Herald News Yellow Red Blue Black



# Freedom: Voices in a cacophony, sometimes making sense

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stant maturity seemed to come on Sept. 11, 2001. I was working for a newspaper in Times Square on that day. The streets were closed to all except emergency vehicles, making the area into an eerily quiet pedestrian mall. Overhead, the huge TV screens of the various networks broadcast the images of the burning towers. People stood or sat on the street in stunned silence or muffled crying, or walked in a kind of daze. Conversation was minimal, except for the collective gasps and shrieks when the first tower fell.

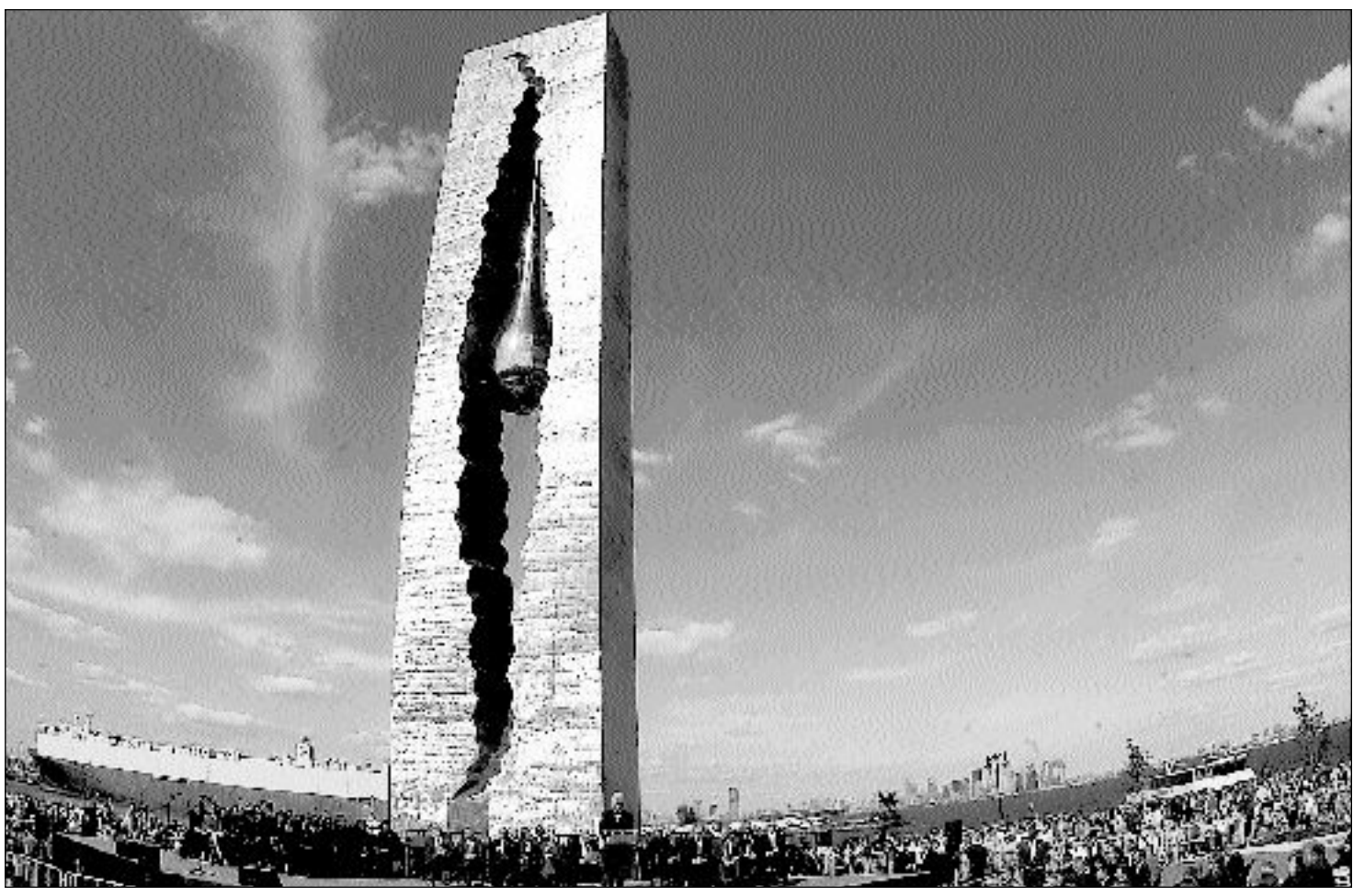
As I walked around ground zero a few days later, the dust still floating in the air, there was a solemnity, almost a reverence, in the attitude of people who had come to see it, united in their grief and resolve. Sept. 11 seemed to bring us together in a way not seen since, perhaps, World War II.

That was, unfortunately, short-lived, as we soon reverted to our old, familiar ways of thinking, and, sometimes, bickering. On the morning of Sept. 11, 2006, I found at ground zero a cacophony, a jumble of messages and points of view.

There were Buddhist monks chanting and pounding drums in a dirge-like cadence; police and firefighters from around the nation and the world; church bells slowly tolling; Mennonite choirs singing; protesters shouting for an end to the war and an investigation of the real facts behind 9/11; others arguing that we should stay to finish the job; and the voices of the families of those killed that day, amplified through the streets, calling out the names and paying their own tributes, as if, in the words of the poet Edwin Arlington Robinson, their loved ones "had earned/More than earth gives to many who have won/More than it has to give when they are gone."

**At ground zero in the days after Sept. 11, 2001, there was a solemnity, almost a reverence, in the attitude of people who had come to see it. Five years later, there was a jumble of messages and points of view.**

In 1990 I attended the reopening ceremonies at the Ellis Island National Monument. As we stood waiting for the ferry to take us to the island, a group held a respectful but persistent protest against the government's lack of funding for AIDS research and treatment. "Why do they have to do that here, on this day?" someone asked, to general agreement from the Ellis Island attendees. The answer, to my mind, was simple: They don't, but the people we honor today struggled that we might be here, all of us, each with his own voice, free to speak it, regardless of how unpopular its words might be.



BETH BALBIERZ/Special to the Herald News

Former President Bill Clinton addresses the crowd at the dedication of "To the Struggle Against World Terrorism," by the Georgian sculptor Zurab Tsereteli, in Bayonne.

President Lincoln spoke, as eloquently as anyone ever has, about the battlefield of Gettysburg and the battle for our nation. His words, like he himself, belong to the ages, and seem just as fitting today about places like Ellis Island and ground zero:

*We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that this nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.*

*But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate … we cannot consecrate … we cannot hallow … this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.*

Nor can any attempt to regulate, curtail or suppress free speech ever succeed. A creationism of false facts will never prevent the evolution of the truth.

On our way back to Manhattan from Bayonne, we again passed the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Today my father's name is etched on a plaque on a wall on the island, along with many others. He began his life in America with the view of the statue and the idea of freedom, and his name will rest there, under her watchful eye, for as long as those monuments stand. The statue, by its very presence, speaks truth to power.

Julia Collins, one of the 9/11 widows who spoke at the Bayonne ceremony, asked what we, as individuals, could do to fight terrorism. Her answer was to live, to go on living, being parents and children and friends, thereby making our communities stronger and safer. And someday, perhaps, turning the sculptor Tsereteli's tear of grief into one of joy.

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JOSEPH P. GRIFFITH/Herald News

Buddhists and protesters chanting for peace at ground zero on Monday.

# Cuba: Carrying on the fight

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Maria fled in May 1960, after learning that the government was mounting a case against him. In the Revolution's early years, the punishment for those who turned against Castro was often death.

"They were fighting for something else," Maria Werlau says. "The government went after those people with a vengeance."

Cañizares returned to Cuba for the 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion, a U.S.-backed attempt by Cuban exiles to overthrow Castro's government. Cañizares was killed by militiamen's gunfire.

"He said, 'I helped to put him in power, and I have to help get him out,'" Werlau says.

Retelling the story of the father she barely knew still brings tears to her eyes. She continues his legacy of fighting the regime – on the economy as well as human rights issues. Because of Werlau's work with the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, Castro himself mentioned her name on Cuban television. It was not a flattering reference.

"They know who I am," she says. "The work I'm doing on two fronts is very damaging to the regime."

She's given up a lot to do this work. With a master's degree in international relations from the University of Chile, Werlau ran a successful financial consulting firm until 2003, when she decided to devote herself to the Cuba Archive.

She rented her house in Chatham and moved into a small townhouse. Her only source of funds now is the rent check and child support from her ex-husband. She has stayed in New Jersey so her children can be close to their dad.

"We need people to do this work outside of Miami," she says. "A lot of work on Cuba is insular. I don't think we've done a good job of telling the story of Cuba."

She and Lago apply a meticulous, scholarly approach to tell that story. They use family testimonies, the work of other Cuban authors and a number of sources to document each of the dead. In order to be included on the list, at least two independent sources must confirm a death.

**Maria Werlau continues her father's legacy of fighting the Castro regime – on the economy as well as human rights issues.**

"The bulk of what we have, I feel very comfortable with," Werlau says. "It comes from so many different sources that I don't think there's deliberate contamination of the data. And the work is available for inspection."

Lago, a Harvard-trained economist and former professor at Catholic University of America, began the project in April 1997, at the urging of several friends involved in human rights work. Two strokes and a divorce had left him half-paralyzed, in a wheelchair and unhappy. Despite the depressing nature of his task, it helped by giving him a way to be useful.

So on April 15, he sat down to write his first case: 22-year-old Virgilio Campaneria, a former law school classmate involved in the underground movement to topple Castro, ratted out by police informers and executed by firing squad in April 1961.

"I was already here in exile when I heard about his death, and it affected me," Lago says. "We always thought that this kid one day was going to be the president of Cuba. He had a big star tattooed on his chest."

From that case, he moved on to the reports of Ruby Hart Phillips, the New York Times correspondent in Havana from 1933 until 1961. In those early years of the revolution, she listed many who'd been rounded up and killed by firing squad. Lago was also able to look at 2-1/2 years' worth of U.S. State Department archives, until the U.S. broke relations with Cuba in 1961. He's combed through dozens of texts and hundreds of articles to find the names of those whose lives were claimed by the revolution.

He's done all this while needing dialysis three times a week. He works on an old computer, typing with his one good hand. He's almost done with a book about his findings, called "Cuba: The Human Cost of the Social Revolution," but is still looking for a publisher.

While most work that commemorates the Cuban dead focuses only on Castro, Lago and Werlau begin counting from 1952, with the military coup led by then-president Batista. They consider this the insurrectionary phase of the revolution. They've attributed almost 3,000 deaths to Batista, a third of which are combat deaths by anti-Batista forces.

"I'm counting the dead on both sides," Lago says. "I want them to say that this guy really looked under every rock to find victims of the Cuban civil war. And it has been a civil war."

The pair's next project is to document those killed while attempting to leave Cuba. Witnesses and former government workers say the Cuban Coast Guard had standing orders, at least until 1994, to shoot anyone trying to flee. With little effort, Lago and Werlau have found close to 250 cases of people killed, either by machine-gun fire or sandbags dropped onto their rafts. Lago estimates the actual tally is almost 78,000, based on a mathematical formula he developed using reports from both the island and the mainland.

"The assumption has always been that they drowned or were eaten by sharks," Werlau says, "but a lot of these people were often killed before they left Cuban waters, before they even left the beach sometimes."

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