debitage

2003-2004 excavation at the Danielson site, Worcester MA.

Field Crew

Yuccacentric
Blistered Avalon
Age-Old Songs
Donkey Balls
Scott Timmreck
The Daily Rede
Raptor's Den
Cathartic Seclusion?
The Cocktail Sermons
thrown into the fire

Lab Assistants

wockerjabby
synesthesia
Genarti's Journal
barbara's LiveJournal
rabi's LiveJournal
Skeptical Notion
Andrea's Blog
Slumbering Lungfish
Abbie the cat has a posse

Advisory Committee

Changed Priorities Ahead
CalPundit
Matthew Yglesias
TAPPED
John Quiggin
Alas, A Blog
Crooked Timber
The Hamster
Easterblogg
Colorado Luis
Beautiful Horizons
Tacitus
Balloon Juice
Sebastian Holsclaw

14.11.03

Trust Fund Stalling

Appeals Court Temporarily Halts Court-Ordered Accounting of Money Owed To Indians

An accounting of money owed to hundreds of thousands of American Indians was put on hold Thursday as an appeals court considers whether recent action by Congress can overturn a federal judge's order.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit issued the stay so attorneys for the government and American Indians suing the Interior Department can file briefs on the effect of the congressional action.

... But Congress, at the urging of the White House, added language to an Interior Department spending bill that prevented an accounting from going forward until Congress defines the scope and methods to be used.

... The Senate's legal counsel and House members from both parties said the provision is likely unconstitutional because the administration cannot dictate to courts how to interpret the law.

-- *via WitchVox*

If the implication of that last sentence -- that the provision is well-known to be unconstitutional -- is right, that's both good news (because it will be overturned) and bad news (because of what it says about our legislators). The Department of the Interior complains about how expensive doing the required audit would be, but stupid delaying stunts like this only make things more expensive. The most cost-effective remedy (and coincidentally the most just, both from the perspective of the affected Native Americans and from the perspective of Americans who think the government ought to be able to balance a checkbook) would be to stop fighting and just do the audit already.

Stentor Danielson, 22:56, archived

OxBlog
Crescat Sententia
The Volokh Conspiracy
Language Hat
Quark Soup
How to Save the World
The Right Christians
Anthroblogology
Disturbing Search Requests

Kiosk

People who send out event announcements as attachments are currently in the Kiosk.

Field Manual

This site uses stylesheets. Which means you shouldn't use Netscape.

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

Washington Post
Sydney Morning Herald
Washington Times
The L.A. Times
The Boston Globe
Christian Science Monitor
The Times-News
The Morning Call
Helsingin Sanomat
El Nuevo Herald
New York Times: Science

A Liberal Solution To A Marxist Problem

Wednesday night I went to a debate that pitted John Williamson -- one of the foremost defenders of the IMF's policies -- against Robert Poland and Dick Peet -- two of its prominent critics. I found Peet's comments on selfishness interesting.

Both Peet and Poland agreed with the basic insight of Adam Smith that capitalism and the market function based on people's selfishness. That is, instead of using an appeal to someone's altruism, or coercive force, a buyer in a market appeals to a seller's selfishness. "I'll give you this money (which you covet) if you'll bake me some bread/build me a car/ etc." Poland seemed to further agree with Smith's view -- shared by most classical liberals -- that this selfishness is part of human nature. The classical liberal position in favor of the market is that it effectively channels this innate selfishness into benefitting society (though Poland's agreement does not extend that far, since in his opinion the market suffers from "the Marx problem" (downward pressure on wages), "the Keynes problem" (business cycles), and "the Polanyi problem" (loss of social solidarity)).

Peet, on the other hand, took a typically Marxist line -- while capitalism requires selfishness, it does not find that selfishness ready-made. Capitalism *produces* selfishness, propagandizing us with advertising to condition us to think we deserve more and more products for ourselves.

One audience member asked Peet how he thought we could combat this advertising. He offered two answers. The first was to broadcast counter-ads, using the power of advertising to push for the goals of socialism rather than the goals of capitalists. This answer is consistent with the view in Marxism, strengthened by some postmodernists like Foucault, that truth is a product of ideology and power.

His second answer was that we need to teach children reading, writing, arithmetic, and deconstruction. If everyone learns to see through the ploys of advertisers, they wouldn't be able to manipulate us and condition us in ways that make us better customers for them. This struck me as a classical liberal solution. The classical liberal view of truth is that the objective use of reason operating on good information will necessarily lead to apprehension of the truth. Indeed, the perfect working of the market's invisible hand depends on this ability to objectively assess things, so as to make deals that are the most beneficial to oneself. If advertising is as persuasive as Peet suggests, then a true defender of the market would dislike it, on the grounds that it enriches the advertiser by subverting the ability of the customer to think rationally about his or her choices. Peet's second prescription for dealing with advertising, then, seems founded on the idea that this kind of clear sight (achieved by deconstructing advertisers' manipulations) is both possible and beneficial.
Stentor Danielson, 20:10, archived

Race And Greed In Dixie

The uproar over Howard Dean's comment that he wants to be the candidate for guys with Confederate flags on their pickup trucks has largely blown over for the moment, but I want to raise the topic again, and make a more straightforwardly

Indian Country Today
National Geographic News
Yahoo! News: Environment and Nature
Yahoo! News: Anthropology and Archaeology
Yahoo! News: Native Americans
IWPR: Central Asia
Witchvox
Arts & Letters Daily
IndyMedia
Foreign Affairs
Foreign Policy
Washington Monthly
The Nation
National Review
The New Republic
Weekly Standard
The American Prospect
Reason
Grist Magazine
Mother Jones
TomPaine.com
Worcester Magazine
The Philosophers' Magazine
In the Hall of Ma'at
Internet Sacred Text Archive

political post than I have been doing of late.

My initial reaction when I heard of the incident was to defend Dean. And I still think that the initial line of criticism -- that Dean was endorsing the flag and the racism that it stands for (in the minds of Northerners and blacks, at least) -- was off base. It's the second line of criticism -- that Dean was stereotyping white southerners by using the image of a guy with a Confederate flag on his pickup truck to represent them -- that made me think.

The thrust of Dean's argument, which has garnered a lot of approval, is this: working-class white southerners would benefit from Democratic programs like progressive taxation, universal health care, strong public education, etc. But the Republican "southern strategy" has won them over to the GOP by playing to these people's racism.

I don't deny that racism is a major problem in this country, south and north. And there is certainly a segment of the southern white population that is driven away from the Democrats due to their stand on racial issues. But I'm skeptical that racism alone is sufficient to explain southerners' allegiance to the Republican party. The equation has to be expanded to include a multitude of cultural issues -- religion in public life, abortion, gay rights (or the lack thereof), etc. Curing southern whites of their racism won't do the Democrats any good if the number one concern of the voters in question is that their candidate be pro-life.

At this point I still accepted that working class southern whites would benefit from Democratic policies (indeed, that would be part of the reason I support those policies, in addition to the way they benefit working class whites in the north and west, and working class non-whites everywhere). But I realized there was an unstated corollary to this point: people *ought* to vote in their economic self-interest. The Dean analysis assumed that people would vote for their economic self-interest unless distracted by something else (such as race). This "class interest" model fits with Democrats' (accurate) perception of the workings of crony capitalism, in which tycoons bounce back and forth between free market rhetoric and asking the government for favors, depending on which strategy will make them the most money. ("Class interest" is a Marxist term, but there are roots here in classical liberalism. Much like Adam Smith argued that the market allows people's pursuit of their self-interest to result in the good of society, in a perfect democracy the outcome that's best for the most people will be selected if each person votes for what benefits them personally.)

I don't know that we can presume that class interest operates this way for working class Republicans from any region. I recall a conversation I had once with my dad, who's a lifelong Republican of moderate means. We were discussing some people we know who had far more money than they needed, and who spent it on things like extravagant vacations. My reaction was that there were so many more productive things for society that they could be doing with that money. My dad, on the other hand, said something to the effect of "well, they worked hard for that money, so I guess they can do what they want with it." His sense of justice (a particular quasi-libertarian sort of justice) was paramount. The relevance to the Dean issue is this: while Republican policies may not be in working

class people's self-interest, those policies do have appeal to those voters independent of any cultural policies that they may come packaged with. White southerners think it's proper that the government tax less and spend less, and vote based on that. Thus, it's not enough (or even necessary) for the Democrats to point out that white southerners would be better off with a Democrat in office, they have to make the case that Democratic policies are just.

My point may be clearer if we consider the case of the rich Democrat. The class interest idea effectively approves of rich people voting Republican -- after all, to vote for the party of progressive taxation and regulation of business is against their economic self-interest. And it's doubtful that Democrats have simply duped some rich people into supporting them through appeals to cultural issues. Democrats think it's perfectly understandable for a rich person to support a liberal economic policy out of a sense of justice toward the less-well-off (as do rich conservatives -- it's conceivable that for many people there can be a coincidental, rather than causal, relationship between "policies I think are just" and "policies that benefit me").

People do vote with their pocketbooks, and may use their own prosperity to judge whether the incumbent has been successful in managing the economy. But in considering which policy is desirable, a person's sense of justice can easily take precendence. The problem with the Dean analysis is less that it assumes southerners are racists and more that it assumes that they're greedy.
Stentor Danielson, 01:27, archived

13.11.03

Bombing The Hand That Feeds You

My comic this week turned out to be not that original, although I hadn't seen the other, similar ones when I drew mine. My commentary was "State Of The Union: The New Face Of Labor," which comes with its own comic.
Stentor Danielson, 20:56, archived

If You Can't Take The Heat, Stay Out Of The Woods

Experts Say California Wildfires Could Worsen With Global Warming

... State lawmakers are requiring the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to begin charging rural homeowners for the cost of fire protection, as the state battles its massive budget deficit.

Nichols suggested the state should consider additional "user fees" on development in fire-prone areas. As it is, taxpayers across the nation pay to fight California's wildfires and to reimburse homeowners for their losses.

"If the true cost of fire protection were built into the cost of construction, it would not be as easy or as cheap as it has been to build in the foothills," Nichols said. "I think that would be a good thing."

The quoted bit doesn't match the headline because it came from the very end of the article, but it's the part that interested me more. The impact of a natural hazard is the result of the intersection of two elements: the event and the exposure. We could have the biggest wildfire in history and it would be no big deal if there was nobody there to get burned by it. In dealing with fire our society has a tendency to fixate on the event. Most of our strategies for reducing the fire hazard center on reducing fire events -- thinning forests, controlled burns, fire suppression, etc. This bias is more pronounced with regard to fire than is the case for some other natural hazards. For example, though we may dream about ways to reduce the occurrence of earthquakes, we mostly look to solutions like earthquake-proof buildings and not moving to California that reduce exposure. It's the percieved controllability of fire that's at issue here. For thousands of years people have built fires, so we're conditioned to think of them as things that are done, not things that just happen. This is reinforced by the fact that there are many things that we *can* do to affect the incidence of fire. Another component is that exposure reduction seems to involve lifestyle changes. We want the freedom to live however we want, and we hope that we can neutralize the exposure risk by eliminating the event. There's a strong tendency to take our lifestyle as given.
Stentor Danielson, 13:14, archived

12.11.03

The White Man's Museum

Is A Museum Obligated To Tell The Whole Truth?

Australia's new national museum, charged with depicting the story of this young nation, has roused the ire of those in power and prompted calls for wholesale changes to the permanent exhibitions.

... Among its recommendations, the review [by the government] said that a major permanent exhibition titled "Horizons," which shows immigrants from the 19th and 20th centuries, should be scrapped in favor of a focus on arrivals in the 19th century only - in other words, the British were in, and the Asians out.

... The review stated that the rotating theater [at the beginning of the museum] with its "potpourri of one-line opinions" should be replaced with the audience "recast as sailors on Captain Cook's longboat approaching the shore for the first time."

But the exhibits, as they stand now, have been a phenomenal success with visitors. In the first year alone, the museum attracted 1 million visitors, 600,000 more than initially envisioned.

I'm probably a bit out of my depth defending a museum display I've never seen, but I have some reactions to the story as reported here. The current display seems very poststructural, disrupting any unified grand narratives of history and pointing to unresolved complexity in what Australia is about. I'll admit to poststructuralist sympathies, but even those without such academic theoretical orientations -- as I presume most of the visitors are -- seem to find the museum appealing. One reason it may work so well is that a focus on the confusing fragmentation of everyday life resonates with people's own experience. Most of us don't feel too much like we're part of some great historical movement, so while such portrayals of the past can be useful in understanding what was going on, they're necessarily artificial.

The changes advocated by the government are a bit worrying. I wouldn't dismiss out of hand the idea that a display could be characterized by anti-white bias, or go too far in ignoring significant events in favor of portraying ordinary life. But the proposed changes indicate a desire to go too far in the opposite direction. They would reinforce a story of Australian history as Anglo history, a history that begins with Captain Cook (who the Aborigines of the time couldn't have cared less about, to judge from their reactions to him as recorded in his journal) and refuses to recognize the shared immigrant experience of the British and Asians. (I'm curious how the museum deals with Anglo Australia's long-standing racism against Asians, which seems to have come from a fear that the Chinese would do to whites what the whites did to the Aborigines. This is not to suggest that the proposed change is based on racism -- it's better explained by an adherence to a linear presentation of history that, due to the differing time periods of the two races' immigration, serves to set whites up as the original founding immigrants.) The "Captain Cook's longboat" device casts the visitor as a white person, and as a human arriving at a preexisting *thing*. The perspective is not centered on a continent recieving new arrivals (as it no doubt would be in a government-approved treatment of recent Asian immigration) and incorporating them somehow into its cultural-natural matrix, but on a group of people finding, claiming, and remaking a continent. But shouldn't Australia be at the center of a museum of Australian history?
Stentor Danielson, 17:27, archived

10.11.03

Longest Run-On Sentence In A Photo Caption Award

Via Dave Barry:

> A Vodou believer pours hot pepper-spiced homemade alcohol on her genital area, one of the key rituals during Gede, a Vodou holiday dedicated to Baron Samdi and the Gede family of spirits of the dead, while other believers, one clutching a miniature coffin, look on in the National Cemetery in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on November 1, 2003, which is All Saints Day and is also the first of two days devoted to the Gede, who are feted for most of the month

of November.

Stentor Danielson, 22:55, archived

Mining And Casinos

It seems to me that the problems with casinos as an economic development strategy for Native American tribes are similar in many ways to the problems of mining as a development strategy for rural areas and developing countries.

The basic premise of most such development schemes is the idea of creating what is sometimes called a "growth pole." This is based on the finding of economic geography that firms benefit from proximity to other successful firms. Economically successful regions arise because firms generate beneficial externalities that other nearby firms can take advantage of -- they foster a pro-business political climate, they produce a trained pool of labor, they share the costs of infrastructure improvements, and so forth. One of the most important of these effects is economic linkages. The most commonly described type of linkages are based on product flows. For example, a successful steel plant will foster the growth of "downstream" industries like car manufacturers that use the steel, as well as "upstream" industries like steelmaking equipment manufacturers that produce things the steel company needs. Another type of linkage is a "fiscal" linkage. A fiscal linkage occurs when some entity -- often a government -- takes a portion of the company's profits and reinvests it in another enterprise.

Mining linkages are predominantly fiscal. Mining companies have been generally unsuccessful at generating upstream and downstream linkages, for a variety of reasons I won't go into at the moment. Casinos work likewise. Generally a casino is a self-contained resort complex, meaning there's little opening for additional related enterprises to accrete around it. Instead, tribes take their casino revenues and reinvest them in things like community services, other enterprises, and payouts to tribe members.

The artificiality of fiscal linkages is one problem. Because there's no economic interrelatedness to dictate what other enterprises will benefit from the linkage (as is the case in upstream and downstream linkages), fiscal linkages are more susceptible to manipulation. Corrupt and nepotistic use of mining revenues is a widespread problem in developing countries. Compounding this problem is the centralization of the money. Mines and casinos are typically single large enterprises, meaning the profts are concentrated in a few hands. This centralization continues when the government takes its cut. This centralization of money leads to a centralization, and hence focused use, of power. This is what has led tribes with casinos to gain more political clout. But it has also led to tribal leaders abusing their power within the tribe, since tribe members are at the mercy of those who control the casino's revenue stream. As I understand it, this kind of problem has plagued the Oneida Nation since the opening of Turning Stone Casino, as many of the out-of-power traditionalist faction feel that they have been greatly wronged by the Nation's leaders.

A second problem is the need for political involvement for

casinos and mines. Both kinds of enterprises generally require special dispensation from the government to open - casinos need exemptions from laws, and mines need grants of land as well as the easing of tax and regulatory burdens. This encourages the growth within casino and mining operations of a skill at and inclination for special-pleading politics. These interests are used to getting special favors and case-by-case consideration from the government rather than following explicit and universal rules, and the concentration of economic power that the enterprises enjoy allows them to demand such consideration. The result is often cronyism. On the other hand, things go bad if the government ever turns on the casino enterprise, as we're seeing with many cash-strapped states. The economic concentration of these enterprises makes them appealing targets. And the history of relations based on special favors makes the government inclined to think that the tribe owes them, and that they can get away with demanding some special favors of their own. This results in an erosion of general principles of tribal sovereignty in favor of relationships worked out on the basis of the particular power relations in individual cases. The erosion of such general principles gives the tribes less of what the pretentious social scientist in me would call a "discursive resource," that is, a social structure or principle that can be drawn on to win an argument or struggle.

I hesitate to condemn casinos (or mines) outright, since without them many more Native Americans would be destitute and powerless. And I think some of the problems are more in the regulatory structure than in the nature of the casino business. Nevertheless, they present some serious problems and point to the difficulties of using a single industry to spur growth, and to the danger of the entanglement of favor-seeking that turns a well-regulated market into crony capitalism.
Stentor Danielson, 14:58, archived

It's Working So Well We Can Stop

At Meetings, U.S. To Seek Support For Broad Ozone Exemptions

The two-decade effort to eliminate chemicals that harm the ozone layer faces its most serious test in recent years this week as the Bush administration seeks international support for broad exemptions to a 2005 ban on a popular pesticide.

Many American farmers say the pesticide, methyl bromide, is vital as they try to compete with farm production in countries where fields are tended by low-paid laborers. Critics of the proposed exemptions, led by the European Union, say that substitute chemicals are already in wide use and that the American request threatens progress toward repairing the ozone layer, which shields the earth from radiation that causes cancers and other problems.

... [California Rep. George P.] Radanovich replied, "The intent of the legislation is to preserve the use of the only effective and affordable pesticide available for certain crops until an alternative is developed."

The dynamics of this proposal bring together a number of issues about how the current administration, and the crony capitalists it represents, think about the environment.

The most obvious comparison is to the Kyoto Protocol. In Kyoto and the ozone rules (the Montreal Protocol), developing countries are given exemptions to environmental standards. The theory is that forcing them to play by the same rules would hamper their achievement of economic success (since they don't have the resources, built up over decades of the early "dirty" phase of development, to invest in clean technology). And in both cases, this element of the rules is at the center of the administration's stated objections. I doubt Bush would go for any effective climate change measures, but he (along with the Senate) says one of the biggest problems with Kyoto is that it doesn't require developing countries to make emissions reductions. Likewise on the ozone front, we're seeing a complaint that developing countries are allowed to continue using methyl bromide, thus giving them an unfair advantage. Given how heavily subsidized -- to the detriment of the competitiveness of developing-world agriculture -- US farming is, I'm not inclined to be too sympathetic. Perhaps the situation is different for the specific crops that most benefit from methyl bromide, but I'm still skeptical, given that fruit and vegetable farming in Florida -- one of the key crops in contention -- has been both politically corrupt and damaging to the environment for reasons that go far beyond methyl bromide. Further, I'm resistant to the idea of sacrificing the environment (particularly since the worst effects will be felt not by the American famers using the chemicals but by people in far-away places like Australia) in order to maintain a level playing field for the most advanced countries.

Second, the contention that there are no good alternatives and that the US wants to continue using methyl bromide only until they're discovered is contrary to the history of international ozone protection treaties. We'll assume for the moment that the farmers, rather than the opponents who argue that there are substitutes already available, are correct here. There were similar concerns raised when the first aspects of the Montreal Protocol went into effect and restricted chemicals like freon and aerosol propellants. Yet as it turned out, the loss of those chemicals spurred research and innovation leading to the development of new chemicals that were all-around better than the old ones. Allowing the US to get out of methyl bromide restrictions will reduce the impetus for the very R&D that the farmers say they're waiting for.

This brings us to an important point about how capitalism as we know it works: it gets stuck in ruts. The costs of entry to many markets allow large companies to dominate them. These companies don't like innovation, because it shakes things up. They'd rather keep producing the products they know how to produce with the equipment and political concessions that they've already got set up. A prime example is the energy industry. The industry is, at present, geared mostly toward fossil fuel production. Innovative ideas that could replace fossil fuels are bought out by the big companies, then put on the back burner where they won't threaten present operations. The pesticide industry would like to stay in its rut, continuing to prodce methyl bromide rather than investing the effort in developing new, more environmentally friendly, formulas (and certainly rather than adopting techniques that would reduce the need for chemical pesticides). Likewise with the farmers

who use methyl bromide.

A final point relates to an issue brought up in John Quiggin's criticism of "skeptical environmentalist" Bjorn Lomborg. One of Quiggin's complaints is that Lomborg "tries to argue against environmental policies by pointing to improvements generated by those very policies." This strategy has been used by the Bush administration before, in pointing to improvements in air quality since the passage of the Clean Air Act as evidence that we can weaken the Act. We see it surface in the push for exemptions from Montreal, as the administration points to improvements in the ozone situation since the implementation of Montreal as proof that they should be able to get out of their Montreal obligations. There's an added twist here, though: the improvements they point to haven't actually begun yet. Ozone-depleting chemicals have long lifespans, so it will be some time before we really start to see the effects. That means there's even *less* reason to allow loopholes in the rules.
Stentor Danielson, 14:05, archived

9.11.03

Rotting In The Grave

Burial: Rest In Green Peace

SO-CALLED GREEN cemeteries, hundreds of which exist in Europe and Africa, are catching on in the United States. Marketed as an alternative to burial in traditional wooden caskets (which remain intact for centuries) and cremation (which wastes energy and causes air pollution), these cemeteries have an environmentally correct solution: bodies are buried in biodegradable shrouds like a blanket or cardboard; individual headstones aren't permitted. This month Texas environmentalist and Universal Ethician Church Bishop George Russell is opening the country's third, and largest, natural cemetery on an 81-acre lot on the shores of Lake Livingston in east Texas. "A pickled body in a case" is not only bad for the environment, Russell argues, but it doesn't follow the Biblical concept of "dust to dust."

Hopefully these are widespread enough by the time I die that I can get in on it. Back when I worked at the funeral home, it always seemed strange to me that the caskets in the showroom made a selling point out of how long the casket, and presumably hence the body in it, would last. It's not like anybody's going to be able to tell whether you're still there somewhere under the ground. Assuming that you don't believe that the soul remains in some way tied to the body -- which I don't -- about the only purpose this information seems to serve is to weird out Barbara by discussing how they test the lifespan of the caskets.

On the other hand, the very fact that I don't believe it matters to my fate what people do with my body after I'm done with it suggests that the choice of burial shouldn't be entirely mine. The ritual of the funeral and burial is for the benefit of the survivors and how they need to grieve. A part of that process,

though, is facilitated by the knowledge that they're doing what the deceased would have wanted, so maybe that's my way to bring in the green cemetary idea.
Stentor Danielson, 17:08, archived

One If By Land, Two If By Sea

Did First Americans Arrive By Land *And* Sea?

A growing number of experts are radically rethinking how the Americas were first populated. Scientists say an emerging picture suggests that the earliest people to reach the New World may have arrived by both land and coastal routes.

For the last several decades, prevailing theory held that a small group of big game hunters in Siberia followed the Pleistocene megafauna—mammoth, mastodon, and extinct bison—across a land bridge that formed during the last Ice Age. Known as Beringia, it connected Asia to Alaska and northwestern Canada. As the glaciers began to retreat, an ice-free corridor opened up around 12,000 years ago, allowing people to make their way south to populate North and South America.

... For decades it was simply assumed that the coast of Beringia was an inhospitable place to live, said Erlandson. New evidence suggests that instead of a straight-line coast, the southern coastline of Beringia was comprised of hundreds of islands, shallow bays, and inlets. Such coastal topography would have facilitated coastal living and migration.

One issue this article doesn't follow up on is the question of megafauna. The prevailing image of the first Americans is of big-game hunters following the mastodons from Siberia. But a coastal route would suggest a much greater emphasis on smaller animals and plants. The Clovis culture would then be an indigenous adaptation, developed as people left their maritime environments and moved inland to where the big game was.

I wonder what the shift from thinking about the first Americans as generalists rather than big game specialists says about how rapidly the continent was populated. Many people believe that the megafauna were wiped out in part by a rapid population expansion of hunters -- the "blitzkreig" hypothesis. I have a preconceived skepticism about this theory based on closer investigations of the cases of South America and Australia. This is bolstered by the historical evidence from hunting of the most mega of the fauna left after the ice ages, the bison. We hear a lot about how conservation-minded the Indians of the plains were in contrast to the wasteful whites who nearly wiped the bison out. But as Shepard Krech points out, another important factor was that the plains Indians simply weren't capable of putting that much hunting pressure on the bison. To do so would have required many more mouths to feed than the plains Indians had (clearly the Lakota never read Malthus). This makes me wonder why the Paleoindians would have been different (though they certainly could have been -- one could argue that other factors, such as climate, reduced

the megafauna's numbers so that they were extinct-able whereas the bison remained too numerous).

On the one hand, it seems like generalists would be able to expand more rapidly, because they're less dependent on any particular resource. It seems like they could more quickly pick up new food sources as they moved across the continent, rather than being limited by the range of the megafauna. Then again, the "blitzkreig" hypothesis only requires rapid population expansion through the areas with megafauna. On the other hand, the archaeological evidence points in the other direction -- there are many Clovis sites, whereas there are no universally agreed-upon pre-Clovis sites (though I personally am pretty confident in Meadowcroft). So either the pre-Clovis generalists tread very lightly upon the land, or there was no population explosion until Clovis times.
Stentor Danielson, 13:37, archived

A Manly W?

The praise of aggressive masculinity that I talked about in the previous post has been much talked about in the last few years with regard to the president. Many conservatives see Bush post-9/11 as the epitome of resurgent manliness, boldly laying the smackdown on our enemies (in contrast to the girly-man Democrats depicted in this odd cartoon). I agree that Bush has been able to project that image, and that it's a big part of his appeal to many people.

But I think he has also been able to project an image more in line with Bill Clinton, who was reviled for the effeminate declaration "I feel your pain." Immediately after September 11, it was his ability to play the comforting father, grieving along with us, that was responsible for his skyrocketing approval more than was his playing the role of the defiant soldier. The soldier has been on display much more in the past year, but Bush remembers how to play the father role. In California on Tuesday, Bush explained how he wasn't going to give any additional aid (as requested by Arnold Schwarzenegger):

> "The best I can do is to listen and hug and empathize as best as I can empathize," the president said. "I suspect the citizens here, who are at the darkest moments, will find light when a fellow citizen loves them."

It's interesting that he went with the compassionate father role here, since fire*fighting* is so steeped in the soldier model. I would have expected a statement of defiant resolution to battle the forces that lead to catastrophic fire (and he did shift into soldier mode when he got to the part of his speech that dealt with Iraq). Perhaps it's that very unexpectedness that makes Bush's statement come off as authentic to people.
Stentor Danielson, 00:37, archived