

September 11, 2001

The Day That Changed the World



Lower Manhattan around 8:30 a.m.
on September 11, 2001
Photograph by David Monderer

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Learn more about the 9/11 attacks and their ongoing repercussions with these online digital resources

On September 11, 2001, nineteen terrorists associated with al-Qaeda, an Islamist extremist group, hijacked four California-bound commercial airplanes. In a coordinated attack that turned the planes into weapons, the terrorists intentionally flew two of the planes into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, a global business complex in New York City. They also flew a third plane into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the U.S. Department of Defense, in Arlington, Virginia. Passengers and crew members on the fourth plane launched a counterattack, forcing the hijacker pilot—who was flying the airplane toward Washington, D.C.—to crash the plane into a field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, near the town of Shanksville.

The 9/11 attacks killed 2,977 people. This was the single largest loss of life resulting from a foreign attack on American soil. The attacks caused the deaths of 441 first responders, the greatest loss of emergency responders on a single day in American history. The events of September 11, 2001 irrevocably changed the lives of victims' families and friends, survivors, first responders, rescue and recovery workers, volunteers, and millions of Americans and people around the world. More than twenty years later, the ongoing consequences of the attacks continue to affect policy debates, civic discourse, and countless individual lives. This exhibition shares some of those stories.

Names in **bold** signify individuals killed as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and February 26, 1993.

RIGHT
Hijacked Flight 175 approaching
the World Trade Center
Photograph by Kelly Guenther

BELOW
Eyewitnesses
Photograph by Don Halasy,
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

BELOW RIGHT
Two-way radio used by Ada Dolch on 9/11
Collection 9/11 Memorial Museum,
Gift of Ada Dolch



**“I have to take
care of the kids.”**

Ada Dolch,
High School for Leadership
and Public Service

ATTACK ON THE TWIN TOWERS

At 8:46 a.m., five hijackers intentionally crashed American Airlines Flight 11 into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. The 76 passengers and 11 crew members on board were killed, and hundreds more died instantly inside the building. The crash cut off all three emergency stairwells and trapped hundreds of people above the 91st floor.

At 9:03 a.m., a second plane crashed into the World Trade Center. Five hijackers flew United Airlines Flight 175 into the South Tower, killing the 51 passengers and nine crew members on board. An unknown number of people inside the building were also killed. The impact made two of the building's three emergency stairwells impassable and cut elevator cables in the area. Many people were trapped above the impact zone and inside elevators.

ADA DOLCH'S STORY

Principal Ada Dolch was at her school just south of the Twin Towers when she heard an enormous boom. She used her radio to communicate with staff on the school's upper floors, where students could see flames coming out of the towers. Knowing her sister **Wendy Alice Rosario Wakeford** worked in the North Tower, Dolch prayed: “God, please take care of Wendy. I have to take care of the kids in my school.” Dolch led the school's evacuation and guided more than 600 students and staff to safety. Her sister was killed in the attacks.





LEFT

FDNY firefighters arrive at the Twin Towers
Photograph by Bolivar Arellano, *New York Post*

BELOW

Paramedics and emergency medical technicians treat injured survivors
Photograph by Mariela Lombard

Portable evacuation chair used by
John Abruzzo
Collection 9/11 Memorial Museum,
Anonymous gift
Object photograph by Matt Flynn

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The attacks on the World Trade Center triggered the largest rescue operation in the history of New York City. Approximately 2,000 police officers and nearly 1,000 firefighters responded to the attacks. More than 100 ambulances were sent to the site within the first hour. Responders from the New York City Fire Department (FDNY), New York City Police Department (NYPD), Port Authority Police Department (PAPD), and other state and federal agencies deployed to the World Trade Center.

Many first responders entered the Twin Towers prepared to rescue trapped civilians. Others helped survivors exit safely, guided the injured to medical assistance, and kept bystanders out of harm's way. Coworkers and strangers assisted one another during their evacuations, offering comfort and support.



JOHN ABRUZZO'S STORY

John Abruzzo was working on the 69th floor of the North Tower when hijacked Flight 11 hit the building. A quadriplegic who relied on a wheelchair for mobility, Abruzzo couldn't descend the emergency stairwell to evacuate on his own. Ten coworkers transferred Abruzzo to a portable evacuation chair and took turns carrying him down the stairs. Firefighters encouraged the group to leave Abruzzo with them, but they chose to stay together. They proceeded to the lobby with Abruzzo and exited the tower through a broken window.

**“We’ve got to
get him out.”**

Michael Curci,
North Tower evacuee and
colleague of John Abruzzo



LEFT
The Pentagon, Arlington, Virginia
Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Justice

ATTACK ON THE PENTAGON

At 9:37 a.m., five hijackers crashed American Airlines Flight 77 into the western side of the Pentagon. Located in Arlington, Virginia, outside the nation's capital of Washington, D.C., the Pentagon is the headquarters of the U.S. Department of Defense and a symbol of the country's military strength. The crash killed the plane's six crew members and 53 passengers, including five children, and 125 people on the ground.

Fires inside the building, fed by jet fuel in the wings of the plane, reached temperatures of up to 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. Leading the firefighting efforts, the Arlington County Fire Department contained the flames in the first 12 hours, although it would take days to completely extinguish the fire.

BELOW
Defense Protective Service Police patch worn
by Isaac Ho'opi'i
Courtesy of the Smithsonian's National
Museum of American History



ISAAC HO'OPI'I'S STORY

Pentagon police officer Isaac Ho'opi'i was driving his canine partner Vito, an explosives detection dog, to the veterinarian when hijacked Flight 77 struck the Pentagon. Ho'opi'i immediately drove to the Pentagon. He left Vito in the car and ran into the burning building. Wanting to let survivors in the smoke-filled corridors know that help was nearby, he called out, "If you can hear me, head toward my voice." Ho'opi'i is credited with carrying at least eight people out of the Pentagon, as well as leading others to safety with his voice.

**"If you can hear
me, head toward
my voice."**

Isaac Ho'opi'i,
Pentagon Defense
Protective Service Police



LEFT
Somerset County, Pennsylvania, moments
after the crash of hijacked Flight 93
Photograph by Valencia McClatchey

ABOARD FLIGHT 93

The four hijackers on board United Airlines Flight 93 attacked at 9:28 a.m., breaking into the cockpit. At least 10 passengers and two crew members made phone calls from Flight 93, learning that two hijacked aircraft had already struck the World Trade Center and providing information about the hijacking to loved ones and authorities on the ground. In a call connected to an Airfone supervisor, passenger **Todd M. Beamer** explained that the plane was flying erratically and the passengers and crew were planning to launch a counterassault. The supervisor, Lisa Jefferson, recounted the last words she heard as, “Are you ready? Okay. Let’s roll!”

Passengers and crew began a six-minute assault on the cockpit shortly before 10:00 a.m. Realizing they were seconds away from being overtaken, the hijackers deliberately crashed the plane in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, approximately 20 minutes’ flying time from Washington, D.C. The seven crew members and 33 passengers on board all perished. Investigators concluded that the hijackers’ intended target may have been the U.S. Capitol Building, where Congress was in session.

“I’m thinking,
how many more
planes are going to
fall out of the sky?”

Craig Bowman, Corporal,
Pennsylvania State Police



LEFT
Watch belonging to Todd M. Beamer
Courtesy of the Beamer family

This wristwatch, worn by Flight 93 passenger Todd Beamer on September 11, 2001, was recovered from the plane’s crash site. The watch’s date-keeper still reads 11.



Photo By
Devon Semendinger
NYC Police Aviation Unit

LEFT

Lower Manhattan after the collapse
of the North Tower

Used with permission of the City of New York
and the New York City Police Department,
Courtesy of Greg Semendinger

BELOW

Missing poster for **Tonyell F. McDay**
Collection 9/11 Memorial Museum,
Gift of Sisters of Charity of New York,
St. Vincent's Hospital

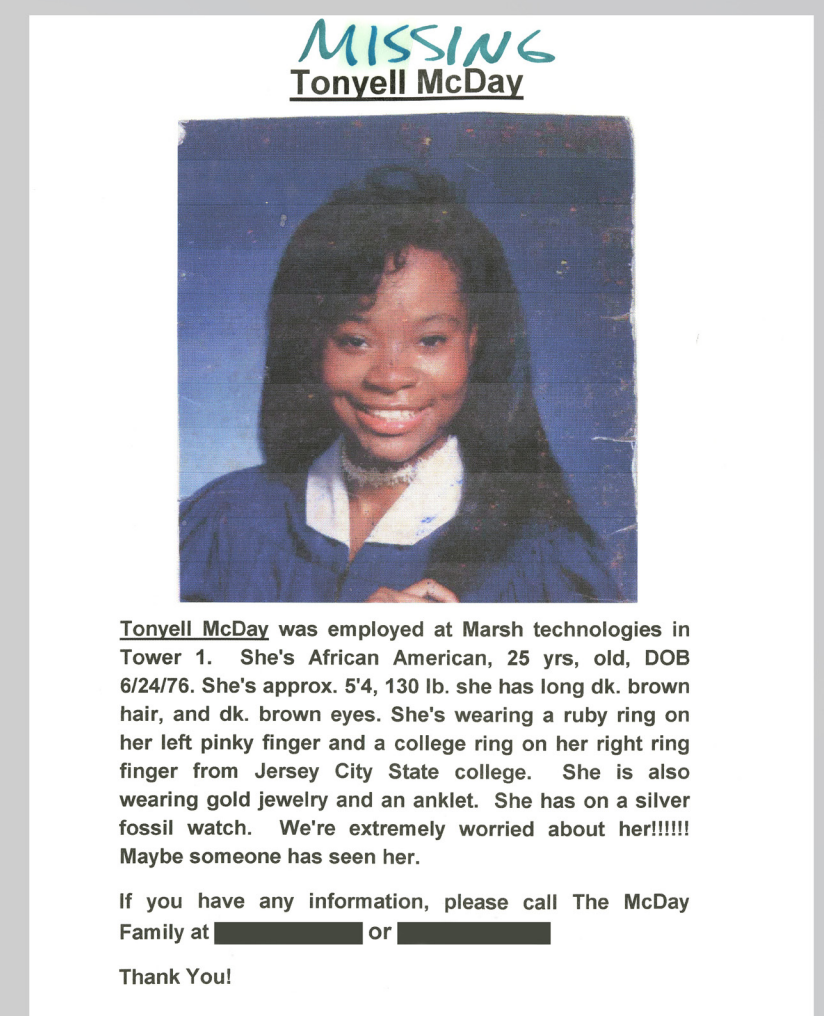
COLLAPSES AT THE WORLD TRADE CENTER

At 9:59 a.m., after burning for 56 minutes, the South Tower collapsed in 10 seconds. Clouds of smoke and debris rolled through the surrounding streets, sending thousands running for their lives. At 10:28 a.m., 102 minutes after the first plane crashed into the World Trade Center, the North Tower also collapsed. More than 2,400 civilians and first responders inside the buildings and in the surrounding area were killed. The victims included 441 first responders: 343 from the FDNY, 37 from the PAPD, 23 from the NYPD, and 38 from other agencies.

At 5:20 p.m., 7 World Trade Center, a 47-story office building just north of the Twin Towers, collapsed after burning for hours.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Search and rescue teams, along with volunteers, immediately converged on the World Trade Center site. The collapse of two 110-story buildings created piles of rubble multiple stories high and extending seven stories belowground. Sharp, burning hot steel wreckage, unstable surfaces, and toxic dust posed dangers for all who had rushed there in hopes of rescuing survivors. Only 18 people were found alive at the site. The last successful rescue occurred midday on September 12.



TONYELL MCDAY'S MISSING POSTER

By the afternoon of September 11, 2001, and for days after, the faces and names of the missing began to appear on flyers created by relatives and friends hoping their loved ones were still alive. The family of **Tonyell McDay**, a computer help desk analyst at Marsh & McLennan Companies on the 97th floor of the North Tower, traveled into Manhattan from New Jersey, wearing homemade missing person posters like this one taped to their clothing.



RIGHT
NYPD officers assist an evacuee on
February 26, 1993
Photograph by Joe Tabacca



LEFT
Sites of al-Qaeda attacks before 9/11
USS *Cole*, photograph by Sergeant Don L.
Maes, U.S. Marine Corps; Nairobi, Kenya,
photograph by Dave Caulkin, AP Photo



THE TOWERS AS TARGETS

Before their destruction in 2001, the Twin Towers dominated the Manhattan skyline for three decades. They took on iconic status in the public imagination, becoming symbolic of New York City and the United States as a whole. Their fame and symbolism, however, also made the towers the targets of two attacks.

On February 26, 1993, terrorists blew up a van loaded with explosives in the parking garage beneath the World Trade Center, killing six people. Although this attack was carried out by a different group of extremists than the 9/11 attacks, the 1993 bombing took place within the broader context of an emerging radical Islamist ideology and foreshadowed the 2001 attacks.

The terrorist organization al-Qaeda was responsible for the 9/11 attacks. The group is an extreme outgrowth of a political movement known as Islamism. Islamists seek control of Muslim-majority countries that they believe are not governing according to their strict interpretation of Islamic law. Founded by Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda hoped to launch a global, violent struggle to break the influence of the West, especially the United States, in Muslim-majority countries. Al-Qaeda represents only a tiny fraction of the world's Muslim community.

AL-QAEDA ATTACKS

On August 7, 1998, al-Qaeda launched a suicide attack, detonating truck bombs outside the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The attacks killed 213 people in Kenya and 11 in Tanzania, and injured more than 4,500.

On October 12, 2000, al-Qaeda suicide bombers filled a fishing boat with explosives and detonated it next to the American naval destroyer *USS Cole* as the ship refueled in Aden, Yemen. Seventeen American sailors were killed, and more than 40 were injured.



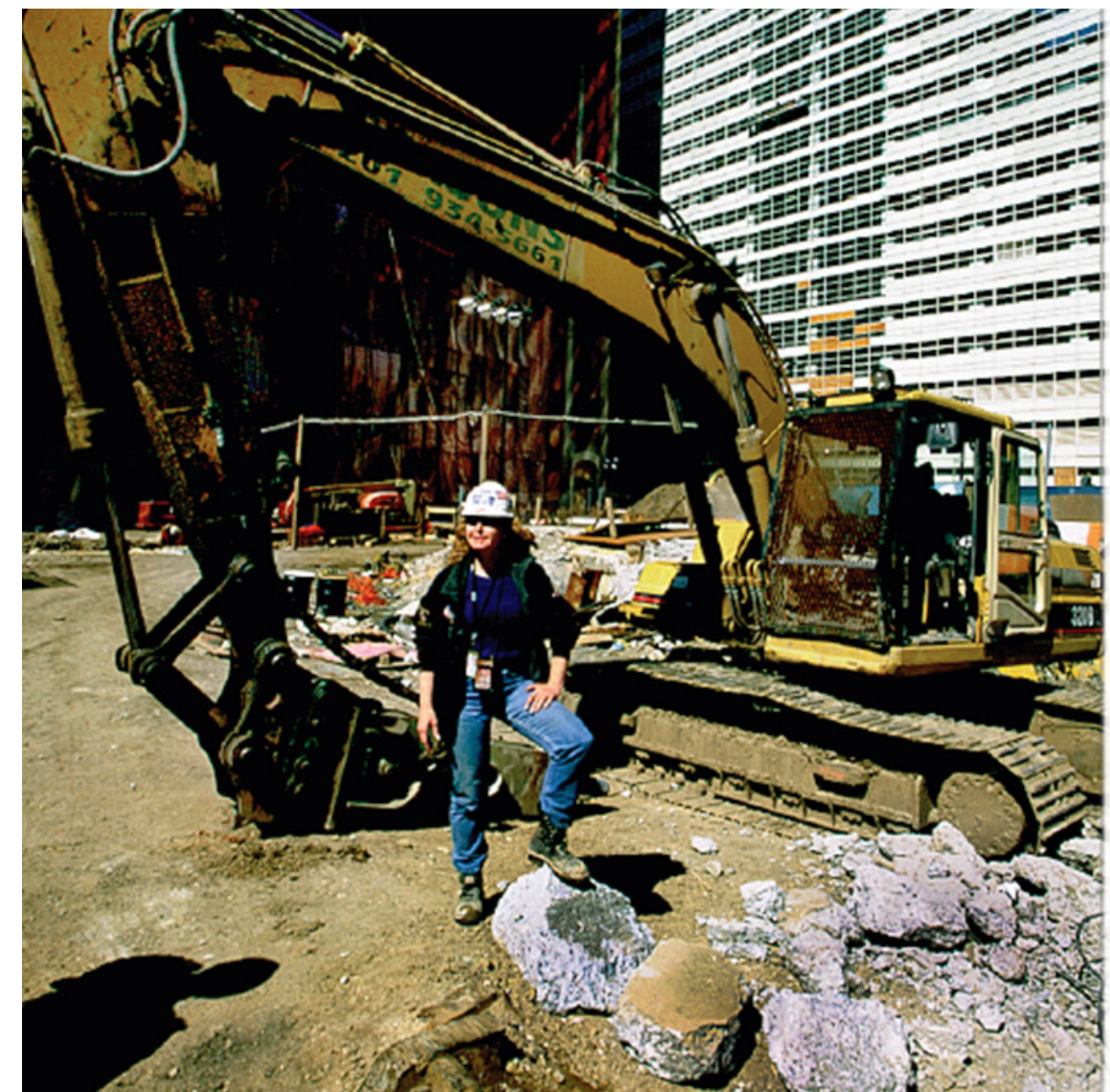
LEFT
Ground Zero on September 25, 2001
Photograph by Joel Meyerowitz,
Courtesy Howard Greenberg Gallery

BELOW
Pia Hofmann at Ground Zero
Photograph by © Michael Goodman

RECOVERY EFFORTS

Within hours of the 9/11 attacks, journalists began referring to the scene of destruction at the World Trade Center site as Ground Zero, a term for the epicenter of an explosion. Within days, thousands of rescue personnel, investigators, engineers, laborers, and volunteers had arrived to join the rescue and recovery efforts. Recovery workers cleared between one and two million tons of debris over the course of nine months.

Most of the World Trade Center wreckage was transported to the Fresh Kills Landfill—meaning “fresh water” in Dutch—on Staten Island. Two dozen federal, state, and city agencies participated in the recovery of human remains and evidence at Fresh Kills. Twenty years later, the families of around 40 percent of 9/11 victims from the World Trade Center have never received identifiable remains of their loved ones.



PIA HOFMANN'S STORY

Pia Hofmann, a member of Local 14 of the International Union of Operating Engineers, began working at Ground Zero the week after 9/11. When Hofmann first recovered the remains of a civilian, she insisted that they receive the same honors as the remains of uniformed responders such as firefighters or police officers. From that day on, when civilian remains were found, a member of the clergy was summoned, an honor guard was formed, and the remains were draped with an American flag while carried from the site.

“I felt like I won a battle for every civilian down there that was left to be found, just to go out with dignity.”

Pia Hofmann, recovery worker

RIGHT
Vigil in Union Square Park, New York City
Photograph by Brandon Remler



BELOW

Vigils and expressions of solidarity
around the world

Enoosaen, Kenya, Collection 9/11 Memorial
Museum, Gift of Wilson Kimeli Naiyomah and
Josh Haner, photograph by Josh Haner; U.S.
Embassy, Amman, Jordan, photograph by
Ali Jarekji, Reuters; Panama City, Panama,
photograph by Alberto Lowe, Reuters



MOURNING AND SOLIDARITY

The urge to mourn alongside others brought people together throughout New York City, across the country, and around the world. People gathered on college campuses, in parks and town halls, and in places of worship. Spontaneous memorials appeared in town squares, on roadside billboards, and outside firehouses and police stations. Flags were flown at half staff in recognition of the country's loss, and candlelight vigils were held in remembrance of the victims and in solidarity against terrorism. The death toll on 9/11 included individuals from more than 90 nations and stirred sympathy around the globe.

MAKING MEANING

People of different ages, backgrounds, and abilities found meaning in public service after the 9/11 attacks. Volunteers flocked to lower Manhattan from around the country to provide assistance. Some signed on with organizations such as the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army, while others volunteered independently. Across the country, many people channeled their emotions by enlisting in the military, founding charities, contributing to philanthropic causes, or helping people in need in other ways.

RIGHT

U.S. Navy camp set up for Operation Iraqi Freedom and named in tribute to Flight 93, April 11, 2003

Photograph by Stan Travioli, U.S. Navy



20 YEARS LATER

GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

On September 20, 2001, U.S. President George W. Bush announced that the United States had declared war on “a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them.” The U.S. government initiated a Global War on Terror, sending troops to Afghanistan in October 2001 and later to Iraq. The 9/11 attacks prompted calls for new strategies to keep the nation safe. The USA PATRIOT Act, passed in October 2001, expanded the government’s intelligence-gathering tools and its ability to detain and deport individuals suspected of terrorism. Many people continue to debate whether the methods used after 9/11 effectively protect national security without compromising civil liberties.

Nearly 10 years after 9/11, U.S. President Barack Obama authorized a special operations raid in Abbottabad, Pakistan, where Osama bin Laden was believed to be hiding. On May 1, 2011, U.S. Navy SEALs and Army aviators carried out the operation and killed bin Laden. Al-Qaeda and related groups remain a threat today. On April 14, 2021, U.S. President Joseph Biden announced that he would withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, ending America’s longest war.



LEFT

Osama bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, on May 3, 2011

Collection 9/11 Memorial Museum, Gift of Warrick Page for the *New York Times*

**“So you need to understand,
9/11 didn’t end at midnight or a year
later....9/11 still goes on.”**

Sonia Agron, American Red Cross volunteer
who worked near Ground Zero after 9/11

BELOW

Former NYPD Detective Luis Alvarez testifies
before Congress in support of the Never
Forget the Heroes Act, June 11, 2019
Photograph by Zach Gibson, Getty Images

20 YEARS LATER

HEALTH EFFECTS

More than 400,000 survivors, first responders, rescue and recovery workers, cleaning crews, lower Manhattan residents, and others are estimated to have been exposed to toxic dust in New York City on 9/11 or during recovery operations. Tens of thousands nationwide are now suffering from chronic illnesses, including respiratory diseases, mental health issues, and more than 100 types of cancer. Thousands of those exposed have died. People with 9/11-related illnesses are particularly susceptible to Covid-19.

In 2011, President Obama signed the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act into law, providing financial compensation to individuals who suffered physical injury or death as a result of the 9/11 attacks. The bill also established a health program to monitor and treat those with 9/11-related illnesses. Congress reauthorized the Zadroga Act in 2015, extending the compensation fund for five additional years and the health program through 2090. In 2019, the Never Forget the Heroes Act extended the compensation fund through 2092. More than 100,000 people living in all 50 states have enrolled in the World Trade Center Health Program.



LUIS ALVAREZ’S STORY

NYPD Detective Luis Alvarez spent three months at Ground Zero aiding in the rescue and recovery efforts after 9/11. In 2016, he was diagnosed with cancer related to his exposure to toxins at the World Trade Center site. In June 2019, Alvarez appeared before Congress to urge lawmakers to pass the Never Forget the Heroes Act. Alvarez had already undergone 68 rounds of chemotherapy and was scheduled to have another the next day. He died on June 29, 2019. The Never Forget the Heroes Act was signed into law one month later.



ABOVE

Volunteers rebuild a church after a tornado,
September 8, 2006

Photograph courtesy of Sandra Hauser, New
York Says Thank You Foundation

ABOVE RIGHT

Mentoring in memory of 9/11, New York City,
September 11, 2009

Photograph courtesy of the Corporation for
National and Community Service

BELOW

National September 11 Memorial & Museum,
New York City

Photograph by Jin S. Lee



20 YEARS LATER

SERVICE AND SELFLESSNESS

Like the medical professionals and others who responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, first responders, recovery workers, and volunteers demonstrated selflessness and compassion both on and after September 11, 2001. Their actions created a connection between public service and 9/11 remembrance that endures today. For many, 9/11 served as a call to change the world for the better, an idea formalized in 2009 when the U.S. Congress made September 11 an annual National Day of Service and Remembrance.

REMEMBRANCE AND REBUILDING

The U.S. Department of Defense opened the National 9/11 Pentagon Memorial on September 11, 2008, seven years after the attacks. The Flight 93 National Memorial, authorized by the U.S. Congress in September 2002, opened for the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. In New York City, the National September 11 Memorial & Museum opened in phases. The 9/11 Memorial was dedicated on the 10th anniversary of the attacks, and the 9/11 Memorial Museum opened in 2014. In 2019, an area of the Memorial was redesigned to honor rescue and recovery workers and the victims of 9/11-related illnesses.

HOW WILL YOU REMEMBER 9/11?

More than two decades have passed since the 9/11 attacks, and terrorism remains a global threat. We may never be able to prevent all of the actions of people intent on harming others, but we do have control over how we respond to such events. Whether by volunteering in our local communities, serving our nation in the military, caring for the sick and injured, or through other efforts, all of us can help build the world in which we want to live. As we witness history unfolding in our own time, the ways we choose to respond—both large and small—can demonstrate the best of human nature after even the worst of days.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

Learn more about the 9/11 attacks and their ongoing repercussions through video interviews, additional stories, lesson plans, and other resources.

