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2012

# Televising Memory: The Tenth Anniversary of 9/11

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### Recommended Citation

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**TELEVISIONING MEMORY: THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF  
9/11**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHLOR OF ARTS**

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**APRIL 13, 2012**

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## **Introduction**

### **Background: September 11, 2001 and the Role of Television**

September 11, 2001 remains one of the most tragic and meaningful events in American history. Suicide bombers associated al-Qaeda, an Islamist extremist group, hijacked four planes targeted for the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the White House. Without precedent or preparation, reactions to the attacks unfolded with astonishment and sadness. In New York City, fire fighters, police officers, and civilians sought to rescue the people who were inside the Towers in the midst of unfamiliarity with such a large-scale crisis. With 2,819 deaths resulting from the attacks, the tragedy of 9/11 became a national focus.<sup>1</sup> The symbolic targets of the White House, the Pentagon, and the World Trade Center implicated the entire nation in an experience of attack on American life, culture, and policy. As new information, images, and video poured into news channels, Americans turned on the television to digest the footage and attempt to grasp the scale of this crisis. For most people, the television was the sole source of updates and information on the attacks and thus the news became the principle form of understanding and consumption about the events of 9/11. Ten years later, television is again the principle source of 9/11 information. The tenth anniversary of 9/11 was memorialized and remembered through television specials. The reliance on media sources during the events of 9/11 translated to a similar reliance on media during the tenth anniversary of 9/11. The images, stories, people, and emotions captured by television sources during and after 9/11 have been re-charged, re-imagined, and re-told by media sources during the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Thus, the fundamental role of television in creating the memory and history of 9/11 is paramount to understanding the process of national memory formation.

On the morning of September 11, information about the attacks arrived primarily through televised media sources. The first attack on the North Tower occurred at 8:46 am ET and was quickly witnessed by people all across the nation on news channels using civilian footage of the plane crashing into the Tower. Although no one was completely sure if the crash was an accident or a purposeful attack, the second plane crash into the Pentagon at 9:37 am and the third plane crash into the South Tower at 10:03 am ET confirmed that a deliberate attack had been organized and executed.<sup>2</sup> Because television is a unique medium that allows for a constant flow of information and is accessible in most homes and/or public spaces, it served an important purpose on 9/11 to distribute a far-reaching message of crisis and tragedy to the nation. In fact, even federal employees utilized television sources that morning as the primary stream of information about the attacks without the availability of developed intelligence.<sup>3</sup> In this way, television channels became a platform for comprehending 9/11. They also served as a uniting experience as all Americans turned to news sources and acquired the same images, facts, and presentations as every other American that relied on the same sources for information. Although online news sources and radio programs provided additional outlets for information gathering, the visual nature of the tragedy elevated television as the key source for minute-to-minute updates and analysis. The role of television on the morning of 9/11, and in the subsequent days, was paramount in forming initial thoughts and understandings about the attacks and the consequences that followed.

### **National Memory and the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 9/11**

On the tenth anniversary of 9/11, television performed a similarly important role by providing a medium for collective national memory formation. National memory, for the purpose of this research, is defined as a united remembrance of an event or experience

that impacts a nation as a whole, speaks to national interests and values, and provides a foundation for placement of the event or experience in a national history. At the same time, national memory is key to individual or personal memory as national memory informs the facts and understandings that underscore an individual's recollections of an event or experience. National memory is engaged when they have touched individual lives on a local level and at the same time have transcended personal connections to affect the general tone and mood of a nation. National memory complicates personal memory by adding national interests to an individual remembrance of an event. The nature of a collective memory suggests that by focusing on particular interpretations of events or experiences, national goals, character, and position are reaffirmed.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the purpose of putting forth a certain way of remembering can be motivated by nationally relevant social, political, and economic aims. If an event or experience is memorialized in a specific and collective manner that serves particular intentions, the ways in which that event or experience is remembered come to include produced interpretations that are framed as fact. Thus, national memory is also inextricably linked to history. The way in which something is memorialized on a grand scale impacts the way that event or experience will be told through history. The creation of a national memory therefore takes on greater meaning, as the formed memory becomes the basis for how people recall and retell the historical importance of the event or experience being memorialized. In this way, national memory actually becomes the framework for personal memory as a collective sense of remembering provides the foundation for the facts and interpretations of the event or experience.

While national memory identifies the importance of remembering events or experiences for their personal as well as national ramifications, the formation of national

memory is inherently problematic. The process of producing memory involves evaluating facts, images, experiences, and stories about an event or experience. Through this process, certain aspects of the event or experience are inevitably forgotten. In order to produce a memory that serves national political, social, or economic aims, the facts of an event or experience must be remembered and told in such a way that these aims are supported.<sup>5</sup> Thus, if national memory formation relies on forgetting, the memory is a representation of a particular myth in service of national aims rather than a true recollection of unadulterated facts. In this way, personal remembrances of national occurrences become mediums through which national myths are evoked and preserved.

### **Television and the Formation of National Memory**

Television plays a significant role in creating and spreading the seeds of national memory. The media formed the basis for information collection and distribution during the unfolding events of 9/11. Because the majority of Americans could not observe the destruction of the attacks or witness the efforts to deal with the devastation in New York City and at the Pentagon, television served as the medium of observation. In this way, the media became a storehouse for the factual representation of 9/11 material. During the tenth anniversary, a similar reliance on media positioned television specials to transmit national memory. While personal memories of the morning of 9/11 may have weakened over the past 10 years, by replaying footage and images of that day, television sources provided Americans with renewed access to 9/11. Thus, the position of the media to distribute this information exemplifies the importance of television in forming personal memories of 9/11. At the same time, the unified circulation of nationally televised specials suggests that national memory was being distributed and infused into personal memory as well. By presenting specials about 9/11 on national news channels and other

national channels such as The History Channel and PBS, television allowed for the formation of personal memories that were also demonstrative of a collective memory. However, news and other specials produced specifically for the tenth anniversary of 9/11 invariably created a particular narrative that served specific goals. During the process of production, the television specials formulated the facts, images, and stories of 9/11 into a cohesive narrative. By highlighting certain aspects and leaving out others that did not fit into the narrative, these specials forged a national memory that is produced. In other words, the nature of creating a narrative, or an engaging story for a television program, involves manipulating the facts into a cohesive story rather than simply relating unfiltered footage and information. If the media provides a limited framework to remember and Americans are reliant on their presentation to construct personal memories, then the ability to form individual memory is undermined by forgetting certain facts and highlighting others. Therefore, manufactured representations of 9/11 become personal memories and, in a greater sense, a collective, national memory.

The tenth anniversary of 9/11 provides a unique opportunity to observe the formation of national memory-making. Anniversaries of monumental events in American history offer time for reflection. With the passage of time, major events are remembered in how those events have impacted the American life and national outlooks and actions. The formation and propagation of national memory about those events therefore peaks at anniversaries as heightened moments of attention to those events. In this renewed state of reflection and commemoration, national events become remembered in ways that serve current motives and circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Because anniversaries are commemorated outside the immediate aftermath of an event, they are situated in different national climates. Thus, the anniversary itself, and the way in which the event is



remembered, comes to represent the long- term impacts of the event more than the initial memories of and reactions to the event. National memory creation at anniversaries responds to remembrance of events in service of current national goals derived from the event's effects. In the case of 9/11, the tenth anniversary is the first major anniversary of the terrorist attacks. Although previous anniversaries, such as the fifth anniversary, are significant, the tenth anniversary is the first opportunity to gain true perspective on 9/11 in terms of how the consequences have played out in a long term way. This historic moment offers the first major opportunity to evaluate the way 9/11 has impacted American life and policy in a long term way. National memory of 9/11 is just starting to form in the wake of social and political consequences directly linked to collective reactions to 9/11. By evaluating the ways in which this tenth anniversary is being remembered, the process of national memory creation unravels. Specifically, the forms of commemoration of 9/11 and the way in which narratives of 9/11 are being retold will reveal what kinds of memories are needed to support current and on-going consequences of 9/11 in American foreign and domestic policy. If national memory serves current national goals, then the formulation of national memory actually exemplifies the role the commemorated event plays in modern issues.

To understand the process of national memory creation for 9/11, television specials remembering 9/11 provide a foundation for analysis. Around the tenth anniversary, major television channels provided specials and documentaries. Approximately forty major, nationally televised specials aired from the end of August up through the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2011 on traditional news channels, including NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, and Fox, as well as on entertainment channels dedicated to specific forms of entertainment and education, such as HBO, PBS, Nickelodeon, The History Channel,

National Geographic, TLC, and Discovery Channel.<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of this research, eleven specials, taken from the above-mentioned networks, provide the basis for analysis. These specials are particularly relevant because they represent programs aired on the most wide-viewed news stations, represent a range of political perspectives, and speak to different age groups and interests. In addition, the eleven specials discussed come from channels that continue to provide public access to the specials through purchase or the Internet. By selecting specials that are still available to viewers after the original air-date, this research relies on narratives that initiated national memory on the tenth anniversary and carry on distribution of that memory forward. Thus, these specials remain the most continually accessible specials and the narratives they produce are likewise the most accessible. While the specials cover different angles of remembrance of 9/11, they each served specific goals of national memory and provided clear directions of commemoration. The wide accessibility of television translates to wide distribution of these specials, and the national narratives they produce.

### **The Function and Structure of 9/11 Memory**

The national memory of 9/11 produced through television specials involves the creation of a myth about American character that serves current social and political purposes. Despite the stylistic and content differences amongst the specials, certain themes remain consistent. These themes manipulate the facts of 9/11 into a cohesive narrative about how 9/11 has impacted American life, culture, and people. Specifically, the television programs frame 9/11, and the consequences of 9/11, in a way that celebrates American superiority, strength, and perseverance in the face of tragedy and aggression. The terrorist attacks by nature revealed a weakness in American security and forced America into the role of the attacked. This role contrasts sharply to a telling of

American history that celebrates strong individuals and conquering heroes. Because 9/11 was a deliberate attack on Americans and caused undeniable personal and national damage, the national memory of 9/11 acknowledges such destruction in a way that makes Americans active in their own survival and not simple passive victims. The tenth anniversary provides a time to re-create 9/11 in a way that focuses on how Americans survived and thrived after the attacks in order to memorialize 9/11 as a moment of American strength, not American weakness.

To achieve this narrative, television specials utilize visual and audio techniques to structure retellings of 9/11 and changes that have occurred as a result of 9/11 in a way that celebrates survival, unity, and growth in American post-9/11. Through language choices, images, music and the use of personal remembrances and stories, the television specials build narratives of 9/11 that rely on emotion reactions to the re-telling of 9/11. In one way, the language emphasizes an American “we” opposed to the attackers. By focusing on the collective nature of 9/11, the specials create the basis for a nationally shared experience and memory. Additionally, the language identifies the heroic nature of Americans’ actions during the events of 9/11 as well as the strength Americans have had in moving forward from 9/11. The images in the specials serve different functions. In one way, replaying footage from 9/11 brings back the initial feelings and reactions to that day. This function allows the specials to reignite the sense of devastation and loss from 9/11 while channeling that sense by providing perspective on how much has changed since that day and how much we have learned as a nation. In another way, the images on the specials highlight objects and places that induce allegiance and loyalty to America. For example, images of American flags, the White House, and the memorial site where the Twin Towers stood suggest that despite the tragedy of 9/11, Americans and the

American way of life have survived and rebuilt. In a similar way, the music in the specials is a subtle yet clearly sets the tone for the specials and underscores the narratives being produced. During images of 9/11, dramatic music emphasizes the seriousness and true devastation of 9/11. Yet, upbeat notes highlighting images of the new memorial of 9/11 and personal stories of survival remind the audience that despite such tragedy, America will reconstruct and grow stronger from new opportunities. Finally, the stories and interviews used in the specials include stories of survivors and people who witnessed the attacks, interviews with family members of victims, interviews with people working to build to memorial, and other personal stories of people involved with the events of 9/11. By using these stories and interviews, the specials emphasize the ways people have coped with 9/11, the individuals who assisted victims or survived 9/11, and the people who are working to move the country forward after 9/11. Thus, the specials rely on individuals to foster the narrative of strong and heroic Americans who were not destroyed by 9/11 and have taken the tragedy to inspire growth and survival into the future. The visual, audio, and stylistic elements of the television specials reveal how a national memory focused on American unity and endurance is produced.

Through creation of this national memory, the television specials serve current national goals. After 9/11, significant changes to America's foreign and domestic policies were initiated. Most importantly, beginning in the weeks following 9/11, the movements toward wars in Iraq and Afghanistan became targeted responses to the terrorist attacks due to the known support for al-Qaeda in those regions. President Bush argued that a networked region of terrorism was responsible for 9/11 and that the United States needed to engage in warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan in order to protect America, American citizens, and the free world.<sup>8</sup> In one way, the federal government's initial military

responses to 9/11 involved a sense of action when 9/11 positioned the United States to play a passive victim role. The federal government's reactions to 9/11 were undoubtedly strong and swift. However, over the years, support for the wars has waned as they drain military resources without any clear resolution or endpoint in sight. The tenth anniversary of 9/11 provided an opportunity to reignite attention and concentration on the wars. By replaying footage of 9/11 and reiterating the tragedy of that day, the specials offered a renewed sense of purpose for the wars. Even though President Obama officially ended the wars, the lingering presence of troops requires continued support for the military. Thus, the national political agenda became ingrained in the national memory of 9/11. Because the wars and their impact on US foreign policy are the most significant and visible consequences of 9/11, their impact cannot be left out of the national memory. However, by framing the wars in the context of 9/11, tenth anniversary television specials bolster a narrative of a strong, relentless American character through decisive national action. Similarly, the specials' discussion of the new memorial at the site of the World Trade Center serves to awaken a sense of unity at a time when political disunity is high. After 9/11, the collective experience of sadness and uncertainty united all Americans. While this sense of a shared experience was emotionally supportive at the time, this unity has disbanded in many ways. As national focus has become farther removed from 9/11 over time, the idea of a unified America has been beaten down, as social and political differences become more pressing. During the Debt Crisis in 2011 and with a presidential election year looming in 2012, political tensions came to divide people of different parties. The tenth anniversary of 9/11 provided an opportunity to re-establish a sense of unity. Being reminded of the tragedy of 9/11, Americans put aside their political differences and respected the shared experience of 9/11. The specials focused on

collective statements about America and reiterated that 9/11 happened to the whole country. In doing so, differences between Americans were displaced by reminders of how 9/11 connects each American through a national experience. By creating a narrative of unity and celebrating American resilience, the television specials fostered at least a temporary time of national harmony. Everyone, regardless of party, could support a remembrance of the victims, survivors, and everyone affected by 9/11 and a commemoration of how much America has overcome since 9/11. The producers of the specials have much to gain in providing such commemoration. By presenting positive stories that celebrate America and the American character, all Americans can subscribe to and appreciate the specials. In other words, no American can attack a narrative of heroism when each American is included in that heroism through the specials' focus on a collective and indistinctive community of "Americans." In this way, the specials appeal to all Americans and can support national interests masked as celebration of an undefeatable American spirit. Television specials served national goals by creating a narrative and memory of 9/11 that focused on the strength and ability to move forward present in the American character.

### **The Ignored Realities of 9/11 National Memory**

While a positive national memory is powerful, it fails to address more negative consequences of 9/11 that are significant to American life and people. In one way, specials that reiterate a singular remembrance of 9/11 are unable to incorporate aspect of 9/11 that complicate a clear narrative. In trying to create a cohesive special that emphasizes a consistent narrative of resilience and strength, the specials failed to present consequences of 9/11 that are unresolved or negative. In another way, the problem with such ignorance is that the national memory created about 9/11 is biased toward positive

aspects and not honest about certain realities. Thus, the national memory inherently supports a myth of American superiority that does not articulate the complete experience of 9/11. While the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are not positive effects of 9/11, they have been framed by the television specials as righteous endeavors to make America safer. However, less attention is given to other, more negative consequences of 9/11 that have led to substantial changes in America's image as a just world power and in domestic policy. The federal government made steps to strengthen government access to private information after 9/11 in order to prevent domestic systems of support for terrorist activity. The USA PATRIOT Act, signed into law on October 26, 2001 allowed for decreased restrictions on governmental and law enforcement surveillance of private e-mail, telephone, and personal record accounts.<sup>9</sup> These measures resulted in increased privacy issues and dissatisfaction with government interference in people's personal lives. Critics of the PATRIOT Act argue that the vagueness of the language and widespread authority given to law enforcement dramatically jeopardizes the individual liberties that define American values of personal freedom.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the attention to Guantanamo Bay, a detention center for suspected terrorists and a term synonymous with torture, occurred shortly after the war in Afghanistan began. While the detainees were allotted minimal protections, Guantanamo functioned outside of full disclosure to the American people.<sup>11</sup> While President Obama has since ordered Guantanamo to be shut down, the base has yet to be actually closed and the experience of Guantanamo Bay as not been positive for the American people or the American image. Ill-treatment of the detainees has brought into question the justice of Guantanamo Bay's interrogation structure and the security practices. Finally, racial tensions created by 9/11 reactions ignited controversy over racial profiling for security purposes and society's racial

structure. Because the terrorists on 9/11 come from Islamic and Arab backgrounds, American citizens of Arab decent as well as Muslims encountered social ostracism. In addition, airport security focused on people who appeared to be Muslim or Arab, regardless of any other indication of danger. Questions over Islam's connection to violence and terrorism surfaced as Americans directed their anger toward innocent followers of a religion. Through this development, divisions in America's population occurred, as American Arabs and Muslims became targets and suspects. The realities of 9/11 reactions exemplify negative and controversial consequences of the attacks. The fallout of these reactions is ongoing and therefore unresolved in terms of long-lasting social and political implications. The uncertainty over the full impact that these changes will make to future security policies and privacy laws combined with the negative image they create for America suggests that discussion about these measures would not support a message of hope, strength, and certainty in a positive future. By turning attention away from divisions and negative realities, the television specials created a more positive memory of 9/11 that bolsters a narrative of American righteousness. However, by ignoring negative consequences, the specials fail to address major concerns and problems America faced and continues to face after 9/11.

Although a consistent theme of American nationalism pervades the majority of 9/11 remembrances, aspects of the ignored realities do appear in some memorial specials. Discussion of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, security changes, and racial tensions provides minor inclusions in tenth anniversary coverage. Yet, inclusion of negative consequences does not disprove a theory of positive national memory forgetting negative consequences. Rather, the methods of discussion and presentation of such negative consequences still involves themes of American positivity. The ways in which



the negative aspects are re-told allows for production of memory and shaping of facts in a way that serves national goals. Therefore, even inclusions of negative elements are told against a larger story of heroism and perpetuate themes of American nationalism. In a larger way, these seemingly contradictory discussions support the argument that national events are inherently complicated and involve different interpretations and understandings. By contradicting themes of overwhelming hope, survival, and positivity, specials focused on more negative consequences actually underscore the point that national memory cannot capture the entire experience of an event through a singular memory. Thus, the appearance of contrasting specials exemplifies how flawed the myth of absolute American superiority and unity and illustrates how complex memories are.

### **Previous Research on National Memory and 9/11 Remembrance**

The problem with 9/11 national memory stems from the position television specials hold as supposedly simple forms of remembrance. In reality, the produced nature of the specials reveals a created narrative of heroism that ignores negative realities and bolsters national goals and values. Previous scholarship on national memory addresses these tensions inherent in memory creation, the implications of a collective memory, and the importance of media in representing and creating national memory. Marita Sturken argues that national or cultural memory of the Vietnam War involves actively reproducing historical events in ways that establish, verify, and define American values and character. This is accomplished, she suggests, by strategically organizing elements of a past event or experience into a coherent narrative that elevates certain ideas of “Americanness” while intentionally forgetting other elements.<sup>12</sup> In producing memory, as opposed to the passive relation of facts of an event, Sturken argues that a focus on truth is shifted toward revealing and validating political goals and social attitudes.<sup>13</sup> Sturken

points out that the media offers a unique space for national memory formation. As Americans watch historical events or commemorations of major events unfold on television, they become a part of a national audience and understand themselves to be part of a collective experience.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Sturken demonstrates how national memory, endorsed through media, actively constructs historical moments in light of current goals and conceptions of political and social platforms and identities.

Additionally, Erika Doss argues that the desire to validate national interests through national memory is derived from emotional responses to tragic events. During moments of anxiety, fear, and anger about an event or experience, memory and commemoration offer an outlet for emotion and a sense of control over how the event or experience is integrated into American public life.<sup>15</sup> In this way, national memories offer a definitive interpretation of an event or experience that translates the consequences of that event or experience into a context of American social, political, and historical understanding. National memories shift chaotic events into clear points in American history. However, Doss complicates this understanding by suggesting that the American culture disallows a clear, uncomplicated national memory. The nature of American life is constantly changing as new people and ideas enter into national discourse.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the ability to conclusively articulate a single interpretation of a nationally experienced event is impossible.

Similarly to Doss and her assertion that the rapidly changing nature of American culture informs the changing structure of national memories, Mary L. Dudziak argues that memories are inherently contested as they serve national goals and navigate definitions of “Americanness.” One year after 9/11, memorial media and literature focused on the unity inspired by national subscription to an American identity. However,

Dudziak argues that 9/11 served as justification for political discourse on terrorism and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup> Through the different uses of 9/11 memories, Dudziak claims that the nature of national memory involves a divided narrative that cannot be simplified into a singular understanding. Because national focus is constantly evolving and changing with new developments and experiences, national memory is not stagnant. Rather, national memory shifts with the social and political changes of the nation in order to meet the needs and goals of a particular time. Brian A. Monahan explores this intrinsic difficulty in national memory making at the level of media involvement in 9/11 remembrance. He argues that the media has been the primary source for 9/11 coverage and memory making.<sup>18</sup> Monahan maintains that the amount of media coverage and the nationally accessible nature of major media coverage have made 9/11 a principle component of national identity and American cultural structure. He suggests that 9/11 itself offered a series of tangible facts. However, through the telling of the story of 9/11 the memory of 9/11 has moved beyond the simple facts and become symbolic of American values, including patriotism, heroism, and unity.<sup>19</sup>

As both Dudziak and Monahan observe, national memory formation is innately complicated. However, the media's memorializing actions attempt to simplify memory in the service of national interests. The previous scholarship on national memory collectively defines national memory as remembrances of an event or experience in a way that deliberately forgets certain elements in favor of a cohesive narrative. In order to serve national goals and speak to current political and cultural climates, national memories fail to incorporate the entirety of experience. Additionally, the media plays a key role in this memory making through its accessibility and importance in recording nationally traumatic events. However, the major scholars on national memory

demonstrate that memory is complex and constantly evolving through history. Thus, singularly focused national memories that advocate particular social and political points of view are intrinsically incomplete as they elevate certain facts and interpretations to formulate a narrative that speaks to current national interests and disregard contradicting elements.

### **Purpose and Methodology**

This research will explore and expand previous scholarship on national memory. This research is more invested in the creation of national memory, not the final product of a formed memory. By investigating media remembrances of 9/11, this research involves the language, images, and stories that are shaping memory of 9/11. Unlike some of the previous research on national memory, this analysis will look at the process of memory making, not just the final product of a physical memory. By using television specials, the process of selecting which stories, images, and ideas will be integrated into the national memory of 9/11, and which ones are left out, will become clear. Using specials from ABC, NBC, CNN, CBS, FOX, PBS, HBO, Nickelodeon, The History Channel, Discovery Channel, and National Geographic, this research seeks to further complicate understandings of national memory. This complication is vital because it reveals the political motivations that underscore national memory. By understanding how inherently impossible it is to produce a national memory that addresses the complexities of 9/11 as a national tragedy, our personal memories of 9/11 can become better informed and more critical. Dismissing the myth of American heroism and virtue allows for a more honest discussion of how negative reactions to 9/11 can be acknowledged and possibly made better. Most of the specials function in service of national goals through elevation of a positive American nationalism. While some of the specials may contradict this narrative

through discussion of more negative components of 9/11 consequences, the way in which these negative elements are presented may in fact still align with current national interests. Furthermore, specials focused on negative reactions to 9/11 reiterate previous scholars' conclusions that national memory is flawed because memory and experience of nationally involved events is inherently complex.

The following chapters explore how 9/11 tenth anniversary television specials initiated national memory formation of 9/11 through overwhelming themes of positive Americanism and through minor rejection of contradictory, negative discussions. Chapter 1 investigates the theme of national unity created by 9/11. Unity suggests that 9/11 happened to the entire nation as a collective experience and thus response to 9/11 was a cohesive, national movement. Specifically, the language used in the specials signifies an American "we" opposed to the terrorist "them." Additionally, personal stories and images with people of identifiably different religions, ethnicities, and backgrounds in the specials institute a unified American character that stood together during the attacks and stands together now in remembrance. Through this theme of unity, major social tensions that resulted from 9/11 are largely ignored. The association of the Muslim and Arab world to the terrorists and the attacks created a hostile environment for American Muslims and Arabs. Social ostracism and singling out of this group led to a sense of disunity for some Americans who felt targeted, not a part of the American nation. While some of the specials may acknowledge such social disorder in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the concluding tone of such specials focuses on how America, as a whole, has moved on from that initial disunity and is now re-united under racial and social equality and justice. For example, in the Discovery Channel's special *Rising: Rebuilding Ground Zero*, images of racially diverse individuals, including a Muslim woman (identified by

her hijab), visiting Ground Zero subtly suggests that the desire to move forward from 9/11 is a collective effort by all Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity. However, a lack of discussion of these lived social, political, and economic consequences of 9/11 in favor of unity serves current national tensions. At a time of heightened political and subsequently social disunity, a national memory of 9/11 reignites Americans under a past collective experience. This re-established sense of unity allows all Americans, regardless of political affiliation, to get behind a memory of 9/11 and exist in harmony.

Chapter 2 investigates themes of survival and re-growth as a part of the national memory of 9/11. The primary narrative technique of the television specials involves personal stories and remembrances of 9/11 to humanize the tragic and monumental experience. These profiles rely on people who survived the attacks and people who searched for and assisted victims. By relying on stories of survival and heroism, the national memory of 9/11 aims toward a strong and brave American spirit. Furthermore, stories that involve recalling a specific person who died in the attacks, such as a firefighter or professional in one of the Towers, are tinted with language of heroism and perfection. Recalling only the valiant and notable actions of such a victim creates a memory of strength, not destruction, and the continuance of a heroic American character that survives in memory. In addition to personal stories, many of the specials focus on the building of the World Trade Center memorial. Through images that celebrate the new buildings, memorials, and museums surrounding the once destroyed World Trade Center, the specials center around re-growth of America and the betterment of that space. The language used to discuss the concepts behind the memorial reiterates hope and future grandeur. The music used as the backdrop to the specials is overwhelmingly upbeat and positive when discussing the memorial. Such positivity suggests that America has only

improved after 9/11 and that any changes to American society and policy are good. The idea behind the memorial and the images identifying it involve bigger and more beautiful use of that space. Therefore, America, and American ideals of power, importance, and inevitable growth survives through newly made expressions of such ideals in the physical memory of 9/11. However, discussion of survival and re-growth of the American character ignores the very real destruction that 9/11 ushered into American culture. The personal stories rely on a narrative of American survival and adaptation in the face of aggression. However, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have deteriorated an image of a pure, strong American. While the specials focus on the survival of American heroism, the wars threaten to disable this ideal by bringing into question the justice of American foreign policy and role America plays in the wars as the aggressor. The wars position America as attacker, not the attacked. However, by reiterating the strength and power of America pervading through 9/11, a reignited sense of righteousness is ingrained in the national memory of 9/11. Thus, current national goals that involve a continued military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan are bolstered through a national memory that validates the rightness of American policy and action.

Finally, Chapter 3 discusses themes of heroism and superiority that make up national memory of 9/11. The language in the specials suggests that the Americans are characterized as heroes. The profile of the victims of 9/11, the responders to the World Trade Center, and the military personnel involved in the United States responses to 9/11 are heroes who have positively preserved the American way of life in the face of evil. The focus on Americans as heroes suggests that the national memory of 9/11 is one that presents the experience and consequences of 9/11 as black and white moments of the good, heroic Americans against the bad, and evil terrorists. Limiting the memory to a

story of good versus evil disrupts the reality of a complicated series of actions in which the American perspective was not always completely positive. Furthermore, the theme of superiority reiterates the theme of heroism within the American community as superiority in the national memory justifies the actions of the “heroes” as based in a fundamental moral superiority of America. The theme of superiority suggests that America’s power is absolute because American values are somehow superior to those of other groups of people. Thus, the inevitable triumph of America in dealing with the fallout of 9/11 is assumed in the national memory because America’s perspective is morally supported. Themes of heroism and superiority underscore national goals seeking to reassure Americans that the current government is prepared and advised for future security of the nation. By enforcing the national memory of 9/11 with ideals of inevitable American safety and success, American citizens are given confidence and assurance in the stability of American life and culture. However, these themes fail to address the uncertainty of social and political policy that began after 9/11 and continues into the present. With the introduction of Guantanamo Bay, the heroism of the American character was brought into question. The masked treatment of Guantanamo detainees undermined the values and standards of internationally sanctioned protocol in regards to detainee treatment. Thus, the justice of American policy after 9/11 became controversial and unstable. In addition, the massive changes of domestic security measures that occurred after 9/11 and remain to this day disable traditional values of an individual’s right to privacy. While the celebration personal rights has been championed as an American liberty, the 9/11 changes ushered in a new era of restrictions to and invasions into personal lives.

The influence of 9/11 tenth anniversary television specials on creation of national memory of 9/11 is paramount. Themes related to a positive American narrative pervade



the specials in order to bolster current national goals. However, through this limited narrative the specials leave out important consequences of 9/11 that undermine a singularly positive narrative. Even specials that do contradict the larger narrative impact the formation of a 9/11 national memory as they exemplify the impossibility of a completely inclusive national memory that speaks to all aspects of 9/11. While the specials aims to remember 9/11 in a collective manner, the inevitable forgetting of certain realities that challenge the positive narrative, and the presence of contradicting stories, and the shaping of 9/11 facts into a cohesive special speaks to the inherently complex nature of memory. National memory of 9/11 seeks to address 9/11 in the context of modern day. In doing so, there cannot be a true, complete memory of 9/11. Rather, only a produced national memory exists in the television specials and reveals how 9/11 is used to underscore current national goals. Memory is complicated, layered, and constantly changing in evolving contexts. Thus, while a perfect national memory cannot exist, analysis of national memory formation exposes how an overwhelmingly positive national narrative about 9/11 speaks to the importance 9/11 holds for current national experience.

## **Chapter 2: Unity**

### **The Theme of Unity**

The theme of unity in the formation of 9/11 national memory involves the creation of a singular American experience of 9/11 and a collective response to 9/11. The television specials commemorating 9/11 attempt to define the events and consequences of 9/11 within the American narrative and create a memory of 9/11 that resonates with all Americans. In order to do so, they must speak to a national audience, not just a select group of people. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon the attempted attacks on the White House symbolically targeted the heart of American economic and political structures. The World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the White House represent cornerstones of America through the economic, political, and international dealings and decisions that begin in these places and filter out into policies and systems that impact the daily lives of Americans. In this way, the attacks touched the foundations of American life and society. Not every American witnessed the attacks or lost a loved one in the aftermath. However, on the national level, the attacks initiated significant changes to American policy, society, and history in a way that all Americans could recognize and understand. Furthermore, the television specials move the idea of a unified American experience of 9/11 forward into the consequences of 9/11. The specials focus on a cohesive response to 9/11 that came from a united America. Because the attacks symbolically targeted all Americans and enabled a collective experience, the responses to the attacks can be seen to represent the voice of a unified America. The television specials focus on an American response to the attacks as a way to solidify the idea that Americans came together in unison after 9/11 and collectively stood behind the federally enforced responses to 9/11. Through stories, images, and language, the television specials

effectively link the concept of a unified America with the experience and consequences of 9/11 that impacted America as a collective unit. The theme of unity throughout the specials allows the specials to make claims about a national memory of 9/11 by assuming to understand and define 9/11 in a way that captures the experience of 9/11 for the collective American population.

By creating a theme of unity that is central to national memory, the television specials fail to recognize the significant disunity that resulted in the days and weeks following 9/11. Unity suggests a collective experience and response yet ignores the lived reality of heightened social and racial tensions brought into the forefront of American culture as directly related to the nature of the attacks. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the concept of unity was used as a coping mechanism to comprehend the attacks. In truth, there was a significant amount of collective response after 9/11 because the scope of the tragedy was so large and the extent of the damage was still unknown. Shows of unity, such through national moments of silence and remembrance, provided space to discuss and attempt to understand what happened on 9/11. On the tenth anniversary, the theme of unity plays a very different role as it attempts to solidify the concept of a collective America in the national memory of 9/11. Unlike the role of unity in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 to begin the healing process, the primary role of unity during the tenth anniversary is to validate the concept of a collective experience and response as the basis for national memory. In order to successfully use unity as a tool to form a national memory, the television specials need to assume that the collective American experience and remembrance of 9/11 can speak to all Americans. Thus, the American experience used in the specials to underscore the narrative is generalized. However, the reality of 9/11 involved significantly varied and contradictory experiences based in the fact that

people didn't necessarily simply experience 9/11 as an American but as a complex identity made up of racial, ethnic, religious, national, and cultural connections and alliances. Furthermore, the message of unity as part of the national memory is overwhelmingly positive in order to categorize 9/11 as creating nationalism and community in the wake of tragedy. Yet, this positive twist fails to account for the negative pressure some Americans experienced after 9/11 due to their association to the Muslim and Arab worlds. By ignoring the complexity and variation within the American population, the specials undermine the presented theme of unity as a component in a positive, glorified national memory.

### **Language Expresses the Theme of Unity**

Throughout the specials, language plays a key role in making unity a central component of the presented 9/11 national memory. For the purpose of this research, language is defined as the words and phrases spoken by subjects or narrators of the specials. Language is a powerful tool of national memory because it provides the basic framework for talking about an event or experience. In the process of memory formation, the words associated with an event or experience become a foundation for converting that event or experience into a subject for conversation, discussion, and understanding. In a basic sense, positive language suggests that the event or experience had a positive impact while negative language suggests that the event or experience had a negative impact. For the television specials, language provides one of the major components of presentation. The spoken narrative of the specials incorporates a specific language that conveys the theme of unity and therefore grounds the national memory of 9/11 in the idea that 9/11 was an event experienced in a collective manner.

The principle function of unity language within the specials is to define the entire population of America as “Americans” and to speak about “America” as the unified community of victims and targets of 9/11. While it may seem obvious that all citizens in America are defined as Americans, the direct appeal within the specials to “Americans” suggests that an American identity plays a specific role in 9/11 national memory. Similarly, the prominent use of the word “America” to describe the diverse community of people remembering 9/11 narrows the scope of individual memory into a unified, national memory. The specials do not mean to appeal to people who subscribe to a detached national or political identity but rather to all people who subscribe to the cultural experience of being an American in a post-9/11 world. Thus, the words “American” or “America” build the theme of unity by downplaying racial, ethnic, and other social identities that American citizens may self-identify as and elevating a singular cultural identity that is based in the collective experience of 9/11. In an NBC special entitled “9/11: America Remembers” that aired on September 10, 2011, the language of unity is particularly important. First, the title itself assumes that “America,” as a collective unit, experienced 9/11. The words “America Remembers” assumes that 9/11, as a national moment in history, is remembered in a unified way by all “Americans.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, the national memory of 9/11 presented in the NBC special takes on the role of remembering 9/11 for all of “America.” Additionally, a Nickelodeon special entitled “What Happened: The Story of 9/11” uses the word “American” repeatedly throughout the special to connect children who were not alive during 9/11 to the role of 9/11 in history. The narrator of the special begins by suggesting that young children may get a lot of wrong information about 9/11. The goal of the special is to educate children in the facts of 9/11 in order to provide them with the necessary background to understand the

tenth anniversary. The narrator states that 9/11 plays an important role in “American history, your history.”<sup>21</sup> In one way, 9/11 marks a significant moment in an objective timeline of American history. However, by stating that this history of 9/11 is “your history,” the language of this special draws on personal subscription to a national history. Therefore, all people in America are obliged to see themselves, to see their personal history, as inextricably linked to a united “American” history, based in the memory of 9/11. Use of the words “America” and “American” are important to note in the formation of national memory of 9/11. This language implicates all people in America, who are impacted by the history and consequences of 9/11 by nature of living in post-9/11 America, as part of a collective “America” with a unified national memory of 9/11.

In addition to the formation of a unified “America” with a singular national memory of 9/11, the language of the television specials create an American “we” against a “them.” The specials address the viewers as a part of a collective group that experienced 9/11. The specific language focuses on the use of the words “we” and “us” in describing how Americans felt about and reacted to the attacks. For example, a National Geographic Channel special entitled “How It Was: Voices of 9/11” captures the memories of New York City emergency dispatchers from the initial calls received from the victims of the World Trade Center attacks. In recalling the reactions expressed in New York City from the dispatchers, responders, and victims, the interviewed dispatchers easily suggest that what they remember is what “we” felt. Rather than limiting their recollections to individual experience, the interviewees extend their memories of the attacks to a collective memory.<sup>22</sup> In a similar way, NBC’s Dateline “9/11-America Remembers” utilizes “we” language to build into the national memory a sense of unified experience. Throughout the special, the narrator, Tom Brokaw, attempts to contextualize

the retelling of September 11, 2001 by reflecting on how “we” reacted. He argues that “we were stunned” and initially unsure “how will we handle” the effects of the attacks.<sup>23</sup> By casually using “we” language, Brokaw seems to assume that his viewers understand and subscribe to the “we” he discusses. However, neither the National Geographic Channel nor the NBC Dateline specials specifically identify who is a part of the “we.” Yet, the prominent use of “we” language throughout all the tenth anniversary specials indicates that all Americans can be included in this collective audience. In this way, the creation of a united “we” in the specials, and in the national memory, builds the foundation for a cohesive experience of 9/11. The “we” then attempts to incorporate all Americans who can subscribe to a generalized, national community based on their participation in a national tragedy.

The other side of the “we” language in the specials is the formation of a specifically identified “them.” While the “we” in the specials seems to apply to all Americans, the “them” discussed in the specials targets a particular group held accountable for the attacks on “us.” Unlike the undefined “we,” the “them” is clearly defined in the specials as the terrorists. In NBC’s “9/11 America Remembers,” clips of President George W. Bush speaking following 9/11 solidify a unified us versus them mentality as he claims “terrorism against our nation will not stand.”<sup>24</sup> Here, Bush begins unity rhetoric that builds into national memory as he makes terrorism stand out as a “them” against a united American nation, united in goal, purpose, and dedication of national values. Continuing on this division between an us and a them, Brokaw in the NBC special separates out the terrorists from the collective American nation by recalling how “we continue to struggle with our grief and anger wondering how terrorists successfully used civilian airliners as weapons against American targets.”<sup>25</sup> In the

language, the idea that there is an American “we” and terrorist “them” is deeply ingrained in the national narrative of 9/11. Identifying the “them” as terrorists who are somehow against America strengthens the theme of unity by giving a name to the force behind the destruction and allowing all Americans impacted by 9/11, which is every American because 9/11 affected the national tone and history, to identify a common foe. The History Channel also demonstrated the theme of unity through language with a History Channel special entitled “9/11: The Days After” which provides footage from individuals from around the nation who self-recorded in their communities in the days after 9/11. In one vignette of the special, a radio host in Texas has listeners call in to his program on news reports in September 13, 2001. After a caller mentions how every neighbor of hers put out an American flag, the radio host states that “the terrorists did what no politician could do, bring America together.”<sup>26</sup> In one way, the language of this statement quite obviously suggests the creation of a unified America after the attacks from the “them” terrorists. In another way, the inclusion of this particular episode and dialogue in The History Channel special reinforces the formation of a national memory based on the unity experienced immediately after the attacks. Thus, the “them” language in the specials serves to strengthen the “we” language by highlighting the common enemy that all Americans, as a collective unit, can remember as responsible for the attacks.

The language of the television specials functions in two ways to bolster the theme of unity in the 9/11 national memory. First, the use of “America” and “American” reinforces that 9/11 is a part of a national history. For the television specials, the basis for being an “American” resides in the experience of living through 9/11 and in the impact of 9/11 on American life. The national experience of 9/11 becomes the foundation for identity and subscription to a unified national memory of 9/11. Second, the use of “we”



and “them” language, or language that sets up a clear distinction between “us” as American victims of 9/11 and “them” as the terrorists responsible for the attacks, creates unity by representing the views and reactions of the collective “us.” The specials incorporate language that reinforces that 9/11 was a national experience that happened to all Americans, as part of a unified “we.” In part, this is accomplished by identifying the terrorists as a common “them” to blame for the pain and destruction of 9/11. Thus, the television specials support the theme of unity through language by speaking about and remembering 9/11 for all Americans and basing that national memory on the “we” Americans that were created in response to the “them” terrorists.

### **Stories and People Portray the Theme of Unity**

In addition to language, the television specials reveal the theme of unity through the people and stories highlighted throughout the narratives. In one way, the specials attempt to portray a unified account of 9/11 by incorporating the perspective of different people with various backgrounds and experiences related to the events of 9/11. Most of the specials include individual people recalling what they went through, witnessed, or felt during 9/11. These portraits of specific stories range from widows who lost husbands in the towers to firefighters to average citizens who happened to be near the World Trade Center on that fateful morning. Even though the specials offer different and individual stories to personalize and accent the retelling of 9/11, the people represented and the stories they tell are framed in a way that presents a unified memory of 9/11. In HBO’s “9/11: Portraits of Resilience,” the structure of the specials is set to show many different people giving their memories of 9/11. The format of the special is simple with a plain white background behind each individual person telling his or her memory of 9/11 into the camera. This basic format gives the impression that HBO has not altered the message

of the special in any way and is simply allowing people to provide their stories. However, the narrative of unity is present because the editing of the special arranges the memories in such a way that each person seems to tell a similar story, despite the detail differences between them. For example, the first few portraits are of several different survivors of the World Trade Center attacks. Even though they were not together during the attacks, the message of their memories is unified. They each speak of the initial shock of the attacks and the subsequent quest for safety.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the HBO special advocates a national memory that is based on unity through the weaving of individual stories into a cohesive narrative of 9/11.

In order to similarly focus on the collective memory of 9/11, a CNN special entitled “Beyond Bravery: The Women of 9/11,” contains interviews with various female emergency responders and survivors from 9/11 in order to showcase the unity of experience despite difference of purpose. In this special, CNN correspondent Soledad O’Brien interviews women who were in New York during 9/11 in an attempt to understand the role of women in the wake of the attacks. While each woman offers a personal account that is based in her individual experience, the framing of these separate stories into one narrative demonstrates how the goal of the CNN special is to formulate a unified memory of 9/11. For example, Terri Tobin was a New York City police officer and one of the first responders at the World Trade Center. She describes how she felt that she was simply doing her duty on 9/11 and does not regret being a part of the difficult actions she had to perform that day. Immediately after Tobin’s remarks, O’Brien’s interview with Regina Wilson, a female New York City firefighter, is heard. Despite the differences between Tobin’s experiences as a police officer and Wilson’s experiences as a firefighter, Wilson, like Tobin, describes an overwhelming sense of duty to serve that

motivated her on 9/11.<sup>28</sup> For focus on women in this special is significant in relation to the theme of unity. The concept of collective experience relies on a particular erasure of differentiating aspects that could disallow Americans from relating to other Americans' experience of 9/11. Specifically, the stereotypical image of a firefighter or police officer is male. The danger and bravery associated with rescue workers is closely related to ideals of male responsibility to protect and defend. However, the special's focus on the female participants in 9/11 rescue work forces a re-imagining of rescue work as distinctly male. Instead, the special temporarily erases gender conceptions in service of creating an image of 9/11 rescue workers as unified across gender lines. In this way, a collective remembrance of 9/11 is bolstered by the appreciation of all rescue workers, regardless of gender, into a singular remembrance of the strength and courage exhibited by rescue workers on 9/11. Within the CNN special, the women portrayed each offer a personal memory of 9/11 that naturally differs from other accounts. However, the format of the special structures the placement of the portraits in such a way that the similarities between the memories are highlighted. The CNN special creates a memory based in a unified experience of 9/11 by paralleling personal narratives and emphasizing the similarities in experiences.

In addition to relating different personal accounts based on similar themes in experience, the specials advocate a theme of unity by presenting people and stories from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. In order to convey a united national memory, the narrative about 9/11 must displace racial, ethnic, and social distinctions in favor of a larger emphasis on a cohesive American national experience. The television specials accomplish this goal by incorporating images, people, and stories in the specials that represent a diverse range of racial and ethnic identities. In doing so, the specials validate

the idea that all people, regardless of background, were united as one American community through a collective 9/11 memory. In HBO's "Portraits of Resilience," the people represented ranged in racial identity. The opening sequence of the special features survivors of the attacks, with four men who are easily identified as most likely Euro-American and one man who is easily identified as most likely African American. Later on, a female veteran of the Iraq war, most likely of Asian descent, describes her experience of 9/11 from the perspective of someone in the armed services. Throughout the special, people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds contribute to the narrative.<sup>29</sup> Although the racial backgrounds of each participant are not directly addressed, the inclusion of a diverse range of people is important. It serves as a subtle reminder that all Americans, regardless of differing racial or ethnic identities, are included in a singular national memory. Similarly, in Discovery Channel's "Rising: Rebuilding Ground Zero," images of people representing diverse backgrounds are present. As the special traces the building of a memorial site at Ground Zero, images of people visiting Ground Zero highlight how emotionally attached visitors to the site are to the memory of the attacks. Amongst the crowded shots of visitors to the site are particular images set apart that focus on a single individual. For example, one shot portrays a Muslim woman, identified by her hijab, standing at Ground Zero in reserved silence. The inclusion of this image, along with other images of racially and ethnically diverse crowds, signifies the attempt of this special to focus on a positive, unified memory of 9/11 over the lived experiences of negative and disjointed memories of 9/11. By incorporating people and images that demonstrate how people of all backgrounds are a part of a singular narrative of 9/11, the specials attempt to achieve the theme of unity within the national memory. Yet, true

accounts of post-9/11 society in America reveal that 9/11 caused more disunity than unity.

### **The Ignored Reality of Disunity After 9/11**

The reality of 9/11 included consequences that led to severe social tensions and disunity in America in the form of widespread targeting of Muslim and Arab Americans as distinctly separate from the victimized American community. The television specials gloss over the negative outcomes of 9/11 in favor of a positive national memory based on unity. However, the social tone shifted after 9/11 as the fear and anger directed at the terrorists responsible was extended to the racial and religious communities associated with the terrorists. Soon after 9/11, suspicion fell on al-Qaeda, a known terrorist organization with distaste for US presence in Middle Eastern affairs, as the group responsible for the attacks. In 2004, Osama bin Laden officially claimed responsibility for the 9/11 attacks in a recorded statement released to al Jazeera. Bin Laden, the founder of the militant Islamic group and the lead organizer of the 9/11 attacks, and the men who hijacked the airplanes that flew in to the World Trade Towers, were Islamic extremists from the Middle East.<sup>30</sup> After news broke that these men were responsible for the attacks, blame for the pain and destruction brought on by 9/11 had a target group. However, the association of the terrorists with the Muslim and Arab worlds quickly spilled over into a blanket association of terrorism and the attacks with Muslims and Arabs.<sup>31</sup> Muslims and Arabs born in the United States and/or living in the United States became linked to the evil “other,” or the terrorists.<sup>32</sup> The association of Muslim and Arab Americans with the evil other disintegrated the ideal of a unified America. Although these Muslims and Arabs Americans experienced 9/11 as other Americans, in that they were on the receiving end of the attacks like other Americans, they were excluded from participation in the

united American community. Rather, American united against these Muslim and Arab citizens. The theme of unity falsely assumes that all people living in America who claim American identity can subscribe to a collective memory of 9/11. However, the events that unfolded after 9/11 that identified Muslims and Arabs as terrorists because of the religious and ethnic identity of the verified terrorists of 9/11 allowed for a separation of Muslim and Arab Americans from the rest of the American community. Thus, the unification of Americans against Muslim and Arab Americans weakens the theme of total unity this theme fails to account for the reality of disarray that underscored the lived impact of 9/11. The consequences of this development manifested in large- scale political and social disunity. In one way, the federal government used racial profiling to target people who appeared to be Arab or Muslim. Through wide spread arrests, detentions, questioning, and other tactics aimed at people without criminal histories, the United States government separated out innocent Arabs, Arab Americans, and Muslims from the rest of American society.<sup>33</sup> While the government defended these actions as necessary security measures, the implementation of racially directed government activity explicitly contributed to disunity in America immediately after 9/11.

In addition to political disunity, the social chaos after 9/11 centered around exclusion of Arabs and Muslims from the unified America experience of 9/11. Average Americans were upset, angered, and disillusioned after the attacks because they signaled a direct assault on national institutions and values. As an outlet for the pain caused by 9/11, some Americans directed their anger toward Muslims and Arabs living in the United States. In 2002, the FBI reported a 1,600 percent increase in hate crimes against Muslims.<sup>34</sup> The reality of this targeted hatred affected thousands of American citizens. Because Arabs and Muslims experienced a severe backlash after 9/11 simply because

they happened to share a thin connection to the social identity of the terrorists, they were not included in the unified American community that developed after 9/11. The intentional removal of Arabs and Muslims from the collective signaled a deep division and tension in American life. However, most of the television specials fail to address this consequence of 9/11 in order to preserve the theme of unity as a component of the national memory of 9/11. Even specials that discuss the negative repercussions experienced by Arabs and Muslims in America do so in such a way as to suggest that those negative reactions were not truly a part of the overall American response and therefore should not be a part of the national memory.

In The History Channel's "9/11: The Days After," interviews with members of the Queens Islamic Center in New York exemplify experiences of Arabs and Muslims post-9/11. The leader of the center states that in the days following 9/11, the Center received death threats and phone messages encouraging the members of the Center to leave America.<sup>35</sup> While The History Channel importantly includes this vignette in the story of 9/11, the special fails to realize this episode as a symbol for an overall disunited national memory. First, this aspect of the special is only a few minutes long, compared to the overwhelming amount of time spent showing positive vignettes that support the idea that unity developed after 9/11 and that the memory of 9/11 is therefore based in a cohesive experience. The few minutes spent displaying the experience of Muslims at the Center is positioned between footage of a radio program celebrating the displays of patriotism in a small Texas community and footage of firefighters rescuing victims of the attacks at Ground Zero.<sup>36</sup> By including the little footage of the Queens Islamic Center in between positive, uplifting stories, the special downplays the significance of the racial and social tensions and celebrates a false story of overall cohesiveness and unity. Second,

the few minutes of the special focused on the Queens Islamic Center ends with images of young Muslim children smiling and playing at the Center.<sup>37</sup> By closing the segment with such images, the special downplays the real hardship experienced by that community and suggests that such hardship was temporary and easily relieved. Thus, the negative consequences of 9/11 that lead to social and racial tensions are disabled in the specials in order to validate an overall positive national memory. Despite the reality of division, the television specials focus on a false social unity that underscores the national narrative about 9/11.

### **The Theme of Unity and Current Goals**

Although the theme of unity in the 9/11 national memory is largely misleading, it serves modern national goals. In 2011 at the time of the tenth anniversary of 9/11, the social and political scene in America included visible disunity. First, the Republican presidential primary campaign offered eight candidates with competing visions and sharp attacks directed at President Obama and the other Republican candidates. The Republican Party could not come together due to the diverse and seemingly opposing positions maintained by different factions and their candidates. At the same time that the various Republican candidates sought to separate themselves from each other, they sought to differentiate themselves from President Obama, his policies, and the current tone in Congress. Such disunity within the Republican Party and between the Democratic and Republican parties was charged with a sense of urgency as many leaders claiming to be the only source of hope for America's future offered different points of view on important political and social issues. Through the chaos brought on by the campaign season, American voters lacked a clear and decisive voice and direction. With so many political voices, choosing a candidate to support became a divisive action amongst voters



of the same party, let alone voters of a different party. Second, the campaign tensions exemplified the growing political tensions in Washington, DC. During the summer of 2011, Congress debated whether or not to raise the debt ceiling. Throughout the long, tumultuous process, Congressional leaders and President Obama disagreed over how to resolve the financial crisis. Although the debt ceiling was ultimately raised to prevent default and decrease the deficit, the bitter battle between Congressional Republicans, led by Speaker of the House John Boehner, and President Obama resulted in disapproval of Obama and Congress from Americans. Around twenty-one percent of Americans blamed President Obama for the crisis while thirty-one blamed Congressional Republicans.<sup>38</sup> The political tensions in Washington filtered into the American population as fear over the financial crisis and disappointment over the inability of lawmakers to resolve the issue quickly caused a disconnect between Americans and Washington politicians.

The disunity of the current political and social scene provided an opportunity for the tenth anniversary of 9/11. At a time when tensions in America were high, the tenth anniversary offered an event that all Americans, regardless of political party or position, could remember together. The devastation of 9/11 and the symbolic attack on American values and institutions existed outside the lines of political affiliation. Thus, remembrance of 9/11 provided a chance to put aside current tensions and focus on what Americans have in common, which is their shared history. In this way, the prevalent theme of unity in the national memory of 9/11 is not necessarily a product of the lived experience of 9/11 but rather an attempt to satisfy current political tensions. In order for the specials to have national appeal, they could not reinforce the idea of separate and different memories of 9/11. Instead, they need to rise above the current experience of

division and offer a concept of a collective memory and narrative that speaks to all Americans as a part of a singular experience.

### **Conclusion**

The theme of unity in the formation of a 9/11 national memory is paramount. In order to present a narrative that all Americans can subscribe to, the specials must address the audience and speak about 9/11 as if the attacks and the experience of the attacks happened to all Americans as a collective community. Thus, creating a fictional, cohesive narrative and a fictional, united America is a chief function of the anniversary specials. By assuming that the American community is naturally diverse yet cohesive, the specials draws on a myth of American exceptionalism, or the myth that America's economic, social, and political systems are ideal and thus America exists outside the rules and conventions of other nations. The specials rely on the seemingly contradictory idea that the American population is brimming with a range of racial, ethnic, and gender social groups yet capable of subscribing to a unified memory of an experience. Thus, the specials define a kind of American exceptionalism that is based in the myth that America is completely diverse yet harmoniously the same. The American exceptionalism celebrated in the specials is marred by the realities of disunity and social tension brought on by 9/11. Although the national memory in the specials ignores realities of racial tensions, it demonstrates the service national memory performs for current problems. By creating a memory based on unity, the specials remind viewers of the power of national unity and perhaps offer an opportunity to reignite national unity during a time of potent national disunity.

## **Chapter 3: Survival and Re-Growth**

### **The Themes of Survival and Re-Growth**

The themes of survival and re-growth are deeply intertwined as they function together in the national memory of 9/11 to solidify an uplifting, positive narrative of American memory and experience. The theme of unity provides the foundation for how the national narrative is structured. More specifically, unity offers the framework and language for how the specials envision the memory of 9/11 as something that can in one way happen to every individual American and in another way happen to a generalized ideal of a singular American identity. With this basis for national memory established, the specials provide specific characteristics that distinguish this singular American identity. The television specials highlight the themes of survival and re-growth to describe the American reaction to and experience of 9/11. Importantly, the focus of these themes overwhelms the 9/11 narrative with positive remembrances of the American response to 9/11. The language, people, and stories presented in the specials celebrate the people, ideas, and aspects of American life that survived 9/11 and grew stronger as a result of 9/11. This positive memory of 9/11 serves current national goals by reigniting ideals of American strength and power that justify an indestructible American presence and action in Iraq and Afghanistan. While this creates a positive memory of 9/11, it fails to recognize the ways in which national reactions to 9/11 have disabled America from moving on from 9/11. Specifically, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have threatened and weakened an ideal of inevitable American superiority. The wars have contradicted supposed American values of economic prosperity, democratic freedom, and moral righteousness. In this way, America and the American way of life have not survived and re-grown stronger. Rather, America has changed immensely as a result of the wars and

the active implementation of American values into foreign policy has been tested. This sharp reality is excluded from the positive national memory of 9/11 in order to uphold ideals of the American character that serve current national goals. The themes of survival and re-growth suggest that at the moment of the tenth anniversary of 9/11, the American people and American way of life have survived a symbolic attack on national values and in fact grown stronger as a result.

The themes of survival and re-growth are separate yet linked themes in 9/11 national memory formation. The focus of the television specials on survival is fundamental to establishing the strength of American values. The attacks on 9/11 were directed at visible elements of American economic and political power. The World Trade Centers, representing the centrality of America in the process of international trade and relations, and the Pentagon, representing a cornerstone of American political and military power, were both targets because they symbolized hubs of American economic, political, and social values of democracy, liberty, and freedom to engage in open, fair markets. By stressing the theme of survival, the specials acknowledge that the attacks targeted these institutions yet suggest that the values represented in these institutions have prevailed. Importantly, the values portrayed as part of the American character are overwhelmingly positive. The survival of American democracy, free markets, and culture suggests that these systems are worth saving. The enduring power of America presented in the specials functions under the assumption that America survived and exhibited strength after the attacks because American values are inherently stronger than the forces working against them. This assumption is key because it tints the national memory of 9/11 with a pure sense of positivity, integrity, and honesty while the underlying values and motivations of the enemies, or those responsible for the attacks, are attributed with a sense of negativity,

dishonesty, and intrinsic injustice. Thus, the specials create a good vs. evil national memory of 9/11 that highlights the ways in which the core values of American life, defined as just systems of social and political interaction, have survived in that face of attempted obliteration by evil forces. In this way, the narrative becomes about the indestructible nature of American systems.

Furthermore, the theme of re-growth builds upon the theme of survival in order to show how American values have not only survived 9/11 but have actually grown stronger as a result. The television specials focus on aspects of American life that have developed after 9/11 and thrived despite the attacks. For example, many of the specials focus on, or at a minimum mention, the memorial built at the site of the World Trade Center. The memorial itself maintains many different components that communicate an underlying message of progress and hope by transforming the physical space into one that celebrates American ingenuity, design, and history with imposing structures, beautiful architecture, and moving tributes. By highlighting the memorial as part of the 9/11 commemoration, the specials incorporate the theme of re-growth into the national memory. Thus, the narrative about 9/11 shifts away from the destruction of the attacks toward the opportunities for growth and change that have characterized American reactions to 9/11. In this light, the national memory put forth in the television specials concentrates not only on how American values survived the attacks but also on how America and the American people have thrived in the ten years after the attacks.

Discussion of the World Trade Center memorial, which opened in September 12, 2011, provides the dominant aspect of the television specials that conveys the themes of survival and re-growth. The September 11, 2001 Memorial and Museum itself consists of several distinct components. In the Memorial Plaza at the center of the memorial, two

reflecting pools are located where the original two towers stood. Surrounding them, four hundred trees fill the Plaza to bring fresh, new life into an area once a symbol for death and destruction. Underneath the Plaza, located thirty feet below ground level, is the memorial museum, which houses items from the towers. Across the street from the Plaza, a new tower, called the One World Trade Center, represents the replacement for the two lost towers. It is four hundred feet taller than the twin towers and reaches one thousand seven hundred and seventy six feet, a symbolic gesture to the founding of America. Finally, a structure in the Plaza, called the Wedge of Light, is designed to play with the sunlight as it streams through the surrounding office buildings and direct the light the way the light shone on the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, 2001.<sup>39</sup> The memorial becomes a part of the national memory of 9/11 as it seeks to visually and physically capture the impact of 9/11. The aspects deemed most significant to include in the memorial thus direct how America will remember 9/11. What is a part of the memorial reminds visitors of certain elements of 9/11 while purposefully excluding others in an effort to produce a particular message about 9/11. Specifically, the memorial seeks to represent a literal and figurative re-growth of America by demonstrating such growth in the physical space impacted by the attacks. At the same time, certain elements of the memorial symbolize the ideas and values that literally and metaphorically survived the attacks and maintain a strong presence in America. The purpose here is not to dissect the memorial as a whole but rather explore how discussion of the memorial, made through the television specials, introduces viewers to the national memory produced in the memorial. In other words, the language used to talk about the memorial, the people and stories used to give a human context to the creation of the memorial, and the images shown in the specials to present the memorial to the world, offer the basis for analysis

into how the television specials utilize the 9/11 memorial to support a national memory based on themes of survival and re-growth.

### **Language About the 9/11 Memorial**

The language used to describe the memorial demonstrates how the themes of survival and re-growth are integral to the formation of the memorial. The memorial symbolizes a physical national memory of 9/11 as it transforms the World Trade Center space into a visual narrative about the survival and re-growth of America after 9/11. In The Discovery Channel special, “Rising: Rebuilding Ground Zero,” the details of what the memorial looks like and what represents for the remembrance of 9/11 are discussed with the designers, architects, and builders of the memorial. David Childs, the lead architect of the memorial, states that building a memorial at Ground Zero is significant because failing to utilize that space allows for the “success of the terrorists, if we show life changed.” He argues that designers of the memorial sought to “build a more fantastic Manhattan” as a signal that America is “moving forward” in the wake of 9/11.<sup>40</sup> Through this language, the special highlights the intent of the memorial to re-grow the devastated space of 9/11. By linking the memorial to defeating the terrorists, Childs notes that the memorial signals a way to move on from the attacks and reaffirm the American way of life targeted by the terrorists. The language of “moving forward” and “build a more fantastic Manhattan” both force viewers to conceptualize the memorial as a positive symbol, not for the destruction of 9/11, but for the strength and development of America. The memory of 9/11 then becomes about the progress and the uplifting changes that have occurred at the World Trade Center, not the initial destruction that happened there. By focusing the interview with Childs on the grand, positive ideals of re-growth that motivated the memorial, the special focuses the national memory of 9/11 on the pro-

active measures taken to reclaim the World Trade Center space as a symbol for American triumph. Furthermore, this special contains an interview with Alice Greenwald, the curator of the museum that is part of the memorial. She states that the museum contains artifacts and materials from the Towers and is located in the “basement” of the Towers. Greenwald notes that the material in the museum “is where it was.”<sup>41</sup> The term “basement” suggests that the museum symbolically holds the place of the foundation of the Towers. Thus, as Greenwald suggests, the most basic structure of the Towers survives through the museum and the artifacts it keeps. By noting that the museum “is where it was,” Greenwald alludes to the idea that though the Towers are gone, the space they occupied and the objects they held have survived in a new format.

The language used to describe the memorial underscores the themes of survival and re-growth in 9/11 national memory formation. The ways in which those closest to the design of the memorial discuss the memorial suggests that the memorial itself represents the survival and re-growth of America after the attacks. Making the World Trade Center space and Manhattan “more fantastic” than before suggests, as David Childs states, the idea that America has grown stronger in the wake of the attacks. Thus, the re-growth of the American life becomes linked to the national memory of 9/11, as the focus on the memorial becomes an intrinsic aspect of the television specials’ commemoration of 9/11. In a similar way, Greenwald’s seemingly simple idea that the memorial museum be built in the “basement” of the Towers holds important meaning. The continued occupancy of the World Trade Center space with relics of the World Trade Center inhabiting the very foundations of the Towers speaks to the survival of “basement” values of America. While the superficial representations of American life were destroyed in the attacks, the memorial symbolically survives the underlying principles of free exchange and



international cooperation that the Towers embodied. Therefore, the national memory of 9/11 becomes imbedded with ideals of a strong, indestructible American character. The television specials utilize language that builds up positive images of an America that survived and grew stronger from 9/11. This language then constructs a national memory of 9/11 based on principles of survival and re-growth exemplified through the 9/11 memorial.

Left out of the discussion of the memorial is the deep conflict that surrounded different designs for the World Trade Center site. The specials focus on how the selected design for the memorial came to be and how the design was realized in the current memorial. However, prior to the selection of the final design, much debate and contestation took place over what memorial or structure should inhabit the somber ground. Some Americans believed that any memorial would demean the World Trade Center space. They opted to keep the space empty of new structures in order to preserve it as a place of solemn remembrance for those who died there. Others felt that rebuilding the site would provide a living memorial for those who perished on 9/11.<sup>42</sup> When the design for the memorial was selected in 2004, deeper conflict arose. The reflecting pool angered families of 9/11 victims who argued that the pool did not do justice to their lost loved ones and to their suffering. Still others felt that the simple reflecting pool signaled a weakness in America's response to 9/11. By placing the pool physically close to the ground, some Americans felt that the pool represented surrender to the terrorists.<sup>43</sup> Clearly, the process of selecting an appropriate memorial for 9/11 was seeped in debate and disagreement. Yet, the television specials leave out this discussion in order to present a history of the making of the 9/11 memorial that seems cohesive. The specials celebrate the memorial as a sign of a singular remembrance of 9/11 that speaks to a collective

American experience. However, the contestation of the memorial design and placement suggests that the chosen memorial does not incorporate all Americans' memories. The memorial then does not represent the survival and re-growth of American life but rather represents the struggle to move on smoothly after 9/11.

### **People Give Meaning to the Memorial**

Along with the language used to talk about the memorial, the people and stories representing the creation of the memorial produce the themes of survival and re-growth. Besides the designers and architects of the memorial, the majority of interviews in the specials involve the people who curate and build the memorial. The inclusions of these human perspectives serve to express how the memorial truly does incorporate a collective memory of 9/11. In "Rising: Rebuilding Ground Zero" on The Discovery Channel, individuals who have helped build the memorial or work at the memorial are interviewed to provide their motivations for involvement with memorializing 9/11. Lee Ielpi, a father whose son died on 9/11 describes his work at the Tribute Center, a center by the Memorial Plaza. Ielpi describes his experience searching for his son's body along with other fathers searching through the devastated World Trade Center in order to find their children's bodies. While Ielpi was able to find his son's "whole" body, he found comfort in starting a support group for other parents who were not able to experience the closure of a funeral with the remains of their loved ones. Inspired by his son and the group of people in need of a community to share the experience of 9/11 with, Ielpi started the Tribute World Trade Center Visitor Center near the Memorial Plaza. Ielpi describes his hope that the center will provide a place to connect members of the community through discussion about 9/11.<sup>44</sup> In this profile of Ielpi, the special focuses on how the development of 9/11 memorialization is based in the collective experience of 9/11. The

specific story of Ielpi details how the formation of a national memory is in fact possible because of the communal aspect of the tragedy. Furthermore, Ielpi's story illustrates that this national memory is based in the themes of survival and re-growth. In one way, Ielpi notes that his son provided the inspiration for the center. Thus, the center becomes a way to remember his son, and all those who died, and survive their memory through a productive and pro-active program. In another way, the center is founded on the principle of re-growth as members of the community come to the center to heal and grow from 9/11 through discussion and education about the attacks. The profile of Ielpi illustrates how those affected by 9/11 have utilized their loss into creation of the 9/11 national memory.

Similarly, "Rising: Rebuilding Ground Zero" features Jimmy Walsh, a plumber who exhibits the themes of survival and re-growth through his work at the memorial. Like the profile of Ielpi, the profile of Walsh details a personal experience of 9/11. Walsh's mother died in one of the towers and her remains were never found. Walsh notes that his desire to work at the memorial stems from his personal loss from 9/11. By working on the memorial, Walsh states that he is able to pay tribute to his mother's memory. In Walsh's profile, the television special builds a national memory that is based in human characteristics that are attributed to a generalized American identity. Firstly, Walsh's work at the memorial provides an avenue for him to survive his mother and channel his loss into productive energy. By including Walsh's personal motivation for working on the memorial, the special seems to highlight that the losses experienced during 9/11 do not indicate defeat of the American spirit because people like Walsh are able to survive the pain of that loss and use that energy to produce an uplifting and prominent physical memorial. Secondly, Walsh's assistance in the reconstruction of the

World Trade Center space signals a literal healing of that space and a symbolic healing of the destruction to personal lives brought on by 9/11. The framing of Walsh's story as part of the story of the building of the memorial suggests that just as the World Trade Center space is renewed through the building of the memorial, so is a kind of renewal in Walsh's life by growing that space into a positive memory of his mother, and all those who died. The survival and re-growth themes highlighted in Walsh's story are used in the special to attribute the same themes to the national memory of 9/11. In Walsh, viewers are meant to see characteristics of the American spirit that survived 9/11 and thrived in the progress made after 9/11. Thus, the special incorporates personal perspectives and stories of people working on the memorial in order to capture the themes of survival and re-growth that have become a part of the national narrative about 9/11 through the memorial.

### **Images of the Memorial**

Finally, images are integrated into the narrative of the television specials to reinforce the themes of survival and re-growth. In this case, images refer to the visual elements that underscore the spoken narrative in the specials. They are not the principle focus of the scene yet they subtly support the themes of survival and re-growth. In CBS's "About 9/11: Ten Years Later," the content consists of individual profile of spouses and family members of 9/11 victims telling memories of their experiences of losing their loved one and of moving on with life after 9/11. In one interview, a man stands in the Memorial Plaza in front of a tree briefly identified as Survivor Tree, the only tree to survive the attacks at the World Trade Center. While he discusses the legacy of 9/11 as one of bravery and resilience, the Survivor Tree provides the backdrop.<sup>45</sup> Although not explicitly discussed, the presence of the Survivor Tree suggests that the hope of the interviewee is based in the survival of America after 9/11. In a way, the Survivor Tree

symbolizes the survival of American values and the American way of life. The indestructibility of the tree mirrors a supposed indestructibility of America. By including this image in the background of the interview, the special seeks to highlight this concept and ground the national memory of 9/11 in the theme of survival.

In addition, Dateline NBC's special, "9/11- America Remembers" the special begins with Tom Brokaw standing on the high up on the One World Trade Center to signal re-growth of America in the ten years after 9/11. He states, "Good evening from Ground Zero."<sup>46</sup> While he introduces the program from "Ground Zero," a notion toward to initial devastation of the World Trade Center that crumbled the impressive towers to the ground, he stands high above the ground on the newly built memorial tower. The visual image of Brokaw standing high on the memorial is a powerful, yet subtle representation of the re-birth of Ground Zero. He details the initial shock experienced in the hours after the attacks yet the image of him on the memorial signals that America has moved on from that moment. Brokaw's physical location on the new memorial symbolizes the literal re-growth of the World Trade Center despite the impact the attacks had on that space and on America. By positioning Brokaw on the memorial, the special begins the commemoration of 9/11 from a symbolic position of power. Although the details Brokaw recounts tell a story of destruction, his position as a narrator with access to the new memorial suggests that America has changed and grown since that destruction. Thus, the national memory put forth in this special is framed to highlight the revival of America. The use of images and visual cues to accentuate the narrative in the television specials perpetuates the themes of survival and re-growth. By surrounding the narrative with symbols of strength and progress, the national memory within the specials connected to a story of American power, survival, and growth.

## **Ignored Realities**

Although the themes of survival and re-growth form a positive, uplifting nature to the 9/11 national memory, they fail to recognize the consequences of 9/11 that have chipped away at the supposed indestructible American values. The first major federal response to 9/11 occurred on October 2, 2001 when President Bush announced the start of military action in Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup> Bush reasoned that al Qaeda, the terrorist organization claiming responsibility for the attacks, and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan that supported al Qaeda, should be targeted in retaliation for 9/11. According to a memo sent by President Bush to the National Security Council, the goal of the military action was the “elimination of terrorism as a threat to our way of life.”<sup>48</sup> The swift and active response to the 9/11 initially maintained support from the American population and media outlets because it represented a powerful response that matched the intensity of the 9/11 attacks.<sup>49</sup> Bush stressed the strength, perseverance, and fundamental belief in freedom that drove the military action in Afghanistan.<sup>50</sup> His focus on the federal response to the attacks as a broader fight to protect American values underscores the national mood that the consequences of the attacks were in some way an example of the indestructibility of the American life. Even the title of the military operation, “Enduring Freedom,” appealed to Americans on the basis that it stood for the survival of a basic principle of American citizenship and constitutional liberty, freedom. In addition to Afghanistan, the Bush administration looked to Iraq for possible connections to the 9/11 attacks. Although no weapons were ever found, Bush asserted that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and that the United States needed to invade Iraq to prevent future attacks. Despite a lack of evidence that Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq, had anything to do with the planning or execution of the 9/11 attacks, movements toward a

war in Iraq began in early 2002.<sup>51</sup> At this point, support for the war in Iraq, called Operation Iraq Freedom, waned. Because of a seeming lack of justification for the war in Iraq with no clear objective for victory and the substantial costs of fighting two wars, the American people voiced objection to the large- scale responses to 9/11. Most noticeably, polls in 2002 indicated that public opinion of the Bush Administration and the wars in Iraq was low.<sup>52</sup> In this climate of concern over the consequences of 9/11, the lived narrative of 9/11 sharply differs from the themes of survival and re-growth that dominate the national memory of 9/11.

Although the initial response for the war in Afghanistan was generally positive as Americans searched for an outlet for destruction brought on by 9/11, negative results brought on directly by the wars diminished the justification that the wars represented the survival of American values. Firstly, the introduction of a second war in Iraq combined with the war in Afghanistan deteriorated the survival of America's economic prosperity and freedom. President Bush's approval ratings slowly declined beginning in mid-2002 as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq dragged on. In 2003, fifty seven percent of Americans stressed that the economy, not terrorism was their primary concern.<sup>53</sup> In 2003, the first full year of both wars, the cost to the American economy was just over eighty one billion dollars and the costs have risen each year to reach over one trillion dollars spent up through 2011.<sup>54</sup> With the substantial costs to the economy and the American people, the ideals of economic freedom and stability were threatened by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, the consequences of 9/11 did not represent the survival and re-growth of American economic values but rather they signaled a major shift toward the diminishing of such values. Secondly, behavior exhibited by some members of the United States military shattered justifications for the wars that rested on ideals of American

honesty, integrity, and freedom. Most notably, in the spring and summer of 2003, allegations of the mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners in the U.S. military prison, Abu Ghraib, surfaced. Photographs displayed Iraqi prisoners in humiliating and degrading positions while United States military personnel taunted and ridiculed them.<sup>55</sup> Although this was an isolated incident, the level of dehumanization exhibited in the photographs tarred the reputation of the wars. This example illustrates the detachment of American ideals of justice and integrity from the lived reality of the wars. Thus, the wars, as consequences of 9/11, did not capture the survival and growth of American values after 9/11 but rather they exhibited the degradation of these economic and social values.

The television specials largely ignore the ways in which the wars have failed to support the themes of survival and re-growth in order to bolster support for the wars. The specials paint the wars as just consequences of 9/11 in order to preserve a positive, uplifting national memory of 9/11. PBS's *Frontline: Top Secret America* documents the initial planning of the invasion of Afghanistan from interviews with top CIA and military officials. While this special details the operations in Afghanistan and the use of secret, unconventional interrogation tactics, the special presents these developments as necessary, based on the kind of war being fought. At the start of the special J. Cofer Black, the man in charge of counterterrorism efforts at the CIA, states, "After 9/11, the gloves came off." By starting the special with this statement, the tone of the special is set. Although the special investigates the negative consequences of 9/11, it allows for justification of the wars as a like response to the unjust attack. Later on in the special, John Rizzo, a lawyer at the CIA, states that the unprecedented formation of secret, overseas prisons became fundamental to the success of the war in Afghanistan because it was "essential that these people [prisoners] be held in absolute isolation, with access to



the fewest number of people.”<sup>56</sup> The justification for the wars and the tactics used is laid out in this special by interviewing members closely linked to the decisions made. By validating the wars in light of the unparalleled destruction brought on by the attacks and the unprecedented environment of fighting well-networked enemies, viewers are swayed to understand why the wars needed to be fought and why they needed to be fought in such a secretive way. In this way, discussion about the wars becomes about the strength, forcefulness, and decisiveness of America. Viewers are encouraged to accept the basis for the military action as necessary and just in order for America to re-build and survive after 9/11. The specials’ framing of the wars reiterates that the consequences of 9/11 developed as rational responses to preserve America’s security. By discussing of the wars as righteous consequences toward protecting America and conserving national values, the television specials structure the national memory of 9/11 as a narrative about the survival and re-growth of America after 9/11.

Even inclusion of the wars in the specials allows for the perpetuation of a positive narrative that serves current goals. The national memory then rests on the idea that the wars acted as reasonable responses to preserve the American life in the face of evil and terror and to re-grow America’s power and influence through undeniable action. The need for this national memory is specific to the current state of public opinion about the ongoing military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. Public opinion shifted away from the initial support given to President Bush and the war in Afghanistan as the costs to America’s economy and reputation increased. In 2010, seven out of ten Americans supported the withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq.<sup>57</sup> President Obama announced in July 2011 steps toward removing troops from Afghanistan and in October 2011 he announced that the war in Iraq was over. Despite this official ending to the wars, troops

remain in both countries in order to slowly shift security from the United States to local authorities. Currently, thousands of troops continue to reside in Iraq and Afghanistan with an ultimate withdrawal from Iraq date set in 2014.<sup>58</sup> The remaining presence of troops necessitates continued support for the wars. In order to justify the continued expenses to support troops in two of America's most expensive and longest wars, it is important for a national memory about 9/11 to serve as a reminder for the underlying principles that drove America into the wars in the first place. By focusing on how the wars allowed for the protection, survival, and growth of American values, the television specials reignite the initial attitudes that validated the wars. In this way, a national memory of 9/11 that centers in themes of survival and re-growth actually serves current national goals.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the specials, the themes of survival and re-growth support an uplifting national memory of 9/11. These themes suggest that America and Americans remain strong despite the attacks. Furthermore, the specials seek to exemplify ways in which America has grown better after 9/11. The focus on the 9/11 memorial exhibits these ideas as the framing of the memorial in the specials highlights the elements of survival and re-growth present in the story of the memorial. This narrative underscores a memory of 9/11 that highlights American exceptionalism. The idea of American indestructibility is a product of the myth of American exceptionalism. The specials celebrate the resilience of America and the vast improvements made after 9/11 because they rely on the myth that America cannot be destroyed, damaged, or attacked because America is exceptional. Yet, this memory fails to incorporate the negative consequences that have tarnished a pristine image of America. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq undermine a national memory that celebrates the survival of core American values, such as integrity and honor, after 9/11

and the re-growth of a fresh American perspective. The wars have taken a toll on America's image and economy as they fail to align with American ideals of honor and prosperity. Still, by excluding discussion of the negative consequences of 9/11, the specials present a positive national memory based on the strength, survival, and re-growth of America after 9/11.

## **Chapter 4: Superiority and Heroism**

### **The Themes of Superiority and Heroism**

The national memory of 9/11 celebrates the superiority of American morality and force and the heroism of the American people. The themes of heroism and superiority function together to justify the actions of America in response to 9/11. They do this by presenting a national memory of 9/11 that celebrates the heroism of the American character, exemplified by the heroic acts of individuals highlighted in the specials. Once the specials establish that Americans are heroic, and therefore honorable, courageous, brave, resilient, and just, the specials seek to express the subsequent superiority of American responses to 9/11. If Americans are heroes, then their actions are heroic, or entail a moral superiority because heroes represent good against inferior villains representing evil. The television specials achieve a national memory that supports the themes of heroism and superiority through triumphant music and language that emphasizes the righteousness of American action taken in response to 9/11. The national memory presented in the specials is positive without addressing the ways in which consequences of 9/11 diminished the idealized image of American heroism and morality. Specifically, the poor treatment of military detainees at Guantanamo Bay and the invasive principles of the Patriot Act undermine a national memory built on the themes of heroism and superiority. Yet, the purpose of leaving out such negative facts serves to boost confidence in the national government's ability to protect America from future attacks. Thus, a national memory infused with the themes of heroism and superiority and ignorant of negative consequences of 9/11 supports current national needs.

The themes of heroism and superiority work in tandem to form an uplifting national memory of 9/11. Heroism is a deeply rooted trans-national cultural conceptions

based in stories of good versus evil and heroes versus villains that characterize children's books, blockbuster films, and any tale that celebrates one idea while it demonizes another idea. In the case of American history and memory, heroism fulfills the same function with a nationalistic aim. By distinguishing one actor in history as a hero, the national memory creates a story in which the hero is worthy of success because he is honorable and just while the villain does not deserve success because he has evil and harmful intentions. The television specials of 9/11 utilize the recognizable metaphor of a hero fighting injustice to characterize America, and Americans, the hero in the story of 9/11. By attributing heroic qualities to the Americans presented in the specials, the national memory becomes about the good, courageous, honorable Americans fighting the evil terrorists. Building on this theme of heroism, the theme of superiority uses the idea of a heroic America to justify the actions America took after 9/11. The theme of superiority suggests that American values and ways of life, that underscore the actions taken by America, are superior to those of other groups of people, namely the terrorists and their allies. Throughout the specials, the righteousness of American action is based in the superior position America holds as a heroic ideal of just, moral, right perspective. Thus, the theme of superiority is intimately bound to the theme of heroism. The 9/11 national memory relies on remembering and presenting Americans, and America at large, as heroes with the right motives and positions against the villainous terrorists with immoral objectives. The television specials use this aspect of national memory to suggest that the heroism of Americans allows for the actions taken by America in response to 9/11 to be remembered as superior and justified. Therefore, the national memory offered in the television specials relies on the themes of heroism and superiority to create a positive

memory in which America champions the enemy because America is stronger, better, and more just.

### **Music Introduces the Hero**

One of the principle techniques used in the television specials to establish the themes of heroism and superiority is music. In the background of the primary narrative, music provides a subtle addition to set the tone and mood of the narrative. Movies, television programs, and any visual presentation incorporate music to direct the audience toward a particular feeling, emotion, or reaction to what is being shown. This is done through the use of specific sets of musical notes and cues that relate to cultural conceptions of what different music tones mean. For example, robust notes with grand instruments and powerful chords generally indicate something positive and good is happening in the program. On the other hand, darker, slower beats perhaps with surprising and startling shifts in tone indicate something sinister or negative is happening. These music cues are utilized in visual media presentations to connect with audience's cultural understandings about music in order to produce a specific reaction to the presentation. Upbeat music prepares the audience for positive reactions while dark music prepares the audience for negative reactions. The television specials commemorating 9/11 use the same music techniques to direct viewers toward a particular national memory about 9/11. In order to validate the themes of heroism and superiority within the national narrative, the specials utilize uplifting and sympathetic music that frames the presented story of 9/11 as a moment to celebrate the integrity and morality of the American spirit.

The theme of heroism is particularly revealed through music because it is based on a familiar story accompanied by familiar musical themes. The narrative of heroism is

a recognizable part of American mythology as a culturally recognized story of a strong, powerful, righteous hero conquering an evil villain. Historically, the heroism narrative is a long-standing allegory that transforms important American figures into heroes. For example, stories of Davy Crockett, a rugged frontiersman, Martin Luther King Jr., a martyr for civil rights, and war veterans are similarly told within a narrative of heroism.<sup>59</sup> These individual martyrs, explorers, and soldiers are turned into heroes and remembered in history through the understandable parallel of a hero's journey. Thus, United States history is filled with simplified and glamorized stories of important individuals who are molded to fit a heroism narrative. In the case of 9/11, the heroes became the first responders, rescue workers, civilian volunteers, survivors, and the family and friends left behind to carry on the American life in the wake of 9/11. The specials frame these individuals as heroes by focusing on the bravery and courage exhibited by these individuals in a time of distress. In a broader way, the individuals profiled in the specials serve to symbolize the heroism of the generalized American character.<sup>60</sup> The music in the specials helps to capture this theme of heroism by using positive musical notes and themes that are similar to the powerful musical themes played in superhero movies. Just as in superhero movies, the music of the specials indicates that Americans are heroes in the story of 9/11 by bolstering the narrative with robust notes and sympathetic cues. In CBS's special "About 9/11: Ten Years Later," music serves as a key tool to direct the narrative as individual profiles of survivors and responders of 9/11 are interviewed about the past and current experiences connected to 9/11.<sup>61</sup> Early on in the special, Madeline Wiebicke, the wife of a firefighter who survived 9/11 but who later died from multiple myeloma that he developed as a result of his action on 9/11, describes her husband, Randy Wiebicke. Images of Randy in his firefighters' uniform and alongside his children

fill the screen as Madeline tearfully recalls her husband's insistence that he go into the towers on 9/11. Although the images on the screen are simple images of Madeline interwoven with images of Randy, the music in the background conducts the tone of the special to direct viewers toward the theme of heroism. When describing his illness, the music is soft and slow to suggest that this brave firefighter sacrificed his own health and eventually his life to courageously fulfill his duties, just like a hero who puts his responsibility to protect and defend before his own life. In this way, viewers are encouraged to imagine Randy as a downfallen hero who perfectly performed his duties and honorably put the security of America and Americans before himself. Later on, Madeline recounts the strength Randy maintained throughout his work as a firefighter. In this scene, as images of her husband in his uniform appear on screen, the music shifts to reveal a more uplifting tone. At the end of Madeline's interview, the viewer is left with positive music that builds up slowly to instill in viewers the idea that Randy should be idealized as a hero whose acts of bravery encompass the entirety of his memory.

Similarly, in HBO's "Portraits of Resilience," the special uses music to bolster the theme of heroism by underscoring individual profiles with uplifting musical cues. Brian Clark, identified as a World Trade Center survivor, recalls his experience of working on the eighty-fourth floor of the South Tower. He recounts a detailed narrative consisting of his memories from when the plane hit the South Tower to when he escaped the building. He notes that he assisted injured co-workers and helped others escape the building as he made his way to the ground floor.<sup>62</sup> Clark's unassuming nature and humble language suggests that he does not imagine himself a hero, simply a lucky man. Yet the music underscoring Clark's narrative indicates a different tone. The music notes, slow yet uplifting, mirror a sigh of relief. Clark's tale of survival and selflessness as he assisted



co-workers exit the tower is projected onto the symbol of a hero's journey. The music, clearly positive, yet respectfully reserved to appreciate the painful and difficult memories Clark must re-tell, indicates that Clark is a hero by reinforcing his narrative with subtly triumphant notes. Like a hero returning from a long journey in which he used his natural bravery and honor to save lives, the music in Clark's piece illustrates his story of courage in a time of panic as a successful hero's story. The music throughout the specials, as exemplified in Clark and Wiebicke narratives, bolsters the theme of heroism by underscoring individual profiles with heroic musical tones and cues. The positive music turns these narratives that recount tragedy into a memory of bravery, resilience, and strength. By including such music and profiles in the story, the specials project this heroic spirit onto a generalized ideal of the American character.

Building on the theme of heroism, the theme of superiority also uses music to turn America's responses to 9/11 into positive memories. In order to present America in a good light and justify American responses to 9/11, the specials use music to celebrate the actions taken after 9/11. In Nickelodeon's "What Happened? The Story of 9/11," the special explores President Obama's successful mission to kill Osama bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda. Throughout the discussion of how bin Laden's death provided for a safer, more secure America, the music is reminiscent of relaxing background music.<sup>63</sup> The calming music suggests that Obama's actions and the subsequent death of bin Laden were a natural progression of America's response to 9/11. Without grand overtures and with relaxing tones, the music directs viewers to conceptualize the government's handling of 9/11 as a straightforward task that was easily conceived of as a valid and necessary response to bin Laden's role in 9/11. Thus, the music delivers a narrative that assumes the superiority of American force because the discussion of bin Laden's death is

not projected as surprising but rather a natural action performed by a supremely prepared and assured government. The national memory then becomes about the power of the United States and the ultimate triumph of America due to the superior strength and courage innate to the American character.

A consequential theme produced through the heroic music that celebrates America's greatness is the theme of evil. While the principle function of music in the specials is to highlight the bravery of Americans and America, a secondary function of the music is to underscore the malevolence of the attackers. If America is the symbolic hero in the story of 9/11, then al Qaeda and the terrorists are the symbolic villains. The music used in the specials performs the task of making the terrorists the evil other by incorporating dark, ominous notes in the infrequent profiles of the attacks and their allies. For example, in Nickelodeon's "What Happened? The Story of 9/11," background on al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, is briefly provided.<sup>64</sup> As images of bin Laden and Saddam Hussein fill the screen, the music slows to a low key on the piano. The heavy, dark notes subtly shade these leaders as the enemy the clear enemy in the narrative of 9/11. The music in the specials therefore fulfills two functions. Most importantly, it focuses the national memory of 9/11 toward a memory that idealizes and idolizes America's position as one of a hero. In a lesser yet significant way, the music identifies the attackers and their allies as the collective enemy that the hero must fight and will ultimately conquer due to the morality, strength, and power embodied in the heroes character. Therefore, the music in the specials creates the hero narrative as a part of the national memory of 9/11 by identifying and characterizing both the symbolic hero and the symbolic villain.

## The Language of Heroism

In addition to music, language is a fundamental tool in producing the themes of heroism and superiority in the national memory of 9/11. Creating a narrative that celebrates the heroism and superiority of America involves demonstrating how ingrained and natural these themes are in the American narrative. The language used by individuals profiled in the specials exemplifies how the basic words of discussion about 9/11 are embedded with concepts of American heroism and superiority. Therefore, the specials are able to solidify a positive national memory of 9/11 by showing how a national narrative based in ideals of heroism and superiority are valid because the basic language used to talk about 9/11 is saturated with words that celebrate the strength, honor, and righteousness of America and Americans. Terms like “hero”, “role model,” “extraordinary,” “brave,” “courageous,” and “honorable,” are frequently used by interviewees in the television specials to characterize the victims, survivors, responders, and volunteers who played a role in 9/11. In CNN’s special, “Beyond Bravery: The Women of 9/11,” the very title suggests that the female firefighters, police officers, and responders profiled embody the heroes journey.<sup>65</sup> Firstly, the identification of the women as representing “bravery” elevates the story of 9/11 to a positive and uplifting example of an American value. Secondly, the indication that the women are “beyond” brave singles out these American responders as extraordinary. The exceptional of these women as ideal examples of bravery parallels their story to the story of a hero because a hero symbolizes the utmost example and experience of valued character traits. Later on in the special, Brenda Berkman, a New York City police officer, suggests that children should idolize these brave women as “role models.”<sup>66</sup> The term “role model” indicates that these women are exceptional and that their behavior deserves to be emulated. Like the ideal hero, these

women embody the strength and courage that provide the “model” for good behavior in society. The language used to describe the Americans involved in 9/11 is packed with images that correlate with the theme of heroism. By incorporating language that brings in hero imagery, the specials produce a national memory built on the heroism of the American people and the American character. In a broader way, this language suggests the superiority of America by identifying the American people as exceptional examples of honorable, courageous living. The heroism of the community translates to a powerful and moral nation at large. Therefore, the themes of heroism and superiority are intertwined in the specials to bolster a positive national memory.

In a similar way, the language of TLC’s “9/11: The Heroes of the 88<sup>th</sup> Floor” characterizes the American people as heroic and superior through specific re-enactments of individual leaders on the 88<sup>th</sup> floor of the North Tower. Through the title, the hero language sets the tone for the special as the individuals are identified as “Heroes of the 88<sup>th</sup> Floor.” From the beginning viewers are staged to interpret the actions and behavior of the individuals as heroic. Identified by co-workers, Frank De Martini, a construction manager who went up to the 88<sup>th</sup> floor of the North Tower after it was hit, is highlighted as the man who saved employees after the plane hit the tower. Walking through a detailed account of how De Martini gathered and calmed everyone and found an exit route, the special uses hero language to characterize De Martini’s actions. Described as “taking charge” and “easing everyone’s fears,” interviewees recall, “we knew that he would get us out safely”. De Martini is credited as “saving lives” as an “everyday hero.”<sup>67</sup> In addition to being directly called a “hero,” the language used by interviewees to describe De Martini and his actions is filled with heroic imagery. His powerful “taking charge” leadership and ability to “safely” direct the escape route characterizes him as a strong,

brave, and good man. The specials use De Martini to stand for the bravery and courage that many Americans exhibited on 9/11. By drawing on specific examples of heroic individuals, the specials claim the importance of these individuals in forming a national narrative. In this way, the heroism of individuals is expanded to represent the heroism of America and all Americans. Also, because many different interviewees provided the language to describe De Martini, the special effectively demonstrates how the theme of heroism is ingrained in the personal memories of 9/11. The special uses the individual memories of 9/11 to provide the basis for a generalized national memory. In this way, the very language used to articulate the personal memories becomes the foundation for the theme of heroism in the national memory.

### **Ignored Consequences**

The themes of heroism and superiority produce a positive national memory of 9/11 that celebrates America yet the reality of American responses to 9/11 undermines this memory in order to produce confidence in the preparedness of American government for future safety. The ignored realities of the consequences of 9/11 are important because they illuminate the underlying complexities of national security and international warfare. President Bush established the controversial detainee facility, Guantanamo Bay, in 2002 as an interrogation site for captives of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>68</sup> Although legitimized by the government as a necessary tool to win the wars and defeat terrorism, the ill treatment of detainees painted the military personnel involved and the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan as dishonorable and unjust. On the domestic front, the USA Patriot Act, or the Patriot Act, was made into law in 2001 by President Bush as a measure to expand the authority and intelligence capabilities of the United States government in order to enhance national security. Although the Patriot Act was swiftly passed by the

United States Congress and supported by many Americans who sought comfort in more visible efforts to thwart terrorists, the implementation of the Patriot Act encouraged invasions into private activity that was assumed to be part of individual civil liberty. With the public divided over the necessity of such changes in domestic policy, national support of the federal government was similarly divided.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the myth of a heroic, superior nation failed to align with the reality of divided support over invasive domestic policies. The realities of American responses to 9/11 undermine a national memory that celebrates a singular story of American heroism, justice, and integrity. However, the national memory of 9/11 serves a current purpose. In the wake of 9/11, threats to American security necessitated revisions and public changes to national security policies to project confidence in the ability of the government to prevent future attacks. In order to encourage support of and assurance that the American government is prepared for future threats, the national memory of 9/11 must suggest to Americans that the government responded swiftly and justly to 9/11. Therefore, a positive national memory of 9/11 establishes trust in the ultimate righteousness of America and the American government to produce confidence in current and future actions.

The consequences of 9/11 that are ignored in the national memory that celebrates the themes of heroism and superiority center around the ways in which the actions taken at Guantanamo Bay and with the Patriot Act failed to mirror the ideal of American justice and honor. Guantanamo Bay and the Patriot Act represent certain aspects of the American government's responses to 9/11. They each undermine the themes of heroism and superiority because they exemplified moments of unfair, unjust behavior and policy faulted to the American government. Guantanamo Bay, located in Cuba, has been used as a United States controlled military site since the early 1900s. Because it is technically

located outside the jurisdiction of the United States, United States officials have argued that Guantanamo Bay exists outside the laws and regulations of the United States legal structure.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, when President Bush announced that Guantanamo Bay would be used as a detention facility for captives of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the legal rights and status of detainees became unclear.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the treatment of the Guantanamo Bay detainees differed from the internationally sanctioned war policies designed under the Geneva conventions, which the United States subscribed to. For example, under the Geneva conventions, prisoners of war are defined as members, or informal members such as volunteers, of the military of the opposing group.<sup>72</sup> With a prisoner of war status, a detainee is granted certain rights and humane treatment. However, the detainees at Guantanamo Bay were not recognized by the United States government as prisoners of war, and thus entitled to protection and fair treatment. The United States position held that the detainees were not prisoners of war for many reasons. One reason put forth suggested that al Qaeda was a terrorist organization, not a national party, and the members of al Qaeda were therefore not fighting as official military members of the state.<sup>73</sup> By denying the rights laid out in the Geneva conventions and failing to extend the legal framework of the United States to detainees, the United States justified ill treatment and harsh interrogation tactics at Guantanamo Bay. While prisoners of war are afforded protection during interrogations, the detainees at Guantanamo were subjected to harsh interrogation methods, including sleep deprivation, sexual humiliation, physical assaults, and other tactics to dehumanize the detainees.<sup>74</sup> When news of mistreatment of detainees became public in 2003, the image of American justice and honor was brought into question. The blatant disregard for internationally sanctioned policies discredited America's image as a humane nation with a righteous legal system

based on principles of fair treatment. The realities of Guantanamo Bay challenge a national memory that celebrates America's reactions to 9/11 as heroic and superior. The ill treatment of detainees deteriorates a positive national memory of 9/11 because it removes America from the position as a hero. The television specials frame American responses to 9/11 within a story of a "good" America fighting the "evil" terrorists. However, as Guantanamo Bay demonstrates, America's role in the world post-9/11 was not simply the role of the conquering hero. Rather, Guantanamo Bay exemplifies an instance in which America performed the role of the unjust villain. In this way, Guantanamo Bay weakens a national memory built on the themes of heroism and superiority because it displaces America as the symbolic hero and reverses the idealized myth of American moral superiority.

The PATRIOT Act also undermines the themes of heroism and superiority in the 9/11 national memory. Signed into law in 2001, the PATRIOT Act initiated changes to national security and privacy policies to provide more government oversight of domestic life. The PATRIOT Act authorized the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other tools of the United States government to strengthen techniques and policies for investigation into terrorist activity within the United States. Although the Act has been renewed since the original 2001 signing, the initiation of the law signaled a dramatic shift in domestic policy. The renewal and subsequent laws that have furthered the tightening of government control over domestic dealings are directly linked to the initial 2001 law. While the Act provided for broad platforms of investigation, some specific changes to domestic security policies include new, defined classes of targeted groups suspected of terrorism and loosened guidelines for wiretapping and electronic surveillance. First, the PATRIOT Act broadened the group of people who could be



investigated for terrorist activity. This group of people includes any person appearing “to intimidate or coerce a civilian population” or “to influence the policy of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.”<sup>75</sup> The vague language of this section allowed for the investigation of domestic political groups that could easily be described as “intimidating civilians” through public, passionate demonstrations of events. This measure caused controversy, as it appeared to be a politically motivated act veiled as a national security necessity. Secondly, the Patriot Act expanded the scope of wiretapping and electronic surveillance. Previous standards for such invasive surveillance were high and demanded a demonstration of probable cause prior to executing surveillance activities. However, the PATRIOT Act dramatically lowered these standards by allowing any investigator to initiate wiretapping if the investigator believed that the intelligence received might assist the United States fight terrorism.<sup>76</sup> The unspecified definition of what exactly constitutes terrorist activity allowed for expansive wiretapping capabilities of any individual without structured legal oversight. In doing so, individual citizens could be tapped without their knowledge despite any clear evidence of terrorist connection or activity. Furthermore, the PATRIOT Act expanded the kind of information that could be gathered from electronic sources. Private voice mail, telephone calls, and email correspondence became subjects of surveillance. With a simple search warrant, investigators could obtain communication records and financial information from the service providers.<sup>77</sup> Access to the personal communications and information of individuals evaporated the right to privacy guaranteed under the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The expansive rights given to investigators under the PATRIOT Act were justified as necessary to combat domestic terrorist activity. However, the vague language of the Act opened up many Americans to surveillance

without regards for the traditional legal restrictions outlined in the Fourth Amendment that protect American citizens from unwarranted searches and surveillance. The PATRIOT Act undermined American ideals of personal liberty from government interference. Disregard for the Fourth Amendment and individual privacy deteriorated the idea that American values and systems of justice are superior and secure. Thus, a national memory that celebrates the honor and morality of the American responses to 9/11 is weakened.

The reason that the television specials fail to address negative consequences of 9/11 is because an uplifting national memory serves current national goals. After 9/11, faith in the security of America and the preparedness of the government to protect America was challenged. The issues brought on by Guantanamo Bay and the PATRIOT Act only function to remind Americans of the inability of the federal government to clearly and efficiently handle the fallout of 9/11. These negative responses and changes suggest that the unpreparedness of the government necessitated impulsive and reckless policies and actions that had destructive consequences. By ignoring Guantanamo Bay and the PATRIOT Act in the narrative about 9/11, the televisions specials create a national memory that focuses on the heroic and moral responses to 9/11. In doing so, the specials support a modern national goal to establish confidence in the government's ability to protect and secure America. In 2010 and again in 2011, President Obama renewed three key aspects of the PATRIOT Act that allow for the continued use of wiretapping surveillance, seizure of items related to terrorist activity, and surveillance of American non-citizens suspected to terrorist activity.<sup>78</sup> The television specials frame the national memory of 9/11 as positive in order to suggest to viewers that the government responded

swiftly and efficiently to 9/11 and that the government continues to enforce measures that ensure the safety of America's future.

### **Conclusion**

The themes of heroism and superiority help the television specials to create a positive national memory. The music and language in the specials characterizes America and Americans as heroic, powerful, and morally superior. Profiles of individuals, described with heroic language and bolstered with uplifting music, serve to identify the people who demonstrated heroic acts during 9/11. The inclusion of such profiles suggests that the specials intend these individuals to represent a broader message of a kind of national heroism. The individual becomes a symbol for a nation. The national heroism suggested in the specials is related to the myth of American exceptionalism. National narratives through the history of the United States bolster the idea that America and Americans are exceptional because national memory has solidified national figures as heroes. The specials of 9/11 draw on this history and extend the heroism narrative to the victims of 9/11. Taken further, the heroism of America indicates a natural claim for moral superiority. The righteousness of the American community provides the backdrop to the ethical and honorable actions that the American community makes. In this way, the specials justify the American responses to 9/11 as naturally superior, because America is exceptional, and just, because America plays the role of the hero in the story of 9/11. However, the reality of responses to 9/11 differs sharply from the positive national memory offered in the specials. The consequences of Guantanamo Bay and the Patriot Act reverse the ideal of American heroism and superiority. While the specials represent America as the heroic, moral actor and the terrorists as the evil actor, the realities of Guantanamo Bay and the Patriot Act place America in the position of the negative actor.

The unjust actions supported by the Bush Administration in response to 9/11 deteriorated the ideal of American righteousness and integrity. The specials ignored these aspects of 9/11 in order to preserve trust and confidence in the United States government. However, the intentional forgetting of Guantanamo Bay and the Patriot Act devalues a wholly positive national memory. While this failure is problematic, the point remains that the television specials present a positive national memory founded in the themes of heroism and superiority in order to perpetuate a myth of 9/11 that idealizes and romanticizes America's role.

## **Conclusion**

### **Memorializing 9/11**

The tenth anniversary of 9/11 provided the first major opportunity to contextualize 9/11 within the American national narrative. In the ten years since 9/11, the consequences of the attacks and the changes that have subsequently occurred in the political and social structure of the United States have unfolded to yield lasting impacts. The television specials that commemorated the tenth anniversary provide a key lens to look through and gauge the national mood toward 9/11. Through the particular language, images, music, and stories presented, the specials contribute to the formation of a singular memory of 9/11. The thematic similarities amongst the different specials suggest that in the ten years since 9/11, the events and consequences of 9/11 have been discussed in particular ways and formed into a narrative that celebrates the resilience, strength, and unity of the American community and of American values. Thus, the specials filter all of the personal experiences and reactions to 9/11 into a singular national experience of 9/11. This process of national memory formation involves intentional forgetting. In order to create a cohesive and positive national memory, certain aspects of 9/11 have been left out or framed in such a way to ignore realities that diverge from the produced narrative. This relationship between remembering and forgetting is key to national memory because what is forgotten reveals just as much about national identity as what is remembered. By forgetting certain realities and consequences in the national memory of 9/11, a myth of American unity, superiority, heroism, survival, and re-growth is instilled in the national narrative at the expense of an honest memory. While a national memory cannot possibly capture the entirety of an event or experience, it is important to understand that national experiences are complex and that the use of a simplified national memory to justify ideals

of American exceptionalism is problematic. The tenth anniversary of 9/11 signals the first major reflection on 9/11, reveals a national desire to frame 9/11 as a moment of American power, and represents a troubled system of national memory formation.

### **The Language, Stories, People, and Music of National Memory**

Throughout the tenth anniversary of 9/11 television specials, the narrative tools in the specials advocate produce a national memory that celebrates America and demonizes those responsible for the 9/11 attacks. The specials incorporate stylistic and narrative techniques to commemorate 9/11 as a moment when American values and people triumphed over all evil due to the intrinsic goodness of America. Most importantly, the language in the specials sets the stage for national memory formation. As the most basic tool of communication in the specials, the presented language is packed with words and phrases that structure America and Americans as united heroes coming together in a time of tragedy in order to ultimately prosper. The language describes Americans in positive ways and discusses the events and consequences of 9/11 as moments that exhibit the tendency toward justice and bravery inherent in the American community. On the other hand, the language categorizes the terrorists and their allies as the clear opposites of American heroes. The language distinguishes between the goodness of America and the badness of the terrorists by limiting positive words and phrases to descriptions of American action and negative words and phrases to descriptions of terrorist actions. In this way, the language of the specials uniformly founds the national memory of 9/11 as a memory that glamorizes America and demonizes those associated with the attacks. Similarly, the stories, people, and images in the specials reinforce a positive national memory of 9/11. Many of the specials profile individuals who were directly impacted by the attacks. In these profiles, individuals are presented as examples of strong Americans

who exhibit bravery, integrity, and unity with the broader American community. Images in the specials stand to symbolize the re-growth and prosperity America has experienced since 9/11. Through these stories and images, the specials structure the national memory of 9/11 to incorporate the positive, uplifting characteristics symbolized in the visual narrative. The isolated stories and images are included in the specials in order to represent larger themes relevant to the entire American community. Thus, the specific people and images in the specials capture themes of nationalism and exceptionalism that become the basis for a positive national memory. Even the music in the specials contributes to this positive national memory. The music in the background of the specials directs the tone of the narrative. Upbeat music with heroic tones becomes associated with the acts of courage and strength performed by Americans. On the other hand, darker, ominous music introduces discussion of the terrorists. Like language, music structures the specials so that viewers internalize the themes of the story. The music paints Americans and their actions as good and the terrorists and their allies as bad by drawing on common cultural associations of beautiful, soft, cheerful music as indicating good and harsh, deep, slow music as indicating bad. In this way, the music in the specials underscores a positive national memory of 9/11 by framing America as good and those responsible for the attacks as bad. The narrative techniques in the specials provide the tools with which the specials produce a positive national memory.

### **American Exceptionalism**

The stylistic methods help produce memory by relating themes of American exceptionalism. Throughout the television specials, themes of American nationalism and exceptionalism are clear and consistent. The concept of unity works within the specials in order to justify the idea of a national memory. By suggesting that Americans, as a

singular community, experienced and reacted to 9/11, the specials set the stage for a singular national memory that captures that collective experience. Although individual people are profiled in the specials, the words and feelings that they present are framed as similar. In this way, the specials suggest that a national narrative is possible because, through the experience of 9/11, each individual has become a part of a collective whole America. Building on this theme of unity, the themes of survival and re-growth in the specials suggest that the attacks did not destroy the heart of America. The language and stories in the specials focus on the people, values, and institutions that survived the attacks. Furthermore, the specials include images and stories about how America has grown as a result of 9/11. Examples of better, stronger national institutions are provided in the specials to firmly implement the idea that American values and the American way of life has not suffered, but actually grown stronger after 9/11. Finally, the themes of superiority and heroism run throughout the specials. By framing Americans as heroes, the specials credit the American community with characteristics associated with heroes. Pictured as brave, honest, just, members of society, the American heroes are at the core of the national memory of 9/11. The specials perpetuate the theme of American heroism in order to ground the national memory of 9/11 in the idea that America is morally superior and exceptional because Americans and American values are honorable and righteous. With this idea firmly planted, the specials illuminate the American reactions to 9/11 as good and just. The themes within the television specials, advocated through narrative techniques, produce a national memory that affirms the positive exceptionalism of America.

The problem with this wholly positive national memory is that the American reaction to 9/11 entailed negative realities. The specials create a national memory based



on the unity of the American people, the survival and re-growth of American values and institutions, and the superiority and heroism of the American character. However, the specials fail to account for the reactions to 9/11 that contradict this positive memory. Severe social disunity divided America after 9/11. As Arab and Muslim Americans and American residents faced increased discrimination and hate, the fabric of a unified American community disintegrated. Not all Americans can subscribe to a national memory that celebrates the goodness of America when national policies and social attitudes after 9/11 separated some Americans from the supposed collective community. Similarly, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan diluted the idea that American values survived the attacks. Examples of torture and dehumanization from the wars demeaned the public image of American honor and justice. While the specials celebrate the resilience of American values, such as fairness and integrity, the wars weakened the real experience of these values in action. The USA PATRIOT Act and Guantanamo Bay also degrade a positive national memory. The American heroism and morality suggested in the specials is undermined by the consequences of 9/11 that positioned America as the villain. Domestically, the PATRIOT Act challenged long held ideals of American justice. Guantanamo Bay similarly brought into question the solidity and superiority of the United States legal and political institutions. All of the negative consequences of 9/11, from social disunity to domestic policy changes, destabilize the validity of the positive national memory. Even when these negative consequences are discussed in the specials, they are downplayed and even justified within the context of acceptable and necessary steps to protect America. The History Channel's "9/11: The Days After" provides the best example of a special that explores the negative realities of 9/11. It reveals the consequences of racial profiling, security policy changes, and foreign wars. While this

special is the most thorough examination of the social and political complexities that developed after 9/11, it is only one of many specials. The majority of the specials did not provide any discussion of the negative realities. The History Channel special is an important addition to the tenth anniversary coverage. However, such coverage should not be limited to a few specials. All coverage of the anniversary should incorporate some discussion of the negative consequences of 9/11 in order to provide the most viewers with as balanced of a presentation as possible. Yet, the themes presented in most of specials do not hold up to an investigation into the complex realities of 9/11. Instead, the national memory offered in the specials perpetuates a myth of American exceptionalism, defined by the themes, at the expense of an honest discussion about 9/11 and the issues America has created as a result of 9/11 reactions.

### **National Memory Makes National Identity**

The formation of national memory is connected to the formation of national identity. National memory is important because it provides an opportunity to define and refine ideas of national character. As a major national experience, 9/11 represents a significant moment in American history. However, the consequences of 9/11 for American history and identity are not immediately obvious. National memory offers a bridge between the actual events of 9/11 and the lasting impact of 9/11. The memory filters through the events of 9/11 and frames them in a particular way in order to say something about America. Thus, through national memory, 9/11 becomes a statement about being American. Furthermore, the ideas about American exceptionalism defined through the themes in the specials become inseparable from current conceptions of “Americanness.”<sup>79</sup> The national memory of 9/11 has altered what it means to be American by attributing characteristics to Americans and America based on the

experience of 9/11. For example, the theme of unity in the specials supposes that there is a definite American community and that all Americans are a part of it. Therefore, being American comes to be defined as subscription to this community and the national memory of 9/11 it maintains. Also, the theme of survival suggests that the strength of American values and institutions is clear. Being American becomes about faith in the power and indestructibility of the American way of life. Thus, participation in the national memory becomes participation in the nation and in the greater community.<sup>80</sup> In this way, national memory functions as a source for national identity, definition, and citizenship.

### **Forgetting in Order to Remember**

However, the process of remembering is inherently linked to the process of forgetting. The practice of remembering through forgetting is not a new concept for American identity formation through memorialization. Throughout American history, the commemoration of significant national events has provided an opportunity to define and reshape identity. However, each national memory provides a space for contestation over what aspects of a particular event should be remembered and what characteristics should be defined as the generalized national identity.<sup>81</sup> The diverse range of experience and individual agendas that characterize the American population means that a singular, cohesive narrative is difficult. Divergent agendas yield different ideas about what should be or should not be a part of the national identity, and thus national memory.<sup>82</sup> The collision and tension between different social and political goals produces a national memory that remembers and forgets certain aspects of an event in order to serve particular interests. In this way, the formation of national memory involves forgetting aspects of an event that do not support the dominant narrative. The forgetting of

particular, divergent angles produces a seemingly cohesive national memory. However, the reality of memory creation includes the intentional forgetting of inconvenient aspects that undermine the principle narrative.

The theme of forgetting is apparent in the 9/11 national memory. The 9/11 television specials articulate a consistent memory that embraces a positive ideal of American participation in 9/11 and the consequences following 9/11. Yet, the reality of life and major events, including 9/11, involves complex and contradictory narratives.<sup>83</sup> The ignored aspects of 9/11 complicate an uplifting narrative and are therefore intentionally “forgotten”. By failing to include discussion of the negative aspects of 9/11, the specials perpetuate a national memory that is “forgetful” in order to validate a positive narrative. The tension between what is included and what is left out of the 9/11 national memory produces a tension between the ideal that Americans strive to emulate and the reality that America exemplifies. For example, the failure of the specials to address the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the ways in which they have degraded America’s value of justice is an intentional action in order to support the idea that America’s values and institutions survived and thrived post-9/11. In this way, what is forgotten in the national memory is just as important to understand as what is incorporated into the national memory. Forgetting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the specials, even though they have constituted a large part of America’s political, economic, and historical narrative, suggests that the wars do not support a positive national memory. Thus, it is clear that the wars somehow contribute to a negative national memory of 9/11. Recognizing the failure of the specials to include the wars opens up discussion about what the United States can learn from the wars, what impact the wars have had on the United States’ image and what responsibility the United States has in the future to

prevent and avoid such negative consequences. Without this discussion and with an ignorant national memory, there is no opportunity to grow, change, and learn from mistakes or suboptimal responses in order to better national responses to future attacks or traumatic events.

### **Evolution of Memory**

In national memory formation, forgetting is a historically and spatially limited exercise. The purpose of forgetting in memory formation is to solidify a dominant narrative by omitting discussion of divergent narratives. However, the motivations behind the dominant narrative are constantly shifting as national goals change over time.<sup>84</sup> At the particular moment of the tenth anniversary of 9/11, the political and social tone in America was specific to that time. The experience of a deeply disunified political system, the continued presence of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the attempts of the federal government to instill faith in the ability of the government to protect the United States against future attacks all culminated at the time of the tenth anniversary. Thus, the produced national memory of 9/11 forgot certain aspects of 9/11 and remembered others in order to create a narrative that addressed the particular national issues facing America during the tenth anniversary. National memory is not static. Rather, it changes over time as the needs of the nation change.<sup>85</sup> At a time what America was disunified, disenchanted with foreign and domestic policy change, and uncertain about the ability of the government to adequately prepare for future attacks, the national memory created an American identity based on unity, triumph, strength, and heroism. In this way, the national memory of 9/11, like all national memories, is subject to change based on the particular set of challenges and issues facing the nation at any given time. It is impossible to predict what the national memory of 9/11 will look like at the twenty- fifth anniversary

or the one- hundredth anniversary because it is impossible to know what the national needs and goals will be in the future. However, it is clear that the national memory will change because the function of national memory is to articulate a national identity in service of the particular set of needs of a particular time and place.

### **The Impossibility of National Memory**

Because national memory relies on forgetting and it is subject to change over time, a truly complete national memory is impossible yet important to contemplate. The concept of a complete or total national memory that captures the entirety of experience is not a plausible option. Different people interpret national events or experiences differently because each person or community of people has a unique interaction with that event or experience based on their individual identities. Furthermore, it is impossible to capture the entire range of repercussions an event or experience will have. Thus, the concept of a complete national memory is not a useful standard by which to judge a national memory. Instead, critic of national memory should be based on the motivations behind it, the role it plays in shaping history, and the position it holds in forming national identity. Understanding the motivations informing national memory reveals the purpose of that national memory. The memory is set to achieve a set of national goals and interpretation of those goals yields a deeper knowledge of what problems and issues are faced in the nation at that time. Furthermore, analysis of national memory should be focused on how the national memory is shaping history. Although the memory may change over time, it still contributes to how an event or experience will be remembered in history. The aspects included and excluded from the memory supply the facts and perspectives that frame the telling of an event or experience in the future. Understanding why a national memory includes or excludes certain aspects will allow for a more

thorough investigation into the historical role an event or experience will have in the telling of history. Finally, examination of national memory should focus on the role memory plays in shaping national identity. The themes incorporated into the memory are meant to perpetuate certain ideas about what characteristics make up community that subscribes to the national identity. Recognition of the inherent forgetfulness of national memory allows for comprehension of the ideals most valued by society. What values and themes are celebrated and which are forgotten suggests the characteristics that are most and least important to the idealized national identity. Thus, the idea of a whole national memory is not useful. All national memories are incomplete, intentionally and unintentionally. Yet, the underlying motivations and impacts of the national memories can be used to better understand the ideals, values, and issues that characterize the nation.

Apparent in the tenth anniversary coverage of 9/11 are the inherent tensions produced in the specials. As the specials attempt to define the national memory in a positive light, they unintentionally reveal the contradictions that make national memories problematic. For example, some of the specials celebrate women as heroes of 9/11 while others limit women as grievors. In some parts, women are recognized as strong, resilient heroes. This conception of the women of 9/11 serves the theme of unity to collectively celebrate survivors and rescue workers despite gender differences. In other parts, women are the grievors who tearfully remember their heroic husbands, sons, and brothers who perished as employees at the World Trade Center and as rescue workers. Thus, the inherent tension in producing a national memory that tries to incorporate women into the hero narrative and limit women as grievors is problematic. Similarly, the design of the memorial space produces a tension in the national memory. The physical memory is presented as a space to collectively remember and define the tragic space into a symbol

of America's re-growth. Yet, the process leading up to the current design of the memorial was contentious. With differing opinions about what should be done with that space, the memorial represents disunity and conflict. Thus, the national memory of 9/11 is problematic as it attempts to define the memorial as a symbol of unity and strength at the same time as it ignores the reality of disunity. Finally, the national memory of 9/11 put forth in the specials is based in the past and future. The specials rely heavily on footage and images from the actual events of 9/11. At the same time, the specials stress how America has moved on and changed for the better since 9/11. In this way, the national memory is filled with contradictions as it is based on emotional connection to past events while it is focused on forgetting the past in favor of a brighter future. The national memory of 9/11 is packed with inherent tensions. Although the specials attempt to portray a cohesive memory, this task is ultimately impossible because the memory contradicts itself and contradicts certain realities.

The tenth anniversary national memory of 9/11 is an important symbol of the values that underscore the American nation. The national memory created through the television specials reveals the themes of unity, survival and re-growth, and superiority and heroism that represent the ideal image and identity of America. The overwhelmingly positive specials celebrate America's role in the consequences and responses to 9/11 as characteristic of a strong, united, righteous nation. While the specials create this positive national memory at the expense of hard realities, the purpose of the national memory is clear. The specials form a national memory that addresses current national problems. Ultimately, the consequences of 9/11 are ongoing and difficult to simplify. However, the role of the television specials in commemorating the tenth anniversary of 9/11 signals to



important role national memory plays in understanding and contextualizing 9/11 for the future of American values and the American identity.

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