

## Hail and Farewell: the End of the American Empire

by Gore Vidal via rialator - truthdig *Sunday, Apr 15 2007, 4:41pm*

international / social/political / other press

Whenever The New York Times finally gets the point to what is going on in our native land a celestial choir can be heard in Times Square, shouting hosannas. This happened recently, on April 14th, when they realized that there could be a dark explanation for what W. is doing when he sends a Mr. Bolton, a U.N. hater, to be ambassador to that body or a Mr. Wolfowitz to the World Bank, a man as ignorant of history and finance as the president himself. Maureen Dowd in the Times was allowed to set the pitch for the latest revelations with her "More Con Than Neo" headline. Meanwhile, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of incompetents are now cluttering the Justice Department while known incompetents are in place to wreck from within regulatory systems and even mighty Walter Reed Hospital itself.



**Gore Vidal**

And then such investigations that W. has cut back—particularly at the height of the pet food investigation, a matter of such passionate interest to our countrymen.

Needless to say, the Times, instinctively pro-Bush, as it too is an inept creature of our leviathan master: corporate America. But though the Times now notes a mysterious problem with Bush's general relations to the outside world, the Times, as usual, cannot grasp what so many of us fans of the American Republic can see so clearly: In the name of Manichaeian religious cults he is eager to destroy every last trace of the New Deal (privatize Social Security) by destroying both the state and its global imperium.

W.'s love of torture and the death penalty suggests this that is Caligula Redux, but actually he is a home-grown Romulus Augustulus, the last Roman emperor as viewed by the Swiss playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt and refashioned by me in an English version that played on Broadway in the 1960s. As the play opens, the northern barbarians are closing in on Rome, while the emperor dawdles, neglecting to appoint a "war tsar" to defend the city itself. What is wrong with him? Well, he does have a plan. When Odoaker, the king of the Teutons, arrives, Romulus expects to be executed, but Odoaker also has a plan: The two rulers will unite in a realm of peace. Romulus then admits that all his actions and non-actions had a single end: the destruction of the bloody empire he had inherited.

For the admiring Teutons he holds up an imaginary globe. "Now watch," he says, as the emperor

dissolves his empire. "Look, all of you, once more upon this tinted globe, this dream of a great empire, floating in space, driven by the slightest breath of my lips, yes, look once more upon the far-flung lands encircling the blue sea with its dancing dolphins, these rich provinces golden with wheat, these teeming cities overflowing with life, yes, the empire was once a sun, warming mankind, but at its zenith it scorched the world. Now it is a harmless bubble, and in the hands of the emperor it dissolves into nothing. And, thus, the throne of blood is overturned!"

Obviously, our weird little emperor is incapable of moral reflection, thus inviting us to reflect morally upon him as he has gone about his systematic wrecking of our common empire, which, after 1945, should have come into its own but thanks to Truman et al. it stayed forever at war and now but, Hark! what is the Times chorus singing now? Can it be a new weekend edition? Without troubling news? Or has W. finally snapped our military machine for fun if not global peace. On a high moral ground Romulus the Great disowned his empire. W. the Minuscule, driven by ignorance and greed like his cronies, leaves us defenseless and at sea in a terrorized world of prisons, phony trials, renditions, executions without due process of law, while leaving in the Middle East a vast charnel house which he likes to call "a fledgling democracy."

At the end of the Broadway play, one Roman soldier (played by Robert Duvall) eager to save Rome joins Romulus, but Romulus tells him "the Roman empire has been dissolved," as surely as W. is dissolving us as hurricanes, tempests, droughts of his making ravage our alabaster cities and amber waves of grain. Ave Atque Vale.

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