

## EIGHTEEN MONTHS AFTER 9-11 (MARCH 2003)

It is 18 months after the horrific events of September 11 – a good time to reassess the burdens we bear. The 3,000+ murdered that day are not our most significant cost. In response to these attacks on the United States we have lost sight of what we, as a nation, stand for. We have reacted in fear causing our most significant loss: moral leadership against injustice and the empathy of the world.

Historically the United States has overreacted to internal threats to our security. As a very young country we passed the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798; later, we repealed habeas corpus during our Civil War; and we interned 120,000 Japanese-Americans during WWII. Today we give up personal liberty with the Patriot Act and acquiesce in the internment of unknown numbers of people who are labeled terrorist supporters. With the long reach of a superpower we are able to snatch our foreign enemies and hold them in military compounds without legal representation for indefinite periods. Even the Nazi war criminals were provided counsel and charged with specific crimes.

As today's superpower, we must lead the world toward justice for all. Instead we respond as the schoolyard bully: counting friends, despising those who dare to disagree with us, and beating up those who "deserve it," Sooner or later bullies and superpowers lose control of their worlds. Our supercilious contempt for the world community quickens the end of our moral power. Acquiescing to the abrogation of our own freedom abets the process and will leave us with no voice and no choice. It is not too late to change this course, but change we must.