

War on Terrorism Hits Home for Generation X

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Foreword

We work hard to raise our children to be happy and to develop good self-esteem. But they and we have another mission as well. To quote a Rabbinic scholar, "If I am only for myself, what am I?" Dina Rabadi's article, from the September 10, 2003 op-ed section of the Boston Globe, seems, to me, to quietly illustrate that ethical teaching.

Dina is the age of many parents who visit this site, parents who have responsibilities to their children and families, to their work, and also to their country and the global community. Reading her article, it seemed to me that she expressed feelings parents might have as they think about their lives and those of their children in this uncertain world.

Although it is written on the sad occasion of the anniversary of September 11, "War on Terrorism" contains a hopeful message about her generation's strengths, as well as a desire to be part of a solution to alleviate suffering and hatred.

- Dr. Howard King

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My friends and I grew up during the '80's and '90's. Times of relative peace and prosperity. Such peace and prosperity made it easy to become focused on things of non-national importance, things like feathered hair, friendship bracelets, and "Melrose Place";

To outsiders, my generation seemed complacent, insular, and silent. We were not voting, not protesting, not caring. We were criticized for being apathetic, apolitical, and directionless — so much so that the 80 million young adults born between 1961 and 1981 were given a non-name — Generation X.

We did, in fact, care — but in more private ways. The political and economic stability most of us were experiencing gave us the time and energy to develop our intellectual, spiritual, and emotional interests. We became Buddhists, started dot-coms, got acupuncture, and worked on our self-esteem. We were aware of national issues, but they weren't urgent enough, massive enough, or relevant enough to ignite a strong emotional reaction from us. On the contrary, we felt that our country was doing OK. Life was good. We chose to volunteer instead of protest, recycle instead of vote.

On September 11, our priorities changed. The World Trade Center was blown up, some 3,000 people were murdered, and so was our sense of security, confidence, and vision of our place in the world, both as young adults and as Americans.

As we watched the second plane crash into the towers, we realized that our future was going to be different. Not only were we going to have to take care of ourselves, we were also going

to have to take care of our country. My generation more than any other, understands that that to truly take care of our country, we are going to need to address the concerns of the rest of the world.

As one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse generations in history, we offer an intimate understanding of international relations. Not only are our families directly from some of the countries in conflict, so are our friends. We have been learning about Islam from our teachers, but also from the Muslims some of us have dated. We have been learning about the Pakistani-Indian tensions in school but also first hand from our best friends who are from Kashmir. We have been told the perception of the United States abroad. We have had the flaws of US foreign policy pointed out to us.

We have been told why there is hatred and resentment toward the United States. On September 11, those conversations were illustrated.

While things in the United States for many years have been pretty good, many other countries are deteriorating.

Asia is home to two-thirds of the world's extreme poor. Entire villages are so poor that they collectively sell their children into sexual slavery. While AIDS recedes in America, it is devastating in Africa. And in the Middle East, there is a region devastated by cycles of hope and oppression — where young men and women are so desperate for a better life for their country and families that they are willing to blow themselves up.

Suffering is suffering, regardless of national borders. As Americans, but more important, as human beings all sharing this earth, we are going to need to work together to alleviate this suffering. Rooting out terrorists is not enough to make us safe.

We are going to have to work together as a global community to reduce the anger, frustration, and despair, which are prompting such attacks. We are going to need to draw on our knowledge of different cultures, value systems, and beliefs. My generation is here to help.