

9/11 + 5

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

Once upon a time in a fairy tale past, the United States of America thought it was safe from the strifes of the world, isolated by oceans it fatuously believed would protect it; even after half a century of a nuclear arms race and the development of intercontinental missiles, the USA assumed a Buck Rogers space shield would defend it from harm.

And from its inviolate fortress it exported a highly sophisticated form of terror, attacking countries all over the world for one purpose or another, generally from the air with bombs and missiles. The USA pioneered many of the methods of war from the air and stratosphere, and used bombs more than any other nation, especially on cities and small villages of other nations.

The morning of September 11, 2001 dramatically ended the nation's illusory immunity. The USA was finally attacked in its own homeland by suicidal commandos who made guided missiles out of American airliners in a brilliant scheme of calculated devastation aimed at the cosmic cathedrals of American civilization and its ambitions for global supremacy.

September 11, 2001 has been called the worst day in American history, the day that changed America forever; and for ideolitical expediency the nation's history has been conflated into pre-9/11 and post-9/11 — 9/11 has been used to declare a world war on terrorism, and like all such days of anguished trauma, it has become a myth of American unity in crisis, which, if there is any veracity to the blusteringly vengeful xenophobia, it lasted barely longer than the attack itself, despite the compulsive flag-waving that suddenly sprouted all over the country.

It is likely the overuse of 9/11 as the 'bloody shirt' — which brings to mind fables of little boys who too often cry wolf — has led to a greater jeopardy of shutting off the national mindset to the real dangers that face the faltering democracy.

The country's leaders reacted to 9/11 with a violence incomparable to what caused it, confusing reality with their own empirical visions — the *causa belli* of the Bush administration from its first day in the White House was to invade Iraq as the linchpin of a Middle Eastern oil empire — and they have used 9/11 to curtail Constitutional liberties in the name of national security far more rigidly than during the World Wars and the Cold War.

Perhaps the stifling consequence of 9/11 has been its use to justify the most salacious (and notorious) power grab in the nation's history, altering the already decrepit democracy into the Hamiltonian dream of a Federalist aristocracy of wealth and privilege in uneasy and perhaps unmanageable alliance with rightwing Christian zealots who see this new millennium as fulfillment of horrendous prophecy, not to mention the opportunity to convert the USA into a militantly theolitical citadel of compulsory evangelical Christianity.

Islamic terrorists, however determined they might be to implement their own millennial visions upon the rest of the world, are not the worst enemy of the American people. The 9/11 terrorists highjacked a few airplanes and suicidally murdered a few thousand Americans. The Bushites have, as a consequence, highjacked the weakened remnants of American democracy and have been murdering it since.

The MacDisney visions for this new century/millennium were dramatically and tragically revealed for the insipid fantasies they really were on 9/11, and it is a drastically different world we perceive for the future since. Yet it is the same old world of danger and death it has always been despite our near success at pretending it isn't. Our center of gravity has radically shifted and we look out upon a newer milieu of uncertainty with feelings of grim anxiety that would be familiar to our earliest ancestors.

The images of the captive passenger-filled suicide jet airliners crashing into both towers of the World Trade Center are indelible in the American psyche five years later — as familiar and cryptic as the smoking ribbons of the *Challenger* space shuttle in 1986.

Other images recall 9/11. Thousands of hands reaching up as if to stop the collapsing south tower of the WTC. Falling bodies of people who jumped to their deaths to escape the fires started by the jets, in particular a couple holding hands as they fell. Doomed firemen going up into the towers passing fleeing survivors going down. The wreckage of a fourth skyjacked airliner forced to crash in Pennsylvania woods short of its probable target in Washington, D.C. by passengers who seemed aware everyone aboard were about to die regardless of their resistance.

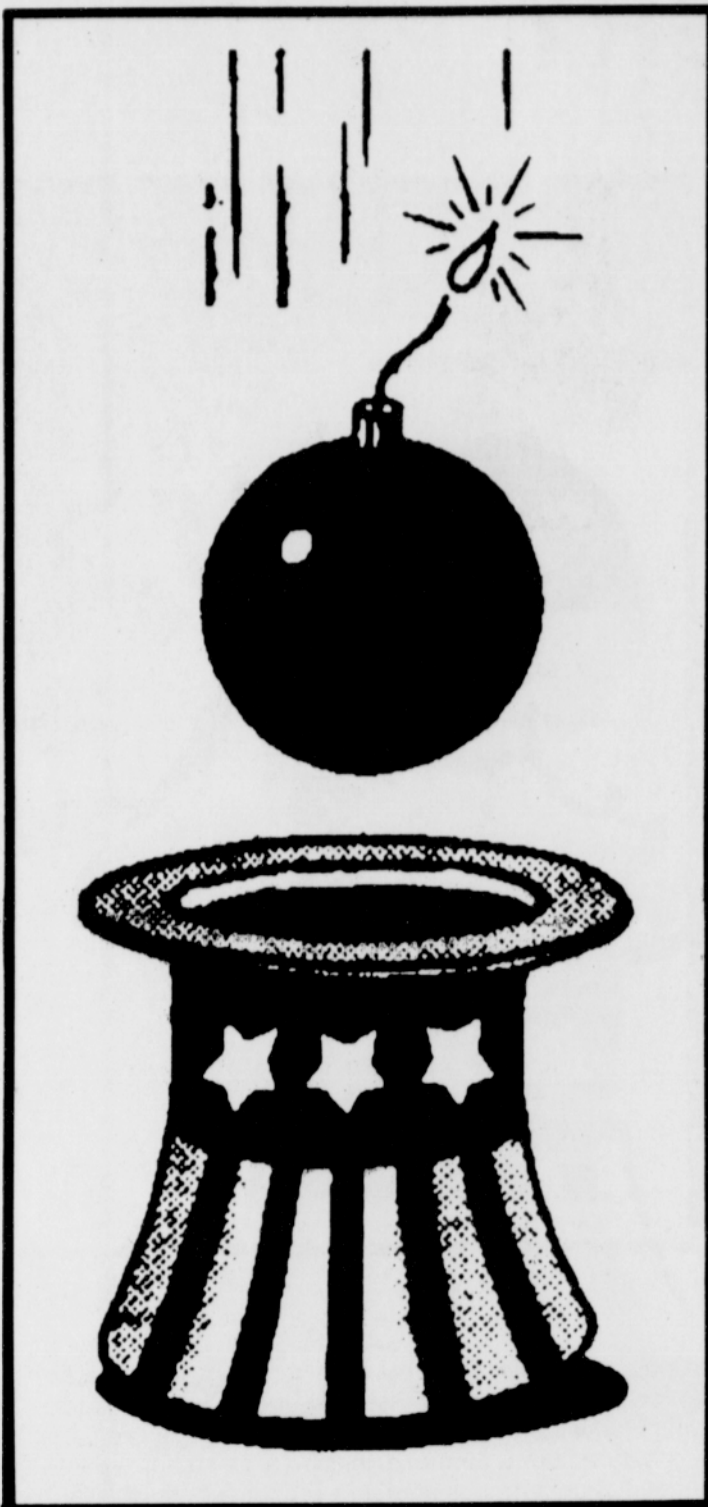
A few obscure images seldom recalled or even noticed are yet revealing and prophetic: Two crowds confronted each other in Chicago on the night of 9/11, one group white and right, the other brown and mostly Muslim, shouting at each other "USA! USA! USA!" A young man on a bicycle in D.C. 9/11 morning just after the third plane kamikazied the Pentagon shouted the attacks on it and the WTC were appropriate punishment for the USA's oppressive foreign policy and was pelted with food and rocks by a shocked and angry crowd. (Police searched his clothes and knapsack for explosives then let him ride away exchanging shouts with people on the sidewalks.)

A woman on 9/11 morning in NYC described a "surreal atmosphere" of people standing on street corners staring up at the flaming towers, and after they collapsed seemed to numbly look at the subsequent pile of rubble that was vast and several stories high. Another woman said she saw crowds of people walking away from 'Ground Zero' stunned after the towers collapsed. "Where are you going?" she asked. "Away," they said.

A woman who used to live in Astoria and who lived across the East River from the WTC saw the towers burst into smoke and flame from a picture window in her apartment high above the street, and regretted she couldn't shut off the view like a TV; yet she did not close the curtains.

The young daughter of a U.S. airline pilot said, "I play with my dolls and I think of (Osama) bin Laden. The dolls save the world sometimes, and sometimes they save the people in the airplanes."

The funerals and memorials were soon over, and after nearly a year most of the rubble at Ground Zero was cleaned up. Yet the national angst of the past five years since 9/11 has been a highly charged personal nightmare also — that a highjacked



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jet airplane loaded with helpless captives is aimed at all our windows. It is a nightmare that has proved very fruitful for the homeland fearmongers of the Bush administration who have kept the terrorist paranoia at high fever since 9/11, the day the

COUNTER BABEL

The original Tower of Babel was built by people who spoke one language until God struck at them for their hubris and they suddenly found their tongues to be incomprehensible to one another. The World Trade Center was populated by people who spoke a great number of native languages but who had settled on a common language, English, in order to advance the cause of globalization more efficiently. The parallels between Babel and the World Trade Center are so blatant that I wonder if the attackers consciously chose their target for that reason. If so, were they not saying, Slow down — we do *not* all understand one another, and we certainly do not agree on the project you have underway.

The language spoken in common by all is a dream, not a reality; trade was never meant to be more than a practical aspect of life, but globalization has been treated as a Crusade in itself, and those wishing not to participate in this notion of progress have been refused voices in the matter. Religious fundamentalism is a loud and clear, if thoroughly disturbing, way for those whose thoughts are not in sync with the flow of 'progress' to declare that they do not trust themselves to create a human future by acts of will and cannot possibly trust those humans who have taken it upon themselves to do so.

I don't see fundamentalism as being about religion at all; it seems to me that no one of genuine spiritual insight would defer to the literal written word in lieu of their own conscience no matter the situation facing them, but insofar as fundamentalism is a compelling force to millions of people around the world, the nature of that force has to be examined in good faith and the fears it represents treated with respect.

We have needlessly rushed into a process that we cannot reverse, and we do not really know what will be the fallout of the changes that take place. We do know that a great deal that has been of proven value for centuries, even millennia, will probably be lost — language culture and the genuine spiritual as well as human understanding it has served to convey, the unbroken memory of generations past that is still a focus of reverence in intact old societies, and the future that would have grown out of such societies if their ways had prevailed. Do we really want to sweep all of this away with little more than a backward glance?

The terrorists who attacked September 11 may not have been consciously aware of such motives, but these are implicit in their actions, and I wish to see the victims honored by our treating the entire incident as rife with understanding to be gained with little further effort. If the terrorists intended nothing but mindless destruction, we can deprive their actions of nihilism by wresting something of good from them in spite of their intent.

We may seem destined to achieve a common language and reverse the momentum of the original fall of Babel at any cost; if we do so at less cost to ourselves — all of ourselves, globally — are we not obligated to do so?

~JUDITH GRIFFIS (NCTE, October 2001)

calendar stopped whenever the Bushites are questioned or criticized about anything, especially around election time.

The Bush administration immediately used 9/11 to implement its Hamiltonian model of Presidential powers, which it calls the "unitary executive theory," which more or less sidelines Constitutional restraints on Presidential power. The Bushites attempted to persuade Americans that it is unpatriotic to defend political and civil liberties during times of crisis — then Attorney General Ashcroft even claimed anyone complaining about loss of civil liberties "only encourages the terrorists." The administration dismissed criticism of its rape of the environment and disintegration of the always tenuous social fabric by intimating such criticism only aided and abetted terrorism.

The 'USA Patriot Act', which was ramrodded through a Congress that neglected to read it for fear of being accused of being "soft" on terrorism a week after 9/11, was a blatant attempt to use 9/11 to reorganize the USA into a corporate militocracy, and with its usual Orwellian doubletalk, the Bushites claimed that increased governmental and police powers expanded personal liberties: The Bill of Rights were still in operation where "deemed appropriate.", Attorney General Ashcroft said.

In truth, the Patriot Act voids the 1st Amendment and at least three others (4th Amendment freedom from unreasonable searches; 5th and 6th Amendment due process of law and protection of life, liberty and property). The Patriot Act would certainly criminalize our original patriots (who were, after all, traitors and terrorists), and it demands we comply and actually assist in the betrayal of principles those founding revolutionaries fought for and established 11 score and 10 years ago.

The great vehemence is that everything must be done to protect the USA from the rest of the world while simultaneously ensuring the rest of the world is vulnerable to the power and might of the USA — this is the 'Bush Doctrine', under which the USA is rapidly mutating into the sort of rogue nation it accuses others of being.

Those who committed the atrocity of 9/11 did not do it because they are 'evil' but because they perceive evil has been done to them, and they reciprocated as they were capable. A major reaction to 9/11 is that that what we have done to others is irrelevant, all that matters is what has been done to us, which is dealt with as if it occurred in a vacuum.

It was not our values but the abandonment of them the terrorists attacked on 9/11. Especially in the previous decade our policies made entire populations desperate and consequently ravaged our own security. Quite opposite the claims that the 9/11 terrorists struck the USA because it is the foundation of liberty, it is instead the opponent of democratic government in the Middle East and much of the southern hemisphere, supporting ruthless autocratic regimes it generally keeps on its tether through force or corruption. Terrorism has risen from our military arms and financial support of repressive and compliant regimes in Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. Terrorism has become synonymous with anti-Americanism and its intensity has greatly to do with our zealously arrogant efforts to subdue liberties and freedoms we claim to exemplify.

Our Cold War policies of 'real politick' did not endear us to much of the emerging world which has suffered heavily under puppet despots we supported in our half century conflict for world supremacy with the Soviet Union, nor does it make us popular today as we use war and the threat of war to control the supply of resources that sustain the 'American way of life' our political leaders proclaim as the mandate of God and Christianity. We use up much more of the world's resources than any other country (and more than many countries combined), and the people whose wealth we appropriate are denied their equitable shares, which makes them upset with us and quite often violently desperate.

For all of its pious rant against terrorism, the U.S. is a major importer of it, and has been since at least the advent of the Cold War. As a matter of fact, the USA is the only nation condemned by the World Court for international terrorism, and it vetoed a UN Security Council resolution for all nations to observe international law — both of these in response to Nicaragua's protest against U.S. instigation and support of the so-called 'Contras', counter-revolutionary terrorists whom Ronald Reagan called "freedom fighters."

The contradictory attitude toward terrorism by the U.S. might be illustrated by rephrasing a famous remark by Winston Churchill during World War 2: "Curse those bastards who crash airplanes into our cities and bless our heroes who bomb their cities." Terrorism is usually depicted as the method of violence used against "us." — somewhat in the manner Robert Graves defined mythology as every religion but one's own. The assertion is that it is not relevant or suitable to discuss what we have done to *them* but only what *they* have done to us.

The U.S. government also interprets terrorism as any form of armed struggle against regimes it arms and supports, no matter how despotic or repressive. As Noam Chomsky has said, "The first and principle method of stopping terrorism is for the United States to stop participating in it."

Quite disingenuously the U.S. refuses to acknowledge the World Court and avoids ratifying UN sponsored international human rights covenants, smugly (or sinisterly) content to claim that our own democratic institutions are all that matter in our conduct of world affairs.

In 1979, the UN passed a strong resolution against terrorism. The U.S. and Israel voted against it. Nothing in the resolution prohibits those fighting for "just cause" against "repression and colonialism." But apartheid South Africa was a U.S. ally at the time — so native "freedom fighters" were classified in the U.S. as "terrorist forces."

Rather than treat terrorists as international criminals to be captured and tried before the World Court, the Bushites raised 9/11 to an apocalyptic struggle between 'good' and 'evil' (i.e., between evangelical Christians and everybody else); Osama bin Laden was transfigured from an ideological psychopath into a comic book Satan who must be destroyed by Captain America.

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