

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



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Si Frumkin

OPEN LETTER TO GEORGE CLOONEY

I mailed *this letter to George Clooney at the end of June. He has not responded or reacted in any way. I think that enough time has now elapsed for me to assume that there will be no reply, so here, for your consideration, is the letter:*

Dear Mr. Clooney:

Let me say this up front: I like you. I like most of the movies you were in. You are an excellent actor. And yes, I don't agree with your political views, but I certainly believe that you are entitled to your opinions, just as I am entitled to mine.

I was prompted to write to you by a major front page article in the June 19, 2007 Los Angeles Times. It was impressive – a half-page photo of yourself over a title in large capital letters, "FAME? PRICELESS" and then just a little smaller, "If celebrity is a credit card, then I'm using it," Clooney says of his Darfur campaign."

The interview wasn't about film. The reporter, Tina Daunt, explained that, "Clooney had more serious matters on his mind". She said that you wanted to only discuss two subjects: American presidential politics and the Darfur conflict.

I doubt that we could agree on the first issue - your enthusiastic support of Barak Obama - but I do share and respect your concern with slaughter in Darfur. (By the way, I did resent the use of the word "recently" when referring to the slaughter as "the ethnic cleansing campaign that President George W. Bush *recently* declared a genocide". I assume that it was Tina's mistake - surely you know that Bush declared it genocide in September 2004, restated it in June 2005 and again in April 2006. This is not recent and compares very favorably with Europe and the U.N. that have yet to use the "g" word).

As I said already, I respect your concern and your work in mobilizing public opinion. I am convinced that your intentions and motives are beyond reproach. I regret, however, that you are unfortunately confusing good intentions with good results.

At the risk of being simplistic I suggest that there are two major goals to be achieved in Darfur: (1) helping the victims and (2) stopping the genocide.



You are primarily concerned with the first goal. Your success in raising money for Darfur is indeed impressive. However, there is no mention what these millions will be spent on and who will control the spending. Will it be the U.N. with its sorry record of corruption and inefficiency (think "Oil for Food")? Will it be the local African leaders and politicians? Is there any kind of a paper trail of the collected funds and their use? Who checks that the money doesn't end up in the pockets of the suppliers, providers, organizers, and commissions and salaries for all concerned? Surely, you know – or should know – how much well intentioned help simply disappears and never reaches those for whom it is intended.

And, anyway, how does money prevent the murderers, the janjaweed, the government helicopters and Antonov bombers from continuing the genocide?

You can get – or try to get – the answers. Have you tried?

I know that the last question is somewhat naïve. I know that violence cannot be stopped by money and that, usually, murderers can only be stopped by force, not gentle persuasion. In normal times, force would probably have been provided, as it usually was when help was needed, by the U.S. But these are not normal times. The political climate that you have helped create makes it impossible for this president to send in even a few platoons of Marines.

Well, there are soldiers who could do the job and who are in the immediate neighborhood. Your influence and celebrity could do much to bring them into action, or at least, make the world aware of them.

There are between 1500 and 2000

French troops stationed in Chad, a country sharing a border with Sudan. The exact number and composition are difficult to obtain but it is certain that they have tanks, helicopters and even Mirage fighters that have already been used in the Ivory Coast, the Central African Republic and in Chad itself in 2006 and 2007. They could impose a no-fly zone over Darfur and stop the Sudanese helicopters and bombers just as we and the Brits stopped Saddam's in northern Iraq. The famed French Foreign Legion could easily intercede and stop the camel-riding Janjaweed murderers.

New York Times' Nicholas Kristoff devoted much space to Darfur. He is aware of the French forces in Darfur and says, "...the French aren't saying what they'll do."

I know what they'll do: nothing!

Your appearance in the U.N. was directed at getting people to know and feel the pain of Darfur. It should have been focused on what can be done and, more importantly, what is not being done by France and by the rest of Europe.



Dear Mr. Clooney, use the phrase that was used by Emil Zola over a century ago: say "*J'accuse*" to France and to the rest of the crocodile-tear crying Europeans who criticize us but are not willing to take our place in fighting evil.

Sincerely, Si Frumkin

THEY WAIT FOR US TO RUN AGAIN MARK STEYN

George W. Bush gave a speech about Iraq last week, and in the middle of it he did something long overdue: He attempted to appropriate the left's most treasured all-purpose historical analogy. Indeed, Vietnam is so ubiquitous in the fulminations of politicians, academics and pundits that we could really use anti-trust legislation to protect us from shopworn historical precedents. But, in the absence thereof, the president has determined that we might at least learn the real "lessons of Vietnam."

"Then as now, people argued the real problem was America's presence and that if we would just withdraw, the killing would end," Bush told the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention Aug. 22. "Many argued that if we pulled out there would be no consequences for the Vietnamese people ... A columnist for the New York Times wrote in a similar vein in 1975, just as Cambodia and Vietnam were falling to the communists: 'It's difficult to imagine,' he said, 'how their lives could be anything but better with the Americans gone.' A headline on that story, dateline Phnom Penh, summed up the argument: 'Indochina Without Americans: For Most a Better Life.' The world would learn just how costly these misimpressions would be."

I don't know about "the world," but apparently a big chunk of America still believes in these "misimpressions." As the New York Times put it, "In urging Americans to stay the course in Iraq, Mr. Bush is challenging the historical memory that the pullout from Vietnam had few negative repercussions for the United States and its allies."

Well, it had a "few negative repercussions" for America's allies in South Vietnam, who were promptly overrun by the North. And it had a "negative repercussion" for former Cambodian Prime Minister Sirik Matak, to whom the U.S. ambassador sportingly offered asylum. "I cannot, alas, leave in such a cowardly fashion," Matak told him. "I never believed for a moment that you would have this sentiment of abandoning a people which has chosen liberty ... I have committed this mistake of believing in you, the Americans." So Sirik Matak stayed in Phnom Penh and a month later was killed by the Khmer Rouge, along with about 2 million other people. If it's hard for individual names to linger in the New York Times' "historical memory," you'd think the general mound of corpses would resonate.

But perhaps these distant people of exotic hue are not what the panjandrums of the New York Times regard as real "allies." In the wake of Vietnam, the communists gobbled up real estate all over the map, and ever closer to America's back yard. In Grenada, Maurice Bishop toppled Prime Minister Sir Eric Gairy: It was the first-ever coup in the British West Indies, and in a faintly surreal touch led to Queen Elizabeth presiding over a People's Revolutionary Government. There were Cuban "advisers" all over Grenada, just as there were Cuban troops all

over Africa.

Because what was lost in Vietnam was not just a war but American credibility.

Do the British qualify as real "allies" to the Times? The Argentine seizure of the Falkland Islands occurred because Gen. Galtieri had figured if the commies were getting away with all this land-grabbing, why shouldn't he get a piece of the action? After all, if the supposed Yank superpower had no stomach to resist routine provocations from its sworn enemy, the toothless British lion certainly wouldn't muster the will for some no-account islands in the South Atlantic.

"The West" as a whole was infected by America's loss of credibility. Thanks to Mrs. Thatcher, Galtieri lost his gamble, but it must have looked a surer thing in the spring of 1982, in the wake of Vietnam, and Soviet expansionism, and the humiliation of Jimmy Carter's botched rescue mission in Iran – the helicopters in the desert, and the ayatollahs poking and prodding the corpses of American servicemen on TV.

American victory in the Cold War looks inevitable in hindsight. It didn't seem that way in the Seventies. And, as Iran reminds us, the enduring legacy of the retreat from Vietnam was the emboldening of other enemies. The forces loosed in the Middle East bedevil to this day, in Iran, and in Lebanon, which Syria invaded



shortly after the fall of Saigon and after its dictator had sneeringly told Henry Kissinger, "You've betrayed Vietnam. Someday you're going to sell out Taiwan. And we're going to be around when you get tired of Israel."

President Assad understood something that too many Americans didn't. Then as now, the anti-war debate is conducted as if it's only about the place you're fighting in: Vietnam is a quagmire, Iraq is a quagmire, so get out of the quagmire. Wrong. The "Vietnam war" was about Vietnam, if you had the misfortune to live in Saigon.

But if you lived in Damascus and Moscow and Havana, the Vietnam war was about America: American credibility, American purpose, American will. For our enemies today, it still is. Osama bin Laden made a bet – that, notwithstanding the T-shirt slogan,

"These Colors Do Run": They ran from Vietnam, and they ran from the helicopters in the desert, and from Lebanon and Somalia – and they will run from Iraq and Afghanistan, because that is the nature of a soft, plump ersatz-superpower that coils up in the fetal position if you prick its toe. Even Republicans like Sen. John Warner seem peculiarly anxious to confirm the bin Laden characterization.

Depending on which Americans you ask, "Vietnam" can mean entirely different things. To the New York Times and the people it goes to dinner parties with, it had "few negative repercussions."

And it's hardly surprising its journalists should think like that when Times publisher Pinch Sulzberger, in a commencement address last year that's almost a parody of parochial boomer narcissism, was still bragging and preening about his generation's role in ending the war. Joseph Nye, dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard (which is apparently some sort of elite institution for which people pay big money to receive instruction from authoritative scholars such as professor Nye), told NPR last week: "After we got out of Vietnam, the people who took over were the North Vietnamese. And that was a government which preserved order" – if by "preserved order," you mean "drove a vast human tide to take to the oceans on small rickety rafts and flee for their lives."

But, if you're not a self-absorbed poseur like Sulzberger, "Vietnam" is not a "tragedy" but a betrayal. The final image of the drama – the U.S. helicopters lifting off from the Embassy roof with desperate locals clinging to the undercarriage – is an image not just of defeat but of the shabby sell-outs necessary to accomplish it.

At least in Indochina, those who got it so horribly wrong – the Kerrys and Fondas and all the rest – could claim they had no idea of what would follow.

To do it all over again in the full knowledge of what followed would turn an aberration into a pattern of behavior. And as the Sirik Matak of Baghdad face the choice between staying and dying or exile and embittered evenings in the new Iraqi émigré restaurants of London and Los Angeles, who will be America's allies in the years ahead?

Professor Bernard Lewis' dictum would be self-evident: "America is harmless as an enemy and treacherous as a friend." Ω

After a few years of benign neglect, Israel is back on the itineraries of well-meaning foreign emissaries. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair visited the country last month in his new role as special envoy of the "quartet" of Middle East peacemakers. Earlier this month, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived. Each visit was concluded with a news conference at which promises of progress were made. But before any lasting on-the-ground movement toward peace can be achieved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, foreign emissaries, as well as some Israelis, will have to shake off some long-disproved tenets of the conventional wisdom about the dispute .

There are four main misconceptions that diplomats bring with them to Israel. Primary among them is the idea that solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a prerequisite for stability in the Mideast . The truth is that the region is riven by clashes that have nothing to do with Israel. For instance, the Jewish state plays no role in the conflict between Shiites and Sunnis, between Persians and Arabs or between Arab nationalists and Arab Islamists.

The second misconception is that Israeli territorial concessions are the key to progress . The reality is that an ascendant jihadist Islam believes that it is leading the battle against Israel and the rest of the West. Given this dynamic, Israeli territorial or other concessions simply fill the jihadists' sails, reinforcing their belief that Israel and the West are weak and can be militarily defeated.

True, a majority of Israelis supported Israel's unilateral withdrawals from Lebanon in 2000 and from Gaza in 2005 in the belief that meeting Hezbollah and Palestinian territorial demands would nullify the cause of conflict between them. We now know the results: The Hezbollah and Palestinian reactions -- concerted terror wars, kidnapped Israeli soldiers, rockets fired at Israeli cities -- made clear that the Mideast's central conflict is not territorial but ideological. And ideology cannot be defeated by concessions.

Emissaries also still believe that "the Occupation" blocks agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. In the West, the term usually means the territories Israel conquered in the Six-Day War in 1967. If the problem between Israelis and Palestinians were just the 1967 territories, and the solution were dividing those lands up between the two sides (as proposed, most recently, in 2000 by former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak), the conflict would have ended long ago.

Instead, the heart of the problem is that many Palestinians -- Fatah and Hamas, in particular -- and even some Israeli Arabs use "Occupation" to refer to all Israel. They do not recognize the Jewish people's right

to an independent state, a right affirmed again and again in the international arena.

Finally, the well-intentioned visiting diplomats believe that the Palestinians want -- and have the ability -- to establish a state that will live in peace alongside Israel. But they are not being clear-eyed. The late Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, established a thugocracy that never improved the basic living conditions of his people. Indeed, Palestinian unemployment and poverty are worse today than they were before Arafat and his cronies assumed power in 1994.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas did not take responsibility for Gazans' welfare, which in part led to Hamas' electoral victory in 2006. Now confined to the West Bank after Hamas kicked his Fatah organization out of Gaza, Abbas has not moved to create a governmental

businesses for decades, on the Gaza border? Why do they attack safe roads linking Gaza and the West Bank? Why is the Palestinian economy in shambles?

Shorn of these mistaken assumptions, the picture in the Middle East is disturbing indeed. No wonder emissaries hold on to them. So what to do? For starters, Western governments and their emissaries must refrain from pressuring Israel for territorial or security concessions, which at best produces only short-term gains and emboldens the Islamist terror groups. Instead, they should try to persuade the Palestinian leaders to commit to a long-term strategy premised on educational, political and economic reforms that would lead to the establishment of a civil society that cherishes life, not death; values human rights and freedom; and develops a middle

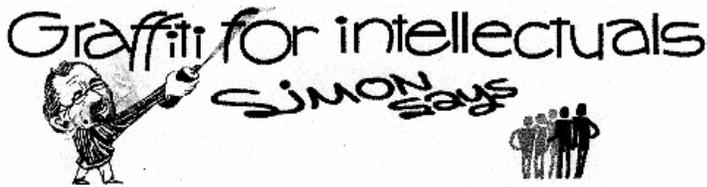
class, not a corrupt, rich elite. At the same time, these governments should set up an international fund that would offer Palestinian refugee families aid -- say \$100,000 to \$200,000 a family -- for their resettlement on the condition that their acceptance of the money would signify resolution of their refugee status. Under no circumstances should emissaries attempt to open a dialogue with Hamas. For the sake of Palestinian society, Hamas and its ideology must be defeated. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the most significant today; it's the battle between jihadist Islam and the West, of which Israel is merely one theater. To defeat jihadist



structure.

A corollary of this fourth misconception is the belief that economic development can neutralize extreme nationalism and religious fanaticism , thus clearing the way toward peace and security. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, had a term for such believers: "naive Zionists." Those who fit this description should demand that the Palestinians explain what they did with the \$7 billion in international aid they received over the years . Seven billion reasons for economic progress -- and yet, why did Palestinian mobs destroy the Erez industrial zone, where Palestinians worked and ran

Islam, the West must overcome the regimes, organizations and ideologies that support and feed it -- and Hamas is foremost among them. The emissaries who travel to Israel must draw on their rich diplomatic experiences, free themselves from misconceptions about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the petty politics that flows from them -- especially the binds of political correctness -- to lead us all toward freedom, security and peace. Anything else is mere meddling. ☆
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WHO'S BLACK ENOUGH? By Brian Copeland, blackamericans.com

Despite the rising American death toll in a divisive war, record gasoline prices and homes lost to foreclosure in historic numbers, this was the one question that I knew Sen. Barack Obama would be asked by Internet voters at the Democratic CNN-YouTube debate.

It is a question that dogs not only the first viable African American presidential candidate in our nation's history but all blacks who defy some intangible, inexplicable standard for racial authenticity. Why is this question still being asked in 2007?



As a middle-class black man, raised and currently residing in the suburbs, I too have been the target of this question. Not too long ago, I received an anonymous letter at the radio station where I work.

It was clear and concise:

"As an African American, I am disgusted every time I hear your voice because YOU are not a genuine black man!"

That letter inspired me to explore why this charge continues to be leveled at me and other successful black professionals. It's a comment I've heard for years from people both black and white. "You're not really black."

Why do people say this to me? Is it the way I dress and speak? The music I listen to? The fact that I TiVo "Frasier"? More important, who has the right to decide what it means to be "genuinely black" in this society?

The dilemma facing the senator and me is not new, nor is it unique. The race police exist in all hues and all cultures. As Obama and I have been labeled "Oreos," Asians considered too Eurocentric by their ethnic peers get taunted as "Twinkies" who are "yellow on the outside and white on the inside." Latinos accused of racial betrayal are labeled

"coconuts." A well-known network newsman told me he gets letters calling him a "self-hating Jew" because he reports without bias on the Middle East.

The disturbing irony is that demonizing people who don't fit a preconceived notion of ethnic authenticity reinforces and perpetuates bigoted stereotypes.

Obama cited his difficulty in hailing a cab as his black "credentials." I can also virtually guarantee that there have been times when he has been followed from aisle to aisle in a store by a suspicious manager, stopped for a nonexistent reason while driving in the "wrong" neighborhood, subjected to the dreaded N-word and accused of a transgression he had nothing to do with. I don't, however, see these elements of racial discrimination as being the entirety of the black experience in America.

Obama is a graduate of Columbia University and Harvard Law School. Upon graduation, he had his pick of job offers from 100 of the top law firms. He was a university lecturer, a civil rights lawyer, a community organizer and a state senator. And now he is one of the handful of nonwhite U.S. senators in this nation's history. Despite all of these achievements, everyone from voters to Newsweek magazine wants to know if his blackness

is authentic enough.

On the other hand, if you go to the street corners of Oakland, Baltimore, Detroit, Compton or any other major urban area in the country on a given night, you'll find guys selling crack, guys with five babies by five different women, guys headed to jail and guys just released from jail, gang bangers and pimps along with hustlers and dealers. Nobody is questioning their racial authenticity. Nobody is saying that they're not real black men.

How and when did we come to the point where black people in America are defined by the lowest common denominator? When did the bottom rung of the ladder become the expected norm, and those who strive for things greater become racial anomalies?

Obama's experience, like mine, is filled with as much pain and joy, as much happiness and sorrow and as many frustrations and rewards as any American with a similar complexion. His is the true African American experience because it is his experience, as my experience is true because it is mine. He has persisted and persevered. If these qualities are not the hallmark of blackness in this country, nothing is.

Brian Copeland is the author of the stage play and book, "Not a Genuine Black Man," published by Hyperion. The play is the longest running one-man show in San Francisco history.

