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Some 9/11 Reflections

The infamous 9/11 anniversary is here—again. I don't know if it will be a benchmark in all of human history, but is clearly is one in our time, and in my own life and reflecting.

On that day I was in Manhattan's underground, on its wonderful subway with 3 others, heading toward the United Nations Secretariat for the 2nd day of an annual conference there. Reading the signs of trouble, cause unknown, we turned around well before getting to 45th Street and 1st Avenue.

As that day unfolded I am sure I never felt so vulnerable in my life—an experience that actually is still meek and mild compared to that of others in other places and times.

It was my first (and I hope last) experience, too, of being “locked down”—once back in Brooklyn, one stayed on that island: bridges and tunnels were closed, air travel stopped except for U.S. Air Force planes buzzing the area, no public transit in motion, media reduced, communication erratic. It was so profoundly sensitizing about all I take for granted. I won't soon forget hearing my provincial crying when finally we communicated by phone (we could call out, others couldn't call in).

As six increasingly troubled years have passed since, one haunting insight from those early days of TV reports: WHAT is going on that *anyone* on our planet would dance and cheer in the streets at word of the 4 airplane crashes that day that killed almost 3000 people!!

This seemed to me to call for major audience analysis: What were they thinking? From where were they coming? What among their points are inaccurate? How can these inaccurate points be addressed?

From all I can see, our major national response to the 9/11 atrocities has been major military retaliation and a profound assumption that we are totally right because it is us, and “they” are fully wrong. Yet the questions

above seem to be much about ideas.

Another very haunting post 9/11 moment for me given those audience analysis questions: several months later, the “Comment on Kentucky” panelist, an expert on Middle East issues from our University of Kentucky saying in effect, no one in our top executive branch at that time was recognized as an expert on the Middle East. My parents would call that “an accident going out to happen!”

Given that so much of human conflict seems, at root, to be about who has how much of what and their attitude about it all, a big point of wisdom from Rodney King so frequently comes to mind: “Can't we all just get along?” Share?

In a world where wealth and decision-making power continue to concentrate into the hands of fewer and fewer people, this call to share almost certainly addresses something at the heart of those 9/11 attacks: they were directed to our centers of wealth and military power. This is part of the price of the U.S. being the sole global super power at the time?

I love our country very, very much, but at some points at national observances like this our expressions of nationalism begin to get to my stomach, because my head and heart believe it isn't all about us, and everything we do is not faultless and we sometimes aren't doing a good job of sorting things.

Granted our basic right to protect ourselves, the evil of killing innocent people, and blessing no violence—as another 9/11 anniversary comes and goes, let us give careful thought to root questions. As with a lot of things in life, if we don't, punishment seems to be built in.

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