

Like a tree standing by the water
Speech from the first anniversary of 9/11

Thank you.

We have come to a time for communal remembering. We will see the images again of 3,000 fine people dying. We will see again in our minds those crematory clouds that overwhelmed the pink-vapored sun and all our sensibilities.

The horror of September 11 was not only the horror of 3,000 deaths: We were all victimized, all dehumanized by seeing our fellow human beings killed in so wholesale a manner, as if we were but ants.

Since that morning, in more than three thousand ways, we have tried to re-humanize the city and our lives. We said "I love you" in public parks. We placed flowers in harsh places. In small cafés by candlelight we rekindled torches of human love and, like resolute townspeople suddenly of one mind, we carried these torches against the monstrously inhumane oppressions and abstractions of modern life.

As a democratic people, we deserved support from our political representatives in that effort -- they are supposed to be the agents of our common dreams. We had an opportunity to make those deaths mean something. We had an opportunity to honor those individual hearts by bringing more humanity, more love into the world in vivid and heart-moving forms. We had an opportunity to defeat the forces of hatred -- that sick product of the spiritually immature mind that reduces humans to abstractions. For a moment, we looked at life with the same amazement that I'm sure those who died shared from the other side. Do they stand around us yet, hoping that we do not fall back into the hypnosis of exploitation -- hoping that we can still imagine love and be conscious and amazed in the world?

Whose cloud is it that darkens our Constitution, our Bill of Rights, our national soul, our responsible position in the world community? It mustn't be one of our own making.

Would you have thought a year ago that people in America could be arrested and held without charges, without lawyers, without any rights? Would you have imagined that America would be running detention and maybe torture camps, holding people secretly for months or years, and with the corporate media cheering them on?

Would you imagine that the government would reorganize around the idea of becoming something of a police state, and that soldiers would be patrolling like policemen and that your email and that the posters on your bedroom wall would put you at risk of all this machinery of snooping and detention and isolation and perhaps torture, and with the corporate media cheering them on?

Could you possibly imagine that any American could be stripped of all his or her rights by being named, with no proof, an enemy combatant, an enemy of the state? Could you have imagined that permanent war would be declared against nobody in particular and that it would be used to defund every social program the radical right ever didn't like? Could you imagine the idea of our elite storm troopers being authorized to go anywhere in the world, without invitation, to kill anyone they please, and with the corporate media cheering them on?

Could you have imagined we could fall so far so fast under this dark cloud?

These dark clouds from the towers, if they darken our Constitution, are clouds of darkest opportunism. The corporate elite behind the radical right miss no trick in manipulating our own fears into a mass capitulation of our freedoms. The maneuvering to undermine our Bill of Rights by a fraudulent pursuit of public safety is as un-American as anything that has occurred in my 92 years.

These un-American usurpers of our election and of our freedoms do not represent us in the least.

We have the courage of our Constitution to live free on our garden Earth as brothers and sisters -- to live free or die. And together as the human community we stand for love. And against death and exploitation and the lie of projected evil we link our arms. We shall not, we shall not be moved. Just like a tree that's standing by the water, we shall not be moved.

The responsible course for America is no secret. Our only real safety lies in crafting an American success story that does not rely upon the repression of the world's people and the destruction of their systems of self-determination for the sake of our industrial needs, but instead upon their rising health and wealth and freedom. Otherwise a state of constant war is indeed inevitable. We know that. We choose against it.

Our only real safety lies in the crafting of an American success story that does not rely upon the trashing of the American and the world environment for the sake of corporate profits, funneled to political careers. Otherwise there is no America the Beautiful for our children or life on earth for our grandchildren. We know that. We choose life and love, and we shall not be moved.

The blue haze that keeps us from seeing our mountains and that is warming the earth and threatening our survival is the product of a domestic political terrorism that harms us far more than any cells of terrorists. In the Northeast alone, where the Hudson River Valley is now blanketed in coal pollution coming from as far away as the Midwest, twice as many Americans die each year from the loosening of environmental standards on coal plants as died in the twin towers. Are we dehumanized when we are killed in so wholesale a manner? To get that coal, a thousand times the explosive might of the Oklahoma City bombing is used each day against the mountains of Appalachia by Mr. Bush's coal friends, who help finance his career. Every four days, the explosive power of the entire

Afghanistan campaign is used against Kentucky and West Virginia mountain ranges we once called "almost heaven," -- all while Mr. Bush rejects any effort to conserve energy. What kind of patriotism is that? It is none.

And what, then, are we the people to do? Well, there is November coming. Let us work hard so that we have some candidates who recognize a needed regime change when they see one, and who are leaders in fact. Our system is overrun with ego-driven would-be reformers who really just take up valuable space, and with ossified political parties who are more interested in protecting the elite on the right or the elite on the left than the people or the future. We have hard political work to do, and the big parties need transforming or dumping.

We also have a war to stop. We need to organize massive peaceful demonstrations in Washington and in our state capitols. The trumped-up war in Iraq is power madness and pure stupidity. The fact that it is monstrously immoral ought to count for something, too.

But beyond the necessary effort to stop the continuing coup, and beyond the need to use the coming election to box in these power mad frat boys, we must each in our own creative ways give testimony to who we are, that we have the courage of our Constitution to live free on our garden Earth as brothers and sisters -- to live free or die; That we are members of the human community and that we stand for love; That for the dead we light candles, not fuses; That against death and exploitation and the lie of projected evil, we link our arms; That we shall not, we shall not be moved. Just like a tree that's standing by the water, we shall not be moved.

Thank you.