

The Uses of September 11

The terrorist attacks on the morning of September 11, 2001, killed three thousand people and left the American nation reeling. Millions spent that morning and the days that followed glued to their television sets, watching repeated images of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and scattered wreckage in Pennsylvania. Police and firefighters flocked to the Pentagon and Ground Zero to aid in rescue and recovery efforts. Rumors began circulating immediately about various terrorist groups or nations that might be responsible, and it was quickly discovered that the terrorist organization al-Qaeda, under the direction of Osama bin Laden, had carried out the attacks.

Americans reacted to the events in various ways, and official responses were immediate. The Bush administration launched the war on terror, which included the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, passage of the Patriot Act, and the invasion of Afghanistan, actions that resulted in heightened government surveillance of both its citizens and adversaries (Document 29.8). In the aftermath of the attacks, more than eighty thousand Arabs and Muslims living in the United States were fingerprinted and registered with the federal government (Documents 29.6 and 29.7). President Bush, believing that Saddam Hussein was linked to al-Qaeda, ordered an American invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003.

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, individuals and communities nationwide responded with an outpouring of grief (Document 29.5). Throughout the nation, communities held ceremonies, candlelight vigils, and marches. Impromptu memorials appeared in New York City and Washington, D.C., and photos of the missing filled subway stations and parks. In 2011, ten years after the attacks, the National

September 11 Memorial and Museum opened and presented personal stories and artifacts to find meaning in the events of that day (Document 29.9).

The following documents present different responses to September 11. As you read these documents, consider how the authors understand the attacks in the larger international context. How do the authors' different backgrounds influence their responses? In what ways do these documents speak to one another?

Document 29.5

Diana Hoffman | "The Power of Freedom," 2002

The September 11 attacks inspired thousands of poems, essays, and songs that expressed sorrow for the victims and resolve that the tragedy would make America a stronger nation. The following poem by Diana Hoffman, which reflects these sentiments, appeared on a memorial Web site in 2002.

I know you're celebrating
 what your evil deeds have wrought
 But with the devastation
 something else you've also brought
 For nothing is more powerful
 than Americans who unite
 Who put aside their differences
 and for freedom fight
 Each defenseless victim whose
 untimely death you caused
 And every fallen hero
 whose brave life was lost
 Has only served to strengthen
 our national resolve

Each freedom-loving citizen
will surely get involved
You've galvanized our nation
into a force so strong
We'll end your reign of terror
although the fight is long
For every heart that's broken
ten million will stand tall
and every tear that's falling
is the mortar for it all
And when this war is over
one thing I know is sure
Our country will be greater
and our freedom will endure

Source: Diana Hoffman, "The Power of Freedom," *Never Forgotten Poems*, accessed October 16, 2015, <http://911neverforget.tripod.com/neverforgotten/id3.html>.

Document 29.6

Khaled Abou El Fadl | Response to September 11, 2001

Arab Americans and Muslims became targets of violence, racial profiling, surveillance, and even deportation in the wake of the September 11 attacks. Khaled Abou El Fadl is a law professor at the University of California at Los Angeles and a leading expert on Islamic law. In the following reflection, he recalls how he felt on September 11 and how being a Muslim shaped his response to the attacks.

My reaction very soon after it happened was anguished hope that Muslims were not involved in this. And actually I remember very distinctly sort of a degree of feeling ashamed about having that hope, because you would like to respond to something like this at a human and universal level. You would like to feel like, Muslim or not Muslim, this is just terrible, period. It's really irrelevant who has done this. But because of what I knew, what it's going to mean for Muslims, I knew that the sort of hyphenation of whether a Muslim did this or not was going to make a big difference for me, for my friends, for my family, for my son. That's a

reality. And the agony of it has not subsided because the worst fears, that this is going to open a door of much suffering for many human beings, has fully materialized. . . .

The word *fear* describes everything. There is fear of fellow citizens being killed. There is fear that you yourself will be the subject of a terrorist attack. Terrorism doesn't have an exemption clause for Arabs or Muslims. If I was on that plane that day, the fact that I was Arab or Muslim wouldn't have made an iota of difference. So you run the risk of being the victim of a terrorist attack as much as any other member of society. But you now also run the risk of being blamed for it, just simply by the fact that you're Arab or Muslim. . . .

We belong on this plane and on our seat, you don't. You're here because we allow you to be here. It's as if it's a privilege. You're different, it's a privilege that you are allowed on this plane. And when I started wearing suits and ties consistently, regardless of how long or short the flight is, I've noticed that the treatment has gotten better. But it's always anxiety producing, not just for the normal security concerns, but because it's an unknown sum. You just don't know whether you're going to run into someone who's going to say something rude, something hurtful, whether you're going to sit next to someone who asks to change seats, which has happened to me, because they don't feel comfortable sitting next to you. Every time you pick up something from your travel bag, or you take out a magazine, or take out a book, they look like they're going to have a heart attack. Or constantly staring at you. It's just, it's an extremely anxiety producing experience and the irony of it is that if, God forbid, there is a terrorist attack, and I am on a plane, I'm just like everyone else, I die just like everyone else.

Source: "Face to Face: Stories from the Aftermath of Infamy," ITVS Interactive, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://archive.itvs.org/facetoface/stories/khaled.html>.

Document 29.7

Anti-Muslim Discrimination, 2011

The terrorist attacks on September 11 incited anti-Muslim sentiment among many Americans. Although President Bush made it clear that the enemy was al-Qaeda and not Muslims in general, the passage of the Patriot Act and the roundup and deportation of Arab and Muslim immigrants reflected an underlying hostility to Muslim Americans. This cartoon, which appeared in a Florida newspaper, compares discrimination against Muslims to the prejudice that Japanese Americans experienced during World War II.



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Document 29.8

Edward Snowden | Interview, 2014

The attacks on September 11 created the need for more reliable intelligence gathering. The latest advances in computer technology aided in this effort. However, as time passed, many critics worried that the government had exceeded the limits of legitimate constitutional bounds and posed a threat to individual freedom. Edward Snowden worked as an intelligence contractor for the National Security Administration (NSA). Following 9/11, the NSA was one of many government agencies conducting information on suspected terrorists. In 2013 Snowden leaked thousands of classified documents to the *Guardian* newspaper revealing the NSA's worldwide secret surveillance program, including the gathering of bulk data on the telephone conversations of many Americans. In the following interview with the *Guardian*, Snowden explains his motivations.

We constantly hear the phrase “national security” but when the state begins . . . broadly intercepting the communications, seizing the communications by themselves, without any warrant, without any suspicion, without any judicial involvement, without any demonstration of probable cause, are they really protecting national security or are they protecting state security?

What I came to feel—and what I think more and more people have seen at least the potential for—is that a regime that is described as a national security agency has stopped representing the public interest and has instead begun to protect and promote state security interests. And the idea of western democracy as having state security bureaus, just that term, that phrase itself, “state security bureau,” is kind of chilling. . . .

Generally, it's not the people at the working level you need to worry about. It's the senior officials, it's the policymakers who are shielded from accountability, who are shielded from oversight and who are allowed to make decisions that affect all of our lives without any public input, any public debate, or any electoral consequences because their

decisions and the consequences of the decisions are never known.

Because of the advance of technology, storage becomes cheaper and cheaper year after year and when our ability to store data outpaces the expense of creating that data, we end up with things that are no longer held for short-term periods, they're held for long-term periods and then they're held for a longer term period. At the NSA for example, we store data for five years on individuals. And that's before getting a waiver to extend that even further.

Source: Alan Rusbridger and Ewen MacAskill, “Edward Snowden Interview,” *Guardian*, July 18, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/18/sp-edward-snowden-nsa-whistleblower-interview-transcript>, accessed December 14, 2015.

Document 29.9

Alice M. Greenwald | Message from the Director of the 9/11 Memorial Museum

After eight years of construction, the National September 11 Memorial and Museum opened to the public on May 21, 2014, at the site of the World Trade Center attacks. The museum documents the history of the events surrounding 9/11 and does so through exhibits of artifacts and personal stories. By 2016, more than 4 million people had visited the museum. In the following statement, the director of the museum explains its historical mission.

Our visitors have a voice in this Museum, reinforcing the idea that each of us is engaged in the making of history. Whether telling one's own 9/11 story, recording a remembrance for someone who was killed in the attacks, or adding an opinion about some of the more challenging questions raised by 9/11, visitors can contribute their own stories to the Museum in our on-site recording studio. What they record will be added to the Museum archive, and excerpts may be integrated into media exhibits on an ongoing basis.

The core creative team responsible for the 9/11 Museum spent years deliberating over how to shape a memorial museum that would offer a safe environment in which to explore difficult history.

While the events of 9/11 are the foundation of the experience, the Museum does more than facilitate learning. It is a place where an encounter with history connects visitors to the shared human impacts of this event, transforming what can seem like the anonymous abstractions of terrorism and mass murder into a very personal sense of loss.

As much about “9/12” as it is about 9/11, the Museum provides a case study in how ordinary people acted in extraordinary circumstances, their acts of kindness, compassion and generosity of spirit demonstrating the profoundly constructive effect

we can have on each other's lives by the choices we make, even in the face of unspeakable destruction. The 9/11 Memorial Museum takes you on a journey into the heart of memory as an agent of transformation, empowering each of us to seek a deeper understanding of what it means to be a human being living in an interdependent world at the start of the 21st century.

Source: Alice M. Greenwald, “Message from the Museum Director,” 2014, 9/11 Memorial, <http://www.911memorial.org/message-museum-director>, accessed October 16, 2015.

Interpret the Evidence

1. Who is Diana Hoffman addressing in her poem (Document 29.5)? What does she hope to accomplish?
2. How does being a Muslim shape Khaled Abou El Fadl's reaction to September 11 (Document 29.6)?
3. Why does the cartoonist in Document 29.7 compare the Muslim experience following September 11 to that of Japanese Americans interned in World War II camps?
4. How does Edward Snowden justify his actions in leaking classified documents from the NSA (Document 29.8)? How does his behavior signify that for many Americans the lessons of 9/11 are lessening in importance and other considerations have become more significant?
5. How does the 9/11 Memorial Museum draw on history to chronicle September 11 (Document 29.9)? What would you include in the museum for the sake of historical accuracy?

Put It in Context

How did the attacks on September 11 change America?