

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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## Senior faces world fraught with peril

My four years at Columbia are coming to an end. During these four years a new world has emerged, a world quite unlike that which would have faced me and my fellow prospective graduates had we been four years older. Although the world of 1991 may indeed harbor future possibilities for the improvement of mankind, it is everywhere fraught with danger and uncertainty.

In comparison, the 1980s were a time of simplicity. The “bad guys” were easily distinguishable from the “good guys”; who was who was of course dependent on one’s political beliefs. Everything was a question of opposites, the opposing camps manned by those who liked, and those who disliked, President Ronald Reagan. The Israelis were wrong or right, and the Arabs were right or wrong. The white minority in South Africa was wrong or in a difficult position, and the black majority was right or deluded. Communism was still around, providing another convenient watershed to divide left and right, Democrat and Republican. Opinions on the military buildup, arms control, binary chemical weapons, Nicaragua/El Salvador, Radio Marti, and Angola all depended on one’s

attitude toward communism.

Meanwhile fundamental changes were taking place in American society. Crack appeared, as did the AIDS epidemic. What were once radical positions on issues of race, gender and "sexual orientation" became cliches of midstream, moderate American political discourse.

Yet more than anything else it was the collapse of communism that destroyed not only the simple ordering of American politics, but the balance of power in the entire world. The current crisis in the Persian Gulf is unfortunately but a test of things to come. As long as the world was, for all intents and purposes, in the hands of the United States and the Soviet Union, relative peace was the rule; neither country wanted war, and neither country was willing to risk large numbers of its own citizens for the sake of territorial expansion.

In Saddam Hussein, the world is faced by a ruler who is willing to bring utter ruin on his country, and death to millions of his people. The former paragon of the crazy Third World leader, Libya's Moammar Qaddafi, was never willing to do this. His campaign of terror, for example, ceased abruptly when Reagan's air strike indicated that the United States was no longer willing to put up with such behavior.

Israel can no longer be blamed for all strife in the Middle East. The recent bloodbath in Lebanon proves once again (if proof were needed) that Arab kills Arab with astonishing frequency and without the slightest hesitation. The world cried out when Israeli police shot 21 Arabs while attempting to control a riot. Only several days later, no one said a word when over 700 Arabs died in Syrian-sponsored fighting in Lebanon.

In South Africa, the white minority government appears willing to negotiate peaceful reform. Yet internecine tribal strife claims shocking numbers of people in unspeakably cruel ways. Women and children are murdered in cold blood with knives; occupants of a train are slaughtered. It is all too clear that the end of white minority rule will usher in an era of horrible bloodletting.

A united Germany appears solidly on the road to economic domination of Europe within years; fears of German militarism are rightly voiced. Thousands of neo-Nazis march in the cities of the former East Germany, giving the Hitler salute and yelling "Heil!" Japan continues its economic expansion and debates modifying its constitution to permit the formation of a real army.

In Eastern Europe, the end of communist rule has meant freedom, shortages, the resurgence of anti-Semitism, and the explosion of traditional ethnic rivalries going back hundreds of years. In most of the republics of the Soviet Union (where

of years. In the case of the remnants of the Soviet Union (where communism still reigns, albeit shakily) there are now rapidly growing secessionist movements. It is not clear how the people of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union will react when they discover that the voyage to capitalism includes many less than pleasant stops along the way: Will they be willing to permit the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the talented few that alone allows capitalism to prosper? Will they be happy seeing how a market economy rewards talent and industry, while punishing the less able? Will the promise of future riches held out by capitalism pacify workers who have labored in sweatshops for years, and motivate them to continue to sweat away for the same minimal wages for an indefinite period of time?

American society, too, is not free from question marks. We have yet to see what sort of world will be created by children who hold as holy the trinity of sex, drugs and rock n' roll. The 1970s panacea of affirmative action does not seem to have accomplished much, and by all accounts the black family is worse off than it was before the civil rights movement.

We are closer now to a nuclear war than we have been since the end of World War II and the invention of the atom bomb. Twice during the Cold War, during the Cuban missile crisis and the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, it seemed that nuclear war was nigh. In both cases, however, the chief players--the United States and the Soviet Union--were quite sane and unwilling to push brinksmanship too far, and of course they were never ready to start a nuclear war. It is hard to say the same of Saddam Hussein.

The 1990s will require us all to participate in forming new positions on the issues that face our world. The old ready-made political ideologies provided by traditional liberalism and conservatism have worn thin. Who will be rash enough to propose new policies for the new times?

*Right on*

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