

KeyOpinion

Independence Day — 2006

Richard L. Hershatter
Contributing Columnist

*Then conquer we must,
When our cause, it is just,
And this be our motto:
In God is our trust.
And the star-spangled banner
In triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free
And the home of the brave.*

(Francis Scott Key, 1814)

In four short days, this blessed nation will be celebrating its two hundred thirtieth birthday.

The warrior heroes of 1776 and the courageous pioneers who framed the Declaration of Independence and spelled out the freedoms enshrined in the Constitution provided a beacon of hope to people everywhere. Their wisdom provided a foundation that has lasted down through the ages, attracting to these shores the ancestors of most of you reading this column.

And if you have read this far, do not despair. This column is not about immigration, "illegal" or otherwise. We confess to confusion about what makes an immigrant illegal, but suspect that the term is somewhat analogous to "illegitimate child." The importance is not with the adjective, but with the manner in which the immigrant or child got here.

However we describe them, the child is still a child and the immigrant is still an immigrant. The former will grow up and vote foolishly, and the latter will keep large parts of our economy running, in spite of their category.

We celebrate the 4th of July because wise men contemplated and created this nation as "the land of the free, and the home of the brave." And thanks to brave men and women in successive generations, through wars civil and foreign, through prosperity and depres-

sion, the United States has remained true to the vision of its founders.

The sons and daughters of each wave of arrivals on these shores carried on the tradition of bravery, with heroes brave enough to fight and die to keep the dream alive. It is fitting and proper that the fourth be celebrated not only with fireworks, (like the immigrants, both legal and illegal) but also with contemplation of how the original concept is holding up.

We are still the home of the brave.

But is this still the land of the free? Are citizens of the United States of America still as free as the founding fathers contemplated?

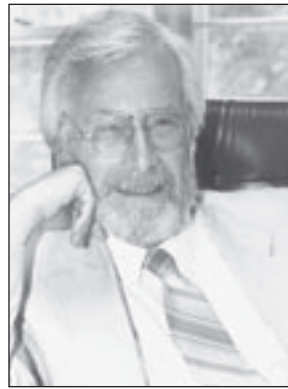
Time was when an American citizen could travel wherever he wished in the world, to any country willing to grant him a visa and take his dollars. There were some logical restrictions, of course — one couldn't travel to a country with which we were at war, except well armed and as part of an expeditionary force.

If one wished to visit a country that was unsafe for our citizens, we'd get a stern warning from the State Department that we were on our own, but we were free to go. Freedom meant freedom, and the government had no business interfering with it.

Sad to say, times seem to have changed, with a corrosion of the citizen's right to go anywhere at any time. Washington's politicians have taken it upon themselves to decide which dictatorships are acceptable destinations for tourists and which are not.

China today is okay for the tourist; Cuba is not.

We are not at war with either country. Both are ruled



by restrictive regimes, but each is relatively safe for travelers. Why the distinction?

Because our founding fathers had a healthy distrust of big-brother-government, they set up an ingenious system of checks and balances, with three separate, but equal branches acting as a check on each other.

In recent years, however, even that safeguard is being chipped away, and individual freedoms are eroded. What has been labeled the "imperial presidency" has assumed the right to effect warrantless eavesdropping, without first securing the protective acquiescence of a court.

Citizen sensibilities are supposedly soothed by the bureaucratic claim that no one should object if they "have nothing to hide."

That misses the point. In a free society, individuals are entitled to their privacy, and freedom means the right to retain personal communications private simply because they are no one else's business.

Half way through a calendar year is not normally a time for resolutions, but as we gather together next week to celebrate the nation's beginnings, let us resolve to protect, defend and salvage the freedoms so dearly gained for us by those who have gone before.

*And the rockets red glare,
The bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night
That our flag was still there.
Oh say, does that star-spangled
Banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free
And the home of the brave?*

(Key, 1814)

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The Aliens are Here

Tom Burgum
Contributing Columnist

The aliens are indeed here and we don't mean extraterrestrials or our friends from south of the border. I have come to believe that we are now victims of some re-write of the cult film, "Invasion of the Body Snatchers." This 1978 film finds the hero returning to his hometown in California to find old friends and neighbors acting in strange ways and incapable of intelligent thought. He soon finds that they have been invaded by alien "pods" capable of replicating humans and taking possession of their minds and bodies. Anyone viewing the news from around the United States and the world can easily come to the conclusion that aliens have now taken possession of the minds of many in the political, artistic and academic world.

The aliens have certainly gotten to the people involved in the World Naked Bike Ride. The sponsors of the bike ride said it all. "On June 10, 2006, cities across the world will experience the naked joy of the world's largest naked protest against oil dependency and car culture in the history of humanity. It is time to stop indecent exposure to automobile emissions and to celebrate the power and individuality of our bodies! Naked Bicycle People Power!" Why people believe riding naked through urban areas will persuade anyone of anything except perhaps to convince them that most humans ought to be fully clothed at all times — some of us even in private.

It is reported that one man even had a political message on his bare bottom. Says Mark Steyn of the Chicago Sun Times, "I was impressed by the way the acres of sagging mottled flesh stayed ruthlessly on message: 'Re-Elect Gore' was the slogan on one man's bottom, as fetchingly dimpled as a Palm Beach Chad, while beneath the 'Gore' on his butt, his upper thighs proudly proclaimed 'No War' (left leg) 'For Oil' (right leg). 'I'd rather have this Bush for President' read one lady's torso with an arrow pointing down to the presidential material in question." Steyn concluded with the observation that, "It's as if the republic itself is now divided into a red buttock and a blue buttock permanently cleaved by the bicycle seat of

war." On the other hand, even Gore's most vocal critics would have to agree that Al Gore does not deserve to be touted on some naked bike-rider's bottom.

The world of art is not free from alien take over. While I hesitate to enter the art world after Dick Hershatter's learned discussion in this publication a few weeks ago, there is clear evidence that aliens have invaded the Tate Modern Museum in London. It seems a well known and highly regarded modern artist named Martin Creed has created an alleged work of art which is nothing more than a recording of nine minutes of the artist making flatulent sounds into a microphone. It is then played back on a loop throughout the museum. The artistic rendering is entitled, "Work No. 401." One hesitates to ask about his other 400 works. The Times also reported that, "Creed is best known for 'Work No. 227: The Lights Going On and Off,' his Turner Prize-winning installation, in which a pair of gallery lights were programmed to turn on and off at regular intervals." Prize winning? Absolutely!

Vulgar or Avant-Garde?

The Tate Gallery ought not be too proud of their new "art" presentation. In 1956 and 1957, the same sounds contained in Mr. Creed's "Work No. 401" could be heard throughout the barracks of the 6th Infantry Regiment in Berlin, Germany. At the time our youth and lack of sophistication lead us to believe we were only vulgar; little did we know we were avant-garde artists.

At first blush the next news item seems to herald a new relationship between France and America. According to the National Review only one person has been named an honorary citizen of Paris since Picasso and that person is an American. The American is the poet



and author, Mumia Abu-Jamal. Truly remarkable, but yet again alien influence seems to be at work. Abu-Jamal was convicted of murdering a Philadelphia policeman by shooting him five times — the first time in the back. He was convicted by the testimony of four eyewitnesses but he has become an international celebrity while imprisoned. His case is currently on appeal before the Federal District Court in Philadelphia and he is supported by such notable organizations as the European Parliament, the San Francisco City Council, Amnesty International and Rage Against the Machine (whoever they are). The National Review also reported that he also will be honored by naming a street in the Paris suburb of St. Denis, "Rue Mumia Abu-Jamal." I wonder if the Parisians have considered other such notables as Pol-Pot or even Joe Stalin. Pol Pot killed over one million Cambodians and Stalin's rule led to the death of 30 to 40 million Russians. Forget naming a street — to be fair one would need a whole district to do either of them proper honor.

Finally, the aliens hit Michigan education hard. The Michigan Department of Education banned the use of "America" or "Americans" as synonyms for the United States and its inhabitants — meaning you and me. The Michigan Education Assessment Program decreed that the word "America" or "Americans" could only be applied to the whole Western Hemisphere. They seem to believe the rest of the folks resent not being called American. You think this might work? Just tell someone from Toronto, Canada, that, despite his preference, he is really an American. Your next undertaking will be to explain what you mean before he knocks you on your politically correct butt. Hell, Mexican illegals in America call themselves Mexicans and carry Mexican flags in their demonstrations. Say what you will about our uninvited guests, they know what makes one a Mexican and what makes one an American — and the Michigan Education Assessment be damned.

I know "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" was fiction and filmed in Pittsburgh. Still, when I look at what is going on in the world, I find myself compelled to believe it is a documentary filmed in San Francisco.