

Bush's Dallas Speech Was Clutch

The slaying of five Dallas police officers in the wake of police shootings that left two African American men dead has been a difficult time for America, to say the least.

The anguish resulting from these tragedies has been accompanied by a surge of anger, blame, and distrust from people of all races. The country feels like a cauldron poised to boil over at the next high-profile death, a disconcerting specter in a nation of 320 million people and ubiquitous media.

It was amidst this anger, sorrow, and finger-pointing that George W. Bush arrived in Dallas yesterday to deliver a speech to honor the victims. Most people would agree that Bush will not be remembered as a great orator, but at the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center he was on his game.

Speaking in a friendly and familiar Southern drawl, which had grown tiresome during his presidency but now evokes a bit of nostalgia, Bush delivered a message that tapped into the better angels of the American soul.

Here's an excerpt:

The shock of this evil still has not faded. At times, it seems like the forces pulling us apart are stronger than the forces binding us together. Argument turns too easily into animosity. Disagreement escalates too quickly into de-humanization.

Too often, we judge other groups by their worst examples, while judging ourselves by our best intentions.

And this has strained our bonds of understanding and common purpose. But Americans, I think, have a great advantage. To renew our unity, we only need to remember our values.

We have never been held together by blood or background. We are bound by things of the spirit, by shared commitments to common ideals.

At our best, we practice empathy, imagining ourselves in the lives and circumstances of others. This is the bridge across our nation's deepest divisions.

And it is not merely a matter of tolerance, but of learning from the struggles and stories of our fellow citizens and finding our better selves in the process.

Bush's performance, to me, was reminiscent of the old quarterback trotted out on the field in the 4th quarter off the bench. He's got two bad knees and arthritis. Nobody gives him a chance. Yet somehow he delivers a winning score in an emergency situation.

At the risk of sounding hyperbolic, in tenor the speech reminded me of Lincoln's [First Inaugural Address](#).

Let's hope W's speech, unlike Lincoln's, does not fall on deaf ears.

*Disclosure: the writer briefly served in the speech writing department of the White House under George W. Bush.

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[Image Credit: White House photo by Eric Draper]