

Institute of World Culture
July 30, 2007

Report on Study Group: *A Republic of Reason*

“Nations succeed or fail and define their essential character by the way they challenge the unknown and cope with fear. And much depends on the quality of their leadership. If leaders exploit public fears to herd people in directions they might not otherwise choose, then fear itself can quickly become a self-perpetuating and freewheeling force that drains national will and weakens national character, diverting attention from real threats deserving of healthy and appropriate fear and sowing confusion about the essential choices that every nation must constantly make about its future.”

Al Gore, *The Assault on Reason*, Chapter One

A study group entitled **A Republic of Reason** was launched successfully last month at the Institute of World Culture. Several students gathered to explore Vice President Al Gore’s new book, *The Assault on Reason*. Questions flowed as students sought understanding of Mr. Gore’s analysis of contemporary society and politics. The destructive impact of one-way media (TV) was explained in penetrating ways. The replacement of reasoned dialogue with emotional appeals and blind faith was described as leading to “vicarious traumatization.” The motivations of those who use the media and dogma to manipulate public opinion were related to desires for economic and political power. One participant, Frank K. Kelly contributed several, well pointed stories of his experience in Washington politics that reinforced Mr. Gore’s observations. Included in the book are several references to what the latest scientific research in biology and psychology indicates about human responses to media input and perceived but illusory dangers. Participants in the group wondered how we could all develop stronger “Dalai Lama cells.” Although the picture painted by Mr. Gore of contemporary society is grim, a positive spirit of constructive dialogue stimulated the group. At the next meeting on August 7th, discussion will continue with a look at the tremendous economic imbalances in America that are destroying a fair and reasonable marketplace of ideas about public policy.(Chapter 3). The group will hear also Mr. Gore’s explanation of how President Bush manipulated media messages to defend the invasion of Iraq and thereby wounded the system of checks and balances that is suppose to protect opportunity for reasoned dialogue and critical thinking within the American political process. (Chapter 4). Newcomers are always welcome. Contact Carolyn Dorrance at 967-1055 for more information or just join us Concord House.