the struggle between those two philosophies, with (during the Revolutionary period, for example) the Federalists being the liberals, and the Anti-Federalists being the populists. The American Civil War was also in part a contest between Southern populists and Northern liberals. And there are many other examples in American history down to the present.

But from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a third public philosophy emerged that can be called progressivism (often mistakenly now called "liberalism" to add to the confusion). Though inspired by Karl Marx and European socialists, it is much more moderate than either.

Both progressives and populists are anti-big business, even though progressives are not opposed to big institutions *per se*. Rather, progressives believe that big government is necessary to protect the middle and lower classes against big business corporations, while liberals love big business but oppose big government. Populists are against big anything, desiring local governance including local control of small businesses.

These three philosophies have competed throughout American history.

Which of the three public philosophies have been dominant (or at least strong or weak) has varied over American history. However, the liberal philosophy has always been America's default public philosophy: "That Government is Best which Governs Least" IS the fundamental belief most Americans hold about their political-economy--or at least it WAS until September 11, 2001. But at various times in the past one or the other two philosophies has become strong enough for a while to shape public policy in their direction to some extent.

Now, as far as the media are concerned, historically, each of the three philosophies has had its advocates and critics in the media. There can be said to be--or at least to have been--newspapers, magazines, and then radio and TV programs (if not actually stations and networks) that were voices of liberalism, populism, or progressivism. But, as the importance of advertising-driven media has risen, with the media becoming nothing but big businesses in and of themselves, the mediated voice of populists and progressives alike has greatly diminished while that of liberals has risen to such an overwhelming volume as to prevent all other perspectives from even entering the consciousness of most Americans.

My point in going over this history, however briefly and imperfectly, is to remind us that different parts of your industry represent some features of one of the three philosophies more strongly than others. While sometimes some of the reporters might have been populists or even progressives, the owners and advertisers have tended to be, and now are overwhelmingly, liberal, or, rather, neoliberal.

Moreover, it is worthwhile recalling that within the overall domination of liberalism within American history, the progressive philosophy was strongest from the Great Depression through WWII, ending with President Carter in 1980, while neoliberalism has been completely triumphant from Reagan through Clinton (yes, Clinton was most

certainly a neoliberal, and not a progressive, you may be sure). Populism has always lingered as a strong undercurrent widely preferred by a great many Americans.

So, what are the futures?

I will not surprise, or please, any of you if I comment that the futures are uncertain. But I might at least get your attention if I point out that the continued dominance of neoliberal globalization is by no means guaranteed; that nothing about the policies and pronouncements of the Bush W administration suggests a continuation of either process (neither neoliberalism nor globalization).

Dubya has been populist in rhetoric, protectionist in economic policy, imperialist in foreign and military affairs, and authoritarian in civil rights. None of that is in accordance with neoliberal philosophies. If W runs and wins again, as he may, then neoliberal globalization is probably over--or at least postponed for the foreseeable future.

If W does not run and win, and if a Democrat does, then one possible future is the return of neoliberal/globalization., neoliberal/globalization being generally supported by the mainstream of the Democratic Party.

Now, there is a great deal of populist opposition to neoliberal/globalization in the US, but it does not come from the Democrats. Most opposition is within the Republican Party itself--from such Republican strongholds as the Religious Right; the Patriots, Militia, and Minutemen; and throughout much of Middle America which is panicked about the continued loss of jobs overseas [See Appendix Two on outsourcing public jobs] and wants everyone to "Buy American". It is only the East Coast Bankers and their corporate and media fellow travelers within the Republican Party--perhaps you--who truly favor neoliberal/globalization.

There is of course considerable populist opposition to neoliberal/globalization in the dwindling labor union portion of the Democratic Party, but they are indeed too few to matter alone. The few remaining progressives within the Democratic Party support globalization over isolationism, as well as the truly free-market aspects of neoliberalism, though they want the invisible hand to be guided by fair public policy. As I said before, unlike populists, progressives are not afraid of bigness per se, and the globe is truly BIG.

Those people who are opposed to globalization and neoliberalism for environmental reasons, or out of concern for the plight of the poor, once were Democrats but now are either Greens or nothing. Nothing, since they find no support for their concerns within the Democratic Party, and know that Greens can never win in our rigged two party-system. So they have abandoned all hope of working within the system, and are content with hugging trees, blowing up SUVs, or text-messaging droll Bush and Schwarzenegger jokes to one another while eating homemade tofu-burgers.

The Neocons within the Republican Party who currently rule the US are certainly not in favor of neoliberal globalization. Instead they have taken us very well down the road to

creating the New American Global Empire that they envisioned and had been working on for many years (through the Project for a New American Century among other platforms) during the time the neoliberal Democrats such as Clinton were temporarily in control. While 9/11 made it possible for the Neocons more easily and quickly to make more of the dramatic policy changes they had long desired, the terrorist attacks of that day were certainly not the CAUSE of the policy changes. Many of the policies were already well under way from the moment W took office, well before the 9/11 attacks. Almost all of W's advisors--Gen. Powell being the most prominent exception--were chosen by Vice President Cheney (who was in charge of the presidential transition team) from the list of people who had signed the New American Century manifesto in June 1997 and/or the document called, *Rebuilding America's Defenses*, in September 2000, thus demonstrating their long-standing commitment to creating the New American Empire during W's reign.

By the way, you need to understand that I am not using the term "New American Empire" as hyperbole, and certainly not as an insult. I am using it as a precise and preferred term of art. Indeed, "empire" has become a source of pride--and by no means a pejorative--for some observers. Arch-conservative (that is to say, liberal) Dinesh D'Souza wrote in *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 26, 2002 "In praise of American empire," stating, "America has become an empire, a fact that Americans are reluctant to admit and that critics of the United States regard with great alarm" while concluding, after a survey of America's imperial actions and intentions: "If this be the workings of empire, let us have more of it."

Thus, the New American Global Empire presents the US and the world with an entirely new and largely unanticipated future--a major challenge for you and all members of the larger neoliberal community. On the one hand, the Neocons wish to project complete and unilateral military control of the world according to certain narrowly-defined interests. But at the same time, Neocons cut taxes, raise public debt, and pare down all governments--federal, state, and local--to, well, to absolutely nothing. They see no need ultimately even for publicly-funded defense or justice, both of which (like all government functions) can and should be done on the cheapest, private, contractual basis--perhaps, according to Neocon ideology, overseas in India where wages are low, skills are high, and loyalty to the American Empire assured.

Since our entire global economy floats on a vast and rising flood of debt, private as well as corporate and public, it is not clear to me how the New American Empire will function in the absence of any responsible public sector at all, but that is what the Neocons desire.

Thus, the time may be ripe for a major restructuring of the American political party system. And it may be that the election of "Ahnul" in Cau-li-for-nia may be an additional harbinger of that transformation, but I won't go down the road of party restructuring with you today. Maybe some other time.

For now, and in conclusion, I will suggest five futures for the United States, and for Hawaii, leaving it to you to decide what the futures of the media might mean in each of the five alternatives.

## **Five Futures for the United States and Hawaii**

### **Triumph of the New American Empire**

US the undisputed global hegemon

US focus on internal security and external military might

Global neoliberalism replaced by American (domestic and foreign) corporatism

Restricted individual rights; emphasis on common American values from the

#### **Bible**

Property and corporate ownership restricted to a few loyal citizens only

Hawaii is a tightly-controlled military center for projection of American imperial rule in Asia.

### **Global Economic and Environmental collapse**

Derivatives-led global debt crisis (at all levels--national, corporate, personal) brings down the overextended house of cards.

Predatory capitalism destroys its resource base

Overpopulation/depopulation; water wars, global warming/cooling (interruption of the global thermohaline current)--climate change, sea-level rise (environmental refugees)

Focus of human activity now on coping with these environmental issues

Hawaii almost entirely on its own--no sun-based tourism, plus few can waste resources coming and going so far.

Hawaii becomes just one more overpopulated, isolated and humid Pacific island coping with sea-level rise, climate change, and environmental refugees from the vanished Marshalls and other Pacific islands.

### **North America in a globalized world**

Global neoliberalism returns with North America as an important participant

Economic concentration into a few global corporations

European Union, Confucian Asia, Hindic Asia, and Islamic Ummah (featuring Islamic capitalism), with South/Central America part of North American sphere, major South Africa subregion. Central Africa slowing rising--on the way to full globalization by end of 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Hawaii globalized, but more part of Asia than of US though still an American state

### **Nine Nations of North America in a localized world**

(Whether following collapse, or as a result of reaction to the excesses of the Empire and/or of WTO/IMF neoliberal globalization)

Preservation and improvement of local culture and lifestyles, not economic growth, the focus of life

Bioregional diversity: Rugged individualism along with communal property ownership

Indigenous people rise everywhere

Hawaiian sovereignty achieved and maintained

**High Tech globalization and beyond**

Beyond the nation-state to global political-economy

Beyond planet Earth (Moon, Mars, Europa, Venus?)

Beyond mere humanity (AI, Genetic engineering, Nanotechnology, Martians and ET?)

Beyond capitalism to a postmoney, postscarcity society

**The Alma Mater for the Branch of the University of Hawaii on Mars:**

In green Manoa valley our Alma Mater stands.  
Where mountain winds and showers refresh her fertile lands.  
The flag of freedom beckons above her shining Walls.  
To wider truth and service our Alma Mater calls.

Hawai'i, we have gathered within thy wide flung doors,  
As sons and daughters claiming thy freely offered stores.  
Our loyal praise we tender, and pledge to hold thy aim,  
Till oceans' far horizons shall hear thy honored name.

In Valles Marineris our Alma Mater waits  
For Martian songs and laughter to ring its opened gates.  
So come and join your children! The journey's now begun  
For wider truth and service, in world's beyond our Sun.