

AJES

Adirondack Journal of
Environmental Studies

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MISSION STATEMENT

The *Adirondack Journal of Environmental Studies* (AJES) exists to foster a dialogue about the broad range of issues that concern the Adirondacks and Northern Forest.

AJES serves to bridge the gaps among academic disciplines and among researchers and practitioners devoted to understanding and promoting the development of sustainable communities, both human and wild.

The journal purposefully avoids serving as a vehicle for any single or special point of view. To the contrary, in searching for common ground AJES welcomes variety and a broad spectrum of opinion from its contributors.

CONTRIBUTING TO AJES

We encourage the submission of manuscripts, reviews, photographs, artwork and letters to the editor. For additional information please visit the AJES website at www.ajes.org/ or contact Gary Chilson at chilsog@paulsmiths.edu or 518-327-6377.

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PREROGATIVE

America's leadership is still wanting

By GARY CHILSON

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Early September saw more than one hundred of the world's leaders and about 40,000 delegates gathered in Johannesburg for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. They reviewed the world's progress since the Earth Summit at Rio and learned that efforts in some areas have been successful, though too little if not too late. There was an added sense of urgency as the world's leaders recommitted themselves to the three central elements of the international agenda: promoting world peace and social justice while protecting the environment. Our leader, however, did not attend — he was too busy back at his ranch plotting his war on Iraq.

Secretary of State Colin Powell attended the Summit in the President's place. Mr. Powell represented us and led our delegates in the final negotiations over humanity's plan to achieve a sustainable global civilization. Then he spoke to the world's leaders and delegates to present America's perspective and our efforts.

I was shocked by the shameful reception Mr. Powell's speech received. CNN images showed delegates standing, shaking their fists, booing and shouting him down. Some of the delegates had to be forcibly removed. What so incensed them?

The Internet provided some clues. Ostensibly, the delegates' anger erupted when Mr. Powell condemned President Mugabe's land reform program in Zimbabwe as pushing "millions of people to the brink of starvation." More boos came for his criticism of Zambia's recent rejection of America's genetically modified food aid. Yet, President Mugabe's support of the racist violence against white farmers in his country is a travesty of justice. And food, even if it is genetically modified, will still feed people in an emergency.

More digging revealed the larger context. What really incensed everyone at the Summit was that Americans are not yet willing to accept the world leadership role

we must assume. For examples: the American delegation opposed the specification of achievable target levels in humanity's plan for the development of renewable energy resources and other quantifiable steps toward sustainability; we insisted upon purely voluntary efforts at the national level — no new legislation to promote sustainability; we championed green-washed corporate imperialism; and our nation was unwilling to devote more than a pittance to achieve sustainability. I found, too, that the international community fully realizes that without strong American leadership and support, their own efforts will continue to be meager, halting and insufficient. So President Bush's absence really made the Summit seem an exercise in futility.

Our government's inability to do the right thing reminds me of Al Gore's comment to Bill McKibben shortly after the Earth Summit ten years ago: "We are in an unusual predicament as a global civilization. The maximum that is politically feasible, even the maximum that is politically *imaginable* right now [emphasis in the original], still falls short of the minimum that is scientifically and ecologically necessary" (*Hope, Human and Wild*, 1995).

We must greatly increase what is the maximum politically feasible in America. One of the best ways is by developing sustainable communities at the local, regional and state levels. By acting locally we will help raise our nation's awareness of this crucial and urgent global issue.

We can be proud of the significant steps we have already taken here within the Adirondacks and Northern Forest. AJES is filled with articles that demonstrate our successes. But more needs to be accomplished. To help promote our achievements and continuing efforts, AJES has gone on-line at www.ajes.org/ with all its archived articles and the Spring 2003 website upgrade is expected to include searchable abstracts. The site is a perpetual "work in progress" and I invite readers to suggest additional improvements.