

New Haven, Conn bikers

6/20/04 Sunday

Thank you.

Many years from now when some of you are as old as I am, the people of this great nation will still remember what happened in the year 2004.

It will be remembered as a year when America faced its greatest danger: when absolute power corrupted absolutely; when the Bill of Rights was in grave danger, as people were rounded up and put away without hearings, without lawyers, and under the direction of a president, who had snickered at the death of a condemned prisoner when he was a governor, and who now ran a White House bent on torture and deceit.

It will be remembered as a toxin that spread far and wide and infected police chiefs in cities like Miami, who orchestrated the brutal beating of peaceful young people come to ask only for justice and fairness.

It will be remembered as a dark cloud over America that threatened not only America's role and reputation in the world, but that threatened every aspect of the environment, every aspect of peace, every aspect of kindness and morality.

It will be remembered that some people stepped forward in this time. Some are now in jail for

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protesting these abuses—such as those in jail for protesting the torture training still ongoing at Fort Benning, Georgia—such as those in jail for being the wrong color, the wrong religion in a dangerous time. These people will be honored in the years ahead for their courage.

It will be remembered that the young people did what they could to preserve democracy and to work for a world of justice in the face of this darkness.

It is not an adventure from the pen of Tolkein, it is a challenge in the real world that some have shrunk from and some have taken hold of.

I have seen so many of these young people. They have spread out all over this nation this Spring and Summer to make a difference, to use the remaining tools of democracy in a thousand creative ways—and to do so with courage and self-sacrifice.

And so this morning begins another such episode.

I am sure that the friends and parents of the young people beginning this journey have their fears and concerns, as they should: it is a long road from here to Oregon. But the work they are embarking upon is worth that risk. It is not just a bicycle ride, it is a great

work of patriotism, and our pride in these young patriots must overcome all our fears for them.

They will register voters. They will open minds. They are part of a peaceful army of young people working all over America on the same patriotic mission.

I ask elder Americans, all Americans, along the road to watch out for these young people as they pass your way. Open your hearts and your refrigerators to them. Give them your courtesy on the highway. And take off your hats to them, for even a hundred years from now, the history of America will include these happy few as examples of the Americans who were awake, the Americans who were brave, the Americans whose creativity and laughter did not hide the earnest look in their eyes—for they are determined to do something great with their lives in this momentous time.

We must wish them well. We must pray for their safe journey. We thank them for their brave and wise hearts. And we send them off on their mission, which is in no small measure a mission to save a free nation and a beautiful planet.

Thank you.