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# Self-Interest Fuels Vietnam Generation's Support of Mideast Action

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By Barbara T. Roessner  
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Poor Michelle Shocked. Dressed in black, guitar in hand, she sought in vain to exhort the revelers at the 1990 Newport Folk Festival to a mass, anti-war "die-in."

Hiroshima,  
Vietnam,

Kuwait.  
Shocked pushed all the buttons, but the current just wouldn't flow.

"This is my political statement," shouted the bearded man next to us as he stretched out on the lawn, yawned, and turned his tanned face to the sun.

He and his wife, both of whom looked to be well into their 40s, settled their newborn baby into its min-

ature tent. Baby tents were really big at the festival this year, as was tie-dye — tie-dyed pants, tie-dyed skirts, tie-dyed T-shirts, shorts, dresses and hats, entire tie-dyed families. There was no alcohol or marijuana to speak of. Sobriety was in, along with falafel.

Neophyte parents with salt-and-pepper hair and weathered skin were also in abundance. Perhaps if their offspring were older — in the vicinity of draft age — they might have responded differently to Shocked's attempt at a pacifist protest. Her charged and plaintive hal-lad about a young "Vietnam widow" seemed to have the audience momentarily entranced. But then, these folks were draft age themselves during Vietnam.

There's nothing like self-interest to determine one's political stance, or to fuel or asphyxiate a war. And self-interest is, for all President Bush's talk of moral principle and the sanctity of national sovereignty, why we now have troops in the Saudi desert. Interestingly, the perceived self-interest of the Vietnam generation seems to be coinciding with the perceived self-interest of the American government. No one wants to pay more for oil.

An editorial cartoon in New York *Newsday* last week shows a balding, bearded guy screaming "Nuke Saddam!" and other contemporary battle cries at his TV set. His wife observes from the doorway, explaining the strange spectacle to their young daughter:

"Your father's a baby-boom liberal, dear — he's never had a war he could support before!"

Yes, the sudden threat of higher prices at the gas pump, especially when hard economic times are already upon us, has many of yesterday's Gandhis feeling at least a temporary surge of pent-up aggression. A recent *New York Times* poll, for example, shows 74 percent of the public favoring U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia.

The poll shows that support for Bush's decision to dispatch those troops rises with education and income — that is, those who are less likely to go are more likely to say others should. (Except for women, of course, whose sensibilities, whether inherited or learned, seem to make

them more predisposed to peace than their male counterparts.)

Historians say that's how public opinion usually goes at the inception of a military action, and such strong consensus about America's involvement in the Middle East is likely to erode as people have time to examine exactly why we're there and the potential consequences of our presence. But I'm not so sure. The great thirty-to-fortyish population bulge has the status quo at stake now, not its individual hides.

Besides, as the attitude of the gentleman who yawned rather than "die in" suggests, getting mellow is in itself an activist statement these days.

In a sort of preamble to the Newport festival's printed program, Ben Cohen of Ben & Jerry's — the Ver-

mont ice cream-maker and beacon of correct capitalism, i.e., egalitarian management that buys Maine blueberries from Native Americans and Brazil nuts from rain-forest farmers — explained why his firm decided to sponsor the legendary festival this year:

"People ask, 'Where are the children of the '60s?' ... They're at the Newport Folk Festival with their children. And we're poised to lead a multigenerational effort into the '90s that's going to change our country from one that is death-defying to one that's life-affirming. For me, that's what this folk festival is all about — changing things for the better and having fun while we're doing it."

Michelle, you should've offered 'em a double scoop of White Russian.