

Memorial Day, 2004
by
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Commander Donovan, Senator Hannon, Mayor Miller, distinguished guests, neighbors, I am honored to be here. Adelphi University aspires to be a good neighbor in Garden City, and this is another occasion for us to emphasize this goal.

As you may know, Adelphi attracts students from over 60 countries, students who want to study in Garden City and this country. For ours is the only country which experiences people dying trying to enter instead of when trying to leave.

I start with a quote from United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, upon being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize:

Today, in Afghanistan, a girl will be born. Her mother will hold her and feed her, comfort her and care for her, just as any mother would anywhere in the world. In these most basic acts of human nature, humanity knows no divisions. But to be born a girl in Afghanistan is to begin life centuries away from the prosperity that one small part of humanity (those of us here) has achieved.¹

While Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke of a young girl in Afghanistan, he “might equally well have mentioned a baby boy or girl” in Iraq, or Kosovo, or Haiti.²

These children, and our values – the rule of law not of man, freedom of speech, of assembly, of religion, of opportunity, from search – are the reasons we send men and women, some not older than boys and girls, to war to defend our national security. War is to be the last resort, and today, Memorial Day, we honor those who paid the ultimate price to protect these values and those children – even when their war is not universally approved.

To these neighbors we give honor, express our sorrow, and make our apologies. Today, we reflect on these individuals as well as on our institutions – people we know and don’t know, some relatives and neighbors, some not, as well as on the Navy, the Army, the Air Force, and the Commander in Chief. Today we remember those who served, those who gave the greatest sacrifice, and those who sent them. Today, we reflect on and remember those who know the value of our vision, the worth of our values, and the priceless nature of our principles. They are our heroes, the ones who deserve our attention. They are the ones we honor.

¹ Annan, Kofi A. “Strategies for World Peace: The view of the UN Secretary-General.” “The Futurist,” May-June 2002, p. 18.

² Ibid.

As Ted Sorenson said, “Our greatest strength has long been not merely our military might but our moral authority...Our richest asset has been not our material wealth but our values.”³ We are the people who...helped create “the United Nations, the Marshall Plan, NATO, and programs like Food for Peace, international human rights (formulated in nearby Lake Success), and international environmental standards. The world admired not only the bravery of the Marine Corps but also the idealism of the Peace Corps.”⁴

Today we honor the heroic: heroic principles like the Bill of Rights, which helps us raise our sights and keep our judgments unbiased, and heroic people like those who died defending these ideals. For these heroes, we need no assurances from others, and we give our affirmation freely – we owe them so much.

Thank you.

³ Sorenson, Theodore C. “A Time to Weep.” Commencement Address, The New School University, New York, May 21, 2004, p. 1.

⁴ Ibid., p.2.