

just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

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COMMENTARY

BY MARTY DAVIS

One nation under God?

Unity now, turbulence on the horizon

We're now in the shadow of the attack on the World Trade Center. Thousand of lives are lost, thousand of tears are shed, and thousands of words are written and spoken. Every editor, publisher and columnist in the United States attempts to be profound, to find and share understanding in the horror of this incident.

I sit now before my own blank screen and offer no pretense of explanation and most surely no words of reverence. I'll share instead my perspective and concerns, then ask that you do the same.

All of us will carry forever in our minds the image of planes crashing into towering landmarks. In the ensuing days the ceaseless pictures, sounds and scenes have left their mark. Some images left a strong and positive impact; others left me worried and concerned.

We all have different triggers that affect our emotions. At which point did you reach emotional overload?

For myself the sight of Dan Rather breaking into tears on *The Late Show with David Letterman* was an astounding moment, one that gave me a job of realization that things were dire indeed. I felt not unlike a small child feels upon seeing his or her father cry for the first time. It brought home the realization that hard, bad times lie ahead.

The events of Sept. 11 have led to jarring changes in the behaviors and attitudes of people across the nation. Overwhelming aid and support are flowing in for the people of New York, and citizens are putting their best foot forward. These outpourings of grief and pain and sympathy from our communities and friends and neighbors speak volumes about the intrinsic goodness of most U.S. citizens.

But at the same time there's a potentially out-of-control wave of "Fourth of July" patriotism—that volatile combination of fireworks, beer and belligerence—that makes the air uneasy. Young white men in pickups with U.S. flags bolted to the beds are not ideal defenders of constitutional liberties.

Redneck patriotism, fueled by the inevitable addition of alcohol and unwarranted bravado, can lead to little good. These fellas make me nervous. If denied the immediate gratification of turbulent revenge, how and where will they vent their pent-up anger? How many six-packs does it takes before "let's blow up an Arab" turns into "let's shoot a nigger, let's kill a queer"?

Ugly words? Ugly times. Watch for the enemy within.

Although I am wary of certain aspects of the new patriotism, I am simply downright puzzled by the resultant odd wedding of God and commerce. It seems every reader board, every sign, every marquee now proclaims either "God Bless America" or "In God We Trust."

I find this disconcerting on many levels. In the most simplistic view, it rather appears God actually, for the moment, has not blessed America, and

in consideration of said fact, why exactly should we now be wagering our trust on such a fickle deity? Are we in some kind of bargaining mode? And I always have cherished the concept of separation of church and state and endorse the continued notion of keeping God in the home and church and out of the drugstore, bakery, auto repair shop and every other place in town.

My neighborhood Walgreens has replaced its standard Metabolife Special reader board message with the requisite renderings of both "United We Stand" and "In God We Trust." My sense is that as soon as sales are dramatically down, corporate patriotic fervor will decrease and marketing emphasis will return to fighting the true scourge of our country's existence: the overweight American.

Bombing Afghanistan is not the solution to punishing those wretched souls responsible for the terrorist attack on New York. These poverty-stricken people are not our enemy. Yes, they hate us, but let's not overlook the notion that perhaps they have reason to.

The Taliban, however, must go. This faction is a cancerous growth that has taken control of a weakened, damaged body of people.

Remove the malignancy and save the nation. This surely is something that the greatest country on earth, the United States of America, can accomplish without relying on mass destruction.

How much would it cost, in dollars and in lives, to bomb a country into submission? Would the cost of ground troops be more or less than the cost of sending in doctors and nurses and teachers and farmers and carpenters?

Wouldn't these people simply be soldiers without uniforms or guns? Is it more "American" to blow a country to smithereens rather than rebuild it and convert it into an ally?

Keep the soldiers at home, and send in peacekeepers. But don't send Bibles, don't send missionaries, and don't send Starbucks, Coca-Cola and Pizza Hut. Don't rape the culture of yet another country in the name of Western capitalism. Don't give these people more reasons to hate us. If we don't respect and honor others, how can we expect and demand the same of them?

Lastly, I think we all can agree that there are no winners in war. Thus said, I put forth the notion of one exception. For more than 10 days now, U.S. Rep. Gary Condit has enjoyed total press anonymity. Tell me this guy isn't happy. And if this noble representative waves his little flag and evokes the deity to bless America, he probably will get himself re-elected.

God bless America, indeed. ☐

To submit LETTERS TO THE EDITOR fax 503-236-1257; e-mail justout@justout.com; visit www.justout.com; or write to P.O. Box 14400, Portland, OR 97293-0400.

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REFLECTIONS

10 years ago in just out... VOL. 8 NO. 11, SEPTEMBER 1991



• Gale Wilhelm, celebrated author of two lesbian novels written between 1935 and 1945, died peacefully at her home in San Francisco on July 11.

• African American activists pressured black lawmakers recently in an unprecedented congressional lobbying and briefing campaign aimed at sparking increased action around the growing crisis of AIDS in their community.

• The highly conservative and extremist Oregon Citizens Alliance has targeted at least one Just Out advertiser. The OCA has launched a harassment campaign against Stan Wiley Realtors and its agent Millynn James, who has advertised in Just Out for nearly a year.

• Pink Panthers, an affiliate of Portland's chapter of Queer Nation, have taken to the

street. The group formed here to combat, in a variety of ways, the increase of hate-motivated crimes against lesbians, gays and bisexuals.

• A new study estimates Oregon has at least 50,000 lesbian, gay and bisexual youth, many of whom experience rejection by family and friends.

• Shan Leslie, owner of Crone Graphics, talks Sept. 10 about her art and her involvement as co-host of *NightScene*, Portland's gay and lesbian television show.

• Banned by Oregon Public Broadcasting, *Tongues Untied* will play at Cinema 21 for one night only Sept. 19. This powerful film depicts the lives of black gay men through poetry, music and prose.

• The Oregon Gay and Lesbian Law Association presents its first dinner Sept. 14 with speakers Gail Shibley, Les AuCoin and Charles Hinkle.

PUBLISHER AND MANAGING EDITOR • Marty Davis
ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR • Oriana Green
NEWS EDITOR • Jim Radosta
CONTRIBUTORS • Marc Acito, Kristan Aspen, Richard Bray, Meryl Cohn, Susan Detroy, Heron, Michael Wayne Keck, Timothy Krause, Sarah Leimert, Christopher McQuain,

Tim Miller, Kelly Reilly, Bob Roehr, Tom Stevenson, Roma Virginia, Rex Wockner
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR • Meg Grace
ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES • Markie Acevedo, Larry Lewis
NATIONAL ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE • Rivendell Marketing Company Inc., 212-242-6863

ART DIRECTOR • Rupert Kinnard
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR • Kevin Moore
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT • Melissa Saylor
OFFICE MANAGER • Melissa Saylor
DISTRIBUTION • Jerilyn Adams, Ed Carder, Ian Drake, Rick Geiger, Julie Hanson, Kelly Keigwin, Gaia Mather, Merid Schwartz