

Mark Finney · Matthew Shannon
Editors

9/11 and the Academy

Responses in the Liberal Arts
and the 21st Century World

palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-030-16418-8 ISBN 978-3-030-16419-5 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16419-5>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019935566

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Foreword

In November 2015, a conference was held at Emory & Henry College in beautiful, southwestern Virginia, focused on “9/11 and the Academy.” The papers presented offered a surprising diversity of approaches, disciplines, perspectives, and expertise, all engaging the fundamental question of whether (and how) 9/11 had changed particular academic disciplines and the liberal arts. The talk titles were as wide-ranging as “Shakespeare after 9/11,” “Global TV after 9/11,” “American Empire and Ancient History,” “Psychology confronts 9/11,” “Studying the Presidency after 9/11,” and “Growth and Uncertainty: The Impact of 9/11 on Security and Intelligence Studies.”

Implicit and explicit in these presentations were the larger questions of what exactly had changed on 9/11, and more to the point, how did the events of that day affect the way we think. The papers not only explored particular areas of study and the frameworks within which we teach our students, but also the impact of those events on the world we inhabit and the future we will bequeath to the generations that follow us.

In offering the keynote address on the first evening of the conference, I focused on the challenges we had faced in creating the 9/11 Memorial Museum. The planning team had been charged with developing a

memorial museum whose mission was to commemorate the victims of the 9/11 attacks and document the history. The museum was to open to the public just over a decade after the attacks that had been witnessed by an estimated two billion people—one-third of the world's population—on September 11, 2001. Inevitably, we struggled with precisely the same set of questions as the conferees, albeit for a broad, general audience, rather than for specific fields of study within the liberal arts.

How would our choices of artifacts and the narrative sequencing necessary to provide a coherent historical account impact the historiography surrounding 9/11? Would our choices, intentionally or not, codify the history even before historians and scholars had a chance to analyze the historical record? How would we successfully balance the equally valid, though not always compatible, expectations of various stakeholders—among them, victims' family members, survivors, first responders, local residents, recovery workers, and landmark preservationists—for whom this history is deeply personal? How does one contain a story that is not over yet, or characterize an event whose repercussions are continuing? How does a museum teach about a historical event when, upon opening, the vast majority of visitors will come in with their own experiences of that very event seared into their memories? How do you explain the significance of an event that has influenced contemporary global politics and social routines, from airport screening to mobile device encryption, to a generation of students who have no lived memory of the event, and for whom this event is already past history?

Our way in was through storytelling—history as experienced by those who were there, as witnesses, as survivors, as victims. As a storytelling museum, our focus has been not so much on historians' interpretations of history as on the human experience of a historical event. At the 9/11 Museum, we present history in the first person. Whereas museums of the American Civil War might rely upon diaries and letters to convey the immediacy of personal experience, we could, as a twenty-first-century museum, draw on the multiplicity of resources provided by contemporary media, especially radio transmissions, cockpit voice recordings, emails, and voicemails. In other words, history as captured in the human voice.

The impact of this approach to public history is that the focus shifts from the teller of the tale to those who lived it. The 9/11 Museum is

a museum about all of our stories. It is a museum that focuses on the impacts of terrorism on real people, people who got up and went to work one morning, or who boarded an airplane for business or pleasure, and got caught in a vortex of unthinkable destruction; people just like you and me. In crafting an experience that enables our visitors to see themselves in the story, the point of entry and the emphatic relevance of the narrative become grounded. Visitors cannot help but ask: What does this have to do with me, with my understanding of the world? What can I learn from the way people responded on that terrible day and in the days and weeks that followed, responses that, for the most part though not exclusively, reflected solidarity and compassion, selflessness and service?

In this respect, like the many, diverse disciplines nurtured within the liberal arts academy, the 9/11 Memorial Museum offers a path toward deep and personalized understanding. We can come to knowledge along a multitude of paths, in museums, in classrooms, and through many disciplines. There are indeed many ways of knowing, and this book provides scholars and students with a range of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the impact of 9/11 on American higher education. The chapters that follow and the work of the 9/11 Memorial Museum offer parallel and, at times, intersecting paths that lead to a better understanding of ourselves and the world in which we live.

New York, NY, USA

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Preface

This book is a collaborative process that has its origins in a November 2015 conference hosted on the campus of Emory & Henry College that brought together scholars to discuss interdisciplinary questions related to the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 (hereafter, 9/11). The conference, like this book, was titled *9/11 and the Academy*. The conferees took advantage of Emory & Henry's campus culture of service and scholarship, bringing to bear a spirit of interdisciplinary cooperation and critical discourse toward the creation of a lively and rigorous dialogue. That dialogue took place within four panels on media studies and representation, history and international studies, education, and psychology and trauma. The conference brought together these seemingly disparate fields to determine how, precisely, different disciplines in the social sciences and humanities responded to or were affected by the changes wrought by 9/11. Alice Greenwald, the director of the 9/11 Memorial Museum, delivered the keynote address. We, as the organizers of the conference and co-editors of this volume, were convinced that a book was necessary to record and contextualize the conversations that took place in Emory, Virginia in 2015. During the intervening years, we solicited papers on additional topics written by scholars who did not

participate in the conference. The resulting chapters do not represent all fields in the academy, nor do they claim to offer the final word on the fields that they do discuss. We hope that this book will initiate a conversation and reach readers with interests in 9/11, higher education, the liberal arts, and the specific fields discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

In the process, we have accrued many debts. The first is owed to the individuals who supported the conference from its initial conception. Emory & Henry's then dean of academic affairs, Dave Haney, translated his academic roots in the humanities into humane support of our conference. In addition, colleagues at Emory & Henry were supportive in every way. A special thanks to Joe Lane, Tal Stanley, and Jim Dawsey for their support. Other colleagues served as commentators on various panels and, in a way, were the first peer-reviewers of the book. Thank you to Janet Crickmer, Tracy Lauder, Joe Lane, Jill Smeltzer, and Jack Wells. Second, we want to extend a gracious thanks to all of the original conference panelists. A special thanks to Matthew Biberman, Craig Caldwell, and Heather Pope for their intellectually stimulating conference papers, and to those on the original education panel: Marilyn Chipman, Joe Miller, Travis Proffitt, and Tal Stanley. This book would not have been possible without them, as all of the original panelists confirmed to us the vitality of the liberal arts and interdisciplinary learning in the twenty-first century. Finally, thanks to all the students who participated, including those from Adams State University and Coastal Carolina University who joined students from Emory & Henry in presenting their own research on the first night of the conference. We are especially grateful to those who worked for the conference, including Kaelee Belletto, Jackson Feezel, Chaz Jones, Catherine Wiedman, and any others who helped in some way to make the conference run smoothly.

Since the conference, we have accrued additional debts. One of those is to the collective patience of the contributors, as four years passed between the initial presentations and the publication of revised and expanded versions of those papers. Thank you to the peer-reviewers, especially for their prodding to consider the broader societal context for these, at times, complex and narrow areas of academic inquiry and historiographic debate. Samantha Ball Shannon assisted with the

twin tasks of editing and indexing, and for that we are grateful. Eleanor Christie and Becky Wyde at Palgrave Macmillan not only found merit in our concept, but also helped us through every step of the publishing process. Finally, we extend our warm appreciation to liberal educators and their supporters everywhere.

Emory, USA

Mark Finney
Matthew Shannon

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