

Behind Gore Vidal's Tirade Against FDR

by Mark Burdman

The Golden Age

by Gore Vidal

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At a time when the miserable policies of the Bush Administration are, understandably, triggering often-impassioned criticisms of Washington, even by usually staunch pro-American figures in different parts of the globe, one must be on guard against certain fashionable “anti-American” commentators, whose own agenda may be even worse than that of the George Bush team—if that can be imagined.

Such a dubious individual is Gore Vidal.

Now resident in Italy, the American-born Vidal has become something of a guru, usually to left-liberal critics, primarily in the United States and Great Britain, but also in continental Europe and elsewhere. He is frequently interviewed in the European press, or writes commentaries, on the American situation. A clever and educated fellow, and talented scribbler of sorts, he is capable of coming up with those witty phrases, trenchant comments, and pithy insights, that seem, at first glance, to be right on target.

But let the reader beware. The fact is, Vidal has become the leading novelist/historian for what can, justifiably, be characterized as the “treason school” of writings about the United States. He comprehends, that he who controls a nation’s history, can effectively control the minds of its population, or, as British writer George Orwell, author of *1984*, once said: “He who controls the past, controls the present.” Vidal is aware that Americans, increasingly as the years go on,

have become dismally ignorant about their own history. His nickname for America is “Amnesia.” His aim, is to fill what he perceives to be a vacuum.

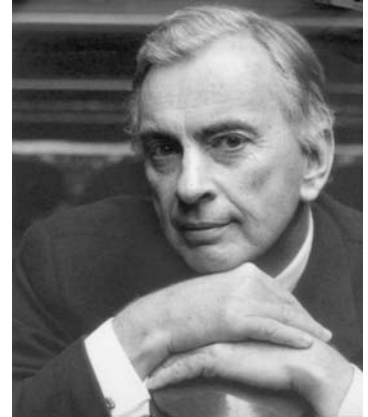
In *The Golden Age*, the most recent in an historical-novel (or novelized history) series that Vidal has dubbed “Narratives of Empire,” the chief target of his venom is President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Secondary targets include Gen. Douglas MacArthur, President John F. Kennedy, and the latter’s brother Robert. In earlier novels, including *Burr* (1973), *1876* (1976), *Lincoln* (1984), and *Empire* (1987), Vidal took vicious aim at George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, John Quincy Adams, Abraham Lincoln, James G. Blaine, and other leading American statesmen and patriots.

The thread running through many of these novels, including in *The Golden Age* and most energetically in *Burr*, is hero-worship for the renegade scoundrel Aaron Burr. In *Burr*, Vidal depicts Burr, as if flaunting the fact, working with Ambassador Anthony Merry and other chief figures of the British Empire, to bring about the disintegration of the United States. Vidal also shows the close relations between Burr and the latter’s chief British patron, Jeremy Bentham, the head of the “secret committee” of the British Foreign Office.¹

Deconstructing Western Civilization

Clearly, Vidal is a leading propagandist, in the tradition of Bentham, for those British imperial interests committed to destroying defenders of the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, in the United States

1. For insights into Burr, see *Treason in America: From Aaron Burr to Averell Harriman*, by Anton Chaitkin (New York: New Benjamin Franklin House, 1985). On Bentham, see article by Lyndon LaRouche in this issue’s *Feature*.



Gore Vidal (right) promotes the treason tradition of Aaron Burr (left) against the patriotic tradition embodied in the last century by President Franklin Roosevelt.

and elsewhere. His family's links to the British Gore family (of former British Ambassador to the U.S. David Ormsby-Gore, a.k.a. Lord Harlech, as well as other well-placed British influentials of that surname) are of relevance to this. And, as the Tennessee Gores, of Al Gore father and son notoriety, also come out of that nest, it is not surprising that Vidal's worldview converges, in crucial respects, on that of the past 35 years' pro-Confederacy "Southern Strategy."

Vidal carries forward the ideas of such negatively influential Brits of the last century as H.G. Wells and Bertrand Russell. His fundamental commitment, like theirs, is to deconstruct the very fabric of Western, Judeo-Christian civilization.

In novels other than in his "Narratives of Empire" series, and in various articles and commentaries, Vidal has vituperated against the 15th-Century Golden Renaissance, specifically because it led to a vast increase in global population. He has campaigned for the massive reduction of world population, particularly its non-white components. He has promoted homosexuality (he is a practicing homosexual) as an efficient means of reducing population. Consistent with all this, Vidal has denounced the monotheistic faiths of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

The Method of Misanthropy

Vidal uses the medium of the historical novel to combine factual historical events and processes, with fictional elements, and thereby ascribe actions and motivations to real historical characters, the which may have, at best, a foggy relation to reality, and, at worst, be pure inventions of the imagination. This method requires no proof by citation. It allows the author the duplicity of saying something nasty, and then denying that he meant it, once the damage has been done;

it allows for a great density of innuendos, gossip, and the like.

Vidal himself has virtually admitted as much, in various locations. For example, in his "Afterword" to *The Golden Age*, he takes pride in having gossiped, in his novel *Lincoln*, that Abraham Lincoln's reported "melancholy and odd health" may have been brought about by "mercury poisoning," from the mercury that he ostensibly used, at one point in his life, against syphilis. He mocked the "Lincoln brigade in academe" for being "outraged by my reference to this 'maggoty story.'"

Vidal's intended effect, is the opposite of what is accomplished by the great tragedies or history plays of a William Shakespeare or Friedrich Schiller. They, too, ground their plot development on historical processes, "things that really happened," and add in fictional elements, in the sense of dialogues and other elements that did not happen in reality. However, when they depict graphically those flaws of the leading character that make an ugly denouement inevitable, it is to make manifest fundamental truths about human behavior. Their intent, is for members of the audience to emerge from the experience better people, capable of taking greater responsibility for their nation, and for mankind as a whole.

Vidal, by contrast, cynically drags the reader into a complex of gossip, sleaze, and perversity, that, insofar as he succeeds, leaves the reader feeling as misanthropic as is the author himself.

What's at Stake

We see this method at work throughout *The Golden Age*. The central theme, accompanied by numerous sub-plots (some incomprehensible, unless the reader has read previous novels of the "Narratives of Empire" series), is the portrayal of FDR as a treacherous intriguer, who plotted to bring the

United States into World War II by, in effect, rigging the Japanese attack on the American fleet anchored at Pearl Harbor. As one character in the book sardonically comments, the “infamy” is not the “date of infamy” as coined by FDR in his famous declaration of war following Dec. 7, 1941, but that of FDR himself.

Vidal insinuates, through the mouth of one anti-FDR character in the book, that FDR, or one of his henchmen, arranged to have the American fleet docked at Pearl Harbor, rather than at San Diego, to make it easier for the Japanese to attack, and to kill some 3,000 American seamen. Vidal puts these words in the mouth of one leading FDR critic: “It’s the way Hitler works. Accuse your victim of aggression. Then, attack him.”

Vidal’s FDR comes off as not much better than a Grade-B movie degenerate mafia godfather. His FDR is a cretin who engages in serial adultery, randomly disposes of friends and associates, and so on.

The accusation that Roosevelt “dragged America into World War II,” has been the common fare for decades of various species of isolationists, populists, and others in the United States. It is gaining new circulation now, at a time when the forces behind George W. Bush, centered around the Mont Pelerin Society, have a vested interest in destroying everything that remains today of what FDR stood for, and in eliminating the positive remembrance of that great President, that tens of millions of Americans still have.

For the “FDR question” is the decisive matter, in determining which way the American nation goes, in the next weeks and months. As Lyndon LaRouche has repeatedly stressed, the revival of the policies and commitments of FDR at this time, provides the unique way for the United States to avoid becoming a fascist nation, as Germany became in 1933, when it rejected the leadership of those whose policies were similar to those of FDR.

LaRouche has made three fundamental points about FDR. One, is that his central commitment was the promotion of the “general welfare” for all the population, in line with what is promised Americans in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. Second, FDR saw himself as the spokesman for the “American intellectual tradition” of Benjamin Franklin, John Quincy Adams, and Lincoln, and ran his 1932 campaign for the Presidency to rally the population behind that tradition. Third, his intent after World War II was to dismantle the colonial empires of Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, and Portugal, and to replace them with a global system based on a community of principle among sovereign nation-states, and on “American System” methods of rapid economic and technological development.

The American ‘Augustus Caesar’

Looked at from this standpoint, Vidal’s scurrilous purpose in writing *The Golden Age* becomes apparent.

There is no need to dignify Vidal with a refutation of the

allegations that fly out, like scatter-shot, from the pages of *The Golden Age*. He is not involved in an honest portrayal of FDR, but a character assassination.

What matters for Vidal, in the “FDR rigged Pearl Harbor” saga, is to establish certain so-called “motives,” the which are meant to confirm his perverted sense of the United States.

Vidal attributes four “motives” to his fictional FDR. One, the least of these but no less nasty, he puts into FDR’s mouth, to explain why he is concerned to act against Japan at a time when the Japanese were rampaging over the Chinese. Says FDR: “We Roosevelts are old China hands. . . . Our Chinese connection goes back to the clipper ships. My grandfather, Warren Delano, made a fortune running opium to the poor Chinese.” I.e., FDR had a Romantic love for the British monarchy’s opium trade.

Motives two and three, of greater weight in the overall account, are closely linked: FDR was desperate to become the first President in American history to have a third term, and was frantic, by the late-1930s, that his New Deal policies to get America out of the Great Depression were not succeeding. The “answer” to both these quandaries, was to get the United States into a war.

But, both of these alleged motivations are still, in Vidal’s world, only stepping-stones to FDR’s Big Idea, namely, to take over the world, with himself as potentate of a new American world empire, which would replace an ostensibly war-wasted and bankrupt British Empire. This book, then, becomes the lawful conclusion of Vidal’s “Narratives of Empire” series, which is founded on the construct that what matters in American history is the ineluctable process toward an “American Empire.”

Hence, FDR, in the novel, is given the nickname “Augustus,” after Augustus Caesar, the founder of the Roman Empire. In Vidal’s account, FDR is determined to accomplish what President Teddy Roosevelt, his cousin, couldn’t do, and what President Woodrow Wilson failed to do. Vidal’s characters repeatedly refer to Wilson as FDR’s “mentor,” an absurd concoction, in view of FDR’s rejection of the Wilson’s pro-Confederacy, pro-Ku Klux Klan worldview.

FDR is portrayed as power-mad, and he and/or his circle are, at times, likened to Hitler and the Nazis.

Whitewashing the British

Throughout this tirade, Vidal engages in what can charitably be called a whitewash of the British Empire.

He simply ignores three basic realities. One, is the deep philosophical, cultural, and political hostility that FDR felt for the British imperial system. Insofar as he does refer to FDR’s anti-British sentiments, he reduces these to the pettiest of emotions, such as that FDR’s Dutch family origins made him resent the British supplanting of the Dutch in the early American colonies, and that FDR personally had ill feelings toward Winston Churchill from the days when Churchill, as British War Secretary during World War I,

treated FDR, who was then U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Navy, disdainfully.

Second, Vidal peddles the usual cant about how the “Americans replaced the British as world empire” after World War II, and that the British Empire doesn’t exist any more. In fact, as *EIR* has documented, the British Empire, after World War II, regrouped under the aegis of the British Commonwealth. That Commonwealth, to the present day, exerts enormous control over world financial flows, particularly via the City of London; over vital raw materials; and over crucial cultural-philosophical trends, as per Churchill’s insistence, at Harvard University in the early 1940s, that the future would be determined by the battle of “empires of the mind.”

There have been powerful U.S. interests, centered in Wall Street, that have promoted an Anglo-American world empire in a “special relationship” with Great Britain. Since the fall of the Soviet Union during 1989-91, the world empire has taken the form of a Commonwealth-centered “Gang of Five”: Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and a United States largely under the thumb of Wall Street and “Confederacy” interests.

Vidal carries the falsification to the point of simply ignoring, in his account of the Harry Truman years following Roosevelt’s premature death in 1945, the famous March 1946 “Iron Curtain” speech by Winston Churchill, in Fulton, Missouri, which launched the “Cold War.” This is hardly what a “leftist” guru might do. But then again, Vidal has a nostalgia, most strange for such a species, for Truman, and for 1945-50. The book title, in fact, is taken from a manuscript written by one of the characters, an account of the years 1945-50.

Cannibals and Bacteria

Vidal’s hatred of American republican leaders and ideas is ultimately driven by an all-compelling misanthropy. This comes out clearly in the last pages of *The Golden Age*, which depict Peter Sanford, the main character of the book, in the year 2000, now 77 years old, likening the modern world to the “Malthusian nightmare” of ancient Mayan civilization, which solved its problems by reverting to cannibalism. This Sanford is clearly meant to be Vidal’s own alter ego, since, by a weird novelistic trick, Vidal himself becomes a character in the novel, in friendly chit-chat with Sanford. The character, Vidal, even engages in dialogue with the reincarnation of Burr, who declares the era of the nation-state to be over, and his own intention to rule the world, through “energy.”

The concluding passage reads: “As for the human case, the generations of men come and go and are in eternity no more than bacteria upon a luminous slide, and the fall of a republic or the rise of an empire—so significant to those involved—is not detectable upon the slide even were there an interested eye to behold that steadily proliferating species which would end either in time or, with luck, become something else, since change is the nature of life, and its hope.”

The “something else” that “that steadily proliferating species” is suppose to become, is an ominous prospect, if one reviews some relevant background, on Vidal’s ideas.

‘There Are 4 Billion People Too Many’

From the late 1980s through the mid-1990s, Vidal became an impassioned advocate of the most extreme Malthusian policies, repeatedly insisting that the world population must be reduced from its level of 6 billion-plus, to no more than 2 billion.

He told a conference in São Paulo, Brazil, in March 1987, that AIDS is a positive factor, because it will “reduce the world population to 2 billion in a generation.” On Dec. 19, 1988, he appeared on West German television, to advise that the United States and the Soviet Union should cooperate on such “soluble” problems as the “population explosion,” because “there are 4 billion people too many.”

In one essay, published in a collection of his essays on the United States, he ranted that the human population has been “breeding like a virus under optimum conditions” over a 100-year period. He advised that “breeders” should be “discouraged,” while “same-sexers” should be treated as “benefactors,” because they help control world population.

Vidal also penned attacks on the Golden Renaissance, for having caused an increase in world population. That Renaissance, he exclaimed, created a “sudden big bang” in population, in which process the white race spread like “a plague” around the globe.

Lyndon LaRouche has heralded the Golden Renaissance as the key positive moment in the history of humanity, especially as it catalyzed a vast rise in world population. He has published a chart, showing the great rise in world population since the Renaissance. Essentially, that same graphic was reprinted by Vidal’s relative Al Gore, in his ecologist rant, *Earth in the Balance*, to warn of the dangers of population growth brought about by Western civilization. That polemic against the Renaissance is frequently heard in advisory circles to Great Britain’s Royal Consort Prince Philip, co-founder, former international president, and now president-emeritus of the World Wildlife Fund (now the World Wide Fund for Nature).

In line with his hatred of the Renaissance, Vidal has repeatedly attacked the monotheistic religions, declaring, in one early-1990s piece, that monotheism is “the greatest disaster ever to befall the human race. . . . I see no good in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.”

Several of these ideas were in a Vidal commentary in the Oct. 10, 1993 London *Sunday Telegraph*, the paper owned by Hollinger Corp. chief executive Conrad Black, the British Empire enthusiast who is close to the Bush family interests in the United States. In it, Vidal called for the creation of a “Northern white race confederacy,” to defend what he portrayed as a dwindling white race, against rapidly increasing Asian and other non-white races.