

9-14-2005

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### Recommended Citation

Harmon, Steve, "War of Words Precedes Debate" (2005). *Features*. Paper 69.  
<http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/features/69>

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## War of Words Precedes Debate Grand Rapids Press, September 14, 2005

*By Steve Harmon*

GRAND RAPIDS -- The two have been going at it long distance for months on whether America should be considered an imperial tyrant.

After blogging missives back-and-forth and writing competing columns on the Iraq war and its meaning for America's role in the world, Arianna Huffington and Victor David Hanson will face off this week in a debate in Grand Rapids.

The celebrated voices from disparate ends of the political spectrum -- Huffington occupies a firm spot on the left, Hanson on the right -- are expected to draw around 600 at the DeVos Place Wednesday night at an event hosted by the Grand Valley State University's Ralph Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies.

"The groupies of these people are coming in from all over the country," said Gleaves Whitney, director of the Hauenstein center. "I've never seen Hanson lose a debate and I've never seen Huffington back down from one. They're going to be going at it hammer and tongs."

Huffington believes that a country that imposes its military might to transform entire regions is as bad as history's worst imperialists. Hanson contends that the U.S. is rightly defending itself by occupying Iraq, and is merely exercising influence that the rest of the world seeks.

"If people voluntarily want to buy McDonalds in Paris or wear American jeans in Brazil, there's nobody pointing a gun at their head," Hanson said. "I don't think the U.S. is taking anybody's property. The issue is our influence."

Hanson, an author of the classics and frequent contributor to the conservative magazine *The National Review*, calls it an "insidious" process, where all the benefits of a democratic capitalistic system inherently draw people seeking freedom and choice.

"Nobody asked the official from the Palestinian Authority to come to Harvard School of Business; Egyptians can say we don't like your money or tanks, so leave, but they don't," Hanson said. "The reason is when you look at the U.S., you see the world's greatest universities, the most open and transparent society, the safest place to invest."

Huffington said she doesn't deny America's greatness; she just doesn't think it should be imposed by the muzzle of a gun.

"We invaded a country that had not attacked us, and, it turns out, did not pose any threat to us," said Huffington, an author, commentator and former gubernatorial candidate in California. "We're building 14 permanent military bases and have not explained why. And our presence continues to be a destabilizing force."

While an American military exercise doesn't fit the standard definition of imperialism, it is an extension of power that effectively has the same effects, Huffington said.

"For me, it's a very pragmatic definition," she said. "It's whether you see military action is related to the safety of this country or not. Nothing else justifies military action except avoiding genocide or helping a humanitarian cause."

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