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Claremont McKenna College

**“We Will Never Forget:” Developing Collective Memory and
Meaning After 9/11**

Submitted to
Tamara Venit-Shelton and Katja Favretto

By
Kylie Harrison

For
Senior Thesis
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Chapter One

Introduction

“No day shall erase you from the memory of time” – Vergil, *Aeneid*¹

“It was the day everything changed.” While this statement could apply to any number of moments in history, for many Americans, hearing this phrase instantly calls forth memories of planes hurtling into edifices of American power, the deafening collapse of the twin towers, soot and smoke shrouding New York City in darkness, and frantic calls to loved ones. The visceral emotion of that day lingers, a crisis of such unprecedented devastation that it left an indelible scar on the American psyche. Ten years after the anniversary of 9/11, 97% of Americans over the age of eight when the attacks occurred can describe exactly where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news.² There are only two other events in American history that have a similar scale of recall when measured ten years later: the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the attack on Pearl Harbor.³ Each of these moments deeply affected American views and way of life, and each played a key role in shaping national identity.

It has been nearly twenty years since 9/11 transformed American society, and a new generation has grown up in that time and cannot comprehend the America that existed before the attacks. When the towers fell, I was only three years old and my

¹ Inscribed on the 9/11 Memorial in New York.

² Drew Desilver, “More than a Decade Later, 9/11 Attacks Continue to Resonate with Americans,” Pew Research Center, May 14, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/14/more-than-a-decade-later-911-attacks-continue-to-resonate-with-americans/>.

³ Ibid.

younger brother had just turned one. For us, as for many other young people, our understanding of 9/11 was amorphous and influenced by a complex mix of meanings delivered in a variety of ways. I first remember learning about 9/11 from my parents, who recounted their experience of watching the towers fall on live news and the fear and shock they felt. I had many other similar experiences growing up, listening to family members, teachers, and other adults share their memories of that day and its aftermath. In middle school and high school, we often had moments of reflection to honor and recognize the tragedy of 9/11 on each anniversary of the attacks. As I got older and started to read the news, I was influenced by *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* articles and presidential speeches commemorating the anniversary. However, it was not until college that I formally learned about 9/11 and the contentious history of the lead up to and the aftermath of the attacks. As a history and government major, I was fascinated by how 9/11 and its significant sociopolitical consequences became part of a historical narrative of America.

As the events of September 11th have moved from memory to history, new scholarship has reflected critical distance from the emotion and chaos of the immediate aftermath. The War on Terror that followed in 9/11's wake and rising political polarization have made the study of 9/11 even more crucial. Much of the scholarship that currently exists on 9/11 focuses on fitting the terrorist events into a larger narrative of Western manipulation in the Middle East, the failure of the United States' national security system, and the rise of a national security state. While all of these inquiries offer valuable insights into contemporary American society, I believe that more scholarship

should delve into the ways 9/11 took on symbolic meaning and became a cultural and political tool for journalists, politicians, and ordinary Americans in the subsequent years.

Historiography

Like any good piece of scholarship, this thesis was not created in a vacuum. I consulted with several different bodies of historical scholarship to formulate the context of my work and guide my analysis. The theoretical frameworks of collective memory and trauma provided the analytical foundation of my thesis, while individual sources on 9/11 enriched my examination of meaning and memory making in the aftermath of the attacks. In the following section, I will provide a brief overview of my core theoretical frameworks, followed by a historiographical overview of the key texts informing my analysis in each chapter.

Collective Memory

Collective memory emerged as a popular mode of analysis in the early twentieth century, founded largely upon the works of Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist and follower of Émile Durkheim. Halbwachs' seminal work, *On Collective Memory (Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire)*, argues that memory is a collective enterprise, and is both produced by and exists within social frameworks and group identities. Individuals rely on society in order to “recall, recognize, and localize their memories,” a process that shapes both individual recollection and reaffirms group memory.⁴ In the individual, the memory

⁴ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis Closer (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

of the group is reified and made manifest. From the moment that recollection occurs, individuals reproduce a collective perception that can only be processed within frames of the group thought, discourse, and identity.⁵ Discourse connects within a single framework of ideas personal thoughts, as well as those of the group. Through the negotiation of memory, a collective, social framework shapes the meaning and significance of past events and “binds our most intimate remembrances to each other.”⁶ Halbwachs argues that recent memories, and memories of a distant past, are not bound together because they occurred contiguously in time, but because “they are part of a totality of thoughts common to a group, the group of people with whom we have a relation at this moment, or with whom we have had a relation on the preceding day or days.”⁷ Thus, in remembering the past, individuals integrate their memory of events into the perspective of the group, a process that requires individuals to confront group interests and standards for reflection.

Halbwachs argues that collective memories of the past are not stagnant, but constantly undergoing reconstruction on the basis of present-day concerns.⁸ Collective frameworks of memory are tools that enable individuals to “reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society.”⁹ Thus, when an event occurs that profoundly affects a group’s identity, there are preexisting systems of beliefs that provide the interpretative framework to understand the event and encode it in collective memory. Every group relies on a set of tools for interpretation: signs, symbols, practices, monuments, museums, customs, stereotype

⁵ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 62.

⁶ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. 53.

⁷ Halbwachs. 52.

⁸ Halbwachs. 40.

⁹ Ibid.

images, and language.¹⁰ These tools provide narrative elements essential to structuring and assigning meaning to events. This is essential, because without an understanding and belief in a collective past, it is impossible for group identities to remain intact.¹¹

Since Halbwachs initial ground-breaking work, a range of scholars from a variety of different disciplines have expanded upon and sharpened the concept of collective memory. Yadin Dudai, a renowned neurobiologist, argues that the term “collective memory” is comprised of three different components: a body of knowledge, an attribute, and a process.¹² In this thesis, I will focus on the last component, the process, which can also be called the act of collective remembering. The process of collective remembering is best described as the “continual evolution of understanding between the individual and the group, as individuals may influence and change the collective memory of the group.”¹³ The practice of collective remembering challenges the notion of static base of facts and instead illustrates the way people and societies must constantly reconstructs representations of the past.

Collective memory inevitably focusses on the construction of identity. Remembering becomes a mode for determining what it means to be part of the group. Yet where history seeks to be objective and recognize the complex multiplicity of perspectives, collective memory is far more motivated by contemporary social and political concerns. The historian Peter Novick views collective remembering as one-

¹⁰ Amos Funkenstein, “Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness,” *History and Memory* 1, no. 1 (1989): 5–26.

¹¹ Funkenstein.

¹² Yadin Dudai, *Memory from A to Z: Keywords, Concepts and Beyond* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹³ James Wertsch and Henry Roediger, “Collective Memory: Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Approaches,” *Memory (Hove, England)* 16 (May 1, 2008): 318–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210701801434>.

dimensional, rooted in “a single, committed perspective” that “reduces events to mythic archetypes.”¹⁴ As memories become interwoven with identity, narrative constructions of an event may ignore or distort certain facts in order to serve a group’s present needs.¹⁵ Thus, collective remembering occurs simultaneously with collective forgetting. Marita Sturken captured this notion, writing, “The desire for narrative closure... forces upon historical events the limits of narrative form and enables forgetting.”¹⁶ This is particularly true in the case of national memory, where national narratives structure collective memory and impose “a coherent ordering of events along a strict narrative line serving as an intellectual and emotional backbone of national identity.”¹⁷ In the creation of national narratives, elites lead the charge in synthesizing events, characters, and motives to produce a clear picture of the past. Elites rely on existing narrative elements, deeply embedded in a nation’s culture and language, to give coherent meaning to complex events. This process is essential in the context of traumatic events, which play an integral role in group identity and also challenge existing frames of meaning.

Collective Trauma

Throughout history, the dramatic restructuring of group identity has often been triggered by traumatic events. From the early persecution of Jews to the horrific losses of

¹⁴ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, First Mariner Books Edition 2000 (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), <https://www.amazon.com/Holocaust-American-Life-Peter-Novick/dp/0618082328>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Duke University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Jan Assmann, “Cultural Memories and National Narratives: With Some Relation to the Case of Georgia,” *Caucasus Context* 3, no. 1 (n.d.): 40–43.

the Holocaust, from the creation of the state of Israel and the Arab losses in the six-day war, trauma often serves as a catalyst, one that binds a group together based on shared experience. In “Notes on Trauma and Community,” Kai Erikson argues that traumatic events create a sense of community and identity, where “shared experience becomes almost like a common culture, a source of kinship.”¹⁸ In fact, most groups have some “myth or origin,” which begin with some sort of founding trauma, an common experience of suffering and perseverance that forged a collective identity.¹⁹ Through the use of narratives about trauma, elites are able to nationalize tragedy and encode the event in the group’s history and identity.²⁰ The state-led process of recognizing and identifying with victims is a core component of embedding a tragedy into a national consciousness and identity. Dominic LaCapra argues that entrenching trauma in a frame of historical loss is a rhetorical device that allows the “appropriation of particular traumas by those who did not experience them, typically in a movement of identity formation that makes invidious and ideological use of traumatic series of events in foundational ways or as symbolic capital.”²¹ The appropriation of a traumatic event into the discourse on national identity is the foundational lens through which I will analyze the memory-creation in the wake of 9/11.

In *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma*, Jeffery Alexander defines cultural trauma as a moment where “members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a

¹⁸ Kai Erikson, “Notes on Trauma and Community,” *American Imago*, Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Trauma: II, 48, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 455–72.

¹⁹ Dominick LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss,” *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 4 (July 1999): 696–727, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448943>.

²⁰ Sven Cvek, *Towering Figures: Reading the 9/11 Archive*. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

²¹ LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss.”

horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever, and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”²² The experience of a shared trauma catalyzes a sense of collective identity and guides group mentality. A traumatic event occurs when a shared context abruptly shifts in an unforeseen and unwelcome way.²³ The reconstitution of a collective identity on the basis of a shared trauma is fundamental to the analysis of 9/11 and the symbolic meaning the event now holds. Alexander argues that “trauma is not something naturally existing; it is something constructed by society.” As a result, there can be some distance between the factual accounting of the event and the popular representations of that event. The process of symbolically characterizing an event allows members of a collective to make “‘claims’ about the shape of social reality, its causes, and the responsibilities for action such causes imply.”²⁴ These claims feed into a larger national narrative, where the public and the state must navigate demands for “emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution.”²⁵

Trauma plays a formative role in creating a clear sense of a collective, an us-versus-them dichotomy, that provides structure to memory and fosters a feeling on an “imagined community.” The terrorist attacks of 9/11, thus, had all the ingredients to constitute a cultural trauma. In the collection *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*,

²² Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2004), 1–30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pp9nb.4>.

²³ Alexander et al.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

several scholars explore the traumatic nature of 9/11.²⁶ In my analysis, I focused on the following: the initial reaction of shock and disbelief, the widespread displays of collective mourning, and the perception that the attacks would leave a scar on the psyche of the nation. In my chapter on commemorations, I examine post-9/11 sentiments, particularly the fear that “2001 was a scarred or ruined year, that the world must be regarded as having a pre-September 11 and post-September 11 reality, that the events would not only never be forgotten but also that we would never be *able* to forget them.”²⁷ These feelings were often expressed by both broadcast news stations and government officials who immediately took up the call to arms and set about attributing meaning to 9/11, so that the public would know what exactly is meant to never be forgotten. In addition to the necessitated “unforgettability” of 9/11, there was sense that Americans had a responsibility to the dead. This responsibility primarily manifested in two ways: protecting the memory of 9/11 in a national memorial and standing united in War on Terror. In the following chapters, I analyze how debates between state officials and the victims’ family members demonstrate the way the dead were used to legitimize specific memories and interpretations of 9/11.

The final three points made by the authors in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* were particularly essential in guiding my analysis of memory-creation throughout the chapters of my thesis. Bernhard Giesen argued that trauma produces deliberative efforts to remember an event collectively, through commemorative ceremonies, public

²⁶The collection, written and compiled only four months after the attacks, is inherently a product of the crisis in which it was written. Yet in its proximity to the its subject, the collection provides additionally insight into how 9/11 was viewed soon after the tragedy took place. Throughout the collection, the scholars argue that 9/11 constituted a cultural trauma for many reasons, summarized in eight points.

²⁷ Alexander et al., “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma.” Epilogue.

observation of anniversaries, and the erection of monuments.²⁸ Furthermore, Giesen describes how “memory supports or even creates an assumption of stability, permanence, and continuity” that is established through the preservation of past traumas or triumphs.²⁹ Thus, collectives seek to assign meaning and then memorialize that meaning in order to protect and project a sense of national identity. I use this framework to examine why efforts to commemorate 9/11 began so soon after the attacks. Additionally, several of the authors in the collection wrote about the necessity of sustained public interest in the remembering process, often involving “contestations among politically interested groups over *how* the remembering should take place.”³⁰ Finally, Alexander, Giesen, and Smelser argue that at the heart of collective trauma is the sense that American identity had been fundamentally altered by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

Media Coverage of September 11th, 2001: The Formative Role of Cable News in 9/11

Memory

In my chapter on the ways cable news networks covered and framed the events of September 11th, I relied on Brian Monahan’s study of 9/11 as a public drama to guide my analysis of how and why certain media narratives emerged. In *The Shock of the News: Media coverage and the Making of 9/11*, Brian Monahan demonstrates how cable news networks privilege events that are shocking and emotionally captivating.³¹ Public dramas

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Bernhard Giesen and Jeffrey C. Alexander, “The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2004), 112–54, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pp9nb.7>.

³⁰ Alexander, “Conclusion,” *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*.

³¹ Brian A. Monahan, “Introduction: Understanding Public Drama,” in *The Shock of the News, Media Coverage and the Making of 9/11* (NYU Press, 2010), 3–17, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qgd3m.5>.

are then constructed out of emotionally charged news elements and molded into a coherent narrative.³² Using this framework, I argue that the chaos and confusion depicted on air in the first twelve hours necessitate a narrative that could make sense of the attacks and calm the American people. To further this argument, I drew upon a collection of articles in *Media Representations of September 11*³³ and used their expanded definition of a public drama to demonstrate how news outlets at the outset of the crisis transformed 9/11 into an “ideological tour de force.” I use their analysis of different forms of media representation to examine why certain interpretations and narratives were preferred over others, and how that influenced public consumption and understanding of the terrorist attacks.

Official Responses to 9/11: The Legacy of September 11th in Presidential Speeches

In my chapter on official responses to 9/11, I drew on scholarship about the inaugural genre and the emergence of the “War on Terror” rhetoric to guide my analysis of how presidential discourse ascribed a national meaning to the attacks. Using Mike Milford’s study on “National Identity, Crisis, and the Inaugural Genre: George W. Bush and 9/11,” I analyzed why presidential speeches post-9/11 emphasized universal American values as a way to promote national identity. As Milford demonstrates in his essay, the presidential speeches relied on allusions to freedom and bravery as a way to assuage the feelings of displacement, confusion, and fear that the physical attacks engendered. Another component of my analysis emerged from Stuart Croft’s examination

³² Ibid.

³³ Also referred to as a media spectacle.

of the “War on Terror” rhetoric in his book *Culture, Crisis, and America’s War on Terror*. Croft’s book discusses the emergence of the “War on Terror” discourse and the way it produced through the interplay of government officials and news networks. Croft contextualizes his analysis through the theory of discourse, which argues that “a discourse is produced by government, reproduced and amplified by social institutions.”³⁴ Drawing upon this framework, I argue that 9/11 narratives are produced through the debates on collective memory held by a mix of social and political institutions. Once events have taken on a particular connotation, politicians are then able to wield its symbolic power to achieve political ends.

Commemorating 9/11: Enshrining Memory in the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum

Prior studies of collective memory and 9/11 have fallen into a variety of niche fields, with the largest body of scholarship centered on collective memory and commemoration. The link between the two is clear; the process of memorializing the dead provides an arena for members of a society to reify memory and meaning and embed particular connotations in the physical landscape. These fixed and visible sites in return legitimize the conception of a common memory, one that is shared only by “the people who possessed and rallied around such a memory.” Furthermore, commemorative sites, rooted in a particular time and space, are intended to provide many citizens with a sense of shared national identity regardless of individual differences of class, region,

³⁴ Ibid.

gender, or race.³⁵ Ideas, more than any particular victory or person, are integral in memorials and monuments. It is a discursive and deliberative process, one that both relies on and challenges traditional power dynamics between state and citizen. State officials, as John Bodnar writes, rely on commemoration as a way of promoting “social unity, the continuity of existing institutions, and loyalty to the status quo.”³⁶ In doing so, they advocate for interpretations of the past and present that “reduce the power of competing interests that appear to threaten the attainment of their goals.”³⁷ Thus, public memorials have two very important roles. First, they serve to preserve memory by permanently embedding significant events into the physical landscape.³⁸ Second, public memorials legitimize particular national narratives and collectives over others.³⁹ However, this common narrative, which may appear cohesive, is often the product of intense and protracted battles over meaning fought between state officials and different popular interest groups.

Contestations over meaning in the memorial are one of the primary avenues of collective remembering, which Yadin Dudai discussed. In *Remembering 9/11: Memorials and Cultural Memory*, Erika Doss explains how memorials serve as teaching tools that illustrate “how, and why, cultural memory is created, and how it shapes local and national identity.”⁴⁰ The construction of every memorial is motivated by a complex mix of

³⁵ John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, Reprint edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

³⁶ Gillis.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Gillis, 143.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Erika Doss, “Remembering 9/11: Memorials and Cultural Memory,” *OAH Magazine of History* 25, no. 3 (July 2011): 27–30, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oahmag/oar018>.

individual and social causes and concerns, which result in widespread debates over “self-definition, national purpose, and the politics of representation.”⁴¹ This is especially true in the case of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, where the process of commemoration served as a vehicle for discussions on the ownership of the dead – both the physical bodies and the symbolic meaning they hold.

Museums, while also a key component of the commemorative process, have a very different purpose and structure in comparison to a memorial. In the context of commemorative site, James Young considers the museum to be part of an “interdependent whole, in which neither history nor memory can stand without the other.”⁴² The purpose of commemoration is to both memorialize and inform, to infuse memory into history, so that each directive shapes the other.⁴³ Thus, the museum must provide the historical context that gives weight to the emotional experience of the memorial.

Abstract

From the oval office to town halls, from the television screen to the archive, Americans sought to define 9/11 and its role in American national identity and history. This thesis will focus on the ways collective memory regarding 9/11 was established, the role of elites in memory initiatives that ingrained 9/11 in American national identity, and how collective memory can be used as a political or cultural tool to create national unity.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² James E. Young, “Memory and the Monument after 9/11,” in *The Future of Memory*, ed. Richard Crownshaw, Jane Kilby, and Antony Rowland, NED-New edition, 1 (Berghahn Books, 2010), 77–92, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qd7gv.10>.

⁴³ Ibid.

Throughout this thesis, I will rely on the theoretical frameworks of collective trauma and collective memory to inform and guide my examination. The framework of collective memory lays the foundation for understanding how national memory was built in the days, weeks, and months after 9/11, while the frame of collective trauma illustrates how a “founding trauma” can forge national identity. In the first two chapters of the thesis, I will look at how elites, particularly television news journalists and government officials, shaped popular understandings of 9/11 and repurposed older cultural discourses to give the attacks larger symbolic meaning. In the final chapter, I will examine the process of commemoration in New York’s 9/11 Memorial and Museum, and study how memorializing the dead provided an arena where individuals, the public, and elites negotiated and enshrined meaning.

Chapter Two

Media Coverage of September 11th, 2001: The Formative Role of Cable News in 9/11 Memory

“For those of you just joining us, let me try to put as many of these pieces together as I can, as we stand here in New York.” At 11:15 am EDT on September 11th, 2001, CNN’s new anchor, Aaron Brown, recounted the shocking timeline of events that had riveted the nation for the past two and a half hours. This update was one of the many hundred that occurred throughout the day, monopolizing the screens of domestic and global audiences as the tragedy of the terrorist attacks unfolded. News stations around the world interrupted regular broadcasting with constant coverage of the attacks, eyewitness accounts, interviews with officials, updates on the rescue efforts, and speculations. All of the audio was accompanied by visceral, gut-wrenching imagery – of the second plane hitting the South tower, of billowing smoke at the crash sites in New York and Washington D.C., of the towers collapsing into mushroom clouds of debris, of people panicking and running in the streets. Sirens could be heard in the background of correspondents on the ground, as well as frantic phone calls being made as new reports came in. Nearly all of the main U.S. media outlets experienced some sort of technical difficulties – video fritzing, calls cutting out – which heightened the sense of chaos and confusion that characterized the day. For millions around the world, it was through the television screen that they learned about and experienced the events of 9/11. Thus, it was also through the lens of the media that much of the memory and meaning of 9/11 was initially constructed.

In this chapter, I will detail the ways in which the media created and fed into the dominant narrative and cultural understandings of 9/11 and how it embedded that narrative into American collective memory. I will focus first on how the media established the significance of the attacks, highlighting the rhetoric that was used and media slogans that were developed. Next, I will illustrate how the attacks were construed as a collective trauma, which played an important role in ingraining the attacks in a new reality and collective identity. Subsequently, I will delve into the construction of the attacks as an “act of war,” relying on media scholars’ analysis of the first twelve hours of coverage. Lastly, I will explore how cable news coverage of 9/11 fostered a sense of national unity rarely present in the United States.⁴⁴

Contextualizing Coverage: An Overview of Cable News Networks

In American society, the role of the press has evolved as media commercialized and new technologies emerged. The modern national media landscape began to take shape in the 19th century with the rise of successful national magazines and advertising-based radio and television broadcasting.⁴⁵ As news reached broader audiences with the radio and the television, concerns about fascism and propaganda prompted discussions on the trustworthiness of the media. In the 1920s, political commentator Walter Lippmann published a well-known piece warning that “opinion can be manufactured,” and as result,

⁴⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, I will primarily be relying on recorded footage from CNN, ABC, and CBS, though it is important to note that the television coverage of 9/11 was remarkable for its homogenous representation and use of common images, symbols, and rhetoric.

⁴⁵ “Media and Democracy: Our American History,” The Aspen Institute, accessed May 4, 2020, <https://csreports.aspeninstitute.org/Knight-Commission-TMD/2019/report/details/0285/Knight-Commission>.

journalistic standards of objectivity were required. Out of these concerns, federal laws were implemented in the 1940s and 1950s that delineated certain standards of objectivity and prevented the consolidation of media coverage under single companies.⁴⁶

Unlike journalists, broadcasters needed government permission to use public airways and were subject to more restrictions on what could be presented. From 1949 to 1987, broadcasters were regulated by the Fairness Doctrine, which required stations to “present controversial issues of public importance” and to do so in a manner that was “honest, equitable, and balanced.”⁴⁷ The policy effectively limited the ability of news outlets to promote a political viewpoint; thus, the reversal of this doctrine in 1987 drastically altered the media landscape that would define the news coverage of 9/11.

Another major shift that occurred in the 1980s was led by the Reagan administration, which passed new laws easing restrictions on media conglomerates. Beginning in 1981, the Reagan administration chipped away at regulations preserving the objective, public service responsibility of the news outlets. The Clinton administration later took a sledgehammer to the bedrock of media regulations. In 1996, President Clinton signed the Telecommunications Act, the first major overhaul of telecommunications law in over sixty years. The new law eradicated the 40-station ownership cap and allowed for cross-ownership of broadcast stations and telecommunications, unleashing a wave of consolidations that left the media landscape dominated by a few giants.⁴⁸ The trend towards media conglomeration over the past thirty

⁴⁶ “Moyers on America. The Net @ Risk. Resources. Timeline | PBS,” accessed May 4, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/net/timeline.html>.

⁴⁷ D.L. Jung, *The Federal Communications Commission, the Broadcast Industry, and the Fairness Doctrine 1981–1987* (New York City, N.Y.: University Press of America, Inc., n.d.).

⁴⁸ Moyers, “Moyers on America: The Net @ Risk.”

years is clear. In 1983, 50 corporations predominantly controlled the American media, but by 1992, that number had dropped by half.⁴⁹ By 2000, a mere six corporations⁵⁰ dominated 90% of the media in America and 70% of cable viewership.⁵¹ The rise of massive media conglomerations over the past thirty years inspired fears that the news media would no longer serve in its role as watchdog and offer diverse, dissenting opinions.⁵² These concerns have only increased as a result of the cable news networks' coverage of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Therefore, the consolidation of American news networks under a few corporations helps explain the remarkable singularity of opinions in the coverage of 9/11.

While the shifting media landscape of the 1980s and 1990s laid the foundation for how cable news channels responded to 9/11, news coverage of the First Gulf War permanently altered the way wars and crises are covered. Due to restrictions on overseas ground deployment of war correspondents, a result of Vietnam era policy, CNN was the only outlet broadcasting from inside Iraq when the bombing began on January 17, 1991. While other networks relied heavily on information and imagery provided by the government, CNN was in the unique position to cover events live. CNN's 24-hour coverage was a milestone in television news that permanently shaped the way crises are covered. CNN's coverage of the First Gulf War challenged the traditional model of a

⁴⁹ "Democracy on Deadline: Who Owns the Media?," PBS.org, accessed May 7, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/democracyondeadline/mediaownership.html>.

⁵⁰ The six parent corporations (GE, News-Corp, Disney, Viacom, Time Warner, and CBS) are the overarching companies that individual cable news networks fall under. Later in this chapter I will focus on CNN, a subsidiary of Time Warner, ABC, a subsidiary of Disney, and CBS, a subsidiary of Viacom/National Amusements.

⁵¹ Ashley Lutz, "These 6 Corporations Control 90% Of The Media In America," Business Insider, June 14, 2012, <https://www.businessinsider.com/these-6-corporations-control-90-of-the-media-in-america-2012-6>.

⁵² "Democracy on Deadline: Who Owns the Media?"

morning-evening news cycle and instead introduced a new era of nonstop, constantly updating flow of information.⁵³ Peter Arnett, CNN's war correspondent in Baghdad and likely the most famous reporter of the Gulf War, described the impact of the media's coverage: "For the first time in media history, an event is covered as it unfolds, anywhere in the world... The critics would argue that the traditional gatekeeper role of journalists — to sift through information and present what seems valid in an accurate way — has disappeared with this live coverage."⁵⁴ The introduction of live coverage irrevocably changed the framework in which news was delivered. After the Gulf War, live coverage transformed the news into a constant stream of information that was often coupled with visceral, disturbing images of the crisis. Viewers increasingly relied on anchors to contextualize and interpret the omnipresent images on their screens. In an analysis on the media and the First Gulf War, written a few months after the war had concluded, Stewart Purvis wrote, "People will argue about which was the first 'television war'... I have no doubt that the Gulf was the first war in which the full potential of satellite technology was used, bringing with it new technical and ethical challenges for broadcasters."⁵⁵ Many of the anchors who covered the First Gulf War were the same as those covering the September 11th attacks. ABC's host Peter Jennings, CBS's host Dan Rather, and NBC's host Tom Brokaw were all veteran reporters who led their network's coverage of both crises. Media coverage of the First Gulf War, fought only a decade before 9/11, provided networks with a template on how to respond to a crisis like 9/11.

⁵³ Rian Dundon, "Operation Desert Storm Was a Practice Run in Press Manipulation," *Medium*, March 1, 2018, <https://timeline.com/photos-gulf-war-cnn-effect-press-manipulation-66680a20cf42>.

⁵⁴ *Reporting America at War: An Oral History* (Hyperion, 2003), <https://www.pbs.org/weta/reportingamericaatwar/reporters/arnett/livecoverage.html>.

⁵⁵ Stewart Purvis, "The Media and the Gulf War," *RSA Journal* 139, no. 5423 (1991): 735–44.

Thus, the new era of the ‘television war’ fundamentally shaped the way cable news networks responded to and interpreted the crisis of the September 11th terrorist attacks. In *The Shock of the News: Media coverage and the Making of 9/11*, Brian Monahan demonstrates how cable news networks are now guided by a mentality shaped by profit-maximization and the need to be the first to break a story in a highly competitive 24-7 news cycle. As a result, the entrainment ethos, which privileges events that are shocking and emotionally captivating, has come to replace traditional journalistic norms of objectivity, investigation, and education.⁵⁶ Monahan argues that news networks processed and packaged the terrorist attacks through a frame of “public drama.” According to Monahan, public dramas are constructed out of emotionally charged news elements and then molded into a narrative, with a cast of characters, dynamic plot, and enthralling setting.⁵⁷ In this way, 9/11 was “transformed into a morality tale centered on patriotism, victimization, and heroes.”⁵⁸ In the frame of the public drama, collective trauma is communicated and reinforced through the use of visceral images and stories that depict pain and suffering. Furthermore, as cable news outlets present images of chaos, confusion, and trauma, reporters are pressured to produce a narrative that will contextualize the images on the screen. Thus, the framework of 9/11 as a public drama enhances my analysis of how news networks influenced the construction of memory and meaning after 9/11.

⁵⁶ Brian A. Monahan, “Introduction: Understanding Public Drama,” in *The Shock of the News, Media Coverage and the Making of 9/11* (NYU Press, 2010), 3–17, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qgd3m.5>.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

An Accident?: The Initial Coverage of the Plane Crashes

Unfolding through live footage on screens around the world, 9/11 occurred primarily as a media event, referred to by scholars as a “spectacle of terror.”⁵⁹ Although chaos and confusion reigned in the coverage of the first 12 hours of the attacks, a dominant discourse emerged that there was a clear America “before” and “after” the events of September 11th. By the end of the day, most cable news networks clearly depicted the terrorist attacks as a turning point in American history, and event that fractured traditional notions of national identity and restructured what it meant to be American. Furthermore, The events of 9/11 were perceived as such a “moral shock,” previous meanings and ways of understanding the world no longer worked.⁶⁰ In broadcast news there is regular programing, breaking news, and news events that are so significant, all commercial breaks and unrelated news are suspended to dedicate the full resources of media institutions to the coverage of a single event. That is what happened, starting at 8:46 am, September 11th, 2001. In this context, the entire of focus the media, and thus the entirety of the public who watches or reads the news, was focused on a single unfolding event.

The significance of what had happened became apparent in stages, as anchors compiled more information and the destruction continued to unfold. CNN was the first network to break the news of a plane flying into and hitting the North Tower at 8:49am EDT, followed by CNBC at 8:50am, MSNBC at 8:52am, and Fox News Channel at 8:54am. CNN opened their coverage with the statement,

⁵⁹ Alternately referred to as a “public drama.”

⁶⁰ Ibid.

This just in. You are looking at an obviously very disturbing live shot there, that is the World Trade Center, and we have unconfirmed reports this morning that a plane has crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center. CNN Center right now is just beginning to work on this story, obviously calling our sources and trying to figure out exactly what happened, but clearly something relatively devastating is happening this morning.⁶¹

CNN quickly got on the air with eyewitnesses, in particular Shawn Murtaugh the VP of Finance, who confirmed that he had observed a small commercial jet hit the side of North tower.⁶² Over the next hour, CNN interviewed several other people, trying to deduce whether the plane crash could have been an accident. In one interview, an expert explained that there were no normal flight patterns around downtown Manhattan and that the weather could not have been a factor causing the crash. It was clear in CNN's initial coverage that they were approaching the crash as a possible accident and were hesitant to broach the possibility of terrorism. The likely reasons for this are twofold. First, CNN had a journalistic obligation to confirm reports before making claims and to remain objective and calm in the face of disaster. Second, if the plane crash was a result of terrorism, it would have already been the largest and most devastating terrorist attack in American history. The fear that the crash was purposeful, and the resulting implications of that type of attack, made CNN and other networks like ABC and CBS hesitant to immediately bring up the idea of terrorism. That being said, CNN began to consider the possibility right before the second plane hit, illustrated by an allusion a CNN commentator made to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.⁶³

⁶¹ CNN, *CNN Sept. 11, 2001 8:48 Am - 9:29 Am* (CNN, 2001), <http://archive.org/details/cnn200109110848-0929>.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Up until the second plane hit the South Tower, there was still speculation on whether the first plane crash could have been an accident. However, at 9:02am EDT viewers on CNN saw a second plane crash into the South Tower of the World Trade Center. Since 8:48am, when the first plane crashed into the North Tower, CNN had constant live footage of the two towers on the screen while eyewitnesses described the scene around the base of the towers. CNN did not immediately rollback the video (neither did ABC or CBS), so the anchors initially thought it was an explosion of the fuselage from the first plane that was still embedded in the North Tower. Soon after, the CNN anchor interrupted the eyewitness to play back the video, stating, “Now, one of our producers said perhaps a second plane was involved, and let's not even speculate to the point, but at least put it out there that perhaps that may have happened.”⁶⁴ Within five minutes of the second plane hitting the South Tower, CNN had confirmed the presence of the plane and showed the impact in a clear, riveting, and utterly horrific close shot. This video would be replayed eight times in the twenty minutes after the attack, and trend that continued throughout the day and served to retraumatize viewers.

As the video was replayed, speculation about a navigational accident seemed comically unlikely, and anchors started to describe the plane crashes as deliberate and purposeful attacks, although they did not refer to it as a terrorist attack until President Bush's speech.⁶⁵ ABC's host Peter Jennings, who in general had more emotionally charged rhetoric in his coverage of the events, quickly followed the second plane crash with the statement: “This looks like it is some sort of concerted effort to attack the World

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Trade Center that is underway.”⁶⁶ Jennings’ comment created a sense of more to come, a slightly different sentiment from CNN and CBS’s coverage of the attack, which was more cautious and hesitant to jump to conclusions. That being said, the balance of uncertainty, desire to be the first to report a critical update, and journalistic integrity was a key calculus for all of the news sites. Jennings’ comment turned out to fall short of the full scale of the attack underway. Around 9:40 am EDT, reports began to filter in about a fire at the Pentagon. Soon after, statements came in that symbols of American power all across the nation were being evacuated, including the White House, Treasury, State Department, embassies, Sears Tower, all in addition to evacuation efforts already underway at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Thus, the terrorist attacks were not merely localized events but a cause of national chaos and paralysis.

So What Does This Mean?: Networks Seek to Interpret the Terrorist Attacks

Once it became clear that planes were being deliberately hijacked and used in a concerted terrorist attack on the United States, Americans turned to their television stations to get information and answers. By the evening of September 11, 2001, around 80 million people were watching prime-time coverage of that morning’s attacks.⁶⁷ The most watched broadcast was NBC’s Tuesday night coverage of the terrorist hijackings, averaging more than 22 million viewers from 8 to 11. ABC News averaged 17.6 million,

⁶⁶ *9/11 Attacks: ABC News Live Coverage - Sept 11, 2001 (Part One)* (New York, 2001), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwiM_R9MR2M.

⁶⁷ Lisa de Moraes, “For an Extraordinary Week, Nielsen Puts the Ratings Aside,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 2001, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2001/09/20/for-an-extraordinary-week-nielsen-puts-the-ratings-aside/52bf74fc-af28-4c43-bbd8-d86509843b9c/>.

CBS News 14.4 million, and Fox averaged 5.6 million.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Nielsen Media Research found that in the month of September, an average of over 4.5 million viewers watch CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News's Prime Time coverage (2.75x the level of viewership in August, 2001).⁶⁹ The unprecedented viewership statistics for Prime Time coverage demonstrate the important role cable news networks played in distributing information and meaning regarding 9/11.

As the primary avenue of information sharing in a time of crisis and the bridge between state officials and the public, the media was essential for reinforcing symbols of collective American identity. The lasting changes of the First Gulf War on the way networks covered crises had a massive impact on the way 9/11 was witnessed by viewers. In the years prior to the Gulf War, there were two news segments – one in the morning and one in the evening. Each news cycle was designed to synthesize the important information of the day into highlight reels easily consumed by audiences. After the Gulf War, however, live coverage transformed the news into a constant stream of information that was often coupled with visceral, disturbing images of the crisis. Viewers relied heavily on anchors to contextualize and interpret the omnipresent images on their screens. In a crisis like 9/11, an event that seemed utterly incomprehensible and unimaginable, Americans looked to their respected network hosts to set the tone and define the terms. In this section, I will examine how the news networks embedded 9/11 in a larger historical context and also exacerbated and emphasized the collective trauma of the event.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ "Cable News Prime Time Viewership," Pew Research Center's Journalism Project, accessed May 7, 2020, <https://www.journalism.org/numbers/cable-news-prime-time-viewership/>.

The unwavering media emphasis on the attack immediately established its significance, but journalists went further by directly integrating the attacks into a larger historical and national context. The media, coupled with government officials, immediately situated 9/11 within the larger context of American history, and thus, national identity. In coverage on September 11th and in ensuing weeks, 9/11 was described by print and broadcast media as a watershed moment and a “fundamental reconfiguring of what it meant to be a citizen of the United States.”⁷⁰ The terrorists attacks shattered American innocence and inducted the country into a global history of violence and insecurity, one that America had been remarkably exempt from in its short existence.⁷¹ The interpretation of the attacks as a profound historical moment is illustrated in the rhetoric used by the main anchormen on CNN, ABC, and CBS in the wake of the attacks, particularly in the first twelve hours of coverage. In the article ““America under Attack”: CNN’s Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11,” Amy Reynolds and Brooke Barnett conducted a qualitative study of the first twelve hours of CNN’s coverage of the attacks and found that journalists and sources provided viewers with strong verbal clues about the enormity of the event. They made repeated references to God, the need for prayer and salvation, and often repeated strategic keywords over and over, including: “horrific,” “unbelievable,” “extraordinary,” “freedom,” “justice,” and “liberty.” The keywords, coupled with emotional adages from anchors and witness, established 9/11 as a national tragedy like no other.

⁷⁰ David Holloway, “Mass Media: Throttling the Life from the Republican Fourth Estate,” in *9/11 and the War on Terror* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 58–80, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r1xbz.9>.

⁷¹ Cvek, *Towering Figures*.

Furthermore, government officials that CNN anchors interviewed powerfully reinforced this notion and gave the attacks historical meaning and context. This has not always been the case. CNN war correspondent Peter Arnett described how during the First Gulf War, “you had Stormin’ Norman having a major influence on what Americans were thinking. But you also had Saddam Hussein on CNN for an hour and a half, giving his version of what was happening, and all manner of other people on many other networks contributing to the flow of information.”⁷² The initial coverage of 9/11, however, was remarkable for the way that journalists and politicians converged on a single meaning. News networks relied heavily on government sources and deferred to politicians when it came to interpreting meaning behind the attacks. An oft cited source on many of the networks, New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani described the attacks as “one of the most heinous acts, certainly in world history.”⁷³ U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft reinforced Giuliani’s sentiment, stating that “Today, America has experienced one of the greatest tragedies ever witnessed on our soil. These heinous acts of violence are an assault on the security of our nation. They are an assault on the security and freedom on every American citizen.”⁷⁴ Throughout the day reporters and their sources relied on keywords such as “America” (instead of the United States or the U.S.), “freedom,” “justice,” “liberty,” and visual graphics, such as the flag. Additionally, media outlets employed a variety of slogans, captions, and graphics to brand the coverage of 9/11 and its aftermath. ABC used the slogans “America Attacked,” “A Nation United,”

⁷² Amy Reynolds and Brooke Barnett, “‘America Under Attack:’ CNN’s Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11,” in *Media Representations of September 11*, ed. Steven Chermak Ph.D, Frankie Y. Bailey, and Michelle Brown (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2003).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

CBS used the phrase “Attack on America,” and CNN’s coverage branded as “America under Attack.” *The New York Times* specials that came out in the aftermath of the attacks were titled “A Nation Challenged,” “Day of Terror,” and “Portraits of Grief.” These verbal and visual references served to reinforce American cultural values and foster a sense of national camaraderie that was integral for framing the event as a national turning point.

In addition to framing 9/11 as a historic moment, the media played an essential role in constructing the attacks as a national trauma, rather than a personal tragedy limited to the victims. As Jeffery Alexander’s theory of cultural trauma suggests, collective trauma occurs when “members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever, and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”⁷⁵ When a traumatic event occurs, there is an acute need for representation and interpretation of the event. Representatives of the collective are then tasked with broadcasting symbolic depictions, which Alexander refers to as “claims” that illustrate “the shape of social reality, its causes, and the responsibilities for action such causes imply.”⁷⁶ The claims in turn provide the basis for a feeling of collective trauma, a sense that the values and security that Americans hold so dear have been fundamentally damaged by terrorist attacks.

The media’s construction of 9/11 as a “pervasive and universal trauma” was made possible by the monopolization of attention, discourse, and coverage of the attack. David Holloway argues that broadcast networks “opened 9/11 to universal participation by

⁷⁵ Alexander et al., “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma.”

⁷⁶ Alexander et al.

national and global audiences, even those very remote from New York or Washington.”⁷⁷ By collapsing the traditional distinctions between those who physically experienced the trauma and those who witnessed it, 9/11 was formed as a collective trauma. Holloway contends that “When the World Trade Center towers collapsed, the scale of the audience facilitated by twenty-first-century mass media meant that the event was ‘real’ on the day for millions of Americans, as well as countless billions around the world.”⁷⁸ Viewers watched in horror with the anchors on television as the second plane crashed into the South Tower, and as the towers collapsed a little over an hour later. The shock, confusion, chaos of the moment unfolded on the screen where tragedy took place in real time, and then over and over as clips were replayed throughout the day. This sentiment was captured by exchange on ABC between the host Peter Jennings and a correspondent, Don Dahler, who was at the scene when the first tower collapsed:

Jennings: “Let’s go to the Trade Center again because John, we now have, what do we have? We don’t...it may be that something fell off the building...”

Dahler: “it has completely collapsed!”

Jennings: (*pause*) “the whole side has collapsed?”

Dahler: “the whole building has collapsed”

Jennings: “the *whole building* has collapsed?”

Dahler: “the whole building has collapsed... it just collapsed. There is panic on the streets, thousands of people running up Church Street, which is what I’m looking out on... The whole building has collapsed... The whole building has collapsed...”

Jennings: “this is what it looked like moments ago... my God...”⁷⁹

Jennings was obviously stunned and overwhelmed by what he witnessed and at first, he struggled to comprehend the information that he was receiving. It was clear that

⁷⁷ Holloway, “Mass Media.”

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ ABC, *9/11 Attacks*.

the scale of destruction was immense, and Jennings quickly brought up the likelihood of massive casualties. Scenes of the towers collapsing were followed by visceral footage of debris shrouding the streets as people frantically tried to escape, close-ups on sobbing eyewitnesses, darkness as the smoke blocked out the sun, and shots of injured individuals seeking help from emergency workers. This media format took the horrific imagery of the attacks and made them personal by focusing on the effect on individuals. Jennings later said in a recap for the day that, “in some ways it is a reminder of what happened when the challenger exploded, and the constant repetition of the explosion of the challenger space shuttle just drove into our collective consciousness all across the nation. What we had witnessed together, though were clearly unable to feel in the same way as those who were in the immediate area.”⁸⁰ The construction of 9/11 as a collective, national tragedy was a key foundation for discourse that decried the attacks as acts of war and provided the main justification for a pro-war, patriotic, unified narrative that emerged in the wake of the attacks.

Now What?: How News Networks Constructed a 9/11 Narrative and Shaped

What it Meant to be “American”

On September 11th, there was one question that was being asked on all the news channels: “Now what?” Thousands of lives had been lost and the wake of the planes had left behind a scar, in the form of a smoldering trail of carnage, on the landscape of two of America’s most important cities. Throughout the day, as Americans frantically sought to

⁸⁰ ABC, *9/11 Attacks*.

understand and give meaning to the attacks, news networks quickly began to construct a narrative of America at war, of “America under Attack.”⁸¹ In this section I will analyze how network anchors relied on historical references to past crisis, namely Pearl Harbor and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, to ground their pro-war narrative.

Additionally, I will examine how networks took cues from the government on how they should interpret the attacks. Finally, I will analyze how the networks’ coverage of 9/11 determined what it meant to be “American” or “un-American.” In doing so, I will primarily focus on how networks and government officials worked together to shape collective memory of the attacks and embed a sense of patriotic American identity linked to national unity.

One of the most important narrative elements that emerged in network coverage of the event was the argument that the terrorist attacks constituted “an act of war” against the America and the free, civilized world globally. In Reynolds and Barnett’s study of the first twelve hours of CNN’s coverage, they observed several thematic clusters that created a dominant frame – that war was the only appropriate response to restore the security of the nation and prevent additional terrorist attacks. By establishing the historic significance of the attacks and the collective trauma endured, media outlets could justify the need for a military response. In CNN’s coverage, the word “war” was used 234 times in the first twelve hours and accompanied by comments from officials who solidified the militaristic narrative. According to Reynolds and Barnett, once sources suggested that the attacks were an “act of war,” journalists “began to incorporate that into their questions

⁸¹ Amy Reynolds and Brooke Barnett, “‘America Under Attack:’ CNN’s Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11.”

and their own interpretations of the events.”⁸² In *Journalism after 9/11*, Barbie Zelizer argues that media coverage of 9/11 restructured the meaning of “America” into a body politic prepared for war.⁸³ Additionally, visual cues reinforced this narrative, illustrated through the slogans outlets produced for their 9/11 coverage (“America under Attack,” etc.) and the symbolic images of the American flag.

News agencies quickly interpreted the attacks into a larger narrative of war and America, and American values, under siege. Just minutes after the first tower collapsed, ABC’s host Peter Jennings remarked that while he had no explanation for the events, “Just looking at that... When was the last time the United States was attacked in this fashion – it was Pearl Harbor in 1941.”⁸⁴ References to Pearl Harbor were common and fed into the narrative that the entirety of America was under attack, not just from a small group of now-dead radicals, but from a looming entity, “terror,” that was harbored in countries abroad. Of course, similar to Pearl Harbor, speeches by President Bush and other news anchors portrayed the attacks were seen as completely unprovoked, the actions of “cowards” and “madmen” who despise the United States. Although the role al Qaeda played in orchestrating the attacks was not officially confirmed on September 11, as media coverage of the day unfolded many suspected Bin Laden was behind the attacks.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan, eds., *Journalism After September 11*, 2 edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁸⁴ ABC, *9/11 Attacks*.

⁸⁵ Washington NBC 4, *NBC Sept. 11, 2001 9:12 Am - 9:54 Am* (NBC 4, Washington, D.C., 2001), <http://archive.org/details/nbc200109110912-0954>.

In the media's simplistic coverage, this hatred was not seen as have any logic or basis but was portrayed to the public as an abhorrence for American values – of freedom, liberty, democracy, justice – not for American foreign policy in the Middle East. In addition to references to Pearl Harbor, many news agencies made connections to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, even before the plane crashes were officially proclaimed terrorist attacks. Commentators on CNN asked a witness describing the first crash (before the second had taken place) if she had been in the city when the World Trade Center was bombed in 1993, and after the collapse of the first tower, Jennings on ABC said that, “if it is a terrorist attack... we may have seen the second coming of that plan.” In comparing the attacks to the 1993 bombing, reporters integrated 9/11 into a larger, pre-existing conflict with terrorism. By being seen as part of a larger trend, military response appeared even more necessary and justified.

Additionally, the media shaped American collective interpretations of 9/11 through the use of particular sources, which privileged pro-war framing. Multiple media studies analysis of the initial coverage found that the news agencies relied on a limited range of sources for expert comment and evaluation, giving preferences to institutional figures, almost exclusively from the military, political, and intelligence establishments.⁸⁶ This privileging of sources close to centers of state power placed what David Holloway refers to as a “disproportionate weight on ‘official or credentialed sources,’ and tended to ignore alternative or popular ones.”⁸⁷ Reynolds and Barnett concur with this point, finding that CNN “relied almost exclusively on current and former government officials

⁸⁶ Reynolds and Barnett, “‘America Under Attack:’ CNN’s Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11.”

⁸⁷ Holloway, “Mass Media.”

to provide interpretation of the day's events and to effectively frame what had happened and what would happen as a result."⁸⁸ It became very early on what would have to happen, with the entire nation united behind the president, a mandate for war seemed clear. In *An Anthology of Dissent*, Phil Scraton writes that politicians, and the media, were able to direct the unmoored spirit of grief into a narrative of "vengeance masquerading as the pursuit of justice in defense of global freedom."⁸⁹ Whether it was vengeance or a quest to protect the nation, news networks' discourse in the wake of 9/11 was largely emotional and simplistic. By virtue of their form, cable news networks are not particularly well suited to complex storytelling. In depth exposés into the complicated history of American policy in the Middle East are difficult for anchors used to reducing information into pithy, innovative soundbites. Thus, through the lens of cable news networks, 9/11 was simplified into a morality tale centered on patriotism, victimization, and heroes.⁹⁰ Network news coverage narrowed, rather than broadened, meaningful discourse that sought to explain and internalize the attacks.⁹¹ Thus, the media and government officials worked hand in hand to guide the vital first stages of collective memory development, shaping the public's understanding of what '9/11' signifies and how it fits in to a larger American identity.

In addition to narrowing public discourse regarding 9/11's meaning as an act of war, the media also limited what it meant to be "American" or "un-American" in the

⁸⁸ Reynolds and Barnett, "'America Under Attack': CNN's Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11."

⁸⁹ Phil Scraton, "Introduction: Witnessing 'Terror,' Anticipating 'War,'" in *Beyond September 11*, An Anthology of Dissent (Pluto Press, 2002), 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fs9k4.5>.

⁹⁰ *Mediated Meanings and Symbolic Politics: Exploring the Significance of 9/11 News Coverage* (9/11 Internet Archive, 2011), <http://archive.org/details/911conferenceBrianMonahan>.

⁹¹ Holloway, "Mass Media."

wake of the attacks. In the introduction to this thesis I discussed the political turmoil dividing the nation prior to September 11th. After the 2000 presidential election the rift was starkly clear, there was not only a distinctly divided red and blue electoral map, there were what many referred to as “two rival Americas.” In an article for *Atlantic Monthly* after the election, David Brooks wrote, “These differences are so many and so stark that they lead to some pretty troubling questions... Are Americans any longer a common people? Do we have one national conversation and one national culture? Are we loyal to the same institutions and the same values?”⁹² In this context 9/11 emerged as a powerful catalyst, one that had the potential to engender bitter dissent or historic unity.

The weakness of Bush’s presidency, the failure of the national security apparatus to protect the nation, and the preexisting political division could have caused rancorous dissent to characterize the nation in the months after the crisis. One of the core pillars of American identity is the presidency as a national *paterfamilias*, in other words the president is considered the symbolic embodiment of the nation.⁹³ This integral symbol of collective, national belonging seemed to be threatened on September 11th, with Bush disappearing for hours after the attacks and then stumbling badly during the brief appearances he made in front of the cameras.⁹⁴ When Bush delivered his address to the nation live on TV that evening, his lackluster performance did little to reassure viewers or quell fears that he was incapable of leading the nation through this crisis as commander in chief. Yet despite this, media networks continued to strongly back Bush, arguing that

⁹² Mark Lisher, “Before Sept. 11, A Nation Divided,” *Austin American-Statesman*, December 30, 2001.

⁹³ Holloway, “Mass Media.”

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

his lack of presence was a sign that he was coordinating America's response. CNN provided reassurances, stating that Bush was busy "marshaling all the resources of the federal government."⁹⁵ Other channels echoed this sentiment, and together the media was remarkable successfully in asserting the President's ability to lead the nation, thus preserving one of the critical components of American national identity.

Furthermore, the terrorist attacks could have been immediately condemned as a failure of the national security apparatus dedicated to protecting the country, but instead initial media coverage portrayed that attacks as so incomprehensible, they could not have been prevented. During ABC's coverage, the hosts spent the moments after the collapse of the first tower talking about how the United States had increased preparation in recent years for biological and chemical attacks but had never considered the hijacking of a plane.⁹⁶ Although Jennings was far more critical of the government's response to 9/11 than other commentators, the doubt he raised about the intelligences agencies handling of the lead up to the attack was mild in comparison to the media critiques several years later. Reporters instead constructed the narrative that the attacks were unfathomable to the sane, civilized observers, an unprovoked attack on an innocent nation, that could not have been known or prevented.

One of the defining narrative components that emerged in media representation of 9/11 was the focus on national unity and cohesion that the attacks engendered. The media strongly influenced public understandings of responsibility in the wake of the attacks, championing "a nation unified" and prescribing what it meant to be "American" or "un-

⁹⁵ J. Smith, "Missing a Beat: Story-Making and the Absent President on September 11," *European Journal of American Culture* Vol. 22, no. 2 (2003): 85–102.

⁹⁶ ABC, *9/11 Attacks*.

American” in the context of an attack on the nation. The theme, “a nation unified,” emerged because the sources of authority, politicians, were united across ideological lines. Of course, the assumption that CNN, ABC, and other mainstream news agencies were making was that Democrats and Republicans comprised the spectrum of viewpoints, and if they were united, it meant that the country was united. Sources who were interviewed on the day and the media outlets that were covering them never suggested an option that did not involve supporting the president wholeheartedly.⁹⁷ Powerful video of the members of Congress spontaneously singing “God Bless America” at the foot of the Capital graced many news channels. CNN’s anchor Wolf Blitzer observed that it was “a pointed display of bipartisan unity at this critical moment in U.S. history” that illustrated Congresses commitment to sending “a message of unity during this difficult moment.”⁹⁸ Messaging from officials and media outlets fostered a sense of community, solidarity, and national commonality which is often missing from American politics.

Government officials and the media worked symbiotically to shape collective memory from the outset of the attacks and ingrain a sense of patriotic ‘Americanness’ linked to national unity. The flip side of this narrative is that it made voicing political dissent, arguing for a historical basis to the attacks, and opposition to the president’s agenda “un-American.” Prescriptive patriotism meant that good Americans were required to stand united behind the president in times of crisis, and that solidarity for the victims of the attacks meant support for the government’s course of action. This sense of unity was short lived, however, because it rested on the emotional experience of shared wounds

⁹⁷ Reynolds and Barnett, “‘America Under Attack:’ CNN’s Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11.”

⁹⁸ Reynolds and Barnett.

and a fear of external threat.⁹⁹ Although incredibly powerful when it existed, effectively quelling any dissent against the initial agenda for war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the power of 9/11 imagery faded as the day moved out of the realm of current events and into national history.

Chapter Conclusion

After 9/11, several of the network hosts developed a near celebrity status, still honored years later for their coverage of the attacks on September 11th. Former broadcaster Marvin Kalb, executive director at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, said that, “When something happens that is jarring to the system, and this surely was, you turn to symbols of continuity, of reassurance, and [the network anchors] served that role.”¹⁰⁰ Peter Jennings described how the universal comment he gets in emails thanking him for his role as ABC’s host on 9/11 are praise for remaining calm during the crisis.¹⁰¹ Jennings in just one example, Aaron Brown and Dan Rather are others, of the way journalists themselves became significant witnesses and conduits for the most positive memories of 9/11. During their coverage of the attacks, network hosts stopped saying 'you,' and they started saying 'we' and 'us.'¹⁰² The change to “We are suffering, we are feeling, our country has been hurt,” reflected the level of

⁹⁹ Jonathan Rieder, “Epilogue: Into the Unknown: Unity and Conflict after September 11, 2001,” in *The Fractious Nation?*, 1st ed., Unity and Division in Contemporary American Life (University of California Press, 2003), 248–78, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppp22.19>.

¹⁰⁰ Lori Robertson, “Anchoring the Nation,” *American Journalism Review* 23, no. 9 (November 2001): 40.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

empathy and subjectivity that made the news networks' coverage of 9/11 incredibly powerful for so many people.¹⁰³

In response to questions about 9/11, Americans all across the country often say, “I remember exactly where I was and what I was doing when I found out the towers were hit.” The powerful, national scope of 9/11, illustrated by this message, was largely constructed by media coverage during and after the attacks. Through the lens of the media, American collective memory was molded to fit into key frames. Narrative and cultural understandings focused on the historical significance of the attacks, the experience of collective trauma, the war mentality that emerged, and the national unity that was created. Each of these elements factor into the collective memory of 9/11 and shaped its transition from a current event to a moment in national history. I would like to conclude this chapter with CNN anchor Aaron Brown famous words, uttered at 10:28 am EDT, when the second tower of the World Trade Center collapsed: “good Lord... there are no words.” While Americans across the nation watched the devastation of the terrorist attacks unfold, so too did reporters, and their emotional coverage of the attacks went a long way in embedding the experience deeply into the collective consciousness of the nation.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Chapter Three

Official Responses to 9/11: The Legacy of September 11th in Presidential Speeches

As the head of state, the president is a powerful actor with the authority to mold the meaning of events for the public and situate them within a broader national context. Presidents use speeches as a medium to promote their goals, which can include endorsing policy initiatives or assuaging public fears, and as a way to define and reinforce the essential values that unite their populace. Given the president's role in influencing the meaning of events on a national scale, the president and presidential speeches have a uniquely important role in the formation of collective memory. The three presidents who have served after the September 11th attacks have shaped public interpretations and collective memory of the event in important ways. George Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump stand for widely divergent political views, but their speeches have constructed a relatively stable set of meanings for the tragedy and its relationship to American national identity. Over nearly two decades, they have reinforced the memory of 9/11 as a moment that simultaneously reflected the country's vulnerability and America's exceptional strength, resolve, and unity in the face of disaster. Yet, Trump's use of Twitter has undermined that consistent messaging and introduced new political uses for the past.

In this chapter, I will analyze the speeches of presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump and the way in which each president shaped and utilized collective memory of 9/11. In the first section, I will give a brief overview of the historical context in which the September 11th attacks occurred and the state of the Bush

presidency at the time. I will examine how Bush's speeches after 9/11 promoted a narrative of American exceptionalism in order to restore collective confidence in the nation, encourage unity, and legitimize the country's embroilment in a "War on Terror." In the next section, I will focus on the speeches delivered by President Obama when Osama Bin Laden was killed, and on the 10th and 15th anniversaries of the attacks. In particular, I will ground Obama's framing of the attacks in the context of his political need to appear patriotic and stimulate consensus during a time of increasing polarization and dissent. In the final section, I will focus on how President Trump has challenged Bush and Obama's portrayal of 9/11 and has created new narratives around the attacks to legitimize his anti-Muslim, anti-immigration, "America-first" rhetoric.

President George W. Bush

When the four planes crashed in New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania, there was no set template for government officials to draw upon. The scale of death and destruction was unprecedented. That said, America had experienced frequent acts of terrorism in the 1970s and 1990s. According to journalists at the RAND corporation and CNN, contemporary global terrorism emerged in the 1970s.¹⁰⁴ Over the course of the decade, nearly 9,840 incidents of terrorism were recorded worldwide, and more than 7,000 people were killed in terrorist attacks.¹⁰⁵ By the mid 1970s, airline hijacking and airline bombings worldwide were occurring at the rate of one a month, and by 1978, over

¹⁰⁴ Brian Michael Jenkins, "The 1970s and the Birth of Contemporary Terrorism," RAND Organization, July 30, 2015, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2015/07/the-1970s-and-the-birth-of-contemporary-terrorism.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

a hundred terrorist attacks occurred per year in the United States.¹⁰⁶ As a response to the famous terrorist attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, President Nixon created the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism, an organization that provided the initial framework for the United States' current counterterrorism structure and policy.¹⁰⁷ While incidents of terrorism in the United States slowed in the 1980s, there was a resurgence of attacks and deaths in the 1990s. Rising concerns over terrorism domestically and abroad influenced President Clinton's rhetoric and informed the Bush administration's response to 9/11.

In the 1990s, President Clinton had laid out the foundational elements of what would become the "War on Terror," championed by President Bush. In his 1998 State of the Union address, President Clinton told the nation that, "We must combat an unholy axis of new threats from terrorists, international criminals, and drug traffickers."¹⁰⁸ Much of the rhetoric used by Clinton, in response to terrorist attacks committed on smaller scale against the United States, provided the foundation for Bush's contextualization of 9/11. Both presidents relied on similar elements in their speeches to the nation: the need for decisive intervention, the need for Americans to be resolute towards ultimate victory, and the claim that America was the target of terrorism not for its policy decisions, but for its values.¹⁰⁹ While an all-out war on terrorism did not gain significant traction during

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ In fact, in a memorandum from January 17, 1973, Henry Kissinger and John Ehrlichman described actions taken by the Cabinet committee to Combat Terrorism, one of which included, "Procedures have been updated—conforming with DOT's stiffened anti-hijacking program—for handling international skyjacking activities that involve U.S. carriers flying abroad and foreign carriers using U.S. airports."

¹⁰⁸ William Clinton, "President Clinton's 1996 State of the Union Address as Delivered," January 23, 1996, <https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/WH/New/other/sotu.html>.

¹⁰⁹ Stuart Croft, *Culture, Crisis and America's War on Terror* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511607356>.

Clinton's administration, the terrorist attacks on September 11th fanned the flames and enabled President Bush to use 9/11 to legitimize a broad war in the Middle East.

In addition to concerns over terrorism, there was a fear that America was increasingly fracturing. During the 1990s a different conflict was ravaging American society, the so-called "culture wars," where vehement disagreements on the cultural constitution of America were being fought between conservatives and progressives. James Hunter captured the essence of this conflict in his 1991 book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. In his book, Hunter described how the dramatic realignment of people into two groups, progressive or orthodox, produced increased polarization in American politics and culture. Hunter writes, "Every day presents us with disheartening signs that America is fragmenting," and as a result, "tensions over social issues... are undermining the cohesion of our union."¹¹⁰ There was a perception that Americans were so caught up in division and dissent, little consensus could be reached when it came to important social and cultural issues. The fear of increased polarization and discord in America skyrocketed during the 2000 election, when George W. Bush won a narrow and highly contentious victory over Al Gore. In his first six months in office, Bush had an unusually low presidential approval rating, ranking 9th out of the eleven presidents who had been in office since 1945.¹¹¹ Questions over the validity of his presidency and his low approval rating meant that Bush had no clear mandate to act, or claim to broad support, when the terrorist attacks occurred on September 11th, 2001. As a result, it was important

¹¹⁰ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* ([New York]: BasicBooks, 1991), <http://archive.org/details/culturewarsstru00hunt>.

¹¹¹ Harry Enten, "Six Months In, Trump Is Historically Unpopular," FiveThirtyEight (Subsidiary of ABC News), July 17, 2017, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/six-months-in-trump-is-historically-unpopular/>.

that Bush framed the attacks in a national narrative of American exceptionalism and as an attack on collective American values. In framing the attacks this way, Bush was able to rally the support of a broad coalition of Americans from all points on the political spectrum.

When the planes crashed in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, there was no clear precedent on how the president should act. The only other time in history that America had been attacked was at Pearl Harbor, which was neither part of the contiguous United States nor an attack on innocent civilians. In the chaos and confusion, Bush needed to provide the American people with assurances and guidance, advice that would resonate deeply with all Americans and provide a balm to the pain brought on by a collective trauma. Thus, Bush tailored the meaning of 9/11 to fit into preexisting social frameworks, highlighting shared American values of freedom, justice, liberty, and heroism. Bush's initial speeches not only shaped collective memory of 9/11, but prescribed actions that "proper Americans" would take to honor the memory of those killed in the attacks. Thus, Bush used the collective memory of 9/11, rooted in older cultural discourses, to serve the political purpose of unifying the nation and initiating a global "War on Terror." In particular, Bush addressed the threat posed to American identity and assuaged public fears by promoting a narrative of American exceptionalism. In doing so, Bush constructed a symbolic depiction of 9/11 that became a historical device ingrained in American national memory. In her book, *In the Name of Terrorism*, Carol Winkler writes that when a crisis occurs, the American public "looks to the

president for reassurance that the nation will again be safe.”¹¹² The speeches that President Bush gave in the immediate wake of 9/11 were vital because of the responsibility Bush had to define the crisis and provide a framework for modern collective understandings of the event. In his article, “Our Mission and Our Moment: George W. Bush and September 11th,” John Murphy describes how the President’s rhetorical choices granted him the ability to “dominate public interpretations of the events of September 11th.”¹¹³

Media outlets described 9/11 as the moment where many Americans experienced a “stark discovery of their nation’s vulnerability.”¹¹⁴ Fear and the sense of helplessness felt as a result of the attack was exacerbated by widespread media coverage and contributed to a sense of uncertainty and insecurity.¹¹⁵ In “War Zone: What Price Liberty?: The Clamor of a Free People,” Linda Greenhouse summarized the state of the nation after 9/11: “As the country struggles for its footing in the aftermath of terror, the process of resetting the balance will also be a process of national self-definition.”¹¹⁶ If the goal of the terrorists was to expose the vulnerability of the American people, as president,

¹¹² Carol Winkler, *In the Name of Terrorism: Presidents on Political Violence in the Post-World War II Era* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), <https://www.amazon.com/Name-Terrorism-Presidents-Post-World-Trajectory/dp/0791466183>.

¹¹³ John M. Murphy, “‘Our Mission and Our Moment:’ George W. Bush and September 11th,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6, no. 4 (2003): 607–32, <https://doi.org/10.1353/rap.2004.0013>.

¹¹⁴ Karen W. Arenson, “After the Attacks: The Colleges; For Some, Return to Classes Is Uncertain,” *The New York Times*, September 16, 2001, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/16/us/after-the-attacks-the-colleges-for-some-return-to-classes-is-uncertain.html>.

¹¹⁵ Blaine Harden, “A Day of Terror: Vulnerability; Physical and Psychological Paralysis of Nation,” *The New York Times*, September 12, 2001, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/12/us/a-day-of-terror-vulnerability-physical-and-psychological-paralysis-of-nation.html>.

¹¹⁶ Linda Greenhouse, “War Zone: What Price Liberty?: The Clamor Of a Free People,” *The New York Times*, September 16, 2001, sec. Week in Review, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/16/weekinreview/war-zone-what-price-liberty-the-clamor-of-a-free-people.html>.

it was Bush's responsibility to reassure the public that America was not weak. Of course, the defined purpose of the attacks varied depending on the source. According to Bush in his September 20th State of the Union address, the rationale behind the attacks could simply be framed as an answer to the question "why do they hate us?" In response to this question, he argued that the members of al Qaeda "hate our freedoms -- our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other."¹¹⁷ In essence, the terrorists hated Americans for who they are, as leaders of civilization, as a nation of freedoms, and as a country of equals. In framing the 9/11 attacks this way, Bush erased the historical and political context that gave rise to Islamic extremism. In Osama bin Laden's 1996 fatwa, republished in 1998, he provides a very different explanation for al Qaeda's anti-American views. In a call to Muslims around the world, Bin Laden declared jihad (defensive war) against Americans for their "blatant imperial arrogance;" for their thinly veiled incursions against Muslims under the auspices of the United Nations; for their support of an illegitimate Israeli state; and for the "occupation of Saudi Arabia, the cornerstone of the Islamic world."¹¹⁸ The complex historical background of U.S. involvement and manipulation in the Middle East, which Bin Laden provides as the rationale for terrorist attacks against the United States, was largely ignored by government officials and news networks in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Instead, the Bush administration promoted an alternate narrative that portrayed America as an innocent, virtuous, unsuspecting nation brutally attacked by an

¹¹⁷ George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on the September 11th Attacks" (Oval Office, Washington, D.C., September 11, 2001).

¹¹⁸ Osama Bin Laden, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, ed. Bruce Lawrence (Verso, 2005).

organization of evil and insane people. This portrayal simplified the multifaceted context in which the attacks occurred and allowed Bush to focus more on rebuilding faith in the nation's strength and promoting national unity.

A recurring theme in President Bush's speeches was the threat posed to American exceptionalism as a result of 9/11. One of the founding principles of the nation, American exceptionalism is the idea that the United States and its people are unique and ideologically superior, both politically and culturally.¹¹⁹ In his seminal work *What I Saw in America*, British author G.K. Chesterton wrote, "America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence."¹²⁰ This creed, and the values that go with it – liberty, egalitarianism, individualism – forms the core rationale for the United States' ideological superiority.¹²¹ The concept of American exceptionalism has long been vital in American politics because it "transcends the ideological and partisan divides within the United States and serves to unite Americans around one common identity."¹²² Throughout his speeches in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Bush cultivated the sense of a cohesive American identity predicated on the values of freedom and justice. This identity was then sharply juxtaposed with the evil, tyrannical, and violent character of the supporters of terrorists or any nations deemed un-American. In his State of the Union Address on September 20th, President Bush stated "On September the 11th,

¹¹⁹ Seymore Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/americanexceptionalism.htm>.

¹²⁰ G. K. Chesterton, *What I Saw in America*, Scholar's Choice Edition (Creative Media Partners, LLC, 2015).

¹²¹ Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*.

¹²² Greenhouse, "War Zone."

enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country... All of this was brought upon us in a single day – and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.”¹²³ By embedding the attacks in the context of American exceptionalism, Bush framed 9/11 as an attack on American values, a discursive device that enabled him to tap into a larger sense of collective national identity.

While a heavy emphasis on universal values was important for promoting national identity, framing 9/11 as an assault on American values magnified the feelings of displacement, confusion, and fear that the physical attacks engendered. Although the carnage of the physical attacks was limited to New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania, Bush’s construction of 9/11 as a threat to the American way of life meant that the impact of the attacks extended far beyond their tangible costs. Mike Milford, professor at Auburn University, wrote that, “when such crises occur, they undermine the assumption of supremacy and jeopardize the national identity it sustains.”¹²⁴ The United States was no longer a nation immune to the fears of attack, which had long been a core component of American exceptionalism and national identity.¹²⁵ Bush captured this sentiment in the opening remarks of his Address to the Nation on the September 11 Attacks; “Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist attacks... These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat.”¹²⁶ The fact that 9/11 threatened not

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Mike Milford, “National Identity, Crisis, and the Inaugural Genre: George W. Bush and 9/11,” *Southern Communication Journal* 81, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 18–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794X.2015.1064989>.

¹²⁵ Rieder, “EPILOGUE.”

¹²⁶ Bush, “Address to the Nation on the September 11th Attacks.”

only individual citizens but more generally the American “way of life” explains why 9/11 was quickly enshrined as a defining moment in American history.

As a historic turning point, 9/11 gave Bush the opportunity to shape both collective memory and America’s response to the attacks. To do so, Bush promoted a narrative of American “resolve” that both assuaged public fears and laid the foundations for the “War on Terror.” In his address to the nation on September 11th, Bush acknowledged that the terrorists had attempted to scare the nation into disorder, but he insisted that “This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace... None of us will ever forget this day.”¹²⁷ The effect of Bush’s statement was twofold: First, his reassurances restored a sense of confidence and normalcy that had been fractured in the attacks. Second, Bush’s statement provided the guiding principle with which “good” Americans were meant to respond. “Good” Americans, ones who were resolved, would stand by the president and his course of action, who would tout patriotic narratives of 9/11 and ignore dissenting opinions.¹²⁸ Hillary Clinton, often at odds with the Bush administrations agenda, clearly captured Bush’s sentiment, stating,

“We will also stand united behind our President as he and his advisors plan the necessary actions to demonstrate America’s resolve and commitment... [New York] epitomizes who we are as Americans. And so, this in a very real sense was an attack on America, on our values, on our power, on who we are as a people... I have expressed my

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Reynolds and Barnett, “‘America Under Attack:’ CNN’s Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11.”

strong support of the President... I know that everyone in this body represents every American, in making clear that we are united and stronger than ever.”¹²⁹

From the House floor to the streets of New York, the lack of dissenting opinions was startling. Former radicals from the 1960s, who condemned marionette-like displays of patriotism, displayed the stars and stripes.¹³⁰ One of those radicals, sociologist Todd Gitlin, was quoted saying, “The flag affirms that you belong to a nation that has been grievously hurt, and you want to show solidarity.”¹³¹ Clinton’s speech and Gitlin’s quote illustrate the collective patriotic fervor the fed into national narratives on 9/11.

The national unity that post-9/11 “resolve” produced gave Bush a mandate to pursue military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. In his very first address to the nation on September 11th, Bush began to outline the steps the United States will take to get justice for the terrorist attacks. In this speech, Bush already starting framing 9/11 and the United States’ response to the attacks within the context of a “War on Terror,” stating, “America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism.”¹³² On September 14th, Bush situated the new “War on Terror” in American collective history in order to cement 9/11’s role in a new national narrative. In his speech on September 14th, he states, “In every generation, the world has produced enemies of human freedom... the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time.”¹³³ The idea of a “calling,” which connotes a

¹²⁹ “Sen. Hillary Clinton Post 9/11 Floor Speech,” Clip of Senate Session, Post 9/11 Floor Speeches (Washington D.C.: C-Span, September 12, 2001), <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4594354/sen-hillary-clinton-post-911-floor-speech>.

¹³⁰ Rieder, “Epilogue.”

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Bush, “Address to the Nation on the September 11th Attacks.”

¹³³ Ibid.

responsibility to serve, further reinforced Bush's rhetorical focus on patriotic duty to the nation. Additionally, the framing of 9/11 in the context of a larger history on human freedom allowed Bush to use the collective memory of 9/11 to legitimize war in the Middle East.

Initially a controversial president with a questionable mandate to lead the American people, the outpouring of patriotic support after 9/11 gave Bush the base he needed to initiate wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. From an approval rating of 51% in August of 2001, Bush's job approval rating skyrocketing to a shocking 90% after 9/11, the highest recorded rate of any United States president (See Figure 1).¹³⁴ The nearly universal bipartisan support for Bush extended to the war in Afghanistan. On September 14, 2001, the House unanimously passed H.R. 64: Authorization for the Use of Military Force, a bill that authorized the use of the United States Armed Forces against "those responsible for the recent attacks launched against the United States" (see Figure 2).¹³⁵ The connection between Afghanistan and al Qaeda had been documented by the CIA prior to 9/11, so in light of the terrorist attacks on September 11th, it was clear to the Bush administration that the Taliban regime and al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan should be the United States first target in the new "War on Terror."¹³⁶ The connection to Iraq, however, was much more tenuous. The post-9/11 consensus still remained, however, and Bush was able to use that consensus and the memory of 9/11 to invade Iraq. On October

¹³⁴ Gallup Inc, "Presidential Approval Ratings -- George W. Bush," Gallup.com, January 20, 2008, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116500/Presidential-Approval-Ratings-George-Bush.aspx>.

¹³⁵ Richard Armey, "Authorization for Use of Military Force (2001 - H.J.Res. 64)," Pub. L. No. 64, H.J. Res. 64 (2001), <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/107/hjres64>.

¹³⁶ Gregg II, Gary L. Gary L. Gregg II, "George W. Bush: Foreign Affairs | Miller Center," University of Virginia Miller Center, October 4, 2016, <https://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/foreign-affairs>.

11, 2002, the House passed H.J. Resolution 114 authorizing the use of force against Iraq. Although some of the consensus had eroded in the year since the September 11th attacks, 69% of the House voted in favor of the resolution (see Figure 3).¹³⁷ The success of measures initiating the Iraq War relied in large part on Bush's framing of the Iraq conflict in terms of the 9/11 narrative. In a speech delivered March 17, 2003, Bush explained to the world why America was going to war against Saddam Hussain's Iraq,

“The regime has a history of reckless aggression in the Middle East. It has a deep hatred of America and our friends. And it has aided, trained and harbored terrorists, including operatives of al Qaeda. The danger is clear: using chemical, biological or, one day, nuclear weapons, obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions and kill thousands or hundreds of thousands of innocent people in our country, or any other. The United States and other nations did nothing to deserve or invite this threat. But we will do everything to defeat it.”¹³⁸

The allusions to al Qaeda grounded Bush's defense against terrorism in the horrifying memories of 9/11. Furthermore, introducing the visceral images of terrorists with a nuclear bomb and the destruction they could wreak compounded national anxieties that had begun on September 11th, 2001. The war in Iraq is a clear example of how a president can rely on collective memories and the symbolic meaning of an event to achieve political goals.

¹³⁷ Dennis Hastert, “Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq,” Pub. L. No. H.J. Res. 114 (2002), <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/107-2002/s237>.

¹³⁸ George W. Bush, “Full Text: Bush's War Ultimatum Speech” (Cross Hall, White House, Washington D.C., March 17, 2003), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/18/usa.iraq>.

President Barack Obama

When it comes to analyzing the collective memory of 9/11, it is important to acknowledge the role of hindsight. Memories of a crisis inevitable become bound up with the response to that crisis. In the case of 9/11, it is difficult for Americans to completely separate the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, from the subsequent “War on Terror” and conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. President Barack Obama’s rhetorical use of 9/11, however, demonstrates that collective memory of 9/11 is different from that of the “War on Terror.” Furthermore, speeches during Obama’s presidency illustrate how the symbolic meaning of 9/11 established by President Bush can be used as a political tool for future presidents.

When Obama ran for president in 2008, Iraq remained a defining topic in the opening stages of debate.¹³⁹ Unlike many of his democratic opponents, Obama was one of the few candidates who opposed the Iraq war from the beginning.¹⁴⁰ His criticism of the war was one of his primary campaign platforms, and he was quoted saying, “We continue to be in a war that should never have been authorized... I am proud of the fact that way back in 2002, I said that this war was a mistake.”¹⁴¹ Public opinion regarding the War on Terror had soured in the intervening years between the Iraq invasion and Obama’s 2008 campaign for president. In June 2007, the Pew Global Attitudes Project found that majorities in 32 out of 47 countries polled wanted NATO troops withdrawn as soon as

¹³⁹ Jeff Zeleny, “As Candidate, Obama Carves Antiwar Stance,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2007, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/26/us/politics/26obama.html>.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

possible.¹⁴² This data shows that foreign support for American values abroad was dwindling, and the sacrifices being made to ensure global safety were no longer wanted. In addition to decreasing global support, American public opinion grew more negative as time passed. Polls in October 2001 indicated that 88 percent of Americans favored military involvement in Afghanistan, yet by August of 2009 a CNN opinion poll found that 57 percent of Americans opposed the war.¹⁴³ The change in opinion was even more significant in the case of the Iraq War. According to a Gallop poll in 2002, 53 percent of Americans favored invading Iraq to remove Saddam Hussain from power.¹⁴⁴ By 2008, public opinion had completely reversed, and Obama was elected into office on a campaign promise of withdrawing American troops from Iraq.

At the same time he was campaigning against the war in Iraq and the secret detention facility at Guantanamo, Obama was smeared with accusations that alleged he was not born in the United States and that he was, in fact, a Muslim.¹⁴⁵ The so-called “Birther Movement,” questioned “the status, location, date, legitimacy, and parentage of the president’s birth as a means of racializing and revoking his American identity and citizenship.”¹⁴⁶ In addition to questions about his citizenship, Obama faced conservative rumors that he was Muslim with “jihadi intentions.”¹⁴⁷ A controversial cover on *The New*

¹⁴² Michael Dimock, “How America Changed During Barack Obama’s Presidency,” Pew Research Center, January 10, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/2017/01/10/how-america-changed-during-barack-obamas-presidency/>.

¹⁴³ Paul Steinhauser, “CNN Poll: Afghanistan War Opposition at All-Time High,” CNN.com, September 1, 2009, <https://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2009/09/01/cnn-poll-afghanistan-war-opposition-at-all-time-high/>.

¹⁴⁴ Gallup Inc, “Top Ten Findings About Public Opinion and Iraq,” Gallup.com, October 8, 2002, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/6964/Top-Ten-Findings-About-Public-Opinion-Iraq.aspx>.

¹⁴⁵ Parlett, Martin A. Martin A. Parlett, *Demonizing a President: The “Foreignization” of Barack Obama* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2014).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 123.

Yorker from July 21st, 2008, captured both of these rumors, portraying Barack Obama as a Muslim terrorist and Michelle Obama as a figure resembling the Black Panthers (see Figure 4).¹⁴⁸ While the cartoon, titled “Politics of Fear,” was intended to satirize the conservative conspiracy theories villainizing Obama, many viewers felt it just reinforced negative stereotypes.¹⁴⁹ The *New Yorker* cartoon, and the conspiracy theories it depicts, illustrated larger concerns over Obama’s qualifications. In particular, racialized fears were often encoded in accusations that Obama was “un-American” and “soft on patriotism.”¹⁵⁰ As a result, Obama used his speeches on the anniversaries of 9/11 as a political tool to illustrate his patriotism, reinforce preexisting collective memory of 9/11, and to remind the nation of a time when the American people were united.

President Obama was a renowned speechmaker and his eloquent remarks thoughtfully memorialized the September 11th attacks in ways both similar and different from his predecessor. The rhetorical use of American exceptionalism was fundamental to Obama’s presidency, as it was a powerful way of communicating his patriotism to critics. Obama’s speeches about 9/11 are important because he dealt with three major events during his presidency: Osama Bin Laden’s death; the 10-year anniversary of the attacks; and the 15-year anniversary of 9/11 in the lead up to the 2016 election. More broadly, during his two terms as president, Obama had to deal with the divisiveness of three major crises: the 2008 Great Recession; the War in Afghanistan; and the War in Iraq. As a result,

¹⁴⁸ “‘New Yorker’ Editor Defends Obama Cover,” NPR.Org, July 14, 2008, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92529393>.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Obama's desire to promote a cohesive and confident America made highlighting 9/11 era collective memory and identity an important discursive tool.

The death of Osama Bin-Laden is an important chapter in the legacy of 9/11 and one of the highlights of Obama's presidency. In his speech on May 2, 2011, Obama reported to the nation that Bin-Laden was killed by United States forces in a targeted operation in Pakistan. Bin-Laden death represented the most significant achievement, according to Obama, in the nation's decade long war on al-Qaeda and on terror.¹⁵¹ However, Obama followed his congratulatory declaration with the caveat that "[Bin-Laden's] death does not mark the end of our effort. There's no doubt that al-Qaeda will continue to pursue attacks against us. We must – and we will – remain vigilant at home and abroad."¹⁵² This statement captures the lasting fear and sense of vulnerability that has racked the nation since the attacks on September 11th, 2001. A CBS news poll taken in the week leading up to the 10th anniversary of the attacks, four months after Bin-Laden's death, found that 67 percent of Americans felt no safer as a result of his death.¹⁵³ Furthermore, Obama's statement in May was accompanied by more warnings from the president that al-Qaeda was likely to strike the United States again.¹⁵⁴ The lasting fear created by the shocking attacks has continued to shape American national identity, and as a result, presidential rhetoric.

¹⁵¹ Obama Barack, "Osama Bin Laden Dead" (East Room, Washington D.C., May 2, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead>.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Adam Gabbatt, "9/11 10th Anniversary: America Remembers - Sunday 11 September 2011," *The Guardian*, September 11, 2011, sec. US news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2011/sep/11/9-11-10th-anniversary-america-live>.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Obama's speech regarding the death of Osama Bin-Laden aimed to recreate the national cohesion of the time before the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. While the message of fear was clear in Obama's address on Bin-Laden's death, he also included calls to American exceptionalism to buttress confidence in a cohesive American national identity. Obama describes how on September 11, 2001, "we were united as one American family," and now, ten years later, Bin-Laden's death illustrates "that America can do whatever we set our mind to. That is the story of our history, whether it's the pursuit of prosperity for our people, or the struggle for equality for all our citizens, our commitment to stand up for our values abroad, and our sacrifices to make the world a safer place."¹⁵⁵ This powerful statement is both inspiring and successful at targeting core values that resonate with the American public. Obama's comments paint an optimistic and rosy picture of America a decade after the attacks, one that did not quite match the political reality of the decade. Since 9/11, the nation had become increasingly polarized between Democrats and Republicans and bitter debates between the two sides resulted in standstills on legislation. Bipartisan support for any policy seemed unlikely and partisan divisions created stark discrepancies between Democrats and Republicans on how they viewed the president. For example, an average of only 14% of Republicans approved of Obama over the course of his presidency, compared with an average of 81% of Democrats.¹⁵⁶ As a result of this increasing polarization, Obama highlighted national cohesion post-9/11 in his anniversary speeches as a means of reminding Americans of a time when they were united.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Dimock, "How America Changed During Barack Obama's Presidency."

The 10th anniversary of September 11th was one of the most important opportunities Obama had to reify the nation's collective memories of that day. In a speech two weeks before the 10th anniversary of the September 11th attacks, Obama delivered remarks sentimentalizing the unity that followed the assault; "We were united, and the outpouring of generosity and compassion reminded us that in times of challenge, we Americans move forward together, as one people... So, as we mark this solemn anniversary, let's summon that spirit once more. And let's show that the sense of common purpose that we need in America doesn't have to be a fleeting moment; it can be a lasting virtue – not just on one day, but every day."¹⁵⁷ Obama's speech accomplishes two things; first, it reaffirms a particular depiction of 9/11 by tapping in to the same rhetorical national identity created by Bush in his speeches. Both presidents highlight how the tragedy brought out the best in the American people, focusing on celebrating the heroism and virtue of the nation's people instead of on the carnage and insecurity the event caused. Second, the speech taps into a collective national identity created by shared experience of 9/11. In his speech, Obama argues that acts of national remembrance that speak to the "character and compassion of our people" are a "way to reclaim that spirit of unity that follow 9/11."¹⁵⁸ The "spirit of unity" is illustrative of belief in a shared American identity, regardless of race, religion, creed, or political ideology.

Obama's speech 15 years after the attacks on September 11th captures much of the same sentiment as his speech at the 10th anniversary, but with more of a focus on the

¹⁵⁷ Obama Barack, "Weekly Address: Observing 9/11 with National Service," whitehouse.gov, August 27, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/27/weekly-address-observing-911-national-service>.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

legacy of the event. The annual speeches that occur on September 11th always pay tribute to the lives lost, the sacrifices made, and the acts of heroism performed. Obama's oratory prowess makes his speeches resonate even deeper, as is the case for his speech on September 11th, 2016. This was the last 9/11 speech Obama would give as president and occurred in the midst of a brutally divisive political campaign between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The polarizing campaign exposed deep ideological fractures in American society, which made appeals to unity all the more desirable. In his address to the nation on the 15th anniversary of 9/11, Obama stated that "it is so important today that we reaffirm our character as a nation – a people drawn from every corner of the world, every color, every religion, every background – bound by a creed as old as our founding, e pluribus unum. Out of many, we are one. For we know that our diversity – our patchwork heritage – is not a weakness."¹⁵⁹ While acknowledge that differences exist, Obama asserts that there is a larger identity, predicated on shared heritage, that unites all Americans.

This reminder of larger, collective, American identity takes on even more significance when placed in the context of Obama-Clinton-Trump relations. In the lead up to the 2016 election, Obama had endorsed Clinton and anointed her as his successor. Clinton was a career government official and the Democratic senator in 2001 when the terrorist attacks occurred. She had illustrated her potential commitment to bipartisan unity with her support of Bush in 2001 and 2001. Trump, on the other hand, was one of the most vocal proponents of conspiracy theories accusing Obama of being Muslim and from

¹⁵⁹ Obama Barack, "President Obama, 15 Years after the Attacks on September 11," whitehouse.gov, September 11, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/09/11/president-obama-15-years-after-attacks-september-11>.

Kenya. In 2011, Trump went on Fox News, claiming, "He doesn't have a birth certificate. He may have one, but there's something on that, maybe religion, maybe it says he is a Muslim...I don't know. Maybe he doesn't want that."¹⁶⁰ The frenzy over Trump's comments eventually got to the point that in April 2011, Obama appeared in the White House briefing room to denounce Trump and release the long-form version of his birth certificate.¹⁶¹ Thus, Obama use of the symbol of 9/11 in his 15th anniversary speech signifies the way presidents can use the memory of 9/11 to foster unity in an age of division.

President Donald Trump

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 marked a clear shift in the way presidents have invoked the memory of 9/11 and the way it which it is done. In the traditional speech format, Trump follows the same rhetorical framework employed by Bush and Obama, highlighting tales of American courage and unity in the face of crisis. Trump, however, is not a speech-making president. Unlike his predecessors, he relies heavily on Twitter to communicate his opinions, policy directives, and condemn his opponents. In a comprehensive survey of Trump's Tweeting history, *The New York Times* found that at the beginning of his presidency, Trump Tweeted about 9 times per day.¹⁶² As a result, the Trump presidency has been defined by a near-constant stream of more than 11,000 tweets

¹⁶⁰ Chris Moody and Kristen Holmes, "Trump's History of Suggesting Obama Is a Muslim - CNNPolitics," *CNN*, September 18, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/09/18/politics/trump-obama-muslim-birther/index.html>.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Michael D. Shear et al., "How Trump Reshaped the Presidency in Over 11,000 Tweets," *The New York Times*, November 2, 2019, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/02/us/politics/trump-twitter-presidency.html>.

over the course of 33 months.¹⁶³ It is clear that unlike previous presidents, Trump's main delivery mechanism for his messages has been social media posts, not formal speeches. The difference in content between Trump's official speeches and his tweets illustrates how in his role of a more "traditional" presidential figure he relies on preexisting rhetorical framework, while in his dominate, more authentic discourse on Twitter he repurposes the memory of 9/11 to serve his "America-first" policies.

Once elected as president, Trump's official speech on September 11th, 2017, fell more in line with the rhetoric used by Bush and Obama. Like his predecessors, Trump's speech focused on the image of a united America in the face of tragedy. In his opening remarks, he stated, "When Americans are in need, Americans pull together – and we are one country. And when we face hardship, we emerge closer, stronger, and more determined than ever... in that hour of darkness, we also came together with renewed purpose. Our differences never looked so small, our common bonds never felt so strong."¹⁶⁴ Trump's remarks reinforce the unity narrative that presidents have promoted since September 11th, 2001. Throughout his speech he reinforces the themes of American resolve, strength, unbroken spirit, confidence, and superiority. He heavily relies on allusions to American exceptionalism throughout his speech, presented through his glorified depiction of the American military and comments on how "as we stand on this hallowed ground, we are reminded of the timeless truth that when America is united, no force on Earth can break us apart."¹⁶⁵ For all his faults when it comes to his depiction of

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Donald Trump, "Read President Trump's 9/11 Memorial Remarks," *Time*, September 11, 2017, <https://time.com/4935852/president-trump-9-11-september-speech-transcript-memorial/>.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

9/11 on Twitter, Trump's nationalistic rhetoric lends itself well to perpetrating a national narrative of 9/11 predicated on American exceptionalism .

On Twitter, Trump has broken with presidential tradition to use 9/11 imagery and references not to promote unity, but to stoke division and to legitimize his protectionist, isolationist, America-first policies. Twitter has revolutionized presidential communication in the Trump era and has altered the dynamic upon which the president and the public interact. Unlike traditional forms of new media, Twitter allows users to curate information, report news in real time, and share opinions with a broad swath of the public. While Obama also used social media, Twitter in particular, throughout his campaigns and presidency, he was never as prolific as Trump. As of December 2019, Trump's personal Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump) has more than 67.9 million followers and 47.4 thousand tweets.¹⁶⁶ Trump has been incredibly active on the platform, both during his campaign and since he took office. In doing so, he bypasses the press and formal speechmaking to directly engage with the American public. Given that the tweets that Trump posts to his @realDonaldTrump are considered official White House statements, it is important to analyze his tweets as a form of presidential speech.¹⁶⁷ Trump's tweets both politicizes 9/11 as a campaign issue and lays the foundation for his anti-immigrant policies.

During his 2016 campaign for president, Trump utilized references to 9/11 to condemn his political rivals, particularly Jeb Bush. In a post on December 9, 2015,

¹⁶⁶ Donald Trump, "Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) / Twitter," Twitter, accessed May 10, 2020, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump>.

¹⁶⁷ Samantha Briggs, "The Freedom of Tweets: The Intersection of Government Use of Social Media and Public Forum Doctrine," *Columbia Journal of Law and Social Problems*, 2019, 38.

Trump wrote, “@ray_aub @nytimes @CNN People forget that the policies of leaders like @JebBush allowed 9/11 killers to immigrate, drive, & pilot planes.”¹⁶⁸ While Trump’s comment addresses the governmental oversights that left the nation vulnerable to the terrorists attacks, he does so not to advocate for a stronger America in the aftermath of its mistake but to mock a political rival. Instead of reflecting on the severity and solemnity of the 9/11 attacks, Trump made petty comments on Twitter. In a tweet on October 16, 2015, he wrote, “@JebBush, At the debate you said your brother kept us safe – I wanted to be nice & did not mention the WTC came down during his watch, 9/11.”¹⁶⁹ By blaming George W. Bush for 9/11 and failing to do his primary job as president, Trump promoted blame, division, and anger against establishment politicians, instead of encouraging a narrative of national unity and resolve.

One of Trump most notable campaign promises was to protect America from terrorism by limiting immigration. Trump stoked anti-Muslim sentiment when we retweeted a report about “swarms” of celebrators in Jersey on September 11th.¹⁷⁰ In November of 2015, he had claimed he “watched the World Trade Center go down” and also watched in New Jersey as “thousands of people were cheering as the building was coming down.”¹⁷¹ Yet factfinders in the wake of Trump’s claims found no evidence that any such event in New Jersey occurred and multiple news outlets, police reports, and politicians all stated that it never happened.¹⁷² The case of the alleged 9/11 celebrators in

¹⁶⁸ Donald Trump, “@realDonaldTrump Twitter Archive,” Twitter, October 16, 2015.

¹⁶⁹ Donald Trump, “@realDonaldTrump Twitter Archive,” Twitter, December 9, 2015.

¹⁷⁰ Donald Trump, “@realDonaldTrump Twitter Archive,” Twitter, December 3, 2015.

¹⁷¹ Tal Kopan, “Donald Trump’s 9/11 Celebration Claim Widely Disputed - CNNPolitics,” CNN.com, November 24, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/11/23/politics/donald-trump-new-jersey-cheering-september-11/index.html>.

¹⁷² Ibid.

New Jersey illustrates the pitfalls of Trump's twitter. Official government statements are assumed to be factually correct representations of events shared with the general public. Trump's twitter posts, which chronically contains factually incorrect or unverified statements, misrepresents events and as a result, distorts public opinion. The purpose of this distortion is to provide legitimacy to his presidential agenda of limiting immigration and promoting "America-first." By fueling anti-Muslim sentiment in his tweets, Trump aims to shift public opinion in his favor. The political purpose of Trump's new 9/11 narrative became clear on January 27, 2017, when Trump signed an Executive Order banning foreign nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries from visiting the country for 90 days, suspended entry to the country of all Syrian refugees indefinitely, and prohibited any other refugees from coming into the country for 120 days.¹⁷³ The order sparked a contentious debate, where opponents accused Trump of being unconstitutional, racist, and un-American.¹⁷⁴ From the outset Trump saw the travel restrictions as a "Muslim Ban," which would "suspend immigration from areas of the world when there is a proven history of terrorism."¹⁷⁵ The original version of the ban, which Trump developed in 2015 and 2016, was explicitly intended to be law preventing Muslims from entering the country.¹⁷⁶ While it eventually evolved into a territorial ban because of constitutional objections to a religious-based ban, the sentiment behind

¹⁷³ "Timeline of the Muslim Ban," ACLU of Washington, May 23, 2017, <https://www.aclu-wa.org/pages/timeline-muslim-ban>.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ David J. Bier, "A Dozen Times Trump Equated His Travel Ban with a Muslim Ban," *Cato Institute*, August 14, 2017, sec. Cato at Liberty, <https://www.cato.org/blog/dozen-times-trump-equated-travel-ban-muslim-ban>.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

Trump's travel ban remained the same. Trump's manipulation of the memory of terrorist attacks to stir anti-Muslim sentiment and influence immigration policy demonstrates the way Trump has drastically shifted how presidents interact with and use collective memory of 9/11.

Chapter Conclusion

It has been nearly two decades since the terrorist attacks stole thousands of innocent American lives. Three different presidents have occupied the Oval Office, the American people have been embroiled in two-decade long wars, and government agencies spy on American citizens in the hopes of preventing another act of terror. In that time, the presidents have played a vital role in shaping collective memory of 9/11, fostering a national narrative that captures the remarkable solidarity, bravery, and ideological superiority of the American people. After 9/11, Americans of all walks of life, all political parties, came together under one nation, under one flag. President Bush and Obama focused on national unity in their speeches on 9/11, respectively creating and perpetrating the symbolic meaning of 9/11. Once meaning had been assigned, both presidents utilized collective memory of 9/11 to serve a tool to meet their political needs. Trump, on the other hand, represents how meaning is not fixed, and can be reconfigured to fit new contexts and serve new political ends. For Trump, the memory of 9/11 helps to legitimize his anti-Muslim, anti-immigration, "America-first" rhetoric. The analysis of Bush, Obama, and Trump illustrates how presidents play an essential role in shaping the memory and meaning of 9/11 for generations to come.

Chapter Four

Commemorating 9/11: Enshrining Memory in the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum

When the towers collapsed, one of the most iconic symbols of New York and America was destroyed amongst the rubble. The World Trade Center was not only a potent cultural symbol but a major industrial hub in the center of downtown New York. Each tower, 110 stories tall, provided almost ten million square feet of office space for 35,000 people and 430 companies.¹⁷⁷ Around 70,000 tourists and commenters visited the WTC complex every day.¹⁷⁸ September 11th became a day that will always have particular connotations of national unity, collective trauma suffering, and resilience. However, as time passes, the immediacy of that trauma and the intimate memory of it becomes more distant. Over time, first-hand experiences by those living at the time of the event, became history, a much more distant and abstract form of remembering. Knowing this, state officials employed architects and designers to create memorials that will communicate the emotions of the contemporary societies to its descendants. The planners orchestrating the rebuilding of Ground Zero had to balance diverse stakeholders with competing claims to the memory and meaning of 9/11 with the state's goal of promoting national values and ideals. Additionally, the master plan for Ground Zero had the challenging responsibility of commemorating the dead while also rebuilding a space for the living.

¹⁷⁷ "World Trade Center History | National September 11 Memorial & Museum," National September 11 Memorial & Museum, accessed May 10, 2020, <https://www.911memorial.org/learn/resources/world-trade-center-history>.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

In the first section of this chapter, I will examine how major developments in the practice of commemoration, looking at World War II memorials and the Vietnam Veterans memorial, influenced the design of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. In the second section, I will focus on the development of the memorial at Ground Zero and analyze how contentious public debates on the direction and design of the memorial served as avenues for collective remembering. Additionally, I will examine how the memorial provided both an interpretive framework and key lessons that shaped the narrative promoted at the 9/11 museum. In the third and final section of this chapter, I will demonstrate how competing official and popular interests, practical concerns, and issues of collective memory came to a head in the proposal for a cultural center on Ground Zero. The first half of this section will be dedicated to examining the reasons behind the failure of the International Freedom Center, while the second half will focus on how the 9/11 Museum personalized collective memory and initiated a perpetual process of commemoration.

Contextualizing Commemoration: An Overview of World War II Memorials and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Monuments are the intersection where public art meets national memory and, over time, they have reflected evolving aesthetic, cultural, and political views. Modern forms of memory and memorial structure arose during the French and American revolutions, when citizens sought to reject past notions of aristocracy and hierarchy and instead design a radically new democratic future and a radically new style of commemoration. The pompous, ostentatious and heroic monuments dedicated to individuals largely faded

during the revolutionary era, because in the new democratic societies this memorial style was no longer capable of commemorating nationally significant events. Liberal republics, founded upon the principles of self-governance, were the antithesis of the monarchical forms of memorization. While hierarchical nations could easily impose upon their subjects a narrative about the past, republics must incorporate different constituents who all have their own version of history that they hope will be the basis of national memory.¹⁷⁹ In a famous 1943 essay entitled “Nine Points on Monumentality,” Sert, Leger, and Giedion argue that “Monuments are...only possible in periods in which a unifying consciousness and unifying culture exist.”¹⁸⁰ In America, like in other modern countries, there is certainly no permanent form of consensus. Thus, modern societies rely on the “rhetoric of monumentality” and a sort of “pseudo-monumentality” that strives to protect and pass on common values and ideals.¹⁸¹ Young argues that “the more fragmented and heterogeneous societies become, it seems, the stronger their need to unify wholly disparate experiences and memories with the common meaning seemingly created in common spaces.”¹⁸² Thus, a monument, embedded in physical, shared space, creates and furthers the illusion that there is a collective memory dependent on collective remembering of the past.

¹⁷⁹ Gillis, *Commemorations*.

¹⁸⁰ Joan Ockman, “Architecture Culture 1943-1968,” *Columbia University School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation* Columbia Books of Architecture (March 14, 2005): 25–30.

¹⁸¹ Young, “Memory and the Monument after 9/11.”

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

WWI memorials were aesthetically, conceptually, and physically different from anything that had come before.¹⁸³ The new era began in January of 1915, when recording and registering the dead became a state responsibility in a way it had not been before.¹⁸⁴ Once the war was over the memorializing process began, a new memorial tradition arose where monuments revolved around large panels with the inscription of soldiers' names.¹⁸⁵ At the same time, minimalist valleys of white cross grave markers served a unique form of memorialization that had important public and private significance.¹⁸⁶ These national cemeteries, often built on the site of major battles, visually illustrated the sheer scale and numbers of dead and recognized sacrifice for the sake of the nation. These men were buried together, despite their different religious, regional, or ethnic backgrounds, because they were united in a common purpose, moment in history, and will forever be remembered in the national framework of service to one's country. Prior to the war, memorials were most often built to commemorate victory, but after WWI memorials are often created to honor collective suffering. These new memorials had to provide a space for collective grieving, a way for citizens to process and overcome the cultural trauma of war.¹⁸⁷ The democratization of memorialization, in the form of the names engraved in WWI monuments, and the blend between public and private

¹⁸³ David Cressy, "National Memory in Early Modern England," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis, Reprint edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 61–73.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas W. Laqueur, "Memory and Naming in the Great War," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis, Reprint edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 150–65.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Note: Not all were white crosses, some had the Star of David for Jewish soldiers who died or a dome for Muslim soldiers who died.

¹⁸⁷ Elizabeth Giddens, "'Memorials and the Forgotten: When Memorials Outlast the Sentiment Behind Them,'" *The New York Times*, September 2, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/nyregion/when-memorials-outlast-the-sentiment-behind-them.html>.

monument are important factors that continue into the post-national phase of commemoration and eventually the 9/11 memorial process.

Another revolution in commemoration occurred in the 1960s with the birth of the anti-monument movement, in which advocates rejected the traditional notion of a monument as a site of ritualized and institutionalized memory. The drastic aesthetic and epistemological changes in commemoration emerged out of a shift towards embedding remembering in everyday life.¹⁸⁸ In America, unprecedented upward and outward mobility made people feel like they were losing touch with the past.¹⁸⁹ Monuments, memorials, and museums were essential in counteracting the feelings of isolation and rootlessness because they fostered a sense of collective identity, a shared history, that all Americans could fit themselves within. Memorials inspired by the anti-monument movement aimed to bridge the gap between “the past and present, between memory and history.”¹⁹⁰ At the same time, these modern memorials aimed to incorporate the competing claims to history that often divide any attempt at a single national narrative.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, an influential ideological predecessor to the 9/11 Memorial, is considered by many scholars to be the first and best American post-national monument. The memorial, designed by Maya Lin, was deeply contested and wracked by conflicting official and vernacular interests. Defenders of the nation-state, including state officials and citizens inspired by patriotic duty, wanted to use the memorial as a device to foster national unity and patriotism after a particularly bloody

¹⁸⁸ Gillis, *Commemorations*.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

and divisive conflict.¹⁹¹ At the same time, the dominant voice in memorial project was that of the ordinary people directly impacted by the war: veterans, family members, and their loved ones.¹⁹² According to John Bodnar, non-state interest groups, such as grieving families, “convey what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like. Its very existence threatens the dogmatic and timeless nature of official expressions.”¹⁹³ Lin’s memorial, designed in 1981, combines elements of classical American design and minimalism with the Great War memorial style.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, the memorial rejected typical displays of patriotic symbolism to focus on pure form.¹⁹⁵ At the time, the memorial created a massive amount of controversy with many defenders of the nation state feeling that the memorial was an insult and a failure.¹⁹⁶ Yet, in the nearly 40 years since the construction of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Maya Lin’s design has largely been considered one of the greatest successes in memorialization.

The complexities and tensions of contemporary commemoration occurs because the need for a unified understanding of the past is at odds with the modern belief that the past is never has just one meaning. The stylistic complexities of memorialization are one of the main arenas where competing official and vernacular interests, practical concerns, and issues of collective memory come to a head in the wake of 9/11.

¹⁹¹ John Bodnar, “Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis, Reprint edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 74–89.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Adam Gopnik, “Stones And Bones: Visiting the 9/11 Memorial and Museum,” *The New Yorker*, July 7, 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/07/07/stones-and-bones>.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Creating the 9/11 Memorial: The Contested Process of Attributing Meaning to a Tragedy

In the wake of the attacks, there were two integral and opposing jobs that state and local officials had to contend with. On the one hand, officials in New York needed to create a quasi-national memorial that would memorialize collective memory of 9/11 and honor the 2,977 lives lost in the terrorist attacks on September 11th. On the other hand, the attacks had destroyed New York's prime commercial center, and officials needed to replace the former WTC with a new commercial hub that could serve the business needs of the city. Complicating these obligations were a variety of public interest groups who all had a stake in the site and the commemoration process. There was complex array of local, state, and federal officials leading the process (see Figure 1) and different designers and contractors for and within each element of site. All of these bodies had to take into consideration the views of the different coalitions of survivors and victims' families, advocates for first responders, and the business community. Public needs, both commercial and political, conflicted with the complex cultural and private emotional needs to memorialize the attack. In this section, I will focus on the development of the memorial at Ground Zero and how the process of commemoration served as the nation's first attempt at interpreting collective memory and capturing it in a tangible site. First, I will examine the role of contentious debates over the direction and design of the buildings at Ground Zero and how these debates served as avenues for collective remembering. Second, I will analyze how the memorial provided a framework that shaped the narrative promoted at the 9/11 museum. While the memorial did not

permanently set either the memory or meaning of 9/11, it did offer frames of understanding that continue to hold power for new generations.

When the debris and wreckage had finally been cleared from the site of the former World Trade Center, officials relied on the existing frameworks of past memorials in their process of commemorating 9/11. Throughout 2002, many public forums met to debate the proper course of action, while at the same time officials at the Lower Manhattan Development Company (LMDC) and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey determined a shortlist of architectural, planning, and engineering teams for the concept studies of the WTC site.¹⁹⁷ Six designs from the shortlist were selected by Beyer Blinder Belle and reviewed in a public forum on July 20, 2002. This town hall meeting, called “Listening to the City,” was attended by over 4,000 people.¹⁹⁸ This meeting included a wide variety of people, from schoolteachers to professional planners to family members of the victims, all invited to engage with the memory of 9/11 and how they wanted it to manifest in a piece of commemorative urban design. In ten-person tables, they listened to and debated the presentations of the first-round of proposed master plans for the WTC site and rejected them all.¹⁹⁹ Each of Beyer Blinder Belle’s plans aimed to please all of the disparate stakeholders, and in doing so, the designs failed.

A vast majority of stakeholders accused the initial plans of perverting the sanctity of the Ground Zero site by doing too much to rebuild the land and not enough to honor the dead. Out of the people who rejected the plans, the most vehemently opposed were

¹⁹⁷ Suzanne Stephens, *Imagining Ground Zero: The Official and Unofficial Proposals for the World Trade Center Site* (Rizzoli, 2004).

¹⁹⁸ Stephens.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

the families of 9/11 victims. Many of the families of the 9/11 victims regarded the sixteen-acre WTC site as a sacred burial ground of sorts, the last resting place for victims of a horrifying tragedy. During the memorial competition, family members spoke in favor of “providing a memorial that would not only take into account the need to appropriately commemorate both the devastation and heroism of September 11 but would also reflect their personal needs for memorialization.”²⁰⁰ This sentiment is best captured by Anthony Gardner’s statement, written on the behalf of the Coalition of 9/11 Families, that states:

We and the tens of thousands of supporters who fought for this memorial did so, not because we wish to turn these few acres in Lower Manhattan into a cemetery or convert the site into one of enduring sadness. We did so because of our unshakable belief that this is Sacred Ground, that the truth should be told there, and that the core values of our nation will be demonstrated by the lives remembered, the deeds done and the spirit reawakened.²⁰¹

This statement beautifully illustrates how Ground Zero is both a place of personal memory, but the site of cultural memory for millions of Americans and citizens around the world. Although many families felt that the entire sixteen-acre site should have a “sacred quality,” that was challenging given New York’s commercial needs. Thus, while the needs of family members influenced the deliberation when it came to the future of the site, they had to compete with the requirements of the site to promote commerce, culture, and commemoration.

After the initial set of designs were rejected, the LMDC and the Port Authority called for an “Innovative Design Study” that would produce a novel master plan that could address some of the tensions in the memorial process. On September 26, 2002,

²⁰⁰ Linda Levitt, “Speaking Memory, Building History,” *Radical History Review*, no. 111 (Fall 2011): 65–78, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1268704>.

²⁰¹ Anthony Gardner, “Family Member Group Response to the Removal of the IFC,” Take Back the Memorial, September 29, 2005, web.archive.org/web/20050930212938/http://takebackthememorial.org.

seven finalists were announced and on February 4, 2003, the finalists were narrowed down to two designs, that of Daniel Libeskind's "Memory Foundations" and of THINK team's "World Cultural Center." When the innovative designs of the master plan finalists were released, some believed that the "whole thing was a memorial" because both designs had such prominent memorial elements.²⁰² One example of this is Libeskind's 1,776 foot tall "Freedom Tower," which was clearly designed to prove America's resilience and ability to rebuild after the attacks.²⁰³ While some felt that these elements were enough to satisfy the commemorative needs of 9/11, The LMDC, however, recognized that there was a need for a designated, official memorial. James Young commends the LMDC's commitment, writing "as tempting as it may be to allow the new building complex to serve as a de-facto memorial, the conflation of re-building and commemoration would also foreclose the crucial process of memorialization, a process... essential to both memory and redevelopment."²⁰⁴ Memorialization enabled the process of collective remembering that was necessary to construct a narrative and meaning for 9/11. Furthermore, collective remembering, demonstrated in the debates over plans for Ground Zero, illustrated how contestations between narratives shaped collective memory in the years after the attacks.

Throughout the debates on plans for Ground Zero, two main perspectives emerged. One perspective, championed by a group of the victims' family members, argued that the entire 16-acre site of Ground Zero should remain empty and devoid of

²⁰² Young, "Memory and the Monument after 9/11." 88.

²⁰³ Jay D. Aronson, *Who Owns the Dead?: The Science and Politics of Death at Ground Zero* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).

²⁰⁴ Young, "Memory and the Monument after 9/11."

any redevelopment. While many members of the public disagreed that the entire site should remain empty, most felt that some form of emptiness was needed to authentically capture the emotion and meaning of 9/11. Artist Shirin Neshat summarized this sentiment, remarking, “In order to remember the loss of lives, you need a certain amount of emptiness. If you build, it’s like you’re covering up the tragedy and [people] will forget it.”²⁰⁵ Joel Shapiro, whose sculpture *Loss and Regeneration* (1993) is located at the entrance to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., echoed Neshat’s statement: “I think leaving the space empty would be the most effective remembrance. It’s like Berlin. You see the devastation...and that’s much more potent than any stupid monument you could build, because you have this real sense of what happened.”²⁰⁶ In essence, if the land was left completely empty, it could act as a memorial, representing the scar and void in both the city and the American psyche. Thus, advocates of this narrative aimed to embed the memory of 9/11 as a collective trauma into the physical landscape of Ground Zero and use the emptiness of the site as a visceral reminder for future generations.

This perspective, however, was in direct contrast to those who viewed building a massive memorial as a roadblock to the city’s need for renewal and economic recovery. There was another perspective shared by many in the community, including both members of the business community and victim’s families, that the best way to memorialize the attack would be to rebuild the original skyscrapers.²⁰⁷ A collection of

²⁰⁵ Doss, “Remembering 9/11.”

²⁰⁶ Erika Doss, “Remembering 9/11.”

²⁰⁷ Young, “Memory and the Monument after 9/11.”

New Yorkers interviewed in January of 2002 expressed this sentiment. A police officer directing traffic at the perimeter of Ground Zero told a reporter that the towers should be rebuilt, otherwise the terrorists would be “getting the best of us.”²⁰⁸ Another interviewee said that he supported the idea of rebuilding the Twin Towers for the symbolism, the idea that “We’re America. We’re strong.”²⁰⁹ The artist James Turrell captured another side of this perspective, stating, “I feel we should rebuild... The new buildings should be higher than the old ones... We should not feel bad about building on top of the ashes. All cultures are built on top of earlier cultures.”²¹⁰ Advocates in favor of rebuilding contextualized their arguments in a nationalistic 9/11 narrative predicated on proving that the nation remained strong in the wake of the attacks. In this sense, redeveloping Ground Zero with an assortment of skyscrapers would prove to the world that America was even bigger and better than it was before the terrorist attacks. This perspective, of course, completely contradicted the point of view of advocates who favored leaving Ground Zero empty. As a result, designers needed to find some way to balance rebuilding with commemoration and do so in a way that addressed the competing perspectives on the site.²¹¹

In 2002-2003, the LMDC decided to host a memorial competition that would both prescribe certain kinds of memory to be preserved while allowing the aesthetic and architectural approach to be chosen by the applicants. A committee of Advisor Council

²⁰⁸ Douglas Quan, “Visions for Ground Zero: Return of the Twin Towers? Or a Vast Memorial? Designers across the U.S. Wade into the Debate over the Future of Ground Zero,” *The Ottawa Citizen* Jan. 2002 (2002): B4.

²⁰⁹ Quan.

²¹⁰ Doss, “Remembering 9/11.”

²¹¹ Young, “Memory and the Monument after 9/11.” 88.

members and hand-picked professions and experts in public, appointed by members of the Families Advisory Council and the LMDC, crafted a ‘Memorial Mission Statement’ that served as a guiding order for the memorial. The final version of the ‘Memorial Mission Statement’ is included below:

- Remember and honor the thousands of innocent men, women, and children murdered by terrorists in the horrific attacks of February 26, 1993 and September 11, 2001.
- Respect this place made sacred though tragic loss.
- Recognize the endurance of those who survived, the courage of those who risked their lives to save others, and the compassion of all who supported us in our darkest hours.
- May the lives remembered, the deeds recognized, and the spirit reawakened be eternal beacons, which reaffirm respect for life, strengthen our resolve to preserve freedom, and inspire an end to hatred, ignorance and intolerance.²¹²

By the time the design submission period closed, the committee had received 13,800 registrations from 92 countries around the world and every state except Alaska.²¹³ The immense outpouring of submissions illustrates the profound importance of 9/11 not only in America but also the world. In the end, it came down to which design made the best memorial. Jurors picked Michael Arad and Peter Walker’s design because it embodied the feelings of loss and absence felt by the nation in response to horrific destruction of the World Trade Center and staggering loss of innocent lives. The footprints of the towers, two large voids containing recessed pools, communicates the feeling that the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, left a permanent scar on both the American landscape and psyche. The surface of the memorial plaza is graced with rows of Sycamore trees, informal clears and groves that are meant to facilitate a sense of a

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

living memorial. The memorial plaza, marked by the cycle of natural rebirth and public spaces, is designed to integrate into “the fabric of the city, the plaza encourages the use of this space by New Yorkers on a daily basis. The memorial grounds will not be isolated from the rest of the city; they will be a living part of it.”²¹⁴ The combination of a formal memorial, that creates memory to be passed onto the new generation, and a living memorial, that provides individual spaces for memory within collective spaces, powerfully broaches the difficult task of memorialization in modern society.²¹⁵

The memorial itself is contained in the sacred ground below the surface of the plaza, where a band of victim’s names encircles the base of the pool. Ramps that border each void lead down to memorial spaces removed from the chaotic and everyday urban landscape on the surface. Once underground, the enormity of the space and of the pools but into perspective the vast scope of the destruction that occurred when the two monumental skyscrapers collapsed.²¹⁶ A thin curtain of water and reflective sheets give off the illusion that the ghost of the towers is still there travelling down into the bedrock. The water flowing into an unknown abyss challenges the traditional static nature of monuments and creates a sense of motion which illustrates memory is not frozen or fixed.²¹⁷ The voids left behind by the destruction of the twin towers are the primary symbols of loss in the memorial, meant to preserve the sense of emptiness that best captures the hollow, traumatic memories of the site. The dynamic nature of the memorial is further accomplished by the way visitors move into, though, and out of the site.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Young, “Memory and the Monument after 9/11.”84.

²¹⁶ Young, “Memory and the Monument after 9/11.”88.

²¹⁷ Young, “Memory and the Monument after 9/11.”84.

Visitors must engage with the memorial instead of just observing it from afar, and the experience imbues personal memory to the collective memory enshrined in the site.

Additionally, Arad and Walker argue that “standing there at the water’s edge, looking at a pool of water that is flowing away into an abyss, a visitor to the site can sense that what is beyond this curtain of water and ribbon of names is inaccessible.”²¹⁸ Thus, the memorial balances the need to commemorate and enshrine 9/11 in America’s national history while also recognizing that different people will have different relationships to the tragedy.

Arad and Walker decided to engrave the names of the victims of the 9/11 attacks on the memorial in order to balance the need for a national memorial and a private grave marker. The blend of a public and private monument complicates the creation of a single collective memory of the attacks. On the one hand, the list of names means nothing, are merely a random collection of strangers that most visitors would never have met or known in their lifetime. On the other hand, the names of all these strangers joined together represents a larger narrative. Together, these innocent strangers embody America as a whole. They represent the immense diversity, in race, religion, ethnicity, and even nationality, of America. Regardless of whether the victims identified as American, they are forever part of the nation’s history and collective memory. The people who died on September 11th are remarkable because they were ordinary citizens mercilessly killed in attack on America. The attacks were not targeted, they were a weapon of terror that murdered civilians indiscriminately. Thus, the names that come

²¹⁸ Young, “Memory and the Monument after 9/11.”88.

together to ring the memorial speak to a collective tragedy that has scarred New York, America, and the world.

The effect of the names on the 9/11 Memorial is very similar to the effect of the pillars at the Denkmal Holocaust Memorial. James Young, a professor at Massachusetts Amherst and a member of the design selection committee for both the Berlin Denkmal and the September 11 Memorial, observed that, “the very idea of ‘collective memory’ is broken down here and replaced with the collected memories of individuals murdered, the terrible meanings of their deaths now multiplied and not merely unified.”²¹⁹ Arad and Walker hoped that the seemingly endless list of names would serve to recognize both the private horror of individual deaths and collective, public tragedy that wounded the nation. [In addition to the open area where visitors can come to recognize and remember 9/11, there is an area at the bedrock of the North Tower, where loved ones can mourn in private, next to a vault containing the unidentified remains of victims.²²⁰ This space serves the competing need for private and personal honoring of the dead outside of a national, collective context.

While the memorial captures the elements of collective memory at the time of its creation, memory is not static. New viewers will interact the memory and its offered meaning as years pass and times change. The jurors selected Arad and Walker’s design because it “capture[d] most succinctly the twin motifs of loss and renewal already articulated so powerfully in Daniel Libeskind’s ‘Memory Foundations.’”²²¹ The purpose

²¹⁹ Young, “Memory and the Monument after 9/11.” 85.

²²⁰ Young, “Memory and the Monument after 9/11.” 91.

²²¹ Ibid.

of Michael Arad and Peter Walker’s ‘Reflecting Absence’ was to try to steer visitors away from the traditional impulse towards closure, to relegating an event to the annals of history, and instead encourage visitors to internalize the memory of the event in a larger collective history, one that constantly shapes national identity. Given the realities of maintaining the waterfalls and the trees, state officials who control the site and taxpayers who fund it will have to constantly engage with the memorial itself and the ways it may evolve. All the different design aspects of the memorial work in harmony to satisfy the ‘Memorial Mission Statement,’ preserving the footprints of the towers, providing access to the bedrock, and weaving the site back into the fabric of the urban community.²²² The integrative design of the physical memorial, one that combines remembrance with reconstruction, “meshes memory with life, embeds memory in life, and... balances our need for memory with the present needs of the living.” Thus, even as the city grows, as people bustle about Manhattan, and as years pass by, the memory of 9/11 will still be embedded in the national and individual conscious.²²³

The Failure of the Freedom Center and the Rise of the 9/11 Museum: Debates over How to Preserve and Teach the Memory of 9/11

On June 7, 2005, Debra Burlingame published a now-famous piece in *The Wall Street Journal* entitled “The Great Ground Zero Heist.” In the article, Burlingame vehemently argued against the proposed International Freedom Center (IFC), claiming that the building dishonored the memory of 9/11, of those who died in the attacks, and of

²²² Ibid.

²²³ See Figure 2 for an aerial view of the memorial and the reflecting pools.

the men and women serving in Iraq. In a powerful appeal to the nation, Burlingame wrote, “Rather than a respectful tribute to our individual and collective loss, they will get a slanted history lesson, a didactic lecture on the meaning of liberty in a post-9/11 world.”²²⁴ She goes on to argue that the designers of the IFC were “trying to hijack the meaning of 9/11,” whereas “we’re trying to rescue it.”²²⁵ Burlingame’s complaints capture the tenor of resentment that inspired the “Take Back the Memorial” movement, an alliance of 9/11 family members who insisted that their personal trauma gave them moral authority over the design and purpose of commemorative buildings at Ground Zero. Eventually, this movement and widespread protests on the fourth anniversary of 9/11 forced officials to abandon the IFC project. As a result, only a dedicated 9/11 Museum was constructed on the site of the former World Trade Center.

In this section, I will examine the rationale behind the opposition of the International Freedom Center and the reason for the project’s eventual failure. In particular, I will discuss how opponents perceived the IFC as an insult to the memory of those who died on September 11, 2001, illustrating the important role the public had in altering the commemoration process. Furthermore, I will analyze how the rejection of the IFC allowed the narratives of American innocence and ideological superiority to persist. This is because the IFC would provide the complex historical context that government officials and news outlets largely ignored in the initial aftermath of the attacks. By preventing the construction of an international cultural center, advocates were able to limit the interpretation of the attacks. Furthermore, after the IFC was abandoned, only a

²²⁴ Debra Burlingame, “The Great Ground Zero Heist,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 7, 2005, Eastern Edition edition.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

9/11 Museum would be left to share the narrative of 9/11. In the second part of this section, I will analyze how the 9/11 Museum reinforced preexisting forms of collective memory and adapted to the lessons learned from the 9/11 Memorial and the failed IFC.

The International Freedom Center

In June of 2003, the LMDC invited a wide variety of cultural institutions to submit proposals for a cultural complex built on Ground Zero. Out of 113 applications, the LMDC chose three in June of 2004. The Joyce International Dance Center and the Signature Theatre Company would occupy a performing arts center and the other two, the Drawing Center and the International Freedom Center (IFC), would be located within a museum complex.²²⁶ Yet as soon as the winners were announced to the public, families of 9/11 victims began to rally against them. Many objected to the construction of any buildings on Ground Zero that were not focused exclusively on telling the story of 9/11 and its victims, which is why the IFC drew the most criticism.²²⁷ The IFC's mission statement described the proposed project as an educational center dedicated to describing "humankind's sometimes uneven but ultimately enduring aspiration for free and open societies."²²⁸ Thus, the IFC was intended to integrate the events of September 11, 2001, into a broader historical context of battles for freedom.

The proposed IFC immediately garnered widespread condemnation because many members of the public feared that the center would complicate dominant 9/11 narratives and memories. Even worse, in the eyes of some opponents, was the fact that the leaders

²²⁶ Aronson, *Who Owns the Dead?: The Science and Politics of Death at Ground Zero*. 176.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ "International Freedom Center Fact Sheet," Renewnyc.org, n.d., http://renewnyc.org/content/pdfs/IFC_factsheet.

of the project were well-known academics, journalists, and civil libertarians who largely opposed America's political response to 9/11.²²⁹ Burlingame expressed the sentiment shared by many family members of 9/11 victims,

“To the IFC's organizers, it is not only history's triumphs that illuminate, but also its failures... The public will be confused at first, and then feel hoodwinked and betrayed... The World Trade Center Memorial Foundation will have erected a building whose only connection to September 11 is a strained, intellectual one... More disturbing, the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. is handing over millions of federal dollars... [to] people whose inflammatory claims of a deliberate torture policy at Guantanamo Bay are undermining this country's efforts to foster freedom elsewhere in the world.”²³⁰

Burlingame's comments illustrate the way many members of the public feared that the IFC would challenge the dominant narratives surrounding the attacks. For example, opponents were concerned that the IFC exhibit would seek “to explain the actions of the terrorists, even though they were, in the eyes of the families, senseless and ultimately inexplicable.”²³¹ As explained in previous chapters, one of the primary narrative components of 9/11 collective memory is the idea that the attacks constituted an attack on American values, not American policy. The IFC exhibit could open up debates on alternate meanings for 9/11 and challenge accepted interpretations that had been created in the wake of the attacks. As a result, providing a historical contextualization was seen as threatening a fundamental component of the public's collective understanding of the attacks.

The fears and outrage surrounding the IFC led to massive and highly contentious debates that demonstrated the fracturing the post-9/11 consensus. In a collection of letters

²²⁹ Aronson, *Who Owns the Dead?: The Science and Politics of Death at Ground Zero*.

²³⁰ Burlingame, “The Great Ground Zero Heist.”

²³¹ Aronson, *Who Owns the Dead?: The Science and Politics of Death at Ground Zero*.

submitted to *The Wall Street Journal* after the publication of Burlingame's article, various citizens captured the arguments at the heart of the "Take Back the Memorial" protest. Bill Kennedy, a survivor of the WTC attack, wrote "I feel the International Freedom Center's plan desecrates what is sacred ground and trivializes for political gain the most significant tragedy of a generation. It disparages all those who died that day and every day since defending our freedom."²³² Mike Denkler, a resident of Pensacola, Florida, wrote, "Tom Bernstein, George Soros, Michael Posner, Anthony Romero, Eric Foner, et al., are spending millions to promote their own "enlightened" self-interest to dilute what should be the single focus of the memorial: to honor and remember those patriots and brave souls who made the supreme sacrifice on Sept. 11, 2001."²³³ On the other side of the argument, Michael Posner, a Human Rights activist in New York, wrote to *The Wall Street Journal*, stating, "The most disquieting aspect of Ms. Burlingame's argument is her blanket condemnation of individuals and organizations that are challenging the U.S. government's departure from the rule of law in the wake of 9/11."²³⁴ Each of these comments illustrate the way political divides, reopened after the start of the Iraq war, motivated debates of the meaning of 9/11 and the role of the memorial. Furthermore, the comments demonstrate how advocates of a "pure" 9/11 memorial used moral language to fortify their arguments. By using charged rhetoric, portrayed through the use of the phrases "sacred ground" and "patriots and brave souls," opponents of the

²³² Bill Kennedy, Mike Denkler, and Michael Posner, "Sacred Ground Must Not Be Desecrated," *Wall Street Journal*, June 20, 2005, sec. Opinion, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB111922966277663738>.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

IFC legitimized their arguments and demonstrated their moral superiority over advocates in favor of the IFC.

Outrage against the IFC inspired the formation of an alliance of 9/11 family members and the creation of the “Take Back the Memorial” movement. The movement had two primary goals: first, to stop the construction of the IFC, and second, to make a memorial that dominated the space in Ground Zero.²³⁵ At the outset, the movement was primarily led by outspoken family members who believed their personal trauma gave them a right to decide how the Ground Zero space was used. However, the movement quickly gained more traction as other public interest groups expressed their support. For example, in August of 2005 the FDNY Union held a press release stating that if the IFC was included in the 9/11 memorial, the FDNY would withdraw its support of the LMDC.²³⁶ Soon after, a petition was signed by 49,000 people and sent to the LMDC and to the mayor’s office. The petition read as follows:

“We, the under-signed, believe that the World Trade Center Memorial should stand as a solemn remembrance of those who died on September 11th, 2001, and not as a journey of history’s ‘failures’ or as a debate about domestic and foreign policy in the post-9/11 world. Political discussions have no place at the World Trade Center September 11th Memorial.”²³⁷

As a result of this petition and the protest held on the fourth anniversary of 9/11, Governor Pataki announced that the IFC project would be abandoned so that progress

²³⁵ Robert Kolker, “The Grief Police: Should a Handful of 9/11 Families Hold All the Power?,” *New York (Subsidiary of Vox Media)*, November 18, 2005, <https://app.getpocket.com/read/522647975>.

²³⁶ Tom Topousis, “FDNY Union Fires on Freedom Center Plan,” *Uniformed Firefighters Association of Greater New York*, August 17, 2005, <https://www.ufanyc.org/cms/contents/view/2102>.

²³⁷ Doss, “Remembering 9/11.”

could be made on the memorial.²³⁸ Following the rejection of the IFC, the Drawing Center, which also supposed to be housed in the museum complex, was abandoned as well.

The “Take Back the Memorial” movement illustrates the important role the public had in shaping the narrative of 9/11 that would be represented in the memorial site. While the memorial process was ostensibly controlled by national, state, and local authorities, the debates over the IFC demonstrate that the state was not the only actor that shaped collective memory during the commemorative process. As a nexus of both cultural and personal memory, the process of memorialization at Ground Zero revealed the essential role collective remembering played in constructing meaning and fostering healing in the wake of 9/11. Additionally, the rejection of the IFC ensured that the national narrative of the attacks, predicated on notions of American innocence and ideological superiority, would be preserved for future generations.

The 9/11 Memorial Museum

After the IFC and Drawing Center projects were abandoned, plans for the 9/11 Museum evolved and grew into a much larger component of the memorial. The space dedicated to preserving and teaching the memory of 9/11 expanded to 110,000 square feet, most of which would be submerged underground. As the scope of the 9/11 Museum grew, so too did the efforts of preservations, survivors, and historians who fought to ensure that archeological remnants and artifacts from 9/11 would be saved and shared for

²³⁸ David W. Dunlap, “Governor Bars Freedom Center at Ground Zero,” *The New York Times*, September 29, 2005, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/29/nyregion/governor-bars-freedom-center-at-ground-zero.html>.

future generations. The process of 9/11 preservation was unique. Traditionally, objects are not considered for the National Register of Historic Places until 50 years after they achieve historical significance.²³⁹ By contrast, the World Trade Center site, including many of the artifacts from the attacks and the cleanup initiative, became eligible in February 2004. The National Register of Historic Places labeled Ground Zero as “exceptionally significant in the history of the United States as the location of events that immediately and profoundly influenced the lives of millions of American citizens.”²⁴⁰

The main purpose of the 9/11 museum, like any historical museum, was to first preserve history and then teach it to later generations. Museums, and the past they present, are essential for maintaining continuity in the collective memory and identity between generations. Yet preserving the memory of 9/11 in a museum was extraordinarily difficult, not because of a lack of archival material but because of the overwhelming abundance of it. Museum directors had to consolidate an incredible amount of information into a coherent narrative, all the while being conscious of the concerns of family members. In this section, I will examine how the 9/11 Museum reinforced preexisting forms of collective memory in the creation of its exhibits and privileged the contributions of family members. In particular, I will focus on how the exhibits personalized collective memory by telling the individual stories of victims and survivors and providing a space for visitors to contribute their own memories.

Originally conceived as a part of the larger cultural complex, the design for the museum shifted as plans for the memorial adapted to public opinion. Eventually, it was

²³⁹ “About the Museum | National September 11 Memorial & Museum,” National September 11 Memorial & Museum, accessed May 9, 2020, <https://www.911memorial.org/visit/museum/about-museum>.

²⁴⁰ “About the Museum | National September 11 Memorial & Museum.”

decided that the Norwegian firm Snøhetta, which won the competition to design the cultural center in 2005, would create an entry pavilion that would lead to an underground museum designed by Davis Brody Bond Aedas. The final version of the museum did not look into the voids, display the names of the dead, and was not as integrated into the memorial as the planners originally intended.²⁴¹ Yet many powerful components of Aedas's design remained: the descending ramp that leads visitors down seven stories, the gigantic sunken cubes of the memorial pool basins, and the exposed slurry wall that kept the city from flooding after the towers collapsed.²⁴² The interior design of the museum was intended to visually illustrate popular metaphors that had emerged in the days and months after September 11th. Each element of the museum's design was intended to communicate the themes of darkness and light, wounding and healing, death and rebirth.²⁴³ These themes extended into the exhibits themselves, which are divided into two sections: one dedicated to commemorating those killed on 9/11 and in the 1993 WTC bombing, and the second dedicated to depicting the events prior, on, and after September 11th.

When completed in 2011, the museum had four core exhibitions. The first, "Historical Exhibition: September 11, 2001," presents the story of 9/11 using artifacts, images, first-person testimony, and archival audio and video recordings.²⁴⁴ Within this

²⁴¹ Clifford A. Pearson, "Creating a Place to Honor the Past and Look Ahead," *Architectural Record* 199, no. 1 (2011): 68.

²⁴² Holland Cotter, "The 9/11 Story Told at Bedrock, Powerful as a Punch to the Gut," *The New York Times*, May 14, 2014, sec. Arts & Design, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/14/arts/design/sept-11-memorial-museum-at-ground-zero-prepares-for-opening.html>.

²⁴³ Cotter.

²⁴⁴ "Exhibitions | National September 11 Memorial & Museum," National September 11 Memorial & Museum, accessed May 9, 2020, <https://www.911memorial.org/visit/museum/exhibitions>.

exhibit are three parts: the Events of the Day, as they unfolded; Before 9/11, which provides the historical context leading up to the attacks; and After 9/11, which addresses the immediate aftermath and ongoing repercussions of the terrorist attacks.²⁴⁵ The second exhibit, “Memorial Exhibition: In Memoriam,” honors the 2,977 individuals killed as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the six individuals killed in the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center on February 26, 1993.²⁴⁶ The third exhibit, “Rebirth at Ground Zero,” is a media installation that displays the physical transformation and renewal at the World Trade Center site alongside personal stories of individuals who were directly affected by 9/11.²⁴⁷ The fourth and final exhibit, “Reflecting on 9/11,” allows visitors to record their own stories, memories, and opinions about 9/11 and the day’s ongoing ramifications.²⁴⁸ Each of the exhibits illustrate how the museum aimed to communicate the historical and cultural memory of 9/11 to a broad audience.

In the first exhibit, salvaged and donated artifacts embody the historical events of the day while also serving as emotional cues that draw viewers into a larger narrative about the attacks. One item in the collection, the famous “Red Bandana” belonging to Wells Remy Crowther, captures within it many of the memories, emotions, and implications of 9/11. Welles Crowther, a 24-year-old equities trader working in the South Tower, was credited with helping at least ten people escape the South Tower before he

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ “Exhibitions | National September 11 Memorial & Museum.”

²⁴⁷ “Exhibitions | National September 11 Memorial & Museum.”

²⁴⁸ “Exhibitions | National September 11 Memorial & Museum.”

was killed in the collapse.²⁴⁹ As smoke filled the building, he wore a red bandana as a protective mask and continued to make trips into the building even as thousands tried to escape. Welles Crowther and his red bandana came to symbolize the remarkable heroism, unity, and courage of the American people on 9/11. The memory of Welles Crowther, often called “the man in the red bandana,” has often been used in presidential and anniversary speeches honoring 9/11. In fact, his story was one told by President Barack Obama at the 2014 dedication ceremony for the National September 11 Memorial & Museum. In addition to speeches, Welles Crowther has appeared as the subject of a documentary, *Man in Red Bandana* (2017), and the New York Times bestseller *The Red Bandana* by Tom Rinaldi. By including the red bandana as an artifact in the museum, curators were able to evocatively capture collective memories of the attacks and the way those memories were used to construct a national narrative post-9/11.

In addition to artifacts in the historical exhibit, there is a large collection of personal photos and memorabilia in memorial exhibition.²⁵⁰ With the “In Memoriam” exhibit, curators had to figure out a way to portray expressions of grief in a way that did not appear obviously contrived. In the end, they decided to display photographs, stories, and mementos donated by family members. These individual expressions of grief became artifacts, carefully categorized, labeled and laid out in exhibits. A review of the museum published in the Art & Design section of *The New York Times*, described the feeling these objects engendered,

²⁴⁹ Corey Kilgannon, “Saved on 9/11, by the Man in the Red Bandanna,” *The New York Times*, September 8, 2017, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/08/nyregion/welles-crowther-man-in-red-bandanna-911.html>.

²⁵⁰ See Figure 3 for an image of the wall in the “In Memoriam” exhibit with photos of the victims.

“For some reason, the largest objects — an intact fire truck with carefully folded hoses but a burned-out cab; a steel column plastered with prayer cards; a storefront jeans display still covered with World Trade Center ashes — are the easiest to take, maybe because of their public identity, or even their resemblance to contemporary sculpture. The hundreds of small, battered personal items, many donated by families of the victims, are another story. Their natural realm is the purse, the pocket, the bedside drawer at home; they feel too ordinary and intimate to have ended up under plexiglass. Infused with lost life, they make the experience of moving through this museum at once theatrical, voyeuristic and devotional.”²⁵¹

The purpose of the memorial exhibit, illustrated through the objects on display, is to “[reflect] the interests and activities of the victims before their lives were cut short.”²⁵²

These simple, ordinary mementos are meant to symbolize the randomness of the attacks and its victims. The objects, whether a purse or a bandana, remind viewers of why the acts of terror on September 11th struck the nation so deeply. It was because those who died were innocent, average Americans who were merely going about their daily lives on a beautiful September day in New York.

While many lauded the museum for their personalization of a collective tragedy, the exhibit was not without controversy. For example, one of the items on display as of May 2020 is a giraffe figurine that once belonged to Lenard Anthony White. The label for the figure describes how Leonard White was a man who cherished going to the opera, exploring art galleries, attending Broadway shows, and collecting giraffe figurines. While the figurine does symbolize the life of Leonard White, it seems more suited to a personal memorial than a national museum. Critics of the museum have argued that curators privileged private memory and individual experience over national considerations and the

²⁵¹ Cotter, “The 9/11 Story Told at Bedrock, Powerful as a Punch to the Gut.”

²⁵² “In Memoriam | National September 11 Memorial & Museum,” National September 11 Memorial & Museum, accessed May 9, 2020, <https://www.911memorial.org/visit/museum/exhibitions/in-memoriam>.

need for a collective history of 9/11. A critic for the New York Times, Edward Rothstein, wrote that out of the people who died during the attacks “the vast number have no claim on public attention other than our sympathy. They deserve memorialization within the context of the largest attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor.” Furthermore, Rothstein faults the museum with become too “preoccupied with the private, not the public.” Rothstein’s remarks express the fears of held by some Americans that the memorial process, and the museum in particular, had allowed the victim’s families to much control over the direction of the site.²⁵³ Advocates for the museum, of course, strongly disagree with Rothstein’s argument. One family member, Anthony Gardner, told a writer, “the best things about the memorial and museum stem from the families’ engagement. That’s what is going to resonate with the visitors and that’s what they are going to remember... We weren’t just in it for the sake of our own loss, but for the sake of history.”²⁵⁴ Regardless on which side of argument readers fall on, this exhibit reflects the important role families played in shaping the construction of the museum. Furthermore, by placing the focus on lives lived rather than lives lost, the museum embodied post-9/11 narratives focusing on renewal.

While the third exhibit echoes the themes of the first two, the fourth exhibit, “Reflecting on 9/11,” is an innovative and beautiful capstone to the museum and the overall memorial site that illustrates how memory can become history and vice versa. In this exhibit, visitors are invited to leave an “inscription,” either a note of remembrance,

²⁵³ Kolker, “The Grief Police: Should a Handful of 9/11 Families Hold All the Power?”

²⁵⁴ Aronson, *Who Owns the Dead?: The Science and Politics of Death at Ground Zero*.

sympathy, or recollection from that day.²⁵⁵ The notes are then projected on a screen below the slurry wall and added to the 9/11 Memorial & Museum digital archive.²⁵⁶ Sarah Senk, author of “The Memory Exchange: Public Mourning at the National 9/11 Memorial Museum,” recorded one phrase she observed while visiting the museum: “I wasn’t there but I still remember.”²⁵⁷ The note was written as part of a series of messages left by a group of nine- and ten-year-old’s visiting the museum as part of an elementary school trip.²⁵⁸ This note, one of many in the constantly growing archive, demonstrates the way interacting with a museum’s exhibits is a way for new generations to learn about and personalize 9/11 collective memory. Furthermore, the exhibit shows that commemoration of 9/11 is perpetually in progress and not fixed despite the creation of the memorial and museum.

Chapter Conclusion

Contestations over the future of the former WTC site questioned the role and purpose of a 9/11 memorial. Some wanted to completely rebuild, while others felt that the emptiness of the tower foundations should remain pure and unbroken by a clutter of office buildings, a constant reminder of the collective trauma imbued in that sacred ground. From the beginning, many different stakeholders competed to shape the design and purpose of the memorial. At the eye of the storm was the state, balancing a civic need

²⁵⁵ Sarah Senk, “The Memory Exchange: Public Mourning at the National 9/11 Memorial Museum,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 48, no. 2 (May 2018): 254–76, <https://doi.org/10.3138/cras.2017.029>.

²⁵⁶ “Exhibitions | National September 11 Memorial & Museum.”

²⁵⁷ Senk, “The Memory Exchange.” 255.

²⁵⁸ Senk. *Ibid.*

to memorialize the dead and a political need to renew the city and set it on the path of economic recovery. While the state played an important role, representatives from the families' of 9/11 victims were the core actors shaping the memorial process through protests and petitions. Family members relied on the moral authority of their personal trauma to claim ownership of the dead and decide what and how collective memories of 9/11 deserved to be commemorated. The debate over memory ownership continues to play an important role as the attacks fade to history and the nation begins to move on. Yet even as 9/11 moves out of contemporary memory and into history, the interactive design of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum demonstrates the way meaning is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

As visitors descend into the hallowed ground where the twin towers once stood, there is enormous art installation titled “Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning.” Inscribed in the center of the work, at the focal point between the two main exhibitions at the bedrock of the museum, is a quote by Virgil, “No day shall erase you from the memory of time.”²⁵⁹ The artwork, created in 2014 by Spencer Finch, contains 2,983 watercolor squares, each in their own shade of blue to represent a different victim of the September 11th terrorist attack.²⁶⁰ The art installation was designed to represent the idea of a collective 9/11 memory; that although “our own perception of the color blue might not be the same as that of another person...just like our perception of color, our memories share a common point of reference.”²⁶¹

Throughout this thesis, I analyzed the ways collective memory emerged and was established in the days, months, and years after the attacks. I looked at how the media created and operated within the dominant narrative of 9/11 by emphasizing the significance of the attacks, enabling the collective traumatization of Americans on September 11th; promulgating pro-war rhetoric; and underscoring the sense of national unity that emerged immediately after the attacks. I examined how presidents over the years have shaped and utilized collective memory, focusing on how presidents have

²⁵⁹ Jordan Friedman, “A Look at the Museum’s Memorial Hall | National September 11 Memorial & Museum,” National September 11 Memorial & Museum, accessed May 11, 2020, <https://www.911memorial.org/connect/blog/look-museums-memorial-hall>.

²⁶⁰ Friedman. Note: Also includes the victims of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

²⁶¹ Friedman. See Figure 1.

traditionally promoted stories of heroism, unity, and American exceptionalism as the main discursive representations of 9/11 memory. Although, in this chapter, I also discussed how President Trump has challenged Bush and Obama's portrayal of 9/11 and has created new narratives around the attacks to legitimize his anti-Muslim, anti-immigration, "America-first" rhetoric. Lastly, I assessed the role of public debates in the commemoration process at Ground Zero, observing how deliberation between state officials, designers, family members of 9/11 victims, and members of the broader community served as an avenue for collective remembering. I ended by looking at the ways the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum works to personalize collective memory and engage visitors in a perpetual process of commemoration. In total, the arguments made in each chapter demonstrate the ways 9/11 collective memory developed, but also produce questions as to the role that memory will play as the events of September 11th, 2001, fade into history.

On April 6, 2020, the *Atlantic* published the article, "The 9/11 Era is Over: The Coronavirus Pandemic and a Chapter of History that Should Have Expired Long Ago." In the article, Ben Rhodes, former deputy national security adviser to Barack Obama, argues that the era of policymaking predicated on the memory of 9/11 must come to an end. On the one hand, he argues that the sentiment "Every day is September 12th" still holds a significant amount of power in state and military circles. Under Trump, the United States has pursued a policy of brinkmanship with Iran, which has included withdrawing from the Iran Nuclear Deal, renewing sanctions, deploying an additional 20,000 U.S. troops to

the Middle East, and assassinating General Qasem Soleimani.²⁶² In fact, the assassination of Soleimani increased tensions between the United States and Iran to the point that war was not out of the question only four months ago.²⁶³ However, even as the state remains tangled up in wars in the Middle East, much of the public, especially the younger generations, no longer view terrorism as the most pressing issue of the country.²⁶⁴

The discrepancy between the national security concerns of the administration and the public have come to a head during the coronavirus pandemic. On April 7, 2020, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced that number of people who have died from the novel coronavirus in New York has surpassed the number killed as a result of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The number grows exponentially higher given that New York has more cases than any other country in the world.²⁶⁵ However, invocations of the past go far beyond comparing numbers of the dead. In an article for CNN, Ray Sanchez describes the parallels between the unprecedented disruptions caused by the terrorist attacks and by the pandemic. Sanchez quotes Governor Cuomo, who made a direct allusion to 9/11 in a recent press briefing on the coronavirus; "For me, in New York, it reminds me of 9/11, where one moment, which was inconceivable, just changed everything, changed your perspective on the world, changed your perspective on safety."²⁶⁶ The main

²⁶² Ben Rhodes, "The 9/11 Era Is Over: The Coronavirus Pandemic and a Chapter of History That Should Have Expired Long Ago," *The Atlantic*, April 6, 2020, sec. Ideas, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/its-not-september-12-anymore/609502/>.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Rhodes, "The 9/11 Era Is Over: The Coronavirus Pandemic and a Chapter of History That Should Have Expired Long Ago."

²⁶⁵ Martin Johnson, "More New Yorkers Have Died from Coronavirus This Week than on 9/11," *The Hill*, April 10, 2020, <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/492223-more-new-yorkers-died-from-covid-19-this-week-than-in-9-11-attacks>.

²⁶⁶ Ray Sanchez, "Echoes of 9/11, as New Yorkers 'Try to Keep Calm but We Can't Quite Carry On,'" *CNN*, March 22, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/22/us/new-york-coronavirus-crisis-911/index.html>.

difference between the two events, argues Sanchez, is that people are seen as a potential source of contagion, not comfort.²⁶⁷ As a result, unity during this public health crisis falls fall behind the national unity seen after 9/11.

The case of the coronavirus pandemic demonstrates that even as time passes, people continue to draw upon 9/11 memory in order to contextualize new events and crises. When dealing with an unprecedented national health crisis, politicians can use allusions to powerful collective memories, such as 9/11, to fit incomprehensible events into preexisting narratives. Thus, analyzing how collective memory of 9/11 developed in the wake of the attacks can help readers understand the symbolic meaning of 9/11 and what it represents when used as a discursive device.

²⁶⁷ Sanchez.

Chapter Three Appendix

Figure 1: George W. Bush's Job Approval Ratings Trend 2001-2009²⁶⁸

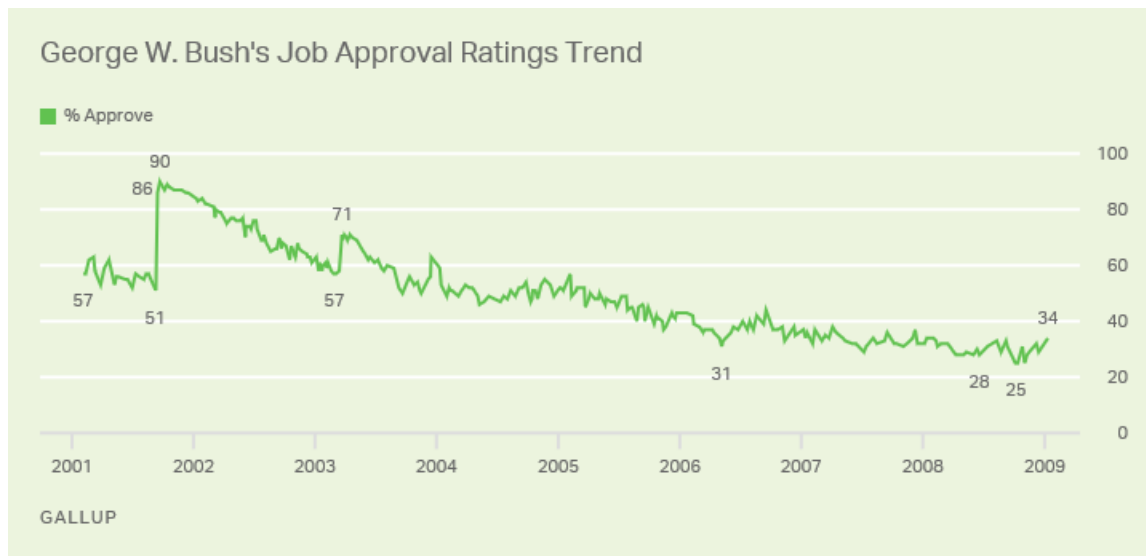


Figure 2: Voting by Party in the House of Representatives on H.J.Res. 64 (Authorization for Use of Military Force)²⁶⁹

	Total Votes (%)	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Yea	100%	214	204	2
Nay	0%	0	1	0
Not Voting	N/A	5	5	0

Figure 3: Voting by Party in the House of Representatives on H.J.Res. 114 (Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq)²⁷⁰

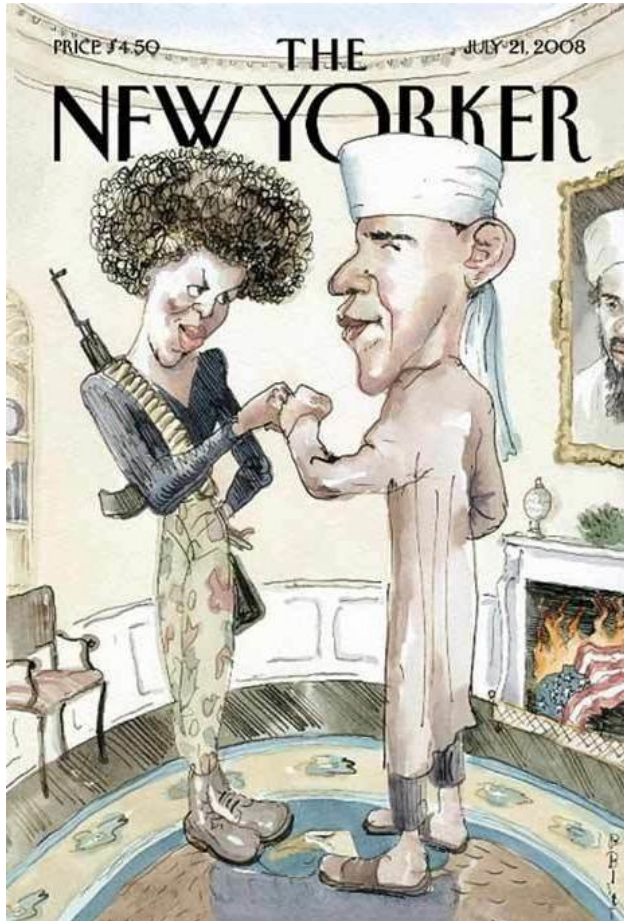
	Total Votes (%)	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Yea	69%	215	81	0
Nay	31%	6	126	1
Not Voting	N/A	2	1	0

²⁶⁸ Inc, "Presidential Approval Ratings -- George W. Bush."

²⁶⁹ Arney, Authorization for Use of Military Force (2001 - H.J.Res. 64).

²⁷⁰ Hastert, Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq.

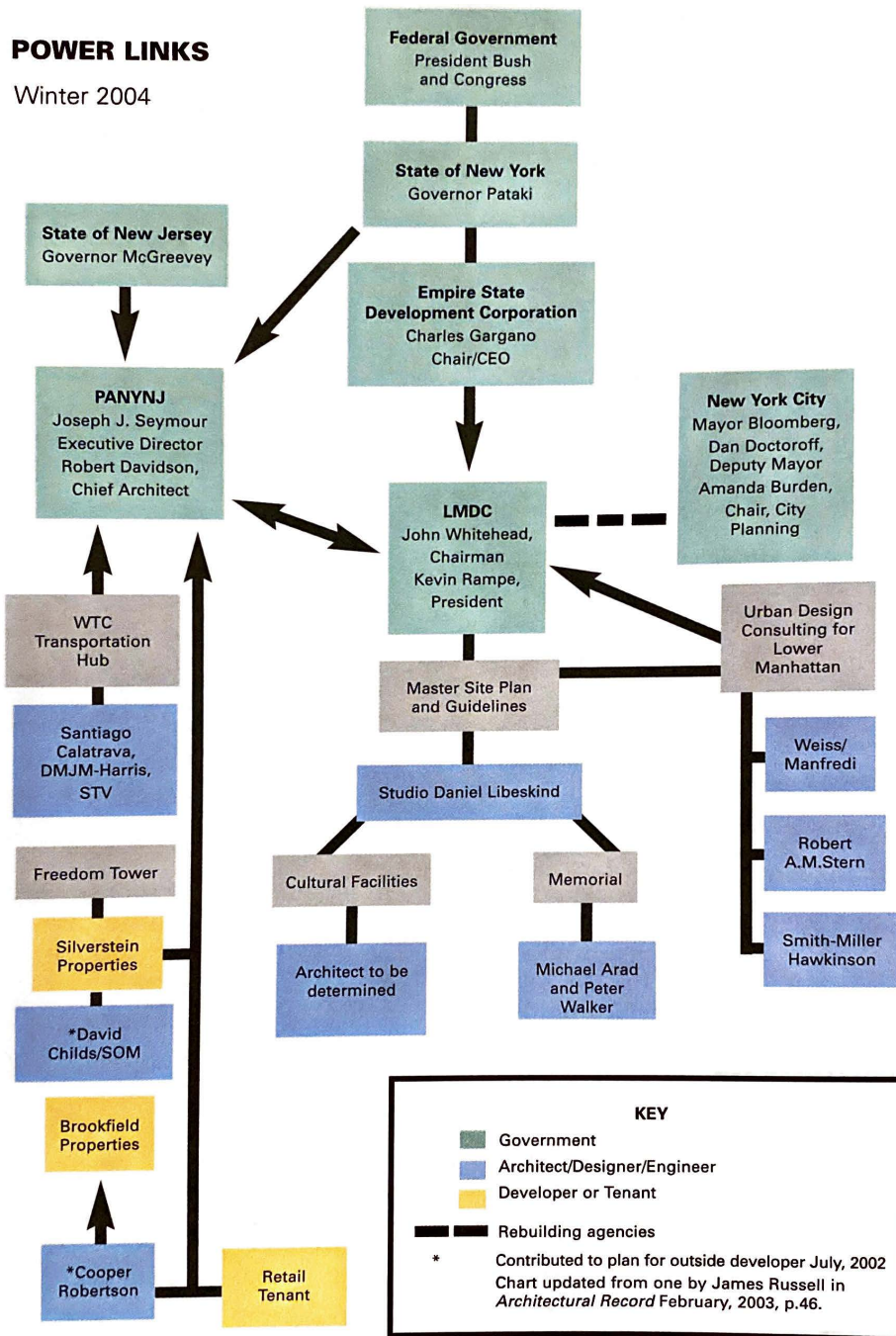
Figure 5: Cover of *The New Yorker*, titled “Politics of Fear,” from July 21st, 2008. The cover portrays Barack Obama as a Muslim terrorist and Michelle Obama as a figure resembling the Black Panthers²⁷¹



²⁷¹ “‘New Yorker’ Editor Defends Obama Cover.”

Chapter Four Appendix

Figure 1: The hierarchy of local, state, and federal officials in charge of the commemoration process at Ground Zero.²⁷²

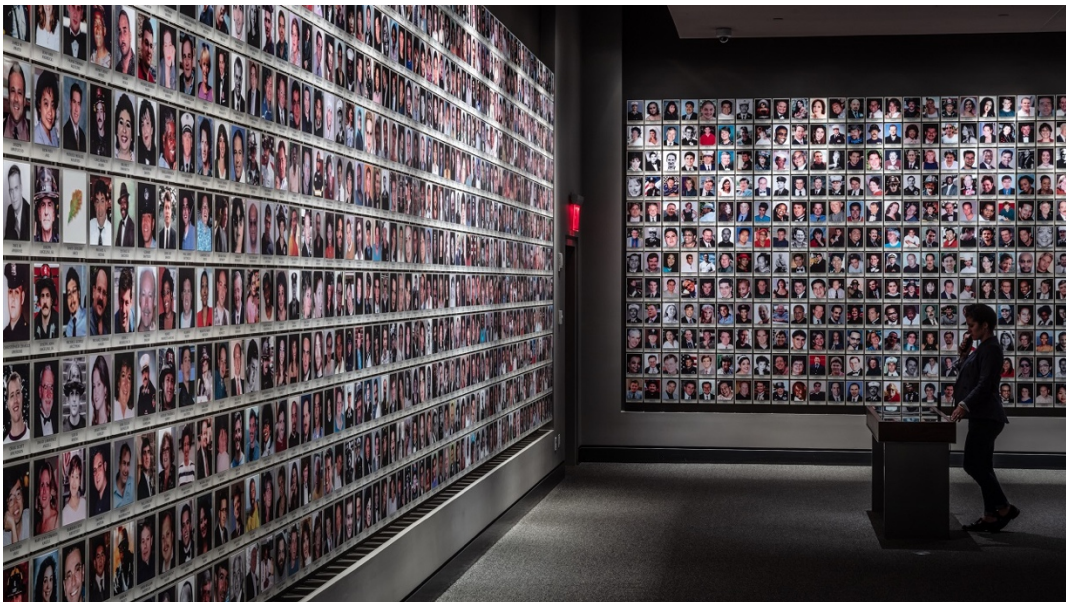


²⁷² Stephens, *Imagining Ground Zero*.

Figure 2: Arial View of the 9/11 Memorial depicting the footprints of the former twin towers.²⁷³



Figure 3: Photos of the Dead in the “In Memoriam” Exhibit²⁷⁴



²⁷³ “About the Museum | National September 11 Memorial & Museum.”

²⁷⁴ “Exhibitions | National September 11 Memorial & Museum.”

Chapter Five Appendix

Figure 1: “Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning,” created in 2014 by Spencer Finch. It contains 2,983 watercolor squares, each in their own shade of blue to represent a different victim of the September 11th terrorist attack.²⁷⁵



²⁷⁵ Friedman, “A Look at the Museum’s Memorial Hall | National September 11 Memorial & Museum.”

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