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Looking Forward, Looking Back: Top Headlines of 2003

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1. WAR IN IRAQ. The year 2003 began with the expectation of some military action in Iraq, given the new national security doctrine established by President George W. Bush. This new approach, now popularly known as the “Bush Doctrine,” calls for preemptive action against likely terrorist threats. The short war in Iraq was a classic demonstration of American military power. Saddam Hussein remained defiant to the end, obviously hoping that international opinion would prevent American action—a very bad decision on his part. President Bush was undeterred by the sluggishness and timidity of the United Nations and the American action in “Operation Iraqi Freedom” broadcast the fact that America will not wait when national security is at stake. The venerable “special relationship” between the United States and Great Britain was evident once again as Prime Minister Tony Blair joined President Bush in defining the War on Terror even as American and British troops fought and won the war.

Operation Iraqi Freedom also proved once again that military action brings unintended consequences. As the year came to an end, the task of establishing a new peace in Iraq appeared more difficult than the war itself. President Bush now faces the challenge of nation-building in Iraq as America continues to find its way as the world’s only superpower. By any measure of evaluation, President Bush defined American determination to act even when world opinion—especially in Western Europe—opposed such action. This alone promises to restructure the global power structure.

2. THE COLUMBIA SHUTTLE CRASH. The tragic loss of the space shuttle Columbia reminded America and the world that human beings were not made for space travel. Outer space remains a foreign and formidable environment for fragile human beings and this tragedy illustrated once again both the grandeur and limitations of American space technology. The loss of a second space shuttle—along with its talented crew—prompted a massive rethinking of America’s mission in space. As 2003 came to an end, many doubted that a space shuttle would ever fly again, and exploration into space may well turn to unmanned vehicles—leaving human beings looking to the heavens from planet earth for the foreseeable future.

3. THE LAWRENCE v. TEXAS DECISION. The United States Supreme Court handed down its decision in the case Lawrence v. Texas on June 26th. Even from this vantage point, it is clear that the Lawrence decision will rank with the 1973 abortion decision, Roe v. Wade, as a major landmark in America’s culture war. Like Roe, the Lawrence decision comes with a significance far beyond its immediate application. Not only did the Supreme Court strike down the Texas sodomy laws, but the majority opinion went on to declare consensual homosexual conduct to be a constitutionally protected right. Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the majority, returned to what Justice Antonin Scalia calls his “sweet mystery of life” argument, opening the door for sexual expression in any consensual form to be claimed as a basic constitutional right.

4. THE ELECTION OF THE EPISCOPALIAN GAY BISHOP. The election and consecration of Canon Gene

Robinson as the Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire sent shock waves throughout the Christian world and threatened to bring schism to the world-wide Anglican Communion. The election of the Episcopal Church's openly-homosexual bishop came as a logical product of a process of theological accommodationism begun long ago. Nevertheless, this audacious act—against both Scripture and church tradition—established the Episcopal Church, USA as the vanguard for sexual revisionism and the homosexual agenda. Even as conservatives threatened to leave the Episcopal Church, the year 2003 ended with relatively little concrete response from Episcopalian evangelicals. As yet, the election of a gay bishop has brought neither schism nor a breakup of the Anglican Communion.

5. ROY MOORE AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS CONTROVERSY. The judicially-mandated removal of the Ten Commandments monument from the foyer of Alabama's state judicial building represented another strategic victory for the forced secularization of America's public culture. Once again, the federal courts pushed the agenda of strict separationism and violated the clear intention of the Constitution's framers, relegating free expression to a strictly private affair. The removal of Chief Justice Roy Moore marked a milestone in Alabama state politics that will likely reverberate across the nation. The removal of the Ten Commandments monument from the building and Chief Justice Moore from his office is not the end of this story. Count on Roy Moore and the Ten Commandments to reverberate throughout the coming year and beyond.

6. ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER ELECTED GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA. The recall of California Governor Gray Davis and the election of Arnold Schwarzenegger symbolized the intersection of America's populist political culture and the culture of celebrity. Depending on one's perspective, the recall represented either American democracy at its perfection or populism run amok. California's recall statute allowed the public to take out its frustration on the state's incompetent incumbent, leading to one of the most interesting electoral races in recent American history. Not only was Governor Davis removed from office by a huge margin, but Arnold Schwarzenegger overcame his political inexperience and charges of sexual misconduct to win the governor's seat by a landslide. Schwarzenegger ran on a platform that combined fiscal conservatism with liberal positions on social issues like abortion and homosexuality. As 2003 closed, it was not yet clear if this election represented a victory for moderate Republicanism or mere public disgust with an unpopular incumbent. The 2004 elections will tell the real story.

7. MASSACHUSETTS GAY MARRIAGE DECISION. The decision of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court striking down a ban on homosexual marriage represents another landmark in the culture's total capitulation to the homosexual agenda. The institution of marriage stands as the most formidable obstacle to homosexual advance and the total normalization of homosexual behavior. The Massachusetts court severed marriage from its heterosexual foundation and from the context of procreation, and instead redefined marriage as a consensual relationship which is basically limited to economic significance. By undermining such a fundamental institution, the Massachusetts court put itself solidly on the side of moral revolution, and forced moves toward a constitutional amendment to prevent homosexual marriage at the federal level. The issue is sure to play in the 2004 Presidential race and will define a major turning point in America's cultural history.

8. THE PARTIAL BIRTH ABORTION BAN. President Bush's signing of the Partial Birth Abortion Act of 2003 represents the first major victory for the pro-life cause in national legislation since the Roe v. Wade decision of 1973. Though passed twice by Congress in years past [only to be vetoed by president Bill Clinton] the partial birth abortion ban drew the nation's attention to one of the most heinous procedures in the abortionist's arsenal. The culture of death took a major hit when President Bush signed this legislation—and the pro-abortion movement is fully aware of the hit it has taken. Watch for abortion to be once again a defining issue in the 2004 presidential race.

9. CAPTURE OF SADDAM HUSSEIN. The capture of Saddam Hussein brings some measure of moral satisfaction to all persons of moral conscience. Not since the Nuremberg Trials has the civilized world faced the opportunity to bring a tyrant to justice for crimes ranging from genocide to torture. The pathetic sight of a bearded Saddam emerging from his "spider hole" reminded the world that justice is not dead and that history can be changed by strategic military action. The fact that Saddam Hussein is no longer the tyrant of Baghdad brings a measure of satisfaction to all who pray for world peace. Watch for his trial to be a major story in 2004 and beyond.

10. THE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL RACE. Long before any primary or caucus vote, the Democratic presidential race was largely defined in the final months of 2003. Representing what he calls "the democratic wing of the Democratic party," former Vermont Governor Howard Dean established himself as the unquestioned front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination. Fueled by an Internet campaign and a liberal resurgence in the Democratic primary

process, Dean represents a clear ideological alternative to President George W. Bush. A Bush-Dean presidential contest will present the nation with its clearest electoral choice since the Nixon-McGovern race of 1972.

Other major headline stories of the year included the case of Terry Schaivo, whose gripping story caught the moral attention of Florida Governor Jeb Bush and the state's legislature as they intervened on Terry's behalf to prevent the removal of her feeding tube. The year ended with her court-appointed guardian poised to make what could be a final decision in her case. The year 2004 will demonstrate whether the culture of death will make her yet another victim.

Other major stories of the year included criminal charges leveled against basketball star Kobe Bryant and entertainer Michael Jackson. These trials are sure to draw major media attention in 2004 but, as is usually the case with celebrities, neither trial is likely to bring much moral satisfaction. Both cases serve as haunting reminders that America's celebrity-obsessed culture produces moral vulgarities. This is no tribute to the American people.

The year 2003 will go down in history as a year that produced more questions than answers. The coming year promises to be more decisive in significance. The presidential election and other pressing issues will see to that. This is no time for concerned citizens to stand on the sidelines.

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