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The State of the Yankee Empire: *Bush’s State of the Union Address*

28 February 2005

(Originally published on Dixie Internet.com)

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." (Matthew 5:14)

If ever one wanted to trace the influence of the 17th-century Puritans in New England to the present day, he could do worse than read Bush's State of the Union speech in 2005. The text is replete with Puritan phraseology. Certainly, no Puritan could have put it better than "The road of Providnce is uneven and unpredictable—yet we know where it leads: It leads to freedom." The Puritans' idea of freedom was different than Bush's of course, but the same guiding thesis is there: the idea of America as a Promised Land, its people a Chosen People, and its future a New Jerusalem. “...one, liberty is not the product of democracy, and two, democracy is an ideology as opposed to liberty which, according to our shelved and rotting Constitution, is a God-given right.”

Surely we could content ourselves with hanging a few witches in Salem?

Of course, we now have terrorists to hang. "The terrorists and insurgents are violently opposed to democracy", claims Bush. It seems not to have occurred to Bush that, if true, that belief puts them in good company with our Founding Fathers, who also violently opposed democracy. Unlike our Founders, however, today we do not hear either liberals or conservatives talk of "spreading liberty" or "protecting liberty". There are two good reasons for that fact: one, liberty is not the product of democracy, and two, democracy is an ideology as opposed to liberty which, according to our shelved and rotting Constitution, is a God-given right.

The Trial of Rebecca Nurse

(salemwitchmuseum.com)

“Surely we could content ourselves with hanging a few witches in Salem?”

It is in the name of this ideology, democracy, that Bush proclaims "a free and sovereign Iraq". A "free and sovereign Iraq"? Even Bush himself must have had a hard time keeping a straight face on this one, especially when he pronounced: "The United States has no right, no desire, and no intention to impose our form of government on anyone else." Really? Iraq is, of course, an artificially constructed state whose continued existence depends upon American imperial might; whose leaders (just as Karzai over in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) must be guarded by American soldiers to avoid assassination by their own "citizens". Moreover, Iraq has, throughout

history, been the dumping ground for various empires, including the Persian, Greek, Roman, Ottoman, British, and American empires. The "Fertile Crescent" we now call Iraq, formerly home to the civilisations of Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, and Assyria, was created by the British Empire from several remnants of the Ottoman Empire (the provinces, or "eyalets", of Baghdad, Mosul, and Al-Basrah). The British, not the Americans, were the first to ask to "get out of Mesopotamia". In any case, Iraq is no more "free" than it ever was, media reports of "free elections" notwithstanding. Nor could it be, given that its population comprises impossibly irreconcilable Arabs and non-Arabs (and the Arabs are at war with each other: Sunni and Shia). In short, Iraq is a puppet state of the American Empire, much the same as it was under its former imperial masters, whether British or Roman.

Don't get me wrong. I believe Bush actually believes his own propaganda. He might even be a decent man. But the old Puritan itch has sore laid hold of him: to make the nations of the world into provinces of the Yankee Empire. He himself would not put the "eschatological consciousness", to quote Bercovitch, of the Puritans that way, of course. In his Inaugural Address, Bush put it this way: "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands."

Let me repeat that: "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands."

No, it does not, nor has it ever. Liberty in our land depends solely upon our own people and their willingness or unwillingness to defend it. Since the American Republic has been replaced by an American Empire, it should be rather obvious how willing Americans have been to defend their own Republic.

But, as Bush quoted, out of context, from the Ode by Arthur William Edgar O'Shaughnessy (1844–1881, English zoologist and poet), "each age is a dream that is dying, or one that is coming to birth." The Ode was originally quoted by Roosevelt in his Inaugural Address (20 January 1937), where Roosevelt refers to the people of America as "we of the Republic". Not once in Bush's State of the Union speech does he mention the word Republic. Not once.

The context of Roosevelt's use of the Ode in 1937 was not "spreading democracy"; it was a change in "moral climate". Unfortunately for Bush's aspirations to literary preeminence, with respect to this quotation he got wrong 1) the author, 2) the context, and 3) the meaning.

We are the music-makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams;
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory:
One man with a dream, at pleasure,
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure

Can trample an empire down.

We, in the ages lying
In the buried past of the earth,
Built Nineveh with our sighing,
And Babel itself with our mirth;
And o'erthrew them with prophesying
To the old of the new world's worth;
For each age is a dream that is dying,
Or one that is coming to birth.

Obviously, O'Shaughnessy is talking about the place of writers and poets in history. As one writer said:

> It makes some sense in its context (a praise of poets and poetry), but as a free-floating apothegm it approximates the profundity of "All soup is either split-pea soup or some other kind of soup. (John V. Fleming, Daily Princetonian, 7 February 2005)

Yet even Fleming missed the real irony. O'Shaughnessy actually points out how propaganda (in this case, poiesis) can "fashion an empire's glory" as well as "trample an empire down". One wonders if Bush's speechwriter wasn't playing an insider's joke on the hapless Bush who could say, and mean it, that the Yankee Empire is "an active force for good in the world" and "the state of our union is confident and strong".

An "active force for good in the world". A Puritan of eld could not have said it more concisely. Could not that phrase have come directly from the Massachusetts Bay Colony of the 1600s? Since when, one might enquire, did America become the Winthrop-Puritan embodiment of the world's "Citty upon a Hill" while "the eies of all people are uppon us"? These are straw questions, since the truth is well hidden from both us and our children. (The short answer is that the Puritans and their Yankee followers largely created the American national identity by virtue of having denied, by violence, the South its part in that task.)

Fortunately, the State of the Union address has only four small faults:

1. Execrable logic
2. Stultifying propaganda
3. Revisionist history
4. The "Union" itself

The latter, however, is a contradiction, since a union can only exist among parties who consent to it. A forced union is no union. Bush seems to have forgotten, in his exuberance to become a real-Cowboy-hat-wearing-Yalie-turned-Southerner, that America is the only country in the world to have "fulfilled" the dream of the "abolition of slavery" by slaughtering its own people and then forcing them into a "union". Such a "Union" as the Yankee Empire has, in its uneasy sleep, burped into being, is similar to a forced marriage in ancient times. The groom may have his satisfaction, but the bride plots in tenebris her freedom.

The State of the Union, then, is that it doesn't exist. All that does exist is a Puritan nightmare, the latest in a long series of empires, each of them, to quote O'Shaughnessy (equally out of context): "*World-losers and world-forsakers / On whom the pale moon*

gleams".