227 Talk: How 9/11 Changed the Future of America

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Take a minute to picture your life. What matters most to you? What will you dedicate your life to? Where do you feel safest? What factors do you take into consideration in order to make your decisions? Do you have an image of what the world will be like in 10 years? Now imagine that within the time of one day, everything about this mental image shifts, never to be changed.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, the mental picture Americans had of their future shifted permanently. Americans never believed an attack on U.S. soil would occur. They trusted that the U.S. was untouchable by foreign enemies. Anyone old enough to remember that day has a story about their reactions, thoughts, and fears that ran through their head that morning. People moved quickly to gather with loved ones and take comfort in a place that they felt was safe. No one knew whether more attacks would follow.

Since the attacks on the World Trade Center, American outlook has changed. We fear an enemy could be walking among us. We make decisions on foreign diplomacy based on the events of the morning of 9/11. Proof of this changed outlook can be seen through policy changes made by the U.S. during the 'War on Terror', changes in international relations, and even through our entertainment and art.

Before 9/11, Americans trusted the government to keep them safe from any possible threat. After, the country was astounded that such an attack could happen on American soil and worked to find the flaws in security. The aftermath of 9/11 was handled as a national security threat instead of a situation the NYPD would lead. President George W. Bush determined the attacks to be an "act of war" against the U.S and the FBI and military worked together to lead the investigation. This action created a new importance and emphasis on the strength of our military. The government also took on a new role of trying to protect the American people from threats that could come from people living in the country. Arab and Muslim Americans quickly became subject to racial profiling that targeted people who looked like they were "of Middle Eastern Descent". This was a controversial tactic because it violated citizens' rights under the fourth, fifth, and sixth amendments.

The U.S. also worked on making more strict immigration policies. The Patriot Act created agencies that were designed to place added surveillance on immigrants in order to target and deport anyone with links to terrorism. These agencies included: The Department of Homeland Security; Customs and Border Protection; and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. These agencies worked together with local police forces to address immigration and enhance security. This lead to many deportations of Muslim and Arab immigrants.

But the U.S. did not only focus on threats that could be found at home. Foreign policies were revisited to ensure our borders were secure and that we had allies who could help in the fight against terrorism. In an effort to increase border security the U.S. Created the Smarter Border Action Plan of 2001 which created more regulations to be followed when entering the

country. Around the world, the U.S. gained new and unexpected allies in central asian countries, China, and Russia, places that were formerly part of the Soviet Union.

All of these political changes combined with shock from the events of 9/11 set the tone for a more tense social climate. New stereotypes and fears arose around immigrants. Muslim and Arab Americans felt unease and discrimination due to profiling, fear, and racism. Between 2000 and 2001 there was a rise in hate crimes against Muslims. In 2000 there were 28 reported hate crimes toward Muslims. In 2001 that number rose to 481.

Americans felt a new wave of nationalism that united them in their shock, rage, and grief. This pride could be seen in the prevalent displays of American flags all over the nation. Artists depicted the towers still standing as an American icon. Pictures of firefighters standing over the rubble holding an American flag showed their heroism of the day. Some people even got tattoos of loved ones lost during the attacks as a symbol of their promise to never forget how 9/11 changed their life.

9/11 also changed the tone of our entertainment. Since 2005, many movies have been made about the heroes of September 11th which became huge box office successes. The effect of the attacks also showed through more subtly in TV shows. SciFi and Horror shows became more common because they allowed the authors to address/evaluate the actions of the nation in alternative world scenarios. These shows focused on the themes of invasive alien forces, government conspiracies, 'us' vs. 'them' dynamics, and the mood of paranoia and dread. It became common to see shows that portrayed the enemy to be ever present and could always be watching.

From the second of the first plane crash on the morning of September 11, 2001, America has been a different country. We fear the enemy that surrounds us, prepare to protect ourselves from dangers that could slip past our borders, and use stereotypes that sometimes violate the rights of citizens in order to target threats within the country. But does it always have to be this way? Can we use compassion and understanding to alleviate fear of the unknown? Will 9/11 forever impact the future of the U.S. or can we reclaim some part of our mental image of the country we had before?