

THREAT AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN DIGNITY IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY: More Than A Book Review

[David Cole, ENEMY ALIENS: Double Standards and Constitutional Freedoms in the War on Terrorism, New York and London: The New Press (2003). US \$ 24.95]

By Tecola W. Hagos

PART ONE: THE IMPACT OF COLE'S BOOK (A REVIEW)

I. General Introduction

"A man is not just if he carries a matter by violence; no, he who distinguishes both right and wrong, who is learned and guides others, not by violence, but by the same law, being a guardian of the law and intelligent, he is called just." The Buddha (from the DHAMMAPADA, circa 530 B.C.)

Of the many books I have read, only a limited number of books have gnawed at my very being resulting in my experiencing intense feeling of foreboding of the apocalyptic, the outrageous, and the hopeless as did David Cole's book ENEMY ALIENS. Next to their Bibles and their Qurans, Ethiopians (or anybody else for that matter) living here in the United States or elsewhere should have in their homes copies of this wonderful book, ENEMY ALIENS, warts and all, both for reference purposes and as a sobering reminder that their lives lived away from home is lived on the razor's edge at great personal risks more than they think.

Great books are an amalgamation of the lives of communities and the lives of their authors woven together and forming great matrix of profound insight. One such great book that comes to mind is the book by Fyodor Dostoevsky, NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND; that book had profound effect on me in my youth and continues to do so every time I reread it. Cole's book ENEMY ALIENS is a very personal book despite its very public message where the personal struggle of the Author is both a trajectory and an integral part of the Book. [See as an example, Cole, Chapter 12] Here is where great passion for a cause can be excused for getting in the way of what academicians would object to as subjectivist approach (writing) to issues of public concern the same way Dostoevsky tried to tackle the issues of his time in a most profound self expression. There is no question that David Cole is a passionate writer. I am glad he is. How else an intelligent and committed person would react to injustice and prejudices being paraded as patriotism and national defense?

The direction the United States Government took after the September 11 terrorist attack, where 2970 individuals died [www.nytimes.com/2002/09/01], may be seen as one of the most important events in the history of this country. It was a defining moment in the history of the people of the United States, and we are still living within the tremor of that monumental event. However, without trivializing the seriousness of the crime committed on September 11, I must point out the fact that in the annals of the most barbaric of Centuries, the Twentieth Century, the death of about three thousand people pales considerably compared to over one hundred million who perished through nuclear bombing, indiscriminate high-flying bombing raids, and military engagements on fields of operations the United States was involved in, along with other Western nations.

The ongoing inhuman treatment of captured Taliban fighters and others, whose identity is not properly disclosed by the Bush government, at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp goes far beyond what can be considered security precaution and is in fact a form of barbaric torture. It exposed the underbelly of the beast in both the American citizenry and the office holders as much as it brought out in dissenters, such as Cole, some of the finest human qualities that any people ought to have. [See Cole, 42-56]

The anger directed against those captured prisoners (one of whom a thirteen year old teenager) seems more of a lashing out in blind fury than a rational act aimed to find the people responsible for the attack. Had any of the people in detention were involved in such crimes, the government would have splashed such news all over the place. As Cole pointed out those prisoners are simply being extra judicially punished for their association with Al Qaeda or the Taliban. Cole wrote, “Guilt by association is a common response in times of fear.” [Cole, Chapter 4, 59] The captured individuals were being used in a grotesque public blood-letting that I find primitive and barbarous, an act that degrades our humanity and our dignity.

This frenzy and cry for “blood” by the Bush Government seems to have lost all sense of proportion or rational thinking, it is even directed at Americas’ longtime friends like France, Germany, Canada et cetera. I have never seen a people so animated and frightened at the same time, as the people I met or observed here in Washington DC and vicinity just after the terrorist attacks; I say this having lived through and having observed two traumatic and bloody revolutions that dramatically changed the lives of people in totally different directions: the 1974 Military takeover and fall of Emperor Haile Selassie and the 1991 overrun by liberation fighters of the Military dictatorship left in place when the brutal Mengistu bolted out of the country in fright of the coming doom.

II. Thesis and Theme: Content and Issues

The book ENEMY ALIENS is divided into four main parts and subdivided into fourteen uneven Chapters. The thesis of the book is plainly and clearly stated in the introduction, and it deals with the legal and moral ramification of trading of “foreign nationals’ liberties for citizens’ security.” Cole argues four main points in support of his thesis that such impulse should be resisted because such trade off is illusory in the long run, counterproductive as a security measure, an overreaction that is bound to be corrected with regret later when things settle down, and an act that is morally and constitutionally indefensible. [Cole, 7] In the process of developing and expounding these points, Cole guides us through a political and legal labyrinth enriched with numerous case citations. His writing is lucid, his presentation informative, and his arguments well organized and convincing. Although to my test, I wish Cole was a little more belligerent than so even keeled and courteous; I wish he had written some well deserved guttural expressions against some of the most outrageous conducts of government officials.

What makes this book particularly timely and important is the fact that it makes us face the fact that most of us did not really know the United States Government, and that all pride in the democratic nature of the Government is misplaced and delusional. The Officials of the Government of the United States over a long period of time have carried out those same violations of human rights and

abuse of power that other national governments were accused of committing year in and year out by the United States Government (See the Annual Reports on foreign governments by the State Department). Many people, citizens and immigrants alike, have suffered under the polarizing umbrella of a system seemingly democratic. Some have disappeared into the nether world of State security system. Some have been harassed and arrested and have been detained without a showing of probable cause. Some have been tortured and viciously singled out for prosecution et cetera by the “greatest democracy” on Earth, the United States.

I crack my head trying to answer how such abuse and trampling of human rights happen in full view of the “People’s” Representatives and the Supreme Court, in our midst with such impunity. To ask such question in itself suggest lack of proper evaluation of the American society and people. The violation of the rights of a minority or target group on the basis of race, national origin, economic class interest, is not something new in the United States. In fact, it seems that it is the norm; thus we are dealing here in terms of difference in degrees of violations from era to era rather than something unusual.

It is important to understand the foundation principle(s) at the bottom of all that is happening in the United States. Despite its religiosity, the United States is founded and functions on secular principles of utility or utilitarianism. Consequences or results seem to determine the type of methodology used to achieve social and economic goals. Cole alluded to this when he stated that “[n]atural law theories no longer hold much influence.” [Cole, 214] This is a frightening situation since it questions very many universal principles of the unity of man and equality of human beings. It is only a short stop to fascism from such national ethos. I suspect that the obvious democratic relationship between the different Government functionaries, between the individual and the government, between individuals et cetera is a great acrobatic display that could as easily collapse if it were not for the infusion of new immigrants who maintained the dream of American democracy from generation to generation. If it were not for such continuous revival and renewal with the infusion of new, ready and eager immigrants, the United States would have evolved into a state with obnoxious and rigid class structure, serfdom, and third rate economy.

Immigrants are the life giving force to the United States, and they are indispensable to the viability and survival of the United States as we know it. Thus, it is ironic that the very people who created and revitalized the United States from generation to generation have to go through a ritualistic purging and persecution by the earlier settled and entrenched population once in every decade. If you study the history of people who contributed greatly as scientists, enterprising-workers, moral leaders, et cetera to the development of the United States to become the World’s great technological and economic power, most of them were/are immigrants. Thus, the current misdirected persecution of immigrants, simply put, is idiotic, but not out of the ordinary.

A. Problem of definition and scope

The Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act (PATRIOT Act) is the legislation that is the single most threat to the constitutionally protected rights of Citizens and residents alike not to mention the havoc it unleashed on international human rights Covenants and Resolutions including the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights. The PATRIOT Act was rushed through a cowered in Congress in a flash and was out being used in no time as a battering ram to demolish constitutionally protected rights that took up most of the two Centuries to build through the painful sacrifices of millions of people since the establishment of the United States. To date, the chief enforcer of the Act, the Justice Department, had only about one or two convictions under the Act out of the thousands of suspects it arrested and detained. [On the limited success of the Department of Justice in apprehending the right people who may have participated in terrorist activities, see Cole, "The War on Our Rights," The Nation, 12 January 2004, 5] In his book, Cole wrote, "Ashcroft's dragnet approach has targeted tens of thousands of Arabs and Muslims for registration, interviews, mass arrests, deportation, and automatic detention, effectively treating an entire, overwhelmingly law-abiding community as suspect." [Cole, 190]

In the PATRIOT Act, the first main problem is the issue of the definition of words like "terrorist," "terrorist activities," "terrorist organization," and "terrorism" as used in the PATRIOT Act and immigration laws. Cole devoted considerable effort in a number of ways trying to deal with the definition of such words. [Cole, Chapters 4 and 5] His conclusion is a sobering one. The definition of such words is expansive that it could cover most anything. Almost any activity or an organization, even remotely connected with an organization perceived either by the President or the Attorney General as dangerous no matter how remote the danger may be, could be considered as a terrorist activity or a terrorist organization. What is also most disturbing is the creeping interfacing of censor of Citizens and non-citizens who may end up being designated as terrorists and lose protection from arbitrary and often degrading and brutal incarceration or detention with no relief.

Similarly, on the side of the investigative branch of government, guidelines for the FBI have been relaxed to such an extent that the requirement of the showing of "probable cause," before any eavesdropping could take place, now can be carried out by the Department of Justice on the simple showing of "reasonable suspicion." Under such very low threshold almost anything could trigger such eavesdropping on wide range of activities, even violating the age old sacred attorney-client communications. [Cole, 80-1]

Cole does not limit his criticism to government functionaries and officials, but also leveled scathing criticism of the American public itself for their complacency with such governmental violations and threats against fundamental principles of human dignity and constitutionally protected individual rights. As a matter of fact, the Book text opened appropriately with a poem by Stephen Rohde:
 "First they came for the Muslims, and I didn't speak up
 because I wasn't a Muslim.

...

Then they come for me...and by that time no
 one was left to speak up." [Cole, 17]

I must emphasize the fact that Cole is as much concerned with the violations of human rights by the Government of the United States as much as he is worried that the public and individual citizens have become silent enablers of such violations in recent events. I completely agree with Cole in that no dictator can bloom in a vacuum without willing sycophantic individuals, and no abuse and

violation of the rights of a target group is possible without the cooperation or indifference of enabler public. It follows then that the challenge to the many violations of the rights of individuals need be mounted first and foremost by the individuals themselves and their communities. The interest of any governmental institution is a self-generating and a self-preserving one, and as such by its very nature opposed to the rights and autonomy of the individual. Thus a responsible community must be vigilant and on the lookout in order to prevent any hegemonic, oppressive, or abusive attempt by its elected or appointed officials.

B. The Law as a Tool of Oppression (particulars)

1. Race, Religion, and Ideology

The concept of the law and how law is applied to particular events in the United States seems to reflect the view that the law is a process solely aimed at legitimizing the United States Government violent and oppressive actions against citizens, non-citizens, residents, and foreigners. This seems to be the case because there seems to be an understanding in society that what ever is not specifically forbidden is permitted in the United States. Thus, the purpose of the law assumed this distortion as a tool of repression rather than as an expression of social order and aspiration to be used by the government to guide, inspire, and lead the people to higher order of reality/existence. Because everything is presumed allowed then the role government takes up is that of a censor of some of the “excess” of individuals, perceived or other wise. Cole discussed a disturbingly consistent pattern of a tradition of violent and abusive suppression of individual rights in time of actual or presumed security danger to the United States from the period around the First World War to date.

From the turn of the Twentieth Century to date the United States government never let up its persecution and prosecution of suspected radicals even though historians and legal scholars seem to limit such activities by identifying periods of intense activities e.g. the Palmer Raids (1920s), Un-American Activities (1940s) Civil Right Movement (1960s) et cetera. Even the most venerable judges are at times seduced by the social trend of the moment, or by mob/herd mentality. For example, Learned Hand, a great jurist in more ways, faltered in the case of United States v. Dennis [Cole, p. 140] during the period of the “Second Red Scare” in the 1950s. So did Chief Justice Earl Warren when he was Governor of California on the issue of the internment of American citizens with Japanese ancestry and Japanese legal residents before he became champion of civil and individual right as a jurist. [Cole, p. 97] These facts tell us two things about human beings including even those who are the best of us 1)that we are all susceptible to mass hysteria, and 2) that we always create/find victims to vent our anger and fear. Cole’s discussion in Chapter 7 about the internment of American citizens with Japanese ancestry and Japanese legal residents during the Second World War is the best in the book, which elegantly explained and exposed a very complex subject.

On the determination of issues dealing with civil and human rights, the Supreme Court, for most of its life since its establishment in 1789 (actual sitting 1790) with the appointment of John Jay as Chief Justice by George Washington, except for the Warren Court period, in the main was involved in legitimizing or rubber stamping of the Government’s oppressive actions and violations of individual human rights by rendering some of the most horrible judgments, such as the Dred Scott v. Sandford 60 U.S. (19 How) 393(1856), Korematsu v. United States, 323 U.S. 214 (1944) et cetera cases. Even

the celebrated case Marbury v. Madison, 5 U.S. 137 (1803), which is often jammed down the throats of starry eyed first year law students in American law schools as “the case” that established the Supreme Court’s power of judicial review, has problems. Despite the fact of the importance of that case, I read the case as a disappointing cope-out and a weaseler of a case, to put it bluntly. It set the tone of a court of timidity and evasion for the life of the Supreme Court to date in general, except for punctuated periods of enlightenment. The Court in the Marbury Case, for example, could have simply asserted its authority as a matter of analytical definition, and thereby would have saved us from all kinds of tortured opinions entered over the years on varied issues trying to establish its authority.

Simply put, the Marbury case involved an aggrieved person, William Marbury, who “moved the court for a rule to James Madison” to order the new Jefferson Administration to distribute to him a commission of an appointment by the outgoing Adam’s Administration. Chief Justice Marshall chose to sacrifice the interest of a citizen by holding that the Federal Judiciary Act of 1789 gave authority to the Court i.e. the writ, not explicitly authorized by the Constitution, thus denying Marbury a ruling rather than ordering the Administration to deliver the commission to Marbury that the Court has found to be in order. Marbury never received his commission. However, the Court thereby gained some power of judicial review by considering the constitutionality of the act of Congress. The decision of the Court was a self contradictory holding since the same could be argued that the Constitution does not explicitly authorize the Supreme Court to review the acts of Congress for what ever reason either. Moreover, the decision flies against the very authority the Court cited: Blackstone--acknowledging “every right, when withheld, must have a remedy.” The Marbury case set the type of “ethical” and legal sophistry that would characterize the Supreme Court for years to come. Maybe my expectation of more assertion of independence by the Court is unrealistic since the Justices of the Court are appointed by the President there by tied into the system in a loop, and that their decision is as much a political action as much as a legal one.

The current Supreme Court, with Chief Justice Rehnquist at its head, exhibits in great depth the polarizing effect of conservative politics since Reagan rode into Washington DC on a conservative charger. However, not everything was a loss. To a respectable degree, in an otherwise gloomy court, at least Justices Breyer, Ginsburg, Souter, and Stevens have maintained a degree of profound insight and understanding of human nature and the liberating role law is supposed to play in the lives of individuals in society. [By the way, in my judgment, Justice Ginsburg is the most heroic of the group.] The greatest disappointment on the Court to me is Justice Thomas (a Black man) who seems to suffer from an acute case of myopic vision of history constructing in his legal opinions a cocoon of selectively idealized universalist conception of Constitutional law, and who seems to be preoccupied with resolving his own personal psychological problems more than his obligation to the culture and race that produced him--what a contrast to Justice Thurgood Marshall.

The eight-year hiatus of the Clinton Administration in between Republican administrations was marred mostly by petty scandal that was magnified by die-hard conservatives and by sulphur and brimstone preachers into something monumental. By contrast the far more compromising lies or misleading statements about alleged Saddam’s immediate danger to the security of the United States, the Bush administration still insists on as the reasons for going to war, is being handled lightly and

being pushed under the rug of obscurity so far. Thus, there is a tradition of telling outright lies, half truths, and deception on the part of the Executive Branch of the American Government. As a result of such history, the public considers “politics” and “politicians” with great suspicion. By comparison other western democracies take their politics and politicians very seriously.

The conviction and execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti on charges that many people believe was trumped up murder charges illustrate one extreme example of the extent the United States Government (a State in this case) had waged its considerable force and money against radical immigrants. Even the most progressive justice of the time Oliver W. Holmes was swept with the tide of the fear of communism of the 1920s that he ended up writing the denial of request for stay of execution by Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927. However, Cole did not discuss that important case maybe because the case has been weighed down with the possibility of some crime (not necessarily the crime charged) committed by the accused.

2. Sinking Further into Tyranny

One other method used by the Executive is to disfranchise a Citizen by taking away the status of citizenship thereby opening him or her unprotected by any Constitutional rights to due process, freedoms and liberty et cetera under the many Amendments. This is one of the most insidious and despicable attack on naturalized citizens. Cole in Chapter 8 has laid out the history of such abuse and the frenzy even by respectable newspaper like the Washington Post advocating the execution of all anarchists. (Cole, 109) I may add that a number of whom were naturalized citizens. The United States Government has used one other devastating weapon, which it has already unleashed against Citizens. By labeling a citizen as “enemy combatant” the government has indeed detained Citizens. There is no content review of such Executive decision by Courts. (See Cole, (43-46) The secret “No fly list” of the names of American citizens is another example of uncontested governmental abuse and encroachment of the freedom of movement of individuals.

Another disturbing fast development is the extent and form of intimidation bordering blackmailing of foreign governments by the United States Government with threats of military attack, economic sanction, blockade et cetera if such foreign governments do not cooperate with the United States in hunting down “terrorists”. The problem with such approach is the fact that it is the United States Government that determines who the terrorists are and what constitute terrorism. George W. Bush’s Manichean world view of “either you are with Us or against Us” is too sophomoric, and reduces complex problems and issues into a series of “either/or” confrontational points with the rest of the world.

Can the United States Government carry out activities outside of the United States and its territories that are illegal had they been performed in the United States and its Territories? In other words, detaining captured Taliban fighters and others at the Guantanamo Bay (assuming Guantanamo Bay is not a United States territory) shield the United States Government from all legal process on behalf of the detainees to determine the legality of the detention and the manner of their detention? A more disturbing practice is emerging as an acceptable practice of the officials of the United States Government in the investigation and interrogation of foreign nationals suspected of “terrorist” activities. Dana Priest and Barton Gellman of the Washington Post about a year ago wrote that

officials of the United States were using other nations to carry out investigations that include torture as a means of interrogation of suspects captured by the United States military forces. [Torture Tactics Used on Terrorism Suspects Held I Secret Overseas,” The Washington Post, 26 December 2002] Many reports and articles have been published since then, but there is no public outcry for such obvious illegal activity of officials of the United States Government. The Supreme Court has as yet to give clear answer on such issues.

Even under narrow Constitutional interpretations, the fact that a particular governmental action is authorized by Congress does not diminish its abuse or barbaric application. The way the PATRIOT Act is being carried out by the officials of the current Administration demonstrates this fact. What is significant to remember is that no law is independent of some moral principle, and law does not function in a vacuum. When one tries to delaminate law from its moral content, then starts horrendous problem of abuse and oppression. The many problematic provisions of the PATRIOT Act significantly conflict with Constitutionally guaranteed rights dealing with rights from arbitrary arrest, illegal search and seizure, freedom of speech and association, equal protection of the law, due process of law that includes speedy trial, et cetera. Especially the most obnoxious practice of the Justice Department of secretiveness of some of the arrests and detentions is fully discussed by Cole. In fact it is quite terrorizing to learn how vindictive officials can be and how much power is being wielded by the President and the Attorney General under the PATRIOT Act, Immigration and other laws against real or imagined enemies.

3. History of Violations and Abuse

In Part 2 of the Book, Cole has provided us a succinct historical narrative with great clarity, a useful context that helps us put in perspective the development of safeguards as well as the curtailment mechanisms used by the United States Government (the Executive, the Judiciary, and Congress) on civil liberties and on the general concepts on human rights and dignity. What is amazing is how many horrible individuals acquire power all throughout the history of this country whether they are Presidents, Federal Judges, Justices and Chief Justices of the Supreme Court, Attorney Generals, Members of Congress et cetera who would go to extraordinary length to hurt individuals.

The current Attorney General, John Ashcroft, reminds me of Thomas de Torquemada (1420-1498), the Grand Inquisitor of Medieval Spain. Cole’s quotations in his book of statements made by Ashcroft are frightening, even when one of the quoted statements seems to be a contradiction [Cole, 48-49] to the entire activities of the Justice Department of its detention, arrest, et cetera of suspected terrorists or material witnesses. The manner the Justice Department went about arresting and detaining what it identified as suspects, material witnesses, and “sleepers” is effectively discussed by Cole. Especially Cole’s discussion of the detention of so called “sleepers” is one of the most chilling accounts of a system that resembles a witch hunt of Medieval Europe. Words like “sleepers” come loaded with negative meanings; the mere calling a person as such puts such a person in a category of convicted criminals.

Look at the type of embarrassing situation the Bush Administration finds itself with the ever shifting reasons it sold the public for going to war with Saddam. The whole war on Saddam Hussein was based on that policy of preemptive strike that has now been totally discredited for none of the claims

of the danger of being attacked by weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and development of nuclear weapon is true. Such school yard rule of conduct is inappropriate as a national foreign policy. It suffices to say the rule of the jungle does not lend any moral or civic authority in the conduct of governments.

In general the public is ill-informed or minimally aware of the abuse and violation of both Constitutionally guaranteed rights and “fundamental” rights under international conventions and declarations of Citizens, Resident Aliens, or people who are illegal immigrants. Everyone should be aware of the danger of a tyrannical government lurking just round the bend of history. For a long time I have been more inclined towards the idea that laws are reflections of long standing open ended customs (with inbuilt mechanism for progressive improvement) processed into existence through the ethos of current social setup. I am not so sure now having read David Cole’s indictment of an entire regime of law as flawed and anti-people (citizens and non-citizens), which is manipulated by few, often racist and corrupt, powerful men to promote their political ambition, whether I will maintain my previous insight on law and society.

III. Limitations of the Book

It would have been most helpful to include in the book pictures of some of the major players in the United States Government, some of the Federal Judges and Justices et cetera. For readers looking at some pictures of the people they are reading about makes history quite tangible. Facing in pictures such officials, who have profoundly affected the rights of individuals not only here in the United States but all over the World, may add existential dimension to the many incidents of violations of individual rights.

A more significant omission in ENEMY ALIENS is the fact that there is hardly any discussion of the causes of the violence against the United States. There is no mention of the Palestine-Israel conflict that may have been one of the two most important reasons why there has been this intense hate of the United States, and the other being the type of support the United States has been giving for almost fifty years to despotic and oppressive Arab governments and others round the world. It would have been helpful to know at least the direction one ought to consider to solve the sources of the conflict taking into account the role played by the United States as mentioned above.

David Cole devoted limited space to the importance and applicability of international law to the very many violations of the United States government of international law and principles. Citizens, aliens, foreign combatants are all covered by this or that international Convention or Resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations that has become aspect of customary international law readily applicable and taking precedent on local (municipal) law or statute. I am not saying that Cole did not pay any attention to international law and practice, but that he should have made the obligation of the United States to abide and follow international law and practice as one of his main thesis.

The brief reference and short analysis of international law toward the end of Cole’s book dealing with judicial process, human rights, the treatment of foreigners in local jurisdictions et cetera as subordinate issues is an unnecessarily limiting approach to a great defensive shield that should be

used to blunt the attacking spear thrusts of racist and xenophobic government officials. I believe international law should have been given a central role by Cole in his treatment of all of the issues raised and discussed in his book.

A couple of International Courts are currently engaged in the trial of leaders and government officials alleged to have committed crimes of genocide and crime against mankind, and several nations have as part of their penal code provisions addressing crimes committed by officials of governments anywhere in the world. It is this understanding of the universal application of criminal law where by some officials of the United States may end up in that Court that prompted the United States Government to campaign intensely to have its military and government officials exempted from such procedures. It has also refused to ratify the convention on the International Criminal Court that was recently established to try criminal violations of the rights of individuals anywhere in the world. In local courts such effort of the United States would be considered as evidence of admission of guilt.

For example, the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War is violated when the United States government denied Taliban Fighters who were captured in battle fields in Afghanistan the status of prisoners of war. No matter how despicable the leadership of the Afghan government of that time (the Taliban) might have been, nevertheless, the Afghan foot-soldiers were just like any other soldier anywhere in the world, pampered or not, for whom the Geneva Convention was established to begin with. Their uniform may look odd, their system of deployment may look or sound disorganized; nevertheless, no matter how much they may look strange, they were soldiers and stood for their own national cause no matter how primitive or distorted a cause it might have been.

Even if we say that the Geneva Convention is not applicable, it still remains that numerous provisions of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which the United States promoted for over fifty years; the Covenant on political rights, which was signed a few years back by the United States, and scores of Resolutions by the United Nations General Assembly against inhuman treatment of prisoners, discrimination, which the United States sponsored or voted for, were all arrogantly violated due to the United States detention of people allegedly involved in terrorism.

Cole discussed the disturbing evolution of a frowned upon administrative detention into a court approved detention or imprisonment of individuals who have not committed any crime. [Cole, 224] I wish he had spent a lot more time on this issue and expound the dangerous trend being endorsed in Demore v. Kim, 123 S.Ct. 1708 (2003). The Supreme Court reversed the lower court's holding that the INS had not shown the need for detention (prior to any conviction resulting in imprisonment) overcoming a permanent resident's "due process" rights. Justices Breyer, Ginsburg, Souter, and Stevens dissented in part; however, their reason falls a shade short of according aliens the benefits of "liberty" of the Fifth Amendment and the full "due process clause" protection of the Fourteenth Amendments of the Constitution. The boldness of the Court's majority opinion seems to have been influenced by the new cycle of purging and demonizing of foreigners specially Arabs and Moslems under a policy of the Bush Administration on preemptive attack. Despite its elaborate legal argument, the majority opinion of the Court is essentially full of sophistry rather than long term oriented guide or profound legal insight.

Nobody truly gains when courts become courts of public opinion or simply become enablers of the politics of the moment. The danger on criminal procedure in non-terrorist crimes also should be considered in connection with the PATRIOT Act. The lowered standard of presumption of innocence and suspension of the human rights of suspected criminals by law-enforcement personnel (the police, prosecutors et cetera) in the effort to fight terrorism under the authority of the PATRIOT Act cannot simply get switched off. Considering the fact that the Supreme Court had decided cases affecting the Miranda protections [*Miranda v. Arizona*, 384 U.S. 436 (1966)] and allowed questionable confessions and collection of evidence [See *Illinois v. Perkins*, 110 S.Ct. 2394 (1990)], it is inevitable that the PATRIOT Act contaminates all law-enforcement activities in both the Federal and State governments. To hold otherwise is totally unrealistic.

It is on the issue of world-perspective, on how things are for minorities specially people of African decent in the rest of the World, where Cole made minimal effort to incorporate the problems he raised in the United States with an overall picture of the state of affairs in the World as an integrated and interconnected whole. However, such discussion may be outside of the thesis of the book when seen in light of the monumental undertaking of Cole; he has courageously stepped out to warn us, at great risk to his person and career, about very serious dangers facing us all by a government administration that is increasingly becoming dictatorial subverting principles of law and democracy. The creeping encroachment on Constitutionally guaranteed rights such as freedom of speech and association (First Amendment), rights against search and seizure (Fourth Amendment), equal protection and due process of law (Fourteenth Amendment) et cetera is a real setback that has taken back enormous ground of development since the period of Civil Rights movement.

PART TWO: COMMENTARY - EXPANDING COLE'S BOOK

IV. Seizing Up the United States: Politics, International Relations

"Soft countries breed soft men." Cyrus the Great [Herodotus, THE HISTORIES, Book Nine: 122]

Students in my logic classes exert great effort to make the difficult distinction between an explanation and an argument, which seems deceptively easy to do for many inattentive and presumptuous people. Even the most astute reader routinely fails to see such important distinction in every day communication. Thus, I warn my readers what I offered as an explanation why individuals act/react in destructive manner is not an argument of justification, but an understanding or explanation as to why such individuals act the way they do.

It is foolish for anyone to expect absolute delamination of law from politics. It is in the nature of social structures that the power structure and the law that is used to prop up such power are both in the same social matrix. However, we can have reasonable expectations that both power and law are used to benefit society as a whole rather than serve individual ambition through schemes that shreds the very delicate fabric of democratic government and individual rights. As far as I am concerned, the most dangerous individual is not the uninitiated person, a person without any sense of history, but rather it is the person with a distorted view of history who is a real danger to society and individual rights. When we study the background of some of the worst brutal dictators such as

Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Mengistu, Doe, et cetera we can find common characteristics of limited education and growing up in dysfunctional and often violent families. Such situation is not limited to any one society but is a dangerous fertile breeding ground of abusive leaders everywhere, including the United States society.

Considering the many benefits the United States had over the years from the United Nations set-up and customary international law and practices, it is quite incongruent for the Bush government to try to minimize or ignore such crucial role in the present crises of terrorism and war with Saddam. The open defiance of the United Nations by the Bush administration is like cutting ones own nose to spite ones own face. Here is where great statesmanship would have been handy in resolving a crisis without demolishing the United Nations system of conflict resolution that took over fifty years to rebuild after the League system collapsed setting off the Second World War. This disrespect for international law and processes that seems to be propounded by Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and Company from the Department of Defense, and their war-drum beaters on the outside such as Richard Perle, who seem to find some way of making money (Tirreme Partners, Carlyle Group) from public policy problems, are on the attack against a far more mature and distinguished soldier, Collin Powell of the State Department, who brings in a degree of statesmanship, dignity, and some sanity to America's foreign relations.

One of the most disturbing social phenomena I have observed here in the United States, which has made me rethink my optimistic view of People living in the United States, is their destructive illusion of "greatness" and "blessedness" that almost every politician never fails to state with a straight face given a chance to appear on television or public meetings. I cringe every time I hear such self congratulatory moronic snobbishness, especially when I hear members of disfranchised minority groups claiming such self congratulatory bliss. The incessant and nauseating reference to "American" people in news and commentaries by the media illustrate to me mass insecurity or mass delusion of a people forgetting their humble beginnings, or mass self denial of traumatized individuals finding comfort in their own narcissistic cocoons.

Is the "American" individual a human being or some other creature? This is not a stupid question. Listening to people talking on television and the radio about America, or their being Americans, and the way reporters and anchors of news on television and radio broadcasters have developed almost ritualistic daily self aggrandizement, I am tempted to think that Americans maybe indeed from a different Planet! Even children of recent immigrants, such as my own cousins who were either born here or came to this country when they were very young think of themselves as a cut above the people of the old country. However, the fact is totally different. If a person really wants to know the background and legacy of the people who are citizens of this nation, that person ought to read the poem by the humanist Emma Lazarus (1849-1887), "The New Colossus," which poem is inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. The second stanza reads:

“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!’ cries she
 With silent lips. ‘Give me your tired, your poor,
 Your huddled masses yearning to breath free,
 The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
 Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Americans are one of the most ordinary of people ever assembled to constitute a nation or a community in World history.

And then in great contrast to the humane Emma Lazarus, who was refined, well brought up, and well educated, you have uncouth and vulgar hatemongers like Country music “super star” Toby Keith who made millions of dollars screaming out some of the most hate-filled lyrics ever written by anyone demonizing and dehumanizing people in foreign countries because of their religion and economic/technology situation. Toby Keith is a high-school dropout with no talent except to croak like a frog his venomous lyrics to a moronic cheering crowd. The following is part of “The Taliban Song” lyrics:

“I’m just a middle aged, middle Eastern camel-herdin’ man.

I got a two-bedroom cave here in northern Afghanistan.

So we prayed to Allah with all of our might and then those big U.S. jets
come flyin’ in one night.

They dropped little bombs all over our holy land and man you
shoulda seen ‘em run, like rabbits, they run: the Taliban.”

The huge consumption of Toby Keith recordings shows the shared sentiments of millions of “Americans” against mostly non-European people as a matter of shared national ethos whether or not there was the 9/11 event. And such a “hatemonger” is adored by millions of people including George W. Bush.

Just to give a very brief perspective on the wealth of the United States, we must understand the fact that no nation is an island, but interconnected with other nations through trade, demographic movement et cetera. One must acknowledge, first of all, that the American economy is fueled by deficit financing by trillions of borrowed fund mostly diverted from the wealth and petrodollars of underdeveloped nations, fund that should have been properly used in the development of the economy and life at the sources. How much of the World’s raw material imported at the cheapest possible price in exchange for manufactured goods and farm products at an exorbitantly high prices go into maintaining the obscenely high lifestyle of Westerners and Americans is never taken into account by lightweight politicians and leaders who never tire boasting of the rich life of their communities.

The fact that there is a human being somewhere in the world starving, oppressed, dehumanized, or disfranchised is an indictment on all of us, and that we all have failed in this life to discharge our duties to our fellow man. Boastfulness, pride, inflated self importance, just like nationalism and racism, are all primitive attitudes and not the state of mind of a “universalist” person. There are many outstanding history books that one ought to read to guard against the polarizing effect of cheap propaganda if one does not trust ones own eyes in observing the suffering of billions and the greed of the few around the world. A book that should be read by everyone on the subject of the “people” who constituted the United States is a book by the great American historian and philosopher Howard Zinn, A PEOPLE’S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES (1980).

Another disturbing phenomenon, which grew into ridiculous proportion during the tumultuous

second-term Presidency of Clinton, where Clinton seemed to calibrate his bombing of targets in foreign countries with his crises at home, is using the rest of the world as a “whipping-boy” or as a “punching-bag” for United States leaders every time they get in trouble with their domestic polls. Although starting wars in far off lands to divert attention from domestic problems is not something new in history, whether it is Clinton or the two Bushs inflicting great pain and destruction on tens of thousands of human beings is a very questionable, dishonest, and irresponsible conduct of foreign policy when the reason given to justify such violence is dubious and violates international law at some level.

I have given up on the United States Military a few years back, before the first Gulf War, after a discussion I had with a retired high military officer who was a fellow teacher at a community College in Maryland. In our discussion about the Greek Government’s anti-American posturing at that time, the retired US Navy-man bluntly told me that the United States should use nuclear weapon if such anti-American attitude escalates into some form of military confrontation. I was absolutely shocked by his statement and even more so because of the fact that the individual was a first or second generation Greek immigrant who still has family connections with cousins in Greece. On reflection, I thought maybe that statement was directed at me and people like me. In order to reach an educated conclusion on that very disturbing discussion, I committed considerable time and effort in learning about the United States military activities and its conduct in battle fields.

It is the most sobering ongoing reevaluation that I have made so far, and I am still learning the depth and scope of the atrocities committed all over the world by the military forces of the United States, for example, in Cambodia, Japan, the Philippines, Iraq, Vietnam, et cetera not to mention the injustice and crime committed against aboriginal or native people of earlier centuries right here. Thus, my study of the history and eyewitness accounts on many of the wars and conflicts the United States participated in since the Second World War changed my prior innocent and unconditional admiration of the military might of the United States to that of a disappointed critique. The recent highly acclaimed documentary film by Errol Morris titled appropriately “The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons From the Life of Robert S. McNamara” based on McNamara’s recollections of the many wars and battles that McNamara was directly or indirectly involved shows how unnecessarily and wantonly destructive the United States military really was. I am fully vindicated in my condemnations of the overkill of the military of the United States Government in all of its engagement from the Second World War to Iraq.

As to McNamara, although he was given numerous opportunities over the years to be fully honest with his views and his mistakes as Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War, he failed to do so through his equivocation and evasive answers. According to a disgusted commentator, the character of McNamara is flawed “because he is both a pathological liar and a comically pathetic braggart.” [Alterman, “The Century of the ‘Son of a Bitch,’” The Nation, 15 Dec. 2003, 10.] Even at this late stage of his life at eighty seven years, McNamara could not bring himself to criticize the Bush administration’s handling of the present crises in the Iraqi war and occupation in a recent interview with Charlie Ross (December 29, 2003). This is a question of character more than anything else. Wishy-washy opportunist individuals, no matter how high they climb the ladder of power, no matter which distinguished school they attended, will always be looking after their pathetic lives and would

not hesitate to compromise universal principles, honor, honesty et cetera. These are kinds of individuals that one finds throughout human history in every race and culture who are cut from the same cloth of disposition of selfishness and greed. Such batch includes officials involved in advising and maintaining the security of dictatorial national leaders such as Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin.

To any objective observer, at this period in human history, it is the United States Government and its military that pose the greatest danger to World peace and security and not the other way around. One obvious reason for such danger is the nature of the power structure in United States that is not defused or spread out among large interest groups and individuals to insure that neither political nor military power is capriciously used against anyone out in the World by a single individual or an exclusive group. Power has, in fact, become progressively exclusive in the hands of very few individuals usually with no meaningful check on their determined decision to take the country to war. A clear example of this is how such few individuals, who may be counted by the number of fingers on one hand, and in collaboration with a handful of demagogue I-know-it-all “journalists” such as Charles Krauthammer and Bill Kristol manipulated the United States Government to launch an attack against Saddam Hussein. Thus, democratic check and balance is nowhere to be found where it counts at the present moment in the American government structure. It underscores the fact how dangerous America is to the rest of the World because this giant of a country could be moved about at the caprices and personal ambitions of few well positioned individuals. It is quite disconcerting to anyone after having believed for years the benign nature of “democracy” as championed by the United States to realize that after all even in the best possible government political power resides in the hands of very few and at times racist individuals.

It is very upsetting to me when I see this very many people buying into the patriotism frenzy without realizing how they are being played like a fiddle by a handful of individuals with personal agenda and goals, which at times seems to have nothing to do with America’s interest. People seem to forget the fact that it was on the decision of one esoteric man, Harry Truman, the least accomplished President of the United States, that the United States Government actually dropped nuclear bombs on non-military targets in Hiroshima and Nagasaki killing and wounding almost a million innocent people (women, men, and children) and leveling two cities: a crime of genocide of the worst kind! It has been shown by serious scholars that the war was over and Japan was defeated already, and it was only a matter days before its surrender when the bombs were dropped. No matter how people may justify the dropping of the first nuclear bomb, there was absolutely no justification for dropping the second nuclear bomb. Such wanton barbaric act earned the United States Government the horrible distinction of being the only Government in the World to have used Nuclear bombs against hundreds of thousands innocent civilians.

Despite the past deaths of hundreds of thousands of soldiers, often in heroic sacrifices specially during the fight against the Fascists and Nazis in Europe, I believe the United States military has changed far from an army in defense of freedom and liberty to a trigger-happy force often on rampage to expand imperialistic domination of the world. By judging from the recent behavior of United States leaders and politicians of recent conflicts, the United States government will not hesitate to use nuclear bombs on nations that may engage it with credible non-nuclear military force. The greatest danger to world peace and coexistence of nations in peace is posed by nations with

illusions of exclusivity and grandeur, illusion of “manifest” destiny, or of being chosen for some glorious reward by a super-being. These kinds of childish fantasies may have helped communities to survive under hostile circumstances in primitive times, but have no validity at this point in human history.

We know that school yard thugs respect only those with power; they have no respect for decency or the good of society. I am now in favor of the state of limbo of the Cold War era than the present state of unchecked swagger and militarism imposed on the American people by a handful warmongers surrounding the current President. The absence of a viable second “world power” would only promote injustice and more chaos because the urge to dominate and destroy the weak seems to be a simple deeply seated character flaw of human beings. From my own unscientific observation the reaction of my students to the Iraqi conflict seems to confirm my suspicion that people tend to support the government of the United States if they see it winning in any undertaking, in other words the bandwagon phenomenon is at work here. If there is no danger of retaliatory force against its actions, the United States government, just like any other powerful government, will simply become more and more belligerent because the nature of its political and economic structure promotes the ascendance of a handful of exceedingly polarizing handful of people who would control the public and plunge it into more wars and conflicts.

As we have seen in the decision making process of going to war against Saddam, the American people will simply be manipulated into going to war by such few overzealous individuals for their own personal goals with diminished sense of the horror of war and no ethical strength to stop such meltdown of civility and coexistence. It seems that most of the people surrounding the current President, with their drum-beaters on the outside seem to have lost their in-built human restraint of gracefully accepting the defeat of an enemy. They have become like the Dove, a symbol of peace, but a merciless killer once provoked into violence. It is a biological fact that most primates including man, and other carnivorous animals do have a built in instinctually triggered mechanism that inhibits them from further attacking a fallen adversary. However, the Dove has no such inhibition. Though it is a docile creature, if it is provoked to a fight, it will simply prick and pluck its foe to death even if the adversary is incapacitated and not fighting back.

V. In Defense of the Indefensible

Maybe it was the limit set by the thesis of the book itself that Cole did not find it necessary to point out to us the many beneficial roles played out by the United States in World history. Thus, to balance our views on World history and the behavior of some of the governments of nations around the World, I have interjected this section defending the United States. Of course, such a section may not be included in an ordinary book review since it is outside the purview of the book under consideration.

On the surface, the creation and coming into power of the United States may look like as the bloodiest series of events in human history, and the result of the work of exceptionally greedy and selfish individuals. Is America a blessing and a new stage in human history that has uplifted mankind to new higher platform of human rights, political freedoms, and economic development and wealth? Having lived in the United States for almost thirty years, and having witnessed the change

of five Governments, I have come to the realization that it is a mistake to make a sweeping condemnation of the United States. However, for reasons I am not going to go into details in this short article, America has in fact elevated humanity to a higher phase of reality in far subtler ways than what seems to be the case at first blush. It is not as a naive new refugee almost thirty years ago believed it to be found in the glitter and the jive, but in far more enduring ethical standards of volunteerism of simple folks.

As a “Black” man (a US Government designation not mine), I realize that specially the Black man is between a rock and a hard place in any community around the world. I can say with certainty that even in my own birth nation I would not last a day before a nefarious and brutal dictatorial government would eliminate or incarcerate me. Millions have suffered such fate around the world. Elsewhere in the world too the persecution and abuse against a black person is relentless. In the long run, it is in the United States that the Black man or any minority has a fighting chance of survival as a human being without being totally dehumanized and terminated. Thus, my criticism of the governments and officials of the United States should not be misconstrued as some form of support to the brutal and often dictatorial governments elsewhere in the world. It is only in the higher interest of improving the political and moral content of the United States Government, as well as that of the society in general, that I have written the above scathing criticism of the United States, its Citizens, Government, and officials.

The recent collapse of the Union Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) in the 1980s was seen by a number of political scientists, historians, and philosophers as the harbinger of a new era of World peace and economic revival. In the twenty years since, much has happened that make us optimists to reevaluate the significance of that momentous event. After all, the evil that lurked in the Soviet system was not limited to the People of the USSR but is to be found across the World’s population--it is the human in all of us that harbor such impulse. The racism and the corruption that followed in the wake of that change are turning bureaucratic oppression into racial oppression. The few Africans and other minorities living in Russia and former East-Block countries are experiencing brutal and often deadly discrimination by the now liberated population.

It is not the first time that “Black” people were exterminated by Caucasians or Asian people. According to Arktinos and Homer, in antiquity, the soldiers of Memnon, the Ethiopian warrior-king who fought on the side of the Trojans against the Greeks (the Greeks were trying to recover Helen their Queen who had eloped with Paris the Trojan Prince), settled around the Black Sea area after their leader Memnon was killed by Achilles in single combat. They were later identified as the Colchians (Ethiopians) of the south-eastern shores of the Black Sea whether they arrived from Susa, Elem (in present day Iraq) or Sais (Egypt). They were completely wiped out by the indigenous Caucasian population. Even in earlier times, it is asserted by van Sertima, the famous historian/anthropologist that the English Isle was first populated by Black people who were completely destroyed by new immigrant Anglo-Saxon settlers from mainland Europe. The Black people of Lagash, Sumer, the founders of settled life and civilization in that part of the world were either killed out or swallowed up by the majority population of Chaldeans, Medes, Akkads et cetera. What happened to the millions Africans sold into slavery in the Arabian Peninsula in the last one thousand years remains a mystery and ought to be studied.

If we take China, the reaction to the presence of a minuscule population of Africans who were students was absolutely horrendous. A couple of decades ago African scholarship students were brutally attacked by the local population and as a result almost every single one of those students left China. It is the most bizarre race prejudice since China has no minority Black population for thousands of years from the time the Black people of China were wiped out in earlier times. Xenophobia specially against Black people is one serious problem that China and other Asian societies have yet to deal with. India, despite its long history of experiment with democracy is still mired in obnoxious caste system where tens of millions of Indians mostly darker skinned Indians are forced to lead a subhuman existence.

In some significant areas of individual rights, the United States is way ahead of the game, specifically when it comes to the overall direction its record on human rights seems to be pointing. It has purged major stumbling blocks of racial and gender discrimination, caste system, the polarization effect of wealth et cetera that European nations to a limited extent, Russia, China, India, Japan in major ways have as yet to confront. Russia and former Eastern Block nations are becoming the worst abusers of Africans or people with African decent in their respective communities. Asiatic nations such as China, Japan, Indonesia et cetera have been making tremendous profit with their one sided foreign trade with African nations that they have to work hard to bring about good relationship with Africans and black people in general.

Even close allies of the United States who share similar historical and cultural background, and with considerable number of minority presence in their respective societies such as Britain and France, even Canada do not have minority representatives in their parliaments or elected offices nor any in high government posts comparable to that of the United States. You do not find Black men or women such as Powell or Rice appointed to such high government offices in European nations. However, African-Americans do not seem to have taken full advantage of their wealth, position of influence et cetera to the great benefit and strengthening of the African-American community.

I think that it will be wrong to draw a definitive single picture of the United States by just examining only its constitutive parts, for America is a state of mind more than a physical presence that transcends the limitations of its parts. In the spirit of new immigrants, it is a whole lot more than its parts. For some of us, especially those who escaped from the jaws of political and religious persecutions, though small in number and a battered lot at that, it is a ground where we are making our last stand against the forces of oppression where ever we find them in like manner as the legendary Ethiopian Patriots who fought Fascist Italy for five horrendous years with nothing more than their bare hands or the Three Hundred Spartans who traveled all the way to Thermopile pass and took on half-a-million-men Army of Xerxes and died to a man in defense of their freedom and their ideal.

The strength or weakness of a society is wholly the function of its organizational principles based on its religion and value system with some accidental creative discovery of physical (natural) laws leading to technological advances. It is quite reveling to me to witness in recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan that the inheritors of the glorious civilizations of Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus the Great, et

cetera hiding in caves and grottos with their dated rifles and scavenged weapons while being bombed with impunity from the air with sophisticated fighter planes and helicopters with laser guided missiles and all kinds of bombs by the children of people immortalized in Emma Lazarus poem. “The wretched refuse of your teeming shores.” We learn a lot from this vignette that it is not lack of courage or lack of individual intellectual capacity that resulted in the devastating defeat of Iraqi soldiers or Taliban fighters. In fact, through a process of illuminating what is common in both nations with that of the United States, we can easily identify what is different that determined one community to be a loser and the other a winner, and that difference is the lack of liberating ideas and democratic political systems in Iraq, Afghanistan or the Middle East in general.

The above quoted statement at the beginning of Part Two by Cyrus the Great was in response to the urging of short-sighted but overzealous subordinates trying to convince the great Cyrus to move his entire population to a more fertile and well watered area in Thrace and beyond (present day Austria, Romania, Serbia) once Cyrus had successfully created his empire by incorporating Lydia (present day Turkey). Cyrus’s response was that his native land Media (part of present day Iraq and Iran) with its hard and rugged land lent them strength, and if they move away from such tough life, they will become land owners with people working for them and growing soft thereby sealing their doom (fate).[Herodotus, Book Nine: 122] The United States is growing fat and blotted and corrupted not only physically but also ethically. My defense of the United State as an “ideal” and “a state of mind” above does not in any way exonerate its many government leaders since its birth, except very few, who have abused and dehumanized peoples and nations all over the world. A lot of people do not seem to realize how dangerous the current Government is to the World and to Americans at home.

Conclusion: In Tandem (Part One and Two)

The most frightening government is a government where a very incapable and mentally “weak” person ascends the power structure and becomes the President of the United States and falls in the hands of a select few corrupt and powerful individuals [as the case was suggested in the 1971 book Being There by Jerzy Kosinski, and superbly acted by Peter Sellers in the movie version in 1979]. It is no secret that despite his affable personality and wholesome family-man image, George W. Bush is perceived both here in the United States and elsewhere in the World by a number of people as a person who is intellectually-challenged. The recent confessional book on the former Secretary of the Treasury Paul O’Neill [THE PRICE OF LOYALTY] did not dispel that perception. Those officials who expressed such concern were either censored by their respective governments (Canada, Germany, Mexico) or unceremoniously bushed out of office. These types of personal feelings should not have counted for much because I felt about Bush the father as a far more decent and heroic man than either Reagan or Clinton, and yet he lost the Presidency to a virtual unknown.

Almost all of my students in my Ethics and other Philosophy courses and several fellow teachers and friends, a representative sample of the American public, with whom I had conversations at different depth seem to believe that George W. Bush is sincere and has the best interest of the nation at heart, but has no idea how that interest really is to be achieved because of his limited knowledge of the intricacies of domestic government and international relations and practices. Some believe he has caused United States’ long-term interest greater harm than any United States president in history. Even more alarming is what seems to be the acute disharmony in the American political psyche

between those who support George W. Bush and those who oppose him. A number of people seem to think that Vice President Cheney and advisor Rove are playing the role of a svengali to an impressionable and naive George W. Bush. However, I suspect that the reality of that relationship might be a surprisingly complex one, and George W. Bush may indeed have himself as the center of his effort, and may turn out to be a very clever politician after all.

By focusing more on personalities, let us not lose sight of the real danger to us who live here in the United States or to people who live all over the world. The danger we all are facing is coming from ceding our freedoms and liberty in times of crises to government functionaries and to the system they put in place to do as they please on the excuse of protecting national security and the welfare of citizens. In fact, it is during such crises, as David Cole has warned us in his book, that we ought to be far more vigilant on the accelerated encroachment on our civil and political rights and the violation of our human dignity. We need to protect the “stranger” among us from abuse and violence against his or her rights and human dignity for our own sake; for the same governmental hand raised against the “stranger” in abuse and violence is more often the hand that ends up being directed at each one of us. As a lasting reminder I quote back Cole’s quotation of Hermann Cohen, from the Front page of his book: “The alien was to be protected, not because he was a member of one’s family, clan, religious community; but because he was a human being. In the alien, therefore, man discovered the idea of humanity.” [Cole, vii]

Goodness is the highest virtue in any culture even though it might take different forms of expression. The measure of a good person is not weighed in by his or her support of popular views or by support of what is mainstream, but it is when he or she stands apart even at the risk of his or her own personal safety because of his or her compassion for the “stranger” amongst us. It is best expressed when one supports unpopular causes and when one stands in defense of the defenseless. Reemphasizing the seriousness of the subject addressed by David Cole in his extremely important book, ENEMY ALIENS, I conclude this hybrid of review and commentary with my great admiration of the courage and dedication of David Cole for warning us, in the great tradition of the Prophets of the Old Testament, about the enormous loss of our ethical values and about the danger facing us all in the officials of the Government of the United States pursuit of a policy of trading of “foreign nationals’ liberties for citizens’ security” by using methods affecting our individual freedoms and liberty and human dignity. The book is an affirmation of the unity and oneness of all human beings.

Tecola W. Hagos
January 2004