

**An Unreflective Man**by **Patrick J. Buchanan** ([more by this author](#))

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With his public approval where Harry Truman's stood when he left office, George W. Bush gave his last press conference yesterday.

And like that predecessor he often identifies with, Bush showed a Trumanesque defiance of his critics -- and a Trumanesque failure to understand what ruined his presidency.

He denounced protectionism, as he has with dismissive contempt since he went to New Hampshire a decade ago. But nowhere in his defense of free trade was there any explanation for how Middle America lost 3 million manufacturing jobs in his first term and a million more in the last year.

Nowhere does there seem an awareness that the ideas he absorbed at his father's knee and the Harvard Business School had resulted in the de-industrialization of his country, an enormous and growing dependency on Japan, China and Asia for the essentials of our national life, and, now, for the borrowed money to pay for them.

Someone once defined tragedy as what happens when a beautiful theory collides with a fact. And this is what has happened every time a great empire -- be it the Spanish, British or American -- embraced free trade as its salvation.

President Bush says it was freedom that prevailed when he rejected the pleas of weak-sister Republicans and backed the surge. But what spared us a debacle in Iraq was an infusion of 30,000 combat troops, an uprising against the murderers of al-Qaida and a U.S. decision to buy off the Sunni tribes, a strategy besieged empires have pursued for centuries.

Nor does there appear in Bush's self-assurance any awareness of the cost of his Freedom Agenda. In Iraq, it is 4,000 U.S. dead, 30,000 wounded, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi dead, millions of refugees, a pogrom against an ancient Christian community, and a strategic victory for Iran and its Shia allies across the Middle East. When last heard from, the Ayatollah Sistani -- the chief Shia cleric in Iraq, who has welcomed Iranian but not American visitors -- was calling for Muslims to stand up against Israeli criminality in Gaza.

Like Woodrow Wilson before him, Bush appears to believe that the nobility of his goals -- expanding freedom and bringing an end to tyranny in our world -- validates and will sanctify his decisions.

Like Wilson, he is a utopian. He fails to understand that idealism has its delusions and disasters.

The war Wilson led us into "to make the world safe for democracy" gave us Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin and 70 years of the most barbaric empire in all history. The peace Wilson brought home led straight to Adolf Hitler, the Third Reich and a second world war far worse than the first.

The West's road to hell has been paved with good intentions.

President Bush rightly denounces Europeans who see Israel as always wrong. Yet he behaves as though Israel can do no wrong. Sixteen days into the Gaza war, with the Palestinian dead and wounded near 5,000, and a humanitarian catastrophe at hand, has our "compassionate conservative" president uttered one word of compassion for those whose losses outnumber the Israelis' 100 to one?

In defending his rejected immigration reform, President Bush clearly sees himself as in the vanguard of decency, and admonishes his party against being perceived as anti-immigrant.

But is this president oblivious to what is happening in his country because of his and his father's failure to secure the border? Even in rich, liberal Montgomery County, Md., one reads over the weekend that there is a hardening of attitudes toward illegal

immigration after a spate of crimes and killings. Working-class Americans pay the price of the idealism around the dinner table at the Crawford ranch.

In his first five years, Bush himself has admitted, 6 million aliens were arrested at the border, breaking into this country. One in 12 -- 500,000 -- had criminal records. Is it anti-immigrant to demand a halt to this invasion, even if it means troops on the border? Is it truly compassionate, or an act of cravenness, to insist that the answer is amnesty for 12 million to 20 million illegals and absolution for the businesses that hired them?

Choleric and cocky Harry Truman may be Bush's role model. But it was Dwight D. Eisenhower who had to clean up the mess Harry left behind.

Six months into office, Ike had ended the Korean War. He had the courage no president has since shown to tell the Israelis they must get off occupied land. They did.

While surely repelled by Nikita Khrushchev, especially for the Hungarian bloodbath of 1956, Ike had him up to Camp David in 1959 because, wicked as the Bolsheviks were, they had nuclear weapons, and one must talk to them.

Prudence is the mark of the true conservative. Ike and Ronald Reagan had it. Neither Bush nor Truman did. And that is why the former left the country so much better off than did the latter.

Goodbye, Mr. President, and God bless.

Mr. Buchanan is a nationally syndicated columnist and author of [Churchill, Hitler, and "The Unnecessary War": How Britain Lost Its Empire and the West Lost the World](#), ["The Death of the West,"](#) ["The Great Betrayal,"](#) ["A Republic, Not an Empire"](#) and ["Where the Right Went Wrong."](#)

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