

**Reflections on the 20th anniversary of 9/11**

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**Introduction:**

Twenty years ago a horrific terrorist attack occurred in the United States. For Generation Z, our knowledge of 9/11 is second hand, from history lessons in High School to stories from our family and friends to mentions of it in today's political environment. As we reflect on that day twenty years later, we hope to continue to inform future generations. To do this, we focus on what happened on September 11, 2001, the actions taken after the attack, and the lasting effects of 9/11.

**Question #1: What happened on September 11, 2001?**

On September 11th, [19 members of the terrorist group, al Qaeda](#), hijacked four different planes in a suicide mission against the United States. Three out of the four planes hit their designated targets, two hit the World Trade Center towers in New York City and one hit the Pentagon in Washington D.C. The fourth plane crashed into a field in Pennsylvania prior to its reaching its intended destination--the U.S Capitol Building. This occurred after passengers fought with the terrorists who had commandeered the plane, causing it to crash.

On 9/11 around 3,000 people died as a direct result of these terrorist attacks and thousands of others were injured and affected through the loss of their family and friends. Many others reported lingering problems as a result of the attacks. Countless first responders risked their lives trying to save others who were trapped inside the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The actions on September 11th have had an impact on how all Americans think and live their daily lives.

**Question #2: What action was taken as a result of the events that took place?**

On the evening of 9/11, President George W. Bush said in an address to the nation: "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them." It had become clear that the attack was orchestrated by Osama bin Laden and members of al Qaeda. It was also known that the Taliban in Afghanistan was providing safe harbor for bin Laden. On September 20th, 2001 President Bush called for the Taliban to hand over bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders or "share in their fate." After the Taliban refused to comply, Congress passed a joint resolution authorizing the use of force against those responsible for the attacks. The resolution received nearly unanimous support by the Congress passing the Senate 98-0 and the House 420-1. Shortly thereafter, U.S. and British forces began an airstrike campaign known as "operation enduring freedom," which quickly resulted in their taking over several Taliban strongholds causing al Qaeda to flee the area.

During his State of the Union address to the Congress in January, 2002, President Bush identified an "Axis of Evil" saying "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated."

Over the next 15 months, the Bush administration made the case that Iraq was an imminent threat to the United States as an ally for terrorists and required military intervention to protect American interests. In March, 2003, a coalition led by the United States began its “shock and awe” campaign to overthrow the regime led by Saddam Hussein. The Iraq war became another front in the global war on terror and would see troops committed to that mission until 2011.

### **Question #3: What are some lasting effects on society of the September 11 attacks?**

The events that occurred on September 11th have left an impact on many Americans today. This is particularly true in the realm of security. For members of Generation Z, many changes that occurred as a result of 9/11 are accepted as commonplace today. For instance, going through TSA (Transportation Security Administration) checkpoints before flying is routine. This was not the case until it was implemented in November of 2001 by President Bush. In speaking with our parents, they noted just how different planning for a trip was before and after the enhanced security requirements at airports.

While changes in air travel is familiar with many as a result of September 11th, society experienced several other major security transformations. This is particularly true regarding surveillance. The Patriot Act was signed into law 45 days after the attacks. This Act altered how the government could monitor American citizens. It allowed for them to tap both international and domestic phones, monitor email communications, and look at financial records.

News outlets also adjusted their reporting to focus more on international events. Prior to 9/11, international affairs were not as widely discussed. However, we can see today that several media sources focus solely on the international community. One last immediate change that occurred as a result of these events was an increase in patriotism. Americans had something to bond over and bring them closer together.

### **Parting Thoughts:**

September 11th, 2001 marked a new era in American history. For those who lived it, the day will never be forgotten. The unity and togetherness that followed such a horrific event immediately brought unity and resilience among the American people. Although a memory for many, to those in Generation Z, it is largely a moment in history which we learn. We recognize the gravity of these events and are hopeful future generations will as well.