

# **Observer Notes**

## **Columbus Metropolitan Main Library**

### **April 24, 2003**

**By the People Forums**  
**Americans' Role in the World**

**Forum Site:** Columbus Main Library (April 24, 2003)

**Moderators:** Chris Taylor and Fred Johnson

**# in Attendance:** 26 (16 male; 10 female)

#### **Personal Stake**

Responding to the question, "Is Americans' role in the world an important issue among your family and friends?"

One person indicated that it tended not to be important to family and friends, except when they were personally affected. A related comment was that the importance depended on whether the discussion centers on policy or impact. For example if family or friends live in Kuwait or members are fighting in Iraq, the relative importance is greater.

Another indicated that one circle of friends are terribly concerned, while another group is just trying to survive with their own concerns and don't have the time to think about Americans' role in the world.

#### **Approach One: International Order**

Generally the participants did not favor this approach, with one or two exceptions. Individuals expressed anger about using our military power and acting in an arrogant and hypocritical fashion. One person suggested that our preemptive attack on Iraq was rationalized by warm and fuzzy ideas rather than facts and that the action is "veiled colonialism".

Other reactions were based on a variety of fears. Some expressed concern about loss of U.S. credibility, potential backlash, potential preemptive attacks elsewhere around the world, precedent created for other countries to launch preemptive attacks of their own, the example we are setting for our children and setting the stage for poor cultures to rise up and use violence to advance their causes. "I think our credibility took a hit during this last effort."

One participant said that our military may be challenged, but not matched. He added that destructive forces need to be met, but the challenge does not have to be ours alone. He was not sure that we need to spend our resources as the world's policeman. "We can use the world's power. We're not alone in the world." Another stated: "We need a community of nations."

A couple of people expressed concern about Americans' lack of understanding about the people we want to influence and that social forces may be unleashed that we don't know yet. Another

person said: “We’re playing Russian Roulette – we need to focus on diffusing the hatred.”

One person stated that overall he was uncomfortable with this approach, but didn’t see any approach in the forum book that addressed another way to deal with situations like Bosnia, where genocide was occurring. “Shouldn’t we do something if we can? Short of military power, what do we do?” Another pointed out that “military spending is not as high a percentage of GNP as in past wars/actions.”

One quote seemed to sum up the general tone of the conversation: “We need to clean up our act and wash the blood off our own hands.”

### **Approach Two: The Democratic Project**

Referring to approach two, one participant said: “It’s a carrot, not a stick. We would wish a good thing on other people.”

There was discussion that focused on our American version of democracy as less than perfect. “People laugh at our democracy when looking at our last election. People know more about us than we do about them. They smell out hypocrisy.” Another person stated: “Our democracy is fragile. We run elections as beauty contests.” Another indicated that people don’t know where our public officials and candidates stand on issues. They hide their true beliefs in order to please enough people to get elected.

There was concern that you can export democracy only to people who want it because culture dictates what people want.

Referring to Thomas Jefferson’s idea of “pursuit of happiness”, one person said we have a responsibility to allow others to pursue their happiness, even if it is different from democracy.

“Democracy is a luxury we can afford – other people are struggling to eat.” The speaker made the point that whoever provides the food may get the attention of struggling people faster - democracy takes time to implement. Another person indicated that this goes back to credibility – we have to model what we profess.

A related thought was that we need to allow local decision-making – this is a community level issue, not a national one and that using tanks to move people toward democracy is short-sighted. Another person agreed, saying: “we need to allow self-determination – that’s what’s important. Iraqis need to write their own constitution without our help.”

Another concern voiced was that those we put into power may not be much better than who they replaced. The fear is that the U.S. will settle for unsavory leadership if we have their loyalty. The participant quoted Harry Truman – “He may be an SOB, but he’s our SOB.”

One participant did feel that we saw Iraq as a legitimate threat and destroyed the regime. Now it seems that establishing democracy is an obligation.

Overall, participants seemed uncomfortable with imposing democracy on peoples who might not want it, particularly when our democracy has it’s own flaws.

### **Approach Three: The Global Market Prescription**

This approach seemed to generate a great deal of cynicism. After an initial comment that the approach would work if done the right way, other thoughts were expressed:

There is an assumption that free trade is American and if expanded would work worldwide. In fact, we were based on protecting markets. We developed our industries and then sold them to the rest of the world.

“Our economic system is overrated, even by us, because we’re comfortable.” The person gave railroads as an example and stated: “A few people got very rich because they were on the inside track.” Another person indicated that this approach wouldn’t do anything to stop terrorist attacks, referring to the Columbine students who were from well-to-do families and still acted in a violent manner.

Another felt that the free trade approach had a hidden agenda. Referring to other countries, “We’re fattening them up to be harvested.” In addition the fear was expressed that this approach would widen the gap between the rich and the poor. “I’m not sure I want to encourage people to get on the bandwagon.”

There were some who were more supportive of the free trade approach. One person expressed the notion that free trade is great, but can make people angry by treating groups unequally. Still a credibility issue – we need to do what we say. Another participant indicated that there seems to be negative feelings about free trade and capitalism, but what other model would you hold up? He agreed that capitalism has flaws, but motivates people to work and advance and that America is based on ideals that should be defended. Another agreed, but felt that capitalism needs to be regulated. In response, someone noted that economies evolve, so we must reassess. The last time that happened in the U.S. was in the 1920's when antitrust laws were put into effect and not much has been done since.

Generally, the tone was to look for a better model. Can we come up with something better. Some countries (i.e. Canada) are already doing a better job.

### **Approach Four: Preserve Our Global Future**

The discussion started with comments about the relatively small amount we spend on foreign aid versus our military.

At this point, one person suggested that we need to combine the different approaches, with military action being a last resort.

Again, the issue of low American credibility was raised, particularly in the area of environmental issues, when looking at our development of genetically engineered crops, which the rest of the world may not accept. The concern is that we are in such a hurry to develop these crops that we fail to understand the long term affects on the environment. This was not considered to be a positive model as a world leader in environmental concerns.

On the other hand, another participant stated that we can be a model, but that if we try to force anything on the rest of the world, we will likely fail. If the world likes something we do, they will copy it.

The moderator felt the group was going astray and reintroduced the approach.

One participant felt it was a pretty good approach. “Around the world people have hatred for our policies, but love our way of life. If we act as if we care, it will help our credibility...we have a heart – it’s not just about money.”

The comment was made that no one had brought up 9/11 during the evening, which was interesting, noting that there has been little constructive or productive results from our reactions to 9/11. Another person, picking up on that theme, indicated that our best response, and most difficult, would be to turn the other cheek. His wish was that our approach to problems would be to forgive and then study the issues that caused the violent action in the first place.

A response to this line of discussion was that Americans invented the concept of no free lunches – that we always expect something back for our good deeds. We need to give them their freedom and then get out of their country.

Another response to addressing underlying issues leading to violence was that at this point in time, we don’t have a way to convene people who will invest the time to think about the consequences of our actions.

One final point of discussion was that this approach seems like big government and that our attempt at a peaceful approach for 12 years didn’t work. He also stated that perhaps corporations need to be more involved and that some of these actions are our responsibility as citizens, not just the responsibility of government.

## **Reflections/Summary**

The moderator commented that she had heard some support for an “ala carte” approach; that all of the approaches have pros and cons and perhaps we need some combination of all the approaches.

A couple of final comments were made, focusing on the concept that this forum was a result of 9/11; that 9/11 was the spark. One participant related a story about a conversation he had with a friend. When the participant noted that he was opposed to a preemptive strike on Iraq, his friend asked if we would have also been against a preemptive strike in 1935 that might have helped avoid the conflagration of WWII. The participant replied: “It sort of took the wind out of my sails.”

Moderator comments: Overall the tone of the forum seemed to be that as Americans, we have a lot of work to do to correct our own flaws – that is the only way to improve our credibility. Without such credibility we cannot hope to be respected and viewed as role models over the long haul.

# **Observer Notes**

## **Newman Center**

### **May 1, 2003**

**Site:** St. Thomas Newman Center, Columbus, Ohio  
**Moderators:** Jerry Freewalt / Donna Brown  
**Reporter:** Catherine Runyan  
**In attendance:** 40+ (not counting press)

#### *Narrative:*

#### **Personal Stake:**

“I’m a veteran, but the President is our President. I stand behind him. We cannot have helicopters that don’t work. We need to be prepared.”

“In the state of Oregon, they’ve cut schools and are closing libraries. We are neglecting our future which is education. “Can we have a role in the world and not take responsibility for what we need to do here?”

We’ve become a superpower. How we respond has human and ecological consequences. How can we use power both creatively and use it as a force?

One participant described her experience in Haiti. It gave a good taste of reality to see the health care system – really was an eye opener.

Another described going to a conference in India. They like Americans but resent our superiority – the fact that “we can dictate what happens in the world.”

Another voiced concern about the President and what we do as a country. She is anxious for her children-for the precedent we are setting. “It’s not easy but we need to do it in this type of way.”

#### *Approach 1:*

“It gives us control.” It’s like a frontier personality which extends to the country. “We feel we have the answer and feel superior. We set our standard as a standard for them. And our history with that is not too good.”

One participant voiced a strategy to address this approach. We need to prevent cycles of violence and war. We need a national authority to make permanent decisions on disagreements. It must be a neutral body representing all nations. We would have to give up control though.”

Another discussed that this is a moral issue. Because we have power, we feel we must use it. What’s important to people drives them.

On 9/11, we lost our sense of control. Before 9/11, we used different approaches (economic, etc.), but we have not recovered. “We’ve been shaken to the core”.

*Q: What justifies a preemptive strike?*

Something massive like Pearl Harbor. We were attacked though. We had cause. We still don’t have any basis for preemptive strike against others. We need absolute proof of evidence of weapons of mass destruction.

We need a larger community to support this, not just the Administration.

“If you knew someone was a threat, it would be okay to stop them.”

The Cuban missile crisis is one example as a better path to take. “Once everything is out of the bottle, it’s hard to put it back in.”

“Saddam Hussein seemed likely to harm a lot of people, but when applied to our own justice system, we don’t recognize threats. Nothing justifies a preemptive strike when we look at our justice system.”

Two participants from Hungary shared that in Bosnia, the UN was begging the US for airstrikes and they waited a long time. It was reactive. Now the US is rushing to “liberate” the Iraqis preemptively – how ironic. “ We need to be honest that this is not about human rights. This is about oil and economic power.”

There is a difference between preemptive strike and preemptive action. In Rwanda where 800,000 were killed, we needed bodies on the ground to protect people from each other. “ It requires moral courage to send troops into an idealistic venture and it takes courage to be consistent about putting people in to protect others.”

*Q: Does unilateral strike make things dangerous or unsafe?*

“I think it’s more dangerous. If it is so important for UN to be cohesive, we are inviting hostility from the rest of the world.”

Another voiced concern about religious strife if we proceed unilaterally (Jews vs. Christians)

Another voiced concern about our young people who have so little knowledge of the world. Doing it “our way” has long term consequences.

You don’t get rid of something without finding out why...finding out the source of the problem. The question of 9/11 is not how to strike back, but why are they so hurt? Not all of them did that; only a small group. “I’m an American but I see things differently. I’m a proud world person.”

“I think it’s important to be preemptive, but it should have been done earlier and broader.” Saddam was encouraged to grow by our government, but he got to be a problem.

“We aren’t a country that needs and likes to learn about people. We aren’t good at speaking different languages.” The strength we need is our education system. “My uncle felt that one of the most important things is to freely travel all over the world. We don’t do that enough.” “You build arms that will protect you, but the real strength is tearing down the wall and finding out about others. The average citizen in the world knows a lot more about us than we do about them.”

### ***Approach 2:***

Administration initially chose approach 1, but they are now using approach 2. “I’m skeptical: are they really different choices?”

Colin Powell in *American Journey* answers so many of these questions. American values are important, but there are gentle ways such as those espoused at the Newman Center....a good example with students from all over the world.

“We are not merely a democracy. We are a republic. We operate more like a plutocracy with 2 establishment parties that choose for us.”

“We need to reform at home – even more important for minority rights protection abroad. Whoever comes to power pushes minority powers out. We need to look at our process of democracy itself. We need to look at our own system and its flaws. Human and minority rights are encoded in the Constitution. But even Hitler was elected democratically.”

The Hungarian participated described that Hungary had dictators in the 70’s and 80’s and in the 90’s turned democratic, but that was rhetoric. This is repeated here after 9/11. This is not democracy. Who really votes? Why is shopping more important than going to the polls?

Another said that if we exclude someone with sanctions, their tendency is to act out. We create resentment and desire to get even. We need to figure out a positive way to communicate with them.

We’ve created this code of human rights, but we work with dictators? Why don’t we support the UN?

*Q: Do we need more foreign exchange programs?*

“If they are truly exchange programs, okay, but we don’t need programs just to impose our views.”

“When I went to Cuba, it’s impoverished but they had better social and health care systems. We could learn from them. We have a tremendous assumption that one size fits all.”

“We have to recognize that democracy has evolved. We have evolved from oligarchy to democracy, but this takes time. We need to instill respect for human rights. This is more important than ‘democracy’.”

An Indian participant noted that India is the largest democracy in the world, but there are fewer human rights than here in America. If it doesn't work in promoting human rights, then "democracy" may not be the answer.

When we consider raising young children, safety and health care are priorities. It's not that great here for young parents. There is violence in the schools. Some children have no health care. Promoting "democracy" is "paternalistic, arrogant, and misguided."

One participant described her youth in Cuba as filled with lies, coercion, and poverty. Her brother along with the entire school was forced to betray his friend when the friend had done nothing wrong....and she still has to send cash for health care for her relatives....no health care system to speak of for them. "Is that freedom?"

We get into trouble supporting dictators. We need to develop new strategies such as "creative engagement"....to look at intangibles vs. economic sanctions which are selectively applied in different circumstances. We need a policy to help the poor and vulnerable in every country. "When we pick and choose dictatorships depending on what suits our interests, we get into trouble."

### ***Approach 3:***

"How interesting that our problems extend all over the world. Do we really have free, open capitalism here? .....What are we really exporting honestly as a solution?"

One participant noted that competition is important, but we are not looking at how cheap labor affects us. Unemployment is a big issue.

Our hope is that global markets raise the standard of living. Does this mean women getting together in Bangladesh or Africa to form businesses so they can feed themselves? Perhaps we need to start at the bottom (small business solution) rather than at the top which is the big company solution.

We don't have a practice in the world of sustainable economic development. Companies build and then leave. Do they put back in what they take out?

Promoting that approach is retarded.

Another voiced that we need an altruistic solution. We can't go to other countries to develop their resources for our own gain. We dictate all approaches and conditions for our assistance. The World Bank is a good example. We dictate terms to countries that need an infrastructure and make them hostage to our economic policies.

Eisenhower noted the rise of the military industrial complex and the growth of global markets. "We need both. We need military power to protect an open marketplace." Currently, we have #1 military power but we are not #1 in the global marketplace.

We need to approach and sustain small efforts to "help others help themselves."

“We are not prepared to deal with varying cultures and customs. Their values and priorities are not ours.”

Another said that perhaps one strategy is a cap on personal income. Are we prepared to do that to close the gap? Or is it more a matter of power? Are we willing to sacrifice? We wouldn't have to give up a lot.

“I come from Hungary and we have so much less. This country is so scared to lose things. It is not so bad to be much poorer.”

We need to settle on a living wage – to stem excessive consumerism. We are based on a drive to get products to be made cheaply so we can buy as many as possible. Settling on a living wage seems to be a slower and more natural process than taking from the rich and giving to the poor.

A final comment on this perspective is that as we globalize markets and decrease prices so we can buy “more”, people are losing their jobs. It is not the top echelon that sacrifices, it's the worker. “Our nation is greedy.” We need to equalize our resources here first, then perhaps we have a strategy to share.

#### ***Approach 4:***

“This is hypocrisy. People don't care. How can we preach this when we destroy our own resources? Are we exporting the greed motive to other countries?”

“In my personal experience, when a multinational comes into a poorer country, they do not show respect to any living thing. It is only interested in cutting costs and net profits.” And are not interested in environmental repercussions of its actions.

Europe is importing this type of mindset. They think if we copy this, we will be “leaders”.

“‘We the people’. Are we that? We've lost that. Greed has come in and taken over. What are we taking into global markets? “

“We make 2 decisions at every moment..one moral and one economic. We need to integrate those two. If we do, we can make a better life for ourselves as ‘we the people’.”

We don't need to take the lead always. We are one of the many. In poorer countries, they need to cooperate to survive. We need to use them as examples as well. “What's wrong with doing laundry in a stream?” They don't see technology as a necessity, more as an imposition outside of their experience.

“I grew up in an Irish getto and have lived in different cultures. We are incredibly adolescent as a nation. We don't have the history and wisdom as a nation. Personally, I favor this approach, but how long is this going to take to live into maturity? We can rewrite history and be right, but we can't rewrite damage to the earth. Will we “use” ourselves into extinction?”

With this approach, if we're on top, it's okay, if on bottom, we have to worry.

"I look at the world as the Titanic and the US is having a good time partying. Maybe if we crash into an iceberg, we'll be forced to receive help."

I've been trying to think why I support this last alternative. It's about the language of cooperation. The rest used the word and concept of force and domination.

"We all have connections to other parts of the world and we need to get in touch with that."

***Reflections:***

"We are cynical of the "agendas" of our country. We have credibility problems."

"I fear what will happen in the long term."

"We have the frustration of arrogance. Imagine how you would feel if you were the victim."

"There is hope for us collectively. But we need to clean up our own act first."

"Relative to approach 4, we are the #1 exporter of arms. We are not making the world safer or cleaner by putting these weapons into circulation. We benefit from that We need to stop. We need to work with UN on a disarming process and encourage others to follow."

"Can we just do it differently? I'll do it this way, and I will be interested in how you do it. Why does it have to be our way?"

"Apathy is a big problem. We feel disenfranchised. We are creating an autocracy economically. We have a terrible disconnect here that we are not making any difference. What do I do?"

## **Observer Notes**

### **Temple Israel**

### **May 8, 2003**

"Americans' Role in the World" held at Temple Israel with Chris Kloth as moderator and Rowland Brown as reporter.

The dialogue began with the moderator asking the group, made up primarily of senior citizens from Westminster Thurber retirement home, whether they had any preliminary reactions or observations to the forum subject based on personal experiences. One referred to a dream she had about Secretary Rumsfeld. Another made an observation that we ought to use the term "mass killing" rather than the term "war."

Turning to the first Approach, "Using Our Power to Secure the Peace," there seemed to agreement that it was a useful and appropriate approach to acts of outright terrorism. But, it was pointed out that there are others that can and do use the same approach such as North Korea, where this approach may be very dangerous. Another person complained that the u.s. always seems to be insisting in doing it "our way" in foreign relations, making it difficult to maintain allies or rely on the United Nations. It was also noted that the approach creates a paradox of simultaneously causing wide resentment in the world, while still not being a suitable approach to resolving relations with a country like North Korea, or any hostile country with weapons of mass destruction. Another worried that this approach, which seems to be the primary approach of this administration, cause much of the world to consider as a "bully."

One participant noted that other populations have suffered for a long time from terrorism, and that we were not alone. Appoint was made that using this approach together with enormous military spending and technological superiority, we have become used to "instant gratification" of short wars and small losses of our own troops compared to the opposition. Has it become easier for us to wage war than keep the peace or deal effectively with dealing with the aftermath of our total victories. Another in this vein pointed out that power and conflict does not readily deal with "core problems."

Turning to the second approach, "Ensuring Democracy" in guiding our foreign policy, the point was immediately that while desirable and powerful under certain conditions, the elimination of severe poverty, hunger and widespread disease seemed to be a precondition of success. Until these basic needs are satisfied, democracy is seen as "luxury." Another noted forcing democracy in conditions and the culture of countries like Iraq and Afghanistan may be naive and presumptuous. Stability, security and tolerance of significant religious and cultural groups may be the first steps toward moving towards a system of citizen involvement that has no precedent history in these countries. A point was raised about why the U.S. has the right to establish such governance rather than the United Nations or other multi-national organizations. Certainly international N.G.O.s are valuable in this effort.

Several noted that our experience after World War II with the Marshall Plan as well as our nation building efforts in occupied Japan and the time and resources that they took should provide important lessons for us today.

Turning to Approach 3, relying on a "Global Market Prescription" that lift all the worlds' boats or economies together brought some but a lesser enthusiastic support than the second or last alternative. Some felt our consumer oriented market economy with a penchant for accumulating too much "stuff", was hardly a good model for the world. Discussion followed on the relative success or dangers in Free Trade Policies and who had gained and who had lost. Protection of jobs of jobs were discussed in the context of each economy concentrating on what

they were best with and the dangers of not having a modern value added approach to developing countries' economies. Issue of preserving countries' cultures while making countries national boundaries less important drew quite a bit of discussion. We were reminded by some that the Sept. 11 destruction of the Twin Towers could be seen as a terrorist protest of these symbols of the U.S.'s and other industrial nations commitment to a global marketplace and capitalism - a conflict of values. Of course, mention was made of the significant disproportionate wealth and resources of the U.S. on a per capita basis.

Finally, moving to Approach 4, "Preserving our Global Future" generally drew more sympathetic support from this more senior group. They conclude that this last approach was necessary if either # or @ was to be successful on a global scale. One discussant commented on our intensive dependence on dwindling fuel and energy resources and a mania for gas guzzling Subs and inadequate mass transportation or tax support for it. Another strain of thought was for an expanded Peace Corps or public service that exposed our young people to other cultures, values and living conditions.

One woman described the importance that our government played in a positive way as she grew up. Such issues as women's rights, social security, minimum wage, health benefits, civil rights, the GI Bill, etc. which our the younger generation never appreciated in valuing the benefits they now enjoy even in a recession.

As the reporter for this group, I was greatly impressed by their acceptance understanding of the deliberative process, their strong and thoughtful participation with almost everyone volunteering opinion without moderator pressure and no visible evidence of disrespect or animosity.

**Observer Notes**  
**JOHN GLENN LIVING-LEARNING CENTER**  
**The Ohio State University**  
**May 11, 2003**

1. A unique aspect of this forum was the similarity of group members yet diverse opinions were expressed. The group was composed of twenty -six freshman college students who live in Baker West Dorm and are all political science majors. Although this was a forum limited to the living learning center residents, one community member did attend.
2. The forum was moderated and recorded by graduate students from the College of Education. The forum lasted approximately two hours.
3. Option one received the most discussion. Overall, it was my impression that the group favored this option over the other three. The general feeling was that the US has a right to protect its interests even if that means a first strike response. This view was contested by some of the members in the group, more for the means than the ends to be achieved. I did hear more comments relative to the draft and its impact on their lives as compared to another forum which I attended.
4. The group seemed to favor those options which would protect the US way of life and not cause dislocations in our economy or standard of living. Option three seemed to be the least favored as that would entail perhaps a loss of jobs, decline in US ability to buy cheap products if the standard of living were to increase in other countries.
5. The forth option brought out some interesting ideas. The group thought that it was not the responsibility of the US to improve the world remember in option one the group did think that it was the US responsibility to police the world. Other nations should become involved.

Report submitted by;  
David Stein  
Forum convener.

# **Observer Notes**

## **Columbus and Worthington Northwest Library**

### **May 15, 2003**

#### **Forum Site:**

Northwest Library  
May 15, 2003

#### **Moderators:**

Mona Connolly and Steve Herminghausen

#### **Reporter:**

Chris Taylor

#### **# in Attendance:**

We had a total of 26 people. One who left early, 2 from WOSU and the 3 of us are included in that number. I estimate that most participants were in their 40s or older. Our one young, African American woman had attended the OSU forum on Sunday and came to see if the discussion would be different. (She thought it had pretty much been the same). We had one woman who was from the former Soviet Union, one woman who had been born in Britain but raised in Morocco and one other British woman. Another man had a son who was currently stationed in Iraq. The remainder of the audience appeared to be mainly retired men and women.

#### **Personal Stake:**

This part was not done. We moved right into Approach 1.

#### **Approach One: International Order**

Mona started by asking if "anyone sees anything positive in this approach?" The first answer was "It all depends on how it's focused" and we then proceeded to discuss elements of approach 2 and 3 for a bit before coming back to approach 1.

Our participant from the former Soviet Union pointed out that in the past the Russian government believed that the world was a dangerous place and that a forceful spread of communism was the way to make it safer. That obviously did not work. She saw this as an analogy to what the US was doing today. We talked about America being resented for trying to force democracy on others who may or not want it.

One participant thought the only good point in this approach was that it "will take a co-ordinate effort" to which another responded "are we going to go all over the world?" There was discussion about whether we (the people) had any power over the people in the pentagon which lead to discussion about our lack of a Republic and why there were no representatives in the room with us today. One man said that he "...came here hoping we would get to have our opinions heard" and wanted to know if we'd contacted representatives to attend. He talked about his dissatisfaction with "gerrymandered districts" and the lack of a true Republic.

When one participant said that the Iraqis did not want us there another who has a son stationed in Iraq disagreed. He said that his son reports in his letters that an Iraqi said to him that they "...have waited 20 years for you guys to come and help."

Mona asked, "will military action against those who threaten our security make the world a safer place?" One man wanted to know who felt threatened by Iraq and another woman jumped right in to say she was but seemed to be threatened by the events of 9/11. We discussed that there was not a positive link from alQuida to Iraq.

The last point of discussion on Approach 1 was that it was far fetched to put more money into military spending when we are trying to reduce taxes.

### **Approach Two: The Democratic Project**

"Seems like we already talked about democracy" is how Steve started the discussion. One participant admitted that democracy is an interesting concept but "...it took us 200 years to get here and we expect others to do it immediately". Perhaps that's a bit naive. Democracy is not a perfect system any more than others are; we just think it's best. It was brought up that the people we are attacking have been colonized for so long now. We've even put in heads of state against the will of the people. It's not that they don't want our help but a more kinder, gentler way would be better.

Our participant who grew up in Morocco told us that she travels a lot. She realizes now that there is a difference between what the American government does and what the American people think. She is more careful now when she talks about America to specify which she mean. She talks to people in her travels and told us the people on the street don't hate Americans. People do want our standard of living.

We got into a bit of discussion about human rights. The consensus seemed to be that we should allow countries to determine what form of government they wanted and not try to force ours on them. There was strong opinion though that we should force human rights and that our definition was the correct one. We debated a bit about the effectiveness of the UN weapons inspections and other initiatives. Some thought they moved too slow. Others thought we were too impatient.

Our last point of discussion on approach two was that there is a problem with going in with a war attitude and not a police action. Someone else argued "isn't that just spin?" but it was clarified that no, war is nation to nation while actions by the United Nations are a police action. We also pointed out that war requires reconstruction while perhaps a police action does not.

### **Approach Three: The Global Market Prescription**

Our discussion of multi-nationalism of American corporations led us to believe that this is not the way either. It's been going on for years and nothing has changed yet. As one participant said, "How come Nike isn't making a difference" in the countries it's in? The answer from the group was that American companies don't pay American wages in other countries. The laws of other countries, notably developing ones, don't force them to. Until all is really equal, we can't

lift all boats. One of the participants pointed out that it's not the Company's job to help the country but to make a profit.

We talked about the fact that it's "not possible to separate the economy from politics." In the past, American companies would complain about regulations being imposed by Central American governments and claim "communism". To stop it, the American government got involved, claiming to be fighting communism by encouraging democracy. Large non-democratic countries (China for example) can negotiate with American companies. For example, we'll buy so much of this if you give us that. This doesn't sound like free trade.

We were back to the point that in a true global economy all standards of living all over the world would be the same. Instead, now we have "horizontal gravity" where companies take their operations where it is cheapest to do business. One participant asked the British woman why England supported the war in Iraq. Her answer was to pay the US back for support during WWII. She also felt that Blair thought that supporting the US would help foster all of Europe being connected. Her husband admitted that his unofficial pub survey six months ago revealed that the British people did not speak highly of Blair, his intent to support the US, nor our intentions re Iraq.

Mona mentioned that the issue book was formed and written by every day people like us. She asked what our acquaintances were saying about these issues and we got a strong reaction from one of the gentleman that they were not saying anything and that's why they (he and his wife) were here today.

#### **Approach Four: Preserve Our Global Future**

Steve began by asking what is America's role in the Big Issues. We started off discussing the amount we spend on military spending vs other (social) issues. One participant felt that we'd already proven in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that war was not the way, yet we were still spending billions on it. Examples were given of changes being made with "no shots fired" like the change in the Soviet Union. Back to the money issues, it was felt that the high expenditures on the military undermined our ability to fund other initiatives good for our (and the world's) welfare. I'm not sure we were sure just where we should reallocate resources.

Someone asked the participants from other countries "what are their governments saying" about resources. The woman from the former Soviet Union pointed out that it was still in so much turmoil and there was still so much corruption that it is bad. They are behind on many levels. The questioner had specifically asked about water and the woman from England seemed to think that it wasn't a problem there.

Someone pointed out that about pollution, America (the government) does not want to go along with the plans of the whole world. We asked, "why would people not want to support" environmental initiatives? Immediately we stated that people don't want to give up their standard of living (SUVs) and companies don't want to pay the high price for pollution abatement. Big companies lobby the government when it comes to regulations to change the laws in their favor. We're not spending enough money on scientific research to develop other forms of energy. We also lamented that for individuals who would wish to live a more economically conscience lifestyle (say biking or taking mass transit or walking) it's just not

possible the way our cities are set up. One participant reminded us that we too have a say. Car companies make SUVs because we buy them. We can't totally blame the companies, they are after all just doing what they are suppose to; satisfying market demand. It was pointed out that investment in socially responsible companies and mutual funds is going up.

Overall one of the participants thought that approach 4 would take too much time and initial costs would be high for the tastes of the current US consumers who are used to having things our way and quickly.

## **Reflections/Summary**

We were asked what ideas we had.

Voting came up. Even though people sometimes feel like their vote doesn't really count for much. Our obligation to be an informed voter was also mentioned. We need to be learn about different viewpoints and be open to them.

We were asked to think about "what is valuable to us?"

We said:       Peace  
                  Justice for everybody.  
                  More say in decision making.

To the question "What can we carry away?" was replied Freedom. But another reminded us not to give away any of our freedoms for any purpose.

## **Observer Notes Delaware Library May 15, 2003**

**Forum Site: May 15, 2003**

**Delaware Public Library 84 East Winter Street, Delaware, Ohio**

**Moderators:**

**Rowland Brown and Tammy Amarosso**

**Reporter:**

**Dana Warner**

**# in Attendance: Total of 10 participants, all of the local participants were women, generally 50 years of age or older.**

**Personal Stake:** This group of women opened the evening's discussion by establishing their international credentials. All had traveled overseas, many to the Middle East (Egypt, Israel) and Asia (Afghanistan); most sought out international sources of news (English versions of foreign newspapers) on the internet; and two had family members in international organizations (United Nations and an aid and development agency). They were astonished by how limited an international view and awareness most Americans have of the world. One woman cited the lack of a substantive discussion of foreign affairs or international issues during the last presidential election. Another pointed out that only 10% of Americans have their passport. Apparently, there isn't much interest or intent to travel abroad. They suggested this lack of interest allows the current American administration to present their policy in Iraq with, what one characterized as, a "lack of honesty". She extended the thought by stating that the Bush administration is appointing administrators who don't know how to rebuild Iraq. These are men who don't know the language, without experience in the region or culture, expertise in development or humanitarian relief. A participant compared our current experience in Iraq to the American colonial experience in Hawaii in terms of America's insensitivity to the local people and culture.

**Approach One: International Order** The group generally believed that Approach 1 personifies the Bush administration's policy toward the world and their projection of power and military might. "We just want power" said one woman. She was skeptical of what she saw as political manipulation by Americans with interests in the Military-Industrial Complex, or their own financial interests and political philosophy. She pointed to the bidding of reconstruction contracts in Iraq to companies such as Bechtel and Halliburton as examples of war profiteering. She felt these forces play into the political macho amongst us in the government and public. Several participants expressed the view that there seemed to be no trust in building an international coalition against terrorism. They believed there was enormous empathy toward the United States as the result of 9/11, but we didn't build on it. One woman was critical of the rise of military influence within American government and the loss of influence of the State Department and diplomacy. She cited a loss of foreign policy expertise through the selling of ambassadorships to political cronies. One woman speculated that the Second Gulf War might actually be partially motivated by an American effort to head off the possibility of the Euro from becoming the international monetary standard for the purchase of oil instead of the U.S. Dollar. They all felt that the American public has a very self-absorbed Americentric view of the events of 9/11. They thought that this view had led the country to military preemptive strikes as a national policy. They view this as a very dangerous approach.

**Approach Two: The Democratic Project** The group was interested in this approach. One woman wondered if we might want to work with a key country within multiple regions of the world as an example of democratic principles. She doubted that we have the resources or persistence to cultivate democracy everyway. On the other hand another person didn't see the promotion of democratic systems as more costly than the military means we currently employ. Could we train a peace corp rather than military regiments? One woman specifically referred to Dennis Kucinich's (the current presidential candidate) proposal for a cabinet level peace department rather than a War Department. One woman wanted to know, "What do we really mean when we want a democracy? There is more to democracy than just voting." Others pointed out there are many international obstacles to the formation of democracies: lack of a democratic tradition, lack of education and an independent press, predominance of authoritarian rule, political instability and violence. How could it be implemented? The United States hasn't supported international institutions, such as the United Nations, that could guide the development. One woman characterized our current approach as a right-now short-term focus on the development of democracy. She suggested with the war over we would shortly lose any interest in and attention on Iraq, much as has happened in Afghanistan. The last thought was the implementation of true democracy in Iraq would be severely hindered by the limitation on the role of women within the society.

**Approach Three: The Global Market Prescription** Our discussion of a world economic approach started with one woman saying that philosophically free trade was great but in a practical sense free trade institutionalizes the powerful and keeps third world countries weak. What is our interest in the role of trade and markets? The American economic model can't be emulated because it's based on the unlimited use of energy and resources. The promotion of free trade begs the question of how trade should appropriately be regulated. One woman spoke of the use of exploitive labor practices and slave labor. She cited a survey given to WalMart shoppers that asked if they would pay more for products if they were produced by workers being paid a fair wage. They would. Issues were also raised concerning the protection of subsistence farmers. Distribution of wealth and reduction of poverty should be a priority.

**Approach Four: Preserve Our Global Future** In a world full of problems how do we address them. If America addressed more world problems (did more problem solving) rather than trying to control the problems we would be seen as more of a team player and it would produce more good will. To have the resources to make a down payment on the world's problems Americans would have to sacrifice some of their own wealth. No American president since Jimmy Carter has suggested that Americans might need to conserve energy use or conserve resources. It's discouraging to think about effectively addressing world problems if we do a poor job of finding resources and commitment to address domestic issues. The group felt there was a significant need to teach citizenship in America and participation in international exchange programs and institutions.

**Reflections/Summary** – The group concluded that the American people are very self absorbed and self centered. One woman said she didn't trust her government. She asked Why did we go to Iraq? The explanation is still lacking. They said there was a lack of discussion and debate about foreign policy issues even among the educated. The country seems to be very reactive and acting out of fear. When asked specifically about the approaches they stated a preference for #4 and for #2 and #4 taken together.