

The New Patriotism: Generation's feelings of national pride come as a surprise



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They've grown up stating the Pledge of Allegiance by rote, chatting their way through "The Star-Spangled Banner" at football games. Some rolled their eyes as Old Glory flew on national holidays, memorized dates that meant nothing more to them than a good grade on a history test.

by Leslie Garcia

The Dallas Morning News

Their generations have been branded X and Y, scorned a bit for their sense of entitlement, perhaps for their lack of appreciation for freedom.

But for many, all that changed Sept. 11. These young people have wept tears that appeared out of nowhere, combed the city for flags they once poo-hooed others for flying. They've listened - really listened - to the words of our national anthem and "God Bless America," and begun singing along. Then they've cried some more.

And nobody's caught more off guard at their response than that generation themselves.

"Before, I used to shrug off patriotism," says Loren Nirumandrad, a 17-year-old freshman at the University of Texas at Dallas. "I felt no bond with my country.

Now I'm glad I live here. Someone has threatened it, and that makes me angry."

She did what for her would have been unthinkable two weeks earlier: She bought a T-shirt with "The Star-Spangled Banner" on it. When she and her friends sign off their "instant messages" on the computer, they leave "God Bless America" on the screen. They fill their e-mails with prayers and quotes from "Chicken Soup for the Teen-Age Soul."

Nirumandrad proudly wears the flag lapel pin her father, a native of Iran and a naturalized U.S. citizen, brought home. Before this, when he'd tell her she needed to show respect for the United States, "I'd be like, 'This country isn't so great,'" she says.

"Maybe it was general teen-age cynicism," she says. "I don't know what made me like that. But it's gone now; it's definitely gone."

In her lifetime, Tricia Nichols, 30, has cried twice hearing the national anthem. The first time was when she was 16 and visiting London. The second was 14 years later, driving to work on Sept. 12.

"The emotions caught me by surprise," says Nichols, a media planner with Launch Partnership. "I hadn't related to the flag since I'd been overseas."

She took it for granted, she says. Now she seeks it out - checking cars and yards in hopes of seeing the symbol that binds her with fellow Americans.

"When I see it, I'm so proud," says Nichols, who made her own patriotic ribbon when her grocery store ran out of its giveaways. "It's something I never would have thought to look for. It's become like looking for Christmas lights on houses in December."

She'd grown up with what she calls a "textbooklike appreciation" of freedom.

The patriotism she experienced was "learned," based on what she'd been told, on what she'd memorized about battles fought and won. It meant, in a very vague sense, a free country and liberties not shared by people in other parts of the world.

The Gulf War happened during her lifetime, but it took place a world away. Then, on Sept. 11, patriotism - which had never before been personified for her - suddenly had thousands of faces.

"Not until now did I actually understand it could go away," says Nichols. "I never understood that."

She knew her grandfather had served in photo intelligence during World War II, but that was so long ago. He'd never really talked much about his military service. Then, much to her surprise, he called her after that Tuesday tragedy.

"He asked if I was holding up OK,"

Nichols says. "He was concerned whether I was scared. It was a very raw conversation. He wanted to let me know he was there and I could talk to him. I never thought we'd have something that would happen in both our lives ... something of this magnitude to share."

"We're very close. He said, 'I know you've never seen anything like this and I never thought we'd go through it again.'"

The tragedy has made Jaundra Clay, 21, a senior at Southern Methodist University, appreciate people who served their country decades before she was even born.

"Before, we (as a generation) would just dismiss veterans, older people," Clay says.

"Then I saw a veteran at the grocery store and I just had to go speak to him. I just said, 'Hello, how are you doing?' He seemed surprised. The things he fought for in his young lifetime are the things that are threatened now. We take so much for granted."

"We've been going through life and think we're invincible. But people died in a second (in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C.). We have to do more."

It's almost lunchtime midweek at SMU's Hughes-Trigg Student Center. Students gather in groups to talk or seek secluded corners to study. A huge yellow banner hangs on one wall, covered with handwritten messages to families of victims and rescue workers.

"People call us Generation X, say we don't do anything good," Clay says. "But we're making donations, putting up these banners. We initiated it on our own, not a faculty member. We came together."

Melissa Knowles, a 19-year-old SMU sophomore from Plano, Texas, echoes those sentiments.

"This has not only renewed a sense of patriotism - especially for Generation X. But we really are coming together, showing we're not lazy and that we can take part in something bigger than ourselves," she says.

An SMU family gave football players bags filled with patriotic stickers and pins. Vic Voloria, 19, put one of the flag decals on his beloved truck.

"Before this happened, I wouldn't have put a flag sticker on my truck, or anything else," he says. "Now I'm proud to have it on there."

At the University of Georgia, Betty Jean Craige, director of the Center for Humanities and Arts, has been encouraged by students' creation of a memorial with flowers, candles, letters.

Young people have come together as a result of the tragedy, she says. In addition, events of recent weeks will help young people recognize the United States' role in a global society.

"This will be a defining moment in terms of understanding of the world being a dangerous place," says Craige, author of "American Patriotism in a Global Society" (SUNY Press; \$17.95).

"This has subdued this generation." His students haven't experienced a war or an economic depression, says Thomas Jodziewicz, history department chairman at the University of Dallas. They question how such horror can happen here.

"They've felt so safe in a sense ...," he says. "With our technology, we believe we're in charge ... what are they used to? The computer going, the TV. We set up a comfortable little place for ourselves. This is uncomfortable. All their gadgets aren't going to protect them."

In class a week after the terrorist attacks, he spoke to them about their self-image being attacked. "Our sense of being perfect, a city on a hill."

"I'm not suggesting they have no values, but this is so outside the box," Jodziewicz says. "They've responded with blood, money, prayer vigils, and I find it marvelous."

Still, as patriotic as some young people are feeling, others can't get into the spirit. At UTD, Netreia McNulty, who considers herself compassionate, is perplexed at her lack of patriotism.

"When things like this happen, I feel bad for the people," she says. "but that doesn't make me more for America. I haven't been wearing red, white and blue stickers. God bless the victims, not God bless America."

Across the country, pockets of young people have protested the war on terrorism. Singing "Give Peace a Chance," some students at Oregon's Lewis & Clark College formed a human peace symbol. At Harvard University, students carried a sign proclaiming, "War Is Also Terrorism."

But for 24-year-old Josh Ihde of Dallas, war means doing his patriotic duty.

"To speak to me six months ago of the draft, I'd have said I'd do anything to avoid it," says Ihde, who works for an accounting firm. "After (the attacks), if that's what I have to do to secure freedom for generations to come, I'd do it."

Rumsfeld meets with Saudis on first stop of tour to reassure allies

by Martin Merzer
and Sudarsan Raghavan
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, beginning a whirlwind tour of what soon could become the front lines of a war against terrorism, acknowledged Wednesday that some key allies in the Muslim world are worried about the consequences of a military strike against terrorists.

"We had a very substantive and interesting and thoughtful discussion about the nature of the problem and the complexities of the problem, and the importance of dealing with it in a way that recognizes secondary effects that could occur," Rumsfeld said after meeting in Saudi Arabia with King Fahd, Crown Prince Abdullah and Prince Sultan, the defense minister.

The four nations on his itinerary - Saudi Arabia, Oman, Egypt and Uzbekistan - are crucial to Washington's campaign to seize suspected terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, dismantle his al-Qaida network and punish his protectors in Afghanistan.

According to a senior administration official involved in planning the military operation, Uzbekistan late Wednesday removed one obstacle by agreeing to allow American combat troops to use bases on its territory. Although some minor issues must be settled when Rumsfeld visits on Friday, Air Force search-and-rescue crews and about 1,000 soldiers from the Army's 10th Mountain Division will be deployed in the former Soviet republic on Afghanistan's northern border, said the official, who asked not to be named.

But some Muslim leaders, even those friendly to the United States, fear a violent reaction from their citizens, and have told American officials that they cannot fully back a U.S.-led military strike.

To fortify the home front, President Bush traveled to New York and Secretary of State Colin Powell invited the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to lunch in Washington.

The president reassured business leaders that the economy would rebound and called upon Congress to spend up to \$75 billion more to help make that happen. He visited firefighters who labored in the

rubble of the World Trade Center. He comforted schoolchildren shaken by the Sept. 11 terrorist assault, adding teachers to the growing roster of American heroes.

"You know why?" the president asked the kids in Debra Nelson's first-grade class at P.S. 130 on Baxter Street in Lower Manhattan.

"Because they love you. And if you've got any worries about what took place at the World Trade Center, they can help you. ... They want to make sure you understand what went on."

During his visit, Bush wrote this on a large piece of poster paper in Room 204:

"I love America because I love freedom."

Still, America remained jittery, and Greyhound Lines suspended bus service nationwide for several hours Wednesday after a passenger slit a driver's throat, causing a wreck in Tennessee that killed six people, including the assailant, and injured 35.

Authorities said the male attacker carried a Croatian passport and wielded a sharp instrument that resembled the box cutters used by the terrorists who hijacked four jetliners Sept. 11 and ultimately killed nearly 6,000 people. Still, officials said, Wednesday's senseless act did not appear to be related to the earlier atrocities.

En route to the Middle East, Rumsfeld acknowledged that regional sensitivities stood on high alert and careful diplomacy would be required.

"We're not going to be making requests of the Saudi Arabian government," Rumsfeld said. "What we intend to do there is ... visit with them about the fact that our interest is to create a set of conditions so we can engage in a sustained effort against terrorist networks."

Does he know the location of bin Laden, accused of sponsoring the Sept. 11 attacks?

"I have a handle, but I don't have (map) coordinates."

Is action against the Afghanistan's hard-line Taliban regime inevitable?

"I guess time will tell."

He said military intelligence would prove crucial to the effort, and that's what he hoped to encourage during the trip.

"It's not going to be a cruise missile or a bomber that's going to be the determining factor," Rumsfeld said. "It's going to be a scrap of information from some

person in some country that's been repressed by a dictatorial regime."

In a related development, U.S. intelligence officials involved in planning covert operations in Afghanistan said they believe the administration's campaign to encourage Afghan military and tribal leaders to abandon the Taliban has begun to bear fruit.

The officials, who agreed to speak only on condition of anonymity, said that some Afghan military officers who aren't members of the Taliban have contacted Afghan opposition figures and indicated that they may be willing to defect.

The opposition leaders, who have been meeting with American officials, are telling the Afghans that the country's military bases would be among the first targets of U.S.-led air attacks, which could begin at any time.

The U.S. officials also said that some Pakistani military and intelligence officers who have close ties to the Afghan military are encouraging their Afghan counterparts to defect and may make arrangements for defecting Afghan pilots to fly their aircraft, all aging Soviet-made models, to Pakistan.

"Most of the leadership of the Afghan military, especially the air force, are not Taliban but professional military," one official said. "All of them may not be willing to stand and fight for bin Laden."

In fact, one official said, a recent CIA analysis suggested that many of Afghanistan's 700 tribal leaders might be induced to abandon the Taliban, and that only the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, and a few thousand hard-core followers might be willing to fight to the death beside bin Laden.

The reports could not be independently confirmed, and U.S. officials have an obvious interest in promoting or exaggerating such reports as part of their campaign to demoralize the Taliban and isolate bin Laden and his protectors.

Nevertheless, one official suggested, even modest success at encouraging defections could delay the start of any military action, because a U.S. attack might rally Afghans behind the Taliban.

Notable quotations

"It was spontaneous, a statement of American solidarity and resolve. It was a moving experience. This has been a day none of us will forget. A horrible day."

-U.S. Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), who sang "God Bless America" on the Capitol steps with nearly 100 other lawmakers after the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, in *People* magazine.

"I can't live in a world without love is a sentiment that's as true in crisis as it is in normal times. It's a totally pro-love sentiment and could only be helpful right now."

-Peter Asher, of Peter and Gordon, whose song "A World Without Love" was on the list of 150 songs that Clear Channel Communications requested that its 1,170 radio stations not play because of the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, in *People Online*.

"We should resolve to make Sept. 11 each year as robust a day as we can. It should feature Americans behaving in their unique, extraordinary ways. Those whose lives were lost should be remembered as they died: in busy activity, never dreaming that that day would be their last on Earth. We will not need to shut down to remember."

-Conservative commentator Rush Limbaugh, on how to commemorate the events in the future, in *Time* magazine.