

Bush II and the “War on Terror”

Everything seemed changed in the world after the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Or was it? True, people in the United States experienced a very real fear. After all, it was the first time we were attacked on our own soil. But when we truly subject the rhetoric of the Bush administration to scrutiny, it becomes clear that much did not change. The politics of fear are part of our history. If we move backward to Salem in 1692 or move forward to McCarthyism in the 1950s, it is easy to recall the politics of fear that encouraged irrational reactions to perceived threats. Internal enemies have always threatened the status quo; they were Loyalists in the eighteenth century, Communists from the mid-nineteenth century through 1989, and today they are terrorists.

Since September 11, 2001, the balance between civil liberties and security has often tipped in favor of the latter. But this imbalance is also part of our history. Only seven years after the Bill of Rights was signed, Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts. During World War I, a new and more virulent rendition of these acts became law. In the wake of September 11, we saw the passage of the PATRIOT Act. The voices in this chapter recognize that we are fighting old enemies in a new political package. They ask us to listen carefully to the reasons the Bush administration gave for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. They ask us to learn from our past mistakes and to question governmental decisions that have lead us into new wars.

Document-Based Questions

MICHAEL MOORE

- I. Do you think that Michael Moore is being fair to Bush? Is it really fair to criticize someone who was born into wealth for taking advantage of his or her position? Why does Moore think such behavior is wrong?

2. Why does it seem hypocritical to Moore that Bush used the federal government to back him in the voter controversy during the 2000 presidential election? Do you agree or disagree with Moore? Explain.
3. What are Moore's complaints about the Democrats? Do you agree or disagree with his criticism? Explain.

ORLANDO AND PHYLLIS RODRIGUEZ

1. Why wouldn't the parents of a young man who perished in the World Trade Center attack support the "war on terror"? Do you think their response was typical or atypical of the responses by families of other victims? Explain.
2. The Rodriguezes feel that a war of revenge will only nurture "further grievances against us." What grievances against the United States already existed in "distant lands"? Do you think we should be concerned about these grievances? Explain.
3. Do you agree that their son, Greg, was "a victim of an inhuman ideology"? How would you describe that ideology?

RITA LASAR

1. What similar themes are echoed in the Rodriguez and Lasar letters?
2. Do you agree or disagree with Lasar that September 11 "did not change the world. What it did, in its own terrible way, was invite Americans to join the world"? Why?
3. In 2002, Lasar felt that "[w]e can no longer afford a go-it-alone approach." Do you think most people in the United States agreed with her when she wrote this piece? What do people think about this unilateral approach today?

MONAMI MAULIK

1. What does Maulik say is the difference between organizing and providing services? Do you agree or disagree? Would you rather be involved in organizing or providing services? Why?

2. Do you agree that an “anti-immigrant backlash is currently being institutionalized”? How and why?
3. How is the PATRIOT Act a form of “state violence”? In what ways does the author think the PATRIOT Act encourages racism and xenophobia?

INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS LOCAL 705

1. Why would some labor unions oppose the war in Iraq?
2. Why did the Teamsters Local 705 think that Bush planned to go to war with Iraq? Were these beliefs typical or atypical of most people? Explain.
3. How can the goal of fighting for justice be used to both defend and support the war in Iraq?

RACHEL CORRIE

1. Why are eight-year-old Palestinians “much more aware of the workings of the global power structure” than Rachel Corrie was as a young adult? Why aren’t eight-year-old Americans as aware? Should they be more aware?
2. What do you find most compelling about Corrie’s description of living in the Gaza Strip?
3. Why do you think the Palestinians would have concerns about the United States going to war with Iraq?

DANNY GLOVER

1. What justification do Danny Glover and the other voices in this chapter provide for the accusation that the United States government represents “the real users of weapons of mass destruction”?
2. What are the “obstacles that have been placed in our path on this journey”? What is the journey Glover describes? Do you think the obstacles were fair? Explain.
3. How and why are some people more inclined to listen to Glover’s message than to messages from some of the other voices in this chapter? Who might be less inclined and why?

AMY GOODMAN

1. How do independent media sources differ from mainstream media sources? Which sources do you prefer, and why?
2. Do you think embedded reporters can provide balanced journalistic news? Why, or why not? What are Amy Goodman's criticisms of embedded reporting?
3. Do you agree with Goodman's goal "to make dissent commonplace in America"? Why, or why not? Do you agree with Goodman when she states, "Dissent is what makes this country healthy"?

TIM PREDMORE

1. Why does Tim Predmore claim that the "shock and awe" description of the war in Iraq is hypocritical? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
2. What does Predmore believe to be the real purpose of this "modern-day crusade"? Do you agree or disagree? Explain. Why has he lost his "conviction"?
3. At the time you read this article, how many United States soldiers had died in Iraq? How many Iraqis?

MARITZA CASTILLO, ET AL.

1. How has the United States government justified sending members of the National Guard to Iraq? How has it justified extending the soldiers' military commitment in Iraq?
2. Do you think that a group of mothers who organized a hunger strike would influence military decisions in regard to the National Guard? Why, or why not?
3. Do you think it is true that the "coalition we are being told about does not really exist"? How does the Bush administration describe this coalition? Is it really a coalition? Should fighting as part of a coalition be required before a nation goes to war?

KURT VONNEGUT

1. What is Kurt Vonnegut’s “dream” for America? How does it compare and contrast with yours?
2. Why do you think Howard Zinn included this particular entry in Chapter 24?
3. Do you think that “only nut cases want to be president”? What examples might Vonnegut use from United States history?

PATTI SMITH

1. This song was written in 1988. Is it still relevant today?
2. Do the “people have the power”? Do they really “rule”? Provide examples from the voices used throughout this book to illustrate your answer.
3. Why does Howard Zinn end his book with Smith’s “People Have the Power”?

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 24,
“Bush II and the ‘War on Terror’”

After reading Chapter 24 in *Voices*, students should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points therein. Following are four possible main points.

1. Immediate and eloquent opposition arose when President Bush declared a vengeful “war on terrorism” after September 11, including those affected by the attack, such as family members.
2. While the “war on terror” declared after September 11, 2001, opened a new chapter in United States history, it also shared continuity with earlier chapters in United States history, especially in terms of the aims, goals, and methods of United States foreign policy and of ways the United States government has sought to treat dissent and limit civil liberties in times of war or during the threat of war.
3. Since September 11, 2001, the anti-immigrant backlash in the United States has increased against those of Arab, South Asian, and Muslim descent and appearance.

4. As the occupation of Iraq continued throughout 2004, opposition to United States involvement grew within military ranks, as well as among veterans of the war and their families.

Main Points in *Voices*, Chapter 24,
 “Bush II and the ‘War on Terror,’” and in *A People’s History*,
 Chapter 24, “The Coming Revolt of the Guards,”
 or Chapter 25, “The 2000 Election and the ‘War on Terrorism’”

If your students are also reading *A People’s History*, they should be encouraged to identify what they believe to be the main points in Chapter 24 in *Voices* and in Chapter 24 or 25 in *A People’s History* (depending on which edition you are using.) Following are five additional points to be stressed when *Voices* and *A People’s History* are used together.

5. In the 2000 election, there was little difference in the corporate support of the Democratic candidate, Al Gore, and the Republican candidate, George W. Bush.
6. The 2000 presidential election was both one of the most “bizarre” events and one of the closest calls in United States history.
7. Despite the claims of the Bush administration, terrorism cannot be defeated by force; rather, defeating terrorism depends on addressing the deep grievances against the United States, making fundamental changes in United States foreign policy, and changing the United States government’s domestic and international funding priorities.
8. Ever since the calamity of September 11, the United States public has been “overwhelmingly supportive” of President Bush’s “war on terrorism.”
9. The mainstream media have failed to convey the full extent of the human catastrophe that has been caused by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, nor have they publicized the voices critical of current United States foreign policy in regard to Afghanistan and Iraq.

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices*

While the following questions are designed for classroom discussion about all the voices read in Chapter 24, they can also be rewritten and included as evaluation tools.

1. In looking back at the 2000 and 2004 presidential races conducted by George W. Bush, how do the two compare and contrast in style and substance?
2. What other choices might have been made after September 11 instead of declaring “war on terrorism”? Do you think people would have supported any of these alternative choices? Why, or why not?
3. What are the “roots of terrorism,” according to Lasar?
4. What is the PATRIOT Act? Why did it receive overwhelming bipartisan support? What are some current criticisms of the act?
5. What is “grassroots” organizing? Do you think that this type of organizational activism is more effective than work done at the state or federal level? How and why? Have you ever been involved in grassroots organizing?
6. What is xenophobia? Is anti-immigrant sentiment new to the United States? Explain.
7. How would you describe the current Palestinian national entity? Why are most Americans ignorant of the current status of the Palestinians? What political changes do most Palestinians support?
8. How much coverage did the mainstream media give to antiwar demonstrations that began in early 2003 and continued throughout the invasion and the subsequent American occupation of Iraq?
9. Is it unpatriotic to challenge the decision of the United States government to go to war with Iraq? Explain.
10. What is “investigative” journalism? Has there been much investigative journalism conducted in regard to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq? Explain. Do you think people want more or less investigative journalism? Why?
11. What problems arise when large corporations dominate ownership of media outlets? What do you expect from the media today? Are your expectations being met? How and why?

12. What general themes are common to all the voices of this chapter?

General-Discussion Questions for *Voices* and *A People's History*

These general-discussion questions are additional questions for students who have read Chapter 24 in *Voices* and Chapter 24 or 25 in *A People's History* (depending on which edition you are using). For all questions, discussion must focus on ways the materials in both chapters help students formulate and articulate their answers.

13. If Al Gore and George W. Bush were alike in their bids for the presidency as Howard Zinn suggests, how did they differ?
14. What was Ralph Nader's political agenda in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections?
15. What was the role of the Electoral College in determining the 1876, 1888, and 2000 presidential elections?
16. Justice John Paul Stevens' minority opinion in *Bush v. Gore* (December 11, 2001) held that the real loser in the 2000 election was "the nation's confidence in the judge as an impartial guardian of the rule of law." Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
17. Why do you think the Democrats have only been able to muster a "timid opposition" to the Bush administration's "pro-big-business agenda"?
18. Do you agree or disagree with Howard Zinn that "terrorism could not be defeated by force"? Does he provide enough evidence to convince you of his position? Explain.
19. Why do you think the American public initially demonstrated overwhelming support for Bush's "war on terrorism"? Was there more or less support for the war on Iraq?
20. Do you agree with some antiwar critics that the United States government was fighting a war of revenge in both Afghanistan and Iraq? If this is the case, is revenge a good reason to wage war?
21. What are the grievances that some people in the Arab world harbor against the United States government? Are these grievances that can be mitigated

with a war on terrorism? Should the United States government address these grievances?

22. Why does Howard Zinn believe that the United States government would never make American foreign-policy changes that would change the power of the military-industrial complex?

Evaluation Tools

SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

These assignments can be adapted to meet any classroom need—homework, short- or long-term research projects, individual or group work. The end product should be flexible, depending on teacher interest and student abilities—papers, journals, oral reports, visual aides, and the like.

1. Watch at least two of Michael Moore’s most recent movies—*Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Roger and Me* would be good choices—or watch one movie and read one of his books—*Stupid White Men* and *Dude, Where’s My Country?* After reading his letter to president-elect Bush written in 2000, what themes do you find consistently emerge from the letter and the movie(s), or the letter, movie, and book? Which themes do you think are most effectively presented in these three sources? Least effectively? Do you think Moore is a modern-day muckraker? Explain. Do you think Moore’s style brings new converts, or does it alienate potential supporters? Use specific examples from your three sources to support your position.
2. Anti-Muslim prejudice existed in the United States long before September 11. Such watchdog organizations as the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) began reporting on anti-Muslim actions shortly after the Gulf War. Learn more about such beliefs and activities over the past decade. What is being done to protect Muslims in the United States? What is not being done? What should be done?
3. Learn more about a grassroots organization in your community that is devoted to a social-justice cause. Attend a meeting, visit its headquarters, and interview a member to learn more about its origin, goals, membership, and accomplishments. Is this an organization you might support?

Explain. Do you think it has been effective in recruiting members and accomplishing any of its goals? Explain.

4. Create an annotated chronology of anti-immigrant federal actions and legislation from the late eighteenth century on. What themes emerge from such actions and legislation? Do we see more or less actions and legislation in the twentieth century than before? Why do you think that we—a nation of immigrants—have such a long history of anti-immigration policies? Do you think this situation will change in the twenty-first century? Explain.
5. In October 2004, Ariel Sharon convinced the Israeli Knesset to vote for the withdrawal of Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip. Learn more about the growth of Jewish settlements in both Gaza and the West Bank from 1967 on. What role have such settlements played in preventing the Israelis and Palestinians from reaching a peaceful solution to a long war? What role has the United States played in getting the Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate the settlement question? Why did a significant percentage of Palestinians oppose the procedure under which the 2004 decision to withdraw was made? Do you think the settler issue will ever be resolved? Explain.
6. Using a search engine of choice, find out more about Rachel Corrie's mission in the Palestinian territories, her death, the media's treatment of her death, and the United States government's response to her death. Do you think she died in vain? Explain.
7. Go to the *Democracy Now!* Web site (www.democracynow.org) and learn more about how and why this independent source is different from mainstream television, radio, and print media. Do you think that we need such a source to ensure, as Howard Zinn notes, that we will not "sacrifice truth for profit"? Select at least one news article from the website to illustrate how truth rather than profit has been the motive behind the report.
8. Using a search engine of choice, select a news story on any particular day that has to do with a current and controversial United States foreign policy. Read at least two articles about this story from the mainstream press and then read two others from independent news sources. Finally, read about the story from a news source outside the United States. How do they compare and contrast? Which is the most useful coverage and why? Least useful?

9. In the November/December 2004 edition of *Mother Jones* magazine, journalist David Goodman reports on a growing movement—Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW). Read the article, “Breaking Ranks,” available online at www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2004/11/10_400.html, and then find out more about IVAW at www.ivaw.net, and Military Families Speak Out at www.mfso.org. How does their information compare and contrast with the article in *Voices* by Tim Predmore? Why are the Iraq veterans and their families “breaking ranks” with the Bush administration? What do you find most compelling about their reasons? Least compelling? Why aren’t these stories covered by the mainstream press? Should they be?
10. Learn more about the origin and functions of the Electoral College in presidential elections. Then write an essay arguing that the Electoral College should or should not be abandoned and replaced by popular vote in all presidential races.
11. Conduct research on Al Jazeera, the Arab news station located in Qatar. View the film *Control Room* and visit the network’s English-language Web site at <http://english.aljazeera.net/HomePage>. What are the origins, goals, and accomplishments of this news organization? How and why does its news coverage differ from that provided in the United States? Do you think its reporting is biased? Is it more or less biased than United States news reporting in the mainstream media?

SUGGESTED ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. In Rita Lasar’s essay, written one year after September 11, she states, “We Americans have a choice.” We could “go-it-alone” or accept the invitation “to join the world.” Using examples from your reading, show reasons for and against each of these choices. Then make your own choice and support it.
2. Shortly after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, President Bush declared that “You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists.” What is the message in this declaration? Is this a new message for a United States president? If so, how? If not, why not? Do you agree or disagree with the president? Does this message infringe your rights under the First Amendment? Be sure to provide examples with your answers.
3. What role have journalists and the media played in “selling” the wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq to the American people? Be sure to use information from the chapters to support your answer. In your opinion, have they been successful? Explain. How would you change news coverage of war?

4. Throughout 2004, much debate focused around the comparisons between United States involvement in Vietnam and in Iraq. Do you think American involvement in the two wars is comparable? Why, or why not? Be sure to use examples from both Chapter 18 and Chapter 24 to answer this question.
5. It has often been said, as Kurt Vonnegut does in Chapter 24, that “power corrupts us, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” What does this statement mean? How do the voices in this chapter support this contention? Do you believe that United States governmental policies of the early twenty-first century support or refute this statement? Provide examples from the reading within your answer.
6. Many people have argued that a vote for a third-party candidate in the 2000 and 2004 elections was a vote that hurt the Democratic Party. Using the various voices you have read, as well as other information in your books, discuss the role of third parties in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. Did they help define the political debate or did they detract from it? Do you think you might support a third-party candidate? If so, under what circumstances? If not, why not?
7. Using as many examples as possible from your reading, write an essay that argues that the war on terrorism—as it is presently being fought—can or cannot be won.
8. Howard Zinn closes the final chapter in *A People's History* by reminding his readers that the future of democracy depends on the actions of the United States public. What decisions have we made in the early twenty-first century that will shape the future of the United States? Are these decisions consistent or inconsistent with past decisions? Which of these decisions do you feel will have a positive effect on the next decades? A negative effect? Be sure to use examples from your reading to back up your answers.
9. In your own words, explain your understanding of the twenty-first century “war on terrorism.” Then use some of the voices from your reading to answer the following questions: How and when did the war begin? How and why has it been a unilateral or a multilateral war? How and why has it

moved from Afghanistan to Iraq? How and why might it expand to other parts of the world?

SIMULATIONS AND OTHER CREATIVE APPROACHES

1. Write two letters—one to George W. Bush and the other to John Kerry—in which you discuss your feelings about the presidential race of 2004. It’s important that you let them know what you thought about the campaign—the debates, what they said that you could support, and what they failed to discuss during the course of the campaign. Then tell them how you felt about the election outcome and what you predict will be the course of our nation over the next four years.
2. Create a grassroots organization that is devoted to activism on a topic important in your academic setting. Define the issue and how you propose your organization will act upon it. Arrange for a meeting and create flyers designed to get people to attend. Then hold a meeting in your classroom. Afterward, determine the degree of success you had in getting your colleagues to “buy in to” your cause. What will you have to do to maintain the organization’s momentum? Do you think it would be worth the effort?
3. Imagine that you have been asked to design a fourth presidential debate for the 2004 election. You have decided to invite the five major candidates—George W. Bush, John Kerry, Ralph Nader (Reform Party/Independent), David Cobb (Green Party), and Michael Badnarik (Libertarian Party). You have also decided that the discussion will be exclusively devoted to United States foreign policy and that you will invite all twelve contributors to Chapter 24 in *Voices* to pose three questions each. The candidates will be given the questions the day before the debate. Now, stage the debate.
4. Write and illustrate a children’s book on antiwar activism. Be sure to include the history of antiwar efforts in the United States, as well as antiwar efforts currently operating in the United States. When the book is completed, ask an elementary-school teacher if she or he is willing to read it in their classroom.