

Yet Another 9/11 Remembrance?

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It seems we're doing the right thing by remembering 9/11 a little better this year—I've noticed more tributes and mentions and memories than in recent years past. Perhaps it's due to an unarticulated but clearly culturally absorbed need for unity in a fractured time. Fractured times are not good for America, or anywhere else. At best they lead to divisions, at worst they lead to anomie or even civil war. It is not and should not be our intention to want a civil war. But neither should we not be ignoring one.

Last week I was mentioning the 9/12 unity. I did not identify why it broke. I'll do that in the next segment, but as I usually recount on this day, and have been for 22 years: I was in Washington, DC on 9/11—my office was right across from the White House. I remember that day well—I had just come out of a Tuesday Bible study we had every week and I turned on the Today Show—and a bunch of us sat transfixed at my television, watching, and watching that second plane strike the World Trade Center as the reporters were trying to figure out how the first fire started. In short order, the Secret Service came to our building and evacuated us.

Professor Wilfred McClay got it right when he compared where we are today in the war on terror to an old sign he has in his office: That sign says "Remember Pearl Harbor." And with Pearl Harbor, we all knew what to remember, some of us still do. We knew what to remember then. And we did. A few years ago that stopped and to remember 9/11 became both a controversial and confused thing. A few years ago we stopped asking if we'd defeated the terrorist threat, and started to ask if we over-reacted, we began to ask if we were Islamophobic.

Today, we remember the tragedy, but we forget the horror. We rightfully honor the memory of the dead, but we ignore and suppress the evil that killed them. The survivors of the Holocaust got it right—they understood the power of memory just as quickly as Eisenhower did when he arrived at the Ohrdorf

death camp. He said the picture of evil needed to be preserved. Holocaust Museums get it mostly right when they intone the phrase: “never again.” And, indeed, today there are Holocaust Studies programs at our universities. I know of no Radical Islam programs. And frankly, I’d be afraid of them given how the professorial class treats the notion of evil and the threat of Radical Islam itself.

In our elementary and secondary schools, most of the textbooks, and a lot—not all, but a lot—of the teachers actually buy into and accept much of the Islamist complaint of America and the West. You know that complaint. It states, as the cultural critic Bruce Bawer, put it: “Knowing little about America and its history, American students are easily persuaded by multicultural-minded professors that their country is not a light unto the nations but a blight on the planet and that other cultures, if not downright admirable, can be excused for their failings, because those failings are, for some reason or other, ultimately our fault.”

I found it interesting that according to one study, fewer than half the states explicitly identify the 9/11 attacks in their high school standards for social studies. “It is extremely complicated to explain what happened,” one education expert said.

The problem of course begins with how we teach civics and American History. You can’t put the genie back in the bottle once you have smashed the bottle. How have we smashed the bottle? We have downgraded our exceptionalism. We have taught that all cultures are deemed equal, only when we don’t teach that America is the problem in the world. We have taught that all religions are deemed equal—except when we find it acceptable to blame the Western Culture or the Christian religion. But you will find it impossible to find an academic critical eye fixed on which societies elevate and esteem individual rights and which do not.

So, where are we going:

Nobody knows. Of course it starts with our own homeland security and moves outward from there into our foreign policy. We had a Secretary of Homeland Security, our former Governor, who said she prefers the phrase “man

caused disasters” to “terrorism.” The Department of Defense and the Department of State were instructed by the Obama White House to replace the phrase “war on terror” with the phrase “overseas contingency operations.”

And that Secretary of Homeland Security said that the prevention of the airliner bombing over Detroit was a case where “the system worked.” Well, yes, the system did work, if the system was a lone Dutch passenger who tackled the terrorist at the last minute.

And then there was Ft. Hood. Then-Chief of Staff of the Army George Casey said what was perhaps the worst thing that could be said about the terrorist attack at Fort Hood. He said, “Our diversity, not only in our Army, but in our country, is a strength. And as horrific as this tragedy was, if our diversity becomes a casualty, I think that’s worse.” Losing political correctness in the military would be worse than the death of 14 people. At an army fort, in Texas.

Then we added insult to injury with the Pentagon Report on Fort Hood. The Report mentioned Radical Islam not once. It mentioned causes of violence such as, “Low-Self-Esteem”, “Depression,” “Disgruntled Employee syndrome,” “white supremacy,” “right wing policies.” Its recommended solution? More health care providers. Lost on the Pentagon was that Major Nidal Hassan was a doctor and psychiatrist—he was a mental health care provider. Lost on almost everyone in positions of responsibility was that none of what was mentioned as the cause was the cause.

I recite this history and more in a moment because this is how, this is precisely how, slowly but surely a culture and mindset gets corrupted, this is how a national mind gets shaped, and how foolish thoughts can be elevated as sophisticated.

During all that our then-Commander in Chief continued to negotiate with Iran and shovel billions of dollars to them, and when the dissidents there had an opportunity to overthrow their Mullahcracy, he said “We Will Not Meddle.” So, meddle we did not—and the dissidents were crushed and Iran is ever closer to a nuclear weapon. We did however meddle in Egypt, we meddled in telling our long-time ally Hosni Mubarak, that he had to go. Go he went, and in came the Muslim Brotherhood. Among its first acts was to establish an alliance with

Iran. Showing how little that administration understood the Middle East, our then Secretary of State and future Democratic presidential candidate testified that Bashar Assad of Syria was “a reformer.” Today, Syria is a slaughterhouse—again.

So, have we won?

No. We simply have not. Iran is more powerful than ever. The Palestinians continually attempt to become a full state recognized by the UN with zero democratic norms, not even elections. Two presidents ago and this one even publicly lectured Israel on the size of its borders, telling our allies they should be constricted to an indefensible 9-mile width. Meanwhile, the A-team of terrorism, Hezbollah, is financially and violently active in Latin America as it was not before.

Let me finish by saying this.

How we talk, think, and teach here, and what goes on here, matters. I take my cues from Lincoln. Only we can destroy ourselves: “If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.”

There were heroes on 9/11, men like Rick Rescorla. He should be a household name. Bill Bennett and I dedicated our book on terrorism (*The Fight of our Lives*) to him. Learning names like his is the other way we stay a nation of freemen. First, unlike the record above, we understand our enemy, we take our enemy seriously, and we and call it by its proper name. Second, we forever esteem those who did just that and made this country better because they saw things for what they really were and saw their duty to save American lives.

Who was Rick Rescorla? He moved to the United States from Great Britain. He came here to actually help us fight in Vietnam. And he fought in the famous battle of Ia Drang, his picture is on the cover of the book “*We Were Soldiers Once...and Young*.” He came back from Vietnam and in time became head of Security for Morgan Stanley. After the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993, he knew the terrorists would come again. So what did he do? Here’s how the journalist Amanda Ripley describes it:

From then on (since 1993), Rescorla started running the entire company through frequent, surprise fire drills. He trained employees to meet in the hallway between the stairwells and, at his direction, go down the stairs, two by two, to the forty-fourth floor. He noticed they moved slowly, so he started timing them with a stopwatch—and they got faster.

The radicalism of Rescorla's drills cannot be overstated. Remember, Morgan Stanley was an investment bank. Millionaire, high-performance bankers on the 73rd floor chafed at Rescorla's evacuation regimen. They did not appreciate interrupting high-net-worth clients in the middle of a meeting. Each drill, which pulled the firm's brokers off their phones and away from their computers, cost the company money. But Rescorla did it anyway. He didn't care whether he was popular.

When guests visited Morgan Stanley for training, Rescorla made sure they all knew how to get out too. Even though the chances were slim, Rescorla wanted them ready for an evacuation.

Then came 9/11.

Rescorla grabbed his bullhorn, his walkie-talkie, and his cell phone and began systematically ordering Morgan Stanley employees to get out. They already knew what to do, even the 250 visitors who were taking a stockbroker training class and had already been shown the nearest stairway.

Rescorla had led soldiers through the Vietcong-controlled Central Highlands of Vietnam. He knew the brain responded poorly to extreme fear. Back then, he had calmed his men by singing Cornish songs from his youth. Now, in the crowded stairwell, as his sweat leached through his suit jacket, Rescorla began to sing into the bullhorn. "Men of Cornwall stand ye steady; It cannot be ever said ye for the battle were not ready; Stand and never yield!"

He saved thousands of lives that day. Thousands. But not his own. His last recorded words were, "As soon as I make sure everyone else gets out." He said those words in response to Morgan Stanley Regional Manager John Olson, who was yelling at him: "Rick, you've got to get out, too!"

Who was Rick Rescorla? He was an American by choice. He was a hero. Of him, as of so many, it may be said of them as Steven Spender wrote: “The names of those who in their lives fought for life; Who wore at their hearts the fire's center. Born of the sun they traveled a short while towards the sun; And left the vivid air signed with their honor.”

We owe it to our heroes, to our ancestors, and to our progeny to know names like that. And we owe it to ourselves to make more Rick Rescorlas—homegrown ones, citizens born here who see in us what so many like Rick born abroad see in us. And, we owe it to civilization’s adherents to oppose civilization’s abuse. Yes, we have an enemy, and yes it is real. And we can never forget it. Nor can we ever or should we ever forget what our enemy has done to us and what it plans for us still. Sometimes our enemies have been Marxists, sometimes Fascists, sometimes Islamofascists, sometimes they are born abroad, sometimes they are born here, sometimes they move here. But the degree to which we appease or even honor them and their ideologies will be the degree to which we save or lose this, the last best hope of earth.

The beginning of our wisdom here will be the beginning of our relearning and remembering who we are and who they are. The beginning of our wisdom starts with understanding that “If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.”