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A Case for Celebration

Suzanne Morse | May. 6, 2011 NCR Today

My great aunt Edith described what it was like in Boston's old Scollay Square at the end of World War II. The details were of a scene just like the iconic *LIFE* magazine photos of Times Square -- an unknown sailor kissing an unknown nurse in a spontaneous show of life and celebration.

I understand the hand-wringing about the celebrating that went on in front of the White House, at Ground Zero in Manhattan, and across college campuses across the country. I've seen the Biblical quote "Rejoice not when your enemy falls, and when he stumbles, let not your heart exult." (Proverbs 24: 17).

It is worth noting that the next lines from Proverbs are:

Lest the LORD see it, be displeased with you, and withdraw his wrath from your enemy.
Be not provoked with evildoers, nor envious of the wicked;
For the evil man has no future, the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

But I think that there is a case to be made for the celebrations. The war in Afghanistan is the longest war the United States has ever engaged in. The youngest students at those college campuses were 8 or 9 when the Twin Towers fell. Their young lives have been shaped by September 11 in the same way that previous generations were shaped by the Cold War, Vietnam or the fall of the Berlin Wall.

This war was never going to produce a sailor-kissing-a-nurse moment ... until Sunday evening. For a lot of people, young and old, this was the closest they would come to VE or VJ day. For sure, there was some ugly triumphalism mixed in ... and just some college-age impulse to party. But I watched on YouTube students from my alma mater sing "God Bless America" and I was proud. They weren't engaging in triumphalism, they were affirming something about who we are as a nation, I think.

Americans don't have long memories when it comes to our adversaries. The country against whom we fought our war for independence is now our oldest, most stalwart friend. Germany and Japan are allies and trading partners. We even have a growing trade relationship with Vietnam. And we welcomed back those who fought a Civil War against the union. President Obama made a point of saying again that we are not at war with Islam but with terrorists who would pervert their religion to justify a murderous ideology. While we should not celebrate anyone's death, we have learned how to rejoice at these moments and then to repair the breach.

I can only hope that is what this moment will lead to, as well. There are many Muslim-Americans in this country who have suffered from an unfair stigma attached to their faith. Perhaps the moments of joy we saw on Monday morning will give way to the recognition that these fellow citizens are an essential part of our American fabric. That is an outcome we can all celebrate.

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