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Getting really rude, crude and boorish

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Where's Leadership?

WHAT is happening to America and Americans? What has happened to the refinement of cultured Americans, to the friendliness of common folk?

Yes, there is the terrible event of Sept 11. But are Americans going to be forever caught in that time warp? Is America going to be always taking on the rest of the world (especially Muslims), and to beat it into submission?

When I was in New York in the early part of this year for the World Economic Forum, an American woman poked me in the chest as we were having a discussion on Dr Mahathir's Press briefing, which had agitated her, especially the Prime Minister's point that the Israelis must withdraw from occupied Palestinian lands.

She was quite abusive as she harangued me about "you people trying to tell `us' what to do" and went on and on about what "we" did on Sept 11 in the lobby of the Waldorf-Astoria, and walked away the moment she didn't like to hear what I had to say.

(I had to be pulled away from charging after her by a friend.)

So what is happening, and are the Americans ever going to come out of it? Where's the civilised behaviour and demeanour?

What has happened to the idealism of Woodrow Wilson, to the compassion of Roosevelt, to the style and panache of Kennedy?

There does seem to be a lack of leadership in Washington these days, only the riding of the wave of understandable popular anger. Those who have always had the agenda of "cleaning up" and "sorting others out", like Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz are having a field day. Those with a human face and heart, like Powell and even O'Neill, are ignored.

President Bush must see where all this hysteria is taking America, Americans and the world. It is permeating almost every aspect of life and pattern of behaviour. Everything is becoming uncivilised. He must exercise leadership to take the world away from the brink.