

To think and act anew

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [October 10, 2001](#) issue

We must not expect our nation's wound to heal quickly: It is too deep and the pain is too profound. We Americans expect instant healing. "Let's put it behind us—get over it—get on with life," we say, as if it were inappropriate to allow tragedy to be tragic for more than a day or two.

I hope we don't get over this too quickly. To do so would be to excuse ourselves from a painful but necessary period of national introspection. I do not mean to say, as some have, that we brought September 11 on ourselves, that the collective political and moral foibles of the American people resulted in us "getting what we deserved." Not at all.

But there are serious questions to be explored, such as the critical tension between security and civil liberties, and perhaps the hardest question of all: Why did those who did this do it? Their reasons may be misguided, immoral, evil and insane, but it is irresponsible not to probe and study and ask and listen until we know the reasons. One of our readers wrote us that his daughter asked, "Daddy, why do they hate us?" Why indeed? Those responsible seemed to be well-educated, mature husbands and fathers. Why were they willing to die to hurt us?

Of course, the fault is not ours. But we do need to find out what it is about us that stimulates and feeds this hatred. Personally, I'm glad to know that we have appropriated funds and deployed aircraft carriers. I'm grateful for President Bush's resolve not to tolerate this terrorism. But I also hope and pray for the moral courage and stamina to lead the nation in a reexamination of the role we play in the new global environment. What we do or do not do reverberates across nations and cultures in ways we do not intend, but must now understand.

Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Kennedy observed in the *New York Times* that the terrorist attack cannot be "countered simply by mustering the nation's prodigious human, financial and industrial brawn" as we did in World War II. "Against our new foes our conventional arsenal is all but useless." Kennedy then quotes words from Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, given on December 1,

1862, a bleak moment in American history. I've always thought that this address includes some of the most important words any American ever spoke:

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

Let's pray to God for the moral courage to think anew and act anew in the perilous days ahead.