

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

Column: Are you a patriot?

By: Will Dempster

Posted: 9/12/05

Nearly four years later, thinking about Sept. 11 is still one of few things capable of moving me to tears. It was unbelievably humbling to observe how the events of Sept. 11 united Americans. For a few months, Americans ceased to divide themselves by their differences. Instead, they united behind one another in temporarily dissolving partisanship and selfishness. No longer were there Democrats and Republicans, Jews and Muslims - only Americans and American flags.

In contrast to past periods of great national trauma, Sept. 11 did not force Americans to sacrifice luxuries for the betterment of their country. Instead, the Bush administration continued recklessly cutting taxes for the wealthiest Americans and financing the largest government expansion since the 1960s by selling current U.S. debt to China. Abandoning the American tradition of sacrifice in the face of a national trauma has yielded a dangerous situation regarding the war in Iraq; there is no national sacrifice and no coherent and agreed-upon principle for success or strategy for exiting this conflict.

For too many Americans the war in Iraq is stale news - decreasing in importance and coverage by local newspapers and cable news. While hundreds of thousands of American troops toil in the seemingly endless quagmire in Iraq, many Americans without family members in the service feel that slapping a one-dollar magnetic yellow ribbon on their car is enough to validate their patriotism and our foreign policy. Most disturbing is the frequency with which such people question the patriotism of war opponents while they too rest comfortably in their homes in America.

By and large, Americans have not had to shoulder the sacrifices of wartime during our present conflict. Unlike in World War II and Vietnam - where all were subjected to Army conscription - the war in Iraq has been executed with an all-volunteer army and National Guard, largely composed by those living in the nation's heartland. Because so few are exposed to the horrors of this conflict, the American people continue to tolerate an administration whose complete ineptitude in handling the war is difficult to describe in words.

Americans must no longer tolerate the empty rhetoric of armchair patriots and develop a comprehensive system of national service. Through this plan, even the nation's wealthiest individuals would not be exempt. Each young American would be required to serve their country for two years. Americans could spend two years teaching in inner-city schools, promoting the U.S.'s image abroad in public diplomacy in the developing world, or in traditional service in the military or National Guard. Requiring such a program would do far more than any civics class could aspire to do. This sacrifice will prove to be a future check on a future presidents like Bush who insist upon fighting a war few agree with and one to which many do not contribute to winning.

Unfortunately, the current administration's track record of imposing sacrifice on only a few courageous Americans almost assures such a program would never be implemented. In the interim, I am initiating a project on campus through which GW students can take action to support our troops, without actually having to sign up to serve in the military.

In the coming weeks I will be selling support your troops dorm and apartment door ribbons for \$50. The proceeds of these sales will go toward purchasing supplies for a special-forces unit soon to deploy

in Iraq, in which a close family friend serves. This act will enable campus patriots to pay more than hollow rhetoric to American troops fighting and dying in Iraq. If you would like more information about it, please e-mail me at wwd@gwu.edu.

Sept. 11 will forever remain one of the darkest moments in U.S. history. While the tragedies of that day must not be forgotten, so must not the heroic tale of what Americans are capable of when bound together in national solidarity. Implementing a clear plan of compulsory national service will ensure such a feeling can exist absent a national trauma.

-The writer, a senior majoring in international affairs, is The Hatchet senior editor.

© Copyright 2007 GW Hatchet