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## Exhibiting Atrocity

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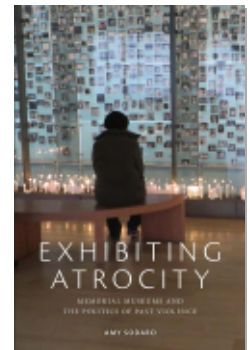
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6 • THE NATIONAL  
SEPTEMBER 11  
MEMORIAL MUSEUM  
“To Bear Solemn Witness”

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In May 2014, the National September 11 Memorial Museum opened to the public. On the site where the World Trade Center once stood, the museum joins the 9/11 Memorial in remembering and honoring the victims of what was the “largest loss of life resulting from a foreign attack on American soil” (9/11 Museum “About Memorial”). The existence of the 9/11 Memorial Museum suggests that the memorial, two massive reflecting pools in the footprints of the twin towers called Reflecting Absence, is inadequate for this task of remembering, and the museum seeks to be not only a place of memory but also a place “for examining the implications of the events of 9/11, documenting the impact of those events and exploring the continuing significance of September 11, 2001” (9/11 Memorial “Museum”). To fulfill this mission of memory and history, contextualization and documentation, a memorial museum was deemed the necessary commemorative form to contain the history and memory of 9/11.

After the buildings came down and seemingly before the dust had settled on September 11, 2001, conversations began about how to both commemorate the tragic event and redevelop the gaping hole in Lower Manhattan. Discussions abounded: some wanted to turn the site into a park; others wanted to rebuild the buildings, but taller; others proposed a variety of memorials;

and still others advocated leaving the site in ruins (Doss 2011, 28). While it seemed clear from the start that there would be some kind of memorial on the site, it was not clear or inevitable that there would also be a memorial museum, as inevitable as it now may seem (Sturken 2015). What was inevitable is that the redevelopment of the site and the effort to commemorate 9/11 in a way that was meaningful and acceptable to the families of those who were killed and the first responders, as well as to New Yorkers, Americans, and the millions of tourists who flock to the city each year, was contentious from the very beginning. Thus the museum is the result of a protracted process that resembles the discussions and debates surrounding the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). However, in this case, rather than a new cultural form of education and commemoration emerging—the memorial museum—we see the difficult process of commemoration of 9/11 resulting in the creation of the by now widely recognized memorial museum form, which in many ways is strained and changed by the complexity of remembering 9/11. In this chapter, I analyze the debates about commemoration of 9/11, with a focus on the decision to create a memorial museum—a cultural form that in this twenty-first-century iteration engages new technologies and modes of remembrance, while reflecting the form's political roots.

## REMEMBERING 9/11

September 11, 2001, is a day that changed the world. The clear, blue-skied September morning was shattered by a kind of terrorism that most Americans had never seen and could hardly imagine. Many Americans and people around the world spent the day and night glued to television sets watching the grim events unfold and a search for meaning emerge, as it became clear that this had been a spectacular terrorist attack. An estimated two billion people around the globe witnessed the event,<sup>1</sup> making it truly international, but it was also immediately framed as an attack on America and, in particular, New York City, though of course the Pentagon was also hit and another plane downed in Pennsylvania. And then there were the families. As the initial chaos, fear, and confusion of the morning gave way to the sickening realization of the scale of the loss and destruction, it became clear to many that a new world order was about to emerge.

The discussions about commemoration that began as Ground Zero smoldered and rescue workers searched for survivors indicate just how

firmly memory has inserted itself into our contemporary world. The events of 9/11 were captured in countless video recordings and photographs, in voice mail messages and black box recordings from the downed flights; the images seem seared into our collective consciousness. As many tried to erase these images, talk turned to the creation of what Nora refers to as *lieux de mémoire*, or mediated, deliberate, and constructed spaces intended to contain the collective memory of the past. It was not clear from the start just what shape this *lieu de mémoire* would take, but it was evident that the significance of the event and site of commemoration would necessitate a deeply reflective process.

As New York City began to resume its daily routines and the rest of the country mourned and got back to work, at the site that had quickly become known as Ground Zero, a huge rescue effort was under way that turned into recovery as it became clear that no more survivors would be found. Clearing the site of the almost two million tons of rubble became a priority and, with it, recovering artifacts and identifying remains. As this lengthy process plodded on, earnest discussions began about what to do with the site; in the attempt to adhere to the democracy that had been attacked on 9/11, the discussions were intended to be public and inclusive. To guide the process, then Governor Pataki and Mayor Giuliani created the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), which, in 2003, selected a design for the site created by Daniel Libeskind, who has by now become something of a “memorial starchitect.” Under his “grand design,” which over the years was wrested from his control, a high-profile design competition was called in 2003 for memorial designs. Evidencing the significance of both the attacks and the site, the competition jury was composed of well-known artists and architects, important civic actors and activists, and experts in the fields of memorialization including Maya Lin and James Young.<sup>3</sup>

The jury unanimously selected Michael Arad’s Reflecting Absence for the memorial component: two deep memorial pools inverting the towers with water cascading down their sides, which are lined with the names of those who died in a style highly reminiscent of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The memorial was initially going to share the space with a cultural center, housing the Drawing Center and the International Freedom Center (IFC), which was intended to be a “living memorial” to 9/11 that told the story through the lens of international struggles for freedom (Dunlap 2005). While controversies immediately surrounded issues like how the names of

the victims would be laid out on the fountains,<sup>3</sup> the more vehement outcry was over the cultural center and, in particular, the IFC. Families of the victims were concerned that its exhibits might denigrate America and, more pressing, that the IFC would detract from the story of 9/11. In response to these fears, they formed a campaign to “take back the memorial” and vigorously argued that the entire site should be dedicated to the memory and story of 9/11. They won and the IFC was evicted from Libeskind’s plan in 2005, mollifying some families for the moment.

The underground space of the memorial plaza had been reserved for some kind of museum, and in 2006, serious discussions began about what that museum would look like. At the helm was museum director Alice Greenwald, former director of the USHMM, who was joined by a team of curatorial and other experts, as well as 9/11 family members and community leaders. Set on creating a memorial museum, from the beginning the creators were extremely self-aware of the challenges to the project that lay ahead. They well understood both the normative expectations surrounding the creation of a memorial museum and the particulars of a memorial museum created to such a high-profile and widely witnessed event. To attempt to navigate this difficult terrain, they began the project with a “Conversation Series” intended to bring together memorial, museum, and trauma experts with key stakeholders, including family members, business and religious leaders, politicians, and community members to discuss the potential and pitfalls of the project. They set out with a set of core considerations that demonstrate the self-reflexivity of the project:

- The potential and character of 21st century museums;
- The particular requirements and sensitivities of memorial museums that must balance the concerns of privacy with the imperative to educate;
- The challenge of understanding the Museum’s role and responsibility to present visually-difficult imagery without re-traumatizing the public and in an age-appropriate way to younger visitors;
- How the story told in the Museum will contribute to the writing of history, and how the emerging story already echoes key themes of the American historical narrative; and
- The role museums increasingly play as instruments of civic renewal. (9/11 Memorial “Conversation Series Report 2006–2008”)

Each year from 2006 to 2013, Conversation Series were held. In the beginning, discussions were more theoretical and broad, such as on the nature and role of museums and the construction of a narrative of 9/11. As the years went by, the discussions became more specific and focused, such as whether and how to tell the story of the many people who jumped to their deaths, whether to display the “composite,”<sup>4</sup> and the depiction of Islam in the museum. One pressing concern was how to display traumatic information without retraumatizing individuals, and for this purpose, trauma experts and counselors were included in the discussions. And throughout the series, a range of museum experts and academics, such as Edward Linenthal and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett<sup>5</sup> joined the talks, reflecting the desire of this process to adhere to what are increasingly accepted as international “best practices” in the creation of memorial museums.

As the conversation series played out over the years, the creation of the exhibits began under the joint leadership of Thinc Design’s Tom Hennes and Local Projects’ Jake Barton. As the team began to delve into the event and its meaning in the effort to determine how it should be represented, one striking fact about 9/11 kept returning: how widely mediated, recorded, and witnessed the attacks had been. Realizing that more than half of the world’s population likely remembers precisely where they were on 9/11, a driving principle in the museum’s design began to emerge, that of letting individuals tell the story of 9/11. This idea of privileging individual memories and stories in the museum was not new for Jake Barton, whose firm had designed the extremely popular StoryCorps oral history project. In a TED Talk on the museum (2013), he describes listening as a form of love and the desire to make “history” out of people’s memory. He notes the “symmetry” between the event and how people tell it and how they need to tell it, and from the very beginning, this new mode of what we might think of as “crowdsourcing” history and memory became the key to the construction of narrative in the 9/11 Museum.

As the previous case studies demonstrate, survivor and witness testimony is always a part of memorial museums. In their effort to be both houses of history and spaces of memory, memorial museums use individual testimony to augment the historical artifacts, documents, and narrative displayed in their exhibits. Testimony as memory creates an affective impact that history cannot. It also serves to give the victims voice and points toward the emphasis in memorial museums on the experiences and humanity of the victims and survivors. In the 9/11 Museum, however,

the use of “testimony” is quite different from other memorial museums. Rather than memory complementing the historical narrative, the history in the 9/11 Museum is meant to be constructed out of individual memories. Part of this is a function of the new kinds of technology that allowed individuals around the world not only to witness the event but also to record and share their memories and experiences of the event. But it also points to the way that the 9/11 Museum takes memorial museum tropes to a new, twenty-first-century level. The “democratization of memory” that has pushed the memory boom and rise of mechanisms like memorial museums that are meant to bring the experiences and voices of marginalized or silenced individuals into public light is, in the 9/11 Museum, taking on a whole new meaning as individual memories become the foundation of the creation of historical narrative. However, as we shall see, while perhaps the intention was to create a fragmented, “collected” memory of 9/11 sourced from experiences all over the world (Young 1993), the museum instead creates a hegemonic and monolithic memory of the event that is deeply political and problematic.

## THE NATIONAL SEPTEMBER 11 MEMORIAL MUSEUM

As the brief background on the museum’s creation above demonstrates, the National September 11 Memorial Museum was created in a deliberate, careful process that drew upon the growing collective body of knowledge and expectations about how to remember a traumatic past through the construction of a memorial museum. In many ways, the process of creating the 9/11 Museum is the logical conclusion of decades of “memorial museum mania”<sup>6</sup> across the globe that has contributed to an international set of norms and best practices; hewing to these norms and processes, the process of creating the museum indeed seems to be a model of “memory work.” And just as 9/11 marked the geopolitical end of the twentieth century, in many ways commemorating it marks the end of twentieth-century commemorative forms; the process outlined above has created a massive, highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art, twenty-first-century memorial museum.

The finished museum boasts of 110,000 feet of exhibition space “in the archaeological heart of the World Trade Center site,” and whether intended to or not, the museum cannot help but to shock and awe visitors—from the twenty-four-dollar entrance fee, to the massive scale of the building and

artifacts on display, to the breadth of the collection and minute-by-minute account of the morning of 9/11, to some of its overt omissions. Visitors enter the museum through the memorial plaza, where it is tucked into a corner of the site, which is dominated by Arad's pools. For someone who has visited other memorial museums, the pavilion's steel beams enclosed in a skin of glass, designed by the Norwegian firm Snøhetta, seems typical of the sleek, industrial concrete and steel "architecture of memory." The similarity to Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, the USHMM, and the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (MMHR) in Chile is instantly striking. And, as is not uncommon at Holocaust museums, the first encounter one has at the 9/11 Museum, after the often extraordinarily long lines, is airport-style security. Once in the building, visitors must empty their pockets and remove their coats to walk through metal detectors. While perhaps this should make one feel secure, it rather reminds that this is a place that has the potential to be dangerous and that visitors should be alert and fearful.

Inside the pavilion, one can go upstairs to an auditorium and café or descend down into the museum proper, which is located at bedrock, seven stories below the ground and designed by New York firm Davis Brody Bond (DBB). Whichever way the visitor goes, she is met in the pavilion by the skeletal remains of the WTC buildings, two "tridents" that are massive in scale. In creating the museum, DBB set four principles to which they would adhere: scale, memory, authenticity, and emotion (Sturken 2015, 478). We shall soon see how memory, authenticity, and emotion play out, but scale is the first thing that strikes a visitor—initially, the scale of the memorial itself and then the scale of the museum represented first in those tridents, which give a taste of what is to come. As a driving principle of its design and a key aspect of the experience of the museum, the sheer scale of it all is deeply important to the story and memory the museum creates about 9/11. As Marita Sturken argues, the scale of the site, the memorial, and the museum "all converge to convey the sense of 9/11 as an event of massive importance" (Sturken 2015, 478).

Acutely aware of the heavy significance of the event one is about to witness, the visitor begins the descent to the museum. On the first lower level, the daylight that had streamed in through the glass of the Pavilion is gone, and muted lighting and somber dark wood shifts the visitor into quiet, serious museum mode. Past the information booth, the exhibit begins with a huge photograph of the Twin Towers on the morning of September 11, the



sun streaming behind them, a spot where many visitors pause for photographs. Breaking the levity, a massive map on the wall shows the trajectory of the planes that morning as they set off on course and then gruesomely changed direction with deadly intent. Here the first bottleneck of visitors occurs as this story we feel we know so well begins to be explicated. Viewing the photo and map, one becomes aware of a cacophony of voices, and as the overview of the events begins to sink in, visitors can begin to make out what the voices are saying. The voices overlap—men and women, many with accents from across the globe. It is a recording of individuals (417 of them to be precise) recounting their memories of 9/11, some of whom were nearby and others thousands of miles away.

As the words of the voices begin to come into focus, so too does a series of columns that lead the visitor forward and onto which are projected words that together create the shapes of continents. If one stands at the right angle, the columns converge to create a map of the globe. Beyond this map, images of people witnessing the event are projected onto further columns. This at



FIGURE 13. View from the platform of the Foundation Hall, with the Last Column in the center and the slurry wall on the left.

Photo by Amy Sodaro.

once reminds the visitor that 9/11 was an event witnessed and felt around the world and also invites the visitor to become a witness to the event as well. And as we shall see, witnessing in the museum becomes an important ethical act and a democratic duty. As one listens, the visitor realizes that like the map, the voices also converge. The individuals from France, England, Morocco, California, and New York finish each other's sentences. What at first seems to depict the multiplicity and fragmentation of individual memories of the day begins to literally form into one coherent narrative: collected memory becoming collective.<sup>7</sup>

Down the ramp past the voices, the visitor reaches a stunning viewing platform overlooking the slurry wall, which was constructed to hold back the waters of the New York Harbor from the World Trade Center buildings. Surrounding it in the cavernous Foundation Hall are scattered massive artifacts, at the center of which is the Last Column.<sup>8</sup> As one gapes yet again at the scale, the depth of the museum begins to sink in, and the visitor must descend yet again to the exhibitions. Another long hallway leads the visitor down past photos of the site before and after the attacks and past projections of the very first 9/11 memorials, the missing posters that desperate

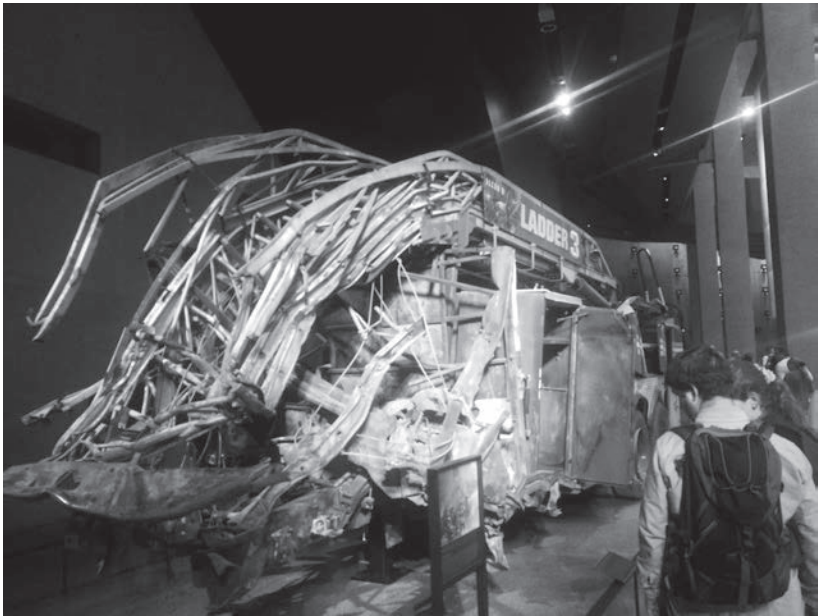


FIGURE 14. Ladder 3 fire truck.  
Photo by Amy Sodaro.

loved ones posted around the city. At the bottom of the ramp is yet another viewing platform, this one overlooking the striking and immense memorial artwork by Spencer Finch, “Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on that September Morning.” The almost three thousand pieces of paper—one for each victim—in almost three thousand different shades of blue remind both of the number of the victims and of the beautiful day that changed the world forever. Set into the blue collage is a quote from Virgil’s *Aeneid*: “No day shall erase you from the memory of time.” Meant to be a testament to the healing and enduring power of memory, the quote has been deeply controversial. In the original context, the “you” were two Trojan perpetrators who were brutally slaughtered after they viciously attacked their enemies. Classicists argue that the original context of the quote makes it more applicable to the perpetrators of 9/11 than its victims (Dunlap 2014). Nevertheless, the quote hangs in massive scale on the wall and also adorns various tchotchkes in the gift shop.

Down one last set of stairs and past the remnant of the “Vesey staircase,” which many people used to escape the burning buildings, the visitor is at last in the cavernous Foundation Hall and unsure about where to go. Straight ahead is a cube wrapped in aluminum—the base of one of the memorial reflecting pools, which contains the memorial—and around the corner are more massive artifacts and the other building footprint. It’s not clear which way the visitor is intended to proceed, but perhaps in the logic of a museum that constructs its narrative around individual experiences the individual should decide for herself. Here, we will begin with the “Historical Exhibit.” Unlike the creators of the MMHR in Chile, who were reluctant to use the term or field of history to describe their recent past, in the 9/11 Museum this exhibit suggests that a mere decade after 9/11, it is an event that necessitates historical framing. In describing the need to create the museum, filmmaker Steven Rosenbaum, who documented the events of 9/11 and the creation of the museum, explains that we oddly know little about 9/11 and argues that “complex nuance and historic detail are at risk of being lost to history” without a museum to tell that history (2012). Thus one anchor of the museum is the historical exhibit, called simply “September 11, 2001.”

## THE HISTORICAL EXHIBIT

Entering the historical exhibit, the museum experience dramatically changes. Photography is allowed in Foundation Hall, where selfie-sticks, iPads held high, and people posing in front of mangled firetrucks and pieces of the buildings feel almost a part of the exhibit. As the crush of visitors squeeze their way through a revolving door, they are reminded that no photography is allowed inside the historical exhibit. Instead, apparently, all senses are to be focused on learning the history of 9/11. And while the pavilion, the descent, and Foundation Hall are all characterized by their sweeping scale and massive proportions, suddenly the museum feels cramped, claustrophobic, chaotic, and uncomfortable. Thus begins the 9/11 experience.

Once inside one is thrust, in multimedia, into the events of the day. Through images, documents, videos, artifacts, and a constant din of overlapping audio background, the museum endeavors to show the visitor how the gorgeous, blue-skied September day was shattered. It immediately becomes apparent that the exhibit follows a timeline. In the way that all memorial museums tell a chronological story following a controlled path, so too does the 9/11 Museum. But instead of spanning months or years, this timeline spans minutes—102 of them, from the time the first plane hit the north tower at 8:46 a.m. until the north tower collapsed at 10:28 a.m. The timeline snakes along the wall with details about what was happening in the sky and on the ground flanking the passing of the minutes, taking us from Lower Manhattan, to the Pentagon, to Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and back to Lower Manhattan. Surrounding the timeline, the senses are assaulted by the images of destruction—the airplane slamming again and again into the south tower; flames leaping from the gaping holes in the buildings; people screaming and running for their lives. Huge artifacts, like twisted ambulances, remind the visitor of the scale of destruction, while small personal belongings like wallets, eyeglasses, shoes, and backpacks, remind of the human scale.

But most powerful and affective is the audio. The soundtrack to the exhibit is a clamor of voices of victims, family members, survivors, talking heads, and witnesses to the event. There are screams and shouts of disbelief, sirens wailing all around, incredulous newscasters trying to make sense of what was happening even while trying to explain it to their viewers, and the voices of the victims themselves in the voice mail messages they left

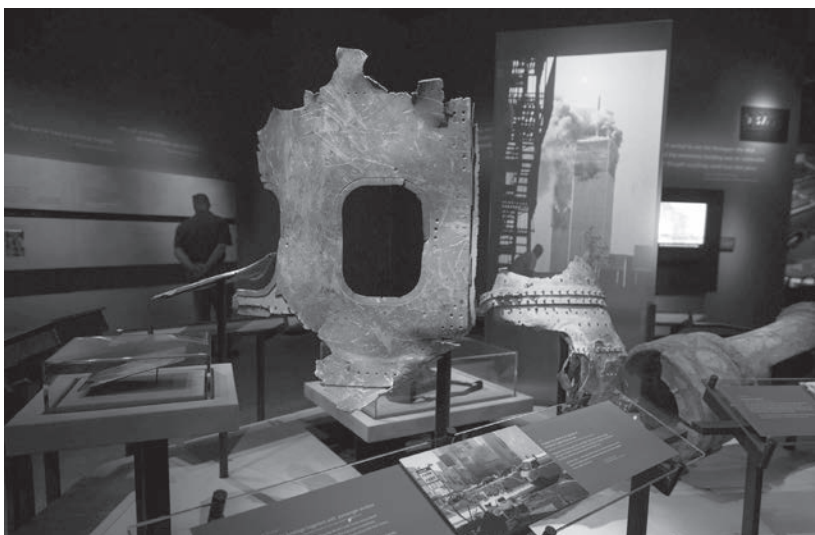


FIGURE 15. Detail of the historical exhibit.  
Damon Winter / *The New York Times* / Redux.

for their loved ones. As noted, testimony is an intrinsic and essential part of all memorial museums, but no others offer the voices of the victims who no longer have a voice, and the effect is deeply affective.

If one wants to delve emotionally deeper, there are other moving and affective recordings and testimonies in the alcoves set off from the main exhibit, with signs warning of the “disturbing material” inside and podiums holding tissues discretely tucked into the corners. One of the lead designers, Tom Hennes of Thinc Design, described their efforts to make the space what they referred to as “safe enough—providing enough safety to allow the experience to enter us in the museum, but not so safe that we don’t stretch our own horizons and come to new insights about ourselves and others” (2014). Visitors who wish to “stretch their horizons” can enter these alcoves and there, in the dark, listen to stories of those who escaped the building. Visitors can hear the recordings from the hijacked flights’ black boxes and the calls made by the flight crews and passengers to their loved ones and to air traffic controllers. One can follow Flight 93 to its heroic end in a Pennsylvania field. Visitors can witness the people who were forced to jump to their deaths in an almost beautiful still photograph of people falling through the sky and in the heart-wrenching quotes on the wall of those who witnessed it. One in particular stands out: “She had a

business suit on, her hair was all askew . . . This woman stood there for what seemed like minutes, then she held down her skirt and then stepped off of the ledge . . . I thought, how human, how modest, to hold down her skirt before she jumped . . . I couldn't look any more." Together with this witness, the visitor is also witness to the impossible choices that people were forced to make that horrific morning.

The intensity of the day begins to ebb after the buildings fall. The chaotic audio collage of sirens and screams gives way to a mournful, monotonous beeping of the Personal Alert Safety System (PASS) device that firefighters wear to notify others if they are in distress. Time slows as the visitor walks in disbelief—like those who were there that day—through the wreckage. Twisted metal reminds of the destruction, and the images are so large and powerful that one almost feels herself coated in the white dust that settled over the city. And with the settling dust, a deep sadness overtakes the fear and trauma of the preceding rooms. As one moves through the immediate aftermath of search, rescue, and recovery, which has a dual emphasis on the destruction of the attacks and the courage of the first responders, the magnitude of the task of recovery becomes almost overwhelming, serving to remind the visitor of the triumph of the very existence of the museum.

After the solemnity of rescue and recovery, the chronology that so rigidly guided the events of 9/11 suddenly ruptures as the historical exhibit turns to a set of disjointed rooms focused on before and after 9/11. From the horrors of the day, visitors step into a strange room of kitschy portrayals of the Twin Towers—a model of the towers stands in the center, and the walls are lined with movie posters and other pop culture references, saving the towers from their architectural banality. This jarringly nostalgic room is followed by a room focused on the 1993 WTC bombing. Those iconic towers were the victim of not one but two terror attacks—a stark reminder of their symbolic power and the persistence of the terrorists who want to harm America. With an ideological connection between the WTC attacks established, the visitor moves on to two rooms focused on the rise of Al Qaeda and the perpetrators of the attacks. The centerpiece of this historical contextualization of 9/11 is an almost seven minute video, narrated by Brian Williams, that traces the emergence and establishment of Al Qaeda. In his newscaster voice, speaking at a breakneck pace, Williams delivers a staccato overview of Al Qaeda and their murky grievances against the United States. A wall of panels opposite the film repeats much of the same

information, with some supplemental detail, and together these are supposed to give visitors the context they need to understand the 9/11 attacks and their ongoing significance. Largely because of the film, the museum garnered criticism in its early days for not doing enough to distinguish Al Qaeda from the peaceful practice of Islam; indeed, some of the terminology used in the museum—"fringe elements of Islam," "Islamist" and "jihad"—could potentially conflate Islam and terrorism in the minds of some. There is a small panel that gives a visual depiction of the miniscule position of Al Qaeda within Sunni Islam, but in the museum's one hundred thousand square feet of exhibition space, this tiny graphic is easy to miss. From my experience, most visitors watch some or all of the video and perhaps glance passingly at the information panels; after all, one has just emerged from an emotionally draining experience, and "we all know" who committed the attacks.

The final section of "Before 9/11" has two small rooms devoted to the hijackers who carried out the attacks. In these two small rooms, the difficulty of representing perpetrators in a memorial museum becomes highly apparent. All memorial museums focus on victims, pointing to an underlying fear that representing the perpetrators or explaining their actions might lead to understanding or condoning them; this is no different in the 9/11 Museum. The plan to include the perpetrators in the exhibit was controversial from the start. Some viewed the decision as "appalling," a form of tribute and "honor" to the terrorists. Others argued that a historical exhibition must tell the history of what had happened, which has to include the perpetrators (Cohen 2012). Particularly polemical was the decision to exhibit photographs of the perpetrators, so a compromise was struck: as one moves from the first to the second room focused on them, small photographs of the hijackers and their names are displayed, arranged according to the flights they hijacked, and hung at knee level. It was clearly a conscious, if awkward, decision to not only morally and politically but also physically ensure that their status in the narrative and displays in the museum is lower than that of victims, survivors, and rescuers. In this part of the exhibit, there are other uncomfortable omissions as well. Under a reproduction of a letter from September 10, 2001, called "The Last Night," only one line of translation is offered, though the full letter written in Arabic intrigues those who wish to really attempt to understand the motivation behind 9/11. The historical exhibition was developed under extreme pressure from family members and others who believed that including the stories of the perpetrators

would allow them a say in the creation of historical narrative. So while the perpetrators are named and photographed and their motivations touched on, the space given to them is limited and kept very much on the periphery of the story the museum is telling. This keeps the focus on the victims and reminds us with whom we are to identify when we remember and process the events of 9/11.

There is more space devoted to “After 9/11,” most of which is focused on how America united in the aftermath of violence. A huge wall is devoted to the proliferation of the American flag in the days and weeks following 9/11. Posters of the missing give faces and names to those whose destruction one has just witnessed, and other makeshift memorials, like messages of sadness and hope scrawled onto walls and doors, take one back to those early hours and days as witnesses struggled to make sense of what had happened. Newspaper headlines and magazine covers give evidence of how a whole nation and world grappled with the attacks and around the room videos depict the responses of talking heads, politicians, late night talk show hosts, and others. Though the difficulty of making sense of the attacks is acutely felt in this section, even more evident is the way that America—and the world—was united in grief, mourning, and resolve.

The final room, “Beyond Recovery,” opens with a set of questions about the ongoing effects of 9/11, like who should be held accountable? How do we know what happened? Sprinkled around these head-scratching questions are words that they might call to mind: memory, proof, extremists, remains, terrorism, enhanced interrogation. Answers to the questions are attempted around the room, with small panels of text and images giving cursory information. Tucked into this part of the exhibit, under the heading “How Can America Protect Its Citizens from Terrorism?”—and afforded the same space the museum gives to addressing conspiracy theories—is the only acknowledgment of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; the United States’ use of torture, unlawful detention, and the PATRIOT Act; and the continued threat of terrorism. The museum’s scant mention of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq contextualizes them within the “Global War on Terror” and is primarily aimed at celebrating the heroism of the troops and suggesting that war was a necessary response to 9/11: a photograph of a bomb in Afghanistan dedicated to memory of the victims, a sign designating a navy camp in Iraq “Let’s Roll,” a note left at the site of the crash of Flight 93 by someone who joined the military because of 9/11. And while there are two dull reproductions of anti-(Iraq) war flyers, they are dwarfed by a



color photograph of a sign toted at a prowar rally reading “We gave peace a chance, we got 9/11.” There is a photograph of detainees at Guantanamo, but other than the inclusion of “enhanced interrogation” in the spread of words related to the big questions, this is as close as the museum comes to addressing the US use of torture and unlawful detention in the aftermath of 9/11. Rather, this section is dominated by four large, gruesome photographs of the attacks “linked to” or “influenced by” Al Qaeda in Bali, Madrid, London, and Mumbai. These terrible images, followed by the carnage one has just witnessed, remind us that terror remains a very real threat. The visitor is thus comforted by the nearby photograph of President Bush signing the PATRIOT Act, a reminder that the American government is doing everything it can and must do to protect its citizens from another 9/11. Indeed, after the experience of the historical exhibition, it seems that any and all tactics for protecting Americans are critically needed and fully justified.

## IN MEMORIAM

The other anchor of the museum is the memorial, In Memoriam, which occupies the other building footprint. The walls of the room are lined with photos of the almost three thousand victims of 9/11 and the 1993 WTC attack. The color photos are all the same size and fill the walls of the large room, reminding the visitor of the staggering scale of loss. If one gets close, the individual photos attest to the individuality of the victims who were lost. But stepping back and viewing the room as a whole, the photos lose their individuality and become one massive victim of hateful ideology. Inside the room is a smaller, darkened cube with a glass floor through which the bedrock can be seen. It is lined with benches, and projected on the walls, one at a time, are more details about individual victims, such as their age and interests, additional photographs, and reminiscences by family and friends. This same information can be looked up in the touch table databases around the room, very much like the searchable database at the MMHR in Chile. And scattered throughout the room are display cases with personal belongings of the victims—phones, rings and wallets, ear muffs and stuffed animals, combs and glasses. The memorial, which so strikingly reminds one of the tower of photos in the USHMM, the courtyard lined with victims’ faces in the House of Terror, the memorial room of photographs in the Kigali Centre, and the Area of Remembrance in the MMHR, attests

to the innocence of the victims, who were simply going about their daily routines when suddenly they were taken by an act of extreme violence. Having just been “through” the attacks, the visitor/victim can’t help but identify and empathize with these thousands of victims who are depicted as being just like her.

## BEYOND THE MUSEUM

True to the memorial museum form, the 9/11 Museum experience does not have to be limited to a visit to the exhibitions. Rather, the museum has a robust set of educational and public programs and a sophisticated website intended to reach far beyond the already massive audience of the museum itself. Like the other museums in this book, the 9/11 Museum is actively collecting testimony from individuals and visitors—not just those who were there during the attacks, but any individual with a memory of the day. It is thus creating a vast oral history archive, which it has used and continues to use to construct its narrative. In this way, it takes the notion of the museum as an interactive and democratic space to an extreme that is practically unprecedented. While the other museums here seek to involve visitors, those who did not directly witness the events are not a part of the writing of history. This effort to involve visitors (and the estimated 2 billion people who witnessed the event) in the museum’s telling of history demonstrates a new, more interactive and wide-reaching role that museums imagine for themselves today. And it is largely twenty-first-century media and technology that makes it possible, which the museum has greatly relied on in its design and development.

Utilizing technology, the museum thus attempts to make sure that even those who cannot physically visit the museum can have a virtual 9/11 experience. The museum’s website has an interactive timeline, not unlike the one that structures the historical exhibit. In this way, anyone can trace the minutes and seconds of that day. It also offers an interactive, virtual tour of the museum and memorial in which visitors can select their own paths, customizing their experiences. It has timelines of the recovery of the site and resources on everything from the health of recovery workers to recent terror attacks.

For those wishing to go deeper, the museum and website offer robust educational resources. In addition to school visits, the museum hosts

professional development for teachers and summer programs and workshops for students and offers online lesson plans and teaching guides for those who are not local. There is a museum ambassador program for high school students who spend a year working at the museum, researching, writing, and giving artifact talks. There are also family programs that use stories and art to teach younger children about 9/11. And for those on the other end of the educational spectrum, scholars and graduate students, the museum's website has an archive of primary sources related to 9/11 (9/11 Memorial "Primary Sources"), including such documents as Osama Bin Laden's "Declaration of Jihad against Americans" from 1996, a full translation of the terrorists' "Last Night" letter of September 10, 2001, the congressional authorization for the use of military force in response to the attacks, the text of the PATRIOT Act, and numerous speeches and remarks by politicians. There are also many webcasts available that feature experts speaking on topics ranging from memorialization and memory to Middle East history and security.

The museum also has an active schedule of public programs meant to further examine issues around terrorism and 9/11, to fulfill its "mission to explore the global impact of 9/11 and its continuing significance" (9/11 Memorial "Public Programs"). A recent sampling of public programs include a talk by photographer Andrea Booher on "Hope at Ground Zero," a discussion with Henry Kissinger on security and the Middle East, a presentation by scholar Katherine E. Brown on the women of ISIS, and a talk by Manhattan district attorney Cyrus Vance on the competing demands of immediate responses to crises versus longer term security. Thus, like the other museums in this book, the 9/11 Museum seeks to go well beyond the exhibiting of artifacts and documents, striving to be a public space for the asking and answering of difficult contemporary questions. Though also like the other museums, of course, most people's experience of the museum is in fact limited to a visit to its exhibitions.

## BEARING WITNESS IN THE MUSEUM

Visiting the museum is a moving, powerful, and sometimes overwhelming experience. And for visitors to Holocaust and other memorial museums, it is also largely familiar. There are common exhibitionary tropes like the narrative structure, emphasis on victims, audio and video testimony,

multimedia and interactive displays, a memorial space with photographs and details about the victims' lives; even the architecture is similar, though on a very large scale. However, there are also some ways in which the 9/11 Museum is dramatically different from other memorial museums, suggesting a new twenty-first-century iteration of the form that politicizes the past in new—and deeply troubling—ways.

Memorial museums have as a key function documentation of past violence so that it cannot be denied or forgotten. As the museums analyzed in this book demonstrate, their artifacts, testimony, and other forms of documentation serve as evidence of the violence that occurred; the museums are intended to literally bear witness to past violence. From the moment one enters the 9/11 Museum, it is clear that this is a different kind of event being remembered—one that was witnessed globally. Rather than bringing to light that which had been hidden, like the genocidal murder, torture, or disappearances that other memorial museums display, the 9/11 Museum is not so much museum as witness but a museum *about* witnessing. The museum crowdsources memories of 9/11 to create a history of that day. The attacks of 9/11 were so heavily mediated—by the media itself, but also by individual witnesses—that there is little that needs to be witnessed in and by the museum.

If we think of the 9/11 Museum as a museum about witnessing in a very twenty-first-century fashion, perhaps the most noteworthy part of the exhibition is its use of audio recording—from recordings of the hijacked airplanes' cockpits, to voice mail messages from family members who never made it home, to news reports and individual remembrances, the experience of the museum is predominantly audio. Lead designer Jake Barton described the museum as a "listening experience," and indeed this is central to not only the experience of the historical exhibit but the larger goals of the museum's creators. The hope was to avoid a single story line and instead allow visitors to reconstruct narratives on their own, using the artifacts on display. According to director Alice Greenwald, "Witnesses are the way into the museum" (Kuang 2014). Further, the act of witnessing is conceived by the designers as an ethical act. Tom Hennes, the other lead designer writes, about witnessing: "By maintaining the first-person voice throughout, and by continuously re-grounding the exhibits in lived experience, we have sought to create conditions where people feel comfortable moving out of their own experience to witness the events and others' myriad responses to them with greater empathy and an increased sense of how

they themselves relate to 9/11. By witnessing others, and being witnessed by others in the museum, we are all brought into closer contact with our own humanity” (Hennes 2014). However, while the museum’s creators intended to democratize memory in the hope of avoiding the creation of a single, hegemonic narrative and history of 9/11, they have actually done quite the opposite. Just as in the opening corridor, the overlapping memories of more than four hundred people who witnessed the event from near or far are stitched together into one “memory” of the day, throughout the historical exhibit, the individual testimonies and memories all reinforce the same story of 9/11. The “collected memory” of many individuals is aggregated into one shared and cohesive collective memory of the day (Young 1993; Olick 1999). While individuals were in different places with different vantage points, together their memories form a shared narrative and history of the events of September 11.

This coherence of the memories of diverse and disparate individuals about such a complicated event is possible because of the limited context of the museum. Temporal context is often politically determined, as we have seen in the other case studies in this book. As the 9/11 Museum was being created, a pressing question that the designers had to engage was the question of when 9/11 began and ended. The simplest answer—and what was ultimately decided upon—is that 9/11 began at 8:46 a.m. on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, and, though the museum suggests that its impact is still not over, in the museum’s telling, 9/11 essentially ended when Ground Zero had been cleared. This narrow temporal contextual focus, like in the MMHR, accomplishes several things at once.

First of all, it allows for a narrative that is relatively simple to tell in a museum: a compelling plot line that follows a clear chronology and is moved along by innocent victims, brave heroes, and evil perpetrators. In fact, this adherence to the chronology of the day through the timeline is one of the most striking things about the historical exhibit. As has been noted, chronological exhibits in memorial museums are a common trope and conform to expectations of how historical museum narratives should be structured. But most memorial museums tell a story that spans months or years. In the 9/11 Museum, most of the story spans 102 minutes, so it is a very different use of chronology.

Literary scholar Justin Neuman has coined the term “chronomania” to describe the “obsession with time and temporal disruption that characterizes representations of 9/11,” which he argues obscures meaning (2011).

While his focus is on the 9/11 Commission Report and various key political speeches after 9/11, his concept works well to describe the obsession with time in the museum. The timeline is nothing if not chronomaniacal, suggesting to visitors that the important question in understanding 9/11 is not why but *when*. Just as the museum's emphasis on witnessing collects the memories of individuals into one shared memory/history of the day, its emphasis on time "by refashioning disaster as chronology . . . aims to replace victims with knowers—first by establishing an authorial subject in command of its perceptual, technological and temporal fields, and second, by attempting to shape personal and collective understandings of 9/11 by securing events unfolding in multiple locations and witnessed in myriad ways on a single, immanent timeline" (Neuman 2011). The timeline becomes all important—the anchor to an understanding of the day that obscures deeper meanings.

This chronomania of the timeline leads us to the second way in which the narrow contextual focus of the museum works: to depict 9/11 as a rupture that occurred "out of the blue," the blue in this idiom of course being the sky. This notion of 9/11 as an event that occurred out of the blue is quite literally suggested in the frequent representational focus on the beautiful September day that was ruptured when planes fell out of the perfect blue sky. The museum's massive wall of sky blues underlines this idealized gorgeous blue from which 9/11 came out, and this is indeed a tempting way to think of that day. It is also a way of remembering 9/11 that is very much encouraged in wide-ranging representations of the day in large part because it allows us to forget about the causes of the event. The framing of 9/11 as a rupture has become very important politically. As Neuman writes, "The disappearance of history at the heart of chronomania denies the narratives that would consider the role played by American policies in creating the material conditions out of which 9/11 arose and substitutes for them dystopian imaginings of greater violence yet to come" (2011).

And this brings us to the third key function of the narrow focus of the museum on the events of the day: this allows the museum—and as Neuman's work shows, other representations of 9/11—to avoid confrontation with the politics behind the cause and consequences of 9/11. This is deeply problematic in a memorial museum. Because they are both museum and memorial, an important feature of memorial museums is their ability to give context to the violence that occurred. Memorials can effectively remember victims and often inspire some kind of moral reflection, but museums are

able to tell a more complete story that combines affect with understanding in order to convey a moral message. And so memorial museums to political violence are meant to take painstaking steps to contextualize the violence so that visitors are better able to comprehend what happened and why. However, of the more than one hundred thousand feet of exhibition space in the 9/11 Museum, very little is devoted to context. The two small rooms on the origins of the 9/11 attacks can hardly address the complexity of the motivations behind the attacks and extremist terrorism more generally, and the lack of any meaningful discussion of the two wars, which continue to embroil American resources and military personnel, or the accelerated rise of extremist terrorism belies any claim the museum can make to contextualizing the events within contemporary American and global society.

Rather, the museum's focus on the events and *trauma* of the day—at the expense of historical contextualization—tell a story of 9/11 that is deeply affective and emotional. In its minute detail of the destruction and traumatic rendering of the 102 minutes, the museum's historical exhibition gives visitors such a forceful emotional experience of 9/11 that they cannot help but come away from the historical exhibition deeply horrified and angry. And while the story the museum tells is one of a wounded America, all visitors, because of the ethical implications of their role as witness to the events, are invited to identify with the individuals and values that were attacked. And the museum goes further than simply promoting American values and ideals such as democracy and freedom. It presents a simple, Manichean image of the world, in which the good “us” (Americans, and by extension, visitors to the museum) was attacked by the evil “them.” The museum takes pains to ensure that the perpetrators of this violence are depicted as “outsiders”—literal in that they were not US citizens and had spent hardly any time in this country and metaphorical in that they espoused an ideology that is radically foreign to most visitors of the museum. Further, in the effort to not grant the perpetrators too much space or voice, the context given to their ideological position is superficial and sheds little light on the deeper causes of the rise of global terrorism. The museum creates an evil other against which the glorious USA triumphs and will continue to triumph. It is ultimately a highly nationalistic museum that serves a Durkheimian, nineteenth-century museological purpose of “renewing the sentiment that the group has of itself and of its unity” (1965, 420). It serves the purpose of bolstering American national identity, drawing all those who visit into its Manichean world of “us against them.” Like the nationalist underpinnings

of the House of Terror and the narrative of national revival in the Kigali Centre, the 9/11 Museum's narrative of the past is deeply nationalistic and divisive.

## CONCLUSION

All the museums examined here are important as tourist sites, a function that greatly impacts the ways in which they confront the past. However, the 9/11 Museum, because of the global impact of the event, the highly public process of redeveloping the site, and its location in the heart of New York City, is especially shaped and challenged by its role as a destination for the millions of tourists from across the globe who visit New York each year. In many senses, its role as a premier tourist destination has, more than anything else, shaped the institution and how it in turn shapes an understanding of and narrative about the past. Similar to the way the MMHR in Santiago had to negotiate the delicate politics of a country still divided, in the case of the 9/11 Museum, the creators had to try to accommodate not only the divergent responses and desires of a range of deeply involved stakeholders but also many other members of the nation and world with some kind of perceived connection to the site. And similar to the MMHR's solution of limiting the context of the museum's narrative, we see a narrow focus in the 9/11 Museum on the events of that September morning at the expense of any deeper historical contextualization or reckoning.

On the one hand, this allows for people from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences to have a meaningful encounter with the events of the day. Those who were there are taken back to that morning; those who watched the events on television are taken a bit closer to the mediated experience of watching on TV; and those who did not witness it firsthand have the opportunity to "see what it was really like."<sup>10</sup> But much more troubling is the way that this narrow focus on the events of the morning allows the museum to avoid confrontation with the important questions that 9/11 raised and continues to raise. The chronomania of the museum and its role as a tourist site simplify the complexity of 9/11 in a way that reproduces a Manichean narrative of good and evil in the world today. Marita Sturken describes this problem in terms of American tourists: "The mode of the tourist, with its innocent pose and distant position, evokes the American citizen who participates uncritically in a culture in which notions of good



and evil are used to define complex conflicts and tensions” (2007, 10). Tourism is an innocent endeavor; it is a fleeting encounter with the past by someone who is free from its weight and burden. The very nature of tourism demands simplification in the effort to make the past something that can be easily consumed and digested (Sturken 2007). And in the 9/11 Museum, the visitors are indeed placed in the innocent, distant position of tourist who is offered up a simplistic version of the past for consumption. After “consuming” 9/11 in a way that is suggested in the museum to elicit thorough understanding, the tourist can then cross the street for high-end shopping, artisanal food, and lovely views of the Hudson River.

If the cultural forms we use truly do shape the ways in which events enter into our collective memory, we have good reason to be wary of what collective memory is being crystallized by the National September 11 Memorial Museum. The museum has exceeded four million visitors since its opening and so promises to impart a particular “prosthetic memory” of 9/11 to many millions of visitors in coming years. But the danger is that this memory will strengthen the kind of outsider/insider division and triumph of the glorious nation that has the potential to contribute to new forms of twenty-first-century violence. In recent months, the United States and Europe have seen a wave of hateful, divisive, and intolerant ideology sweeping political and social life, evidenced in the United States by the election of Donald Trump as president. The values that the museum is meant to promote, such as democracy, freedom, and tolerance, appear to be under very real threat today for many Americans and others around the world. In particular, the Trump administration’s focus on the threat of terrorism in the effort to sow fear and bolster support for exclusionary and xenophobic policies like the immigration [Muslim] ban, demonstrate just how ripe the memory of 9/11 continues to be for manipulation and mobilization. And it cannot help to have the 9/11 Museum constructing a national narrative of 9/11 that echoes the divisive and exclusionary political rhetoric from the right. While we can hope that the museum will find a way to stand up for the values it is meant to promote, the traumatic and divisive ahistorical narrative created in and by the museum can potentially help fuel the kinds of dangerous ideology and rhetoric that threatens them.