

Remembering 9/11

How much do you remember about 9/11? Almost certainly – unless you are quite young – you know the basics: Islamic terrorists hijacked planes and flew them into targets in New York City and Washington, D.C.

But do you remember how many American victims were murdered that day? In Mitchell Zuckoff's book published last year, [*Fall and Rise: The Story of 9/11*](#), the name of every victim is listed. They are given in small print and crowded onto the page in two dense columns. Even so, the names take up 35 pages, with 80 to 90 names per page. There are 10 people on the list of those slain by our enemies with the last name Jones. Fourteen have the last name Smith – 15, in fact, when you realize that one of them, Monica Rodriguez Smith, was pregnant.

This is what was done to us and what we are given to recall.

And then there are the survivors. Do you know of Elaine Duch? She was very badly burned by a fireball inside one of the Twin Towers. She survived, but never fully recovered. Her life is still marred by constant pain; the scars on her body and face separate her from her fellows; she has never been able to return to work, to drive a car, or to live the life she led before Sept. 11, 2001.

Do you know the story of Ron Clifford? He had a meeting at the World Trade Center. When he heard the first plane crash into the North Tower, he ran out into the street and discovered a woman, Jennieann Maffeo, who had been standing outside the building when the plane hit and had been severely burned. Clifford aided Maffeo, tending to her massive injuries as best he could. During his attempt to help her, the second plane crashed into the South Tower. Later, Clifford learned that his sister and his niece had been aboard that plane. The

woman he had heroically tried to help, Jennieann Maffeo, did not survive her injuries. Clifford described the day as “the end of the world.”

Do you know of Melissa Doi? She was in one of the towers, in a floor above the impact of the plane that crashed into it. She was trapped and called 911. The conversation she had with the operator was recorded. In that conversation with dispatcher Vanessa Barnes, Doi bluntly asks Barnes, “I’m gonna die, aren’t I?” Barnes works fervently to calm her, telling her “Please don’t give up...You’re going to be fine, can you hear me?” As Doi grows increasingly silent, the desperation in Barnes’ voice intensifies. Doi asks her to call her mother, but Barnes’ phone does not have three-way call capacity. She gives Barnes a message: “Tell my mother that I love her and that she’s the best mom in the whole world.”

We should think of Elaine Duch, Ron Clifford, and Jennieann Maffeo. We should think of Melissa Doi and we should think of her mother listening to the recording of that call.

Some ask the question, why do we still focus on this event? Is it not better to forget, to allow the pain to dissipate and to get on with our lives? “Wouldn’t they have wanted it that way?”

My call to memory is not about any desire for more wars, certainly. President Trump has indicated he will continue drawing down our troop levels in Iraq and Afghanistan, and this is a good thing. Those wars were in the most generous analysis inconsistent as a response to the 9/11 attacks, and they produced still more needless suffering by innocents without resolving the problem.

But our imperative to remember 9/11 is driven only in part by the healthy need to be reminded of the existence of our enemies outside this country. It is much more to call attention to the nature of what is happening inside our

borders that I write.

Our forgetting, you see, is actively being accelerated by some, and some are endeavoring not simply to forget, but to misremember and to distort what happened that day in accordance with their own twisted view of America. It was happening already in the immediate wake of the attacks, but it has reached a truly astounding level now, nearly two decades later. In the week after the attacks, I had a heated argument with several university colleagues who were already, while the effort at recovery of bodies was still in its early stages, championing the vile claim that “America had it coming.”

These professors did not hold real power in this country, but their influence was felt. This year, at the local high school that my oldest daughter attends, no official ceremony is planned this week to mark the anniversary and teach about the event. The same is true at the university at which I work.

Today, there are people sitting in the Congress of the United States who giggle while discussing mass terror attacks like those of 9/11 and pursue policies expressly designed to destroy the America that was attacked on that day. On a public television program in 2013, Ilhan Omar discussed a class on terrorism she had taken in college. She laughed and joked about Islamic terrorism with the show’s host, who chucklingly asked her whether the class had “labs” and “field trips.” She ridiculed the tendency of the course’s instructor to say the names of al-Qaeda and Hezbollah with an “intensity” he did not use to describe the United States, England, or the American military.

The [video of the interview is still available](#) online. It must be seen to be fully understood in its implications for this country’s future. This is a woman who spontaneously approaches the topic of terrorist attack against this country as a matter of great amusement, who is clearly distant from the worldview of the typical American, who needs no explanation as to why

one says “al-Qaeda” in a way different from the way one says “England.” A woman who sits in a position of power. There are others in elite positions who share her view on the America that was attacked on Sept. 11, 2001.

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