

5,000 bells could be heard tolling for all of us Sept. 11

This time of crisis forces us to take a closer look at the meaning of life and death.

A sound that cannot be silenced has filled the air since the Trade Towers collapsed – do you hear it? It's not the sound of exploding planes or crumbling steel or shattering glass. It's not the sound of screams and sirens and TV reports. It's a sound far more solemn and steady, and it

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curiously resonates within the inner man as if faintly familiar but forgotten or suppressed for all these years. John Donne wrote, "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in all Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."

In our individual pasts, a bell, or a few, have tolled the eerie tune to which 5,000 joined the morning of Sept. 11. And now the sobering sound of 5,000 bells swinging over eternity's threshold emanates throughout the land.

It sobers indeed, clearing away the mist of diversions that have hitherto prevented us from seeing that door through which each one of us will pass. It sobers indeed, reminding us that life is short, and our own bell will soon join their chorus. It sobers indeed, asking, *What does a man gain from all his labor under the sun?* (Ecclesiastes 1:3) It bids us to be still, if but for a moment, to learn what the souls of those in the rubble now know, but cannot tell us.

But the sound is fading – can you hear it? It's being washed over by the noise of *All-there-is*. *All-there-is* demands our attention, lest we question whether buying-selling-planning, more-better-faster, freedom-pleasure-safety is really all there is.

Like the ring of a cell phone during prayer in the sanctuary, the babble of *All-there-is* seeks to disrupt the sound of 5,000 bells tolling. *All-there-is* can be sly, also hiding in the form of "togetherness," "we are stronger now" and "God Bless America." But whatever form it takes, its message is always the same: do not think of death, especially your own.

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college sports, political demonstrations and dog shows – anything to keep us from pondering why we're here, and then why we're suddenly not. And perhaps that's why the maxims of our lives – "Just do it," "Create your future," "He who dies with the most toys, wins" – are most unfit for our gravestones. The way we currently go through life is at odds with the way, or the fact, that we exit it. But times such as these shake us from our stupor, and we can respond in one of three ways.

The first way is the one we're best at: weep, have a moment of remembrance and then drown out the sound of the bells. We gawk at the news, we have a candlelight vigil and then we return to the strong drink of *All-there-is*.

The best of us turn to activism, the worst to amusement. The former, chanting "we will prevail," glory in the coordinated efforts of communities and the resilience of a nation.

The latter, after seeing too much horror on TV, simply change the channel. Each of these Pascal calls "diversions," which are various ways of distracting our minds from mortality and matters of eternal consequence.

The second is the one we're taught in the science departments of the academy. Time, matter and chance got us here, a cold universe will take us away, so have the courage to tell the simple-minded that there is no meaning to any of this. The tragedy of life is not in the freak accidents that whisk away our loved ones, for in a random and chaotic universe, that is to be expected. The tragedy of life is the fact that we mistake the biochemical reactions in our brains for "true love" for another, or "devotion" to the God, or "the sound of 5,000 bells tolling" since Sept. 11. The moment of silence is the proper response, since all there is "out there" is silence.

The third response is sacred, and full of songs and speech. It admonishes us to be grateful for liberty and cooperation, friendship and family, prosperity and peace, but to never entrust to them our hope. If terrorists

don't wrench these things from us, then death will wrench us from these things. And in that humble acknowledgement it undoes the response of the activists.

C. S. Lewis said to Oxford students during the Second World War, "All the animal life in us, all schemes of happiness that centered in this world, were always doomed to final frustration. In ordinary times only a wise man can realize it. Now the stupidest of us knows."

The pile of rubble that once was the emblem of our worldly strength bids us to hear the words recorded by Jeremiah: "This is what the Lord says: Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me" (Jeremiah 9:23). This leads us to prayer, which has little to do with silence and everything to do with listening, responding and preparing oneself for a world without end.

The bells do toll, and as Donne says, they toll for thee, dear reader. How will you respond? Will you be caught up in the futile flurry of *All-there-is*? Will you stoically succumb to the faceless, causal nexus? Or will you establish your hope in something that does not find its end in death, but rather its fulfillment?

Feeling inferior on campus

What it's like not to be just another rich white kid.

I am just so hopelessly lower-middle class it isn't even funny. And, as a Wake Forest student, this creates issues.

I don't drive a Lexus. I've never spent more than 16 dollars on a T-shirt. I have one

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pair of shoes. One. The computer on which I'm typing this column right now is by far the nicest thing I've ever been able to claim as mine (and I'm not even sure I have the right to claim it). The pair of khakis I'm wearing right now? I bought them at Goodwill. My 1993 Jeep Cherokee Country's transmission doesn't know the difference between drive and neutral (which makes for great stories at parties). What's more lower-middle class than an idiot car?

The reason that I bring all of these traits, which I deem as neither good or bad, to the table is that, at a place like this, where the majority of the student body actually

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sweats tiny bits of gold bullion and has minuscule diamonds floating in their bloodstreams, a guy can feel a little ... inferior.

I mean, when every third car I see is a Mercedes, it just makes me want to go out to the old satellite parking lot (perhaps the topic of a later column) and spray paint the word "Escalade" on the back of the old Cherokee (and maybe even wash the thing sometime).

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I used to eat Play-Doh. They used to eat *caviar-flavored* Play-Doh. I drove a Big-Wheel. They used to have people

drive their Big-Wheels around for them.

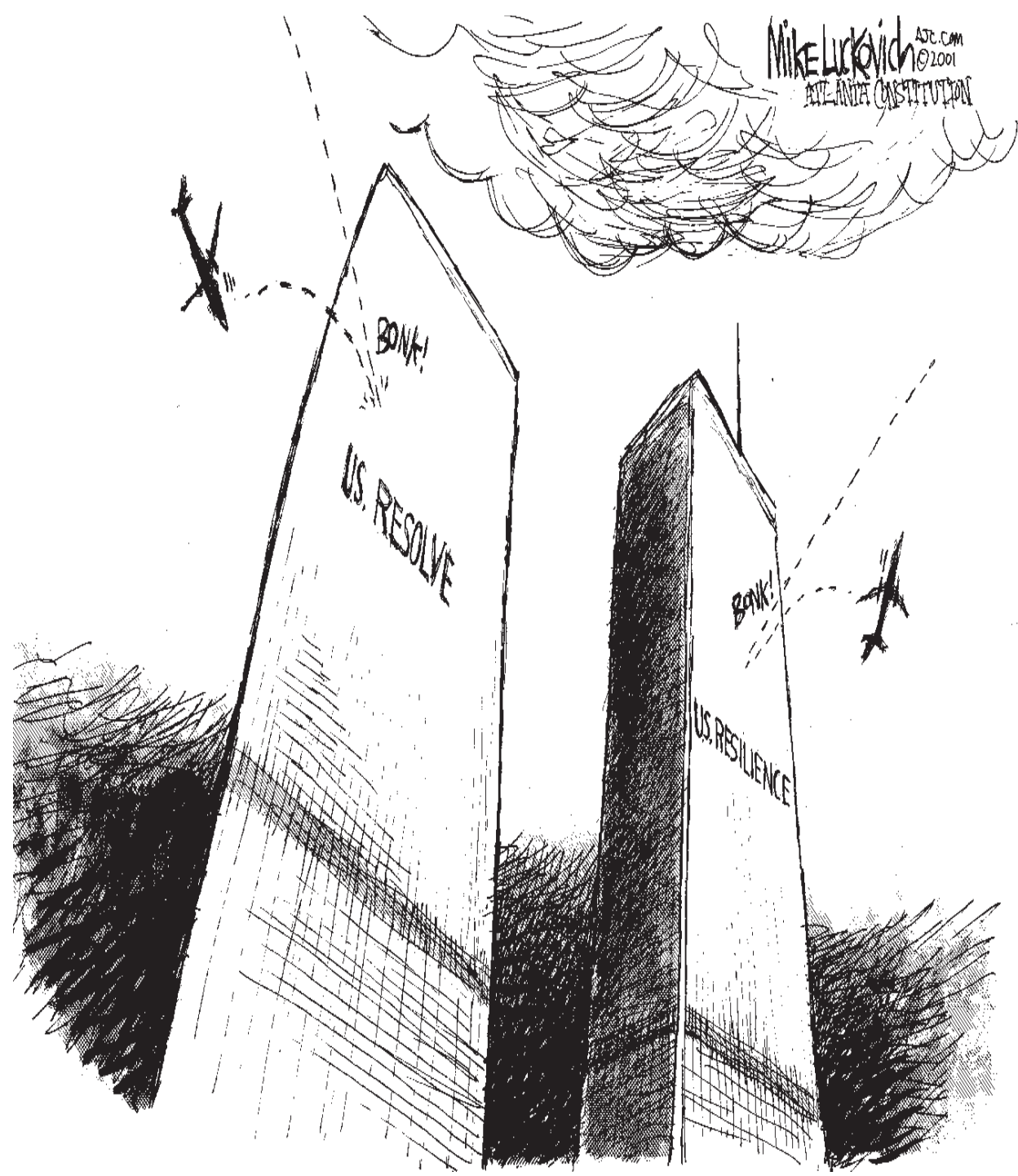
Now, I don't want anybody to get the wrong idea. Just because someone is rich, that doesn't mean that he or she is necessarily a bad person. I know a lot of wealthy individuals who donate lots of money to worthy causes. Like, I heard somewhere that Bill Gates was providing money to a foundation that would install trampoline rooms into the houses of underprivileged families.

I'm just saying that there's a distinct difference between Manhattan and the Bronx, between the people who grew up eating potato chips and those who ate the *extra fancy* kind.

I think you see what I'm getting at here. I'm just not like the 70 percent of people on campus who own their own islands. And I know that a lot of the folks on campus didn't grow up drinking Dom Perignon.

So, for those of you in this category, next time you see one of your highly wealthy classmates drop \$75,000 out of his pocket, don't resent him for it.

Help him pick up the giant wads of cash. Just maybe he'll give you a dollar or two. And if you become the guy's friend, then go into law or medicine, you'll have a money fountain for life.



All Americans should stand behind their country

America is a great nation, and deserves to be recognized as such during this time of national crisis.

After reading the column by Lisa Mann ("America is not a nation of innocents," Sept. 13) in the *Old Gold and Black*, and after hearing the prevailing anti-American sentiment in classroom discussions this past week, it is our obligation as patriotic Americans to question these people's flawed conceptions of what this nation stands for. Why are these people

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trying to justify the actions of these spineless engineers of terror? Moreover, how would our grandparents, members of this country's "greatest generation" who fought for freedom, respond to such statements? We are livid about America being labeled as evil. It is time for Americans to realize the greatness of this nation, and, for those who choose to remain ignorant because it is popular on college campuses, we suggest you move to one of the dictator-led nations whose tyrannical methods you espouse.

Regarding Mann's unfounded notion that the United States is a great oppressor that "kill(s) thousands of civilians" and "bullies" other countries, we wonder if she is not guilty of being

propagandized much in the same way the citizens of these tyrannical regimes are – with baseless accusations denouncing democracy and freedom.

People that cite the United States' Middle Eastern policy as a justification of the actions from this past week blame our alliance with Israel. Israel remains one of the only free nations in the Middle East, where its citizens have rights and independence from authoritarian leaders. Do you believe the United States would show such one-sided positioning between Israel and its enemies if they were democratic societies with respect for basic human rights?

Furthermore, any hostility shown by the United States in the region is in response to dictators of these countries that fire on American planes and attack defenseless countries. For an individual to state that the United States entered the Gulf War simply to keep gas prices down for our SUV's should stop blindly using daddy's credit card long enough to realize that gas prices have gone up since the Gulf War. They must also feel, as Saddam Hussein did, that Iraq had an inherent right to invade a powerless Kuwait and take over their oil reserves.

There is a rising popular concept of America going around killing innocent civilians in Iraq, as shown by a propaganda group that came to campus at the end of last semester. This conveniently leaves out the fact that Saddam Hussein violated international rules of war by storing his military arsenal and operations at civilian sites. But Hussein, in certain people's minds, is not to blame, but rather the United States. A revolting individual that shows a blatant disregard for his own people and places them

Our militaristic response, which seemingly will be one of Biblical proportions, will show just how wronged we really were. Just as our grandparents took up the cause of freedom in World War II, our generation will witness firsthand the power that is the United States Armed Forces. It is bewildering that people claim that we must not respond with excessive force, for it would just contribute to the cycle of violence.

directly in harm's way should not be considered culpable, but instead a nation fighting for freedom and against tyranny is considered, by its own people, as the guilty party. We are aware that there have been instances when the United States has backed an autocratic government in place of a doubtlessly more brutal communist regime. However, to make the argument that many on campus have that the United States is an evil oppressor is an unsubstantiated and categorically inane claim.

The most deplorable statement we have heard in the past week is that America was not "wronged" by the actions of these terrorists. While it is certain that the individuals that perished along with their families were aggrieved beyond most, it is evident that our nation has suffered a tragic loss as a whole. What have we done that would cause one to make such a disrespectful claim – could it be our haste to always help other democracies in need, or is it

perhaps the way we have made the cause of freedom such an important focus at home and abroad? This was an attack on our way of life, an act of war against the greatest nation in the world, and we were most definitely wronged. Anyone who disagrees with that sentiment is against everything this country stands for.

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Would it be better, then, to stand idly by and show our enemies that we are willing to accept such horrific acts? Should we have followed this same logic during World War II and not have contributed to the "cycle of violence" in Nazi Germany?

Our country has an ethical responsibility to defend the people of this nation, and this will be done best through a united international assault on terrorism. This is the call on our generation, just as our grandparents' generation had its call for the fight of freedom.

All Americans should be ready and willing to serve our great nation, and fight for liberty and justice. Our sentiments are echoed by the words of President Ronald Reagan on June 6, 1984 during the D-Day commemoration: "We will always remember. We will always be proud. We will always be prepared, so we may always be free."