

What Happened on 9/11? Nine Years of Polling College Undergraduates: “It was always just a fact that it happened.”

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FOLLOWING THE DEATH of Osama Bin Laden, many American young people across the country gathered on street corners and in front of the White House, some celebrating with chants of “U-S-A” and others singing the national anthem. Press coverage of the youthful celebrators, many of them part of Generation Y or the Millennial Generation, renamed these young people the “9/11 Generation.”¹ Newspaper accounts following Bin Laden’s demise discuss him as “the common evil” that the Millennial Generation faced in much the same way as their grandparents had faced Hitler.² One student remarks that Bin Laden’s death is “the defining moment” of his generation.³ Nine-eleven, it appears, is a memorable moment for this generation.

Over nine years earlier, on September 11, 2001, I was also concerned about how young people would come to understand what came to be called “9/11.” After spending the morning of September 11, 2001 watching television as the Twin Towers in New York collapsed, I arrived on campus to teach my lower-division history class, and was immediately informed that classes were cancelled for the day because of the “evil attacks.” Since I regularly tell my students that “evil” is not a useful analytic term for the writing and understanding of history, I devised a questionnaire for my History 101 students to assess their understanding of the event.⁴

The particular history class I was teaching then and for the nine years following is a Critical Thinking history class that stresses the facts and evidence that historians use, and emphasizes the importance of evidence to back up historical analysis. My questionnaire, thus, focused on “what happened,” i.e., the evidence necessary for interpretation or analysis. I also asked the students how they learned about the event, in an attempt to help students evaluate bias in the interpretation of facts and evidence. I administered the questionnaire to twenty-one different History 101 classes in the next nine years, to a total of 864 students. This paper discusses the responses I received yearly from 2001 until the present. I also include two sets of results from spring semester 2011—the first from the questionnaire I administered in the first couple of weeks of the semester as usual, and the second from the same questionnaire administered after the capture and death of Osama Bin Laden in May 2011.

The Questionnaire

Because this particular History 101 course is a critical thinking methods course rather than a content specific course, it lends itself to an exploration of the issues an event such as 9/11 raises for the teaching of history. Recognizing that an important question we address in history is “how do we know what we know?”, the history 9/11 questionnaire asked: 1) What happened? 2) Who or what is responsible? 3) How do we know what happened? and 4) What consequences will arise? Although I initially believed the focus of my research would address the issue of bias, the “how do we know what we know” impetus behind critical thinking, I soon realized that I needed to first address the large discrepancy among the students in what they believed occurred on 9/11. This paper, which presents a brief review of the responses, thus focuses on the first two questions: What happened? and Who is responsible?

After the first administration of the survey on September 13, 2001, when students uniformly explain “what happened” in terms of hijacked planes, the deaths of thousands, and a terrorist threat, it became increasingly evident that in the ensuing years, student respondents understand “what happened” on 9/11 depending on whom they see as responsible for 9/11. Interestingly, and of concern to history teachers, is that who they see as responsible for 9/11 changes considerably during this nine-year period.

Tallying the Results

Because of the free form nature of the questions, it became important to develop some guidelines to interpret the answers. Evaluating over 850

ripped notebook pages and deciphering handwriting and misspellings was a challenge. After reading through the responses several times, however, I began to notice some patterns that could make the information useful to history teachers. By the third year anniversary of 9/11, it became obvious that the answers to “What happened on 9/11?” differ considerably between the students who were young adults on 9/11 and those who experienced the events of September 11, 2001 at a younger age. Over the course of the survey, it also became apparent that differences occur between the years and among students, possibly reflecting their exposure to major headline events and popular culture.⁵ Very few of the eight hundred plus students, even those who were in elementary school in 2001, remark that they learned about 9/11 in a history class. Those who were younger in 2001 apparently grew up in a context where others assume that they “know” what happened on 9/11, but very few of them had been taught this recent history in school. Their answers reveal their ignorance and confusion.⁶

However, it is still possible to learn something from these responses that can help us as history teachers refine our approach to teaching recent U.S. history and remedy this ignorance and confusion. Generalizing about a generation, as in the recent coverage of Osama Bin Laden’s death, can lead to false assumptions about the knowledge base of our students—the knowledge base we attempt to expand upon when we teach. Since accessing and assessing students’ prior knowledge is an important step in successful teaching, evidence from this survey suggests that we history teachers need to ask our students how they understand 9/11 when we teach recent U.S. history.

What follows in this paper is a year-by-year presentation of some of the findings from this questionnaire regarding “what happened on 9/11.” I have tried to let the students speak for themselves, although to avoid distraction, I have corrected minor spelling and punctuation errors. Although I present the tallies of those named responsible for 9/11 numerically, many students blame the events of 9/11 on a variety of sources, thus making those numbers greater than the number of students surveyed. Although a small majority consistently name Al Qaeda as the source of the attacks, revealing their familiarity with the accepted chronology, large numbers of students also identify Iraq, generic terrorists, and conspirators for the events of 9/11. The questionnaire reveals that, far from sharing a unified view of “what happened on 9/11,” student opinions differ considerably about what happened, challenging the notion of a generational understanding of the event. In fact, it is not how students define 9/11, but rather how much they differ as a group in their understanding of 9/11 that stands out most clearly from this survey.

The Context

Because so much has been written about 9/11, and because so much of “what happened” is colored by controversy, it became important for me to develop a baseline definition of what happened on 9/11 with which I could compare the students’ answers. Briefly, as a context for this survey, I accept a mainstream chronological account to define 9/11 as the event on September 11, 2001, when four commercial U.S. airliners were hijacked and crashed into the Twin Towers of New York City, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania, killing approximately three thousand people. The United States blamed Al Qaeda, under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden, who also later claimed responsibility. The United States declared a “War on Terror,” and conducted a bombing campaign against Afghanistan in search of Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Later, citing a threat from weapons of mass destruction, the U.S. engaged in a war with Iraq and its leader, Saddam Hussein, although there is no evidence suggesting Iraq was at all involved with the events of 9/11. During the ensuing decade, various alternative and conspiracy theories have developed, many suggesting U.S. complicity with the events. Both the war on Iraq and the conspiracy theories are not part of the immediacy of “what happened on 9/11,” but they do play an important part in how students in this questionnaire define 9/11.

The Survey

What follows are the voices of some of the 864 eighteen- to twenty-year-old college students explaining what happened on 9/11 or who is responsible for 9/11. Using four categories of attribution for 9/11—Al Qaeda, Iraq, Generic Terrorists, and Conspirators—I initially tried to create a chart to demonstrate their relative importance as defining factors for 9/11 as understood by my students during this nine-year survey period.⁷ However, the combination of the students’ own confusion about the issue, as well as the open-ended nature of the questionnaire, made quantification difficult. Nevertheless, we do get an impressionistic account based on their collective written responses, which gives us insight into how this particular cohort understands the event, soon reduced to the term, “9/11.” Their responses also reveal that there are extreme differences about what 9/11 means to them. These differences in interpretation, of course, have potential consequences for general communication and understanding, particularly when the term is used so freely by the media and politicians.

September 13, 2001 (2 days after 9/11)

Two days after the attack, nearly eighty percent (31/39) of the students explain “what happened” in terms of planes, buildings, and loss of life.

Many of the respondents are vague about the “terrorists” who caused the destruction, but a quarter of them (10/39) mention Al Qaeda, one even citing the earlier U.S. Embassy bombings in Africa. These young adults are angry and confused. Many speculate why—oil? Israel? hatred of the U.S.?—but they all share a similar concept of “what happened” on 9/11, despite their bewilderment about why it happened.

February 12, 2002 (5 months after 9/11)

Five months after the event, with the term “9/11” in common usage, the History 101 students do not define 9/11 in terms of the planes and buildings, but more in terms of what comes out of it—the deaths and the surge in American pride and patriotism. About twenty percent (10/48) of the students mention Al Qaeda as responsible, while one person blames the U.S. for not preventing it. Two-thirds of the students define 9/11 as a wake-up call, either for America to be more prepared, or for Americans to emerge from their bubble of ignorance.

The sense of shock and bewilderment as seen in the survey conducted five months earlier contrasts with the passion of the respondents in this February 2002 survey. A not atypical respondent captures accurately the emotional response, if not the numbers of dead: “September 11 is one of the greatest tragedies the modern world has ever known. Tens of thousands of people died due to hateful extremists.” Two students equate 9/11 with “Ground Zero,” and one speaks for several when he says that “we will get through this . . . we are the United States.” Ten others, however, are cynical about the exploitation and scams revolving around 9/11 (“\$10 for a flag!”). Five months after the event, the shared sense of what happened on 9/11 has begun to unravel.

September 11, 2003 (2 years after 9/11)

At the two-year anniversary of 9/11, a quarter of my students are vague about “what happened,” but their ignorance does not preclude their passion. One feels “hatred to those who caused this,” and ends with “God Bless the U.S.A.” Another suggests it was a plan to “disgrace the land of George Bush (oil tycoon)” and the “consequences should be to drop a huge bomb and end the Middle East.” A third sees it as a “different point of view between the U.S. and the Palestine region.”

Over half, however, attribute 9/11 to Al Qaeda (19/33), but half of these link Al Qaeda to Iraq. Although some students indicate an understanding that the American war against Iraq may have been a consequence of 9/11, more students see Iraq and Saddam Hussein as the cause of 9/11, or are confused. One links motive to the attacks: “Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden are envious of the U.S. and want to take over the world.” This conflation of Al Qaeda and Iraq will continue throughout the next eight years of responses.

September 13, 2004 (3 years after 9/11)

Three years after the event, sixty percent of the respondents (22/34) define 9/11 in terms of Al Qaeda's involvement alone or in collusion with Iraq. One, for example, points out that the pilots of the planes "worked for Osama Bin Laden from Iraq." Another blames "terrorist people" who caused "us to go to war in Afghanistan and Iraq." A third takes a different approach and suggests President Bush lied by suggesting that "Iraq ... was in cahoots with Bin Laden."

What is more striking in this survey is the mixture of both tentativeness about what they know ("what I have heard from other people," or "it's said to be Osama Bin Laden") contrasting with a strong assertion of what they believe. One assertive student notes that "some people claim (the planes crashed) but I think our own air force shot the planes down." Another claims that "terrorist people" caused 9/11 and "all of them are enemies and do not deserve to live."

Perhaps reflecting the election year, there are several references to President Bush. The attack occurs as a response to policies of "the Bush family" for one respondent, while Bush "visited the site" for another. A third respondent mentions that "Bush lied about Iraq." Some who cite generic terrorists as behind 9/11 believe they did it because they "hate our freedoms" or are jealous of the U.S.

For those of us who teach history in the context of civics or social studies, we might note that 2004 was the first year many of these respondents could vote, and "9/11" was increasingly becoming a shortcut term used by the media and politicians.

September 13, 2005 (4 years after 9/11)

These undergraduate respondents were fourteen years old in 2001. Many respond that they do not really know or cannot remember too well about what happened on 9/11. One speaks for many about her ignorance of 9/11: "I'm not sure why. I remember knowing right after it happened during all the hype but I can't really remember anymore." One is even vaguer: "All I remember is chaos and fear."

For those who feel they understand what happened on 9/11, forty percent (12/30) link it wholly or in part to Al Qaeda, while an equal number blame generic terrorists. A third of the respondents tie Iraq to 9/11, but they interpret the connection differently. One is sure that "four planes were hijacked ... by terrorists from Iraq." Another does "not really know the causes," but sees 9/11 as a consequence of "President Bush making and breaking deals." A third respondent notes that Al Qaeda is responsible for 9/11, but continues that "the war in Iraq is also due to 9/11, or that is what the president suggests as he connected Iraq and Saddam Hussein to the 9/11 attacks."

Interestingly, several students discuss the children who were killed or who lost their parents on 9/11, probably reflecting the respondents' youth at the

time. There is abundant mention of Homeland Security and the Patriot Act, with students split between the need for more security and a cynicism about these measures. Many continue to shape their answers with phrases such as “if I remember correctly,” or “from what I’ve heard.” It appears that this group of students did not learn about 9/11 from their official curriculum, but one does try to fit it into what he was learning in his history class: “From what I heard, it involved the U.S. and Russia during the Cold War.”

August 30, 2006 (5 years after 9/11)

The students taking the survey on the five-year anniversary of 9/11 were thirteen to fifteen years old and high school freshmen in 2001. The vast majority of them mention how they watched the events in school all day.

Although a quarter of the respondents (10/44) are quite vague about 9/11, mentioning only that some planes went into New York buildings and they “can’t remember why,” or that “terrorists” were responsible, over seventy percent of the students (32/44) link the events of 9/11 to an attack solely or in part by Al Qaeda, with twenty percent blaming Iraq. Nevertheless, despite the high number mentioning Al Qaeda as responsible, few know what Al Qaeda is, and most express ignorance about the event in general. One student, for example, mentions that Al Qaeda killed “thousands and millions of people in the Twin Towers.” Another says Al Qaeda did it “cuz they’re jerks.” A more thoughtful student tries her best to explain 9/11. She is specific about the time, yet she jumbles the basic facts, and attributes 9/11 to a variety of sources:

It was 6:05 am when two airplanes were crashed into the twin towers in New York. I am not sure of the city, but I think Manhattan. The Pentagon was bombed and millions of people were killed ... The person responsible was said to be Bin Laden, but yet they said that Saddam Hussein was also involved. Al Qaeda is another terrorist individual ... The Bush family, well his father, as I recall, sent two airplanes to bomb Iran, and I think that it has something to do with revenge, oil, or power.

Later, as a consequence, the student notes that “Iraq will remember that the USA tried to control it.” This student exhibits the mixture of specificity and vagueness typical of many of the respondents. Their understanding of 9/11 is based on their memories from childhood, and many of them are conscious of that. One student, thirteen at the time, writes: “I was in class and thought what was on TV was a joke. I didn’t really understand the scope of it all, and still don’t.” A tenth grader at the time echoes this belief, but now holds Al Qaeda responsible. She writes: “I remember the day if happened like yesterday. My thoughts have since changed about it because I was too immature to understand.” Perhaps this vulnerability of youth explains the several responses who mention being scared. One fears “World War III,” while another is glad she watched the event with other children at school, because she knew she “wasn’t going through this alone.”

September 19, 2007 (6 years after 9/11)

On the sixth anniversary of 9/11, although sixty percent of respondents (27/45) still reference Al Qaeda, over half of these continue to conflate Al Qaeda and Iraq (“Terrorists from Iraq and Osama Bin Laden and his followers”), while twenty students blame Iraq solely (“Two airplanes sent by Iraq...”). A quarter of the respondents are vague in their explanation about what happened on 9/11; many again, as noted in the 2006 survey, are conscious of their youth. One explains: “I don’t really know why it happened. I was a child then, so I didn’t care. Even now I still don’t know exactly why.”

Two students, in contrast, cite their understanding of 9/11 from other sources. One refers to *The 9/11 Commission Report* and another mentions the movie about the plane that crashed into the Pennsylvania field. One thoughtful respondent notes: “I believe Al Qaeda was involved, along with Osama Bin Laden, which makes no sense as to why we’re at war in Iraq.” His is a minority opinion, however, as many more students would agree with one respondent’s take on 9/11: “It was all a plan by Al Qaeda involving Saddam Hussein and Bin Laden.” Although only one student comes out strongly in support of conspiracy—“On 9/11, George Bush attacked the Twin Towers in an effort to get the American people to rally against Iraq”—many students in this 2007 cohort seem open to alternative interpretations.

September 10, 2008 (7 years after 9/11)

Seven years after the event, the number of students who are unclear about 9/11 or who blame generic terrorists declines from the previous year, while the relative numbers of those who believe that Al Qaeda or Iraq were solely or partially responsible remain about the same (27/47 for Al Qaeda and 16/47 for Iraq). The tentativeness and confusion about their answers continues. Two try to figure out whom to blame. The first admits: “I am not really sure who is responsible, but I hear people saying it was the Taliban. The war on terror is in Iraq so I guess that’s where terrorists are from.” The other agrees, but is skeptical: “I don’t know who’s responsible. Supposedly it’s Saddam, but I’ve heard many different stories.”

What stands out about this cohort is that over a quarter of the respondents (13/47) name the U.S. government, President Bush, or lax American security as responsible for 9/11. One student, who blames terrorist revenge against “George Bush’s daddy” for the events of 9/11, encapsulates a growing belief by many students about what happened on 9/11, as he lists who is responsible: “George W. Bush and his father (starting feuds), Airport (for not checking people thoroughly), the terrorists (for being who they are), and Osama (for generating the terrorists).” Although three other students mention the dual complicity of the U.S. and Afghanistan, they mention they are skeptical of conspiracy theories.

Students are, however, in this election year, equally skeptical of more accepted versions of what happened on 9/11; particularly with the ongoing

war in Iraq. A few mention the war in Iraq as a consequence of 9/11, without the causal link students regularly made in the earlier questionnaires. One notes that “blame was placed on Iraq.” Another says: “Osama Bin Laden is responsible for the terrorist attacks. I don’t know how Saddam even came into the picture.”

Perhaps because 2008 was an election year, this cohort seems more involved with trying to understand 9/11, or at least the war in Iraq that followed. One student is hopeful that “with a new president . . . we will be given the real motive on why we are still” at war. Another is less sanguine, but speaks for many in this group: “The Twin Towers fell, the Iraq war started, Saddam died, Civil War, presidential incompetence, and the terrorists are still out there. Aren’t we planning to invade Iran or something?”

September 2, 2009 (8 years after 9/11)

If the 2008 elections inspired students to think about 9/11, the cohort of 2009, who were in elementary school at the time, displays again a vague understanding of what happened on or who was responsible for 9/11, with nearly half of them blaming generic terrorists for the event, and fewer citing conspiracy theories. Some are quite unclear. One mentions buildings being “bombed” and another knows only that “most people say it was terrorists.”

Perhaps reflecting the U.S. pullout of combat troops from Iraq, less than twenty percent (11/57) of the students link Iraq to 9/11, while nearly half still find Al Qaeda wholly or partially responsible.

Continuing a theme witnessed in the 2008 cohort, these students are conscious of being children when 9/11 happened. Only one mentions being taught about it in school, but several discuss how their teachers would bring it up on the anniversaries. One student mentions that “years after, every year, we would talk and discuss this in class.” Another notes: “My teachers referred to that every (September) since then. I can’t say I know for sure who is responsible . . . I’ve wanted to ask ever since.” Another student apparently speaks for many in this cohort: “The information passed around in school kept getting mixed up like a game of ‘telephone,’ but eventually people began understanding through the news and articles.” Two more students articulate a strong sentiment from this group. The first, who blames generic terrorists, says: “Since I was only nine, I couldn’t even begin to grasp the tragic and horrific event.” The other, who learned about it “from another kid at recess,” says, “I honestly have never thought about why—it was always just a fact that it happened.”

August 30, 2010 (9 years after 9/11)

Nine years after 9/11, over half of the respondents hold Al Qaeda wholly or partially responsible (45/85), while a third blame vague terrorists (26/85)—about twice as many who name Iraq (14/85). As Iraq fades from significance in this questionnaire, the conspiracy number rises, and nearly

twenty percent of the students (15/85) find the U.S. government or airlines either complicit or incompetent. One person believes 9/11 is about a “plane malfunctioning or the pilot made a grave mistake.” A more typical respondent, who mentions that teachers never told him about it, believes Bush to be responsible “because he knew and didn’t do anything.”

At least a quarter of this group had some kind of sense of recent history and the context for 9/11, but even these question what they know. For those who blame terrorists (and a couple put “terrorists” in quotation marks), they modify their statements. For example, one says: “I am led to believe Muslim terrorists are responsible, but I am uncertain of that ‘fact.’” Even those who accept Al Qaeda’s responsibility are skeptical. One student says “supposedly Al Qaeda” was at fault. Another echoes that sentiment: “They want us to believe Al Qaeda is responsible for it.” One student seems to sum up the general attitude of this 2010 group: “Some believe that it was the terrorists’ fault, but others think it’s all a government conspiracy. I personally don’t think anyone, including myself, will ever know the full story and truth.”

February 31, 2011 and May 10, 2011 (9 ½ years after 9/11)

Although this paper has focused on the responses from the questionnaire that was generally administered in the fall semester, for most years, I also conducted the survey in the spring, as I did nine years earlier in 2002. After the capture and killing of Osama Bin Laden in May 2011, I administered a second questionnaire to a different section of the History 101 class, thus making their responses free from any interest in the topic the first questionnaire may have generated. I was hoping to see how much the massive publicity around the killing of Bin Laden would affect students’ understanding of 9/11. Not surprisingly, nearly eighty percent of the students linked Al Qaeda to 9/11 in the latter survey, up from the two-thirds majority prior to Bin Laden’s death. The responses that blame Iraq fell from one-third to less than twenty percent, and those that implicate the U.S. went from over one-quarter in February to less than one-quarter in May. The vague generic terrorist category also dropped significantly (from twenty-five percent to fifteen percent), probably reflecting those who believe Bin Laden to be responsible following the coverage of his capture and death.

These numbers perhaps look heartening to those of us who teach recent history and have a concern that our students stay in touch with history as it happens. However, reading the students’ response to “what happened on 9/11,” even after the publicity surrounding Osama Bin Laden’s role, reveals a continued limited understanding of the event. Despite the massive coverage of 9/11 and Bin Laden in the week preceding the second poll, some students appear oblivious to the ongoing event surrounding Bin Laden in 2011, and apparently do not link information about his death to my questionnaire regarding 9/11. For example, one student still explains 9/11 through her personal experience: “my parents ... relayed the information to me ... as

best they could to an 8 year old. The people involved in taking over the planes are responsible, though I'm not precisely sure who that is." Another mentions learning "some information from school. Every 9/11, teachers would talk about the tragedy." Yet, this student erroneously concludes that "the person responsible was Saddam." Another faults both Iraq and the U.S. government: "The U.S. is responsible, they are connected with the Iraqis. It's obvious they could have prevented it."

Many students, however, seem to be more in touch with current events. One notes that "according to the media, Osama Bin Laden was in charge and now he is finally dead." For another, Bin Laden's death "brings closure," while a third student realizes that Bin Laden's death "is just one chapter in the book of terrorism." The skepticism about official explanations of 9/11 remains, however. One student understands that Bin Laden and Al Qaeda have been blamed for 9/11, but he does not "believe if this is 100% correct." Another notes: "The news say Al Qaeda and Bin Laden, but I don't really know too much." A third is also skeptical: "Al Qaeda claims responsibility, but some claim it is an inside job."

Another student combines both cynicism and relativism, in a not atypical response, where he acknowledges the recent event, notes other points of view, yet holds on to his own beliefs: "According to the government we were attacked by Osama Bin Laden. But personally I believe it was a planned/controlled demolition by the government. Everyone draws their own conclusions."

This quotation seems an appropriate place to end this overview of nine years of student responses to the question of "what happened on 9/11." This student's willingness to acknowledge an accepted point of view ("the government"), alternative points of view ("everyone draws their own conclusions") and his personal point of view ("planned demolition") in three brief sentences, speaks to the difficulty of discussing 9/11, without clarifying how we understand it.

If we are to teach recent history, we need to appreciate how students understand the historical events around them. We cannot assume that when we talk about or teach 9/11, we are talking about the same event to all our students. Increasingly, 9/11 is part of the history curriculum, but if the responses from this last cohort are any indication, students are still confused, and confusion about a term that is used as a shortcut for political and social issues is reason enough for history teachers to ask their students what they know about recent history before attempting to teach it. When President Obama gave his speech regarding the planned troop pullout from Afghanistan on June 22, 2011, he thanked "intelligence professionals and Special Forces (who) killed Osama Bin Laden, the only leader that al Qaeda had ever known." Obama remarked that this "was a victory for all who have served since 9/11," then quoted a soldier who "summed

it up well.” That soldier said that “the message ... is we don’t forget.”⁸ For the majority of the eight hundred students taking my survey over the last nine years, “not forgetting” about 9/11 is clearly not the issue—most do not remember 9/11 with any degree of accuracy, and few have been taught it. It is our challenge as history teachers to recognize this gap in their knowledge and to offer a remedy.

Notes

1. Varying accounts generally set the boundaries of this generation from 1980-1981 to 2000-2001, preceded by Generation X, and before them, the Baby Boomers. Although scholars study how this particular technologically sophisticated and/or dependent generation appears to learn, the focus of this article is not on how they learn, but on what they know (or do not know) about one particular issue—9/11—in this first or second year of college. For a discussion about how this generation uses and learns information, see Alison Black, “Gen Y: Who They are and How They Learn,” *Educational Horizons* 88, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 92-101.

2. Craig Fehrman, “The Millennials have a Moment,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May 2011.

3. Rick Rojas, Larry Gordon, and Christopher Goffard, “A Turning Point for a Generation,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 May 2011.

4. Anonymous student responses to History 101 9/11 Student Survey administered at California State University, Long Beach periodically from September 2001 to May 2011.

5. Students seem more opinionated about 9/11 during election years, for example, or after seeing movies such as Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) or the A&E Network movie about the plane that went down in Pennsylvania, *Flight 93* (2006).

6. The results of this survey may surprise some history teachers who regularly teach 9/11 as part of the U.S. curriculum. For a discussion about the controversies over incorporating 9/11 in history textbooks, as well as the obstacles to teaching recent history where schools are reluctant or unable to adopt new textbooks, or who face pressures from standardized tests, see Jon Wiener, “Teaching 9/11,” *The Nation*, 26 September 2005, 25.

7. For the purpose of tallying the results, the Al Qaeda category includes those who indicate Al Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden, the Taliban, or Afghanistan. The Iraq category also includes Saddam Hussein. The Generic Terrorist category includes vague explanations such as “planes went into buildings,” or “a terrorist attack occurred in New York,” as well as generalized attributions to “mid-Easterners” or “Muslims” as responsible. The U.S. or Conspiracy category includes those who blame the U.S. for either not being prepared for or being complicit with the planning of the attack.

8. “Text of President Obama’s Speech on Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, 22 June 2011, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/world/asia/23obama-afghanistan-speech-text.html?sq=Text%20of%20President%20Obama%EF%BF%BDs%20Speech%20on%20Afghanistan&st=cse&scp=1&pagewanted=all>>.