

commentary

from other pens...

American uncovers lost civilization

By Lawrence L. Knutson

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — In the fall of 1839, John Lloyd Stephens, author, celebrated traveler and newly commissioned diplomat, set off for Central America in search of a government. He found a lost civilization.

Stephens starts the story at the moment he boarded a ship in New York: "Being entrusted by the president with a special confidential mission to Central America, on Wednesday, the third of October, 1839, I embarked onboard the British brig, Mary Ann, Hampton, master, for the Bay of Honduras. ...

"It was before seven in the morning; the streets and wharves were still; the battery was desolate; and at a moment of leaving it on a voyage of uncertain duration, (New York) seemed more beautiful than I had ever known it before."

The voyage began a 10-month test of endurance, willpower and ingenuity — not to speak of diplomacy. It resulted in a wildly successful two-volume work, "Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan," published in 1841.

Stephens, then 33, was accompanied by skilled English illustrator Frederick Catherwood. They were beset by mosquitos, civil war, biting flies, rebel armies, food poisoning, torrential rain, mud, heat, exhaustion, disease and frustration.

"Everything susceptible of injury from damp was rusty or moldy and in ruinous condition; we were not much better," Stephens wrote.

Central America was in such an uproar Stevens could find no one to accept his diplomatic credentials.

"After diligent search, no government found," he reported to President James Buchanan. The unhappy and fragmenting Republic of Central America was soon to be divided into the modern states of Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Honduras.

When Stephens laid diplomacy aside and turned to the real purpose of his journey, he was successful. He became the first writer to systematically observe the remains of Central America's Mayan civilization.

The story is told again in a remarkable new volume in which Stephens is just one of the stars: "Return Passages, Great American Travel Writing, 1780-1910," by Larzer Ziff of Johns Hopkins University.

Ziff tells Stephen's story and those of four other travelers and writers: John Ledyard, a Connecticut Yankee who sailed with Capt. James Cook around the world and crossed Russia and Siberia on foot; Bayard Taylor, a professional who was the only writer on Commodore Matthew Perry's 1852 expedition to Japan; Mark Twain, who focused his ironic spirit on tourism in such books as "Innocents Abroad;" and novelist Henry James, who made travel writing a literary performance.

"The books they constructed from those travels beguiled Americana readers with their depictions of the old and the exotic; everything that America was not," Ziff writes.

Ziff notes Stephens was already a successful travel writer. He was known to many as "the American traveler."

At Copan in Honduras, Stephens and Catherwood first found a carved slab, then a vine-covered and completely unknown city.

"It lay before us like a shattered bark in the midst of an ocean, her masts gone, her name effaced; her crew perished and none to tell whence she came. ... The only sounds that disturbed the quiet of this buried city were the sounds of monkeys moving among the tops of trees. ..."

By the time Stephens' second book on the remains of the Mayan civilization was published in 1843, the author could claim a number of discoveries — including 44 ancient cities, Chichen Itza in the Mexico's Yucatan among them, all previously "lost, buried and unknown."

"In scope, wealth of incident and significance of detail, Stephen's narratives remain unsurpassed by the books of travel of any other American," Ziff writes.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Lawrence L. Knutson has covered the White House, Congress and Washington's history for more than 30 years.

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A yellow ribbon or a yellow streak?

Following WW II some said Asia would never become civilized, and they may be right, since China took 24 Americans hostage.

Oops don't say hostage. Let's step back here.

Since the Korean war the Communist Chinese have called the hated American devils a paper tiger. Sure don't blame them.

We should have let General Douglas McArthur finish the job in Korea. There has been two undeclared wars in Asia, neither the Korean police action nor the Vietnam war has been America's greatest hour.

However, there is the other side of the story. We saved China from Japanese imperialism. Furthermore, we sabotaged the pro-American Chiang Kai-chek and just look what he did for Taiwan, their annual income is \$25,000, but on the Mainland China 80 percent of their people earn less than one dollar a day. That means nearly a billion (900,000,000) may live in huts with dirt floors but their military wants our satellites. Even worse they want them from the western devils Loral Hughes, and Westinghouse.

China wants our \$100,000,000,000 (100 trillion) in capital flows (hedge fund money from U.S. banks), to build their factories. We are their best market too. They send us \$100 billion in Donald Duck exports to U.S. shopping centers.

Wonder who would cry uncle first, China or the soccer moms if they could not export their surpluses to the good ole US of A?

It's a lot of money but don't forget the rights of passage in the Taiwan straits. They already control the Panama Canal. This China dog has been using the United State for its tree long enough.

There are two worlds, one oriental and the other



wayne gattshall

- wayne's world

western. It is a world that neither finds easy to span. If this post Berlin Wall world seems scrambled — it is because—it is.

There is a saying in Asia, "think global but act local." The oriental mind seeks relationships (guanxi) with the local people and local bureaucrats. It is not who you are but who you know. They strive for access to people of eminence who have political value in their homeland and in other Asian autocracies.

They prefer an informal relationship that can be more binding than legal contracts. Yup they got that right! Therefore, the subtle meaning of the big Chief in the White Teepee toasting the most paramount Chinese leader on U.S. television was seen in Asia it was a gripping event.

But what was highly relevant in Washington was—when the Chinese Commissar of Beijing met with important U.S. businessmen. It was the Chinese thinking global and U.S. business CEOs who thought local. They held no bias to solicit a comparative advantage in behalf of their cyberspace markets. Thus the big government-corporate General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs was being played out in Washington.

It was hard to tell what was foreign policy and what was trade. Even the village idiot knows this intergrationist cyberspace snake has caught the United States asleep at the switch.

Congress should boost health budget



morton kondracke

- commentary

stressed Health Care Finance Administration, which runs Medicare.

Still, no expert believes that the amount he budgeted for Medicare is anything close to adequate. Rather, it is thought that the figure was mandated to make room for his top priority, the \$1.6 trillion tax cut.

For the nation's 42.5 million uninsured, Bush is proposing a one-year increase of \$124 million for community health centers to provide primary care and preventive services for about 11 million people, about 4.4 million of whom are uninsured.

For the long run, however, Bush is calling for tax credits worth only \$71.5 billion over 10 years, which would help fewer than 5 million people — and only those whose employers do not provide insurance.

During the budget debate, the Senate approved another \$7 billion, but it has the opportunity to pass a bipartisan proposal — admittedly expensive — that would cut the ranks of the uninsured in half.

Originally put forward last year by the "New Democrat" Progressive Policy Institute, the \$400 billion plan has been introduced by Sens. Jim Jeffords, R-Vt., and John Breaux, D-La., with Sens. Bill Frist, R-Tenn., Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, Tom Carper, D-Del., and Blanche Lincoln, D-Ark., as co-sponsors.

Unlike Bush's proposal, the Jeffords-Breaux measure would provide tax credits to help lower-income workers participate in employer-provided health plans, thereby encouraging the employers not to drop coverage.

As first described by columnist Matthew Miller, the concept behind the proposal is a amalgam of the traditional liberal idea of eventual universal health coverage and conservatives' refusal to put the government in charge of health care.

Bush, the New Democrats, and the Jeffords-Breaux group all accept the idea of tax credits as the vehicle for expanding coverage. In fact, one of Bush's new White House health advisers, Mark McClellan, formerly of Stanford University, helped draft the Progressive Policy Institute pro-

posal.

That plan also calls for the creation of voluntary purchasing groups to bargain with insurance companies, state oversight of the plan and retention of existing "safety-net" programs, such as Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

An ABC News poll released this week reveals that by 52 percent to 42 percent, adults prefer providing health care coverage to the uninsured to receiving an income tax cut.

That preference indicates that Congress would be on safe ground shifting Bush's priorities — and that he'd benefit by this action. In fact, the Senate began that procedure by shaving his tax cut by \$400 billion and applying the money in part to health care. The House should go along.

Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill.

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