

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – EAU CLAIRE

MEDIA AND MEMORY:  
THE IMPACT OF THE MEDIA ON THE AMERICAN MEMORY  
OF 9/11

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
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## Abstract

The study of memory in American history is a more recent trend that is opening up opportunities to more ways in which we can understand our past and the interplay between how the past can be manipulated for the needs of the present. It is important to look beyond the actual content of both individuals and the collective memory because it is constantly being constructed, reconstructed, and forgotten in America regardless if it is intentional or not because of the changing contexts of the present. This paper will focus on how the mass media has influenced American memories of the attacks on September 11, 2001 and how allowed large support for the War on Terror. This paper will begin by exploring the basic concepts of memory construction and collective memories. It will then explore examples of mass media influences in the outlets of images, music, and movies that represent 9/11 and how those influenced the memory of 9/11 in Americans. Lastly, the paper explores how the mass media outlets and their influences in how Americans remembered 9/11 may have allowed for increased support for the Bush administration's foreign policies. The paper will examine the link that was established between 9/11 and Iraq due to the lumping of foreign policies under the encompassing War on Terror. Due to the link of the 9/11 attacks to Iraq, the invasion of Iraq was accepted and highly supported even though there was lack of sufficient evidence to justify the invasion

## Introduction

Over 3,000 people were killed when 19 Islamic extremist from al-Qaeda hijacked four commercial airplanes and crashed them against targets in the United States. Two of the planes hit the World Trade Centers in New York City, one hit the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and the last crash-landed in a field in Pennsylvania failing to reach its target because the other passengers overtook the hijackers on the plane. This is what is known today as 9/11.

The attacks that took place on September 11 have had a dramatic impact internationally, but specifically in the United States, they influenced every aspect of the lives of Americans. One aspect that separates the 9/11 attacks from those in the past, such as Pearl Harbor, was the extensive coverage by the American media. While similar events in the past have also had the extensive media coverage that 9/11 did, the coverage was not as fast of a reaction. From the moment of the impact of the first plane into the first Trade Center, through the days following the attacks, all of America saw it all unfold and watched as it was shown repeatedly on their televisions and computers. The strong emotions that Americans were already feeling were further strengthened by the extensive coverage of the American media outlets. Most everyone felt they were a part of it, rather than just those who were actually near ground zero or had close relations to those in the attacks. The intensity and significance of the attacks on 9/11 became a new, large part of the American collective memory. The mass media coverage of 9/11 and its aftermath have had a significant impact on how Americans remember the attack. More importantly, the influx of patriotic icons and themes following the attack increased the emotions associated with the memory of 9/11. This was exaggerated by their presence in popular entertainment industries such as music and film. This has added to the already powerful

collective memory in America, which if linked to patriotic causes would develop a supportive American public. The memory of 9/11 that was created through mass media outlets ultimately created a context in which the War on Terror, more specifically the invasion in Iraq, was accepted without much dissent.

## Overview of memory and historiography of it

Before going deeper into the importance of the American collective memory of 9/11 and how it aided in creating a society that was more likely to support foreign action like the War on Terror<sup>1</sup>, it is just as important to understand memory by itself. Many people are familiar with the term of a flashbulb memory. This is the concept that a memory that is associated with a high amount of emotion or significance can be remembered with an exceptional amount of detail. The attacks of 9/11 are considered flashbulb memories for most Americans that lived through them. However, while it may be true that memories that are associated with emotion can be remembered better than normal memories, they still are not reliable.

One of the factors that influence the accuracy of flashbulb memory, and for this case with 9/11, is the individual's proximity to the event and the emotions that they felt during the event.<sup>2</sup> Writing for the American Psychological Association, Bridget Law documented how, over time, the consistency of Americans' memories of 9/11 declined. "They believed that their 9/11

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<sup>1</sup> For this paper, the term of the War on Terror will refer to both the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. This term is important because rather than just referring to an invasion of Iraq, it is a direct reference to 9/11. This term was created after 9/11 with the policy of the U.S. taking action against anyone who aided in the 9/11 attacks as they would be a U.S. enemy. This is especially important as people are more likely to support a war that is linked to the 9/11 attack than one that wasn't. The term "war on terror" makes many people believe that there is a direct connection between the 9/11 attacks and Saddam Hussein and Iraq, when there really appears to be little if any. But, with the belief that the invasion of Iraq is a response to 9/11 there are more supporters of the invasion.

<sup>2</sup> Bridget Murray Law, "Seared in Our Memories", *Monitor on Psychology* 42, no. 8, (Sept 2011), <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/09/memories.aspx> (accessed September 26, 2013).

memories were much more accurate than their regular memories... People had already changed their stories of how they heard about the attacks over just a few days, from the day after the event to one week later. 'Because at that point you've told 35 people how you heard about it, and it's been solidified in your memory the way you're telling it, not necessarily how it really happened.'"<sup>3</sup> One of the important things to note about 9/11, as we have noted before, was that the majority of Americans developed a flashbulb memory of the attacks based on what they were viewing on television or other media outlets. Those who were actually at ground zero have more accurate memories of the events that unfolded because of the extreme emotional experience they had compared to most other Americans. Law cited James McGaugh, who is a memory expert, who stated, "'Just a tiny bit of emotional arousal will influence whether you remember something just a few minutes later," says McGaugh. And the more directly you're affected by something like 9/11—the closer you are to it physically and emotionally—the more emotionally arousing, and better remembered, it will likely be, he says.'"<sup>4</sup> This shows how memory is not a concrete element and is constantly being constructed, changing, re-constructed, and in some cases forgotten. The majority of Americans remember 9/11 based on what they saw through the media outlets during the attacks and the days following; therefore, going off what memory researchers have noticed, their memories are most likely to have changed numerous times since the attacks.

If the individual's memory of 9/11 is susceptible to change and modification then that makes the overall collective memory of a country just as susceptible. The Oxford English dictionary defines collective memory as "the memory of a group of people, typically passed from

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<sup>3</sup>Bridget Murray Law, "Seared in Our Memories," *Monitor on Psychology* 42, no. 8, (Sept 2011), <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/09/memories.aspx> (accessed September 26, 2013).

one generation to the next.”<sup>5</sup> Building on that, it is important to know that when people share a memory, it creates a strong bond between those people such as patriotism or nationalism. In the construction of the collective memory over 9/11 there is an immense amount of emotion that fosters the dramatic increase in patriotism or nationalism following the attacks. The constructing of collective memories is something that has happened and continues to happen throughout history all over the globe. It is important to look at other instances in American history to better understand memory and how it is constructed.

David Thelen provided an analysis of how memory is constructed and should be viewed. Thelen looked to other academic fields, such as biology, psychology, other historical works, and societal examples. Thelen first turned to biology and psychology to use science to prove that memory is subjective and always changing in the way they are constructed in the human brain. Then, he turned to historians and societal examples, such as national monuments and myths, to show how as time has gone forward, the way things are remembered changes in academia and society, typically to fulfill the needs of the present. Experiences from the past are all associated with identities of individuals, groups, and cultures, with each of these on different points of a spectrum. “At one end of the spectrum are psychological issues of individual motivation and perception in the creation of memories. At the other end are linguistic or anthropological issues of how cultures establish traditions and myths from the past to guide the conduct of their members in the present. While history touches both ends of the spectrum, its concerns fall most comfortably on points between those ends.”<sup>6</sup>

Susannah Radstone re-emphasized the point of how memory should be understood based on its relations within social and public spheres. She argued, “Without this dual focus, studies of

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<sup>5</sup>*Oxford Dictionary Online*, s.v. “Collective Memory,” accessed May 6, 2013, [http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/collective%2Bmemory?q=collective+memory](http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/collective%2Bmemory?q=collective+memory)

<sup>6</sup> David Thelen, “Memory and American History,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no.4 (1989): 1117.

memory will share with approaches grounded in identity politics a limited view of the processes, practices and institutions through which experience or memory make their mark and are made.”<sup>7</sup>

The construction of a collective or public memory can cause different versions of the past to become accepted and believed. This type of scenario is often associated with a creation or enforcement of patriotism or developing a sense of nostalgia to legitimize a particular heritage. An example of how this is done is through the construction of national memories. For example, in the aftermath of the Civil War, America was still much divided. Memorials were created to focus on the valor of both Union and Confederate soldiers, rather than mentioning the issue of slavery and race.<sup>8</sup> This demonstrates how the priority of America in reconstruction was placed on reuniting the country rather than solving the race problem. The way the Civil War was remembered documented just that. This also demonstrates the idea that memory construction is limited to the context of the time, it is not flexible enough to be altered in any direction; because the highly conflicted American context is what drove the memory of the Civil War to reflect the valor of both sides rather than the controversial issue of race. It is important to think of the memory of 9/11 in these ways because it can help us understand how America’s memory of 9/11 may have been altered. One of the biggest influences on America’s memory of 9/11 was the immense coverage by the mass media.

## Mass Media

The mass media’s role during and after the 9/11 attacks in shaping how 9/11 is remembered is extremely important. Referring back to earlier in this paper, it was noted that

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<sup>7</sup> Susannah Radstone, “Reconceiving Binaries: The Limits of Memory,” *History Workshop Journal*, No. 59 (2005): 148.

<sup>8</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.



memory is something that is constantly being influenced, as much as by societal factors as it is by what someone actually remembered. In addition, the closer an individual was in proximity and or the higher emotional connotations associated to an event the more accurate of a memory they will have. While some Americans had a clear memory of their experience on 9/11 because they were physically involved with the attacks at ground-zero, the large majority of Americans look back on the attacks based on what they were seeing in the news. This put a lot of power in the hands of the media as they were portraying the events of 9/11 to Americans as the way they portrayed what information was spread influenced the initial memories of the viewers. Even those who were at ground-zero and have their own personal memories to look back on were probably influenced to some effect by the high exposure to the mass media in the aftermath of 9/11. While the news coverage of the events was important, the popular entertainment industry and their portrayal and memories of 9/11 also played a big role. For the purposes of this paper, mass media refers to all the ways in which news is transported and remembered in the popular entertainment industry. This includes television, radio, internet, newspapers, and magazines, photographs, and any other ways news or information can be communicated.

As stated before, the mass media coverage of the 9/11 attacks was part of what makes 9/11 unique when compared to other tragic events in American history. This was because none, prior to 9/11, were communicated as fast or as personally to the American public. While the attacks and events surrounding 9/11 were unfolding, almost all Americans took a break from their normal daily routines and just watched it all take place through the media coverage.

Communication with family and friends further influenced people's own memories of 9/11 as the more different stories of the same event one hears, the more their own account of it will begin to blend with others. It seemed that Americans needed to talk about their traumatizing experiences

to as many other people as they could and would compare their experiences with one another. Often times the way people portray their own personal experience to others is actually different from how it happened. Through the repetition of re-telling this story to many different people, it becomes the truth in their own mind.<sup>9</sup> It is also possible that by sharing experiences with one another, people began to mix the experiences of others with their own. The interaction of people with other people accounts for changes in memory by itself, but when combined with the news coverage and commemorations of 9/11 in the entertainment industry, it leaves room for a lot of changing in what someone remembered about 9/11.

An important aspect of mass media, especially in referencing the difference between past events in American history and 9/11 is the impact of the internet. Internet was still a relatively new media channel during 9/11, but it played an important role. The internet is important because of its significance in the daily lives of Americans in this digital age. The internet can be used as a way for people to record their own thoughts, memories, and beliefs for themselves and other people to read. It is also a popular place for people to stay up-to-date on current events. The internet is especially prominent regarding memory because it is fast enough to keep up with the constantly evolving memories of Americans. Referencing back to the idea that as people communicated their different experiences and memories of 9/11 their own actual memory started to differ from what they were communicating to others. The internet allows for this to happen with people who don't know each other in settings such as chat rooms, discussion forums, or other areas of social media. This communication while online, combined with the viewing of information on the different websites, would intensify this mixing up of memories through communication and new information. There were also websites created with the sole purpose of

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<sup>9</sup>Bridget Murray Law, "Seared in Our Memories", *Monitor on Psychology* 42, no. 8, (Sept 2011), <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/09/memories.aspx> (accessed September 26, 2013).

trying to document the 9/11 attack and different memories of it. An example of this is the September 11 Digital Archive, which takes submissions of experiences regardless of who the author is, the intent, or their actual experiences. The memories that are recorded in the archive reflect the themes of patriotism that were visible in the media. Ekaterina Haskins, referring to the memories on the archive, stated, "They echo the spontaneous vernacular commemoration begun in public spaces in the days after the attacks as well as testify to the connection between privately shaped memories and those furnished for public consumption by mainstream media."<sup>10</sup> The trend of the online digital memories reflecting the trends of the mass media implies that the way individuals remember the attacks was shaped by the mass media coverage. Therefore, it would seem that, at least in the case of the 9/11 memories that are documented online, have been influenced by the mass media coverage during and after the 9/11 attacks as well as the sharing of memories and information through conversation and communication.

It is also important to acknowledge the immense amount of conspiracy theories that have grown out of the 9/11 attack. Many different conspiracy theories exist, with a few that are more prominent than others, all with the claim that there are either inconsistencies in official reports or just that the facts do not add up. A few of the more prominent ones were that it was an inside job by the government to either allow the construction of a new world order or that it was to happen as a justification for President Bush and the major oil and defense companies to lead military invasions of the Middle East to get control of their oil.<sup>11</sup> However, while there has been many different conspiracies to come about, they all rely on either circumstantial evidence or just one piece of evidence rather than looking at all aspects of the events. According to Robert Goldberg,

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<sup>10</sup> Ekaterina Haskins, "Between Archive and Participation: Public Memory in a Digital Age," *RSQ: Rhetorical Society Quarterly* 37, no.4 (2007): 411.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Alan Goldberg, "'Who Profited from the Crime?' Intelligence Failure, Conspiracy Theories and the Case of September 11," *Intelligence & National Security* 19, no. 2 (Summer2004 2004): 249-261.

a historian from the University of Utah, the conspiracy theories offered much to those who believed them. Goldberg stated, “If slippery in their logic and often careless of facts and assumptions, they order the random and make consistent the paradoxical. In the face of national crisis and human failure, conspiracy theories rush to find purpose in tragedy and clarity in ambiguity. They also respond to the traumatized who cry for vengeance and demand the identities of those responsible.”<sup>12</sup> This helps to understand why conspiracy theories are created in that it helps many people cope with the trauma they went through in losing someone and wanting an answer. Conspiracy theories especially seem to surround events in which there was a failure with intelligence. People seem to be mistrustful of major events in when there should have been intelligence that would have allowed its prevention, and many appear to want to explain or plot their own belief of the scenarios that took place regardless of how irrational they may be. Conspiracy theories are important in looking at 9/11 and how the American public view and remember it as there are many who believe the conspiracy theories. Those who did, would have been more likely to be critical of the government and the increase in patriotism that ensued afterward.

The mass media that covered the attacks of 9/11 is important, but the symbolism and feelings that came with that coverage is even more important. The symbolism, such as the World Trade Centers, created emotions with the viewers of the media. The strong emotions that people felt will bond with the memories that American viewers have of the events. Therefore, the emotions the American public developed while viewing the mass media coverage of the attacks and their aftermath created an emotional memory.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Alan Goldberg, "'Who Profited from the Crime?' Intelligence Failure, Conspiracy Theories and the Case of September 11," *Intelligence & National Security* 19, no. 2 (Summer2004 2004): 256.

## Images

During the attacks and afterward, there was an influx of imagery across the nation, such as photographs and newspaper covers, which became so popular they achieved an iconic status. John Lucaites and Robert Hariman, both experts on communication, developed a criterion to denote what was needed for an image to achieve iconic status and used it to analyze images and the effects they had on the American culture. The criteria required was that the image must be recognized by everyone within a culture, be understood as representing significant historical events, have a strong emotional connotation, and be mass-produced across a range of media, genres, and topics.<sup>13</sup> The obvious iconic image that came out of the 9/11 attacks was that of the World Trade Centers. This was because the Twin Towers were already an iconic American symbol of power and strength prior to the attack, however with their collapse the symbolism changed dramatically to a representation of terror and destruction. This was a rapid change in representation because of the massive viewing of the repetitive coverage of the planes flying into the towers being engrained into the American memory. This change in representation was significant because the new symbolism of terror and destruction became part of the American context in the post-9/11 period.<sup>14</sup> While before 9/11, Americans viewed their country as powerful and dominant in the world; after the attacks they are worried about their safety and fearful of if there will be another act of terrorism. The memory of 9/11 was a constant reminder of what could happen maintaining this feeling of insecurity. The example of the changing in representation of the World Trade Centers reflects the same change that the United States went through before and after the attack.

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Public Identity and Collective Memory in U.S. Iconic Photography: The Image of 'Accidental Napalm,' *Critical Studies In Media Communication* 20, no. 1 (March 2003): 37.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



Figure 1: Robert Clark, 2001.

A recognizable image following 9/11 was a photograph taken by Robert Clark. The photograph was shot from an angle that captured the World Trade Centers within the entire New York City skyline. It showed the immediate moment prior to the impact of the second plane with the first tower having smoke billowing out of it. The wide frame of the photo documented the pleasantries of the day without the 9/11 attacks with the sun shining and blue sky in the background contrasting the black smoke from the towers. Another important thing that this photo captured was the symbolism of the New York City skyline, the airplane, and the World Trade Center themselves. The New York City skyline was an American symbol and icon that all Americans recognize and associate with commercial and economic strength. The airplane symbolized the idea of commercial strength as well, as it was a commercial airline. The commercial flying industry was important to Americans with travel, regardless of it was business or leisure travel. These same themes can be said about the World Trade Centers as a symbol of strength and power in terms of finance or economics, as mentioned before. The important thing about these symbolic themes in the picture and that it looks like an ordinary, pleasant day was

the obvious contradiction that they were under attack. This contradiction came to mark a new symbolic meaning for all of these things moving more towards remembrance of the terror and tragedy of 9/11 and a sense of vulnerability rather than symbolism of American power and strength. The picture catches the mood of an American people who were not expecting an attack as the rest of the picture catches a pleasant day in the powerful New York City skyline, which changed quickly with the black smoke from the attacks on the World Trade Centers. This reflected the changing in American's moods or perceptions as prior to 9/11 the ordinary American felt secure and safe as a citizen in one of the more dominant countries in the world. However, after 9/11, Americans had a sense of vulnerability and were leery of the possibility of future terrorist attacks in America.



Figure 2: Drew, Richard. *The Falling Man*. 2001.

The next image was one that brought a lot of controversy. This was a photo, taken by Richard Drew, titled *The Falling Man*. This photo depicted a man who was falling head down from the North tower of the World Trade Center. The person falling was one of many who were trapped on the upper floors of the towers above where the impacts of the planes were. Many of these people ended up falling off or out of the towers or jumped to avoid the fire and smoke from

the impact. This was an emotional photo because it documented the fact that people who were in the towers were forced or chose to jump from the buildings to avoid dying from flames or smoke while knowing they would not survive the jump. This built on the already powerful emotions of the events whether watching it happen in person or seeing it through media outlets. Mark D. Thompson, a theologian from Moore Theological College described this photo, as “perhaps the most powerful image of despair at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not found in art, or literature, or even popular music. It is found in a single photograph.”<sup>15</sup> When viewing the picture there seems to be two themes of what it symbolized. The first, the more obvious of the two, was tragic despair in jumping to your death rather than dying in the flames or smoke of the building. The other was the idea that those who jumped did so because it would give them the freedom of choosing how they would die rather than dying in the building. In either case, it still carried the theme of most 9/11 images in documenting the terror and tragedy that took place.

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<sup>15</sup> Brian Rosner, “Luther on Despair,” *The Consolations of Theology*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008, p.63.





Figure 3: Thomas E. Franklin, *FDNY- Ground Zero Spirit*, 2001.

One of the most recognizable images that was spread across the nation was a photograph taken by Thomas Franklin titled, "FDNY - Ground Zero Spirit." It depicted three firefighters raising an American flag on ground zero. The firefighters were covered in dust while the entire background of the picture was rubble piled up higher than the picture will go, and even the pole the flag is being hung on is standing crooked.<sup>16</sup> This image also reached an iconic status according to the criteria of Lucaites and Hariman. It was a popular image that everyone who remembers 9/11 would be familiar with, it would be understood as representing the significantly historical event of the 9/11 attacks, it has strong emotional connotation, and that it was widely used in mass media. This image was one example of the immense increase in patriotic symbols that grew out of the 9/11 attacks. It captured the feeling that even though America had just experienced an attack of extreme terror and destruction, it would still rise up to face the challenge. Coming days after the attacks when Americans were feeling insecure and confused

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas E. Franklin, *FDNY- Ground Zero Spirit*, 2001.

about what had happened, this image, as well as many others, gave Americans a cause to unify with patriotism.

The examples of images discussed in this paper are among many photos or images that were spread across America and the rest of the world. One of the things noticeable while looking through the vast amount of images, the majority of them focused on the World Trade Center attack, whether it was during or after, and there was a lack of images on attack at the Pentagon. This could be because the attack at the World Trade Center was more tragic in terms of devastation and human lives lost. Regardless of why this may be, the focus of the attack in New York over the Pentagon seems to be a trend in how 9/11 has been documented; thus, influencing how 9/11 will have come to be remembered.

The overall feelings and emotions that Americans have come to associate with the 9/11 attacks correlate with those that can be seen in the influx of imagery on and following that day, such as those above. After watching the events unfold through the media or experiencing them in person that were intensified through the repetition of images viewed afterward created a feeling of vulnerability. In the aftermath of 9/11 and the shock of going from a feeling of safety to vulnerability, an influx in patriotism and nationalism spread across the country. The influx in patriotic icons documented the growing of patriotic feelings of the American public. This was also evident elsewhere in society during that time with examples of using the name freedom fries instead of French fries, the wearing of patriotic pins or ribbons, and just an increase in displaying the American flag at one's home. Katherine Hatfield also stated the importance of 9/11 and the influence of the iconography would have on the American memory. "The events of September 11, 2001, have left an indelible imprint on the American public's memory. The images of 9/11 will transcend beyond this generation; they will continue to inform and narrate the events of 9/11

to generations that come.”<sup>17</sup> The imagery that came out during and after the events of 9/11 has had a large impact on how people remember 9/11. The images that have been covered in this section document this shift. The first, of the World Trade Center and the New York City skyline represents the initial shock that Americans felt when first seeing and learning about the attacks taking place. The next image titled *Falling Man*, expands on the tragedy and terror of the events as well as adding a more personal connection with the viewing of a man falling from the sky. Lastly, the image of the firefighters raising the American flag in the midst of the rubble, expand on the tragedy that had already taken place, but that America will continue on which brings on the patriotic sentiment. The representations and symbolism of the images coincided with how Americans came to think about the objects in the images, such as 9/11 or the World Trade Centers. The imagery captured both the harshness of the attacks and the patriotic response in the aftermath of the attacks, which had been engrained with the memories of Americans. The emotional connotations of the imagery that spread across the country deepened the emotions that Americans had already felt about the attacks. Starting with initial shock, to further understanding of tragedy and terror, to a patriotic response of anger and vulnerable feeling of insecurity pushed Americans to be more supportive of government policies, especially those that were linked as reaction to 9/11.

## Music

Another important element of mass media and popular entertainment was music. When looking at music in history, one can get a feel for the time that the music was created in. Whether one looks at the style, lyrics, or interpretation, music overall and individual songs provide an interesting lens to view an event from a new outlook. In the aftermath of 9/11, American music,

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<sup>17</sup> Katherine Hatfield, “Research: Falling Towers, Emerging Iconography: A Rhetorical Analysis of Twin Towers Images After 9/11,” *Texas Speech Communication Journal* 33, no.1 (2008): 72.

specifically the country genre, became extremely influential. Andrew Boulton, an expert on the intersections between landscape, locative media, and neogeography, analyzed how the country music industry took on a patriotic stance after 9/11 up to the present. Songs had lyrics that directly commemorated 9/11 as well as the War on Terror. There were many songs that were specifically about commemorating the attacks on 9/11 and what happened that day. Music is a powerful outlet for people whether they were creating the music or listening. While at first people expressed a disinterest in music, after a while many people turned away from television to tuning in “to local rock, pop, and country stations for a sense of community, in a virtual public space that television could not provide.”<sup>18</sup> Radio became the medium of choice in the months following 9/11 when it came to providing comfort to communities across America. The songs remembering 9/11 were played repeatedly when released and even in recent times when played invoke strong emotions and memories of 9/11. While musicians such as Toby Keith and Darryl Worley had increased popularity with songs that were aligned with the Bush administration and in favor of the war, many bands had the opposite experience. Clear Channel Radio, the owner of over 1,200 radio stations in the United States issued a list of 156 songs following 9/11 that were not to be played in respect to the national mood of mourning.<sup>19</sup> The list appeared to be skewed against songs or bands with liberal political views more so than the actual content of the lyrics. Similarly in March of 2003, another list of undesirable songs appeared that recommended the images of ‘war, soldiers, war planes, bombs, missiles, riots, and social unrest, executions’ and ‘other obviously sensitive material’ not be aired in Europe.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Zalot. “Turning Away from the Television Tape Loop: Characterising Some Local Rock, Pop, and Country Music Radio Stations Responses to the September 11, 2001, terrorist Attacks.” *New Jersey Journal of Communication*, 10: 1, 2002, 31.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Scherzinger, “Double Voices of Musical Censorship After 9/11,” in *Music in the Post-9/11 World*, ed. Jonathan Ritter, J. Martin Daughtry, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

The Dixie Chicks are an example of a prominent musical group that were negatively effected by the blacklisting of radio stations. On March 10, 2003, Natalie Maines, the lead singer, made the comment that they were ashamed that President Bush was from Texas. After the comment was made, there were negative reactions by the public. “In Kansas City, Missouri, a ‘Chicken toss’ took place, at which Dixie Chicks CDS and tapes were tossed into the trash. Likewise, KRMD-FM, part of Cumulus Media, organized and sponsored a CD-smashing rally in Louisiana. In an effort to lure Dixie Chicks fans away from their concerts, some protestors organized alternative concerts offering free entry to Dixie Chicks concert ticket-holders.”<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that the Dixie Chicks are one of many bands that were blacklisted by radio stations following 9/11. However, what is important in their case is that they were blacklisted explicitly for comments made rather than song lyrics or images within music videos. Whether radio stations were pressured by corporate interests with the Bush Administration or by local grassroots movement is something that has been debated on. Rossman, a culture and economic sociologist professor from UCLA, believed that social pressures are what led to the blacklisting on radio stations due to independent variables. Rossman believed these variables were the percentage of electoral support for President Bush in 2000 and the percentage of the population in the active military.<sup>22</sup> The second variable being the degree of support for military action in Iraq in August and September of 2002, and whether a question designed to measure tolerance of free speech.<sup>23</sup> Local communities that called for the removal of certain bands or songs

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Scherzinger, “Double Voices of Musical Censorship After 9/11,” in *Music in the Post-9/11 World*, ed. Jonathan Ritter, J. Martin Daughtry, London: Routledge, 2007, 99.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 100.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.100.

demonstrated larger support for President Bush, had higher proportions of active duty military, citizens supported the war, and were less tolerant of free speech.<sup>24</sup>

Martin Scherzinger argued the opposite in that corporate leaders were the ones who called for the blacklisting. Scherzinger pointed out that the owner of Clear Channel Radio, the Bush administration had a strong bond, and mutual support of each other dating back to before President Bush became president. In addition, Scherzinger explained that it comes down to who made the decision to blacklist certain bands or songs, not the external pressures. Scherzinger stated that Lewis W. Dickey Jr. the CEO of Cumulus, another major radio company, “conceded that *he* had ordered Cumulus stations to remove the Dixie Chicks and that local station managers ‘fell in line’ with the corporate decision.”<sup>25</sup> Either way, whether it was local interests or corporate executives that pushed for the blacklisting of songs or bands that went against the Bush administration or were anti-war, the fact that it happened shows how the music industry was greatly influenced by the foreign policy of the Bush administration that stemmed as a reaction to the 9/11 attacks.

On the other side, musicians such as Toby Keith and Darryl Worley spoke out as advocates for the war effort and had increased popularity with songs that invoked the memories of 9/11. Toby Keith’s song titled, “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue” shows the feelings of many Americans following the 9/11 attack with wanting to attack who attacked us. For example, the lyrics state, “soon as we could clearly through our big black eye, man we lit up your world like the fourth of July.”<sup>26</sup> While this shows the vengeful feelings of many Americans, it also shows the way the American public starts lumping enemies together as one group. Instead of

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Scherzinger, “Double Voices of Musical Censorship After 9/11,” in *Music in the Post-9/11 World*, ed. Jonathan Ritter, J. Martin Daughtry, London: Routledge, 2007, p.100.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 102

<sup>26</sup> Toby Keith, "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue." Unleashed. Toby Keith, James Stroud, July 23, 2002.

specifically stating that we attacked the terrorists from 9/11, it lumps those terrorist with the everyday people in with Afghanistan and soon to be Iraq. This documents how the War on Terror isn't very specific with who the United States enemy is after 9/11 other than all of those deemed to be a threat to United States security or have links to Al Qaeda terrorist. This is a trend that can be spotted in all the outlets of American media, not just country music.

Another interesting trend noticeable in the realm of country music is a questioning of Americans who are not in favor of the War on Terror. This can be seen in the song titled, "Have you Forgotten?" by Darryl Worley which directly references the 9/11 attacks. It expressed frustrations with those within the United States who oppose military action in the War on Terror: "I hear people saying we do not need this war," and the chorus was then addressed solely to these people. Telling them to stop "preaching," it asks: "have you forgotten?"<sup>27</sup> Andrew Boulton analyzes the lyrics further stating, "In the title, 'you' seems to address opponents of the war, and perhaps also implicitly those waverers among 'us' disillusioned with this direction of American foreign policy who need reminding that the War on Terror is fundamentally 'about' September 11."<sup>28</sup>

The evidence in the music industry during this period reflects an interesting evolution of how the memory of 9/11 became as directly associated with policies such as the War on Terror. The events and memory of 9/11 was used as a justification for foreign intervention as retaliation against those who attacked America on September 11, 2001, as well as for some heightened domestic security policies that arose from this. As the lyrics and connotations above note, there was resentment against people who disagreed with these policies. For example, those who

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<sup>27</sup>Darryl Worley, "Have You Forgotten?," *Have You Forgotten*. Frank Rogers, James Stroud, April 15, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Boulton, "The Popular Geopolitical Wor(l)ds of Post-9/11 Country Music," *Popular Music and Society* 31, no. 3 (2008): 373-387.

thought the Patriot Act was a violation of the American's people constitutional rights were thought of as having something to hide and seemed more suspicious because the policy was implemented shortly after 9/11 with the concept in mind that it would help stop future terrorists. This is much more obvious with the examples of the Dixie Chicks or other celebrities and politicians that were in opposition to the War in Iraq. Bands like the Dixie Chicks were blacklisted by Clear Channel and Cumulus Media radio stations. Regardless of whether the influence to blacklist these bands or songs came from local interests or the corporate executives in charge of the radio, the blacklists are in line with the Bush Administration and pro-war support.<sup>29</sup> These people were seen as almost anti-American because of the strong connection that was made between the War on Iraq as part of the larger War on Terror which made to be a direct response to the 9/11 attacks. This was evident in the "Have You Forgotten" lyrics mentioned before.<sup>30</sup> The trend that can be seen in the music industry reflects the American society that it came out of which in turn came back to influence those who listened the music.

As discussed before with images, the music industry provides a light on America following 9/11. The music industry, because of it taking longer to produce songs and put them on the radio than it does with images, comes in a little later after 9/11. In the aftermath of the shock and terror of 9/11, an influx in nationalistic or patriotic emotions were vastly spread across the country with anger in wanting to seek justice. The music industry captured that with the example lyrics of Darryl Worley and Toby Keith in supporting a war against those who had been linked to the 9/11 attacks. While many musicians, especially in the country music genre, produced songs and made statements that were in favor U.S. foreign policies, there were some musicians who were not and they faced consequences by being publicly criticized and boycotted as well as

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<sup>29</sup>Martin Scherzinger, "Double Voices of Musical Censorship After 9/11," In *Music in the Post-9/11 World* Ed. London: Routledge, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Darryl Worley, "Have You Forgotten?," *Have You Forgotten*, Frank Rogers, James Stroud, April 15, 2003.



facing blacklisting on radio stations. These events show how there was controlling of the media outlets in order to try to keep a certain supportive American public. The idea of the memory of 9/11 being used for justification for government policies is something that will be a continuing theme in this paper.

## Movies

The movie industry was another element of mass media that was critical in influencing the memory of 9/11. Much like other forms of media, movies contain a bias in how they are written, directed, and produced. Even though biases may exist in a film, it still provides a glimpse of how the overall public was feeling and remembering the subject a film in the time of its creation. For this paper, the films that will be focused on are *United 93*<sup>31</sup> and *World Trade Center*.<sup>32</sup>

*United 93* focused on the story of the passengers that were able to stop the terrorist who had hijacked a plane and crashed it into a field rather than its destined target. While the film was based on a true story, there were still some discrepancies between the movie and what actually happened because of the Hollywood nature of the film. The film content had some separation from reality because of the need to create a storyline for an audience rather than what would appear in a more accurate film like a documentary. While the movie was made for cinematic reasons, it had a more important place in the American landscape as it became part of the public memory. Similar to music, images, or other elements of popular culture, watching this movie would have an impact on the viewer, as they would relate to their own experiences of 9/11 invoking the emotions that go along with that. The media hugely covered *United 93* prior to its release as well as the review of the movie afterward. John W. Jordan, a communications

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Greengrass, *United 93*, DVD, Directed by Paul Greengrass (New York City: Universal Pictures, 2006)

<sup>32</sup> Andrea Berloff, *World Trade Center*, DVD, Directed by Oliver Stone (Hollywood: Paramount, 2006).

professor, noticed something important about the high media coverage of the movie. Jordan stated that “The amount of media coverage *United 93* generated revealed how desperate film reviewers were to talk about 9/11. What they failed to appreciate was that the general public was, and still is, equally in need of such an opportunity.”<sup>33</sup> Professor John W. Jordan brought up an interesting point; when the movie was released in 2006 there was still a need by the American people to talk about 9/11 and their experiences and emotions of it. It showed how important of an event it was in America and how even after five years, it continued to be a significant issue for Americans.

The Movie *World Trade Center* also was released in 2006. This film focused on the experiences surrounding the World Trade Centers on 9/11 specifically with the focus on firefighters who were trapped when the second tower fell and through great obstacles, they end up being rescued. Both of these films are similar in the fact that they document events on 9/11, but in the midst of the terrorism, they documented heroism. In *United 93*, the passengers on the plane showed heroism and in *World Trade Center*, the heroism was with the firefighters and then those who rescued people from ground zero. It seems that in these two films both coming out about the same time were attempting to remember the events as well as document the heroism of the American people in responding to the attacks. Regardless of the authenticity of these Hollywood films, they have a place in the public memory of 9/11.

As a media outlet, movies are less reactive than images and music because of the longer time of writing, production, and all other aspects of movie development. Similar to how the music industry responded more slowly than the immediate response of images, movies respond more slowly than the music industry. Because of this, both movies coming out in 2006, five

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<sup>33</sup> John Jordan, "Transcending Hollywood: The Referendum on *United 93* as Cinematic Memorial," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25, no. 2 (2008): 219.

years after the attacks, captured a different point in how Americans remembered or felt about the 9/11 attacks. As mentioned above, there was still a perceived need for Americans to talk about their feelings about 9/11 caught by the vast media coverage of the movies both before and after they were released. As discussed, both movies had major themes of heroism, which was telling about the American context in this time in their remembrance of 9/11. Rather than focusing on the harshness and terror of the attacks, while they were obvious still very much focused on, the plot of the stories were based on the heroic actions of air plane passengers and firefighters. This point is important as it helps explain where the overall collective memory of 9/11 was in America about five years after the attacks in while acknowledging the extreme tragedy and destruction of the attacks; they remembered the heroic actions that also happened that day.

They will continue to invoke emotions and influence the memories of their audiences in the future especially with how the younger generations react without having lived through the events to have their own individual accounts to look back on.

## **Memory invokes for specific motives**

The mass media coverage of the 9/11 attacks multiplied the patriotism that became linked to the memories of Americans. The significance of the attack and the changing symbolism that erupted in the aftermath enhanced the bonding of Americans across the country. Referencing back to the discussion of iconography earlier in this paper, iconic status is not something that is limited to only images. It is also important to note that national icons are not only created in times of national despair; however, this is common because of the significance of these times that the icons become a reference for. Jean Gottmann describes iconography as “the whole system of symbols in which a people believes... A national ‘iconography’ in our sense

encompasses the national flag, the proud memories of past history as well as the principles of the prevailing religion, the generally accepted rules of economics, the established social hierarchy, the heroes quoted in the schools, the classic authors, and so forth and so on.”<sup>34</sup> These icons were seen on a daily basis and became so engrained into the lives of Americans that they could not do anything without viewing them. This brings up the concept of “banal nationalism” which Michael Billings, Professor of Social Sciences at Loughborough University, defined as “the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced...These habits are not removed from everyday life...Daily, the nation is indicated or ‘flagged,’ in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition.”<sup>35</sup> The concept of banal nationalism described how the icons of a country create a form of nationalism through the everyday lives of a country’s people based on the iconography that Gottmann described before. An important theme of banal nationalism was that the shared experiences of viewing a nation’s iconography could create an immense level of support for the government. This unification of Americans through a patriotic bond in the aftermath of 9/11 became a part of the American identity; thus, adding to the banal nationalism of America. The powerful memory of 9/11 as a shared experience for Americans that could unify them together.

An example of this concept can be seen on October 11, 2001, President George Bush paid tribute to the victims of the 9/11 attack. During this speech, President Bush used language that inspired confidence in America as a pure country that would fight to deliver justice against our evil enemies. For example, “Today, we are a nation awakened to the evil of terrorism, and determined to destroy it. That work began the moment we were attacked; and it will continue

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<sup>34</sup> Jean Gottmann, “The Political Partitioning of our World: An Attempt At Analysis,” *World Politics* 4 no. 4 (Jul. 1952): 516.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Billings, *Banal Nationalism*, London: Sage, 1995.

until justice is delivered.”<sup>36</sup> It was important for President Bush to instill confidence in Americans in this time where there was a feeling of vulnerability in the country. President Bush also invoked American history and emotions with Arlington Cemetery, “final resting place of many thousands who died for our country over the generations. Enemies of America have now added to these graves, and they wish to add more. Unlike our enemies, we value every life, and we mourn every loss.”<sup>37</sup> President Bush and the U.S. government invoked patriotism in their communication to America as well as marking the evil of American enemies. While stating that America will always remember and honor those who died, yet we will not let this stop America from rising above the rubble and seeking justice for what has happened shows that America will seek and deliver justice. First, it unified the country when stating America as a whole will remember and honor the victims of the attack and relates to the public memory. Then, it gave everyone a cause to unify behind in serving justice. This speech was one example of many that demonstrated how the leadership in America was demonstrating the same themes that were emphasized by the media with emotions to instill confidence and unify Americans.

This trend continued in American governmental leaders moving forward in time, especially in foreign intervention of Afghanistan and Iraq. One of the things to note during this period was the high approval ratings of U.S. government by the American people. This high approval rating can be linked to the banal nationalism in America. The events of 9/11 added to the existing reservoir of banal nationalism in the United States, further increasing the nationalistic zeal among Americans. The Bush administration tapped this increase by using “the language of nationalism, incessant flag waving, bellicose saber rattling, and the exaggerated

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<sup>36</sup>George W. Bush, "President Pays Tribute at Pentagon Memorial" (Arlington, Virginia, November 10, 2001).

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

elevation of Saddam Hussein's threat to the United States."<sup>38</sup> In January of 2001 only 55% of respondents were "extremely proud" to be an American compared to 65% in January of 2002 rising to 69% in September and then 70% in June of 2003.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the number of those who were intending on flying a flag rose from 66% on July 4, 2001 to 83% in 2002.<sup>40</sup>

While I wouldn't go as far to say that President Bush and the government intentionally lied or attempted to trick the American public, there was a link was created between the terrorism of the 9/11 attacks and Saddam Hussein. Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner conducted a study on why there was such a high level of support for the Iraq War by the American public. They suggested, "that the principal reason that three-quarters of the American public supported the war was that the Bush administration successfully convinced them that a link existed between Saddam Hussein and terrorism generally, and between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda specifically. Framing the war on Iraq in this way connected it intimately with 9/11, leading to levels of support for this war that stretched nearly as high as the levels of support for the war in Afghanistan."<sup>41</sup> While President Bush never specifically linked these together, the language used in speeches could be interpreted this way.

An example of this link can be taken from President Bush's speech on October 7, 2002. In this speech, President Bush outlined the threat that Iraq and Saddam Hussein posed to the United States; he used the theme that Iraq was a force of evil, much like the terrorists who attacked America on 9/11 and that America will fight against it.<sup>42</sup> President Bush references 9/11 multiple times in this speech. After stating that Al Qaeda had ties to Iraq as some of their

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<sup>38</sup> Gerald Webster, "American Nationalism, The Flag, And The Invasion of Iraq," *The Geographic Review* 101, no.1 (Jan. 2011):14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner, "Shaping Public Opinion: The 9/11-Iraq Connection in the Bush Administration's Rhetoric," *Perspective on Politics* 3. no. 3 (2005): 525.

<sup>42</sup> George W. Bush, "The Iraqi Threat" (Cincinnati, Ohio, October 7, 2002).

members fled there, he stated, "the attacks of September the 11th showed our country that vast oceans no longer protect us from danger. Before that tragic date, we had only hints of al Qaeda's plans and designs. Today in Iraq, we see a threat whose outlines are far more clearly defined, and whose consequences could be far more deadly. Saddam Hussein's actions have put us on notice, and there is no refuge from our responsibilities."<sup>43</sup> Therefore, as I mentioned before, President Bush does not specifically state that Iraq was involved with the 9/11 attacks; however, he referenced 9/11 often when speaking about Iraq and the possible threat it would be with weapons of mass destruction, which could lead many to think of it this way. The War on Terror was used as a kind of umbrella term to lump the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts underneath. By linking Iraq to the War on Terror, it effectively linked it to the terrorist attack of 9/11 and the strong emotions that the American people had towards it. Gerald Webster makes this point as well stating "Because the Bush administration had included the invasions of Iraq broadly within the war on terror, many members of the public viewed the 9/11 attacks on the United States as the provocation for military action."<sup>44</sup> With the powerful emotions linked to the collective memory of 9/11 connected as a reason to enter a conflict, there was much less dissent among the American population. Another implication of this development either was that those who may have opposed the invasion of Iraq would have kept their opinion to themselves or face the risk of being ostracized as unpatriotic or as unsupportive of American troops. This was especially interesting as the reasoning for going to Iraq was based on the threat they would pose if they had "weapons of mass destruction" which were never found once the U.S. invaded.<sup>45</sup> The invasion of

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<sup>43</sup> George W. Bush, "The Iraqi Threat" (Cincinnati, Ohio, October 7, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Gerald Webster, "American Nationalism, The Flag, And The Invasion of Iraq," *The Geographic Review* 101, no.1 (Jan. 2011):14.

<sup>45</sup> Kevin Coe, "George W. Bush, Television News, and Rationales for the Iraq War," *Journal Of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 55, no. 3 (July 2011): 307-324.

Iraq under the overall War on Terror was accepted and supported in America even though there was a lack of evidence for the claims that justified the invasion because of the perceived link of Saddam Hussein and Iraq to the 9/11 attacks.

## Conclusion

The 9/11 attacks have had a significant impact on the United States and the lives of Americans. The mass media's coverage of the 9/11 attack and its aftermath intensified that impact. The popular images that rose out of this context became American icons carrying symbolism and emotions of patriotism that unified the country. That bond was created over the shared feeling of the tragedy they all felt a part of, whether they were there in person or watching it on a television on the other side of the country. These strong patriotic bonds became a part of the American identity adding to the banal nationalism that rallied more support America behind patriotic causes. The mass media's immense coverage of the 9/11 attacks and its aftermath influenced the American collective memory as well as fueling an influx of patriotism. The heightened media coverage of the 9/11 attacks played a tremendous role in shaping how Americans perceived the attacks, thus shaping their memory as well. The years following September 11, 2001, in America may have been different if the memory of 9/11 would not have been as linked to the overall War on Terror as a justification. The coverage of the media played a direct role in shaping an American memory that did just that.



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