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## *MEMORIAL ESSAY*

### SUSTAINING THE MORAL SURGE

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Months have passed, commemorations have been held at ground zero, and Congress has declared September 11 a yearly National Day of Remembrance.

Surely it will be another date that will live in infamy; no law is needed to ordain that, and no law could change it. But September 11 was, and should be, something more. And after the devastation is cleared, new buildings raised up, and commerce and finance return—all critical to the prosperity of New York and the nation—the other great test will be whether we sustain the moral power surge which moved across the city and this country in response to the terrorist attack.

On one of the worst of days, we found the best in each other. Instead of being defined by the terrorists, as they had planned, we defined ourselves. I saw this moral surge manifest itself as our students and neighbors gathered for a vigil in Washington Square Park. One first-year law student from rural Georgia told how terrified he was that Tuesday morning, asking himself: “Why am I here?” Now he said, as he stood in front of the great arch that marks the Square: “I have seen New York, my classmates, my community. How could I be anywhere else?”

Amid the outpouring of spirit in the days that followed, we were all rescue workers, saving and affirming our humanity. Tens of thousands contributed their food, their money, their sweat, and their

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blood. Volunteers in record numbers were frustrated by their inability to do more. We all clearly saw the commitment of our police and firefighters, and we came to view them differently than we ever had before. Confounding past enmities even as he confirmed the strength of his leadership, Mayor Giuliani became a unifier and healer. We all reached out; we comforted; in the face of so much death, we gave a new and unforgettable life to the idea of community.

But the moral surge could recede, just as the good feeling during the blackouts of the past faded after the lights came back on. If so, the commemorations of September 11 would become just rituals of remembrance, the rebuilding just business as usual. So in the end, rebuilding structures is not enough; we have to build a renewed spirit of New York based on our values of freedom and tolerance, our vision of a diverse, open society.

Each of us has a part to play. Universities like ours can and will provide scholarships for the children of the victims. We can and will create chronicles of this singular moment, to capture not just the horror, but also the affirmation that rose from the ashes. We can and will send witnesses, teams of students and faculty, into schools and communities across the country, sharing what they saw and felt here, and striving to convert the spirit of the moment into the spirit of an era.

But I also believe that whatever any of us does separately, all of us have to ask what we can do together in this transformative time. We are at a moral crossroads, and universities have a singular responsibility to shape the ideas that matter and to advance the creation of the future. It is easy to celebrate the extraordinary response to this crisis. The real challenge is to make the unforgettable sense of community after September 11 more than a memory or a moment in time, but the new ground of our common being. We may have a worldwide architectural competition to rebuild on the sixteen acres of ground zero; we must also build on the moral foundation which the people of New York have shown the world since the attack.

We are the world's first city, not just America's. And the world is ready to hear from us, to respond, to join us in renewal. A French newspaper proclaims: "We are all New Yorkers." The Mayor of Rome offers to withdraw that city's bid for the 2012 Olympics in favor of New York, so the Games can open in the sight of the Statue of Liberty as a global expression of solidarity.

Societies live by stories. On September 11, the page turned and now we have to write a new chapter. We must make it the story of a continuing moral surge—and of a New York that truly will be the world's "shining city on a hill."