

**James Young** discusses the selection process and design of the National September 11 Memorial (9/11 Memorial).

## The Speaker

James Young served as a member of the jury that selected *Reflecting Absence*, the design for the 9/11 Memorial. He was also a jury member for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, Germany. He is professor of English and Judaic Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and author of the books *At Memories Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* and *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*.

## Review Questions

**CHAPTER 1:** *Early discussions of how to memorialize 9/11 in the aftermath of the attacks*

1. Why does Young think that the official process of memorializing 9/11 started too early?
2. According to Young, how have memorials as public spaces evolved over the past 20 years? How has this affected the political uses of memorials?

**CHAPTER 2:** *The process and thinking behind the design competition*

1. Young felt the memorial should not figuratively or literally represent the attacks. Why? How does this relate to changing ideas about memorials as public sites?
2. Why did the transparency of the design process cause some anxiety in the public?

**CHAPTER 3:** *The make-up of the jury, engaging with various constituency groups, and the process of picking the final design*

1. Name several members of the jury and explain why their inclusion led to Young's describing it as "deftly composed."
2. What recommendation did the jury have for winning architect Michael Arad's original design? What was their reasoning? How did Arad change his design?

**CHAPTER 4:** *The key elements of the Memorial design*

1. Young discusses two key elements of the Memorial design that convey meaning to visitors. Which elements does he describe? What do they communicate to visitors?

## KEY REFERENCES

### 9/11 Memorial Jury

A group of 13 individuals who selected the final design for the 9/11 Memorial. The group reviewed each of 5,201 original submissions, ultimately winnowing the field to eight final designs. They selected Michael Arad and Peter Walker's *Reflecting Absence* in January 2004.

Members of the jury represented various fields and constituencies and included architects, historians, artists, city and state officials, lower Manhattan residents, and family members of 9/11 victims.

### Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

A memorial in Berlin, Germany commemorating the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Designed by Peter Eisenman, the memorial was dedicated in May 2005, and represents an abstract approach to memorial design.

## Review Questions (continued)

CHAPTER 5: *Comparing Young’s experiences on two memorial juries and the process involved in creating successful memorials*

1. Some people wanted to memorialize the 9/11 attacks by leaving the entire 16-acre World Trade Center site empty. Why didn’t Young and the other jurors agree with this approach? Do you agree?
2. Young notes that memory is fluid and evolves over time. What are the implications of this idea on contemporary memorial design?

CHAPTER 6: *Looking back on the Memorial selection process and forward to the rebuilding of lower Manhattan*

1. How does Young describe the interactions between New York City government agencies and the Memorial jury? How did the city’s response facilitate the success of the project?
2. According to Young, in what ways will the Memorial act as a “crossroads” in lower Manhattan?

## KEY REFERENCES (continued)

### Memorial Voids

A term used to describe the two recessed pools and waterfalls that form the centerpieces of the 9/11 Memorial. The voids sit within the footprints of the original Twin Towers.

The 2,983 names of the victims from the 9/11 and 1993 terrorist attacks are etched into bronze parapets around the pools.

## Questions for Further Discussion

Young states: “Without meaning, I didn’t think we could arrive at a memorial.” What does he mean and how did this belief inform the Memorial design process?

Young describes the range of designs that were submitted in the Memorial design competition. The 5,201 original submissions were narrowed down to eight finalists, including the winner, *Reflecting Absence*. Visit [www.wtcsitememorial.org/finalists.html](http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/finalists.html) to view the designs and architect statements for the seven other finalists. How are they similar? How are they different? How do their designs communicate different ideas about 9/11? If you were a Memorial juror, which would you have picked? Why?

During the development process for the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, applicants were told to “articulate the problem, don’t answer it.” Explain this statement. What does it mean in terms of actually developing and designing a memorial? Why might this principle provoke some pushback from certain constituencies? Do you believe *Reflecting Absence* successfully embodies this idea? Why or why not?

## Recommended Resources

Young, James. *At Memories Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*. (Yale University Press, 2000).

Young, James. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. (Yale University Press, 1994).