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The White Man Unburdened

Excuse: lightning and thunder, shock and awe. Dust, ash, fog, fire, smoke, sand, blood, and a good deal of waste now moves to the wings. The stage, however, remains occupied. The question posed at curtain-rise has not been answered. Why did we go to war? If no real weapons of mass destruction are found, the question will keen in pitch.

Or, if more likely some weapons are uncovered in Iraq, it is also likely that even more have been moved to new hiding places beyond the Iraqi border. ~~horrific events could ensue~~ horrific events Should ~~they~~ take place, we can count on a predictable response: "Good, honest, innocent Americans died today because of evil Al-Queda terrorists." Yes, we will hear the President's voice ~~speaking~~ the before he even utters such words. (For those of us who ~~do not like~~ are not happy with George Bush, we may as well recognize that living with putting up with him in the Oval Office is like being married to a mate who always says exactly what you know in advance he or she is going to say, which helps to account for why more than half of America now appears to love him.)

The key question remains—why did we go to war? It is not yet answered. The ~~end, it is likely that a host of responses will produce a cognitive stew.~~ has already produced But the The most painful single ingredient at the moment, is, of course, the discovery of the graves. We have relieved the world of a monster who killed untold numbers, mega-numbers, of ~~innocent~~ victims. Nowhere is any emphasis put upon the fact that most of the bodies were of the Shiites of southern Iraq who have been decimated repeatedly in the last twelve years for

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daring to rebel against Saddam in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War. ^{Yet we} ~~We were the~~
^{in the first place}
 ones who encouraged them to revolt and then failed to help them. Why? There may
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 believed that a Shiite victory over Saddam could result in a host of Iraqi imams who
 might make common cause with the Iranian ayatollahs, Shiites joining with Shiites!
 Today, from the point of view of the remaining Iraqi Shiites, it would be hard for us to
 prove to them that they were not the victims of a double-cross. So they may look upon
^{the} ~~and those graves~~ that we congratulate ourselves for having liberated ^{sepulchral} ~~as~~ voices calling out
 from their tombs—asking us to take a share of the blame. Which, of course, we will
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The intensity of the falsification could best be seen as a reflection of the
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 corporation. How many organization people high and low, managers, division heads,
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Count on it, we looked for many a justifiable reason to go to war with Iraq. They were a nuclear threat; they were teeming with weapons of mass destruction; they were working with Al-Queda; they had even been the dirty geniuses behind 9/11. The reasons offered to the American public proved skimpy, unverifiable, and void of the realpolitik of our need to get a choke-hold on the Middle East for many a reason more than Israeli-Palestine. We had to sell the war on false pretenses.

The intensity of the falsification could best be seen as a reflection of the incredible damage 9/11 has brought to America morale, particularly the core—the corporation. ^{All the} ~~How many~~ organization people high and low, managers, division heads, secretaries, salesmen, accountants, ^{market} specialists, all that congeries of ^{corporate office} (Americans), plus all who had relatives, friends, or classmates who worked in the Twin Towers—the shock travelled into the fundament of the American psyche. And the American working class

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identified with the warriors who were lost fighting that blaze, the firemen and the police, all instantly ennobled.

It was a political bonanza for Bush provided he could deliver an appropriate sense of revenge to the millions who identified directly with those incinerated in the Twin Towers. When Osama bin Laden failed to be captured by the posses we sent to Afghanistan, Bush was thrust back to ongoing domestic problems that did not give any immediate suggestion ~~of being~~ ^{that they could prove} solution-friendly. The economy was sinking, the market was down, and some classic bastions of American faith (corporate integrity, the FBI, and the Catholic Church—to cite but three) had each suffered a separate and grievous loss of face. Increasing joblessness was an acid bath to ~~that faith~~ ^{national morale}. Since our Administration was conceivably not ready to tackle any one of the serious problems looming before them that did not involve enriching the top, it was natural for the Administration to feel an impulse to move into larger ventures, thrusts into the empyrean—war! We could say we went to war because we very much needed a successful war as a species of psychic rejuvenation, ~~and~~ any major excuse would do—nuclear threat, terrorist nests, weapons of mass destruction—one could always make the final claim that one was liberating the Iraqis, ~~and who~~ ^{One could not. One could only} could argue with that? ^{ask: what will the cost be to our democracy?}

Be it said that the Administration knew something a good many of us did not—it

knew that we had a very good, perhaps even an extraordinarily good, if essentially untested, group of armed forces, a skilled, disciplined, well-motivated military, career-focused and run by a field-rank and general staff who were intelligent, articulate, and considerably less corrupt than any other power cohort in America.

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In such a pass, how could the White House fail to use them? They could prove quintessential morale-builders to a core element of American life—those tens of millions of Americans who had been spiritually wounded by 9/11, and they could also serve an even larger group, which had once been near to fifty percent of the population, and remained key to the President's political footing. This group had taken a real beating. As a matter of collective ego, the good average white American male had had very little to nourish his morale since the job market had gone bad, nothing, in fact, unless he happened to be a member of the Armed Forces. There, it was certainly different. The Armed Forces had become the paradigmatic equal of a great young athlete looking to test his true size. Could it be that there was a bozo out in the boondocks who was made to order, and his name was Iraq? Iraq had a tough rep, but not much was left to him inside. A dream opponent. A desert war ~~with no caves in sight~~ ^{great at} is designed for an air force whose state-of-the-art is comparable in perfection to a top-flight fashion model on a runway. Yes, we would liberate the Iraqis.

So we went ahead against all obstacles ^{of} which the UN was the first. Wantonly, shamelessly, proudly, exuberantly, at least one half of our prodigiously divided America could hardly wait for the new war. We understood that our television was going to be terrific. And it was. Sanitized but terrific—which is, after all, exactly what network and good cable television are supposed to be.

~~And there,~~
There were other ~~minor significant~~ factors for using our military skills, minor but significant; ~~and~~ ^{these} reasons return us to the ongoing malaise of the white American male. He had been taking a daily drubbing over the last thirty years. For better or worse, the women's movement has had its breakthrough successes and the old, easy white male

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ego had withered in the glare. Even the consolation of rooting for his team on TV had been skewed. ^{For many,} There was now measurably less reward in watching sports than there used to be, a clear and declarable loss. The great ~~white~~ stars of yesteryear were for the most part gone, gone in football, in basketball, in boxing, and half gone in baseball. Black genius now prevailed in all those sports (and the Hispanics were coming up fast; even the Asians were beginning to make their mark.) We white men were now left with half of tennis (at least its male half), and might also point to ice hockey, skiing, soccer, golf, (with the notable exception of the Tiger) as well as lacrosse, track, swimming, and the World-Wide Wrestling Federation—remnants and orts of a once great and glorious white ^{athletic} centrality. Of course, there were sports fans who loved the ^{stars} athletes on their favorite teams without regard to race. Sometimes, they even liked black athletes the most. Such white men tended to be liberals. They were no use to Bush. He needed to take care of ^{more} his immediate constituency. If he had a covert strength, it was his knowledge of the unspoken things that bothered American white men the most—just those matters they were not always ready to admit to themselves. The first was that people hipped on sports can get over-addicted to victory. Sports, the corporate ethic (advertising) and the American flag had become a go-for-the-win triumvirate that had developed ^{many} ~~all sorts of~~ psychic connections with the military. ^{Naturally, war} War, after all, was, with all else, the most dramatic and serious extrapolation of sports, ^{could be seen by game} and the concept of victory as the noblest species of profit in union with patriotism. So Bush knew that a big victory in an easy war would work for the good white American male. If Blacks and Hispanics were representative of their share of the population in the enlisted ranks, still they were not a majority, and the faces of the officer corps, (as seen on the tube), suggested that the

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percentage of white men increased as one rose in rank to field and general officers. Moreover, we had knock-out tank echelons, Super-Marines, and—one magical ace in the hole—the best air force that ever existed. If we could not find our machismo anywhere else, we could certainly count on the interface between combat and technology. Let me then advance the offensive suggestion that this may have been one of the covert but real reasons we went looking for war. We knew we were likely to be good at it.

In the course, however, of all the quick events of the last month, our military passed through a transmogrification. Indeed, it was one hellion of a morph. We went, willy-nilly, from a potentially great athlete into serving as ^{an emergency intern,} ~~a master surgeon~~ required to operate at high speed on an awfully sick patient full of frustration, outrage and violence. Now in the last month, even as the patient is getting stitched ^{up somewhat,} ~~up a little,~~ a new and troubling question arises: Have any fresh medicines been developed to deal with what seem to be teeming infections? Do we really know how to treat livid suppurations? Or would it be better to just keep trusting our great American luck, our faith in our divinely-protected can-do luck? We are, by custom, gung-ho. If these suppurations prove to be unmanageable, or just too time-consuming, may we not leave them behind? We could move on to the next venue. Syria, we might declare in our best John Wayne voice: You can run, but you can't hide. Saudi Arabia, you over-rated tank of blubber, do you need us more than ever? And Iran, watch it, we have eyes for you. You could be a real meal. Because when we fight, we feel good, we are ready to go, and ^{then some more,} ~~go~~ We have had a taste. Why, there's a basket-full of billions to be made in the Middle East just so long as we can stay ahead of the trillions of debts that are coming after us back home.

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Be it said: the motives that lead to a nation's major historical acts can probably rise no higher than the spiritual understanding of its leadership. While George W. may not know as much as he believes he knows about the dispositions of God's blessing, he is driving us at high speed all the same—this man at the wheel whose most legitimate boast might be that he knew how to parlay the part-ownership of a major-league baseball team into a gubernatorial win in Texas. And—shall we ever forget?—was catapulted, by legal *finesse* and finagling, into a now-tainted but still almighty hymn: All Hail to the Chief!

No, we will rise no higher than the spiritual understanding of our leadership. And *now that* ~~once the ardor of victory~~ *was begun to cool* ~~cools, some will begin to see~~ how it is flawed. For we are

victim once again of all those advertising sciences that depend on mendacity and manipulation. We have been gulled about the real reasons for this war, tweaked and poked by some of the best button-pushers around to believe that we won a noble and

necessary contest when, in fact, the opponent was a hollowed-out palooka *whose* ~~monstrosities were ebbing into oblige~~ *perhaps he was not the old tyrant* ~~perhaps Saddam made a decision to go underground with as much wealth as he~~

had ~~already~~ spirited away, and would fund Al Queda or some extension of it in a collaboration of sorts with Osama bin Ladin—a new underground team, the *Incompatible* Terrorist Twins. That is an hypothesis as mad as the world we are beginning to live in.

Democracy, more than any other political system, depends on a modicum of honesty. Ultimately, it is much at the mercy of ~~any dishonest~~ *a* leader who has never been embarrassed by himself. What is to be said of a man who spent two years in the Air Force of the National Guard (as a way of not having to go to Viet Nam) and proceeded—like many another spoiled and wealthy father's son—not to bother to show up for duty in his second year of service. Most of us have episodes in our youth that can cause us shame on

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reflection. It is a mark of maturation that we do not try to profit from our early lacks and
vices but do our best to learn from them. Bush proceeded, however, to turn his ~~deck~~

~~the camp Inagi campaign's end~~ ^(declaration of)
~~moment at the end of the campaign into a mighty fashion show. Now well he wore the~~

~~uniform he had not honored!~~ ^{was a luxury in} Jack Kennedy, a war hero, never put on war garb while he
was Commander-in-Chief. ^{So well} ~~for~~ General Eisenhower. George W. Bush who might, if

he had been entirely on his own, have made a world-class male model (since he never

takes an awkward photograph) proceeded to tote the ^{flight} helmet and sport the ^{flight suit} uniform ^{and}
~~there he was for the photo op looking~~
certainly looked like one more great guy among the great guys, no, you cannot stop a man

who has never been embarrassed by himself. Let us hope that our democracy ^{will} ~~can~~

survive these endless foulings of the nest.

Clarification:
to show himself in flight
regalia

He chose to arrive on the deck of the
aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln
(italics mine) on an ~~S-3B~~ S-3B Viking jet,
that ~~came in with~~ ^{a dramatic tail-hook landing,}
The carrier was easily within
helicopter range of the San Diego (CA)
~~base~~ but G.W. would not have been
able then to ^{show himself} ~~arrive~~ ^{in flight suit}
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encouraged them to revolt in the first place, and then failed to help them. Why? There may have been an ongoing argument in the first Bush administration which was finally won by those who believed that a Shiite victory over Saddam could result in a host of Iraqi imams who might make common cause with the Iranian ayatollahs, Shiites joining with Shiites!. Today, from the point of view of the remaining Iraqi Shiites, it would be hard for us to prove to them that they were not the victims of a double-cross. So they may look upon the graves that we congratulate ourselves for having liberated as sepulchral voices calling out from their tombs—asking us to take a share of the blame. Which, of course, we will not..

Count on it, during the approach to war, we looked for many a justifiable reason to go to war. The Iraqis were a nuclear threat; they were teeming with weapons of mass destruction; they were working closely with Al-Queda; they had even been the dirty geniuses behind 9/11. The reasons offered to the American public proved skimpy, unverifiable, and void of the realpolitik of our need to get a choke-hold on the Middle East for many a reason more than Israeli-Palestine. We had to sell the war on false pretenses.

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In such a pass, how could the White House fail to use them? They would prove quintessential morale-builders to a core element of American life—those tens of millions of Americans who had been spiritually wounded by 9/11. They could also serve an even larger group, which had once been near to fifty percent of the population, and remained key to the President's political footing. This group had taken a real beating. As a matter of collective ego, the good average white American male had had very little to nourish his morale since the job market had gone bad, nothing, in fact, unless he happened to be a member of the Armed Forces. There, it was certainly different. The Armed Forces had become the paradigmatic equal of a great young athlete looking to test his true size. Could it be that there was a bozo out in the boondocks who was made to order, and his name was Iraq? Iraq had a tough rep, but not much was left to him inside. A dream opponent. A desert war is designed for an air force whose state-of-the-art is comparable in perfection to a top-flight fashion model on a runway. Yes, we would liberate the Iraqis.

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And there were other factors for using our military skills, minor but significant: These reasons return us to the ongoing malaise of the white American male. He had been taking a daily drubbing over the last thirty years. For better or worse, the women's movement has had its breakthrough successes and the old, easy white male ego had

withered in the glare. Even the consolation of rooting for his team on TV had been skewed. For many, there was now measurably less reward in watching sports than there used to be, a clear and declarable loss. The great white stars of yesteryear were for the most part gone, gone in football, in basketball, in boxing, and half gone in baseball. Black genius now prevailed in all these sports (and the Hispanics were coming up fast; even the Asians were beginning to make their mark.) We white men were now left with half of tennis (at least its male half), and might also point to ice hockey, skiing, soccer, golf, (with the notable exception of the Tiger) as well as lacrosse, track, swimming, and the World-Wide Wrestling Federation—remnants and orphans of a once great and glorious white athletic centrality. Of course, there were sports fans who loved the stars on their favorite teams without regard to race. Sometimes, they even liked black athletes the most. Such white men tended to be liberals. They were no use to Bush. He needed to take care of his more immediate constituency. If he had a covert strength, it was his knowledge of the unspoken things that bothered American white men the most—just those matters they were not always ready to admit to themselves. The first was that people hooked on sports can get over-addicted to victory. Sports, the corporate ethic (advertising), and the American flag had become a go-for-the-win triumvirate that had developed many psychic connections with the military. After all, war was, with all else, the most dramatic and serious extrapolation of sports. The concept of victory could be seen by some as the noblest species of profit in union with patriotism. So Bush knew that a big victory in an easy war would work for the good white American male. If Blacks and Hispanics were representative of their share of the population in the enlisted ranks, still they were not a majority, and the faces of the officer corps, (as seen on the tube),

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Perhaps he was not that old. Perhaps Saddam made a decision to go underground with as much wealth as he had spirited away, and would fund Al Queda or some extension of it in a collaboration of sorts with Osama bin Ladin—a new underground team, the Incompatible Terrorist Twins. That is an hypothesis as mad as the world we are beginning to live in.

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Norman Mailer