

CORRESPONDENCE

Leaden ship

To the editors:

Although I agree with the military intervention in Iraq, I take exception to Fred Barnes's rosy view of President Bush's leadership as expressed in "Finest Hour" (February 11). We should remember that the crisis is partially of the administration's making. It stubbornly persisted in cozying up to Iraq despite numerous warnings, even hours before the invasion. Further, confusing signals were transmitted to Saddam Hussein about the administration's attitude toward an invasion.

Then the president oversold the value of the economic sanctions. If he correctly believed that sanctions would only hurt Iraq and not compel Saddam to withdraw, why didn't he say so? Even after ordering the military buildup, the president never presented the country with a cogent, consistent reason for the policy. Was it to defend Saudi Arabia? Was it oil? The overthrow of Saddam? The liberation of Kuwait? Democracy? I know why I think that we should be there, but I still have no idea why the president thinks so, what his goals are, and what kind of deal he may choose to cut.

We may be thankful that the president finally muddled into the correct policy, but this incoherent, often deceptive program should not be confused with dynamic leadership.

LORNE HOUTEN

Los Angeles, California

Influence meddling

To the editors:

Karel van Wolferen's review of Pat Choate's *Agents of Influence* ("America's Illusions," February 11) is an unwitting act of *hara-kiri*, so flawless that the reader need not draw the sword.

To take but one example, Mr. van Wolferen writes: "Americans are particularly vulnerable to Japanese propaganda for the additional reason that they consider morally reprehensible a degree of deceit that is still within the bounds of what is socially permissible in Japan." But he misses the irony when he also asks us to believe, with Mr. Choate, that (in the words of the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*) "influence in Washington is just like in Indonesia. It's for sale!" The irony is greater yet when he complains that "honest analysis" of the kind that he offers is (not surprisingly) dismissed as "emotional out-

bursts" and "Japan-bashing," while he condemns the careful scholarly critiques of the tales of Japanese perfidy as "propaganda" produced by American academics "intimidated" by the prospects of losing "Japanese academic funding."

Where Messrs. Choate and van Wolferen truly offend us is not in the fantasies that they force us to read, but in the violence that they do to the uniquely American sense that individuals are not, as in vulgar Marxism, creatures of special interests but can transcend them. Thus, we generally attribute principles, not ulterior motives, to our citizens. Jews talk about the Middle East, Indians about the subcontinent, Hispanics about South America, and we correctly do not insist on their identifying their ethnicity, for we presume that they speak as Americans. So do we permit corporate, labor, and other groups, whether domestic or foreign, to support our universities and research institutions: we trust the good sense of our citizens to preserve their independence and integrity.

These values make our civil society less fractious and more civilized; they also tend to be self-validating. It would be a pity to begin losing them over a hysterical reaction to Japan's economic success.

JAGDISH BHAGWATI

New York, New York

To the editors:

In his review of *Agents of Influence* Karel van Wolferen has offered an impressive attempt at "reality management" himself. The book and review merely issue a "wake-up call" to America, illuminating U.S. weakness with Japanese lobbying victories. They succeed in part: America's political bungleings are made plain. But they falsely make Japan out to be a uniquely insidious force in Washington, one that somehow plays the American power game by some set of dangerous homegrown rules.

Mr. van Wolferen writes that the Japanese have "adapt[ed] a venerable American institution—lobbying—to their uses," but what he shows is Japan playing hardball in Washington's long-standing power-brokering system. He says, for example, that the Japanese-controlled AUTOPAC—whose funds are provided by Americans, as Michael Kinsley has noted ("The Nefarious East," September 24, 1990)—has a "hit list" of elected officials "who can be

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defeated with last-minute spending of hundreds of thousands of dollars in close electoral races," a tactic that he anticipates "will strike some Americans as dishonest or unethical."

Maybe so, but is this tactic some shrewd departure from the venerable American principle of funding candidates whose policies one supports? Does Mr. van Wolferen find it different from the routine lobbying practices of the NRA? He then laments that in a struggle between U.S. and Japanese interests, the Japanese will "almost always be able to spend more to buy influence in Washington." Is Japan's purchased power a perversion of some balanced American system where wealth holds no great advantage? For all his claims of "manipulation" of the American system, Mr. van Wolferen merely shows that Japan is rich and organized enough to beat America at its own game.

ROBERT WEINER

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Sax appeal

To the editors:

I welcomed Edward Rothstein's efficient dismemberment of the multiculturalist challenge to the prevalence of Western music in American universities and concert halls ("Roll Over Beethoven," February 4). Nevertheless, there's a big hole in his article. He neglects to discuss the phenomenon of jazz.

It could be argued that jazz in all its forms is the first genuine multicultural art. It is a child of many cultures that has matured under the constant, shifting influences of new ones. No musical tradition in history has woven such an elegant diversity of musical ideas into its fabric. No musical club has ever welcomed musicians of so many nations and races into its ranks.

But jazz composers and practitioners will join us in insisting on an objective standard of judgment. Certain kinds of music are more complex, more universally inspiring, or more enduring through the vicissitudes of fashion and taste than others. Whatever the standard, some music is measurably superior to other music. Mozart was a better composer than Salieri. Charlie Mingus was a better composer and bandleader than Glenn Miller. And, though it is politically incorrect to say it, humanity's record of musical expression has on balance benefited more from the contribution of, for example, Germany than it has by, say, Japan. This is not to dismiss the value of Japanese music—just to register its relative significance in the broad sweep of music history.

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