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# SEPTEMBER

A Look Back On The Event That Changed The World

The upcoming 10 year anniversary of the September 11 attacks presents an important opportunity to look back and reflect on the events of that tragic day. It is hard to believe that 10 years has passed since that event which has etched itself into the American psyche as one of the darkest days in recent American history - when the United States was attacked on home soil resulting in the deaths of thousands.

The numbers speak for themselves. 2810 people killed in the attacks. 19858 body parts found. 3051 children who lost a parent. \$105 billion of economic loss to New York in the month following the attack. 422000 New Yorkers who suffer from post-traumatic

stress disorder as a result of 9/11.

It is important to reflect on the lives lost on that day, to not represent the loss of a human life as a number on a page, but to look at each number as the life of a living, breathing human being.

On the 10 year anniversary, it is important to remember those who lost their lives in the attack and the men who were a part of the rescue and clean-up efforts. However, the anniversary should also be taken as an opportunity to look back on the attack and the subsequent events.

Time has allowed for emotions to cool, wounds to heal and we should observe what attitudes have changed 10 years after, the lessons

that have or haven't been learnt since that time.

Initially, the reaction of most of the Western world could be described as shock, horror, awe and terror. We saw the repeated, grainy footage of the planes crashing into the twin towers followed by the reaction of those on the ground. These images were beamed, in real time, to living rooms across the world. The media went crazy, desperate for any information.

After the initial shock, many Americans expressed their anger over the attacks. Why was it that America was attacked? What had America done to deserve this? The public wanted answers. Very few in America understood the real reason

behind the attack and even fewer appeared on the media after the attack to explain them.

There was another aspect that the western media avoiding showing at the time. This was the reaction of some of those in the Muslim world. That was, the celebrations and jubilant atmosphere in many countries in the Middle East. Why was it that they could celebrate such a disgusting, low-life attack? The media did not like these images and subsequently did not show them.

An image that was shown by the media were the men that jumped to their deaths. Instead of being burnt alive, these men chose to jump from hundreds of metres above the ground to their deaths. The image of the falling man was shown around the world on the day of September 12. These images provoked reactions of disgust from many around America.

For whatever reason, Americans decided that these were not the images of September 11 that they wanted to see or remember and the images were quickly replaced with the firemen, police officers and volunteers on the scene who

helped with the rescue and clean-up efforts.

Twenty six days after the 9/11 attacks, American launched an invasion into Afghanistan and this was soon followed by the war in Iraq. The “war on terror” was meant to free the world of terrorists and ensure that they did not have a place to launch more attacks. Just like the attack on the twin towers, people around the world were able to watch the invasion, the tactics of “shock and awe”, as these images were broadcast around the world.

At the time, the Western media did not report in any great detail the reactions from around the Muslim world. September 11 for some Muslims was a great victory against the imperialistic American Empire.

Osama bin Laden himself stated that the attacks were due to multiple reasons. Bin Laden stated in his “Letter to America”<sup>1</sup> that *“The creation and continuation of Israel is one of the greatest crimes, and you are the leaders of its criminals. ... The creation of Israel is a crime which must be erased. Each and every*

*person whose hands have become polluted in the contribution towards this crime must pay its price, and pay for it heavily”.*

Al-Qaeda also issued a fatwa<sup>2</sup> in 1998 that stated *“for over seven years the United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbours, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighbouring Muslim peoples”*

This was the real reason behind the attacks. The reason that the western media did not report.

The reason that Americans did not want to hear.

So what has happened in the 10 years since these events? 10 years on and the reaction to the attacks, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, continue. 10 years on, the memory of September 11 has not faded in the minds of Americans. Although time has allowed for the initial anger to subside, some will always remain. 10 years on,

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/pa/ra/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>

most Americans still do not understand the true reasons behind the attacks.

The events of September 11 have not faded in the minds of most Americans, the memories are still too clear.

For some Muslims, the 10 year anniversary will still be a celebration of the day that the greatest nation in the world was brought to its knees. The attack on America soil is still seen as revenge for the actions taken by the US over many, many years including their involvement in the Middle East.

For some Muslims, their attitudes towards America have not changed a single iota since the attacks. They still perceive the United States as a war mongering country that invades countries, props up dictators and steals resources.

10 years may not be enough time to greatly change the attitudes of people and their memories of the attack. For many, it is still too raw a memory. What will be interesting is that way that the attacks are remembered and recorded by history in 20, 30 and 40 years time. What will be remembered? What will be forgotten?

We can see that even 10 years on, the American media focus on the events, victims and heroes of the day. They do not cover the reasons behind the attacks. The media do not even cover those who jumped from the buildings. Instead, they wish to portray a nation that is not scared of terrorists, a nation with a resolve to continue on, to show that they were not severely affected.

*“Though God cannot alter the past, historians can”*

On the first anniversary, one business owner said that education was an important aspect to remembering the attacks. Kaid Zanta<sup>3</sup> said *“Teach kids what the terrorists did, when they grow up they need to know what happened”*. Yet nothing was mentioned about teaching kids the reasons behind what the terrorists did.

Samuel Butler said that *“though God cannot alter the past, historians can”*. History and memory directly affect each other. Part of history is a written record of

<sup>3</sup>  
<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,62824,00.html>

human memories, human opinions, emotions and biases. History cannot help but reflect the views of those that write it.

With the constant, live, coverage by the media of the events of 9/11, the media has played an important role in shaping the way that the events are remembered and recorded in history.

This is why, when the history books are read in the years to come, it will be the extremist terrorists who wanted to see the downfall of America because they did not like what America stood for, who will be remembered. It will be the brave heroes who risked their own lives to save others. It will be the innocent victims who had done nothing wrong. It will be the families and the impacts of the attack on them.

President Theodore Roosevelt said *“That we are to stand by the president, right or wrong is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public.”*

This patriotic stance of standing by one’s country, no matter what the circumstances was a major force behind the media coverage in America. The media felt that they needed

to portray and image of resilience, strength and unity. Their anger at the attacks was clear. No one really attempted to explain the true reasons for fear of being labelled unpatriotic.

This sense of patriotism is firmly embedded in the history of the attacks of September 11.

We can take from this patriotic bias of the western media that history is partly a record of our memories. And our memories are influenced by many factors including our emotions, thoughts and prejudices. History and memory intertwine.

In our modern world, history is also partly shaped by the media and it was the

media that will impact the way that history is recorded.

The way that history is recorded depends on ours, and others, recollections of the event. History cannot help but be full of human emotions, opinions and flaws.