A Brighter Aftermath

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In the weeks after America’s most recent terrorist attacks, discussion focuses on them solely. It began with the “whos.” Who’s responsible for this? Whose jurisdiction is it to find the attackers? Who’s going to help our nation? From this track it quickly jumped to the “what ifs.” What if someone noticed the plotters? What if we’d elected Gore instead of Bush? What if the attacks happened later in the day? The terrorism conversation moves on discussing motives, anthrax, the Yankees, and recession. We talk about survivors, about percentages, about our degrees of separation from the attacks. However, our deliberation over the attacks has yet to focus on the “sinces.”

Since September 11, our relation to the metropolis of New York has changed. Once revered for its status as the immigrant capital of the United States, New York has evolved into the news capital of the world. Except for the CNN center in Atlanta, every other major news syndicate is based in New York. The buildings in New York City have become icons for information. After the destruction of the World Trade Center’s twin towers, the entire skyline changed. The fearless members of New York’s finest are no longer indomitable. The friendly city captured in films like Sleepless in Seattle, It Could Happen to You, or Keeping the Faith has given way to a harsher, realistic city that’s vulnerable and unfamiliar. Can this “new” New York City continue to inform a 21st century world? Alternatively, has the terrorism invoked the same kind of paranoia in our information capital that it hoped to disperse to our entire nation?

Since the news has begun focusing solely on terrorism, the energy crisis so prevalent on the west coast has all but ended. Suddenly with the destruction of the towers and the Pentagon, we all have enough power and no longer need to conserve. In actuality, there are no longer endangered species, the salmon population is larger than ever, and clear cutting has been found to benefit the environment. We no longer need to worry about shortages of any kind. We all share a common view on the abortion, cloning, and death penalty issues that used to separate us. We don’t have to worry; we’re Americans. In fact, our car companies entice us to purchase by offering no interest loans. We’re reminded to spend our tax rebates to boost the economy. However, half of the nationalism promoting signs, flags, and t-shirts are not even “made in America.” What about the other controversies crowding our news before our fixation with Islamic fundamentalism began? They’ve all evidently solved themselves, packed up, and gone home.
Since the terrorist attacks, our country has experienced the kind of nationalism everyday that we typically only witness on Super Bowl Sunday. Everyday we’re subjected to displays of our nation’s flag whether it’s in the window of a dusty foreign car or on a scantily clad, anorexic female. Every sound bite has the melody of a patriotic song in the background, reminding us that our flag is invincible; God likes the United States best and numerous other messages that would be controversial at any other time. Everyday people are attempting to remember more and more of their 5th grade American History classes in order to chat each other up while on public transportation and debate daily around the water cooler. We’ve learned more about Middle East geography in the past few months than during the years of the Persian Gulf War. We’re as close as we’ve ever been nationally, but do we really know anyone better than before September 11?

Since the attacks, we’re more familiar with one person now than ever before, God. God, in fact, is on our billboards, our headlines, our TV screens, and in our government. He is everywhere, including the original home we built for him, “church.” In times of desperation, it appears okay for God to come and walk amongst His people again. It’s okay to have a government built with a basis for religious acceptance and the separation of church and state to invoke God. Evidently, God is now at our command. We can keep Him in his little church box until we need Him and then unleash Him whenever things get too tough for us. Now He must “help us” and “bless us,” not to mention take the blame when bad things happen, because He’s God. Besides, we weren’t really ignoring Him before; we just thought He liked it better alone in His box.

In all the turmoil and aftermath of the September 11 attacks, we’ve managed to become the nation we thought we always were. We solved our problems, we can ignore our differences, our days are collectively sunny, and our future is bright. Overnight we’ve organized relief efforts and the ever-fruitful benefit concerts. (Perhaps we should also organize regular attacks on our country to benefit the national well-being.) We’ve regained pride in our country and found God. Before September 11, we managed to become smug and inactive in a country that was founded on struggle and developed through strife. What would the forefathers of our country say to our newfound nationalism? They would probably just sigh and shake their heads at our complacency for a nation they fought to bring about.