

Yale Daily News, Heading the Call of our Time, September 17, 2001

We are, it is said, an insulated generation. The argument seems impossible to refute. The Gulf War -- rapid, precise and, above all, distant -- concluded in our early youth, a lopsided American victory now located somewhere in the pages of the Yale College Program of Studies. When international communism imploded, peacefully, in Europe, there was a palpable sense that we had inherited another generation's delayed victory. Our generation's cause celebre is a maddeningly abstract anti-corporate and anti-globalization movement.

Those days are over.

The sight of the World Trade Center's twin towers crumbling away from the New York skyline and the Pentagon's west side obliterated in full view of the nation's leading military leaders has ushered in a new era.

We are called forth today to enter the service of our nation. We must answer that call.

"In every generation, the world has produced enemies of human freedom," President George W. Bush '68 said at Friday's memorial service in Washington, D.C. "They have attacked America because we are freedom's home and defender. And the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time."

As he spoke, he cast a quick glance at his own father, former President George Bush '48 -- soldier, public servant and president -- who served his country in war and in peace. It is a commitment made by many who pass through these walls in times of crisis: Joseph Lieberman '64 LAW '67, John Kerry '66 and Bill Clinton LAW '73.

The calling of our time is the war against terror. A new generation of Yale graduates now faces the world with a duty and purpose.

It is worth noting why that was missing for so long. In the last decade, the American economy has roared through a period of unfathomable prosperity. Congress wiped away the deficit. Welfare was tossed aside. Classmates became millionaires. We lived, meanwhile, in peace -- squabbling over the occasional peace-keeping mission that might cost us an American life abroad.

Those days, too, are over.

After September 11, 2001, we came of age as a generation. We agreed on an agenda. We faced the same enemy. And now the government is asking us: Will we serve? In the armed services, in the intelligence branches, alongside our military strategists and elected leaders.

Will we?

We must. The era of the individual, acting in isolation, paying taxes, voting in elections but otherwise ignoring the national interest has ended. It had to. It was recognized by terrorists for what it was and then carefully exploited.

It cannot happen again.

Yale's burgeoning international student body should also be spurred to action. Last week's terrorist attack was more than a turning point in American history -- it was a turning point in human history. The evil we are confronting respects no national borders, east or west. It is a threat to dozens of states and to human dignity itself.

We know no more than Bush and his advisers what lies ahead in the war against terrorism. We must do what enlightened world citizens can do: foster a better understanding of our fellow man and serve our nation in its effort to root out a common enemy.

Throughout the history of this university, Yalies have heeded the call of duty for country. We must answer the calling of our time -- for if we don't, who will?