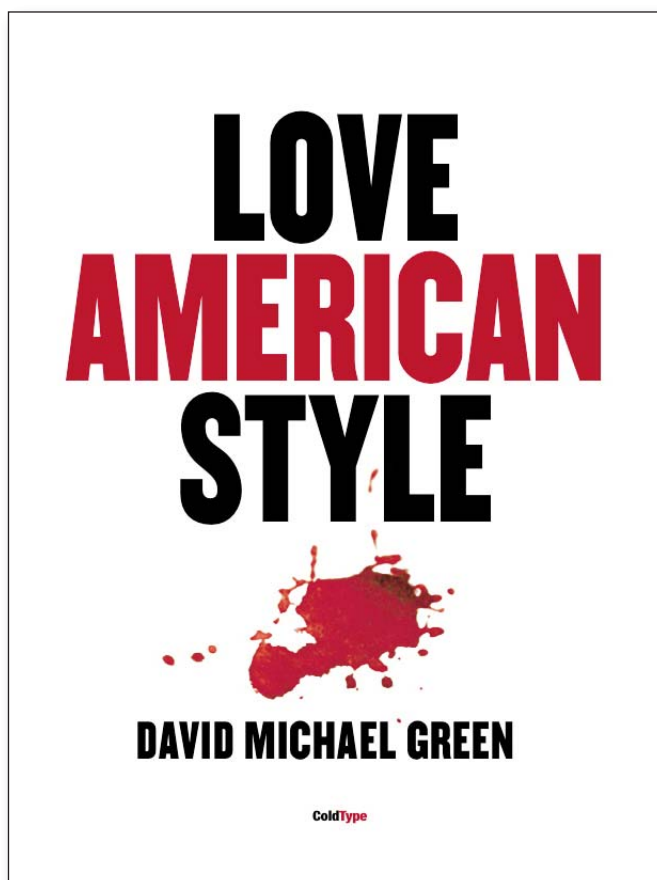


LOVE
AMERICAN
STYLE



DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

ColdType



David Michael Green is a professor of political science at Hofstra University in New York. He is delighted to receive readers' reactions to his articles (<mailto:dmg@regressiveantidote.net>), but regrets that time constraints do not always allow him to respond.

More of his work can be found at his website, <http://regressiveantidote.net>

© David Michael Green 2008

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD
www.coldtype.net

LOVE AMERICAN STYLE . . . DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

*Outside I hear the ground shaking
Up from underneath
It's only when the empire's breaking
That you see their teeth
– Al Stewart, “Rain Barrel”*

Americans love to think that we're a peaceful people, and that we fight wars only when we must. Unfortunately, you can count in nanoseconds how long those assertions hold up when exposed to such insidious commie dirty tricks as the application of logic or the examination of empirical history. Sure, any war can be spun as some necessity against some Very Bad Person, preferably of brown skin, slanted eyes and/or differing deity. Not only can any war be so spun, probably every war there ever was has been, at least since the days when governments had to start offering some justification or another for their little foreign adventures.

But pick your barometer – any one will work – and you'll quickly see who are the militant folks on the planet. For America, it turns out – gulp – to be that bloated, frightened meth-addict staring back at us in the mirror, not some overseas evil emperor du jour.

For example, suppose you wanted to measure comparative national war-like tendencies by simply counting wars. Since World War II, the US has messed around, in ways big and small, in Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Lebanon, Granada, Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti, Somalia, Afghanistan again, and Iraq again. No country in the world can begin to match this record in the last half-century. And I'm not even listing here the covert operations (almost everywhere), including the ones that toppled democratically elected governments (Iran, Guatemala, Chile, etc.), the long-term occupations of

LOVE AMERICAN STYLE . . . DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

Latin American countries by the US military, the gunboat diplomacy of the American Navy around the world, the aiding and abetting of other killers (Saddam invading Iran, for example, apartheid South Africa or the Israeli occupation of Palestine), the militarization of the oceans and of space, or the myriad other ways in which the US leads the planet in aggressive tendencies. (For a whole century's worth of overseas fun – not even counting the big stuff – Stephen Kinzer's *Overthrow* is highly recommended reading.)

Who has China been invading lately? Russia? Fidel? Those perfidious (and perfumed) French? Heck, even Saddam couldn't touch this record for aggression, especially once you account for the fact that the US government assisted his foreign soiree into Iran (complete with the chemical weapons, of course) and likely green-lighted the one into Kuwait as well. And let's even grant that one or two of those American adventures had some measure of altruism associated with them, as perhaps the Balkan or Somalian affairs might have (I'd like to know the full story before making that judgement). Isn't the sheer volume of them – especially relative to the number of wars other countries have fought – a bit problematic for maintaining the pretense of America's pacific intent? My conservative (in both senses of the word) list above goes to nearly twenty. Isn't that a bit much for a peace-loving country?

But scratch that measure if you must (perhaps it cuts too close to the bone). Maybe we can detect America's dislike for war in another metric, say military spending. Oops. Turns out that's going to be a bit problematic too. I guess it won't be a huge surprise to anybody that the US spends more on 'defense' than any other country in the world. Maybe that's not so completely absurd, given that we have the third largest population on the planet. (At least it's not entirely out of line if you set aside the slightly inconvenient fact that the two larger countries are about four times bigger than we are). But here's the truly scary part: The United States not only outspends every other country in the world on military goodies, it outspends ALL other countries of the world. Combined. That's right. Take all 190-plus countries out there and add together their defense budgets and you still won't equal America's alone. What's more, that doesn't even include the \$100 billion or so that we're dropping each year in Iraq and Afghanistan, nor the additional costs in veterans' (so-called) care, munitions replacement and economic losses we have been hemorrhaging for those wars, and will continue to, for decades to come, estimated to run up toward two trillion bucks total. (Oh, and did I mention that one-sixth of our population doesn't have healthcare coverage? Never mind. I'm sure those are completely unrelated facts.) Anyhow, does that sound like a peace-loving country to you? We love it so much that we outspend nearly 200 other countries in the world – combined! – in buying shit for war? And think about this for a second: How absolutely disas-

EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW . . . DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

trous does your diplomacy have to get so that you need to be able to fight off every other country of the world, all at once?!

Okay, okay, so that one didn't work out so well either. The good news is that at least we don't make the world an uglier place by continually inventing new and more vicious weaponry. Not us peace-loving Americans! You know, like atom bombs, napalm, bunker-busters, cluster bombs, neutron bombs, space lasers, phosphorous bombs and stuff like that! Who would build such things? What kind of depraved mind would harness so much of its scientific and industrial establishment to such ends? Who would... er... um... Hey, wait a minute! What do you mean that we invented and manufactured all those things?!? I thought we were the peace-loving people! Meanwhile, can I interest you in some depleted uranium at a very, very attractive price?

Okay, but we must be good neighbors, really, because we're always the ones who are pushing for all sorts of international treaties to limit war, weapons and the worst practices of nasty governments. You know, for example, how we signed on to the United Nations Charter (which we more or less also wrote), and its requirement that states may only use militarized aggression in the case of self-defense or when authorized by the Security Council to do so in a collective security operation. Hey, sometimes we even comply with it! Or maybe you prefer the treaties against land mines, child soldiers or the weaponization of space, which we're pretty much the only folks not signing? The "quaint" and "obsolete" Geneva Conventions against torture and war crimes? How about the International Criminal Court, which John Bolton led the Bush administration into single-handedly trying to destroy? Hmm... Wonder why they would have wanted to get rid of that? Gee, I thought genocide and war crimes were a bad thing! America is the world leader in supporting human rights and seeking peace. So, remember, if you hear someone tell you that we've been abdicating, avoiding, ignoring and destroying all these (and myriad other) treaties that seek to end or prevent war, it's just the liberal America-hating media elites telling lies again, because they want us to lose our wars. (And why would they want that? That's easy! So some other country can march in, take away their enormously profitable media franchises, steal their mansions and yachts, and then hang them for treason and pillaging, of course. Who wouldn't trade their current set-up for that? Trust me, these guys know a good thing when they see it.)

Alright, alright, so it turns out that none of these measures of warlike tendencies turned out so very well. American is winning these contests about as often as is Hillary Clinton on the campaign trail. And with about as much grace, too. But at least the rest of the world thinks of us as nice, peaceful neighbors, right? Well, actually, they sometimes do! Just not now. And just not when we're, uh, engaged in most

LOVE AMERICAN STYLE . . . DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

of our wars. Vietnam wasn't exactly appreciated out there in the global community, and that opinion hasn't changed a whole lot, even after we've established a lovely little trading relationship with that same communist country that we once argued would be so dangerous if it went... er, well, communist. You know, like China! That's why we don't trade with them now, or – perish the thought – make ourselves vulnerable by allowing them to finance our national binge borrowing. No sense aiding and abetting the enemy, eh?! (This is getting so confusing, though. Are communists our friends or our adversaries? Are we trying to help them or hurt them? Why does it seem like it depends on how much money there is to be made?)

Sorry – I digress. Despite ourselves, America is in fact sometimes admired in world opinion. But not when we play our war games. People didn't like Vietnam, they didn't like Central America in the 1980s, they didn't care for Iran, Guatemala or Chile, Granada or Lebanon, and they resent the hell out of our support for Israeli colonialism in Palestine. They can't stand America's duplicity, hypocrisy and arrogance when it comes to so many aspects of international diplomacy, including the aforementioned treaties we've avoided when we're not trying to destroy them. Yet nothing has so inflamed world opinion as the gross transgression against international law and human morality that is Iraq. America's standing in world opinion isn't the only measure of how comparatively warlike we are, but it certainly is a valid one. When everybody else in the neighborhood hates you, or hates something you do, it's a moment for a little reflection and introspection, isn't it? Unless, of course, you're just an asshole. Then why bother?

No, America's standing in world opinion isn't the only barometer of our aggressive tendencies, but then again, every single one of them we've examined has turned out the same. We fight by far and away more wars than any other country in the world. We spend way more money on our military than every other country in the world, combined! – nearly 200 hundred of them altogether! We out-do the world in creating new and vicious ways to liberate more and more people from the ongoing hassle of being alive. We abdicate every treaty meant to keep the dogs of war at bay, from ABM to Geneva to the UN Charter. Or else we smash them. And, finally, we are admired for our peaceful tendencies in every part of the world. Except where we're not. Which turns out to be just about everywhere nowadays.

What a record, eh? Even the East German judge has to give this puppy a high score for consistency! Even if you disqualify one of these measures for some reason or another, surely the fact that they all point in the same direction is uncomfortably telling.

I don't want to give the wrong impression. Much as I'd like to be, I'm not a pacifist, because I realize that there are genuinely bad actors out there who can't be

LOVE AMERICAN STYLE . . . DAVID MICHAEL GREEN

tamed by a Dick Cheney charm offensive, or beaten into submission by a Condoleeza Rice piano sonata. I'm glad the US military was there to stomp Hitler. Maybe even Korea, Bosnia and Kosovo could be justified as a response to aggression, though here it gets murkier. But Vietnam? No way. Today's Iraq war? Utterly shameful. The Mexican War? Spanish-American War? Cuba? Nicaragua? Guatemala? Granada? Be serious. Way too often America's pacific intentions are harder to find than the elusive Higgs boson particle. Probably you'd need a massive supercollider and a bunch of expensive detection equipment to do it, too.

And god knows I'm not blaming the troops for this. Indeed, too often they're the second victims (the truth being the first) of policymakers like Lyndon Johnson, George W. Bush and Hillary Clinton, for whom war is a game and people are pawns.

But because of these monsters and the record they've created, Americans have to face an ugly and unfortunate fact. Despite what your sixth grade civics teacher told you, we're not the white-hats of the world. Or at least not often enough. We just like to think we are.

But thinking and being are, alas, two different things, as we found out going into Iraq – thinking we'd be greeted with chocolates and flowers.

We may get them yet, however. Perhaps they'll be handed to us at the exit ramp, as the next president extricates a sobered United States from the disaster of its latest example of bringing love, American-style to the world.



**READ MORE BY
DAVID MICHAEL
GREEN AT
COLDTYPE.NET**

Download political essays by many of the best and brightest commentators from around the world, plus books, booklets, essays, newspapers and magazines – all in pdf format – all free of charge, at

www.coldtype.net

(Click on this link to enter web site)



ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD