Remembering
September 11
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Some days you never see coming. I am in my backyard the morning of September 11, 2001, when my wife calls out: “A plane just crashed into the World Trade Center!”

At first, the news doesn’t register. A plane? Perhaps it’s some small Piper Cub that strayed off course. But the plumes of billowing, black smoke on television tell a different story.

As the event sinks in, you begin to make connections, trying to stay ahead of unfolding events. Who do we know? Immediately I think of two teachers and two students. My wife’s sister and her husband both teach in the city. Their daughters are in class near the Twin Towers. Aly, in eighth grade, hears the impact of the first plane when it hits the first tower. She is still looking out the window 18 minutes later when, in disbelief, she sees a fireball erupt as a plane hits the second tower. Larisa, in fourth grade, is only eight blocks from the towers. She and her teachers are soon running north as fast as they can, a cloud of dust, smoke and ashes filling the sky behind them.

Michael, their father, is six miles away at a school in Queens. After hearing the news, he goes up to the roof. The sky that morning is crystal clear.

Days after the attack, President George W. Bush stood atop the rubble of the World Trade Center and vowed to bring the people behind the attacks to justice. ▼

### Victims of the September 11 Attacks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of People Killed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Trade Center</td>
<td>2,749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentagon</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset County, Pennsylvania</td>
<td>40</td>
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</tbody>
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Among the victims, special honor was paid to the First Responders – more than 350 firefighters, police, and rescue personnel who died trying to save others. ▼
clear and he sees the first tower collapse. The sight leaves his knees so weak, he almost falls to the ground. Instantly, he knows he has to reach his family. With the subways down, he walks across the 59th Street Bridge as thousands of cars flee the city. Other New Yorkers can only walk, their clothes covered with ash. Michael thinks, “So this is what it’s like to be on the receiving end of history.”

He finds his wife and children and they manage to get home. But below 14th Street, where he lives, no motor vehicles are allowed to enter. That night, in the middle of the city that never sleeps, the city of honking taxis and rumbling subways, he and his family are startled by an immense quiet. The only noise they can hear is crickets. Crickets in the middle of New York City.

During an event so shattering, everyone looks to make connections—with their family, friends, and fellow citizens. Phone lines are jammed. Citizens gather in candlelight vigils. Firefighters and police become instant heroes.

Few of these tales will ever reach the history books. Yet the stories are out there, waiting to be discovered. In the years following September 11, historians have worked to move beyond the shock, sadness, and bravery of those first days. They seek to remember a truly defining event in American history—and to discover the meaning of it.

Student Activity
Create an Oral History Talk to people about their memories of 9/11 and their thoughts about the anniversary. Record your interview in writing, by audio, or with video. Start with people you know, such as adults or older friends. Then think about anyone who may be in the military or have a family member in the military, or people you know that live in or near New York City, Washington, D.C., or Shanksville, Pennsylvania. List 6-7 questions to ask. Consider questions such as What were you doing when you heard about the attacks? How do you think 9/11 changed the country?
September 11, 2001
All times are Eastern Daylight Time

An airliner from Boston carrying 92 passengers crashes into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City.

8:45 am
Another airline from Boston with 64 passengers crashes into the South Tower of the World Trade Center.

9:03 am
An airliner from Washington, D.C., crashes into the Pentagon.

9:40 am
The Federal Aviation Administration halts all aircraft takeoffs in the United States.

9:49 am

September 11th in Context

Osama bin Laden founds al Qaeda, a terrorist group committed to an extremist brand of Islam.

1988–1999

1993

1995

American terrorists bomb federal building in Oklahoma City – one of many examples of terrorism not related to the Middle East.

Al Qaeda bombers make first, unsuccessful attempt to bring down the World Trade Center.
The South Tower of the World Trade Center collapses.

United Flight 93, carrying 45 people, crashes in a field near Pittsburgh after passengers attack hijackers who had taken over the plane.

The North Tower of the World Trade Center collapses.

President Bush addresses the nation, saying that Americans will remain strong against “evil despicable acts of terror.”

**September:** Al Qaeda attacks the United States.

**October:** U.S. leads invasion of Afghanistan to pursue al Qaeda leaders.

**2001**

U.S. and allied troops invade Iraq and depose dictator Saddam Hussein.

**2003**

**2005**

Suicide bombers in London, England, kill more than 50 people.

**2011**

April: U.S. Navy SEALs locate and kill Osama bin Laden in Pakistan.

**September:** Americans observe the tenth anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks.
American life changed on September 11, 2001. While most Americans report few differences in their everyday lives, some transformations have been dramatic. For historians, questions about how much things change over time—or remain the same—are keys to understanding the past.

**Security and Freedom** One change is dramatic indeed: a new emphasis on security. Often, it has come at the risk of basic freedoms.

Since the early days of the Republic, Americans have been free to travel with few restrictions. Anyone who goes to an airport today can see how different things are. Passengers who once walked unimpeded to gateways must now stop at checkpoints. Officers from the new Transportation Security Administration scan passengers’ luggage and bodies for weapons. People entering courthouses and other public buildings undergo similar checks. Most Americans accept travel restrictions when they believe safety is at stake, just as they largely did during the Civil War.

After the September 11 attacks, airport security was tightened. Today, passengers often wait in line an hour or more to get to their gates. Anyone of any age is subject to a random search. Items such as liquids or even nail clippers may be confiscated.
However, some Americans have questioned invasions of privacy. The Patriot Act of 2001 enlarged the power of federal agencies to monitor anything they consider terrorist activity. Government authorities can comb e-mails, financial and medical records, library and telephone databases, and even a person’s garbage – sometimes without a search warrant. Recently, FBI agents received authority to investigate suspected terrorists with no solid proof of their suspicions. Privacy has often been limited when Americans see themselves under attack, such as during the Cold War. In this regard, the War on Terror is little different.

**New Vulnerability** After 9/11, Americans experienced a new sense of vulnerability. Nearly three-quarters believed it was “extremely important” for the government to combat terrorism. Because the terrorists who carried out the attacks were Muslim extremists, many Americans viewed Muslims with suspicion.

Ten years later, anxiety has diminished. In 2011, only four Americans in ten saw combating terrorism as “extremely important,” a lower priority than repairing the economy.

Yet, Muslim Americans still face suspicion. In 2010, for example, a firestorm of criticism erupted when Muslim groups sought to construct an Islamic center in New York near the site of the World Trade Center. Supporters argued that most American Muslims are loyal citizens and the proposed center was a gesture of unity. Opponents believed it was an insult to people who died at the hands of Muslim extremists. Also, some politicians have declared that, if elected, they would not hire Muslims.

In financially-troubled times, economic concerns can quickly eclipse security, such as during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when defense budgets shrank. On the other hand, suspicion induced by fear dies hard, as Japanese Americans who were interned during the Second World War discovered. Change came to America on 9/11 but change within a longer history of continuity. Whether in the area of freedom, privacy, or vulnerability, the attacks accelerated changes that were already underway.

▲ Six days after the attacks, President Bush spoke at an Islamic center in Washington. He spoke out both against terrorists and against people who took out their anger on innocent Muslims. Here, a Muslim American joins thousands of others at a September 11 memorial at Yankee Stadium

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**Student Activity**

**Create a Lesson** Think about the ways that increased security affects people’s lives. For example, there are now limits on the amount of liquid you can carry on an airplane and travelers must take off their shoes at airport security stations. In some circumstances, security officers can physically examine passengers. It has become more difficult to get a U.S. Passport. Choose one example of increased security and find out the rules that apply. Then create a very short illustrated lesson to explain the rules to a young child. Your lesson can be delivered orally or in writing. Remember that your goal is to explain the rule without scaring the child.
The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 shocked and enraged Americans. In two hours, more Americans died than in the War of 1812, the Spanish American War, or the Gulf War. Americans from coast to coast could only watch the events on television and ask themselves: Who did this? What were the reasons? How could we protect ourselves?

**A New Kind of Enemy** Authorities quickly answered the “who” question. The attacks were planned and carried out by the Middle Eastern terrorist network al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin-Laden. Al-Qaeda had been responsible for other attacks on Americans, including the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Africa which killed 224 civilians. Al-Qaeda opposed everything about the United States, from its political freedoms and cultural openness to its close ties with Israel.

The attacks posed a challenge for foreign policy leaders. The last major attack on American soil had been the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Then, the U.S. responded by declaring war on Japan and entering World War II. But on 9/11, America had not been attacked by another country. Nor could the United States end terrorist attacks by defeating an enemy nation in a conventional war.

Instead, President Bush declared war on terrorism itself. On the evening of September 11, he told the nation, “Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedoms came under attack.” He promised that America would respond to the attacks and do its utmost to prevent future ones.

In October 2001, the military alliance led by the United States invaded Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s Taliban government supported al-Qaeda and gave sanctuary to bin-Laden and other terrorists. The majority of Americans approved of the invasion.

In Afghanistan, American and allied force ousted the Taliban from power and worked to build a democratic government. However, fighting continued as the Taliban retained many strongholds. After the death of bin-Laden in May 2011, President Obama announced plans to start withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.
In March 2003, the alliance also invaded Iraq. President Bush argued that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein supported global terrorism and had used chemical warfare against his own people. However, the invasion of Iraq proved controversial. There is no evidence that Iraq had any connection to the September 11 attacks. Claims that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction proved to be untrue.

**Long-Term Impact** The war against terrorism has been long and difficult, but it has yielded important results. The efforts of the alliance led to the capture or death of many terrorists and the disruption of the terrorist network. Symbolic of this effort was the Navy SEAL operation on April 29, 2011, that culminated in the death of bin-Laden, who had been hiding in Pakistan.

American leaders view Pakistan as a key ally in the war on terror. Since the death of bin-Laden, however, some Americans have asked how he could have survived in a country that supposedly supported the U.S. anti-terrorism policy. Such questions have strained relations between the two countries. Today, more than ever, the United States seeks allies that are committed to the destruction of the global terrorist network.

After toppling Saddam Hussein, Americans oversaw elections in Iraq and helped the Iraqis write a new constitution. Americans debated whether such “nation-building” should be a part of the War on Terror. Here, a U.S. soldier teaches an Iraqi student in one of the many schools built after the invasion. ▼

**Student Activity**

**Research** How is the war against terrorism going today? What related issues or views do Americans find important today? Research to find out the following: How many U.S. troops are currently stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan? Are there U.S. troops fighting terrorism anywhere else in the world today? What are those troops actually doing on a daily basis? What views do government leaders have about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? What goals or concerns do American citizens have with regards to these wars? Use websites for the U.S. military as well as major news outlets to gather information. Share your findings as the page of a history scrapbook with statistics, quotations, and images.
It is almost impossible to measure the heaviest cost of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001—the loss of 2,886 lives. But the attacks also had economic costs felt locally, nationally, and internationally. Some costs were felt immediately after the attacks. Some are still being felt today.

**Immediate Costs** A monetary value can be applied to the physical structures that were destroyed as a result of the attacks. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2002, the direct costs of the attacks were $27.2 billion. This includes both the cost of property damage and the cost of cleanup and rebuilding efforts afterward. (See the graph below for a breakdown of these costs.)

Another clear cost was disruption of business, especially in the areas hit hardest. Half a million people worked in or near the World Trade Center. The tragedy disrupted their work, and many lost their jobs altogether. With travel all but halted after the attacks, mass layoffs occurred in hundreds of industries throughout the country, particularly the airline, tourism, and hotel industries. Business interruption losses totaled $109 billion.

The New York Stock Exchange did not open on September 11, and when it reopened the following week, stock prices plunged. People feared a financial
panic. Stock exchanges in the United States and throughout the world recovered fairly swiftly, however. The Federal Reserve, which helps regulate the nation’s money supply, injected billions of dollars into the economy, keeping international exchange flowing. The Fed also lowered key interest rates, which kept credit available to banks and consumers.

**Long-Term Costs** The most significant long-term economic effect of the attacks has been shifting of resources. In order to fight a war, a government is always forced to shift funds and labor from domestic projects to military efforts. This type of economic choice is often referred to as a ‘guns-or-butter’ decision. Since 2001, about 20 percent of the U.S. budget—from $350 billion in 2002 to nearly $750 billion in 2011—has gone to provide domestic security and fight the War on Terror. The most obvious recipients of these federal outlays include the military, airports, and increased border and port security. Another recipient is the Treasury Department’s Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. Its 700 investigators and financial experts trace and hinder terrorist transactions.

Security concerns have also raised business costs. Many private companies installed new security measures. Some set up checkpoints with metal detectors, or hired extra security guards. Others invested in improved computer security programs to prevent hacking or to back up company files in case of attack. The costs of these and other counterterrorism measures have raised the prices of goods and services. Although U.S. troops killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden on May 1, 2011, security will continue to be an added cost of doing business and running the country.

This graph shows the costs of fighting two wars. The war in Afghanistan began in October 2001. The Iraq War began in March 2003. President Bush concentrated most U.S. military resources on Iraq. President Obama, who took office in 2009, began withdrawing troops from Iraq and ordered a troop surge in Afghanistan.

**Student Activity**

**Make Decisions** You know that if you buy a movie ticket, you might have to skip buying a new shirt. Government, and businesses must also make trade-offs and spending decisions. The billions of dollars spent on security and fighting terrorism since 9/11 has left less money for other needs. Is it more important to pay for security and wars than for schools, roads, or space exploration? Is it more important for a company to ensure the safety of its workplace and information than to invest in researching new products? What economic trade-offs, if any, would you make to keep the country safe? List at least three budget goals you would postpone or give up in order to pay for security, or explain why you would not sacrifice other goals. Then defend your decisions in a classroom debate.
Remembering September 11

Impact on Government and Citizenship Daniel M. Shea

After September 11, 2001, many Americans re-examined what their country meant to them. At the same time, the federal government’s response to the attacks caused disagreement.

A Question of Civil Liberties September 11 left Americans terrified of another terrorist strike. As a result, security was heightened. Within weeks, Congress passed the Patriot Act, which lowered restrictions on law enforcement agencies when investigating terrorist suspects. The Act made it easier to tap telephone lines, search phone records and emails, and review financial documents, without a warrant in some cases.

Americans have always valued personal privacy—a key aspect of individual liberty. Finding the right balance between privacy and security since September 11 has been controversial. We all want to feel safe, and we all want to head-off future attacks, but does that require pat downs at airports and bag searches at ball games? How far should individual liberties be sacrificed in the name of security?

Did 9/11 Unite or Divide Us? Immediately after the attacks, Americans felt a sense of unity. The deaths took place in New York, in Washington, in Pennsylvania – but everyone knew that the entire country was under attack.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some Legislation Resulting From September 11, 2001</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name of Legislation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists Resolution</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA Patriot Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victims of Terrorism Relief Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real ID Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act</td>
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</table>

The 9/11 terrorist attacks led to the passage of many new laws. Some strengthened counterterrorism efforts. Others were designed to aid victims of the attacks.

The War on Terror has highlighted the key role of intelligence-gathering departments such as the CIA.
First thoughts were for the victims and their families. Regardless of differences, millions gave blood or donated to funds for the victims. People of all faiths prayed for the nation and its leaders. As in the past, threats and grief brought Americans together.

But that sense of shared purpose faded quickly. In past conflicts, such as World War II, the enemy was obvious and the mission clear. But 9/11 was an attack by a fluid network of terrorists spread out across several nations. It was impossible to simply “go get ‘em!”

Most Americans supported the invasion of Afghanistan, which took place only a few weeks after the attacks. There was clear evidence that the Taliban government was shielding terrorists who planned the attack. But the invasion of Iraq in 2003 created a deep divide in America. While many favored the invasion, others felt the war in Iraq was a distraction from chasing the actual culprits and would cost needless American and Iraqi lives.

The 2004 and 2008 presidential elections were among the most partisan contests in generations. Americans were taking sides, unwilling to compromise. One commentator wrote, “It’s a mistake not to see something new, something raw and bitter and dangerous, in the particular moment we’re in.” These divisions were not caused by the terrorist attacks. But they showed that the sense of unity that came after 9/11 was very fragile.

We should be proud of our response to September 11. It was a shining moment of unity. Yet knowing how to respond to a terrorist threat in the long-term proved to be controversial. Still, the testament to our strength is not the immediate response to a crisis, but the freedom to disagree with passion even during times of uncertainty.

**Student Activity**

**Plan a Citizenship Campaign** Everyone living in the United States at the time of 9/11 felt attacked, so they tried to help the community recover in whatever ways they could. Much of that unity has been lost in the years since. What do you think can be done to reclaim it? How can individual Americans once again feel their shared citizenship in the national community? How can they work together to keep that community safe?

Develop one piece of a citizenship campaign. You may write a TV ad, create a poster, develop a comedy skit or radio essay, or design a web page. Whatever the medium, define the obligations of citizenship in your product. Convince your audience to take up those obligations in a personal way.
Credits

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