**Honour the Brave: The 9/11 Memorial and Museum New York**

As was famously written, “Terrorists want a lot of people watching and a lot of people listening, not a lot of people dead” (Jenkins 1975:158) and nothing invokes the theatrical nature of extreme violence as remembering the 9/11 attacks, carried out by Al Qaeda against the United States of America in 2001. The sheer horror of 3000 plus individuals being murdered create a spectacle the likes of which we can only hope not to see again. Like a theatrical event, the attacks attracted an audience of millions of people around the globe (*The Guardian 2001*) who sat and watched the horror unfold on their television sets and millions more will have seen the footage replayed on the news, over the internet and, even, as part of University courses studying a range of topics as varied as international relations, military history, terrorism studies and law enforcement. Such a huge audience was inevitable as the attacks are indelibly stamped on the course of history and rank along side events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the death of Princess Diana. Even twenty years later many people report being able to recall exactly where they were when either they saw the attacks unfold or heard about them (Hartig and Doherty 2021).

Such a traumatic event has clearly changed peoples lives and not just those who lost loved ones in the attacks themselves. First responders, who risked everything to save people on the day, have died in large numbers (Freedman 2004). Military families from across the United States and her Allies have experienced the death or serious injury of members of the Armed Forces (Watson Institute 2022) and numerous civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan have died as a result of the Global War on Terror which the attacks spawned (Watson Institute 2022). As such, it is unsurprising that there is a collective desire to memorialise the attacks and have a location which can be visited that can serve as a focus point for the grief, sadness and remembrance of all who have been affected.

However, the 9/11 memorial and the associated museum have become an oddly juxtaposed pair. One, the memorial pools, serve as the official memorial to those killed in the attacks and are in essence sacred ground (Baptist 2015). The other, the museum, is a quasi-voyeuristic experience which enables those that have no direct connection to the events of 9/11, the rescue attempts or the wars that day spawned, to consume collective grief (Kennicott 2014). Whilst the waterfall pools are a sombre, austere place which encourages quiet reflection of the sheer scale of loss generated by the attacks and is a fitting and respectful memorial the museum is a jumbled confusion of competing influences which has been noted by many authors since it opened (Kennicott 2014, Hess & Herbig 2013, Baptist 2015, Wainwright 2014).

First, the museum is explicitly a paid for environment with tickets costing from $26 through to $75 dollars depending on the level of access needed (9/11 Memorial). Whilst it is arguable that this helps limit visitor numbers and provides money for the management of the site it also creates a layer of consumption. Visitors have to choose to part with their money and with the many competing sites and attractions that New York offers. Thus, visitors are choosing to consume the experience the Museum offers, and this immediately places the 9/11 Museum into the realms of ‘infotainment’ as visitors are clearly seeking an experience worthy of the cost. When viewed through this lens it becomes unsurprising that there are numerous accounts of visitors taking ‘selfies’ with exhibits (Cherelus 2016) and that a gift shop exists on site.

Second, the museum is set seven stories underground and has a distinctly religious feel to the way that visitors descend into darkness to witness the horror of that day. As has been pointed out previously (Doss 2011) such theatrical elements are part of the process through which cultural memory is built within a society. The quasi-religious experience of descending into the metaphorical hell displayed within the 9/11 museum is an attempt to create memorial mania (Doss 2011) which seeks not collective reflection but, rather, a collective expression of grief, rage and a siege mentality whereby the very ideals of America are under attack.

If we accept that 9/11 was perceived as an attack on the very idea of what it is to be American, then it becomes unsurprising that the memorialisation has been commodified. Rather than being disrespectful this commodification is arguably a direct expression of the collective desire of Americans to re-affirm their culture and shows how culture, grief and history are intertwined. This intertwining of consumption with memorialisation does not detract from the importance of sites of collective grief nor does it derogate from the cultural significance of remembering those who were lost in the tragedy. In many ways’ consumption enables such remembering, as I personally experience, every time I see the fridge magnet I bought during my own trip to the memorial and the museum. As the magnet says “honour the brave” who died or sacrificed themselves to protect others that day and in the days that followed through the act of commercial consumption. What could be more American than that? NOT SURE THIS HITS THE CORRECT TONE

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