

Battel, November 4, 2001

On September 11th of this year members of an international terrorist movement attacked two American cities, killing thousands of innocent civilians, citizens of many nations, and causing the destruction of billions of dollars in property. When they had recovered from the shock, most Americans reacted in the same two ways. They clearly and powerfully supported their government's determination to use military force to stop such attacks and to prevent future ones by capturing or killing the perpetrators, tearing up their organizations root and branch and, to this end, removing the leaderships of those states that supported and gave refuge to these people. Most Americans also expressed a new unity, an explicit patriotism and love of

their country not seen among us for a very long time.

That is not what we have seen and heard from the faculty here at Yale or, apparently, on most elite campuses in the country, and certainly not from the overwhelming majority of people designated as "intellectuals" who have spoken up in public. Their first concern has been to discuss the motives of the attackers, which are always seen as deep-rooted, underlying, understandable when viewed with the required sympathy. We need, they say, "to reflect on the deeper causes of this conflict with bin Laden." They have urged us to consider the killers' anger and resentment, provoked by their poverty in a world dominated by American wealth, by their understandable hatred of American power and influence throughout the world, by their

appropriate dismay at alleged errors or wickedness of American policies, political, economic, military or environmental, depending on the tastes of the commentator. At Yale we have been told that we must seek the "underlying causes" of these attacks, that "it is from the desperate, angry and bereaved that these suicide pilots came;" that "offensive cultural messages" spread by the United States understandably provoke hatred, as they would in us if the roles were reversed.

They offer any and all explanations, so long as they indicate that the attackers are really the victims, that the fault really rests with the United States. What is most striking about these statements is their arrogance. They suggest that the enlightened commentator can penetrate the souls of the attackers and know

their deepest motives; strangely enough their conclusions square with their own prejudices. A far better guide might be the statements of the perpetrators, who have not been reluctant to reveal them. In February of 1998 bin Laden published his declaration of a holy war against America in which he said "To kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military, is an individual duty of every Muslim who is able." His particular complaints included what he called the American "occupation" of Saudi Arabia, its policy against the Iraq of Saddam Hussein, and its support of Israel, among other things. In countless statements he and others have made it clear that the U.S. is "the great Satan," the enemy of all they hold dear. That includes the establishment of an extreme and reactionary Muslim fundamentalism at least in

all current Muslim lands, which is a considerable portion of the globe. It would impose a totalitarian theocracy that would subjugate the mass of the people, especially its women. They hate the U.S. not only because its power stands in the way of the achievement of their vision, but because its free, open, democratic, tolerant, liberal and prosperous society is a powerful competitor for the allegiance of millions of Muslims around the world. No change of American policy, no retreat from the world, no repentance or increase of modesty can change these things. Only the destruction of it and its way of life will do, and Osama bin Laden makes no bones about it. In a videotaped statement after the attacks on New York and Washington he said:

"Here is America struck by God Almighty in one of its vital organs, so that its greatest buildings are destroyed, Grace and gratitude to God. America has been filled with horror from north to south and east to west, and thanks be to God.

God has blessed a group of vanguard Muslims, the forefront of Islam, to destroy America. May God bless them and allot them a supreme place in heaven..."

"As to America, I say to it and its people a few words: I swear to God that America will not live in peace before peace reigns in Palestine, and before all the army of infidels depart the land of Muhammad, peace be upon him."

I think these statements of the attackers' motives and intentions are more reliable than the guesses and explanations of others, laden as

they are with their own agendas. Yet here at Yale, and elsewhere, we hear calls for "prayerful reflection...and repentance on our part" and for more practical responses, urging us to ask "whether we really have to be such a Colossus, so engaged across the globe, and so sure that we have the best system and the best answers in this complicated...world of ours." One need not be a Western chauvinist to believe that most people around the world, Muslims included, would prefer our system and answers to bin Laden's, if the choice were open to them. But most Muslims live under despotisms, and the choice is not open. Make no mistake about it: we are at war, a war waged against us by angry and determined men who will not let us escape, a war that will be more difficult and longer than most of us understand. If America is defeated

in this war or driven to a cowering withdrawal into isolationism, liberty's brightest light will go out, and a terrible darkness will descend on the whole world.

We must face the fact that Americans and our friends around the world are in great danger from people who make it plain that they are determined to kill us, to destroy our country and our way of life. Betraying our friends, retreating from the world, expressing our guilt, our shame, our repentance for anything and everything they claim we have done, will neither appease nor deter them. It is our existence that troubles them. We seek not vengeance but only safety and the establishment of an order in the world that is secure against wanton violence and that allows people freely to choose the way of life that pleases them.

Even if the U.S. were not the prime target of this holy war against modern civilization, America would need to take a leading role in defeating it, for it has been a beacon of liberty to the world since its creation and especially in the twentieth century. The attacks on America have produced a wave of supporting vilifications from "intellectuals" here and abroad, but I think it useful to quote an Englishman writing in the London Sunday Times who has a different view: "Let us ponder exactly what the Americans did in that most awful of all centuries, the 20th. They saved Europe from barbarism in two world wars. After the second world war they rebuilt the continent from the ashes. They confronted and peacefully defeated Soviet communism, the most murderous system ever devised by man... America, primarily,

ejected Iraq from Kuwait and stopped the slaughter in the Balkans while the Europeans dithered...

'People should think,' David Halberstam...says from the blasted city of New York, 'what the world would be like without the backdrop of American leadership with all its flaws over the past sixty years.' Probably, I think, a bit like hell." It does not take an American to find some small virtue in a country that has helped save the world from Wilhelminian Germany's right-wing imperialism, Hitler's Nazi regime, Stalin's totalitarianism and Japan's militaristic domination. Yet voices here and abroad from the world of leftist intellectual orthodoxy condemn and blame the U.S., as they have done for more than half a century. One Italian journalist wrote that "Ninety percent of

the Arab world believes that America got what it deserved." This, she says, is not an exaggeration but an understatement. On this side of the water Susan Sontag tells us that the assaults on America are not an "attack on 'civilization' or 'humanity' or 'the free world' but an attack on the world's self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions."

Another writer announces that "Force will get us nowhere. It is reparations that are owing, not retribution."

None of this should be surprising, for such voices have been plentiful and disastrous throughout the last century, as is lamented by a wiser voice from an earlier era:

"The worst difficulties from which we suffer... come from within. They do not come from the

cottages of the wage earners, they come from a peculiar type of brainy people always found in our country, who, if they add something to its culture, take much from its strength. Our difficulties come from the mood of unwarrantable self abasement into which we have been cast by a powerful section of our own intellectuals...

Nothing can save England if she will not save herself. If we lose faith in ourselves, in our capacity to guide and govern, if we lose our will to live, then indeed our story is told.

[Winston S. Churchill, Royal Society of St. George, 24 April 1933]

That statement was made by Winston Churchill in 1933 as he vainly tried to rally his country to rearm and resist Adolf Hitler before it was too late. The problems he encountered are with

us today, not six years before the commencement of violence but after we have been attacked.

Some members of the same intelligentsia have also decried the outburst of patriotism that has greeted the new assault on America. Katha Pollitt, writing in *The Nation*, wrote that her daughter "thinks we ought to fly an American flag out the window. Definitely not, I say: the flag stands for jingoism and vengeance and war." The novelist Barbara Kingsolving writes, "Patriotism threatens free speech with death... The American flag stands for intimidation, censorship, violence, bigotry, sexism, homophobia and shoving the Constitution through a paper-shredder."

Such ideas have a wide currency and should especially concern those of us who take some part in educating Americans. The encouragement

of patriotism is no longer a part of our public educational system, and the cost of that omission is now making itself felt. This would have alarmed and dismayed the founders of our country.

Thomas Jefferson believed that the most important goals of education were civic and moral. He urged that all students have a political education through the study of the "forms of government", political history, and foreign affairs. This was meant to communicate the special virtues of republican representative democracy, the dangers that threatened it, and the responsibility of its citizens to esteem and protect it.

Since every citizen has natural rights and powers, every one of them must

understand and esteem the institutions,
laws, and traditions of his country if it is
to succeed. Jefferson meant American
education to produce a necessary patriotism.
To add one humble voice to a great one, I
agree. Democracy, of all political systems,
because it depends on the participation of
its citizens in their own government and
because it depends on their own free will to
risk their lives in its defense, stands in
the greatest need of an education that
produces patriotism.

I recognize that I have said something
shocking. For the first hundred and fifty
years of American history such a statement
would have been a commonplace, so widespread
was its acceptance. But the last-half
century has seen a sharp turn away from what

had been traditional attitudes toward the purposes and functions of education. Our schools have retreated from the idea of moral education, except for some attempts at what is called "values clarification", which is generally a cloak for moral relativism verging on nihilism of the sort that asserts that whatever feels good is good.

Even more vigorously have the schools fled from the idea of encouraging patriotism. In the intellectual climate of our time the very suggestion has brought contemptuous sneers or outrage, depending on the mood of the listener. There is no end of quoting Samuel Johnson's famous remark that "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel," but no recollection of Boswell's explanation that "he did not mean a real and

generous love for our country, but that pretended patriotism which so many, in all ages and countries, have made a cloak for self-interest." Many have been the attacks on patriotism for intolerance, arrogance, and bellicosity, but that is unfairly to equate it with its bloated distortion, chauvinism. My dictionary defines the latter as "militant and boastful devotion to and glorification of one's country," but a patriot as "one who loves, supports, and defends his country." That does not require us to hate, contemn, denigrate, or attack any other country, nor does it require us to admire our own uncritically. Few countries have been subjected to as much criticism and questioning even from its patriotic citizens, as our own. Most Americans would

empathize with at least the second part of Winston Churchill's remark that "When I am abroad, I always make it a rule never to criticize or attack the government of my own country. I make up for lost time when I come home."

So distant are we from a proper understanding of patriotism that I sometimes hear people say, "It is silly to be patriotic. Why should I love, support, and defend a country just because, quite by chance, I happened to be born there?" In fact, there should be a presupposition in favor of patriotism, for human beings are not solitary creatures but require organized societies if they are to flourish or even survive. Just as an individual must have an appropriate love of himself if he is to

perform well, an appropriate love of his family if he and it are to prosper, so, too, must he love his country if it is to survive. Neither family nor nation can flourish without love, support, and defense, so that an individual who has benefited from those institutions not only serves his self-interest but also has a moral responsibility to give them his support.

The assaults on patriotism, therefore, are failures of character. They are made by privileged people who enjoy the full benefits offered by the country they deride and detest, its opportunities, its freedom, its riches, but they lack the basic decency to pay it the allegiance and respect that honor demands. But honor, of course, is often another object of their derision.

For the rest of us, our own honor and our devotion to our nation's special virtues requires us to respect and defend their opportunity to be irresponsible and subversive of our safety, but nothing forbids us from pointing out the despicable nature of their behavior.

Free countries like our own, have an even more powerful claim on the patriotism of their citizens than do others, and, it seems to me, our country has an even greater need of it than most. Every country requires a high degree of cooperation and unity among its citizens if it is to achieve the internal harmony that every good society requires. These must rest on something shared and valued in common. Most countries have relied on the common ancestry and

traditions of their people as the basis of their unity, but the United States of America can rely on no such commonality. We are an enormously diverse and varied people, almost all immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. We come from every continent on the face of the earth, our forebears spoke, and many of us still speak, many different languages, and all the races and religions of the world are to be found among us. The great strengths provided by this diversity are matched by great dangers. We are always vulnerable to divisions among us that can be exploited to set one group against another and destroy the unity and harmony that have allowed us to flourish.

We live in a time when civic devotion has been undermined and national unity is under

attack. The individualism that is so crucial a part of our tradition is often used to destroy civic responsibility. The idea of a common American culture, enriched by the diverse elements that compose it but available equally to all, is under assault, and attempts are made to replace it with narrower and politically divisive programs that are certain to set one group of Americans against another.

The answer to these problems and our only hope for the future must lie in education, which philosophers have rightly put at the center of the propagation of justice and the good society. We rightly look to education to solve the pressing current problems of our economic and technological competition with other nations, but we must not neglect

the inescapable political, and ethical effects of education. We in the academic community have too often engaged in miseducation. If we encourage separatism we will get separatism and the terrible conflict in society it will bring. If we encourage rampant individualism to trample on the need for a community and common citizenship, if we ignore civic education, the forging of a single people, the building of a legitimate patriotism, we will have selfish individuals, heedless of the needs of others, the war of all against all, the reluctance to work toward the common good and to defend our country when defense is needed.

The civic sense America needs can come only from a common educational effort. In

telling the story of the American political experience we must insist on the honest search for truth; we must permit no comfortable self-deception or evasion, no seeking of scape-goats. The story of this country's vision of a free, democratic republic and of its struggle to achieve it need not fear the most thorough examination and can proudly stand comparison with that of any other land. It provides the basis for the civic devotion and love of country we so badly need.

In spite of the shock caused by the attacks on New York and Washington and the recent discovery of anthrax in the mail, surely part of the terrorists effort to shake America's resolve, I am not sure that we all understand how serious is the

challenge that now faces us. We are only at the beginning of a long and deadly war that will inflict loss and pain, that will require sacrifice and steady commitment and determination even during very dark hours to come. We must be powerfully armed, morally as well as materially, if we are to do what must be done. That will take courage and unity, and these must rest on a justified and informed patriotism to sustain us through the worst times.

A verse by Edna St. Vincent Millay provides a clear answer to the question of why Americans should love their country:

Not for the flag
Of any land because myself was born there
Will I give up my life.

But will I love that land where man is free,
And that will I defend.

Ours is such a land.

Up to now, I fear, too many American intellectuals and too many members of the faculties of our greatest universities have been a part of our country's problem. If we are to overcome the dangers that face us we will need them to become part of the solution. I hope some of them may be persuaded by the clearer thinking of another British statesman, this one of our time, Prime Minister Tony Blair, who understands the impact on the killers of what we all say:

"They have one hope - that we are somehow decadent, that we lack the moral fiber or

will or courage to take them on; that we will start and then falter; that when the first setbacks occur, that we will lose our nerve...It is important that we never forget why we are doing it, important we never forget how we watched the planes fly into the twin towers. Never forget those answering machine messages. Never forget how we felt imagining how mothers told children they were about to die. If we do not act against al Qaeda and the Taliban, al Qaeda will have perpetrated the atrocity, the Taliban will have sheltered them and we will have done nothing. We will have done nothing despite the fact, also inescapable, that they intend to commit more atrocities."

I hope that the natural, admirable,
vitally necessary patriotism that is now
gaining strength and expression among the
ordinary people of our land will help to
educate those among us who feel superior to
them. We will need it in the long,
dangerous and difficult struggle that lies
before us.

