



9/11: One Day That Changed the World

You know the drill. Liquids in a baggie, shoes off, laptop in its own bin. Airport security wasn't always like this. On the morning of September 11, 2001, hijacked planes crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania in the deadliest terrorist attack in US history. In the chaos and grief that followed, one question dominated: who did this, and why? Teach this video to help students connect history to our world today.

**0:00**

Graphic of baggage carousel zooming into the contents of different luggage; twin towers against a hazy red sky; time and flight path of American Airlines flight 11 during the 9/11 attacks; explosion; split screen of map highlighting the path of United Airlines flight 175 and President Bush on a telephone during a school visit, towers on fire; debris from the collapse of the towers; emergency personnel assisting.

In the 2020s, getting through airport security takes elaborate planning. Your tiny liquids have to be in the right bag; you have to make sure your shoes or belt or jewelry or metal hip don't set off the security alarm. And say bye-bye to the souvenir hot sauce or honey you forgot was more than 3.4 ounces.

But it wasn't always this way.

The precise moment air travel (and so much else) changed forever was 8:46 a.m. on September 11th, 2001 when a hijacked American Airlines flight crashed into the North Tower of the iconic World Trade Center in downtown Manhattan.

For 17 more minutes, it seemed like a terrible accident. Then, a United Airlines flight crashed into the South Tower. It would collapse at 9:59 a.m., followed by the North Tower at 10:28 a.m. Throughout the rest of the day, fire and debris rained down on the streets and on other buildings.

1:04

Diagram of World Trade Center complex highlighting 7 WTC; rubble and debris; map showing two flight paths; the Pentagon; map marking landmarks of Washington D.C; empty field, candles being blown out; Great Seal of the US with handwritten notes and an arrow pointing to "Al-Qaeda".

Hours later, at 5:20 p.m., the nearby World Trade Center Building 7 also collapsed.

And the day's destruction wasn't limited to New York. Two other planes had also been hijacked. American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon at 9:37 a.m., just outside of Washington, D.C. And the passengers of United Airlines Flight 93 attempted to overtake their hijackers by storming the plane's cockpit, crashing the plane in an empty field in Pennsylvania at 10:02 a.m.

Every person on each of the planes died instantly. They were among the nearly 3,000 people who died that day. It was the deadliest terrorist attack ever on U.S. soil.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the U.S. was reeling— and full of questions. Who was responsible and why? Pretty quickly, though, the US identified the terrorist organization al-Qaeda as responsible for the attack.

2:09

Portrait of Osama bin Laden; footage of bin Laden in army fatigues surrounded by footage of American flags and American political leaders; GW Bush meeting with Israeli leadership; scenes of American soldier with a man in Arab attire; quotes by bin Laden; newspaper headlines of attacks on the US by Al-Qaeda; post-it notes with questions about 9/11.

Al-Qaeda is an extremist group founded by Osama bin Laden, a militant leader born in Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden was a fundamentalist Sunni Muslim who disliked the U.S. because of their support for the corrupt government controlling Saudi Arabia, friendship with Israel, and general involvement in Islamic countries.

Using Afghanistan as a base for al-Qaeda, bin Laden eventually declared a holy war, or jihad, against the U.S in 1996— five years before the 9/11 attacks. The group carried out a series of smaller attacks, but when the US government didn't respond, they planned a larger event that would finally capture US attention— and force it out of the Middle East for good.

But, as often happens with huge political events, some people became suspicious of the US government as well. 9/11 led to a boom of conspiracy theories, with a whopping 42% of adults in the US believing their government knew more about what happened that day than they were letting on, according to a survey conducted in 2006.

3:22

Hand-drawn illustrations and notes depicting 9/11 conspiracy theories;

Like, some people argued that then U.S. President George W. Bush and his government were responsible for the World Trade Center's collapse through a controlled demolition to serve his own political interests. Other theories were more moderate: that the government knew something was going to go down and



warning symbols along a blue grid; US government seal alongside topographical map of the Middle East; portrait of GW Bush surrounded by celebratory decor, five stars, and a line graph trending upwards in favor of Bush; analytical data and grids overlaid on twin towers.

4:41

Security monitors displaying a rewind status over blue grid with warning icons; domino effect; map highlighting Afghanistan and Iraq in red; hand drawn diagram showing connections related to the War on Terror; spinning globes; split image of UN Security Council and President Bush; various countries' flags alongside images of US military personnel.

6:20

US military dressed in tactical gear in a desert attending to dead and injured soldiers; footage of Middle Eastern streets, civilians, and soldiers; large pair of blue eyes with stars as pupils; binoculars; TSA officers at work; military officers monitoring computer screens and surveilling via land, air and water.

chose not to act on that information, which would explain why the hijacked planes weren't intercepted by the US military.

Those conspiracies lie in some truths — like how there were definitely intelligence failures on the part of the US government when it came to reacting to bin Laden's threats leading up to the attack. And the U.S. did have a lot of interests in the Middle East, and an attack on U.S. soil would be the perfect excuse to invade.

The 9/11 attacks also made Bush (briefly) really popular; his approval rating shot up from 51% to a whopping 90% following the tragedy.

But there's plenty of evidence on the other side too. Experts with the National Institute of Standards and Technology analyzed the attacks and concluded that the collapse of the Twin Towers was caused by exactly what it looked like: a combination of impact from aircraft and widespread fires afterward.

And while US intelligence agencies did fail to take action, there's no credible evidence that anyone in the US government was directly involved in the attacks.

What isn't a conspiracy, though, is that 9/11 set off a chain of events with impacts all over the world. The most immediate result of 9/11 was the War on Terror, a U.S. military campaign that lasted around 20 years.

It 2001, the US invaded Afghanistan, where al-Qaeda was based. Two years later, the U.S. also invaded Iraq— but for reasons that were a bit murkier. The Bush administration cited claims like the government's ties to al-Qaeda and their possession of chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, both of which turned out to be false.

But the US wasn't alone in these wars— plenty of other countries joined the fight. In response to the attacks in the US, the United Nations Security Council immediately passed Resolution 1368, which condemned the tragedy and acknowledged the threat it posed to international security and peace. And when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, they did so with major backing from the United Kingdom, along with support from countries like Australia, Canada, France, Turkey, Pakistan, Russia, and Germany.

The U.K. was also a major backer in the later Iraq invasion, cementing a tight partnership with the U.S., along with a whole coalition of other countries, with the UK, Poland, and Australia sending troops directly.

But all that conflict came at a massive cost. Over 7,000 U.S. troops alone died during the war and it cost the U.S. around \$8 trillion. Even more staggering was the loss of Middle Eastern lives. For many complicated reasons, many Iraqis and Afghans chose to support the US military during these conflicts, and tens of thousands died fighting alongside US soldiers. And approximately 432,000 civilians are believed to have been killed as a direct consequence of the war— with even more dying from indirect causes like famine and disease.

Meanwhile, a lot was happening within U.S. borders, too. Like the rise of the U.S. surveillance state, which basically means the government started to really closely monitor its civilians on every level.

In response to 9/11, the government quickly created the Transportation Security Administration, or TSA— those people that oversee things like the slog of airport security. In 2002, they expanded their reach by creating the U.S. Department of

**7:42**

Split image of luggage and passport inspections; ICE officers making arrests; US Capitol building; aerial view of the Pentagon; White House with green digital codes in the windows; large pairs of eyes within an outline of the US; spinning Statue of Liberty alongside a vintage map of the US titled Nationalism with changing symbols and outlines.

Homeland Security, or DHS, a brand new federal arm meant to generally ensure public safety by preventing future attacks like 9/11.

And in 2003, DHS merged two separate departments, the US Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, to create Immigration and Customs Enforcement, better known as ICE.

Lawmakers also turned to legislation in the wake of 9/11. The most high-profile law during this era was the Patriot Act, which greatly expanded the government's ability to spy on everyday people in the name of keeping the nation safe. It gave the government the right to access a lot of private information, like phone calls, texts, emails, GPS data, and even cell phone records any time they deemed someone or something suspicious.

But according to the American Civil Liberties Union this crackdown was pretty ineffective. It didn't actually make people safer— but it did put certain people at risk.

Which brings us to another huge consequence. In the wake of 9/11, U.S. leaders pushed nationalism, or a sense of national superiority, often at the expense of anyone else.

8:54

Photos of 911 plane hijackers with "ISLAM" overlaid over them; anti-Muslim hate crimes reported to FBI with stylized individuals representing the increased number of incidents in 2002; fluctuating line graph showing different dates and incidents with headlines of hate crimes in the background.

Although the plane hijackers were religious fundamentalists, their Muslim identity led many U.S. lawmakers and other officials to escalate Islamophobia, or prejudice towards anyone associated with Islam, and targeted them through policies and laws like the Patriot Act.

That rhetoric from the government was powerful and heightened existing xenophobia; Americans all over the country turned on their neighbors, leading to a massive spike in hate crimes and discrimination against anyone they felt didn't look how they thought Americans should— especially Muslims. Even fifteen years later, hate crimes against Muslims were five times higher in the U.S. than they were before 9/11.

9:41

Spinning globe between flower beds; list of Al Qaeda and Islamic State groups in 2026 next to a black and white globe with pink and blue markers in different areas; images of the original World Trade Center complex, 911 debris and rubble, emergency personnel hanging an enormous US flag, National September 11 Memorial; dominos with 911 symbols; baggage carousel.

All of these measures were supposed to help prevent future attacks. But 9/11 also shifted how extremists work. New transnational terror groups like ISIS also formed in retaliation to the War on Terror, using different tactics, like online recruitment to spread their message and gain members.

All of this points to a key takeaway: even if they happen at a specific time in a specific place, major historical events don't happen in a vacuum. So, while the common refrain from 9/11 is "never forget", urging us to remember the lives lost that morning, it's really important to also remember all the other world-changing results of the day. The morning of September 11th, 2001 changed our whole world— in ways that are still playing out right now.