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WINNING ALL THE BATTLES

Robert L. O'Connell

In 264 B.C. Carthage, the most economically dynamic polity in the Mediterranean basin, blundered into war with Rome, the region's most relentlessly militaristic power. It was a terrible mistake. For unlike in our own time when power is a complex equation of economic, cultural, and coercive factors, military strength then inevitably trumped wealth, and after a succession of three Punic wars, lasting over a century, Carthage would be utterly obliterated, virtually expunged from the face of history. Had the city quit after the first war, essentially a naval extravaganza lasting twenty-three years, Rome might well have acquiesced to Carthage's continued existence. But it was the fate of the city, which had previously been dominated by merchants and agro-businessmen, to suffer an unexpected outcropping of military talent, and this sealed its doom.

They were the Barcids, a clan of generals in a town of admirals, a family whose abilities, aggressiveness, and, above all, hatred of Rome allowed them to dominate Punic politics and keep the suicidal grudge match going. The first prominent member, Hamilcar, had been the best Carthaginian general in the initial conflict with Rome. But, unhappy with the peace terms, he abandoned his mercenary army, which then revolted against Carthage, leading to a terrible civil war that ended only after their original commander annihilated the rebels. Likely now a controversial figure in Carthage, Hamilcar received permission to march his new army across North Africa to Spain, where he would establish a family enclave based on local gold and silver mines. Accompanying him was his nine-year-old son Hannibal, from whom he extracted an oath of eternal enmity against Rome—a curse that would chart the boy's future.

For it was this Hannibal in 218 B.C. who led the army he inherited from his father across one of the highest passes in the Alps and invaded Italy. Staging the assault from his family's base in Spain, now an empire within an empire, he dragged Carthage into an entirely problematic war with Rome, one that would have been destined for a quick and disastrous end had it not been for one factor: Hannibal himself.

Almost immediately he gathered his bedraggled, freeze-dried near-wreck of an army and led them to two sharp victories over the Romans, the last one at the River Trebia wiping out most of a major consular army. He followed that up the next spring by luring another consular army into a trap set along the shores of Lake Trasimene, staging the most lethal single ambush in Western military history.

By now he had Rome's full attention. The hyper-warlike city on the Tiber, destined soon to rule the Mediterranean world, responded by fielding a crusher of a field force, basically four consular armies welded haphazardly together, and invited Hannibal to fight that. With breathtaking guile on August 2, 216 B.C., he surrounded it on a plain near the abandoned town of Cannae, and then over the

HANNIBAL, AFTER A MARBLE BUST DISCOVERED AT CAPUA.

From William O'Connor Morris, *Hannibal* (London, 1897).

course of an afternoon chopped it to bits, killing that day more men than the United States lost in combat during the entire Vietnam conflict.

For the first and only time he had a chance to win the war. Maharbal, his audacious cavalry commander, urged him to march on Rome immediately, arriving before the shock from Cannae could subside, but the boss hedged and the moment was lost. Instead, Hannibal assumed that the authorities on the Tiber would be ready to talk terms and sent a delegation, only to have them thrown back in his face.

Rome was just getting started. The battle-scarred veterans who ran the Senate had faith in their alliances and understood Rome's central advantage. In the words of Fabius Maximus, the city's shrewdest military leader: "We are carrying on war in Italy, in our own country . . . Hannibal, on the other hand, is in a foreign and hostile land . . . . Do you doubt that we shall get the better of a man who is growing weaker by the day?"

So Rome kept fielding armies, drawing on huge manpower reserves, and gradually producing better fighters and generals. Yet to an amazing degree Hannibal kept beating them, never losing a significant battle during his stay in Italy. Still, as the years piled up, the Roman confederation refused to crack, and Hannibal found himself pushed steadily further south until he occupied just the toe of the Italian boot, a stranger in a strange land always. He left finally in 203, soon to preside over Carthage's surrender. Hannibal's only legacy was his city's doom; for the Romans would never forgive or forget Carthage, utterly destroying the place and its people in 146 B.C.

So ended history's most flagrant example of winning all the battles but losing the war—a sort of military oxymoron that often leaves armchair strategists scratching their heads. But such a phenomenon is more than just a freakish occurrence; it can be the starkest barometer of effectiveness, one that those involved ignore at their own risk.

Consider the fate of the Spanish in their efforts to suppress the rebellious Dutch in the late 16th century, sending the best and most experienced army in Europe to the Netherlands to deliver a succession of poundings virtually whenever their hapless adversaries ventured beyond fortifications. Yet the rebellion refused to be stifled, the Dutch even seemed to prosper, while the Spanish found themselves increasingly short of cash, their unpaid troops mutinous, and gradually losing hold of the situation.

The lessons should have been obvious, Spain's power was overextended, it was being exercised in a hostile environment, military leverage was nonexistent. When you win all the battles and still nothing good happens, it should be a sure sign that the whole operation is not working. Instead, Spain hung tough and went into centuries of decline.

Now all this would be academic if it were not for the fact that something suspiciously similar keeps happening to the United States. We find ourselves, it seems, repeatedly caught in the same trap, trying to operate in environments where our political purchase is minimal, and then compensating militarily (winning all the battles), which only obscures our basic dilemma.

We have a very capable and well-equipped military. Consequently, it tends to perform well even under the most adverse conditions; conditions that would destroy many other armies. Yet the results frequently range from disappointing to nonexistent. So our fate in Vietnam was epitomized during negotiations a week before the fall of Saigon, when an American general told his counterpart: "You know you never beat us on the battlefield." "That may be so," the Vietnamese replied, "but it is also irrelevant."

The tale has been much the same during our incursions into Iraq and Afghanistan, two very uninviting military environments: first a string of stunning victories; then a stubborn and lethal insurgency. Fortunately, our ground forces had enough adaptability in their fighting DNA to evolve a fairly good approximation of an anti-insurgency campaign. But it's also important to remember that these forces are primarily designed to fight conventional battles, and those who control them think in these terms. Their basic orientation is massive (more troops, more stuff) and kinetic (as in explosive force).

It's already pretty clear that this approach can interfere with the political tasks of gaining local trust and promoting security; collateral damage and civilian casualties have a way of doing that. It's less apparent but still significant that we have been able to compensate by employing our military crunch as a kind of substitute for political adroitness. Through a combination of high-tech intelligence and remote delivery we've actually gotten quite good at picking off our adversaries' leadership and inflicting violence in ways that hurt groups like al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Yet it comes with a huge footprint of men and materiel, a price tag that puts an inherent time limit on this kind of war in a democracy. We may pay any price and bear any burden, but not forever, and everybody knows it. So the insurgents hang on, knowing we will eventually pick up and leave.

Meanwhile, another American military community, a much smaller one centered on special operations, argues that unconventional warfare—aided by cultural awareness and political manipulation—can be waged even in the heart of Islam and with much smaller numbers. Such a solution might actually allow us to maintain a sufficiently low profile to stay the course and outlast insurgencies that drag on an average of twenty-five years. But this is not guaranteed. Anti-insurgent thinking remains a work in progress and the right mix of ingredients is still an open question. Nevertheless, it seems abundantly clear that winning all the battles won't do it, and, as hard as it is, we must focus on winning hearts and minds.

This is extraordinarily ambitious and some would say naive; but we should be reminded that some of the most successful special operators in history arrived in similarly strange and hostile environments carrying crosses not guns. These were the Jesuits who penetrated India, China, and Japan during the 16th and 17th centuries, and, through a combination of flexibility, imagination, and dedication, worked their way up to the highest reaches of all three societies. They fought not a single battle, but they won many a convert as they climbed.

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THE WASPISH HETERO-PATRIARCHY: LOCATING POWER IN RECENT AMERICAN HISTORY

Kevin M. Schultz

As a term for describing the group of Americans who have historically sat atop the economic, cultural, and political hierarchy in the United States, we could do a lot worse than "Waspish hetero-patriarchy." Lengthy yes, but also surprisingly complete, historically grounded, and, if I do say so myself, it even has a nice ring to it. It serves a particularly important need in the American context, too, because textbook titles and national syntheses tell us that the United States has been in the middle of an ongoing struggle, a *Story of Freedom* within an *Unfinished Nation*. And while historians have found it relatively easy to identify the groups doing all that struggling, they rarely identify who it is these actors are fighting against. Are they "white"? Anglo-Saxon? Protestant? The answer, of course, is that for most of American history they were all of these, and more. Whiteness has been a perpetual undercurrent, but "whiteness" takes us only so far, the term demanding a more thorough definition than Whiteness Studies scholars have been willing to give it.[1] Anglo-Saxon once reigned supreme, but it lost its power after Congress changed the immigration laws in the 1920s and made many national-origin distinctions moot. And Protestantism, while a perpetual undercurrent like white-
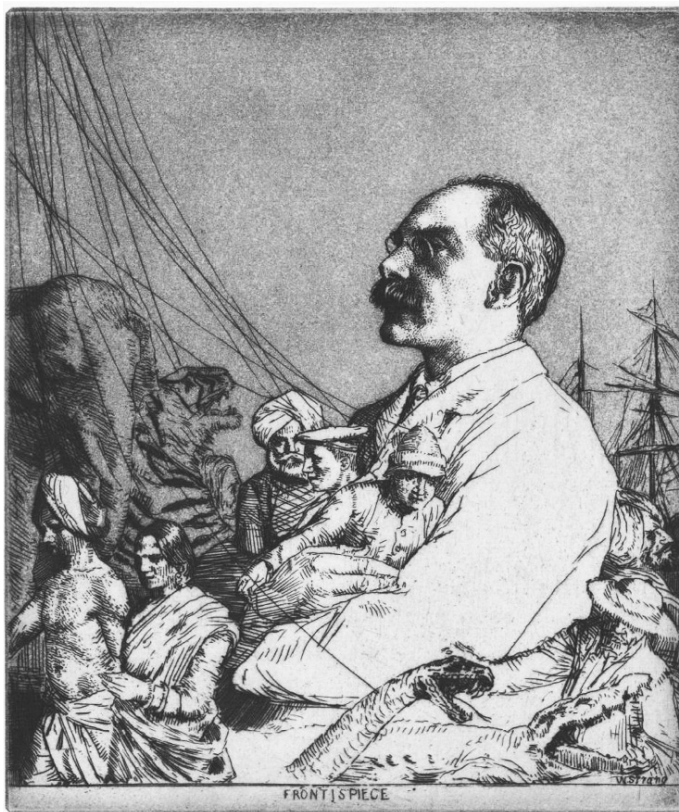
A turn-of-the-century etching of Rudyard Kipling. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

ness, was not always the most overt identity of those in power. Putting all these together, we're left with the traditional moniker WASP, but this leaves out the women's movement and the gay rights movement of the previous three or four decades. A more complete term is "Waspish hetero-patriarchy"; let's see how it does historically.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term WASP was coined only in 1962, when the civil rights movement required an oppositional force against which it could protest. Rather than simply choose "white" (which would come later, and subsequently destroy much of our historical memory), the social landscape of the early 1960s demanded a more inclusive term. WASP is what social scientists came up with.

What came before WASP as a descriptive term for the dominant American social and cultural presence? During the first three decades of the 20th century, the term "Anglo-Saxon" took on importance as a national social identity. The term has deep roots; the Anglo-Saxons are famed for a 5th-century invasion of the British Isles. But at the beginning of the 20th century there was a need in America for a term that would differentiate the social elite from all others. Anglo-Saxon served that need.

Why Anglo-Saxon? For one thing, during the