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## Hail and Farewell

By ANTHONY LEWIS  
Published: December 15, 2001

### BOSTON

Everything comes to an end, my friend Sydney Gruson told me long ago. Now the time has come for this column to end.

I have been writing it for 32 years. As I look back at those turbulent decades, I see a time of challenge to a basic tenet of modern society: faith in reason.

No one can miss the reality of that challenge after Sept. 11. Islamic fundamentalism, rejecting the rational processes of modernity, menaces the peace and security of many societies.

But the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism is not to be found in Islam alone. Fundamentalist Christians in America, believing that the Bible's story of creation is the literal truth, question not only Darwin but the scientific method that has made contemporary civilization possible.

Religion and extreme nationalism have formed deadly combinations in these decades, impervious to reason. Serbs in the grip of religion and mystical nationalist history killed thousands and expelled millions in their "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnia. Fundamentalist Judaism and extreme Israeli nationalism have fed the movement to plant settlements in Palestinian territory, fueling Islamic militancy among Palestinians.

Faith in reason was the foundation stone of the United States. The men who met in Philadelphia in 1787 set out to create a nation from struggling states so distant from each other that it took seven days for George Washington to learn that New Hampshire had provided the needed ninth vote to bring their Constitution into being. They wagered that a national government based on written rules could hold the country together.

Intricate checks and balances, they reasoned, would prevent the abuses of power that tempt all politicians. They put their faith not in men but in law: the law of the Constitution.

Without the foundation of law, this vast country could never have survived as one, could never have absorbed streams of immigrants from myriad cultures. With one terrible exception, the Civil War, law and the Constitution have kept America whole and free.

Of course we have not always been faithful to the vision of the Framers. In time of war and stress, we have yielded again and again to fear. Fear of Jacobin terror in France produced the Sedition Act of 1798. In World War I, men and women were sentenced to long prison terms for mildly critical political speech. In World War II, unreasoning fear led to the internment of Japanese-Americans. During the cold war, fear of Communism brought the abuses of McCarthyism.

Today again fear threatens reason. Aliens are imprisoned for months on the flimsiest of grounds. The a general of the United States moves to punish people on the basis of secret evidence, the Kafkaesque hal tyranny. Recently F.B.I. agents went to a Houston art museum and, on suspicion that it was promoting terrorism, scrutinized a work that showed a city skyline burning.

I am an optimist about America. But how can I maintain that optimism after Vietnam, after the murder of so many who fought for civil rights, after the Red scare and after the abusive tactics planned by government today? I can because we have regretted our mistakes in the past, relearning every time that no ruler can be trusted with arbitrary power. And I believe we will again.

The hard question is whether our commitment to law will survive the new sense of vulnerability that is with us all after Sept. 11. It is easy to tolerate dissent when we feel safe.

But after all, this has always been a country of unbounded optimism, a country that struggles with itself and conquers corrupting habit. In my lifetime we have carried out two revolutions, unfinished but extraordinary: the ending of racial discrimination and the move toward equality for women. Thirty-two years ago few imagined that the secretary of state could be anything but a white male.

In a speech nearly a century ago, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. foresaw racial conflict and destruction of the world's resources. But even that great skeptic concluded: "Beyond the vision of battling races and an impoverished earth I catch a dreaming glimpse of peace."

In the end I believe that faith in reason will prevail. But it will not happen automatically. Freedom under law is hard work. If rulers cannot be trusted with arbitrary power, it is up to citizens to raise their voices at injustice. The most important office in a democracy, Justice Louis Brandeis said, is the office of citizen.

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