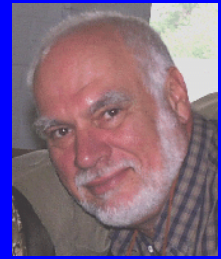


**BLOWING THE WHISTLE
ON HIJACKED U.S. VALUES**



George F. Simons

Wrap Up 2003

Had enough Viagra ads? I don't mean spam. I mean in politics. The US men's movement encourages men to distinguish between manliness and machismo. With close to 2 million monthly hits, www.menstuff.org concerns itself with whatever makes men healthy, spiritually and politically as well as physically. In January 2003, just as the Administration's propaganda campaign for the Iraq War was cresting, I was invited to contribute a monthly column to this site.

I chose to create a series of op-ed articles called *Bellicose Veins* to examine the strains of mental virus being used to override the US cultural immune system and stimulate the body politic to march deeper into the Middle East. Working abroad much of the time had me feeling ineffectual in influencing what was going on at home. But, it also had the advantage of letting me see how others see us, as well as of how we see ourselves. Here is how we have been examining some of the US cultural values during the past year.

1. "Manifest Destiny: the Promised Land is Everywhere"—How are individual entitlement and our love of challenging frontiers are being used to support economic expansionism and political imperialism? Do we have a perpetual right to bigger, better, more...?

2. "Frontier Justice"—19th century cowboy heroes of our collective fantasy are used in the 21st century to justify taking international law into our own hands to defeat the "bad guy." Will today's self-appointed federal marshals and sheriffs selflessly ride off into the sunset after the shootout at Baghdad Corral?

3. "Dynamics of Defamation"—Jingoistic rhetoric is perverting public moral sensitivity into black-and-white, good-and-evil labels for people. Indignant righteousness becomes the cover-up for fear and leads us to undermine our own civil and human rights. What will become of the pluralistic community that our diversity efforts have been building for generations?

4. "One Nation, indivisible under God"—While we value strict separation of church and state to protect freedom of belief from coercion by religious groups, a blatant Christian right sectarianism is being invited to dominate US civil religion. Manipulating familiar symbols and slogans, will we allow it to seduce individuals and co-opt religious organizations into supporting "crusades" against "the enemy?"

5. "High and compelling ideals—are we Control Freaks?"—Are we idealists or materialists or some combination of both? Certainly folks in the US are driven to achieve success and master their environment. At what cost to ourselves and our future?

6. Playing with the Dark Angel of Abstraction—the US love of play and technology is turned into fascination with "clean" battlefield prowess that abstracts from the human cost of

violence. War is just another video game. Does your play station make you clean up the battlefield or look to the social or environmental fallout of the engagement?

7. Co-opted Patriotism—Instead of taking advantage of diverse values and perspectives in crisis, politicians define patriotism to exclude those who would oppose or question them. Telling the same stories over and over until nothing else can be heard, they are now free to do whatever they want, as panicked people buy duct tape to seal their windows instead of their ears.

8. "War for Peace"—Paradoxically US Americans believe that worthwhile things take time and effort. At the same time, we love to get something for nothing and make things happen. This ambivalence in our mental software allows political hackers to insert a delusional code into our programming—it's called "war for peace."

9. "Learning Non-Violent Communication"—How we choose and use words can often block communication despite our good will. We reviewed some of the principles developed by the Center for Non-Violent Communication to remove even unintended aggression from how we speak.

10. "Testosterone Poisoning"—Penis power seems to be integral to the national identity now, with women pictured as desiring it as much as men. Where is this monomaniacal need, reflected in endless waves of spam, coming from? Is there no other less penile way to establish the US identity and influence?

11. "Literary Violence for Children—and the rest of us"—Taking a look at popular literature, we see books and films created for children that capture adults as well with a sense of lawlessness and justified violence. How can we stay creatively childlike without being stubborn and belligerent children?

12. "Both hands full —a case for diversity in thinking patterns"—There is a difference between knowing what is right and wrong and making everything either right or wrong, or worse, good and evil. Even friends can have a good passionate argument in search of the truth once this is understood and accepted.

I am proud to have among my friends, both those who served in Vietnam and those who resisted the war. Resisters to Vietnam sometimes desecrated US symbols, e.g., burning flags, to express deeply felt values. Feeling alienated, they acted so and made themselves outsiders. Today's objectors must insist that our US identity and culture are truly ours and take them back when they are being hijacked. That is an important aim of this column.

Bellicose Veins will continue in 2004 to encourage you to examine our cherished symbols and beliefs and to claim them and reassert them in all their integrity when caricatures of them are being used to manipulate and ultimately destroy our public good sense. You are invited to contribute to this column. Write service@diversophy.com with your reactions and ideas.