

Jefferson Analysis  
*George W. Bush Remarks on 9/11 and 1/6  
Enlighten National Conversation*

By Rev. Charles Brock



Former President George W. Bush gave some major remarks on the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in Pennsylvania, where one of the attack planes was foiled by brave patriots and crashed to the ground rather than the intended U.S. Capitol building. Bush attempted to give comfort, but he also showed deep concern about how America has been breaking bad in the past few years.

On Bush's speech, Jennifer Rubin, a respected op-ed columnist for the Washington Post, writes:

*In perhaps the most important words spoken in his political career, Bush in his remarks at the crash site of United Airlines Flight 93 drew a straight line between the 9/11 terrorists and the 1/6 terrorists. 'We have seen growing evidence that the dangers to our country can come not only across borders but from violence that gathers within,' he said. 'There is little cultural overlap between violent extremists abroad and violent extremists at home. But in their disdain for pluralism, in their disregard for human life, in their determination to defile national symbols, they are*

*children of the same foul spirit.' He added, 'It is our continuing duty to confront them.' Bush's words were an indictment not only of the violent MAGA insurrectionists but also, implicitly, of his party that coddles them and the leader whom the 1/6 terrorists wanted to install by force.*

That is enormous! It is a put down of Trumpism in all its glory, or should the word be “gory”? But he also says some things that the press largely ignored that deserve a hearing as well – the obliviousness of Americans on why we were attacked on 9/11 and considerations of the spirituality of the attacks on America on both 9/11 and 1/6.

Bush said, “Many Americans struggled to understand why an enemy would hate us with such zeal.” This was one of the major problems of the early Bush Administration – there was a tremendous ignorance of the radical side of Islam and why we were so hated outside our boundaries. As Osama bin Laden said in his fatwa against America:

*It should not be hidden from you that the people of Islam had suffered from aggression, iniquity, and injustice imposed on them by the Zionist-Crusaders alliance and their collaborators; to the extent that the Muslims' blood became the cheapest and their wealth as loot in the hands of the enemies. Their blood was spilled in Palestine and Iraq. The horrifying pictures of the massacre of Qana, in Lebanon are still fresh in our memory. Massacres in Tajikistan, Burma, Cashmere, Assam, Philippine, Fatani, Ogaden, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnia, and in Bosnia-Herzegovina took place, massacres that send shivers in the body and shake the conscience. All of this and the world watch and hear, and not only didn't respond to these atrocities but also with a clear conspiracy between the USA and its allies and under the cover of the iniquitous United Nations, the dispossessed people were even prevented from obtaining arms to defend themselves.*

Whatever the truths of these statements, they were not widely debated in America before 9/11, and not much afterward. We wallowed in our ignorance. And why did we invade Iraq without proof of weapons of mass destruction? We didn't let Dr. Hans Blix complete his United Nations' inspection before we blundered in. Did we have to torture people? Did we have to divide the world into binary camps – “you are either for us or against us?” We really needed to know what America was up to in the world, but we were kept out of the picture by the government and by much of the media.

The positive aspect Bush brought up was in relation to spirituality. He said: All that many could hear was God's terrible silence. There are many who still struggle with a lonely pain that cuts deep within. In those fateful hours, we learned other lessons as well. We saw that Americans were vulnerable, but not fragile – that they possess a core of strength that survives the worst that life can bring. We learned that bravery is more common than we imagined, emerging with sudden splendor in the face of death. We vividly felt how every hour with our loved ones is a temporary and holy gift. And we found that even the longest days end.

Many of us have tried to make spiritual sense of these events. There is no simple explanation for the mix of Providence and human will that sets the direction of our lives. But comfort can come from a different sort of knowledge. After wandering long and lost in the dark, many have found they were actually walking, step by step, toward grace.

This is deep and profound. Let me try to unpack it.

For many, the events were mind- and soul-numbing, and they can never get over them. All too often we have been taught to be optimistic about ourselves and our world – try hard, work hard, and believe in yourself and good things will happen, and you will die happily. That is truly deceptive for most people. But others, in this vale of tears, try to see a way through life with more realism. They realize the world can be tough as nails, and we often fail no matter how hard we try. Christianity stresses the Cross. Jesus did not die happy. Life is tragic. This is echoed by all major world religions.

But Bush saw a “core of strength” in America and that, with great difficulty, we emerged. We realized that “every hour with our loved ones is a temporary and holy gift. We don’t know what God intends for us and the world, but often if we look deeply enough, we find ourselves walking, step by step, towards grace.” That is what Bush believed about his presidency. He said in defense of America’s search for liberty not only for itself but for all: “In the trenches of World War I, through a two-front war in the 1940s, the difficult battles of Korea and Vietnam, and in missions of rescue and liberation on nearly every continent, Americans have amply displayed our willingness to sacrifice for liberty.”

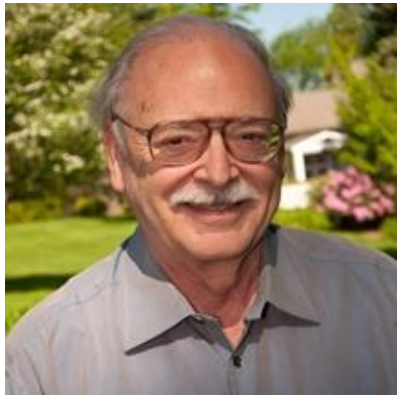
Bush believed that God had called him to provide for the security and the mission of America as with the Founders and the other many presidents. It was all part of the theological and political picture that we have painted about American history – America is a chosen nation (among others) to pursue the freedom agenda for itself and the world.

Some may question this view. It needs to be constantly debated. I think there is truth in it for us today. We show what it means to be American when we are concerned about others besides ourselves, especially those under oppression. I believe John Adams’ stirring words still set an agenda for us today: “I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant, and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.” It helps to give us a purpose for the nation. Education and abolitionism are both still needed around the world. It is reliably estimated that some 25 million people are in slavery.

The same can be said about America today. We have a long way to go before we solve the race problem. And the poverty problem. We have the highest percentage differences between rich and poor in the world. And corporate America controls our lives. And white supremacy has re-emerged with its “foul spirit.” There are also far too many who want to suppress the vote of Black and Latino people, limit the press, and push for a pro-white, male, evangelical authoritarianism to reign here like in Russia, North Korea, Turkey, Egypt, and elsewhere. We must apply the insights of the Founders, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and George W. Bush to tackle some of our vast domestic issues before we can see ourselves as an example for the world. We are far from that at present, and it is getting worse.

Bush sees this now, and in his later years, like many presidents, he is becoming a prophet for our time. And like all the prophets, he has much to confess. But age and experience may mean something after all. Let’s listen to him, amend our ways, and move on to a better prospect. We have the tools from the past. Let’s

use them in the future.



## Charles Brock, M. Litt. Brock Institute for Mega Issues Education

Rev. Charles Brock, a founding board member and longtime board secretary of the Jefferson Educational Society, said he looks forward to discussing President Bush's speech with him when Mr. Bush visits Erie on Nov. 9 to deliver the keynote address at the Jefferson's Global Summit XIII speaker series.

Reverend Charles Brock, an Erie native, is an Emeritus Fellow, Chaplain, and Director of Ministerial Education, Mansfield College, Oxford, UK, where he taught for 35 years. He currently serves as the Director of the Institute on the American Dream at Penn State Behrend, where he teaches for the politics and religion departments.

Rev. Brock is acting minister of The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Girard, PA and he is a Founding Member of the JES. Rev. Brock will serve as the Director of the Brock Institute for Mega Issues Education at the Jefferson Educational Society.

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