As ethnographers, we’re not just interested in the global, or the local, but the intricate point of intersection between the two. Our experiences with Taiwanese indie music taught us much. A bold interpreter of Euro-American and Taiwanese music, Freddy Lim orients the Taiwanese as a “local flavor” of the East to a global audience. Waigoren musicians use their social and cultural capital to make a place for themselves in the music scene, and then their difference is consumed as a “local color” in Taiwanese music. These two contrasting examples shed light on the complex issues of transnational sociality and cultural globalization in postcolonial Taiwan.

Now that we are back in Virginia, our interconnections with Taiwan continue to develop over the Internet. Wendy is following the Taiwanese indie music scene through chats, emails, and blogs. She also anticipates following ChthoniC’s North American tour next January. Carey is making contact with English-speaking expatriates in Taiwan through email and social networking websites and discovering a wealth of information about culture and society in English-language Taiwanese magazines on-line. She is also working on her Chinese speaking and reading ability. While we listen to the recordings brought back from Taiwan, we conspire our next trip back to the island.

**BOOK REVIEW:**

**CULTURE WARRIOR by BILL O’REILLY**

Media personality Bill O’Reilly started his career as a news reporter for local television stations in Dallas, Boston, and New York. He anchored the syndicated daytime news program Inside Edition beginning in 1995, and the following year, acquired his own television opinion program on the newly-minted FoxNews cable network. Shortly after its debut, his show, The O’Reilly Factor, jumped to the top of the ratings where it has remained virtually unchallenged ever since.

O’Reilly has become famous for his polemical rants and aggressive interviewing style. He is equally famous for his clan of roving “shock and awe” reporters, sent to ambush unsuspecting interviewees with a barrage of explosive questions. However, his abrasive reputation has not worn away his public image or popularity. In the past decade, O’Reilly has published numerous books, many of which made, if not topped, The New York Times “Best Sellers” list.

Now that O’Reilly has released his eighth book—the almost scandalously-titled autobiography *A Bold Fresh Piece of Humanity*, O’Reilly’s “most intimate book yet”—we at Amalgam thought it timely to look back and refresh our memories: to find out what this larger-than-life media figure thinks about the present moment in American history, and of course, examine where he thinks we have gone so terribly wrong. To do that, we asked several University of Virginia graduate students to read and review O’Reilly last book, *Culture Warrior*—a book in which, according to his website, O’Reilly “clearly fights the good fight for the soul of America.”

---


Benjamin Snyder, Sociology

In *Culture Warrior* Bill O’Reilly, the host of the political talk show *The O’Reilly Factor*, divides Americans into two categories: secular progressives, or S-Ps for short, and traditionalists. O’Reilly thinks of traditionalists as those who “see their country as a good and worthy enterprise” and S-Ps as those who “see America as evil” (27). Siding with the traditionalists, O’Reilly sees himself as a leader in the culture war over the fate of the nation. “The culture war must be won quickly and definitely,” O’Reilly intones, thus his book aims to “explain why [the S-P movement] is so harmful for America, and to identify the movement’s top leaders” (7). Proceeding from this basic dichotomy, O’Reilly enumerates the people (from George Lakoff to Terry Gross) and organizations (“the liberal media” and the ACLU) that promote the S-P moral agenda, exposing their hypocrisies and their implications for America’s future.

One could critique O’Reilly’s book on methodological and substantive grounds. He neither builds on the scholarly literature on the subject of culture wars nor proves his points using systematic analysis. Then again, O’Reilly is an agitator, not an academic; so, the value of this text for social scientists, in my opinion, is that it can be read as an expression of a particular voice—an elite, conservative, white, male voice—in a particular time and place—modern America.

Read in this way, it becomes evident that O’Reilly is caught between two personalities throughout the book. At times he speaks as the obedient Irish-Catholic schoolboy that he tells us he once was—the boy who, certain in his religious beliefs, watched his father work hard to provide the family the American dream: a house in Levittown, one of America’s first suburbs, and a college degree for Bill. At other times he speaks as the political pundit that he is today—the man who loudly strikes back at the *ad hominem* attacks he has suffered under the media spotlight with a brash, traditionalist vision. In this voice, he periodically refers to himself as “O’Reilly Tzu,” a tongue-in-cheek appropriation of Sun Tzu, the author of the ancient Chinese war manual *The Art of War*.

Between these voices, O’Reilly is pulled in two directions. On the one hand, he dogmatically affirms the traditions upon which America was supposedly founded: Judeo-Christian philosophy and the rugged individualism of free-market capitalism. On the other hand, he attempts to fight a war with those who would alter these foundations—secular-progressives. The latter desire means that he must tailor his message to fit as many people into the traditionalist camp as possible (strength in numbers) while using the other side’s tools (science and objectivity) in the service of traditionalism in order to win adherents. Consequently, every time O’Reilly tries to reduce America to two categories, the categories themselves seem to shift.

This is especially evident in the last third of the book where he moves on from his excoriations of S-P elites and begins describing what it will take to win the culture war. Here we see that traditionalism is filled with contradictions for O’Reilly himself. At points he claims to be fighting for a guiding moral vision: “The traditional culture warrior understands that a clear definition of right and wrong is imperative for a disciplined society that protects its citizenry” (201). When it comes to actually fighting the good fight, however, O’Reilly can’t bring himself to commit head-over-heels to his own vision. “Things change quickly in America; for that reason, no one ideology or belief system can be correct in every matter. The clearheaded warrior who uses fact-based arguments rather than boring mantras…will win people over.” (198). Here we see O’Reilly, the romantic idealist, engaged in his own subconscious battle with O’Reilly Tzu, the strategic realist.

*Culture Warrior* is filled with these kinds of tensions. For example, O’Reilly manages to support same-sex parenting and *proscribe* same-sex marriage on the same page. “A variety of scientific studies have shown,” he writes, “that kids raised by gay parents usually turn out the same way children in traditional homes do. Remember, the traditional warrior fights with facts.” But just a few paragraphs later he declares, “[T]here is good reason why American society is built around the traditional heterosexual home. As a societal stabilizer, traditional marriage deserves a special place in our national life. Homosexuality is an alternative situation.” And how does O’Reilly reconcile this tension?
"A long time ago, I decided to leave the judgments about sin to the Deity. I believe that falls under His or Her job description. Since every human being is a sinner, we should all concentrate on healing ourselves" (179). Through this logical sleight-of-hand, O'Reilly marries his allegiance to metaphysical Truth with his perception that the terms of the debate in the culture war are defined by secular ways of knowing, which only respond to fact-based judgment in his eyes. Consequently, he feels compelled to embalm tradition, sheltering God's judgment within the private sphere. At the same time, he feels compelled to take up the supposed standards of secular rationalism if he is to engage in culture war and win. In this way, O'Reilly is probably like many people in America; he is neither fully traditional nor fully secular. His logic shifts with the needs of the moment.

Because of this subterranean tension, O'Reilly's call-to-arms at the end of the book falls flat. He is left with a naïve call for a realignment of the traditionalist moral code. He writes, "I'm suggesting an unemotional examination of religion. This may come as a surprise to some, but you do not have to believe in God to be a traditional warrior, although the vast majority of us do acknowledge a higher power. But the [traditionalist] code as far as religion is concerned is secular. Here's the twist: T-Warriors believe that the United States was founded on Judeo-Christian principles that have provided a foundation for freedom and justice" (200).

O'Reilly is calling for what the sociologist Robert Bellah, drawing on Rousseau, famously called "civil religion." Bellah (1967) wrote that, in the past, civil religion "borrowed selectively from the [Christian] religious tradition in such a way that the average American saw no conflict between the two. In this way, the civil religion was able to build up, without any bitter struggle with the church, powerful symbols of national solidarity and to mobilize deep levels of personal motivation for the attainment of national goals" (50). Like Bellah, O'Reilly sees that a vaguely religious sentiment has been a powerful unifier and mobilizer for Americans throughout the nation's history. However, O'Reilly calls for one major alteration to civil religion—an alteration that Bellah saw coming: the elimination of God. Bellah (1967) wrote, "If the whole God symbolism requires reformulation, there will be obvious consequences for the civil religion, consequences perhaps of liberal alienation and of fundamentalist ossification that have not so far been prominent in this realm" (52). Bellah suggests that removing God from civil religion threatens the loss of a potent binding moral address between liberals and conservatives in the public sphere. He worries that, with this loss of binding moral address, liberals will seem more secular and alienated from civil religion while conservatives will retreat into an embalmed version of traditionalism that masks itself as patriotism. Whereas liberals will come to worry that God is dead, conservatives will begin to love God to death.

If we read O'Reilly's book as an expression of a particular voice in a particular time and place, then perhaps it hints at just how far some cultural elites have met these predictions since Bellah's essay was written. Perhaps O'Reilly's logical schizophrenia speaks to what Bellah saw coming: the ossification of tradition within elite conservative movements—a traditionalism that is increasingly out of touch with secularizing liberal elites. As a traditionalist at heart working in the heart of the secular media industry, O'Reilly must feel this tension intensely within himself. Hence, when it comes to reconciling his traditionalist values with his political goals, he feels a lack of binding moral address within himself. While O'Reilly the idealist desires to unflinchingly advance God and Country together, O'Reilly the realist suspects that only a fact-based service to Country is a plausible platform for his politics.

Admittedly, I am probably closer to an S-P than a traditionalist—in fact, the "Are you a culture warrior or secular-progressive?" survey on O'Reilly's website confirms this. So, it should come as no surprise that I did find the following observation in this book compelling: "So it does happen that members of the two opposing forces...can similarly love and respect their country but also disagree as to how the country should be run. This situation can lead to lively debate and, sometimes, to an exchange of valid points" (191). It remains to be seen whether O'Reilly or other cultural elites who love America will proceed from this position rather than neut divisions of Americans into good and evil. Judging by this book, it doesn't look promising.

References


Mark Meier, English

Bill O'Reilly heaps anecdotes, excerpts, and litany of enemies into an argument that America is the noblest, freest, and most powerful country on Earth, and it should perpetuate the traditions that have made it such, because those traditions maximize Americans' shot at wealth and happiness and better the world.

Mr. O'Reilly’s “traditionalists” believe in Judeo-Christian philosophy, hard work, self-reliance, private property, and alms giving,
the recipients of which traditionalists prefer to decide rather than delegate to any government. Traditionalists, O’Reilly further claims, constitute the majority of America. They perceive their public school students never graduate from high school; they drop out. Once again, the math tells the story” (141). It does? Ninety-eight percent describes the number of students who continue to college once they have finished high school. Forty percent describes the number who fail to finish high school ever. For all I know, in D.C., 100 percent of the 60 percent that attain a public high school diploma go on to college (a net college enrollment rate of 60 percent), whereas 90 percent of those who start Catholic high school drop out (net 9.8 percent college). But I don’t know, because Mr. O’Reilly didn’t tell me. He presented incomparable statistics, in need of interpretation, as self-evident truth.

Is that hyperbole? More likely a mistake. They happen.

Mr. O’Reilly at least excludes math’s unreliable narration when the answers become really obvious. He writes of disaster, "Even on big breaking news stories like hurricanes and terror bombings, when no point of view is necessary, Fox News dominates” (61).

See, a hurricane is not sentient. Ask a physicist why we had Katrina, and you’ll hear about the same pressure and temperature differentials that make any hurricane. Ask Al Gore, however, and you might hear about global warming.

Terorists, meanwhile, are not hurricanes. In fact, they’re humans who can justify or change their existence and actions in ways that may beg outside explanation. Ask a terrorist why he (sometimes she) would attack Americans, and you may hear, “I hate freedom. Americans have it most.” Then ask someone else. A sociologist may mention radicalizing milieux, an economist inequality and globalized capital, a military historian evolving weaponry and asymmetrical warfare.

Why does Mr. O’Reilly withhold analysis when I really need it? Some terrorist might want to kill me and him simply because of the common color of our passports. Mr. O’Reilly is most persuasive and engaging when he recounts personal experiences that shaped his opinions. Why wouldn’t a terrorist have experiences that lead to a point of view is necessary, Fox News dominates” (61).

In another case of missing perspectives, Mr. O’Reilly lists all 22 US Representatives who voted against the 2005 “Resolution to Protect Christmas Symbols and Traditions.” He concludes, “But now you know who the most secular members of the House really are” (91). Funny,
Amalgam

John Lewis of Georgia is on the list. He attended American Baptist Theological Seminary, collaborated with Martin Luther King, Jr. (whom Mr. O’Reilly considers a traditionalist [145]), and was severely beaten for wanting to walk from Selma to Montgomery. Funnier, about one-third of the representatives who opposed the resolution were black, whereas blacks are only about one-eighth of the US population. Why might they be particularly sensitive toward public displays of certain symbols and norms? Mere secularism?

I need lots of help here, because at other times, Mr. O’Reilly very much links race and ethnicity to the S-P threat. Culture Warrior begins with an imagined 2020 S-P State of the Union address by President Gloria Hernandez—a Latina, I presume. This strawwoman’s address enables Mr. O’Reilly to define “the secular-progressive program,” which would end America as Mr. O’Reilly knows and prefers it. Near the book’s end, he attributes an epigraph to a Black Panther: “Whenever any form of government becomes destructive…[sic] it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it. – Huey Newton” (190). Odd. Newton’s quoting the Declaration of Independence:

That to secure these rights [including life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness], Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends [securing individuals’ rights], it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Mr. O’Reilly admires the Founding Fathers. Why not give them the epigraph? That would make it difficult to title the chapter “Hating America.” Then why keep the quotation but ascribe it to Huey Newton? Is it hate when Huey quotes the Declaration, but patriotism when Bill does? Or is News satire alizing Jefferson, and I can’t tell from the limited context? A page later, Mr. O’Reilly writes, “Others [S-Ps], however, are fanatics who genuinely believe America is a wicked country that must be reformed in any way possible short of violence in the streets (there are very few S-P Huey Newtons)” (191). Ah, Newton = violence on the streets = extreme S-P. Wouldn’t King George III have done the same math for Sam Adams, not to mention Crispus Attucks? Did I become a moral relativist by asking?

Mr. O’Reilly does pose a question he does not answer. Beneath a picture of himself interviewing Susan Sarandon in the 1970s, he asks, “Who has better hair?” (160). He does, hands down. Implicitly, though, throughout his book, Mr. O’Reilly repeats two questions. In a democracy, where majority rules, why and how, if ever, should the majority regard the sentiments and concerns of minorities? And what becomes of us as the world we know and feel comfortable in changes? Such questions perplex me, too, and my European friends. Since I won’t find answers, I look forward to Mr. O’Reilly’s continued assistance. Does he look forward to mine?

Chad Wayner, Religious Studies

America is at war, Bill O’Reilly reminds his reader. The war must be won “quickly and definitively,” for “today the stakes are as high as they get.” If the war is lost, “the United States as we have known it for 230 years will cease to exist.” All legitimate means must be deployed, for its adversaries use “stealth and subterfuge.”

Of course, the war O’Reilly has in mind in Culture Warrior is not the one in Iraq or Afghanistan, but “the vicious culture war that is currently under way in the United States of America.” Most simply, O’Reilly’s war is between those who love America and those who hate her. On the one side, the traditionalists—including O’Reilly himself—believe that the United States has spread abundant goodness to the world, and on the other, the secular-progressives strive to change those States dramatically, to make them more like Western Europe. The “battles” of this culture war are fought almost solely among the opinions and reports of broadcast and print journalism, though O’Reilly does often highlight the role of movie celebrities in the fray.

The armies of the secular-progressives march under the flags of “a few far-left billionaires,” like George Soros and Peter Lewis, and are led by their “guiding philosopher” George Lakoff, professor of cognitive science and linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley. Their “shock troops” are the members of the American Civil Liberties Union, whose “battle plan” employs one tactic for one aim—namely, to change traditional America by judicial fiat. Fighting at their side is the “powerful and battle-ready brigade” that is the secular media. Drawing inspiration from the opinion pages of the New York Times, this cadre of newspeople plies their words primarily to frame and defend the actions of the ACLU. Were they to win this war, America would be a libertine society without discipline and without judgments on personal behavior. America would lose its superpower status, revere its Judeo-Christian...
Amalgam of a single culture warrior rather than richly detailing the war, its hasty and near blindness to others, its penchant for reporting the experiences Security Agency’s overseas wiretapping activities. O’Reilly seems determine which individuals leaked information about the National Valerie Plame, but have not publicly called for investigations that would execution of those government officials who exposed former CIA agent O’Reilly also observes that the ACLU has publicly called for the pros.

notes that his hedge fund is based in Curacao and his real estate publicly advocates raising taxes for affluent Americans, but O’Reilly

normative visions for our shared public life. For one, George Soros takes solace in knowing that he “fought on the side of the angels.”

This culture war has been hot for some time, and O’Reilly ulti-mately expects that the secular-progressives and the traditionalists will continue to battle for decades, and perhaps even for generations to come. He closes with a plea to the T-Warriors to “hold on to the good and destroy the bad.” Even if the T-Warriors ultimately lose, O’Reilly takes solace in knowing that he “fought on the side of the angels.”

For this reader, the book is at its best when it highlights the asymmetric aims and seemingly hypocritical actions of those offering normative visions for our shared public life. For one, George Soros publicly advocates raising taxes for affluent Americans, but O’Reilly notes that his hedge fund is based in Curacao and his real estate company in Bermuda, presumably to avoid paying corporate taxes. O’Reilly also observes that the ACLU has publicly called for the pros-ection of those government officials who exposed former CIA agent Valerie Plame, but have not publicly called for investigations that would determine which individuals leaked information about the National Security Agency’s overseas wiretapping activities. O’Reilly seems keenly aware that many soldiers in this culture war may be masking a narrower self-interest behind a facade of beneficence.

On the whole though, there is much to vex the deliberate reader: its inordinate focus on certain cultural forms (broadcast and print media) and near blindness to others, its penchant for reporting the experiences of a single culture warrior rather than richly detailing the war, its hasty dispersion of enigmatic labels like “Judeo-Christian philosophy” (which, if it were ever clear, ceased to be seen so after Will Herberg’s well-known Protestant, Catholic, Jew and “Founding Fathers,” and its relative inattentiveness to voices in his Catholic tradition who have spoken powerfully on the issues that concern him (e.g., Pope Benedict’s Deus Caritas Est, or Pope John Paul II’s Centesimus Annus). However, there may also be something more worrisome than vexation here. Throughout the book, from its language and tone to its peculiar symbol for paragraph breaks (i.e., clashed sabers), the pages ooze with the metaphor of war. And he is earnest about this, as iwar is exactly the right term. Perhaps this should be little surprise, for O’Reilly is not the first, nor likely the last to argue that cultural conflict is best understood as warfare. Yet, on this point, O’Reilly may not fully appreciate the significance and effects of his literary trope.

As his nemesis George Lakoff has observed in his Metaphors We Live By, “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experi-encing one thing through another.” Metaphors both illumine and shadow aspects of their subject; they offer filtered light. Filtered light can beautify or nullify its subject, and the attentive observer can and should appreciate a metaphor’s work. Yet, metaphors are not merely decorative, for as James Childress has noted, metaphors not only “shape how we think, what we experience, and what we do by what

We Live By, “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experi-encing one thing through another.”

In short, metaphors do both descriptive and normative work; they may help us to better see, but they also lead us to walk some paths rather than others.

Culture Warrior repeatedly describes the author’s disparate disagreements with a wide variety of persons—from Terry Gross to George Clooney to Michael Moore—on a wider variety of issues—from the battle for Christmas to the military tribunals at Guantanamo—as conflagrations in a war over America’s future. Given his metaphor, this makes sense, as the most enduring characteristic of modern war is its totality. Modern war extends the battlefield from beneath the sea to beyond the skies; the destructive power of modern weaponry renders the customary distinction between combatants and non-combatants practically untenable. For many, this obliteration of physical and moral limits is profoundly unsettling. As J. Glenn Gray and others have noted, to sanction the totality of modern war requires a moral absolutism

1 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 5.

coupled with “an image of the enemy sufficiently evil to inspire hatred and repugnance.” At the same time that modern war shatters moral limits, it demands an image of the enemy to warrant her annihilation.

Perhaps then it is not surprising then that O’Reilly reminds us that “the world is, and always has been, a struggle between good and evil.” Whereas the secular-progressives are not quite “sinners,” but merely “intellectually deficient,” the T-Warriors understand that “a clear definition of right and wrong is imperative for a disciplined society that protects its citizenry.” Whereas the secular-progressives’ unrealistic and naive assessment of the war of terror “disqualifies [them] from any serious participation in the post-9/11 decision-making process,” the T-Warrior understands that “the United States is a righteous country... at [its] core a noble country in a world full of hatred and violence.” At its base, O’Reilly’s analysis of culture as war leads him to employ a conceptual framework built upon a variety of such binary oppositions. Regardless of the descriptive adequacy of these binaries, it is striking to see how the metaphor of war guides O’Reilly’s analysis toward standard battlefield tactics. Once one sees the opposition is dumb, unrealistic, and naive, their voice need not be found.

In sum, Bill O’Reilly’s Culture Warrior has collected a host of adjectives from its reviewers -- “bluff,” “bombastic,” “confident,” “strident,” “self-consumed.” At the risk of sounding alarmist, perhaps we should add “dangerous.” If metaphors can use us, and if we do not sufficiently assess their adequacy, one can imagine that a T-Warrior situated in a widely accessible public forum could have a significant impact on our ability to deliberate and disagree democratically about our shared common life. To have robust disagreement, respectful exchange, and shared consensus requires a host of virtues and disciplines, but most basically, it demands that one’s eye can differentiate relevantly distinct conflicts and interpret them appropriately. To do so, all conflict cannot be war, and those which are must still surrender to the moral limits that bound conduct in war.

---


Amalgam is an interdisciplinary journal that showcases the outstanding work produced by the University of Virginia graduate student body.

For its second volume (to be released in the Spring of 2009) Amalgam seeks papers by University of Virginia graduate students from a wide variety of academic areas and on an array of topics. While we at Amalgam are deeply interested in promoting serious research and rigorous intellectual thought, we are also invested in encouraging a level of discourse that will enable scholars from multiple fields to interact with and understand each other. Amalgam hopes to attract term papers, research notes and reviews, book reviews, academic interviews, and creative work that are of the highest quality—but that are also accessible to a diverse academic audience.

We also seek book reviews of Naomi Klein’s international bestseller The Shock Doctrine. Students in all disciplines are encouraged to submit. Reviews should be no less than 1,000 words.

Please send all submissions to: amalgamjournal@gmail.com