Vermont: The Once and Future Republic

By James Hogue

Republic: A system of government in which the people hold sovereign power and elect representatives who exercise that power. It contrasts, on the one hand, with a pure democracy, in which the people or community as an organized whole wield the sovereign power of government, and on the other with the rule of one person (such as a king, emperor, czar, or sultan). Black’s Law Dictionary, abridged seventh edition.

During the fourteen years between Vermont’s Declaration of Independence (January 15, 1777) and its acceptance into the union (March 4, 1791) Vermont convened an elected assembly, adopted a constitution, coined its own money (VERMONT RES PUBLICA), operated a postal service, conducted military operations, diplomatic relations and trade, recruited and commanded its own militia, and wrote its own laws in a legislature elected at Town Meeting, where the people also elected the governor and his twelve member council.

According to Ira Allen, Vermont from 1777 to 1791 proved a “free & Independent State Wholly unconnected with any Power whatever.” (Letter to Alexander Dundas and Justus Sherwood, May 8, 1781 re: the exchange of prisoners) Ira’s brother Ethan called it a “neutral republic” in his letter to General Frederick Haldimand on June 16, 1782.

From the brothers Allen to the first historians such as Jared Sparks, then John Pell in 1929, through the romanticism of Frederick van de Water, to the recent scholarship of Michael Belle- siles, Vermont is referred to as an independent state and republic. Said Sparks of the Green Mountain Boys in his 1829 biography of Ethan:

Independence was their first and determined purpose; and, while they were neglected by Congress, and, like another Poland, threatened with a triple partition between the adjoining States, they felt at liberty to pursue any course, that would secure their safety . . . It was on this principle, that they encouraged advances to be made by the British, and not that they ever had the remotest intention of deserting the cause of their country, or submitting in any manner to the jurisdiction of the English government.

Sparks further states that many in Congress refused to interfere in Vermont’s affairs, “affirming love another more is not so say that in the passions of long ago we loved another less.

COURAGE

Hate is easy. Love takes guts.

So the second theme of our movement must be courage. True courage it seems to me involves time and ambiguity. A philosopher once wrote,
Dawn comes a bit earlier now that January is here in central Vermont’s Mad River Valley, and our cozy communities bustle with visitors sneaking in one more ski before heading home, kids returning to school after the holidays, and the warmth and hum of local commerce. We are surrounded by what sometimes feels like timeless beauty here: the understated majesty of the snow-blanketed Green Mountains just to our west; the Mad River’s morning mist snaking lazily across the frozen beats of ice-crusted meadow and through the naked trees; the ski and snowmobile trails crisscrossing the Valley floor, beckoning for just a few minutes of our precious time.

Though this is a scene that fellow Vermonter Norman Rockwell would love, we know, too, of the realities a Vermont winter brings. Keeping our homes warm, our families fed, and our farms, schools, businesses, civic networks, and houses of worship alive in the dead of winter requires hard work and constant vigilance. And we all have neighbors struggling to survive in the face of rising energy costs and dwindling federal support for society’s most vulnerable – “to heat or to eat” becomes a real and difficult choice for many. Our beautiful yet precarious Green Mountain existence is thrown into even sharper relief when considered against a national backdrop much less inviting than our snow-covered landscape: spiking fossil fuel prices, mounting national debt, titanic military expenditures, unbridled corporate power, and a sense that world events are beyond our control.

As we enter our second year publishing Vermont Commons and I officially step into the editor’s chair, I feel obliged to acknowledge these realities, and explain our newspaper’s core operating assumptions. The articulate and occasionally maddening writer/columnist George Will is fond of pointing out that the United States emerged, not out of the primordial mists, but out of a particular historical moment – the collective 1776 decision by a small number of English colonists to assert certain agreed-upon basic truths. From this famous “revolutionary” moment, Will asserts, a small group of middling and well-to-do merchants invented a new republic with the Constitution’s 1788 ratification, as well as creating a national creed revolving around those famous and much-debated words from Jefferson’s Declaration. “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” are cornerstones of U.S. mythology. Our national doctrine. Our creed. One to which all of us in the United States, regardless of where we are from, asent.

We at Vermont Commons are hammering out our own creed, built, like Jefferson’s “Declaration,” on three fundamental beliefs. The first of these is that this collective project called the United States – once a near-universally admired republic and now the richest and most powerful Empire on the planet - is simply too big and too unsustainable to continue existing in its current form. We assert this, as Frank Bryan reminds us in these pages, not lightly or with any anger, glee, or malice, but with a deep sense of melancholy and no small measure of regret. We are patriots first and foremost. We are proud to be Americans. We are in love with this continent’s stunning landscapes, its marvelous cities and quaint towns, and its generous people. If given the choice, most all of us would live nowhere else but here.

But “here” in these United States — our country, and, more importantly, our national government — is no longer our own. Rampant militarism, endless war, election fraud, debt-for-growth spending, hyper-corporate commercialism, Peak Oil, climate change, and a host of other pressing problems loom large. We are, by virtue of being citizens of the richest and most powerful Empire in world history, implicated in these

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Re-Inventing Vermont: A New Year, An Open Invitation…
daunting realities. For those who believe that the federal government is simply incompetent, we have suggested that the truth may be far more sinister. For others who assert that the U.S. Empire, decades in the making, can somehow be reformed simply by electing the right millionaire/presidential candidate to office, or by passing the right piece of legislation, we believe otherwise.

Our ultimate goal is "re-invention."

We assert to a second belief here at Vermont Commons. Namely, that secession — the state of Vermont's peaceable and voluntary withdrawal from the United States Empire — is not merely a viable policy option supported by both the U.S. Constitution and our own history. Secession ultimately represents the best practical response to the series of crises now confronting all of us as American citizens living amidst Empire. Secession is not "running away" from the problems facing us, as some critics have asserted, but confronting those problems square on, unflinchingly and honestly, and encouraging our fellow Americans across this great land to do the same. To save what is best about our beloved United States, in other words, we must peaceably dismantle it, reclaiming our land, our resources, our rights, and our responsibilities to one another from those who rob us of the same, while they energetically wave the flag and speak of "freedom," "liberty," and "democracy."

Our ultimate goal is "re-invention."

For those who live within Vermont's boundaries, our third core belief is really directed at and towards you. We at Vermont Commons believe that we Vermonters, working independently and in concert with the entire world, can better feed, power, clothe, transport, educate, entertain and sustain ourselves as an independent republic than we can as one of fifty states in an Empire that is crumbling (and very much in denial about this fact). This will not be easy, of course, and we may fail. But, as I travel throughout our remarkable state, I see promising signs everywhere: the family farms, front yard gardens, and local businesses dotting our hills and valleys; our annual town meetings and the ongoing work of our local governing bodies; myriad Green Mountain organizations tackling what will be some of the 21st century's toughest problems: re-inventing our energy paradigm for a post-carbon age, for example, or figuring out how to revitalize our local and state economies as global corporations abandon us for more exploitable labor and cheaper resources elsewhere.

All of these ongoing projects, profoundly local in nature, but directly connected to the wider world in so many ways, offer us more than hope. These gardens and grassroots organizations are signposts, pointing the way towards a future we are only now beginning to imagine.

Our ultimate goal is "re-invention."

This year and this month marks the first annual "Vermont Independence Day," a calendar day celebrating Vermont's first declaration of independence as an independent republic in January 1777. That independent republic governed, fed, powered, and supported its citizens for fourteen years prior to admission into the Union.

And now, the reality of global Peak Oil is setting in. The federal government, a project now primarily run by and for the world's wealthiest corporations, is busy off-shoring taxable wealth, raiding the U.S. Treasury on the sly, borrowing money at unprecedented rates, manipulating electoral returns, attacking its own citizens as part of a so-called "war on terror," and shelling out a weekly $1 billion to fund a sequential global war for the world's last fossil fuel energy reserves.

We can do better.
We must do better.

The time has come, once again, for us to consider independence. Decentralization. Devolution. Smaller scale organization. Not just here, but globally.

For us, and for our children. And our children's children.

And Vermont can lead the way.

We at Vermont Commons champion, within these pages, a good hard look towards our common future together, and seek common ground wherever, whenever, and with whomever is interested in rolling up our collective sleeves and sharing the work (and the rewards) re-invention will bring. We've got some exciting challenges ahead. Long live the (dis)United States and the second Vermont Republic.

A Republic that, one day soon, will be.

Rob Williams
Editor

VERMONT MARBLE SECEDES FROM SUPREME COURT

As Vermonters move inexorably closer to secession from the American Empire and its façade of "equal justice under the law," it was curiously appropriate that a block of Vermont marble has seceded from the US Supreme Court building. A medicine ball-sized piece of marble molding fell from the facade over the entrance to the Supreme Court on Monday, November 28th. The piece of Vermont marble was part of the dentil ornamentation surrounding the icons of the Court. As it fell, it took a chunk out of Authority, leaving Liberty and Order intact, and damaged the veneer of Equal Justice Under Law.

The dentil cracked off to the right of center in the pediment of the building. One might say the event took a bit of the "teeth" out of the right. Though the fallen marble lay directly in the center of the court entrance through which visitors had just passed, no one was injured, reinforcing the non-violent nature of Vermont culture, both human and geomorphological.

As the Court gets stacked by neo-cons to remove the last bulwarks against tyranny, could this "coincidence" be more appropriate? Block by block, let us continue to dismantle the corrupt artifacts and icons of Empire.

— Robert Riversong

Vermont Commons welcomes your input

Please e-mail letters to editor@vtcommons.org or post to 308 Walls Drive, Waitsfield, VT 05673. Although we will try to print your letters in their entirety, we may edit to fit. Please be concise. Be sure to include your contact information (name, address, telephone, and e-mail) for verification purposes.
Representing Empire: The Politics of the Living Dead

By Thomas Naylor

During a recent fund raiser for his Senatorial campaign, Congressman Bernie Sanders railed against the U.S. Senate, correctly claiming that it is corrupt to the core since it is owned, operated, and controlled by Corporate America. During the Q&A session that followed, I raised two questions. “If the U.S. Senate is as corrupt as you say it is, why would you ever consider serving in such a tainted body?”

Hadn’t you rather be president of your own little country, the independent Republic of Vermont?”

The first question went unanswered. As for the second, he smiled and jokingly said, “Only after I have been elected to the Senate...” He really didn’t get it. Nor do many of the so-called Vermont Progressives who support him.

The United States government has lost its moral authority. It has no soul. It is too big, too central-ized, too powerful, too materialistic, too intrusive, too militaristic, and too unresponsive to the needs of Vermont citizens and communities. As Kirk-patrick Sale noted in his address to the Vermont Independence Convention last October 28, this is the same government that opposes “the Geneva Convention, the international criminal court, international law, the United Nations, test-ban treaties, the Kyoto Treaty, budget controls, civil rights, Social Security, and an independent judiciary.”

The U.S. Congress condones the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, a war on terrorism which we helped create, an impotent homeland security bureaucracy, corporate greed, pandering to the rich and powerful, the denial of civil liberties, environmental degradation, pseudo-religious drivel, prisoner abuse, a foreign policy based on full spectrum dominance and imperial over-stretch, and a culture of deceit.

Congressman Sanders, Senator Jim Jeffords, and Senator Patrick Leahy are all card-carrying members of this culture of deceit. They are an integral part of the problem, not the solution. Those who support them politically are also contributing directly to the further loss of moral authority by our government.

The Congressional Club is a very exclusive club whose members have been seduced by a combina-tion of money and power. They are paid by the U.S. government and are, therefore, loyal to Washing-ton, not their respective home states. Most members behave as though they were world-class prostitutes. That’s how they stay in office.

Take Senator Patrick Leahy, for example. Leahy and the other members of the Vermont Congres-sional delegation all voted against the resolution authorizing the war in Iraq, but consistently sup-port legislation funding the war. Every time the Burlington office of General Dynamics receives a new multi-million dollar defense contract, it is Sen-ator Leahy who announces the contract with great glee. He also has no qualms about speaking at Nor-wich University and announcing a new Homeland Security contract for the University, even though it was caught in bed with the Indonesian secret police a few years ago. At different times of the year, Leahy can be found playing a wide variety of different roles—the hawk, the dove, the statesman, the patriot, the military strategist, the peacemaker, and the tough talking negotiator.

Who is the real Patrick Leahy?

Bernie Sanders often attacks big corporations and globalization, but he loves big government, the same big government that is controlled by Corporate America. He seems to think he can have it both ways. Ironically, most of his support-ers truly believe that only the federal government can solve all of our problems.

Vermont Progressives whine a lot about Presi-dent George W. Bush, but are prepared to do nothing to rid our nation of this plague. They seem to think that all that will be required is to elect a liberal Democrat to the White House, one who advocates campaign finance reform, and all of our problems will be solved.

It matters not whether Hillary Clinton or Con-doleezza Rice is our next president; the results will be equally grim. Campaign finance reform will never see the light of day because Corporate America exercises hammerlock control over the U.S. Congress.

We have a single political party in this country, the Republican Party, disguised as a two-party sys-tem. The Democratic Party headed by former Vermont Governor Howard Dean is effectively brain dead, having had no new political ideas since the 1960s.

Both Governor Jim Douglas and Lt. Governor Brian Dubie are enthusiastic supporters of George W. Bush, the war in Iraq, and Corporate America. Neither has shown any interest whatsoever in bringing back the Vermont National Guard troops from Iraq. Douglas is much more interested in pro-ducting genetically modified seed producer Mon-santo from Vermont farmers and consumers than he is in protecting Vermonters from the global behemoth. And he loves Wal-Mart. Never mind the devastating effect it’s had on small merchants all over Vermont. Last, but by no means least, he even spent the night in the Bush While House. Why?

Lt. Governor Dubie is an American Airlines cap-tain who flies nearly every week. He also flies fre-quently for the Air National Guard. From whom is he trying to protect Vermont?

Quebec?

Upstate New York?

Or possibly New Hampshire?

President Bush is the political and moral leader of our morally bankrupt government. To whom are Douglas and Dubie loyal? The American Empire, Corporate America, or Vermont?

What Governor Douglas, Lt. Governor Dubie, and the Vermont Congressional delegation all have in common is that they are ciphers. In the parlance of communications intelligence, ciphers produce secret messages deliberately encoded to mislead unintended recipients. But a cipher may also be a person who transmits messages intended to mislead virtually everyone.

Ciphers are one of the most important instru-ments of mass manipulation and social control in the culture of the living dead, a culture in which peo-ple behave as though they have been deprived of life and don’t even know it.

But Vermont is a culture of the living. It is smaller, more rural, more democratic, less violent, less commercial, more egalitarian, more humane, more independent, and more radical than most states. It provides a communitarian alternative to the dehu-manized, mass production, mass consumption, narcissistic lifestyle that pervades most of America.

The call of the Second Vermont Republic is a call for Vermont to reclaim its soul – to return to its rightful status as an independent republic. In so doing, Vermont can provide a kinder, gentler model for a nation obsessed with money, power, size, speed, greed, and fear of terrorism.

The Second Vermont Republic wants to take back Vermont from big business, big markets, and big government. It also wants to take back Vermont from Howard Dean, Jim Douglas, Brian Dubie, Jim Jeffords, Patrick Leahy, and Bernie Sanders.

Vive Le Vermont Libre!

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Vermont Commons is distributed every month in the Vermont Guardian and at select locations throughout the state, with a current circula-tion of 8,000 in print and many more online.

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Our Land, Our Destiny: Vermont Independence Convention Keynote Address

James Howard Kunstler

When we think about the destiny of our land, there are a few questions we might ask:

What do we mean by ‘our land’?
What has been holding it together?
Who are we?
And who will we become?

For about 210 years, we have been a federal democratic republic composed of more than a few states, eventually adding up to fifty. At times, the citizen’s identity has shifted from allegiance to a particular state to the republic as a whole — as when Robert E. Lee, for instance, famously declared that he was first a citizen of Virginia.

Lately the tendency has been for citizens to think of themselves first as Americans, and secondarily as New Yorkers or Virginians or Vermonters.

What has held us together — at least since the convulsion of the Civil War — is a common culture and especially the common enterprise of a great industrial economy.

For much of our history, including the first half of the 20th century, we were a resourceful, adaptive, generous, brave, forward-looking people who believed in earnest effort, who occupied a beautiful landscape full of places worth caring about and worth defending.

Since then, lost in raptures of easy motoring, fried food, incessant infotainment, and desperate money grubbing, we became a nation of overfed, fried food, incessant infotainment, and desperate money grubbing, we became a nation of overfed, rich Americans who believed that it was possible to get something for nothing, who ravaged the landscape in an orgy of wanton carelessness, who believed we were entitled to lives of everlasting comfort and convenience, no matter what, and expected the rest of the world to pay for it.

We even elected a vice-president who declared that this American way of life was non-negotiable.

We now face the most serious challenge to our collective identity, economy, culture, and security since the Civil War. The end of the cheap fossil fuel era will change everything about how we live in this country. It will challenge all of our assumptions. It will compel us to do things differently — whether we like it or not.

We are at or near the all-time maximum global oil production peak. We do not have to run out of oil to find ourselves in trouble. When world demand for oil exceeds the world’s ability to produce oil, all the complex systems we depend on will de-stabilize.

Everything from national chain retail, to the Archer Daniel Midland Cheez Doodle and Pepsi model of agriculture, to the arrangements for heating our homes and lighting our cities will begin to wobble. Some of these things will fail us and begin to change our lives.

At the same time, we will be tempted to join a worldwide scramble for the world’s remaining oil — most of which belongs to countries whose people don’t like us — and the nature of this contest may be very violent.

Our suburbs will prove to be a huge liability.

They represent the greatest misallocation of resources in the history of the world.

The project of suburbia represent a set of tragic choices because it is a living arrangement with no future. And that future is now here in the form of the peak oil predicament.

Because they have no future, our suburbs entail a powerful psychological of previous investment that will prevent us from even thinking about reforming them or letting go of them.

That’s why vice-president Cheney said the “American way of life” is non-negotiable.

There will be a great battle to preserve the supposed entitlements to suburbia and it will be an epochal act of futility, a huge waste of effort and resources that might have been much better spent in finding new ways to carry on an American civilization.

We might, for instance, have invested in restoring our national railroad system, which we will need desperately, because no other project we might undertake would have such a profoundly positive impact on our oil consumption.

But instead we will try desperately to make cars that get better mileage, so we can continue being car dependent and continue building out and elaborating the infrastructure for a living arrangement with no future — the subdivisions of the McHouses, the strip malls, the big box pods, the deployments of hamburger shacks and pizza huts.

In the service of defending suburbia, the American public may turn to political maniacs, who will promise to make the country just like it was in 1997, before we started having all these problems.

In the course of this long emergency we face, life and politics are apt to become profoundly local. Many of my friends wring their hands over George W. Bush, whom they regard as the second coming of Adolf Hitler and who think the Federal government will regulate every inch of their lives. I tell them, in the long emergency the federal government will be impotent and ineffectual — just as they were after Hurricane Katrina — and that the federal government will be lucky if they can answer the phones five years from now, let alone regulate anybody’s life.

I tell them, life in America is going to become profoundly and intensely local, and it will be the local politicians you’ll have to worry about.

American life will become intensely and profoundly local because the complex systems that hold this nation together are going to fail.

We will have to grow a lot more of our food in the regions where we live. That won’t be easy. A lot of our best agricultural land close to our towns and cities has been paved over. A lot of knowledge has been lost.

We are going to have to reconstruct local economies, local networks of interdependency — and that will not be easy given the methodical destruction of economic infrastructure to our communities by Wal-Mart and the rest of the national chain companies over the past forty years.

As these severe challenges arise, different regions of the United States will cope differently.

The Sun Belt will probably suffer in equal proportion to the degree that it benefited from the cheap oil fiesta of the past several decades — because it squandered its wealth in building gigantic suburban metropoles that have no future.

Atlanta, Dallas, Orlando, Charlotte. The people in these places will be full of grievance and bewilderment, and they may seek comfort in the romance of firearms in seeking to defend the indefensible entitlements of their failing suburbs.

The people in Phoenix and Tucson will have dreadful problems with water on top of their problems with oil and the loss of cheap air conditioning. They may not be able to grow any food of their own, locally. In Las Vegas, the excitement will be over. The capital of a something for nothing culture will be left to the wind, the tarantulas and the Gila monsters.

California, the most tragic part of our country — because it was once the most beautiful and is now most lost — will have many of the previously mentioned problems and the prospect of awful ethnic conflict.

I am describing a nation that may not hold together far into the 20th century. I would like to be wrong about this, but it hard to look at the big picture and come up with a different set of conclusions.

All parts of the United States are going to endure hardships in the decades ahead, but some regions or states may be better prepared, or just luckier. I tend to me more optimistic about the future in New England, The mid-Atlantic States, the upper Midwest, and the Pacific Northwest (if it can escape the wrath emanating out of California.)

I include Vermont in this list, of course. This part of the country enjoys some advantages: an armature of towns scaled to the requirements of life in a lower energy world; a lot of good agricultural land; a civic tradition of responsible local governance; a set of regional collective character traits we associate with New England Yankees at their best: rectitude, discipline, perseverance, and allegiance to the community.

I’m personally not an advocate of national breakup or secession. I grew up with United States and I have been, until recently, been pretty comfortable with the idea that we would stick together no matter what.

But in the Long Emergency all bets are off for politics, economics, and social cohesion. Turbulence will be the rule and we will have to do our best to make sure that the just prevail over the wicked, and that the weak are not trampled, and that the best that was in us as a people can somehow be rescued from dumpster of memory.

Anyway, I’m a New Yorker, an up-stater, and I don’t relish the idea of patrolling the waters of Lake Champlain in a solar electric gunboat to keep you Green Mountain boys and girls from chopping down the Adirondacks so you can bake all that granola you are reputed to subsist on.

However things turn out, I hope you’ll let me across the border from time to time to see how things are going.

Thanks very much for your attention, and good luck figuring all this out.
A Not So Different Drummer

By Garret Keizer

That they can sometimes be smug about saying so does not necessarily mean that Vermonters are wrong to describe themselves as an independent people. Their political history can fairly be said to have begun with an assertion of independence — the Green Mountain Boys thumping their noses at the land barons of New York — and to have been marked by a periodic reassertion of the same, perhaps most admirably when Vermont became the first state in the union to abolish slavery, perhaps more dubiously when it was one of only two states (Maine was the other) not to support Franklin Roosevelt in the presidential election of 1936. Today Vermont is the only state in the union to boast both a Republican governor and a Socialist congressman. And it remains one of only a few states to have taken the apparently shocking step of allowing two consenting adults of the same gender to engage in legalized monogamy. If one contention of this essay is that we can sometimes make too much of Vermont’s independence, it would be foolish to make nothing of it at all.

But no sooner do we accept the proposition of Vermont’s “fierce independence” than we are confronted with several questions that we must address, if only because no people who failed to do so could remain independent, much less fierce, for very long. The first of these is whether Vermont is quite as independent as its citizens imagine. Are Vermonters noticeably any more independent than, say, people from New Jersey?

Out of fairness to Vermont, it ought to be said that, true or not, people from New Jersey seem to think so. In other words, the so-called “Vermont character” is not solely a matter of self-congratulation. I often notice when visiting my relatives “down country” how readily people assume that since I live in the Green Mountains, in an old farmhouse where I grow a vegetable garden and heat with wood, that I exist in some kind of mystical communion with the land. I am thought to be independent of, or at least somewhat independent of the moral compromises and environmental liabilities that beset my less wholesome brethren.

Of course this is a crotch. Unless one is completely off the grid, life in the country is not so much an alternative to life in the suburbs as an exaggerated version of it. My communion is less with the land than with the internal combustion engine, of which I presently own seven kinds, both two and four-stroke, which enable my life in the woods. Compared to me, the typical Manhattanite, who uses public transportation and buys her supper unwrapped at the corner market (to which she walks), is a veritable tree-hugger.

The nature boy mythology is not without political parallels. One gets (or promotes) the impression that we Vermonters are less implicated in the actions of the federal government because our post offices tend to be smaller than those in the District of Columbia. Or, that we have less responsibility for the imperial cast of American foreign policy because we’ve gone to a Bread and Puppet performance or might at one time have shaken hands with Ben or possibly Jerry.

This is where the Second Vermont Republic has done the state a service. To be honest, I have some reservations about the Second Vermont Republic. To cite but one, I question how a citizenry often lacking in the discipline required to participate in the governance of an established nation-state could or would acquire the even greater discipline required to turn a breakaway state into a nation. Still, by having the laudable effrontery to suggest that Vermont ought to be independent, the secessionists are calling into question what too many of us glibly assume to be a done deal. It is as if someone had asked Bill Clinton or John Kerry if he would like to become a Democrat, which to my way of thinking would have been both a reasonable and an efficacious invitation.

The second question we need to pose is whether independence is always a virtue. I suspect it is not. Aleming that marches over a cliff to the sound of a different drummer is still a lemming.

In Vermont, the celebration of “fierce independence” has traditionally been done through a sacrament known as low wages. Low wages derive from a dearth of organized labor, which in turn derives from an economy based largely and long on small scale agriculture. As for the small farms themselves, their pitiless destruction — or to put it another way, the fact that dairy farmers are earning the same price for raw milk today as they got in the mid 1970s — derives partly from the fact that “hardy, independent people” are not only easier to romanticize; they’re easier to divide and conquer. And this is true not only of the farmers themselves, but of their more or less oblivious neighbors, who will hold forth at the slightest instigation on “what makes Vermont so very, very special,” seemingly without the slightest idea of what essentially that is. These are sometimes the same people who will run over three toothless farm hands in their rush to get to Montpelier to demonstrate on behalf of campesinos in any part of the world that isn’t Orleans County.

The dubious value of “fierce independence” is also illustrated as Vermont’s smaller towns and more remote regions fall prey to outside developers and industrial energy projects in a manner reminiscent of how the West was won, to say nothing of the entire Third World. There is always some independent chief or village potentate ready to cut his own deal, and the art of successful colonization depends to a large degree on knowing where to find him. But for a ready supply of such “native independence,” Europeans might never have beaten King Philip or Tecumseh. If independence means the ability to stand alone, it can also mean, and historically has been demonstrated to mean, the ability to stand alone in effigy outside a cigar store.

This leads to the last question, or the last I have room for, and also the most unsettling. Do we, even know what independence is? To write as I have done here, one should have at least some idea, and to date this is what I have:

First of all, independence is a socially-derived value. To say that a Sasquatch (or a mad survivalist) crashing through the Idaho woods is independent signifies very little. We might as well attempt to define purity with reference to an uncontaminated urine sample. Meaningful independence exists in relation to — relationships. It is not “a stand” so much as one partner of a dance, the other partner being solidarity. When our solidarity is such that every Vermonter can enjoy a decent independence, then we have learned how to dance with something like grace.

The second thing I know is that genuine independence has to do with paying your own way. Even a kid knows that. The wild getup of a “free spirit” is so much livery if his life depends on any patron’s largesse. In that regard, one finds a certain bohemian disingenuousness among a number of Vermonters, a pose of rebellion against everything that makes the modern world so ugly, but an undiminished craving for its handouts. We want cell phones but we don’t want to look at any cell towers. We find it “such a shame” that so many trailers are cluttering up the landscape but apparently not such a shame that so many working class women are diapering our dependents for minimum wage.

In certain nineteenth century restaurants, dogs were used to turn the roasting spits, trotting their lives away in rotating cages. (After this was deemed inhuman, the dogs were in some cases replaced with black children.) The “Vermont way of life,” especially as extolled by those having the wherewithal to find it so ultra glorious, often strikes me as a reservation in one of those restaurants—at a table as far away as possible from the sound of the rotisserie and the dog, with a nice view out the window and some wonderful entrees under MEAT.

On this level, even the questions I have posed thus far are too abstract. So is any notion of an “independent Vermont” — unless we turn to a more concrete set of questions, namely: Where do we get our energy? What do we do with our waste? How do we employ all our people? These questions need to be posed on a local as well as a state level, and not just when our “way of life is threatened” by a new box store or power plant with plans of moving to town. The questions need to be answered in a way and on a scale that preserve every person’s individual responsibility for the answer (and every person’s fair share of the benefits should the answer prove tenable). And here is a good rule of thumb: whenever you think you can hire one big company or employ one expensive technology to “take care of it,” you haven’t got the answer. And you certainly haven’t got your independence.

As things stand now, our choices often seem divided between a right wing ready to engage those questions (if only to provide a number of short-term, profit-motivated answers) and a left wing that prefers to wait until after a revolution that in its heart of hearts it hopes never comes. And that is where I arrive at the limits of my own independence, for I need some help getting beyond that impasse, and I am not too proud to ask.
Independent Vermont/Independent Wôbanakik

By Frederick M. Wiseman

Our brothers, a few days ago we came to see
our father Mister Johnson, (the British Indian
Agent for Eastern Canada) then he made all of
our hearths (Indian Nations) happy. He gave us
a text. ... which states that the Iroquois
(Kahnawake Mohawks) and the Five Nations
do not possess the lands south of Lake Champlain,
and that they belong to the Abenakis.
(Explanatory italics are Wiseman’s additions)
— National Archives of Canada. ca. 1804

Independence. It is a sweet sounding word. It
implies freedom and the charting of a future
separate from a past burdened with tyranny; or at
least the necessity of bowing to another’s external
wishes. Vermont has always prided itself on its
independent spirit, and this pride has entered into
the nation’s consciousness to emerge as an Amer-
ican stereotype. However, there is a little under-
stood facet to Vermont’s vision of past independ-
ence, as the Republic of Vermont, and a dreamed-
of future as perhaps an independent political
entity. That vision is clouded by a small yet grow-
ing sense of Vermont as Indian country. “Indian
Country,” is a stereotype almost antithetical to
that of a free Vermont. It has meant and still
means a territory that is more than a “wilderness.”
As used by American armed service personnel in
Iraq and Afghanistan, it is a territory full of ene-
mies whose desire is to set back the march of civ-
ilization, enlightenment, and even freedom. But
all civilized nations have, for many years, recog-
nized that the rights of aboriginal peoples are
inherent, and linked definitively to the concept of
homeland. This is why European colonial powers
had to use warfare and treaties to leverage land
from Native peoples in North America beginning
in the late 1700s. That is why the United States
codified the idea of aboriginal rights and the legal
process of cession of those rights through treaty
making in the August 1793 Greenville Treaty. That
is why the United States has a statute, 25CFR19,
specifically dealing with the process of settling
Native claims to lands that were not legally taken
by a treaty making process.

Vermont and the Independent Abenaki Nation
When it became important in the late 18th cen-
tury for Vermont to seek to establish itself as inde-
dependent from New Hampshire or New York, or
even from the United States, it had to somehow
get rid of the Abenakis and their antecedent legal
claims to Wôbanakik, an ancient aboriginal land
that included the soil of much of Vermont. This
goal was met in a variety of ways, the famous
“Captain Louis and the British Flag” scam of Ira
Allen to leverage Mississquoi Abenakis from their
ancient village in the 1786-1788 period (see William
Haviland and Marjory Power, 1994. The
Original Vmonters. Hanover, NH: University Press
of New England, pp. 242-244) and the ignoring of
the expiration of the famous Robertson’s Lease on
lands in the Mississquoi Valley (ibid. 273-4) in 1856.

The Abenakis, of course, never ceded any of this
land to France in the 17th century, the English in
the 1760s, or Vermont, either as republic or state,
in the late 18th century. The Abenakis never forgot
their ancient rights, claims that evolved into a more
desire for hunting and fishing rights, and, most
recently, a quest for state and federal recognition.

A deputation of the St. Francis (Abenaki)
Indians, at Montpelier, claiming compensation
for all that territory in Vermont west of Otter
Creek, and between Lake Champlain and
where the waters begin to flow into the
Connecticuth...

The Caledonian. Nov. 26, 1853

In 1989, VT District Court Judge Joseph
Wolchik found that the Vermont Abenakis had
never ceded their aboriginal rights to their terri-
tory. But his lengthy, well-reasoned legal opinion
was overturned by the Vermont supreme court in
its infamous “weight of history” argument that an
oppressor can remove Indians from their land
without any legal instrument or due process. This
ancient fear of local Indians has been promoted
many times by Vermont officials, most famously
by Vermont’s former governor Howard Dean.

“The Governor fears state recognition would help
the Abenaki gain federal recognition and then in
turn push for a casino and reservation of their own,
says his (Dean’s) spokeswoman Susan Allen. (See
Anne Wallace Allen Associated Press, April 17, 1999.)

In an effort to create a climate of fear within
Vermont regarding the Abenakis, Dean went fur-
ther in early 2002:

Not only would it (state recognition of the
Abenakis), allow them (the Abenakis) to open
gambling casinos without any input from the
state essentially, it would also paralyze any
obody from getting a mortgage or selling their
house for the foreseeable future.

Former Gov. Howard Dean,
January 18, 2002, telecast on WCAX, Burlington

In order to protect itself from its Indian commu-
nities, Vermont pursued a multi-year program
 costing scores of thousands of taxpayer dollars to
ethnically cleanse its history of Abenakis. Appar-
ently beginning in 2001, the State collected evi-
dence only injurious to the idea of an Indian Com-
munity in Vermont.

It is well known that the historic Abenaki of
Vermont retreated to Canada at the end of the
18th century.

Preliminary Report on Abenaki
Petition for Tribal Recognition
state.vt.us.atg (downloaded in 2002)

This technique of “ethnic disconnection” has
been used many times by oppressor states to deny
indigenous rights. The most recent example is Ser-
bian ethnocide, where the Slobodan Milosevic
regime rewrote history to assert that Bosnian
Muslims were “transient” ethnic Albanians with-
out indigenous rights.

So what does all of this history have to do with a
“once and future” independent Vermont.

Vermont’s independent legal status
I suspect that the specter of antecedent and ongo-
ing historical Abenaki rights weighs on Vermont’s
historical and collective ethnic conscience. It lies
so far from Vermont’s protestations of being a pro-
gressive state, the first to outlaw slavery, and its
current status as one of the “blue–states” in the
union. It underlies the myth of Vermont as a
“dark and bloody ground,” an unharnned no
man’s land between the “real” Indians of New
York and the “real” Indians of Maine that we all
grew up with. It underlies the dreary years of Ver-
mont Eugenics Survey, where the state tried to
eliminate the problem by statistics and steriliza-
tion. And it certainly underlies the fear that blos-
soms in the editorial pages of the Burlington Free
Press as recognition becomes a possibility (e.g.
April 1999, and May, 2003), or in the former gover-
nors’ and current Attorney General’s well publi-
cized anti-Abenaki rhetoric.

But try as they might, the lawyers for the state
have not been able to come up with that “golden
piece of paper” which shows that Vermont was lib-
erated from the specter of pre-existing Abenaki
aboriginal rights by treaty or any other legal instru-
ment. And so it must say that the “real” Abenakis
are safely across the border in Canada, without any
residual American claims. And it paints the local
people who claim an Abenaki identity as genetic,
cultural and political frauds, entirely unconnected
with the original inhabitants of Wôbanakik.

Therefore, when we examine the concept of a
sovereign Vermont entity, whether as a state, a
“semi-dependent domestic nation” (such as was
envisioned by the Marshall Supreme Court for
Indian Tribes), or as a sovereign republic of its own,
the whole question of “does Vermont even exist?
under the rule of aboriginal sovereignty and rights
must be asked. As the process of empire and nation-
state breakdown accelerates, the newly freed micro-
states, such as we see emerging from the old Soviet
Union and Communist Europe, or even in Fran-
cophone Canada, must come to grips with their
tribal roots. The tribal reality can be savagely dealt
with as in Bosnia, Chechnya or Sunni Iraq, or it can
be handled by ignoring the whole situation, is does
the pro-independence Quebequois party in Canada.

Thus, the founders of Vermont as we know it,
the Warners, the Allens and their ilk, made a
strategic if unavoidable error. They neither killed
the Abenakis into oblivion, nor took Indian land
by any legal instrument that would hold up in any
court (except perhaps the Vermont supreme
court). So the specter of Abenaki sovereignty
remains as a dark, little remembered dream on the
edges of Vermont’s collective consciousness.

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Hogues, continued from page 1

that Vermont was in fact independent, and had a right to set up such a scheme of government as she chose."

This argument comes straight from John Adams, whose recommendation, delivered to “the Inhabitants of Vermont” by Dr. Thomas Young, led Vermont to form its own government early in 1777. On May 16th of ’76 he wrote: “That it be recommended... where no government sufficient to the exigencies of their affairs hath been hitherto established: to adopt such government, as shall, in the opinion of the representatives of the people, best conduce to the happiness and safety of their constituents in particular, and America in general.” Adams’ argument goes back to principles established by the Magna Carta of 1215, described in Blackstone as “the safety of the whole,” and which Ethan called “the law of self-preservation,” or the right of a community to exist. This right is also stated most clearly; and carried further, in the Vermont Declaration of Independence.

Van de Water states, in The Reluctant Republic (1941), paraphrasing the sentiments expressed by the Allens, Jonas Fay, Thomas Chittenden, and the Green Mountain Boys, that:

the land they had defended against the intrusions of New York should be forever theirs – an independent nation... It must be, without qualification or higher loyalty, the property of the folk who now hold it and their children and their children’s children – a land of freemen, a republic.

Bellesiles, in Revolutionary Outlaws, points out the shocking words heard round the world in Vermont’s Constitution.

That all men are born equally free and independent... Therefore, no male person, born in this country, or brought from oversea, ought to be holden by law, to serve any person, as a servant, slave or apprentice, after he arrives at the age of twenty-one, nor female, in like manner, after she arrives at the age of eighteen.

The Vermont Constitution of 1777 shamed the U.S. Constitution of 1787, which would not bring itself to reach the same, logical conclusion on the subjects of involuntary servitude and slavery. Make no mistake: the Vermont Constitution was powerful, and far more revolutionary than any before it. It was based on the Constitution of Pennsylvania, and radicalized (traced to its root) by the Allens, Chittenden, and the Green Mountain Boys; and it represented true republicanism and was anathema not only to the South, but also to New York. (It was also anathema, it seems, to Isaac Tichenor, Nathaniel Chipman, and the moneyed federalists who slid into power in Vermont after Ethan’s death in February of 1789.)

Bellesiles tells us of an even greater slap in the face delivered by Vermont to the entire colonial structure. The French historian Achar de Bounvouloir in 1778 wrote that Vermonters, led by Ethan, held all colonial charters to be void, their powers superseded by the will of the people. This means that Vermonters did not rely upon legitimacy from a superior authority, past or present, but rather in their own authority, granted to them by nature and nature’s God.

In the story of Vermont’s independence, there are some fascinating incidents. Ethan took Fort Ticonderoga with the Green Mountain Boys, refusing to serve under the duly appointed, would-be commander, Benedict Arnold. General Starke and Colonels Warner and Herrick refused to obey the orders of General Schuyler regarding the deployments of their men in the retreat from Ticonderoga. (This refusal led to their defense of and victory at Bennington, and foiled Burgoyne’s advance.) The young republic attracted the secession of 16 towns from New Hampshire and several from New York. This could not have been a decision that the towns took lightly. Vermont eventually surrendered these towns in order to join the union. That Vermont had the sole authority to surrender them is recognition on the part of Congress, New York and New Hampshire that Vermont was sovereign. Another amusing story in the saga of Vermont independence is the threat by Congress in 1783 to invade the Green Mountain republic. General Washington advised against it.

In their passion for liberty and their hatred of privilege and arbitrary power, the leaders and the people of Vermont considered statehood to be their goal, because in statehood they found sovereignty, freedom and unity. It was the continued rebuffing of their application by Congress that made Vermont a republic.

Whether or not most of the settlers realized that they were living in a republic is debatable, but of little importance. Governor Chittenden would agree that “public acknowledgement of the powers of the earth” is “a mistaken notion of government.” Bellesiles contends in Revolutionary Outlaws that “the region considered itself an independent republic.” However, from the beginning of recorded history to the present time, there are countless examples of people thinking one thing when something else was the case, and of people who disagreed with one another as to the nature of governments.

(’Haiti was an island inhabited by indigenous natives, a slave colony, a republic, a dictatorship, and a democratic republic. Is it now a democracy or a colony with a new Rwandan? Likewise, the people of Chechnya consider themselves Chechhian; and what of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and the Russian republic?)

We may leave legal and political historians to categorize. They have definitively categorized Vermont 1777-1791 as a republic.

But hold... I see in the distance a spectral soldier... to his enemies, more dreaded than death and all its terrors... to his friends, as firm as adamant. It is he with the heart of a lion, the deftness of the wind, the courage of Alexander, and the fierceness of a winter storm. He speaks; and his voice bounds through the hills as the catamount roars:

“I am as Resolutely Determined to Defend the Independence of Vermont, as Congress are that of the United States, and, Rather than fail, will Retire with hardy Green Mountain Boys into the Desolate Caverns of the mountains and wage war with human Nature at large.”

He’s Back.

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“America is lost in a gnarled thicket of bought politicos, corporate con men and media hucksters. But we’re lucky: Lappé has drawn the map that will get us out alive. Read it and get going.”

—GREG PALAST, author, The Best Democracy Money Can Buy
Bryan, continued from page 1

"Life is the art of reaching sufficient conclusions based on insufficient evidence." My friend Bill Mares says: "Maturity is living with ambiguity." Either way, sustained action in the face of ambiguity spells courage. As with love, the greater the cause, the greater the ambiguity.

Question: Do we have the guts to sustain our action in the face of doubt? What we are up to is intellectually complex. To survive we must work through that complexity over the long haul. Tom Wolfe (author of The Right Stuff) says that the most courageous act a human being can attempt is to land a high performance aircraft on an aircraft carrier at night. Why? Not because it takes the "Powder River let ’r buck!” mentality of a cowboy bull rider, but because it takes absolute concentration on the end in sight, while fighting off the fear involved in making a dozen adjustments in your actions during which any single misstep means death. It is being careful and precise when every atom of your being screams, "Go for it!"

We can either be an organization based on easy slogans and gutless emotions like hate that we employ to cover our own insecurities — and if we don’t have any then our critics are right and we ARE nuts — or we can use the right stuff. Understand, this does not mean that the movement should be "intellectualized." Hell no. Without sustained and bold action we die. But it also means, as Hemingway said, grace in the face of danger. For us grace is not a flowing cape and precise dancer’s steps. It is hard and honest thinking.

Bill Clinton was a draft dodger. George Bush Jr. was a draft dodger.

Both statements are cowardly. What we are doing is justified because the most passionate members of both the political parties that rule America subscribe to one of them and not the other. Worse, the other members of America’s ruling elite don’t seem to give a damn if leaders of our major political institutions thus continue to soil themselves in public.

When James Howard Kunstler nastily attacked race car drivers at the Montpelier convention he gave us a perfect example of gutless simplicity — this time (I assume) employed to ingratiate him with his audience. It should have been a learning moment for us. Hate was in his voice. I think he must have felt insecure. But why? Until that moment we were with him! Perhaps calling these kinds of people those kinds of names has become a habit for him.

Whatever the case he exhibited the importance of the third theme that flows from Judy Collin’s lyrics.

Humanity

Question: If there were race car drivers in the audience and Kunstler knew it, would he have said the same things?

Perhaps. What if, however, he lived in a small town in Vermont (Let’s say Washington or East Montpelier near Thunder Road International Speedway). Would he have made these remarks at town meeting in these towns?

No.

Such behavior does not meet the test of human scale. Life is different when you meet folks on the street, at the gas station, in the store. Playwright Jonathan Miller said it best: in order for a relation-

ship to be humane it must be complicated and dutiful. These characteristics are learned best in communities where human interaction is maximized. I will stop and help someone who drives their car into a ditch in Starksboro not because (as Jefferson said) I am a rural person and thus one of "the chosen people of God." I will stop because I have learned over the years that because the person in the ditch may know it’s my truck going by, I may have to explain to him the next time I see him why I didn’t stop.

Were Kunstler a citizen of Williamstown, Vermont or Wilkesboro, North Carolina, if he were not separated in time and space from the citizens of these places, if indeed they were his neighbors and not just statistics he would act differently. He would act humanely.

Thus it is that we must imagine ourselves before a winter’s fire. The birds have flown south. The cold is upon us. A long winter lies ahead. And there is time — a lot of time — that we will be sharing together. For after secession, we will be alone.

The conditions of life on a human scale have for more than two hundred years fashioned the very place we seek to preserve in a new form — an independent republic, the Second Vermont Republic. This is our heritage. This is what makes Vermont special. It is not the scenery. It is not our mountains "stretching straight and true" as Frost said. It is us as we live in our communities — our small towns. It is neither the easy days of summer nor the tourist-filled weeks of autumn. We find ourselves when the colors fade into gray and then white (as Mosher says in his incandescent final paragraph of Alabama Jesses.) We find ourselves when we hunker down, dig in, and see the winter through. We find ourselves when we are alone with each other.

Most of all we find ourselves in our governance. In our two-year term for governor, in our citizen legislature, in our town meetings — the planet’s most single example of real democracy — of democracy as it was meant to be.

A Final Word

As we work toward our independence let us never forget what drives us. We are not doing this to rid ourselves of America. We are doing this to preserve the one place that best represents what America was all about, the one place that best exhibits the values that made America great. We are doing this to re-establish a new smaller America as it was before big government and big business and big media forgot what America was all about.

Let us form a new coalition of left and right fashioned not on the opportunity for political gain, but rather an appreciation for what we have in common — a fear of giant institutions of influence whether they be seen as under public or private control. Exxon or the Defense Department, the U.S. Department of Education or Wal-Mart, Verizon or the FCC, who cares?

The problem is size. For size precludes popular control of either public institutions or the market place.

Let us be as opposed to the governmental imperialism toward citizens in their states and localities, as we are opposed to imperialism outward over the markets and cultures of the world. Let us always understand that for all but the very wealthy in America, mega-bureaucracy is always totalitarian.

Above all let us be civil, tolerant, and aware of the common humanity we share with those with whom we disagree. Let us always “walk a mile in their shoes” before we criticize. For this is the way of Vermont democracy. This means we have more to do than seek common with the Union. We must sustain the passion that drove us to it. And that passion is about what Vermont is and only secondarily about what America is not.

For it is not an independent republic we seek. It is an independent Vermont republic. If we achieve the Republic and lose Vermont — what would be the point?

Listen with me, therefore, to the words of Ralph Nading Hill as he describes Vermonters in his classic Contrary Country.

Rebellions runs through the entire fabric of the lives of this resilient people whose ancestors first came to till a resistant soil. Perhaps because Vermont has so clearly diverged form twentieth century streamlined living, the trait of waywardness has recently been the subject of intense rediscovery by transplants and humorists, as if it were a new discovery on the landscape of New England.

But it is not really new…

Rebellion is their birthright [and] fires of rebellion, which flamed for a hundred years, have not gone out. Coals of protest still smolder in town meetings, under the dome of the state capitol and by phrases spoken by Vermont legislators in Washington…

These words are as true today as they were when they were published in 1950. Rebellion remains our birthright. •

Wiseman, continued from page 7

Quo vadis Vermont?

Vermont is a strange place, with arch-conservative roots that somehow contribute to its odd allure for the most liberal and progressive Americans who still seem to flock here. It is more than its current image as a theme park for people who have made their money elsewhere and want to come here to get away from it all! The battles against Wal-Marts and wind farms seem to reinforce this idea. The Vermont conservatives of the 1970s had their say when they derided the Abenakis for wanting to over-fish and over-hunt Vermont for food, so that game collected by sportsmen would become scarce. The Vermont liberals of the last ten years had their say through their concocted, far fetched scenarios of Abenakis defating big and growing government by setting up casinos to compete with state-sponsored gambling through the Vermont Lottery, and having a land base, perhaps with health and educational institutions, not entirely under “their” government’s control. Thus, it is hard to predict how those who feel most acutely the uniqueness of Vermont and hope for a measure of autonomy, would consider and treat its aboriginal, tribal origins.

But neither Vermont historian nor Vermont pro-independence activist can leave for long the knowledge that somewhere, some time, the Abenakis will have to be full partner in the “real” Vermont of the future. •
Independent Media (Un)Covers The Empire: Project Censored 2006

BOOK REVIEW by Rob Williams

“The Daily Prophet is bound to report the truth occasionally, if only accidentally.”

Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, speaking in J Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince

During times of great upheaval — election fraud, militarism, “terror” attacks, corporate corruption, and war — it is sometimes useful to take refuge in the wisdom of stories told to us as children. In J.K. Rowling’s wildly popular “Harry Potter” series, for example, the Daily Prophet (the wizarding world’s newspaper of record) often serves as little more than a mouthpiece for the Establishment, stenographically serving up “news” that reflects the “spin” of the Ministry of Magic, while chipping away at the reputations of those who challenge the Ministry’s power. Helped along by mentors such as Dumbledore, Harry and his young school mates, wizards-in-training all, begin to realize that much of what passes for official “news” in the Daily Prophet is nothing more than carefully constructed public relations propaganda designed to manipulate wizard hearts and minds.

Popular children’s stories like “Harry Potter” often reveal much about the way the real world works. Remember the classic about the Emperor’s New Clothes? Once upon a time, a rich and powerful emperor ordered snazzy new garments from the tailor with a sense of humor, an outfit consisting of nothing more than his birthday suit. The Emperor proved so taken with his new threads that he refused to acknowledge that he was sans clothing, parading about for the entire world to see. All of his loyal subjects, busy bowing and scraping, couldn’t bring themselves to tell him the truth.

The Emperor was naked.

One person in the crowd—a lone child—refuses to wallow in this exercise in collective denial, deciding not to play along with the Game. And that one child began telling others, who told others, who pointed it out to others, and soon—the story got out.

The Emperor was naked.

In a healthy and functioning democratic society, journalists must play the role of the child in that well-known fable. It is journalists who ask hard questions of the powerful. It is journalists who provide a rigorous accounting of the evidence as it presents itself. It is journalists who report truths about the way the world works, no matter how inconvenient or troubling.

The Empire is naked.

As the United States enters the 21st century, however, its third century as a so-called constitutional Republic, most mainstream American journalists, out of fear, ignorance, or denial, refuse to acknowledge a simple fact about our great country.

The Empire is naked.

The state of our “news” culture (and I use the term loosely) is deeply troubling. The United States is now the most powerful Empire in the world. And, as citizens of the most powerful Empire in world history, Americans had better know what the heck is going on. But when it comes to “news,” Americans live in one of the most heavily censored societies in the world.

The Empire is naked.

“Censorship” in the United States, you say? Preposterous. (Note: we are conditioned from birth to believe exactly the opposite.) Choices, we are told, define our media culture, unlike those oppressive top-down state-run regimes — Cuba, say, or the pre-glasnost Soviet Union — in which state-controlled media tell people what to think. We’ve got dozens of television stations, hundreds of magazines, thousands of radio stations, millions of web sites.

The Empire is naked.

Censorship? Don’t be absurd. Pay no attention to the fact that most Americans surveyed claim to get all of their news and information about the world from television. Or that we see, on average, more than 3,000 advertisements each day. Or that 90% of our media content is owned by one of six transnational corporations. Or that millions of taxpayer dollars are funneled into dozens of federal agencies for the express purpose of subsidizing the manufacture of corporate-friendly “news” — VNRs (video news releases) broadcast daily on millions of American TV sets without being identified as such. Or that Big Business spends more than 1 trillion dollars each year on powerful advertising, marketing, and branding campaigns that influence the ways we think, feel, buy, and behave. Just ignore such inconvenient facts.

“Manufacturing consent” is just a well-worn cliché quoted by smug Chomskyites in a desperate attempt to sell books to cynics and justify their own pathetic academic existence.

The Empire is naked.

“Denial” is not just a river in Egypt. Fortunately, though, for those who care about hard-hitting investigative journalism, we’ve got one of those little boys from the fable in our midst. Every year for the past three decades, Sonoma State University’s Department of Sociology has produced a powerful little book called “Project Censored” (PC), reporting on the “top 25” censored stories ignored or suppressed by our corporate-financed mainstream media culture of “news” (and remember, I use the term loosely). More than 250 people — students, staff, community experts, guest writers — all worked this past year to collectively create one of the most powerful antidotes to the denial that is rampant in our society.

The Empire is naked.

And what a year 2005 was for obfuscation, diversion, spin, disinformation, and yes, denial, on the screens and in the pages of the U.S. mainstream press. Want to know how many Iraqis have been killed in modern Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization? (The “best-estimate” answer — more than 100,000. Wondering if any lingering questions about the 911 “terrorist” attacks exist? (The answer — enough unanswered questions to fill several books.) How “bout that “Oil For Food” program? Concerned about Big Brother, the Patriot Act, and the arrival of a post-911 “surveillance society”? What happened during the 2004 presidential “election” (and I use “THAT” term loosely) anyway? Questioning why the new Department of Homeland Security seems congenitally incapable rooting out and then rooting the bad guys? “Project Censored” (PC) will answer all these questions for you, but only because mainstream news has done such a lousy job of the same.

The Empire is naked.

Indeed, PC 2006 is a sobering read, but the information is presented in an accessible manner. Each “censored story” is summarized in just a few lively pages, complete with URL links to web sites containing further information for research, and an “update” section from experts who’ve continued to track each “censored” story up to the date of publication. Tom Tomorrow cartoons pepper the book, adding retro-spite and much-needed chuckles along the way. The “Junk News” section reminds us what stories dominated the headlines — Ashton and Demi, the Michael Jackson imbroglio, etc. — no need to remind you of them here. Meanwhile, PC 2006 provides more in-depth accounts of critical but ignored events of the past year — unanswered 911 questions (Read archived stories from our own “911 Reconsidered” issue at www.vtcommons.org/journal); the theft of the 2004 presidential “election” (remember, a loose term, subject to slpppage); Junk Science; and the cozy relationship between the military/industrial complex and corporate media owners, to name but a few.

The Empire is naked.

Strangely, perhaps, my annual reading of “Project Censored,” like my reading of “Harry Potter,” always provides me with some glimmers of hope. Independent investigative journalism has been much marginalized within the mainstream in the United States, yes, but it is very much alive and well if one knows where to look. Dozens of bright young college students at Sonoma State are receiving the kind of training they’ll need to be actual investigative journalists, instead of simply serving as “stenographers to power” as they come of age. Hundreds of thoughtful people collectively bend their minds each year to the age-old task of excavating and presenting uncomfortable but important truths about the world’s inequalities and injustices.

The Empire is naked.

Inspired books like Project Censored 2006, meanwhile, remind us that, here in the Green Mountain State, it is time to clothe ourselves with the truth, and put our energies toward re-invention.

Long live the Second Vermont Republic.
What Is “Independence”?

Bill Brueckner

Independence: not subject to control by others, synonyms: self-government, autonomy, self-rule, self-determination, freedom, liberty and individualism; the antonym is dependence.

The desire for independence of the people within the colonies from direct, despotic control by King George led to the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, that declared we have unalienable rights endowed by our creator that include the rights to “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” The word “Liberty” was used to describe Independence. Other than in the title, Independence, it is not mentioned. Liberty has the same definition as independence and is used interchangeably. I regard the word independence as the noun form to describe a state of being; liberty as the verb form of independence describing active participation in any activity. Our Constitution provides for a Republican form of government and the rule of law, and demonstrates continuity to the Declaration of Independence. “We the People of the United States” created our nation to secure the people Independence, not only from King George but also from control by any authority. Independence is not mentioned in the Constitution. Liberty is used in its place in the Constitution’s preamble: “and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity”.

The continuity of our nation’s founding principles is evident in the Vermont Constitution, born on July 9, 1793, as well. Vermont is an independent Republic created under the US Constitution’s guarantee to all states of a Republican form of government. Independence is mentioned once in the Vermont Constitution while liberty is used in six articles/sections. Vermont Constitution: “That every member of society hath a right to be protected in the enjoyment of life, liberty, and property, and therefore is bound to contribute the member’s proportion towards the expense of that protection…” This Article is the authority for state government to raise money that clearly states the only reason why “every member of society” must contribute is to protect our right to enjoy liberty. With the limitation to use tax money for protection of our enjoyment of liberty, along with the lack of constitutional authority to make law to direct our actions and interrupt liberty, it is clear government has no authority to be a service provider for education, health care, welfare, economic development, control the economy, or job creation.

Our founders understood that the Republican form of government that places the law above all persons including those holding the seats of government was the only means of protecting independence, as well as all other rights. This design of government was implemented to protect all from tyrants who would rule us rather than represent us according to the law. The founders of our nation amended the Constitution in 1791 with ten amendments called the Bill of Rights to further protect us from a government of tyrants. Each amendment is a command to government:

Amendment 1: Congress shall make no law…regarding religion, speech or the press, right to assembly and to petition government for redress of grievances. Amendment 2: the right to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. Amendment 4: right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects shall not be violated only exception is probable cause that a crime has been committed. Amendment 5: requires a grand jury indictment for a capital crime, prevents double jeopardy, prohibits self-incrimination, and prevents government from seizing your rights to life liberty or property without due process of law and prevents government taking your property for public use without just compensation. Amendment 6: right to a speedy public trial, impartial jury, to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation, the right to confront witnesses, right to council and a compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor. Amendment 7: the right to a jury trial in federal civil trials. Amendment 8: Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted. Amendment 9: Prevents the courts from inferring from the silence of the Constitution that an unlisted right is unavailable to protect individuals from government. Amendment 10: The people are free to act, without permission outside the scope of the federal government’s powers.

The Bill of Rights is a restatement of our right to independence, and the liberty to participate in any act we wish, as long as it does not interfere with the rights of another. The Bill of Rights establishes a legal system of protections that recognizes the imperfections of people, and provides for fairness and equity even when laws are broken and the rights of another are violated.

The Constitution also establishes the authorities of government and a system of checks and balances in its different branches to provide that those who hold the seats of government will govern as an umbrella, one under which all people are allowed to participate in the enjoyment of their lives, free from interference and control. All those in federal, state and local government are required to take an oath to support the Constitution, and state legislators and officers must take oaths to both the US and State Constitutions.

We no longer have statesmen and stateswomen who occupy the seats of government. All are political hacks of a two party mob that have changed the basic design of this nation.

No longer are laws limited to the authorities granted by the Constitutions that cite penalties to those that would violate the rights of another and create injury or harm. The purpose of law has been changed to order dependency, creating classes of winners and losers, forcing people into and out of contracts, asserting control on people’s actions, and creating situation in which the government is superimposing controls on people’s property and all other rights.

This is the antonym of independence!

This is in denial of each person’s sovereignty, self-government, autonomy, self-rule, self-determination, freedom, liberty and individualism and right to be independent from authoritarian control. Those who hold the seats of government at every level (federal, state and local) have criminally assaulted independence and liberty. The destruction of our rights has been perpetrated against “We the people…” by a two party mob who violate their oaths, assume and assert powers they do not have, with a blatant disregard for the commands of fundamental principles placed on them by the Bill of Rights.

The right of Independence has degenerated to nothing more than the gleam in the eye of a few remaining patriots. This can never be turned around until the governance of the country is returned to the authorities and limits of authority of the Constitutions.

Vermont Constitution, Article 18: That frequent recurrence to fundamental principles, and a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, industry, and frugality are necessary to preserve the blessings of liberty, and keep government free; the people ought, therefore to pay particular attention to these points, in the choice of officers and representatives, and have a right, in a legal way, to exact a due and constant regard to them, from their legislators and magistrates, in making and executing such laws as are necessary for the good government of the state.

The burden is on us to reinstate independence.

Your government is what you allow.
DISPERSIONS  

By Kirkpatrick Sale

The Middlebury Institute: The Logic of American Secession

By Kirkpatrick Sale

It has been well and truly said that an effective speech should last no longer than the time it takes the average man to make love.

So in conclusion…

No, I can’t wrap up just yet.

Let’s pretend we’re talking not about the average man but about Vermonters—that will give me a few more minutes.

So that I can tell you about the Middlebury Institute. This is a think tank, devoted to the study of separatism, secession, and self-determination, born out of the Radical Consultation that we held just a year ago at the Middlebury Inn, and at present exists in Cold Spring, New York (not coincidentally at my house). That can be so because the Middlebury Institute is an idea, a VISION, that can locate anywhere, not necessarily in Middlebury—though indeed I would hope someday that we could have a real presence there.

That idea, that vision, is essentially to make separatism a political reality and put secession on the national agenda, encouraging and supporting secessionist movements, and working toward the eventual dissolution of the American empire. Our initial letter setting out our aims and rationale is available, along with the Middlebury Declaration that came out of the same Radcon meeting, in envelopes at the front of the hall.

And if you wish to be a part of our processes, please provide your name and addresses at the sign-up sheet there.

But in a word, the Middlebury Institute exists to make secession in this country REAL. By showing that it is

1. Legally feasible
2. Economically viable
3. Politically possible, and
4. Eminently desirable.

ONE — Legally feasible, because the Constitution, which says nothing about secession, reserves powers not delegated to the U.S. to the states or the people, and that has to include the power of secession. In addition, when the Confederate states were seceding in the 19th century, Congress considered an amendment forbidding secession—meaning that such a provision wasn’t there in the first place. Moreover, “any people anywhere”—and here I am quoting—“being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable, a most sacred right.”

— Abraham Lincoln

and any secessionist state would work to increase its self-sufficiency through careful development of these existing resources instead of letting them be exploited by out-of-state interests. Besides, it would no longer have to pay Federal income, gasoline, telephone, and other taxes, or support Federal army bases and offices. Right now, seventeen states pay more to the Federal government than they get back in benefits, some way more, and they would get to keep these funds — another 25 get only a negligibly greater return from Washington over what they pay in. And besides, a secessionist state doesn’t cut itself off from the rest of the world just because it is independent—it could continue to trade with other states and nations for what necessities it could not produce itself.

THREE — Politically possible, because as James Kunstler [author of The Long Emergency] convincingly told us this morning, the crises around peak oil and the end of a gasoline economy, and the disruptions caused by the alarming increase of global warming, will require greater dependency on local communities, bioregions, and coherent states. I’ve been told that secession is no remedy because we all will be hit by the consequences of a global warming that respects no boundaries. But the fact is that an independent state is far more able to come up with means of dealing with these consequences because it could confront them on a local and doable level, and if anyone thinks that comprehension of these problems, much less solutions to them, is going to come from a national level, they’re living in Cloud Cuckoo Land whose capital is Crawford, Texas. Moreover, if secession becomes simply a necessary way for certain populations to survive in the Long Emergency, no Federal government is going to be able to stop it.

And finally, FOUR — it is eminently desirable, because as has become increasingly evident in the last four years it is intolerable for a citizen to succumb to a government that is OPPOSED TO the Geneva Convention, the international criminal court, international law, the U.N., test-ban treaties, the Kyoto treaty, budget controls, civil rights, Social Security, an independent judiciary, OPPOSED TO homosexuality and gay marriage, condoms, abortion, Plan B pills, medical marijuana, stem cell research, evolution and all of science, gun control, democratic elections, clean air and water, conservation and alternative energy, endangered species, and a free and democratic republic with the right to secession… and is IN FAVOR of unjust and unjustified warfare, brutal torture in defiance of all conventions, illegal detentions, the fostering of terrorism, war profiteering, sky-high trade deficits, cronies and corporate insiders in high office, weak and incompetent Federal agencies, IN FAVOR OF Patriot Act infringements, illegal surveillance, tax cuts for the rich, corporate control of elections, lawmaking by lobbyists, political and corporate corruption, government secrecy and unaccountability, IN FAVOR OF global warming, acid rain, smokestack pollution, creationism, born-again evangelicalism, eminent Armageddon and Rapture, and a deceitful and dangerous neo-con commitment to global hegemony — it is intolerable, I say, for a citizen to live under such a government, in such a country. That is not a country I want to live in. That is a country I am incapable of loving. But I have no intention of going to Canada, or France. I love my home… and I want to leave this country without leaving home. And the only way, ladies and gentlemen, the only way to do that is…SECESSION.

I know that even now some of you are doubtful about whether such a course can succeed, so I want to conclude with a favorite story of mine for doubters and naysayers, about how things can work out when they seem most impossible, if we are but willing to use our imaginations and a little common sense.

A story about a man in a far-off tribe who had 17 horses, which he left to his sons in his will with the proviso that the eldest son get one half of them, the middle son one third, and the youngest son one ninth.

Well this was a great puzzlement to the sons, because it was impossible to divide 17 horses that way, so they went to the village elder, an old woman known for her wisdom in all matters.

Hearing their predicament, she said, well, I’ll tell you what I’ll do — I’ll give you one of my horses, and then you’ll have 18.

The rest is easy — half of 18 is 9, for the eldest, and a third of 18 is 6, for the next, and a ninth of 18 is 2, for the youngest.

And then you there will be 9, plus 6, which is 15, plus 2, which is 17 — and then you can give me my extra horse back when you’re done!”

The Middlebury Institute, I am here to say, will be that village elder. •