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Editors' Introduction

It is both a profound truth and a common cliché that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, had great historical impact, traumatizing masses of people in the United States and beyond. Astounding in their audacity and in their success, these attacks literally brought down two of the largest buildings in the world—symbolic and actual centers of U.S. financial power—and directly hit the Pentagon, the center of U.S. military power. Thousands were killed or grievously wounded. And in the midst of the massive destruction, there was real heroism—from the passengers of United Airlines Flight 93 who revolted against the hijackers of their plane, causing it to crash into a Pennsylvania field rather than finding a target in Washington, D.C., to the first responders at the attack sites who mounted rescue operations at great peril to themselves. These attacks and their aftermath were the stuff of historical mythology, and the mythologizing process of what became known as “9/11” began at once, dominated by the Bush administration and the U.S. political establishment.

As the tenth anniversary of the September 11 attacks approaches, the dominant mythologies of 9/11 have been weakened by a decade of unending war, attacks on civil liberties, and a pernicious xenophobia, largely in the name of responding to the attacks. Nevertheless, the planned, official tenth anniversary commemorations of these attacks threaten to revive these declining mythologies. The editorial collective (EC) of *Radical History Review* believes that this tenth anniversary must become an occasion to critically investigate and discuss the meanings of 9/11, not an occasion to resanctify official explanations. The EC therefore decided to produce an *RHR* issue that questions and challenges dominant 9/11 mythologies, not by dissecting the historical causes of the attacks, but by focusing on the many ways in which the attacks have been *historicized*—that is, historically defined, represented, symbolized, and used—in numerous social and cultural spheres. Hence this special issue, *RHR* 111, “Historicizing 9/11.”

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In the call for proposals for this issue, we aimed for contributions on many different topics related to our theme, so we cast a wide net. We indicated that we welcomed participation not only by those who identify as historians but also from intellectuals and artists of a range of different backgrounds. This we got. Proposals came in from researchers into and practitioners of literature, media, journalism, communications, popular culture, theater, international relations, personal testimony, and visual art. Only a minority of the proposals came from “historians,” narrowly defined. This disciplinary diversity is retained in the contributions selected for this issue. We have divided these contributions into several thematic sections.

Our first section, “Historical Reflections,” is perhaps the most classically historical of the issue. In the opening piece, “The Contested Meaning of September 11,” the issue’s coeditor Jim O’Brien explores the development of the Bush administration’s interpretation of 9/11, its use to justify this administration’s foreign policy over much of the ensuing decade, and the oppositional interpretations it engendered. Next, in an *RHR* interview with Paul Atwood, the historian and U.S. foreign policy specialist Andrew Bacevich discusses the “perpetual warfare” initiated by the United States in the wake of 9/11, resulting in a crisis of civilian control over military matters. Closing this section, Ivan Greenberg traces the post-9/11 restrictions on domestic dissent to their origins in the earlier practices of the FBI and analyzes the transformation and amplification of these practices during the so-called war on terror.

In our second section, “Public Spaces,” two articles consider the processes of 9/11 historicizing at public memorial sites. Micki McElya focuses on the Arlington National Cemetery memorial to the September 11 attack on the Pentagon. She argues that the historical linkages and meanings of this monument are not fixed but have shifted and continue to shift with developments in U.S. foreign and domestic policy. Linda Levitt addresses the yet-to-be-completed reconstruction of the World Trade Center site in New York—popularly dubbed “ground zero”—and examines the roles played by members of victims’ families in the ongoing struggle to shape the memorial aspects of the reconfigured site.

In “Testimonies and Archives,” our third section, three articles deal with the collecting and archiving of oral histories and digital materials concerning the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath. Mary Marshall Clark, the director of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University, reports on the September 11, 2001, Oral History Narrative and Memory Project, which has collected interviews from hundreds of “ordinary” people from various racial and ethnic communities in New York City who were eyewitnesses to, or deeply impacted by, the attacks. In a complementary article, Ann Cvetkovich discusses the interviews with people of Afghani background in the same Columbia University project. Both Clark and Cvetkovich emphasize the critical importance of the diverse testimony contained in the proj-

ect archive to our historical understandings of 9/11. Following this, Stephen Brier and Joshua Brown, two former *RHR* editors, describe the creation and functioning of the gigantic September 11 Digital Archive, one of the world's largest digital repositories of historical materials on the 9/11 events. Along with describing the project's history, they raise important questions about the need for historians to function as archivists and preservationists in an era of fragile and ephemeral digital communications.

Our "Curated Spaces" section features an introduction to, and striking images from, the Index of the Disappeared project of artists Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani, which transforms documents from the war on terror into subversive artistic images. The following section also emphasizes the visual, as its name, "Visual Representations," indicates, but understood in a variety of ways. First, Jaclyn Kirouac-Fram explores the historical implications of the famous "Falling Man" photo and other images of the so-called jumpers from the World Trade Center, and of the public reactions to these. Kent Worcester follows with an examination of the often oppositional depictions of 9/11 in comics and graphic art, many of which were produced by New York City artists who witnessed the attacks and their aftermath. Art Spiegelman's remarkable *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004) is among the works covered.

Two of the essays in this section concern movies. Thomas Riegler traces the changing ways in which television and cinema addressed 9/11; he argues that these media were the primary cultural means of giving popular historical meanings to the terrorist attacks, and he provides numerous examples of the themes that emerged. James Stone also considers film and 9/11, focusing on a single, recent movie, *Cloverfield* (dir. Matt Reeves, 2008). He argues that *Cloverfield*, by deploying footage of a gigantic monster attack on New York City reminiscent of documentary images of street scenes after the World Trade Center attacks, elicits viewer pleasure and thereby undermines the sanctified meanings of the 9/11 mythology.

From visual representations of 9/11, we turn to literature in our section "Literary Resonances." Bob Batchelor opens the section with an analysis of how two American "literary lions," the novelists John Updike and Don DeLillo, offer contrasting yet politically potent interpretations of the meanings of 9/11 and of the post-9/11 United States. Next, Sonia Baelo-Allué argues that, in the direct aftermath of the September 2001 attacks, literature had little to add to the journalism of the day. Yet by the middle 2000s, she writes, important novelists began creating intermedial works—incorporating other media such as photographic images, newspaper articles, radio transcripts, phone messages, e-mails, and interviews with eyewitnesses—thereby offering effective if complicated (even contradictory) representations and accounts of the 9/11 experience and its traumas. In the final article of this section, Matthew Schneider-Mayerson proposes that the surprising suc-

cess of Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code*, and, subsequently, of his other novels, can be largely explained by the growth of "conspiracism" as a popular reaction to the 9/11 attacks.

In our "UK Reflections" section, we offer two pieces. First, Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie considers the U.S. and British reactions to 9/11 and to the terrorist bombings of the London Underground on July 7, 2005; similarities and differences in historicizing terrorist attacks in the two countries are probed. Then, in a passionate and personal narrative, Amir Saeed, a cultural studies scholar and British citizen of Pakistani origin, describes how his identity was transformed under the impact of increased Islamophobia in the post-9/11 United Kingdom.

In our section "Teaching 9/11," Jeffrey Melnick discusses his students' responses to the confrontational nature of David Rees's *Get Your War On* cartoons, which the students consistently found challenging but for different reasons as the decade wore on. He argues that the changes show a significant shift in the place of 9/11 in U.S. popular culture. In this same section, Magid Shihade reviews his mixed experiences teaching a course that critically addressed the broadly accepted historical meanings of 9/11 at several universities in the United States and at one in Pakistan.

Finally, we present a selection of the historian and cartoonist Joshua Brown's online series of *Life during Wartime* cartoons, begun shortly after the March 2003 invasion of Iraq and continuing into 2011. His cartoons convey the flavor of U.S. government policies in the decade that followed September 11, 2001, often carried out in the name of responding to that day's events.

In this issue, then, our authors and we seek to complicate understandings of how the September 11 attacks have been rendered into history, to take our inquiries into areas of society and culture not usually considered in this regard, and to give another shake to the already shaken 9/11 interpretive orthodoxy.

—Andor Skotnes and Jim O'Brien