

Opinion

Liberty celebration used to flaunt U.S. narcissism

Newsweek has published a special issue. ABC will telecast the event. Commemorative coins have been issued, awards will be bestowed by the president and, even more, Frank Sinatra will sing. The Statue of Liberty, 100 years old and all gussied up, is going to get a party. It is clear, we love that statue. It is just as clear that we love ourselves more.



Richard Cohen

The statue has earned our affection, and there is nothing wrong with bathing it with fireworks and showering it with praise. It is a mighty monument, almost sacred to some, that says more about America — the reality and the myth — than any other work of man or nature. The statue is our statement: an outstretched arm, a welcome and the promise, sometimes false, that you can be

what you want to be. For many immigrants, that promise was kept.

But the celebration of the statue's 100th anniversary is fast becoming more than a birthday party for a national symbol. Like the 1984 Olympics before it, it is becoming an excuse for celebrating not just who we are as a nation but our self-proclaimed superiority as well. We are no longer just different or distinct. We are number one.

In the last several years, the United States has gone from resurgent nationalism to outright narcissism. We can't get enough of ourselves. We no longer just celebrate distinctive American traits — our culture, our ethic — but proclaim them the best. Free enterprise capitalism, which on the whole has been a boon to America, is prescribed as panacea. We are confident we have the kinks worked out and think the whole world ought to adopt it.

The new narcissism has given rise to a new kind of isolationism. Unlike the old

isolationism, the urge is not to withdraw into our own continent so much as it is to ignore the wishes and the sensibilities of the rest of the world. We have, for instance, slowly diminished the importance of the United Nations. We have withdrawn entirely from UNESCO. We walked out of the World Court when Nicaragua went before it to complain of U.S. attempts to topple its government. The trend and the results are clear: We are more on our own than we used to be.

Similarly, the United States went it alone when it came to the Libyan air strike. Aside from the British permitting the use of NATO air bases, the rest of the Western Alliance would not go along. They had their doubts; we dismissed them. For what seemed like good reasons at the time, we bombed a sovereign country, killed the child of its leader, and now have reason to wonder if we retaliated against the right country. Is it possible that Syria is behind

most terrorism?

America, though, shows no doubts. It is in no mood to second-guess itself — not on Libya, not on SALT II, not on stoking the fires of counterinsurgencies all over the world. Our righteousness is proclaimed by the president and lesser politicians, and blessed in the most sanctimonious terms by preachers. From the former we are told we are right; from the latter we are told that God is on our side. Like Iran under the Ayatollah, both have fused religion and politics into iron conviction. We do God's work and, by golly, we do it well.

Some will say this narcissism is a product of the preceding era of national doubt. The war in Vietnam and the scandal of Watergate all caused us to question what sort of people we were. We were hard on ourselves, but then we had reason to be. The saddest monument in America commemorates the dead of Vietnam — and those are only some of that war's victims. A nation as

powerful as ours can do a lot of damage when it is wrong. Its first obligation should be humility, caution and prudence: all true conservative virtues. But now we run those barricades of virtue with little patience. We are insufferably sure we are right. As a nation, we wear one of those "Damn, I'm Good" buttons.

Everyone loves a party and, for sure, the Statue of Liberty deserves one. But this party is fast becoming another episode in a national binge — a bender of yahooism, chauvinism and narcissism by a country whose greatness is manifest and hardly needs to be so brassily proclaimed.

The old lady in the harbor is being used. The party we claim is for her is really for ourselves, and the noise is getting awful. Walt Whitman listened and heard America singing. Now it blows it owns horn.

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Conservative should take note of his target's advice

The New American, a conservative rag of little worth and even less renown, regards itself as a champion of traditional American values.



Michelle Powe

The magazine's writers continually are assailing people who oppose their views as nonpatriots, communists, liberals and the like. No one to the left of Adolf Hitler is safe from these maniacal mudslingers.

But now the magazine has turned on an American institution; it has attacked one of the very traditions it claims to be protecting. Paranoia does strange things to people.

In the June 16 issue, *New American* writer John F. McManus — also syndicated by the John Birch Society Features — lambastes columnist Ann Landers,

who he says "has consistently promoted a variety of leftist causes." Ann Landers?

McManus is disgusted with Landers because, in a May column, she actually expressed optimism that the United States might be able to cooperate with the Soviets now that that country is led by Mikhail Gorbachev — a man McManus calls "one of world's bloodiest tyrants."

The bloody tyrant reference apparently stems from charges that the Soviets scatter booby-trapped toys in Afghan villages and place plastic mines in the paths of civilians.

Of course the fact that our own Central Intelligence Agency has published a do-it-yourself murder manual, telling its readers how to slit enemies' throats, how to go about assassinating government officials and how to start revolutions, gives us plenty of room to criticize. McManus is upset with Landers be-

cause rather than condemning the Soviets, "she used the occasion to exult about the great possibilities for peace now present because of Mikhail Gorbachev's arrival on the scene." What a crime against this nation.

We certainly wouldn't want anyone advocating international peace. No way.

And we certainly wouldn't want anyone to try to be rational about the Soviets and to work toward establishing good relations with them rather than slinging hysterical criticisms and causing even more fear and distrust. Nope. Uh uh.

Any red-blooded, God-fearing American knows there's no such good thing as a good communist. You can't trust 'em.

Better dead than red.

Damn the torpedos, full speed ahead.

McManus says Landers has misled millions of Americans with her political views. (Landers may be respected worldwide for her advice to the lovers, but whether people turn to her column everyday for political direction is questionable.) She's in favor of nuclear disarmament. She's in favor of gun control. She's pro-choice.

Maybe the fact that Landers has 70 million readers in 1,000 newspapers in this country means she's in touch with the American people and their views.

The *New American* certainly can't boast such a readership. Could it be that these extreme right-wingers don't have their fingers on the pulse of America after all?

Maybe McManus ought to write to Ann Landers for political advice. It certainly couldn't hurt.

Michelle Powe is a senior journalism major and editor for *The Battalion*.

Mail Call

Opposite interpretation

EDITOR:

Possible social effects of cultural artifacts popular with today's youth is, I believe, a worthy topic for the Opinion Page. Loren Steffy's recent column, "Robot heroes promote awe for machines, not men," was an enjoyable example.

However, Steffy may have overextended his critical enthusiasm in slamming the movie "Tron." Indeed, this movie is open to exactly the opposite interpretation to that given it by the Opinion Page editor. The "good" anthropomorphized software and hardware characters in this movie are in awe of the "users" — the human programmers.

The climax of this movie is the destruction of the "evil" central processing unit which has attempted to block commands by the "users." Thus, the movie appears to glorify human control of technology, rather than the technology itself.

Steffy, then, need not be so glum in his assessment of media-presented role models for today's youth. I recommend he view "Tron" again.

John M. Montgomery

Laundry money

EDITOR:

I was registered in a volleyball class at the beginning of the semester and I dropped the class and added bowling. This class is for my required P.E. 199.

My volleyball instructor told the class that the University charges \$12 for all P.E. classes to cover the cost of laundry for our gym clothes.

However, when I dropped the volleyball class and added the bowling class, I was not refunded the \$12. The bowling class does not require gym clothes, so why should the University charge students taking bowling \$12 for laundry?

Moreover, students taking bowling are required to pay an additional \$11 for rental of bowling shoes and lanes at the Memorial Student Center. Why can't the University put the \$12 charged to bowling students toward the cost of shoe rental and lanes?

I feel that this practice adopted by the University is unfair and hope that someone can clear my doubts. I further hope that the answer will not be "It's a required-fee."

Joseph Varaquese
Class of '86

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