

A LOT OF "LIBERTY," NOT A LOT OF "PRUDENCE": PRESIDENT BUSH AND THE WESTERN RHETORICAL TRADITION

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The twentieth of January was a great day to be a teacher of rhetoric. As my class and I listened to the second half of the inaugural address (alas, not perfectly timed with my fourth period) and then watched the whole speech over the Internet the next day, we had a sense that something important had been said, that perhaps this might be a speech that would be remembered and discussed for many years to come. But why?

It is something of a paradox that a man who is regarded by many as our least articulate and least intellectual President in memory—the only President who speaks Spanish better than English, as Jay Leno would have it—has proven time and time again to be, except for President Reagan, our most rhetorical and, at times, our most profound President in half a century.

By rhetoric I mean not only the clever deployment of catchy words and phrases, the kind of fighting for sound-bites of which we see so much during elections. Nor do I even mean the crafting of beautiful expressions that please the ear and tickle the fancy and yet do not say very much, the tradition of *belles lettres* that we inherit from the French. By rhetoric I mean the effective delivery of a profound truth whose moral imperative requires its audience to act. America's rhetorical tradition, perhaps even more than its philosophical tradition, defines who we are as a people and a nation. This tradition defines our greatness and, at times, our fatal flaws.

As Americans, we have inherited our rhetorical tradition from two different

sources, two cities that demand particular kinds of citizenship: Athens and Jerusalem. All great speeches or public utterances in American history have been inspired by one or both of these rhetorical traditions. President Bush's Second Inaugural is arguably a great speech because he has combined these two traditions in order to define the American mission not only for his second term, but for this coming century. The question remains whether he has left unspoken a part of this tradition that would prevent us from a fatal overreaching.

From Athens we have inherited the rhetoric of political freedom. This freedom requires political questions to be settled by majorities of the people peacefully and under the rule of law. Moreover, in a free society, no one is above the law. Pericles boasted of this unique method of government in his famous Funeral Oration:

Let me say that this system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbors. It is more a case of being a model to others, than of our imitating anyone else. Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law.

Maintaining a free government requires certain virtues of the people, particularly tolerance and courage, tolerance among fellow citizens within Athens and courage against potential attackers from without. Pericles highlights the openness of Athenian society:

We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbour if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do we give him the kind of black looks which, though they do no real harm, still do hurt people's feelings. We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law.

Furthermore, he praises the forefathers of Athens for their courage. "In this land of ours there have always been the same people living from generation to generation up till now, and they, by their courage and their virtues, have handed it on to us, a free country." Even more so, he praises those men who have recently fallen in the war, who fought to maintain Athenian freedom: "This, then is the kind of city for which these men, who could not bear the thought of losing her, nobly fought and nobly died."

This unique freedom of the Athenians did not exist in a vacuum. In his Plague Speech, Pericles contrasted freedom with its stark opposite: slavery. A people must choose between the two:

If one has a free choice and can live undisturbed, it is sheer folly to go to war. But suppose this choice was forced upon one—submission and immediate slavery or danger with the hope of survival: Then I prefer the man who stands up to a danger rather than one who runs away from it.

Pericles went on to say that Athens did not have a choice. Whereas in the Funeral Oration, he called Athens "the school of Hellas," in the Plague Speech he took off the gloves and confessed that Athens ruled an empire: "Your empire is now like a tyranny: it might have been wrong to take it; it is certainly dangerous to let it go." The rhetoric of freedom inherited from Athens, then, was not one of universal human rights. Freedom meant maintaining one's own

freedom and "doing what one can" to others, as the Melians found out.

The criterion by which a polis—a nation, if you will—tried to extend its empire over others or engage in war took the form of this choice, presented rhetorically by Pericles. Did Athens have the option of going to war or not? Immediately after presenting this question, Pericles answered it emphatically by inserting himself into the equation: "As for me, I am the same as I was, and do not alter; it is you who have changed." (Recall how many times President Bush accused Senator Kerry of flip-flopping and pointed to his own steadfastness in the war on terror.) Was Pericles right about the war? (Is Bush?) In a rare commentary, the historian Thucydides just after the Plague Speech wrote that Pericles advocated the correct policy for Athens. "[H]e appears to have accurately estimated what the power of Athens was." Further, he possessed the *wisdom* and *foresight* to lead Athens to bide her time and take care of her navy. In short, Pericles possessed the prudence not to overextend Athens during a time of war, unlike subsequent leaders, particularly Alcibiades. Leaders, according to Thucydides, are to be judged not only for their daring and their defense of freedom but for their prudence in ensuring that the state can accomplish the tasks given to it by those leaders. From the Greeks, then, we in the West have inherited the rhetoric of freedom, of daring enterprise, of courage and tolerance, but also of prudence, the latter needed to keep a people from biting off more than they can chew.

Whereas from Athens we inherit a particularistic rhetoric of political freedom, from Jerusalem we inherit a universal rhetoric of ethical freedom. Whereas in the Greek tradition, the political world is divided into free and slave, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the entire universe,

heaven and earth, is locked in a struggle between good and evil, the whole of which, however, is subjected to the will and pleasure of the one God. Freedom comes in the form of the freedom from sin. Jesus enjoins his followers in the Sermon on the Mount to pray to God, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." This powerful rhetoric of ethical emancipation is at times directed at individuals who must shun the temptations of this fallen world while awaiting their passage to the next.

At other times the Law and the Prophets and the sayings of Jesus and the letters of Paul seem to go on the offensive in the here and now. God acts in history, at times very decisively in battle or to free His people from bondage. The ancient Israelites triumph over others in battle because of their God. God enjoins his followers to hate evil:

*You who love the Lord, hate evil!
He preserves the souls of His saints,
He delivers them out of the hand of the
wicked.*

—*Psalms 97:10*

The New Testament, on the whole a more peaceful account of a suffering Savior, nonetheless has Jesus assuring us that he brings not peace but the sword. The Apostle Paul urges us to fight the good fight. Furthermore, the political message of the New Testament seems to embrace even more radically the leveling or democratic tendencies of the Greeks. "Blessed are the meek." "It is easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle." The God of the Scriptures, therefore, is one who humbles kings and who destroys evil cities and empires.

Of course, many words of Scripture caution us not to become too elevated in the certainty of our righteousness or in our hatred and chastisement of evil. "Judge not

lest ye be judged." "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." We see "through a glass darkly." Prudence, then, must accompany our beliefs and actions and therefore becomes a religious as well as a political virtue in the history of the West. Yet the notion that the only message coming from Scripture is that we must "turn the other cheek" to our oppressors is far from the truth. That the tension between "Christian soldiers" and "slaves obeying their masters" is not wholly resolved in Scripture, at least from the perspective of a usable rhetoric, explains why the pendulum of church history has swung between the complete withdrawal of Christians from the corruptions of the world and politics on the one hand and an extreme messianic effort to purify the world on the other.

The long and venerated and sometimes rancorous marriage of the classical and Christian rhetorical traditions gained new life in America, a land settled by Puritan refugees seeking to plant a "city upon a hill" and imperial adventurers seeking economic chance and freedom. Further, these robust settlers inherited a new strain of this combined tradition incubated in the laboratories of the Enlightenment. We might call this third tradition the rhetoric of natural rights. In natural rights theory, the particularistic political freedom of the Greeks (and later the British) aspires to the universality of the Scriptures and further claims the authority of reason. The cerebral John Locke will provide all the details in a rather long and philosophical book called *Two Treatises on Government*, only the second of which treatises is much read and then only by a few. In the hands of a Thomas Paine or a Thomas Jefferson, however, natural rights theory becomes a stirring call to action to the oppressed everywhere:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its power in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Moreover, the reiterated "He" of the Declaration, followed by the crimes for which King George is guilty, puts not only that king but all tyrants on notice. Because *He* has abused his powers, *We* will, relying on Divine Providence as our judge, risk our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor—for freedom. We might ask what men who love freedom and have honor would not do so? These are not words of peace but of the sword.

As revolutionary as the language of the Declaration is, Jefferson offers this one caveat, a warning label, or what we might call today, a sanity check:

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

Prudence urges us to estimate our real power and to act accordingly. We know that the Revolutionaries, subsequently named the Founders, succeeded in their daring project.

Ipsa facto, they must have been prudent. Yet we are given no hard and fast rules for the exercise of prudence. When does prudence act as a cover for pusillanimity? When does caution really mean cowardice? And what is the appropriate rhetoric of prudence? Will not the speaker who urges careful deliberation or restraint not always appear weak and uninspiring next to the thoughtless advocate of daring and enterprise? Remember that the Athenians disregarded poor Nicias when he tried to dissuade them from undertaking the Sicilian expedition. He then tried to oppose Alcibiades again by proposing an enormous increase in the amount of men and ships the Athenians would send in hopes that this giant expense would scare them away from the idea. The Athenian people instead gloried in the size of the expedition, whose failure caused Athens ultimately to lose the war. The Athenians' defeat flowed from their own hubris.

Once liberty is established in one nation, we might ask, what does the free nation owe to the universal cause of liberty? The success of the American Revolution owed in part to the help of the French. Do we owe similar help, whether monetary or military, to other oppressed peoples? Jefferson subsequently used an interesting phrase. He called America an "empire of liberty." Should we use our imperial might to harness, in Periclean terms, our adventurous spirit to force an entry "into every sea and into every land" and everywhere to leave behind "everlasting memorials of good done to our friends or suffering inflicted on our enemies," or rather to the enemies of freedom?

It is perhaps only a slight exaggeration to say that all subsequent debates in American foreign policy have been set in terms of America's helping the world to be free or exercising prudence in preserving her own

self-interest and well-being. At times we have avoided "entangling alliances" as urged in Washington's Farewell Address. At others we have sought to "make the world safe for democracy" in Wilson's messianic rhetoric. We have drug our feet while fascist dictators have overrun Europe only to enter the fight later after millions have been killed. We have waged war in far-off lands, presumably for the cause of freedom, only to have our own people march in the streets and call our soldiers "baby-killers." At the beginning of the twenty-first century, as the "last remaining super-power," not yet four years after the deadliest attack on our shores, where does our President say we find ourselves in the march of history? How does he use words to tell us who we are and what we must do in the world?

Now we turn to President Bush's Second Inaugural. This speech has been watched, reprinted, and much quoted in the press, so I shall not rehearse the whole of it. Yet I do want to point out the extent to which it echoes some of the rhetorical themes and traditions we have been following. The President divides the world very sharply into both free and unfree (the political view) and good and evil (the religious view). Tyranny and evil threaten us, those on the side of freedom and good: "For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny—prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder—violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat." Nonetheless, we can take comfort in the knowledge that "There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and the tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom." Thus President Bush casts our situation as a perennial struggle between freedom and

tyranny, good and evil, but elevates our side to a force of history whose purpose is bring hope and goodness into the world.

He then claims that we must not only recognize, must not only join, must not only lead this force of history because of the universal tendencies of our political and religious ideas, but because it is in our self-interest to do so: "We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world. America's vital interests and deepest beliefs are now one." Thus, President Bush in a few sentences obliterates the old, international-relations distinction between the realists, who only pursue America's interests abroad, and the idealists, who seek to remake the world according to American ideals of liberty.

The President draws upon the self-evident truths of the Declaration, the authority of a just God, the words of Lincoln, and the images of oppressed peoples to make his case.

From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth. Across the generations we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government, because no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave.

We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation: the moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right. America will not pretend that jailed dissidents prefer their chains, or that women welcome humiliation and

servitude, or that any human being aspires to live at the mercy of bullies.

The rulers of outlaw regimes can know that we still believe as Abraham Lincoln did: "Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves; and, under the rule of a just God, cannot long retain it."

These self-evident truths force the President's opponents into a dark rhetorical corner. Who wants to stand up against the words of the Declaration or of Lincoln, against the will of the maker of Heaven and earth, or against the hopes of peoples in chains—on behalf of cruel tyrants or of a political inertia which can only serve cruel tyrants? To do so would be to throw oneself onto the "ash-heap of history" in Reagan's remarkable turn on Marx's phrase. To do so would be un-American.

One might take a cynical view for the moment and ask whether all these pleasing sentiments are just empty words—mere rhetoric—the kind of self-congratulatory pronouncements heard at nineteenth-century Fourth-of-July celebrations? Thinking so might be a severe "misunderestimation" of this President. His audience cannot forget that he has sent troops into two countries and maintained them there despite growing opposition at home. Moreover, he seems to mean these words to reflect a policy, not just a fond hope. Like Jefferson, he puts tyrants on notice: "So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."

A few things in the speech that might at first strike us incongruous actually draw further on the Western rhetorical tradition. The middle section of the speech concerns principally Americans' character. Is Bush

preaching? There is a considerable amount of preaching in the Western rhetorical tradition, to be sure, but this appeal to the American character fits hand in glove with both American foreign policy and the American form of government. From his fellow Americans the President has "asked patience in the hard task of securing America." Patience is, supposedly, that most difficult virtue for a democracy, given to temporary mood swings, as we know from our reading of Athenian history. Nonetheless, the country has accepted "obligations that are difficult to fulfill, and would be dishonorable to abandon," obligations whose fulfilling has liberated "tens of millions." President Bush, in the tradition of Pericles and Lincoln, praises the fallen in battle for their courage, a courage that ennobles them and secures their memory in history: "Some have shown their devotion to our country in deaths that honored their whole lives—and we will always honor their names and their sacrifice." Moreover, even the children can see that our cause is righteous and good and that courage is needed for us to prevail: "All Americans have witnessed this idealism, and some for the first time. I ask our youngest citizens to believe the evidence of your eyes. You have seen duty and allegiance in the determined faces of our soldiers. You have seen that life is fragile, and evil is real, and courage triumphs." And, in what commentators have recognized as an echo of President Kennedy, the current President asks these youngest Americans to "Make the choice to serve in a cause larger than your wants, larger than yourself" so that they will "add not just to the wealth of our country, but to its character."

President Bush further addresses the connection between freedom and personal character at home. The President reminds us that

In America's ideal of freedom, the public interest depends upon private character—on integrity, and tolerance, and the rule of conscience in our own lives. Self-government relies in the end, on the governing of the self. That edifice of character is built in families, supported by communities with standards, and sustained in our national life by the truths of Sinai, the Sermon on the Mount, the words of the Koran, and the varied faiths of our people. Americans move forward in every generation by reaffirming all that is good and true that come before—ideals of justice and conduct that are the same yesterday, today, and forever.

A great deal is said in these few lines. Realize that the argument against freedom in the first place is that people cannot be trusted to look after themselves. "The masses must be kept in check by an omnipotent ruler," every tyrant in history has said in one form or another. The rule of conscience, however, guarantees that people will for the most part lead their own lives responsibly and safely. Here in summary form is the contribution of Scottish moral sense philosophy to the natural rights argument. Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith meet John Locke. Conscience cannot do everything, as everyone who has been tempted knows. Conscience and self-government must be supported by the culture and by the sanctions of eternal law. Notice that the President has extended Christian truths to include those of the Jews and, bigger shock, Muslims. He wants to show that America's fight is not with Islam but with terrorism. Does expanding Christian truths to all monotheistic faiths by name and potentially all faiths held by the American people water down the message? By no means. America is founded upon religious freedom and toleration. And all religions hold to the same truths, according to Bush. Before Bush, C. S. Lewis called

this universal agreement in morality *The Tao*, the code of morality accepted by all religions and all peoples. In this same vein, realize that President Bush is not invoking the tepid "family values" that got his father nowhere. He calls upon Americans to show true virtues, like courage and justice, virtues that are the same yesterday, today, and forever. In the President's sweeping rhetoric, not only tyranny in foreign lands, but also postmodernism in our own land has been thrown onto the ash-heap of history.

With God and liberty and natural rights and our own virtues as a people with us, who can be against us? Well, not everyone received the President's speech with rapture. Surprisingly, some of Bush's harshest critics did not come from the Left. True, a few on the Left noticed that the President did not bother to mention the war in Iraq or use the word terrorism or say much at all about his domestic agenda. Still others reminded their readers that Bush is still not a man to be trusted. Yet on the whole the President's "Wilsonian" rhetoric seemed to steal the liberal script. The *Washington Post* editorial pretty much only called the President to live up to his new "rhetoric of freedom." Ultra-liberal columnist Ellen Goodman lamented that the Right has so effectively hijacked the words "liberty" and "God" and "life": took the words right out of liberals' mouths.

A more surprising critique of the President's speech came from the Right, principally on the grounds of prudence. In *The Wall Street Journal*, Peggy Noonan accused the President's speech of having "way too much God," a strange sentiment coming from a speechwriter for President Reagan, the same President who not only invoked God frequently in his speeches but also urged in his First Inaugural that every Inauguration Day in the future "be declared a day of prayer." Noonan asserted that "Tyranny is a very bad thing and quite

wicked, but one doesn't expect we're going to eradicate it any time soon. Again, this is not heaven, it's earth." William F. Buckley, Jr. also tried to call the President back down from the heavens. "But even granted the difficulties in applying the Bush code everywhere, the American realist inevitably asked himself questions, upon hearing the soaring, Biblical rhetoric of the president. How to apply the presidential criteria? Okay. Never mind the tyrannies in spotty little states in Africa.... But what about China?" Buckley concluded: "The sentiments of President Bush are fine, and his sincerity was transparent. But in speaking about bringing liberty to the rest of the world, he could have gone at it more platonically: but this would have required him to corral his enthusiasm for liberty everywhere with appropriately moderate rhetoric."

Being conservatives and therefore friends of the President, both Noonan and Buckley were willing to blame the President's "soaring" rhetoric on poor editing on the part of the White House staff. Let us take the President at his word and consider the criticism of imprudence. Will the President through his new rhetoric set the nation on a course of ruin? Why would a man who prides himself on common sense, an MBA no less, turn his second administration into one of reckless folly, as Senator Kerry accused him of doing in his first term? That was the accusation, wasn't it, that the President had taken his eye off the ball of terrorism and plunged headlong into Iraq for no good reason?

The President's lack of prudence, to adopt this view for a moment, could be the result of many things. We have heard *ad nauseam* how his administration has been taken over by the shady neo-conservatives, who hammer out an ideological foreign policy in the back rooms of, well,

Commentary magazine and The Johns Hopkins Nitze School. Or, perhaps his resounding electoral victory has filled him with a "worrisome hubris," as columnist David Ignatius suggested. Perhaps a more compelling theory is that the younger Bush hopes to avoid the mistakes of his father. Remember that Bush 41 was the prudent President *par excellence*. But what legacy did the Prudent Bush leave his son? True, he presided very businesslike over the fall of the Soviet Union. Yet his prudence did not give him the nomination in 1980. His tenure during the fall of communism owed largely to the very imprudent things—or so it was thought at the time—said and done by President Reagan, the cowboy president. The elder Bush prudently stopped the first war in Iraq before gaining final victory, thus leaving Saddam and his henchmen in power. He also very prudently raised taxes and cost himself reelection. He talked about "the vision thing" without offering a vision. Indeed, one wonders whether the younger Bush could even use the word prudent in a speech when the memory of Dana Carvey's satire on his father—"Nah . . . Wouldn't be prudent"—is still fresh in the mind of most voters. Churchill once fended off criticisms of his changing an opinion by saying he would "rather be right than consistent." The younger Bush seems to have learned from the Reagan-elder Bush years that the only way to be right is to be consistent at all costs and, perhaps, to be ideological. Thus his Second Inaugural ends up being essentially a Reagan speech, but a Reagan on steroids.

This theory, however full of intrigue, with Bush 43 cast as the redeemer of the Bush name, is not wholly satisfactory. Much like the neo-con theory, it might or might not offer insight into the Bush psychology or the intrigues of Washington, but it does not address how these words transcend the man and define a people, how the President's

words speak to the better angels of the American nature. The key to the President's message, or at least to the change in tone of this Inaugural, lies in the beginning of the speech, words that have *not* been quoted again and again in the press:

At this second gathering, our duties are defined not by the words I use, but by the history we have seen together. For half a century, America defended our own freedom by standing watch over distant borders. After the shipwreck of communism came years of relative quiet, years of repose, years of sabbatical—and then there came a day of fire.

The nineties, heralded by the Senator Kerry and the Democrats as days of peace and prosperity and budget surpluses, were anything but that, according to the President's reading of history. These were days when we thought we had defeated our one and only enemy. We had reached the "end of history." During the peaceful nineties, professors on sabbatical were free to write their books denying the existence of permanent truths and blasting the history of the West as a history of oppression. Teenagers were free to act as though having no character has no consequences. Presidents could occasionally make forays into foreign policy, to boost their ratings in the polls, to deflect criticism from their personal shortcomings (lying, for example), or to leave "a legacy." But these were not serious efforts. And Presidential candidates, to include the current President, could squabble about who will most ably serve as chief pharmacist in getting prescription drugs into the hands of seniors. Meanwhile, in a far-off land, demented and determined men living in tents could plot disasters that could kill thousands, could be plotting disasters still that might kill hundreds of thousands.

The President, then, has landed upon a permanent truth, not one pleasant to think about, but one only imprudently ignored. That truth is simply that slave and free, good and evil, cannot peacefully and permanently live side by side. They are in a permanent state of war, though momentary armistices may take place from time to time. Modern Americans can no more live peacefully with the tyrannies of the world than the Israelites could coexist peacefully with the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; than the Greeks could coexist peacefully with the Persians; than the Athenians could coexist peacefully with the Spartans; than the British could coexist peacefully with the Nazis; than the West could coexist peacefully with the Soviets. The history of the world is a history of freedom gaining a precarious foothold among peoples who despise what they don't have. To name only terrorism or only the insurgents in Iraq or only the axis of evil as the enemy would have been and would be the most imprudent and shortsighted mistake a president could possibly make. It would return this country to a pre-September-eleventh mentality. As the President spoke, at least two countries inimical to everything American and free were acquiring nuclear weapons; Vladimir Putin was consolidating a Stalinist grip over the former Soviet Union, atrocities were being committed in Darfur, and who knows how many others were imagining a world without freedom, a world without the United States. Admittedly, Americans do not share a common border with our current enemies. Yet a dirty bomb that could kill thousands or a deadly virus that could kill millions is only a boat ride or an airline flight away. President Bush did not say he would immediately invade all lands held by tyrants. He did not even say that all the fighting would be "the task of arms." He did, however, deprive us of our illusions, that the

war on terrorism is the last war, while at the same time bolstering our dreams and our hopes, that liberty will continue to win wars and lands and peoples. Moreover, he put our own actions into a world-historical perspective, transcending our narrow differences and momentary passions. "From the perspective of a single day, including this day of dedication, the issues and questions before our country are many. From the viewpoint of centuries, the questions that come to us are narrowed and few. Did our generation advance the cause of freedom? And did our character bring credit to that cause?"

Another President in our history attempted to negotiate with slavery and evil and sounded every syllable in the rhetoric of prudence: Abraham Lincoln. He reassured the South in his First Inaugural that there need be no war. He told the slave-holding South that the free and slave states were not enemies but friends. Both sides read from the same Bible and prayed to the same God, yet (as long as one remained slave) each invoked His aid against the other. And the war came. A few years before, Lincoln had uttered Bush's permanent truth, just as Christ had uttered it: "A house divided against itself cannot stand." The house will become all one thing or all the other. It may take time. It may be the work of generations. But once freedom comes into the world, so Lincoln said and so Bush says, it will grow in spite of the only enemy freedom has: despotism.

The recent Second Inaugural was President Bush's "House Divided" speech. It was the product of a transformed Presidency, a Presidency forged in the fire, and a transformed nation. Perhaps all the enemies of freedom will not be dealt with during the next four years. But at the beginning of this century, he does not want Americans to be lulled to sleep again.

Besides being heir to Pericles' Funeral Oration, the Bible, and the Declaration, President Bush is also every inch the Texan. And in Texas we have a saying: "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." President Bush, like the rest of us, was taken off guard by the attack on September 11th. He thought, like Wilson, that he could be a domestic president in a largely peaceful world. Chastened by history and experience, he does not want this powerful and free but still vulnerable nation to be fooled again.

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