

Then came that epic morning, which Bush answered by giving the hijackers far more than they could accomplish with four planes. His grand democratization plan reduced Iraq to rubble, drove Iran to arm, and provided terrorists with the ultimate recruiting tool. America, once renowned for her decency, became the aggressor her foes alleged.

At home, our failed attempt at global liberation has left us less free than ever before. Ancient liberties, cultural imperatives, even basic solvency were subsumed by the war effort. And the conservative movement that gave Bush his margin sanitized his radicalism at the cost of its soul.

It would be easy to leave him to that delusion and turn a more hopeful page. But Bush wasn't alone in his failure: a country marched behind him and a movement cheered him on. If the failings of the Bush era are to be corrected—or at least not repeated—we need a clear view of where we've been. History will render the final judgment, but herewith a preliminary damage assessment:

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