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# **Terrorism, Trauma, and Memory: Constructing National Identity at The 9/11 Museum and The Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum**

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**TERRORISM, TRAUMA, AND MEMORY: CONSTRUCTING NATIONAL IDENTITY  
AT THE 9/11 MUSEUM AND THE OKLAHOMA CITY NATIONAL  
MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, Communication

By

Caroline LeeAnn Whittenburg

May 2021

# **TERRORISM, TRAUMA, AND MEMORY: CONSTRUCTING NATIONAL IDENTITY AT THE 9/11 MUSEUM AND THE OKLAHOMA CITY NATIONAL MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM**

Communication

Missouri State University, May 2021

Master of Arts

Caroline LeeAnn Whittenburg

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis undertakes an analysis of the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and the 9/11 Museum in New York City, New York, focusing on the construction of an idealized citizen that is mobilized as a defense against terrorist threats. Employing rhetorical field methods, I focus on how these spaces work symbolically and materially to shape visitors' sense of national identity. I pay careful attention to how message construction relates to whether the terrorist threat is framed as internal or external, and how that influences what it means to be American. This argument is grounded through the process of identification and division exemplified through the spaces' highly impactful symbolic and material features. The symbolic features of the space outline the character of the heroic idealized citizen and its antithesis, the "evil" other that opposes heroic values. In contrast the material features of the spaces, such as victim testimonies, audio recordings of the attack, and remnants of trauma, traumatize visitors through simulation, thus inviting identification through shared experience. Ultimately, this thesis outlines how the material features of spaces evoke strong visceral reactions that move beyond symbolic "meaning-making" features; therefore, materiality remains deserving of serious scholarly attention. Additionally, this thesis highlights that despite the heroism evident in these memorial and museums, the material simulation of trauma halts the process of growth and self-reflexivity.

**KEYWORDS:** identification, affect, public memory, museums, memorials, domestic terrorism, foreign terrorism, trauma, Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 9/11 Museum

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Donna Whittenburg.

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## INTRODUCTION

Brutal and devastating acts of terrorism are, sadly, central to the history of the United States and to our national character. Over time, such acts have been both foreign, as was seen in the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, and domestic, as was seen most recently in the insurrection at the US Capitol and the Atlanta spa shootings. How we rhetorically “locate” terrorist actions shapes both how we, as a nation, respond to them and how we view ourselves. In this thesis, I examine two official sites of public memory concerned with terrorist attacks, interrogating how the framing of terrorist threats and events as either external (i.e., “foreign”) or internal (i.e., “domestic”) shapes public policy and influences what it means to be a US American. Specifically, I undertake a rhetorical analysis of two sites: the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and the 9/11 Museum located in New York City. These two sites retell the history of two of the worst terrorist attacks in the United States, commemorating the individuals who lost their lives on April 19, 1995, and September 11, 2001.

Museums and memorials are essential to the processes of confronting trauma and crafting national identity. Their inherently material nature has the unique ability to move visitors in deeply emotive ways, which few other forms of discourse can match. The physicality of these spaces works rhetorically to instill a sense of history’s immediacy and undeniability. Although there is considerable research conducted on terrorism in relation to public memory and space that has helped inform my understanding of trauma in relation to terrorism and memory, there is a lack of research conducted in relation to how sites of public memory craft messages in relation to external versus internal terrorist threats, and how this shapes visitors’ sense of national identity. I



believe this gap in research is predominantly caused by the need for rhetorical fieldwork to attend to the embodied material aspects of space. These sites are over a thousand miles apart, which makes conducting this form of research difficult. In my thesis, I examine how the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum and the 9/11 Museum work symbolically and materially to shape visitors' sense of national identity through Kenneth Burke's (1969) concept of identification and division. Employing rhetorical analysis, I attend to how message-construction relates to whether the terrorist threat is framed as internal or external, and how that shapes our collective understanding of being "American."

## LITERATURE: PUBLIC MEMORY, MATERIALITY, IDENTIFICATION

This study is shaped and influenced by a number of key academic literatures. While by no means an exhaustive list, I want to briefly outline a few of those here. Specifically, I wish to highlight the importance of research on public memory, materiality and affect, and identification and division.

### Public Memory

To understand the multifaceted nature of a community and collective identity, one must understand “public memory” or appeals to a shared sense of the past. In *Places of Public Memory*, Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (2010) outline the overarching positions of contemporary memory scholars leading to the development of six key assumptions of what public memory truly is (p. 6). They are as follows:

(1) memory is activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties; (2) memory narrates shared identities, constructing senses of communal belonging; (3) memory is animated by affect; (4) memory is partial, partisan, and thus often contested; (5) memory relies on material and/or symbolic support; (6) memory has history. (p. 6)

While there are many other assumptions held across fields and disciplines, these are the common themes.

First, memory works to help individuals cope with their fears and anxieties of the present (Dickinson, et al, 2010). Therefore, groups glamorize, distort, and shape history to cope with their present-day needs, or simply as a way of “understanding, valorizing, justifying, excusing, or subverting conditions or beliefs of their current moment” (p. 6). As the cliché says, history is

written by the winners and public memory is no different. Therefore, public memory is neither inert or unbiased. Its relation to the present shapes the way it is portrayed.

Second, public memory constructs a collective sense of identity and functions as a tie to a sense of belonging (Dickinson et al., 2010, p. 7). Barbie Zelizer (1995) shares that “unlike personal memory, which refers to an individual’s ability to conserve information, the collective memory comprises recollections of the past that are determined and shaped by the group... Remembering becomes implicated in a range of other activities having much to do with identity formation, power and authority, cultural norms, and social interaction as with the simple act of recall” (p. 214). According to Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka (1995), memory “comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose cultivation serves to stabilize or convey that society’s self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity” (p. 132). This process of identity construction within the group not only shapes the individuals but their inherent patriotism (Bodnar, 1991), and ultimately their motivations towards a nation. Therefore, memory and identity are two sides of one coin.

Third, public memory is “animated by affect” (Dickinson et al., 2010, p. 7). Which means, quite simply that public memory is brought to life by visceral emotive reactions to events that go beyond what is written in history books. Public memory is created when a group has an intense reaction to something like trauma, which anchors memory within the infrastructure of this group. According to Dickinson et al. (2010) “public memory embraces events, people, objects, and places that it deems worthy of preservation, based on some kind of emotional attachment” (p. 7). This emotional attachment is created by non-signifying features that move beyond words.

Fourth, public memory is “partial, partisan, and thus frequently contested” (Dickinson et al., 2010, p. 9). Humans are fallible and this can ultimately shape memory. According to Zelizer (1995), memories are like mosaics, pieced together to create something new and different. She asserts that “no single memory contains all that we know, or could know, about any given event, personality, or issue” (p. 224). Therefore, public memory is incomplete due to its lack of finality.

Fifth, public memory relies on material and symbolic support (Dickinson et al., 2010, p. 10). Dickinson et al. (2010) contend that “memory is typically understood as relying on material and/or symbolic supporters language, ritual performances, communication technologies, objects, and places that work in various ways to consummate individual’s attachment to the group” (p. 10). Zelizer (1995) similarly proposes that “memory exists in the world rather than in a person’s head... [meaning] that collective memory often resides in the artifacts that mark its existence” (p. 232). Therefore, memory is tangible and has the ability to connect individuals together and to the past by creating something to figuratively hold on to.

Sixth, public memory ultimately has a history (Dickinson et al., 2010, p. 10). “Scholars agree that [memory] is historically situated, that both its cultural practices and intellectual status have changed over time and in different societies” (Dickinson et al., 2010, p. 10). According to Alison Landsberg (2004), “memory is historically and culturally specific; it has meant different things to people and cultures at different times and has been instrumentalized in the service of diverse cultural practices” (p. 3). Landsberg (2004) goes further to say that memory is about “negotiating a relationship with the past” (p. 3). This relationship is crucial in the art of understanding public memory in the present as they ultimately go hand in hand. If public memory responds “to the needs of the present, serving the interests of the present, [and]

animating the present” then it is imperative that scholars attend to its history (Dickinson, et al., 2010, p. 12).

Outside of the six universal assumptions, another key feature of public memory is its relation to space and place. Zelizer (1995) shares how “monuments and memorials provide rich examples of the ways in which space has assured memory’s preservation” (p. 223). Nathan Wachtel (1986) furthers this notion stating how “the preservation of recollections rests on their anchorage in space” (p. 212). Space plays a large role in the construction of memory and is the infrastructure of society, as these sites work as anchors to history. As Pierre Nora (1989) asserts, places of public memory work, “to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial” (p. 19). The process of archiving and preserving the past is crucial to society’s understanding of history and even an understanding of themselves. Memorials and museums are essential to a flourishing society and shape many aspects of life. “The process by which memorials come into being, their very nature as public, material artifacts leads to a permanence and institutionalization that must be carefully examined” (Gallagher 1999, p. 304). Without places of public memory, society would lose important aspects of its history that bind the public together.

Dickinson et al. (2010) discuss the binding nature of these sites, stating that it, “is theorized in most scholarship as narrating a common identity, a construction that forwards an at least momentarily definitive articulation of the group. It also offers to individuals a symbolic connection with the group and a sense of belonging to it” (p. 7). The process of defining a group is precisely the goal of the sites I will be analyzing. These groups are utilized to invite a sense of belonging that curbs anxieties created by an “Other.” As Dickinson et al. (2010) further elaborate and, as I have previously stated, “public memory has been variously described as responding to

needs of the present, serving the interests of the present, animating the present, serving as rhetorical resources of the present, and so forth” (p. 12). One of the inherent *needs* of human beings is the ability to rely on each other to move on from tragedy. Through appeals to a collective past, individuals find strength and with that strength can cast evils from their defined group. Memory is crucial to the preservation and health of society, and places of public memory work rhetorically to preserve and attend to the memory of the collective. This preservation can be enacted through vernacular and official sites of public memory. Vernacular discourse is what Kent Ono and John Sloop (1995) share as “culturally syncretic” and “constructed out of fragments of popular culture” (p. 23). Therefore, vernacular sites of memory are created outside of the hegemonic power structures. In contrast, official sites of memory are created within the official dominating power structures. Both the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum and the 9/11 Museum are strictly official sites of memory, erected and created by the government. Although everyday citizens were a part of the planning process, the final decisions were in the hands of official institutions of power. These museums and other like them have three primary rhetorical practices: collecting, exhibiting, and (re)presenting (Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2005).

First, museums collect artifacts central to the commemoration of the specific site. Curators use these material artifacts to allow visitors to tangibly engage with history. However, these curators use these objects to tell a story; therefore certain portions of history are highlighted while others are not, and this process of remembering and forgetting is oftentimes controlled by the objects on display. The material nature of collecting creates anchors for visitors to engage with history.

Second, museums engage in the practice of exhibiting that function to create an intentional retelling of the past. The spatial organization of exhibits shapes visitors' perceptions of a version of the past by "situating, locating, and (re)contextualizing artifacts in actual spaces" (Dickinson et al., 2005, p. 90). Exhibit designers meticulously craft each portion of museum and, in turn, shape the overall message of the space.

Third, museums (re)present history through their recreation of "lived experience." These spaces allow visitors to at times step into the shoes of historical figures and experience their lives. This embodiment of history allows visitors to engage with history beyond what is offered in history books and allows for the museums message to move visitors at a more visceral level.

These key practices museums engage in are the very thing that sets them apart from other sources that retell the past. They work together to create these larger-than-life institutions that allow visitors to engage with tangible ties to the history that has shaped and molded cultures and people. They allow the process of retelling the world's stories to become two dimensional and deeply impactful.

### **Materiality/Symbolicity**

Our *sense* (meaning and feeling) of the world is crafted through both the symbolic and material features of spaces like memorials and museums. According to Ott and Dickinson (2019), "rhetoric is the capacity of the thing-symbol—via its aesthetic qualities signifying practices—to generate affect and discourse, whose intertwined sensory and cognitive processing elicit presence and meaning effects in a particular space-time" (p. 54). To understand this definition, I will unpack each of its clauses.

First, rhetoric is the capacity of the thing-symbol. Ott and Dickinson (2019) contend that the concept of the thing-symbol signals that “rhetoric is always, at once, material and symbolic. It is comprised of both physical matter and cultural signs” (p. 55). Utilizing the example of museum, these spaces have both symbolic (i.e., placards, signs, testimonies) and material (i.e., artifacts, controlled movement, audio) features that move visitors, and the symbolic features cannot exist without the material. In fact, these institutions are moving *because* they have both symbolic and material appeals.

Second, via its aesthetic qualities and signifying practices. Ott and Dickinson (2019) assert that “the aesthetic qualities of a thing-symbol shape the experience of its nonrepresentational register, while signifying practices modulate the experience of its representational register” (p. 58). The aesthetic qualities of a text are nonrepresentational and moves by engaging in our senses: hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell. In contrast, the signifying process of the thing-symbol is representational and moves through the use of symbolism that is “complex, culturally coded, and cognitively rendered” (Ott & Dickinson, 2019, p. 62).

Third, to generate affect and discourse. This portion of the definition “seeks to account for the ways that the aesthetic qualities and signifying practices of the thing-symbol manifest themselves in and to human experience” (Ott & Dickinson, 2019, p. 63). The term affect is used to discuss the nonsignifying and unqualified intensity of matter-energy that moves individuals through their senses by creating a visceral or carnal knowledge (Ott & Dickinson, 2019). Discourse is used to discuss the “historically-contingent systems of representation that govern meaning and knowledge and render a thing-symbol’s signifying practices intelligible” (Ott & Dickinson, 2019, p. 63).



Fourth, whose intertwined sensory and cognitive processing. Affect and discourse's dual character creates our capacity to be moved. Ott and Dickinson (2019) state "in addition to concretizing material (aesthetic) and symbolic (representational) inducements, affect and discourse highlight different ways of knowing, of processing our ubiquitous thing-symbol environment" (p. 69). It is the intertwined nature of the sensory and cognitive process of affect and discourse that produce presence and meaning effects that create an embodied experience that makes material and symbolic demands upon us (Ott & Dickinson, 2019, p. 69-74).

Fifth, elicit presence and meaning effects in a particular space-time. The first four clauses of the definition of rhetoric focuses on how rhetoric sways our sense of things, meaning both and affect, to shape both our bodily states and mental attitudes (Ott & Dickinson, 2019). The fifth clause focused on what rhetoric actually *does*, as shown through its presence and meaning effects. These effects are "potentialities [and] should not be confused with actualities, which are concrete outcomes; a potentiality refers to the tendency or capacity of a thing-symbol to induce particular, though not-yet-actualized, outcomes" (Ott & Dickinson, 2019, p. 74). The *presence* effects are created by the material features of the thing-symbol that elicit visceral reactions. The *meaning* effects are created by the symbolic features of the thing-symbol that illicit cognitive reactions.

Museums and memorials are both inherently symbolic and material in nature. Although these sites have many signifying features, their ability to move beyond the symbolic with material features to recreate history is what makes these texts so unique. These rhetorical features move individuals to adopt a specific retelling of history. Blair (1999) attends to this notion further stating, "rhetoric of all kinds acts on the whole person—body as well as mind. ... there are particular physical actions the text demands of us: ways it inserts itself into our

attention, and ways of encouraging or discouraging us to act or move. ... Memorials (and other constructed sites) do perhaps even more obvious work on the body” (p. 46). Sites of public memory powerfully elicit “affect,” or the precognitive reaction to matter that moves and sways bodies in some manner (Ott, 2017; Labanyi, 2010). According to Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998), museums are the most trusted form of the retelling of history. This is due to museums’ intense use of symbolism and materiality in their retelling. The rhetorical appeal of museal spaces, then, is rooted in the physical presence of material remnants of the past, the embodied movement through space, the interaction of both humans and material objects, and the elicitation of affect. These experiences, which are thoroughly rhetorical, ultimately work to construct a shared understanding of past events and collective identity.

### **Identification and Division**

Sites of public memory, like many other rhetorical texts, invite identification and, with that, division. The concept of identification, one of theorist Kenneth Burke’s (1969) most well-known concepts, focuses on “the natural tendency of persons or publics to unite through common ideologies, a need born of an initial division from one another” (Borrowman & Kmetz, 2011, p. 281). In his work, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke (1969) states, “the Rhetoric deals with the possibilities of classification... the ways in which individuals are at odds with one another or become identified with groups more or less at odds with one another” (p. 22). Ultimately identification is made up of four principles: identification appeals to shared substance, is rooted in division, is an ideological endeavor, and is a call to action.

First, identification is appeals to shared substance. In other words, identification, or consubstantiation, “may be necessary to any way of life. For substance, in the old philosophies,

was an act; and a way of life is an acting-together; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial” (Burke, 1969, p. 21). Additionally, Diane Davis (2008) shares “identification... or ‘consubstantiation,’ is both the mode by which individual existents establish a sense of identity and the mode by which they establish a relation to one another” (p. 126). This relation to one another is established by having the same essence or make up. This classification process both pushes individuals into groups as well as casts those deemed as “other” out.

Second, identification is rooted in division. To become one with a group or individual, in turn, means you are distancing and dividing from any other group or individual outside that particular group. In the case of the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum and the 9/11 Museum, this works in favor of the idealized Oklahoma/American citizen who is used as a defense against the anxiety of the threat of terrorism. As Burke (1969) elaborates, “Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (p. 22). By creating the idealized other to identify with, the act of division from the evil “other” is compensatory, thus curbing visitors’ anxiety. In the case of museums, identification often occurs on a material, affective, bodily register. One of the central aims of this thesis will be to explore the embodied and nonsignifying dimensions of identification that go beyond Burke’s (1969) focus on symbolicity.

Third, identification is an ideological endeavor. According to Ott and Mack (2020) “ideology is a system of ideas that unconsciously shapes and constrains both our beliefs and behaviors [that structures our world in four ways]: limitation, normalization, privileging, and interpellation” (p. 138). Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation is one of the key features of

identification. Ott and Mack (2020) outline Althusser's key concept sharing that, "ideology is so infused into the social structure that it actually serves as the force to interpellated us, or the force that calls use into existence as social subjects" (p. 140). They go on to outline how this process is happening, stating that "individuals, far from being unique or original, are actually a collection of different ideological systems fused into one identity through the process of "hailing"" (p. 140). This process of "hailing" is identification. When urging an individual to identify with a person or group, you are asking them to become one singular identity. Burke (1969) contends that singular beings can "be classed with other unique individuals as joint participants in common principles, possessors of the same or similar properties" (p. 22). Ultimately, identification hails individuals to have an ideological shift in behaviors and beliefs to become one with a person or group.

Fourth, identification is a call to action. Ultimately, the invitation of identification is the call for change. By asking for unity, or to be consubstantial, the invitee must change parts of themselves to become part of the group and less like everyone outside of said group. This invitation is something that people can choose to ignore; however, it is still functioning as a call to action.

## **“METHODS”**

In the discipline of communication, the practice of rhetorical criticism, which is properly understood as an art rather than a science, comes perhaps the closest to being anti- or, at least, a-methodological. As Edwin Black (1994) famously wrote in his analysis of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, “sometimes—maybe even all the time—a subject deserves to supersede a method, and to receive its own form of disclosure” (p. 22). Like Black, I believe discourse—whether speech or protest or film or museum—ought to receive its own modes of disclosure. Thus, I do not come with a predetermined way of approaching or “unlocking” my object.

That my approach eschews method, of course, does not mean that it is a-theoretical or free from assumption. The practice of criticism is rooted both in the assumptions of the critic—assumptions about the nature of “texts” and how they function, for instance—and the questions the critic poses of the object. In that context, it is important to acknowledge that I view texts and, in particular, museums as especially diffuse (rather than discrete) texts, meaning that they have fluid and unstable boundaries. Drawing upon the work of Michael Calvin McGee (1990), I treat places of public memory such as museums as “diffuse” texts that require the assembly of cultural fragments to “produce a finish discourse” (p. 288). In assembling or “constructing” a text from the fragments of the objects at the center of my study, I pay careful attention to how the symbolic (i.e., the placards, testimonies, or human-made symbols) and material features (i.e., physical artifacts, aesthetics of photos and images, and organized movement) of these spaces function to invite identification and, thus, division. I accomplish assembling these fragments through rhetorical field methods or what is sometimes referred to as participatory critical rhetoric.

Michael Middleton, Aaron Hess, Danielle Endres, and Samantha Senda-Cook (2017) outline rhetorical field methods as “a set of research practices that bring qualitative methods of data collection such as participant observation, interviewing, and oral history into the process of doing rhetorical criticism” (p. xiv). They go on to further unpack this practice, sharing how participatory critical rhetoric, or what I refer to as rhetorical field methods, “signals that a rhetorical critic engages in fieldwork as a part of the critical process, where the critic enters a naturalistic field in which rhetoric occurs in order to observe, participate with, document, and analyze that rhetoric in its embodied and emplaced instantiation” (p. xv). Unlike traditional rhetorical texts, like speeches and other forms of public address, without attending to the implicatedness of sites of public memory, critics are unable to see how these sites are truly functioning. It is their “undocumented, embodied, emplaced, material, and ephemeral” features that deeply move the public. In fact, “rhetorical field methods explore the dialectic between rhetorical texts and the lived experiences through which those texts are encountered and come to have significant meanings” (Middleton, Senda-Cook, & Endres, 2011, p. 392). The embodied context and lived experiences of sites of public memory and other rhetorical text interanimate one another and can lead to unpredictable and at times even conflicting messages (Middleton et al., 2011). With museums and memorials, these lived contexts often times come in the form of experiential landscapes.

Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki (2006) assert, “experiential landscapes invite visitors to assume (to occupy) particular subject positions. These subject positions, in turn, literally shape perception” (p. 30). Visitors must interact with the landscape before they interact with space and, “to understand visitors’ experiences of [a] museum, then, it is vital that we first

explore the rhetorical codes of the surrounding landscape and the practices of looking they invite” (Dickinson et al., 2006, p. 31).

When researching the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum and the 9/11 Museum, I physically went to these spaces and spent hours conducting detailed fieldwork to attend to the diffused nature of these sites. I focus on the experiential landscape that the spaces are situated in, how visitors are asked to move through the space, how the museum controls the time spent in each section, and any other embodied experience unique to the specific site. For example, having the 9/11 Museum and Memorial at Ground Zero in the hustle and bustle of New York City matters deeply to visitor’s interpretation and museum experience. After physically visiting these sites and experiencing them as a visitor, I then start to construct fragments that I use to articulate exactly what is happening. Through this process, there are portions of the spaces that I prioritize and parts I leave out of the criticism. Museums and memorials are too diffused to attend to all of the features of the site within a single work of criticism, therefore I pay close attention to the features that are the most moving for visitors.

Despite attending to and conducting fieldwork for each of the spaces I analyze, due to the Covid-19 Pandemic I was forced to spend less time at the 9/11 Museum. The Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum was just a short car ride away from my current location, so I was able to visit the site on three separate occasions allowing me to accumulate a vast amount of detailed field notes that greatly helped my analysis. In contrast, I have only had the opportunity to visit the 9/11 Museum once, before the virus hit. Due to pandemic travel constraints and the majority of the site being shut down, I have had to combine my first visit’s field notes with the detailed museum website that currently has virtual exhibits.

This study will be organized into four chapters, an introduction, two analytic chapters focused on the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum and the 9/11 Museum, and a concluding chapter. The conclusion chapter will reflect on key similarities and differences between how we officially remember domestic and foreign terrorist threats and tragedies, as well as the consequences of those threats for our collective sense of self as a nation.



## THE OKLAHOMA STANDARD: ESTABLISHING NATIONAL IDENTITY AT THE OKLAHOMA CITY NATIONAL MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM

*“We come here to remember those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever. May all who leave here know the impact of violence. May this memorial offer comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity” (Memorial Mission Statement).*

On April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh, with the help of Terry Nichols, detonated a bomb in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City, killing 168 people, 19 of whom were children. In light of this disaster, Oklahoma City created a memorial and museum not only to commemorate the event and honor those who died, but also to highlight the goodness of Oklahoma citizens in the moments following the attack. The memorial and museum website recalls this attack stating,

The resulting deaths... immediately touched thousands of family members whose lives will forever bear the scars of having had those precious to them taken away so brutally. Suffering with such families are countless survivors, including children, who struggle not only with the suffering around them, but with their own physical and emotional injuries and with shaping a life beyond April 19. Such losses and struggles are personal and, since they resulted from so public an attack, they also are shared with a community, a nation and the world. (“Lessons Learned”, n.d.)

This space is a premier institution that commemorates an issue of great importance, terrorism. I argue that the museum constructs an idealized Oklahoman citizen, which it frames as a defense against domestic threats. This central subject position is mobilized through its symbolic and material features that function to establish identification and division. To illustrate how this space functions as a defense against domestic threats, this chapter proceeds in two stages. First, I undertake a close reading of the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, demonstrating how the space symbolically invites both identification and division, as well as

how its materiality evokes the same invitation but through a completely different path. Second, I reflect on the critical importance of attending not just to the symbolicity of a space, but also to its materiality and how this contributes to fully understanding the rhetorical experience of a text.

### **Symbolic Identification and Division**

The Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum functions to highlight the overwhelming goodness of humanity as seen in the aftermath of the attack while simultaneously illuminating the evil that the museum deemed to be hiding in plain sight. The space's use of video testimony of victims, first responders, and average Oklahoman citizens, material artifacts related to the attack and its aftermath, and the text outlining the "Oklahoman Standard" all work to define both an idealized Oklahoma citizen as well as the evil "other" of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. This defining process gives visitors something to aspire to emulate and identify with as well as something to despise, divide from, and cast out. I will begin by outlining the mechanisms that define the ideal Oklahoma citizen and move on to highlight the various tools used to define McVeigh and Nichols as the evil "other."

**Defining the Oklahoma Standard.** Upon entering the museum, visitors encounter the orientation theater and are greeted with a video narrated by Oklahoma native, Kristin Chenoweth. This video outlines the events that transpired on April 19, 1995, illuminating the resiliency and goodness of the Oklahoma citizen. "It was a brutal, shocking and unprecedented attack... homegrown terrorism... it tested us... but rather than running away from the destruction, we ran toward the bombed buildings" (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). They speak about their experiences as if it was the only logical thing for them to do. As if it was their duty rather than an act of kindness. Chenoweth fondly expresses how, "on

that day Oklahomans and Americans... lost [their] innocence, but not [their] character”

(Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). By beginning the museum experience by defining the *character* of the average citizen in light of overwhelming tragedy, visitors are invited to view the rest of the space with reverence towards this ideal citizen.

As visitors move past the beginning video and further into the museum, they enter into a replica of a board room. They are invited to sit and listen to the beginning of the meeting. Everything sounds normal and calm until 9:02 a.m., at which point the bomb goes off. Visitors then hear the sound of complete chaos and fear as they are let into the next room which is a semi-replica of the carnage of the blast. Audio recordings of the screams, chaos, and wailing sirens are played through the museum speakers as visitors walk throughout the replicated debris. For a short time, visitors can more closely imagine the trauma of the day, thus making the actions of the citizens of Oklahoma all the more impactful. After visitors move throughout the carnage, they come to a video of victims sharing their experiences. Dennis Purifoy, one of the survivors, describes the chaos following the explosion and the process of frantically screaming and digging for his coworkers and pulling them out of the debris. He recalls the moment he tried to return to the building to rescue the coworkers who had not made it out. Due to the building's instability and the arrival of first responders, he was not allowed back inside the building. As he recalls this experience, he becomes visibly emotional having to pause to regain composure, highlighting both his goodness of character and his heroism. Another experience of sheer heroism and altruism highlighted in this video was the process of rescuing the children from the debris. Don Hull describes how he and his colleagues formed a line and passed the children down one by one from the second floor to safety. Police Officer Alan Prokop recalls one important memory of this moment.

I stepped in the ambulance and there was a man lying there on a gurney and he opened his eyes and looked up at me and he just kind of smiled when he saw Brandon [child from the blast] and he opened his arms. I laid Brandon on top of his chest and he cupped his arms over him and just kind of nodded to me and he smiled. And I thought, you know, to everything you see something great... you know... the compassion that this very hurt man had for this child (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020).

The space utilizes heroic accounts of victims immediately following the blast to symbolically define the idealized Oklahoma citizen, a citizen who would risk, while under insurmountable duress, their own safety and wellbeing to help their colleagues and children they have never met.

The next area utilized to establish an idealized Oklahoma citizen is dedicated to the weeks following the bombing. Visitors encounter images and video testimonies of families and first responders recovering and responding in the weeks following the attack. These visuals highlight the altruistic response of citizens in the face of tragedy. The museum highlights the community support in light of this moment by highlighting all of the ways Oklahomans stood up to help. Blood banks were incredibly full, with long wait times. People would drop everything to donate supplies. Reporter Jenifer Reynolds recalls the community involvement, stating, “We’d say, ‘right now they need D cell batteries’ and we’d have to come on 30 minutes later and say, ‘okay, okay, okay, no more D cell batteries’ because that many people would drop what they were doing and within 30 minutes show up at the bomb site with batteries” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). This works to strengthen the definition of the idealized Oklahoma citizen who was waiting in the wings to be as helpful as possible. However, it was not just the citizens who were exemplars for citizenship. Firefighter Ted Wilson describes the respect given to the recovered deceased victims stating, “We’d place them on the gurney, we’d strap them in, and then everybody would pause for a minute and our chaplains would say a

prayer—for the families, for the workers, and it was our way of putting some dignity into a bad situation” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). This not only defines the first responders as *heroes*, but also as overwhelmingly good people, inviting visitors to view Oklahomans as the exemplars of citizenship. This concept was furthered by President Clinton’s response towards the bombing which was highlighted in an exhibit video. He stated, “if anybody thinks that Americans are mostly mean and selfish, they ought to come to Oklahoma. If anybody thinks Americans have lost the capacity for love and care and courage, they ought to come to Oklahoma” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). The space symbolically invites visitors to view Oklahomans as the pillars of American patriotism, thereby mobilizing identification.

After hearing victim testimonies that work to define heroism, thus, inviting identification, visitors encounter the Gallery of Honor. This exhibit pays homage to the victims who lost their lives from the bombing. The circular room is set up with an image of the victim accompanied by an artifact that was close to them. Some of these artifacts include a piano paperweight, an angel figurine, a charm bracelet, and toys for the children. Playing over the speakers in this room are the victims family members reading off their names. According to the museum placard, “From the youngest child to the oldest retiree—every person who was killed leaves behind family and friends who remember the uniqueness of their loved one. It is that individuality this gallery hopes to recognize... It is a gallery of hobbies and passions, hopes and dreams. It is a gallery of everyday people and extraordinary loss. It is a gallery of honor” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). All of the features of this gallery humanize not just the victims, but also those who were left behind. Rather than simply listing the names, the museum created a space that tells a short story of each individual who lost their life and gives a voice to their

grieving loved ones. This gallery symbolizes the humanity of those grieving and those gone, strengthening the sense of oneness visitors feel towards Oklahomans.

Before visitors leave the museum to see the memorial, they encounter the wall dedicated to the Oklahoma Standard. Although this wall is not as high tech or imposing as the rest of the museum, its placement and content make it important to acknowledge.

Service, honor, kindness... The core tenets of the Oklahoma Standard were born out of the overwhelming community response to the Oklahoma City bombing. Visiting rescue workers and journalists were so moved by the way Oklahomans took care of each other, they referred to it as the Oklahoma Standard. It lives on today as a model by which Oklahomans respond to the needs of their neighbors, fellow citizens and communities... Today you have seen a remarkable story of loss, courage and comeback. You have learned how a community came together and took care of their neighbors. As you leave here today, what can you do? What will you do? (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020)

These are the last words visitors see before leaving the museum portion of the space. These words further define the idealized Oklahoma citizen and how they heroically helped their community. The wall also invites visitors to adopt these core tenants within their own character and to symbolically become an Oklahoma citizen through adopting this standard for their own lives. This is the ultimate ideal Oklahoma citizen with which visitors to become one.

Like the museum, the memorial has many features that symbolically invite identification. The Survivor Tree, Reflecting Pool, and Field of Empty Chairs all signify something important to the Oklahoman. The Survivor Tree, “an American elm [that] bore witness to the violence of April 19, 1995, and withstood the full force of the attack” (“The Survivor Tree,” n.d.), functions to symbolize the resilience of the Oklahoma people in the face of trauma. Mirroring the content of the museum, the Survivor Tree invites visitors to view the idealized Oklahoma citizen as an entity with deep roots that can withstand the harshest of attacks. The Reflecting Pool is used to

symbolize the healing process, inviting visitors to feel the tranquility of moving forward and looking towards the future, the mindset of many Oklahomans after the bombing. And finally, the Field of Empty Chairs is a representation of every individual who lost their life from the bombing (Figure 1.). According to the memorial website, “The 168 Chairs represent those killed on April 19, 1995. They stand in nine rows, each representing a floor of the Federal Building where the field is now located. Each chair bears the name of someone killed on that floor. Nineteen smaller chairs stand for the children” (“The Memorial,” n.d.).



Figure 1. Field of Empty Chairs

This section of the memorial invites visitors to sit in the seats of those who are gone, creating a sense of oneness with the individuals who lost their lives and also those who are left behind to mourn them. Clint Seidl, the young son of Kathy Lynn Seidl who died in the bombing, discusses the importance of the chairs stating, “I think these chairs are going to be real nice because, I know it would make me proud and the rest of my family proud, and my mom proud, [that] if someone got tired that they could sit in my mom’s chair” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). By having tangible symbols for visitors to make sense of, the

memorial further invites visitors to identify with the idealized Oklahoma citizen, thus dividing themselves from the evil “other” of McVeigh and Nichols.

The museum’s framing of the response of Oklahoma citizens shapes and defines an idealized hero for visitors to identify with and look up to, to cope with the anxiety surrounding domestic terrorism. The space highlights the goodness of this community as a whole; outlining how even crime went down during this time, showing that even Oklahoman criminals were exemplars of citizenship. All of these accounts give visitors something to aspire to and emulate in their own lives leading them to identify with the idealized Oklahoma citizen and divide from the evil “other.”

**Defining the Evil “Other.”** Much like the symbolic defining of the idealized citizen, the museum’s symbolic features also define and situate the evil “other” that represents domestic terrorism through the framing of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. The first portion of the museum works to unpack the similarities of McVeigh and Nichols with Oklahoma citizens. The museum highlights how difficult it was for citizens to come to terms with the domestic nature of the attack and how they perceived it to be a foreign threat in the beginning. In one portion of the museum that is dedicated to the news following the blast, a video of a news anchor states, “I’m not proud of it, but my first reaction was that this must be someone in the middle east” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). Another anchor shared similar thoughts on how initial speculation was that the culprit was an “Arab terrorist” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). This language and footage are used to highlight how Americans did not even suspect that this evil could have been the act of one of their own.

Another section of the museum houses details of where Timothy McVeigh was staying before the attack, giving visitors a glimpse into the lives of he and Terry Nichols. This section



includes perceptions of people previously encountered with respect to McVeigh's arrest for unrelated traffic and weapons violations. Gloria Brown discusses sharing an elevator with McVeigh stating, "I remember focusing on the young man and he was very clean cut and kept thinking 'I wonder why he is going to jail? What could he have done that he would be going to jail?'" (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). This highlights how difficult it was for citizens to come to terms with the evil that looked and acted like them. In relation to Nichols, the narrator of the video states, "Herrington, Kansas [where Nichols lived] main street was paved with family values and quiet living. So, it seems unbelievable that someone involved in the planning of the Oklahoma City bombing would be living in a wood-framed house" (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). These two accounts are utilized to signify the similarities McVeigh and Nichols had with Oklahoman citizens. Not only were they clean cut average looking men, they were more importantly Americans. The first portion of the space works to grapple with the domestic nature of the attack. However, most of the museum works to undermine these similarities by highlighting the evil these two men represented. Some language used throughout the rest of the space includes "baby killer" and "monster." Jailer Marsha Moritz even discussed how calm and unaffected McVeigh was, stating "He didn't have any emotion... no emotion" (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). The dehumanizing language and description of McVeigh paired with the emotional accounts of people who lost their children and family members, encourages visitors to distance themselves from McVeigh and Nichols and identify with the human good of the ideal Oklahoma citizen. Despite the similarities on the surface, the Oklahoma citizen represents a goodness that the evil "other" is missing entirely. This is summed up with the final words of Judge Steven Taylor to Terry Nichols at his sentencing. "It is truly ironic that the very government and the

Constitution... you professed to hate is the very government that assured you a fair trial and protected your rights” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). The museum uses this to emphasize that even in the face of the overwhelming hatred spewed from these men, Oklahomans were still honorable. This strengthens the dichotomy of good and evil and pushes visitors to aspire to be the former.

### **Material Identification and Division**

In addition to the museum’s symbolic features, the material aesthetic qualities of the space also invite identification and division. However, the materiality moves past the cognitive perception of the symbol and affectively moves visitors by appealing to their sensations. Where the symbolic features of the space function to define the idealized Oklahoma citizen as a heroic good for visitors to identify with, the materiality of the space induces identification through the simulation of trauma, in a story-like fashion, separated in chapters as shown on the visitor guide handed to every visitor upon entry (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, n.d.). This space asks visitors to move through the “story” in a strictly controlled manner to affectively stimulate the trauma and anxiety of the attack. Ott, Bean, and Marin (2016) discuss controlled movement, defining it as “the rigorous direction and monitoring of bodies” (p. 5). Their research illuminates how The Counterterrorism Education Learning Lab, or The CELL, utilizes the rhetorical feature of controlled movement to support their pro-surveillance message. Ott et al. (2016) discuss The CELL and outlines how it manipulates “the aesthetic qualities of its various spaces... to [create] different atmospheres in different spaces” (p. 6). They go on to state how, “the exhibition does more than just create different atmospheres; it strictly controls the order and pace of movement through them” (p. 6). Like The CELL, the Oklahoma City National Memorial

and Museum creates the semi-controlled atmosphere of trauma, anxiety, confusion, and ultimately relief to simulate the experience of being in the attack along with other Oklahoma citizens. I proceed in five sections of the simulation: a day like any other, chaos from the blast, rescue and recovery, honoring the victims, seeking justice, and moving forward.

**A Day Like Any Other.** The first portion of the museum is used to situate visitors within the year of 1995. The orientation video in chapter 1 of the space outlines how the day of April 19 was like any other day; “The sun was shining, and the birds were singing, it was a beautiful spring morning... it was an extraordinary beautiful April day... then it turned on a dime” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). This imagery paints a picture for visitors, allowing them to imagine the sensation of the morning. Shortly after watching this video, visitors walk into chapter 2, dedicated to the history of the site and what was happening around this time. This includes highlighting what type of technology was being utilized, which music was popular, and even which film won best picture at the Oscars. However, more than just pop culture, the museum also highlights the rise of extremist groups and the Waco standoff of 1993, showing the growing unrest of certain citizens during this era. This experience invites visitors to situate themselves within the year of 1995.

More than just situating visitors within 1995, this chapter also outlines the types of employees that worked in the federal building and what was happening with them on April 19. Visitors are then asked to situate themselves within the federal building. On a wall under a clock that is about to strike 9:00 a.m. is a list of items on a schedule. At 9:00 a.m. “EMSA begins advanced paramedic training class, the Police Department begins training personnel on the new Mobile Command Post vehicle, the Federal Employees Credit Union opens for business, America’s Kids day care has 21 children checked in, the YMCA day care center has 53 children

checked in, and the Water Resource Board hearing for the Wikle family's application begins" (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). There is a video playing next to this schedule sharing the minutes for the Water Resource Board meeting, sharing testimonies of those who were present, inviting visitors to feel a part of this everyday life by simulating a normal workday. When the clock hits 9:00 a.m. the door next to this wall opens, allowing visitors into chapter 3, "A Hearing." Visitors are asked to stand or sit down in a replica of a boardroom and the door they just moved through closes behind them. An audio recording of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board meeting that took place on April 19 starts to play, allowing visitors to simulate being at the federal building on that day. Just two minutes into the meeting, at 9:02 a.m., the bomb detonates. The explosion is loud and utterly terrifying; visitors can hear the screams of terror from the individuals present at the meeting, affectively traumatizing visitors as if they were actually experiencing the bombing firsthand. As the audio of screams is playing, images of the 168 victims are displayed across from where visitors are sitting, furthering the trauma by seeing the carnage. The combination of simulating an average day in 1995 and experiencing the blast pushes visitors to identify with the Oklahoma citizen, as they somewhat experience the trauma of the attack.

**Chaos from the Blast.** After experiencing the traumatizing detonation of the blast, visitors are let into chapter 4A, a room that is structured to display the chaos and carnage following the blast. This room displays the debris, plays audio of people trying to get to safety, and plays breaking news coverage of the event. Emergency response vehicle sirens are wailing. The partially destroyed Alfred P. Murrah Building sign is on display along with chunks of plaster, clocks stopped at 9:02 a.m., and other bits of rubble. The room is structured to not allow

visitors to see where they are going next or what is in front of them as there are pillars with images of the debris separating the space (Figure 2.).



Figure 2. Chaos

This affectively moves visitors into a state of anxiety in the face of the trauma they just experienced. Like the citizens in the building after the trauma of the blast, they did not know where to go next or what was in front of them. This further simulates the experience of the bombing, establishing a sense of oneness between the visitors and the victims.

Chapter 4B is dedicated to hearing survivors' experiences. From this point on, the museum is structured chronologically with clear time stamps outlining what has happened at what time. This simulates the feeling of experiencing the aftermath of the event in real time. Survivor testimonies, paired with video evidence from the day, highlight the experiences of individuals in the moments shortly following the past. They speak about how they felt the ground

shake and disappear beneath them and looking up to see only the sky. Survivor Amy Petty shares how, “The third and fourth floor broke off into a V and fell, and I fell with it... at the bottom of it... and the rubble just sort of fell in and packed up on top of me” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). Behind Petty is footage of the building right after the bombing, showing exactly what she was describing. There is footage of the survivors, who were giving their testimonies, still trapped in the building. They recall hearing people call out to them as they were buried under the rubble, praying not to die in this way, and one woman remembers calling back, “You are walking on our faces” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). These testimonies, paired with the graphic images of bleeding survivors and crying bloody children, make the event more deeply real and tangible, evoking the sensation of trauma. The more visitors hear of the survivors' experiences and see the bloody carnage, the further they identify with them.

**Rescue and Recovery.** In the days following the attack, the rescue and recovery efforts were a time of both great tragedy and resilience. Chapter 5A, “World Reaction to Reporting Terrorism,” and 5B, “Rescue and Recovery,” both invite visitors to experience the moments following the attack. First, visitors experience audio recordings of the various news reports that were playing all across the globe. There are multiple renderings of what happened as these stations were receiving different accounts. This audio simulates the confusion surrounding the attack, moving visitors to feel as if they were taken back to this time by simulating watching the news with the rest of the world. However, one thing was clear in all of these audio recordings. President Clinton stated in his press conference, “This was an act of cowardice... and it was evil” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). This statement, paired with the

combined affect of trauma, anxiety, and confusion, pushes visitors to divide from the “cowards” and identify with the heroic citizens.

Moving from Chapter 5A to 5B visitors experience the process of search and recovery, living the experiences of “trapped survivors, tireless rescuers [highlighting] unbridled selflessness” (*Visitors Guide*). Time markers found in this space mark when rain started to fall and the exact time survivors were being transported to hospitals or beginning to be recovered from the building. As the death toll rises, the time markers move from looking like normal placards to looking like tombstones. This adds to the combined affect of trauma, anxiety, and confusion by evoking the sensation of mourning and grief. A video outlining search and recovery efforts shares the desperate measures taken to rescue Daina Bradley. There was a graphic image of Bradley pinned under a beam with a massive amount of blood on and around her. Dr. Andy Sullivan shares his experience:

She was essentially lying on her back with a solid beam like a wall on to the right side of her... I said that we really had no choice... we had to either amputate her leg or leave her there... we couldn't give her an anesthetic [but] we did have a medicine called Versed. It's a hypnotic and it's an amnesic, so that fortunately even if she is awake, she might not remember what we were doing... I'm right-handed and the wall was on my right, so this had to be done with my left hand... I came out at least twice thinking I had completed the amputation and we'd try to pull her and there would be something that was attached. At that point everything I had, had been dulled by the operation [and] by the rocks, and the only thing I had left was a pocketknife. (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020)

This video, paired with gruesome images of Bradley, simulates the full trauma of the event. The process of hearing victim' testimonies to form a narrative of the events, seeing tombstones marking the overwhelming death toll of the attack, and having the unimaginable experience of an

impromptu amputation become imaginable, forces visitors to experience a simulation of the sensations following the attack, thus becoming an Oklahoma citizen for a short time.

**Honoring the Victims.** Chapter 7, “The Gallery of Honor,” and chapter 8, “Impact and Healing,” focus on the process of honoring those who were lost and moving towards healing. Both of these chapters have material remnants that strengthen the unity between visitors and Oklahoma citizens. First, the carefully curated artifacts I previously discussed in the Gallery of Honor function to tell the story of the individuals who lost their lives (Figure 3.).



Figure 3. Gallery of Honor

Much like the Gallery of Honor, the Fence functions to tell the story of those who were left behind. The Fence is a feature of the memorial that became “a pilgrimage for hundreds of thousands of Americans – and people around the world” (Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, 2020). It was a place where people left objects to pay their respects. These objects highlight the community response to the bombing, ultimately giving a voice to the grieving and a



tool to heal. These material objects invite unity between the visitor and the Oklahoma citizen, all while affectively curbing the anxieties created during the beginning portion of the museum's simulation by creating the sensation of healing.

**Seeking Justice.** Although the healing process began for both Oklahomans and visitors simulating the events, the next chapter of the space is dedicated to investigating and seeking justice. Chapter 9, “Investigation, Evidence, and Justice,” allows visitors to partake in both the investigation and prosecution of McVeigh and Nichols. This portion of the museum has interactive touch screens that allow visitors to “follow” trails of evidence like the investigators who were on the bombing case (Figure 4.).



Figure 4. Trail of Evidence

This leads visitors to identify with and simulate both the lives of Oklahomans in the blast and also law enforcement officials who were in charge of finding, charging, and prosecuting

McVeigh and Nichols. This strengthens the identification visitors have with the idealized Oklahoma citizen as they have simulated multiple Oklahoman experiences. Another major aspect of this chapter of the museum is dedicated to the trial and sentencing of McVeigh. Because of the trauma visitors experience in the beginning portion of the museum, this portion evokes the affect of anger and the urge to seek justice alongside Oklahoma citizens. Visitors see the events leading up to the trial and are invited to react as the citizens reacted. Their level of investment in the justice portion of the museum would not have been as strong without the simulated trauma experienced earlier. Visitors are invited to so closely identify with the idealized Oklahoma citizen that they are pushed towards anger and an overwhelming urge to cast out those that were responsible for this trauma. Thus, when Timothy McVeigh is put to death by lethal injection and Terry Nichols is sentenced to life in prison, visitors, along with their unified Oklahomans, are invited to release the trauma, anxiety, and confusion evoked throughout the simulation and move towards healing. The evil has been cast out and order is restored.

**Moving Forward.** Visitors move from the trial to experience an example of a city who moved forward and rebuilt, not just physically, but mentally as well. This chapter has the wall dedicated to the Oklahoma Standard, the Survivor Tree, the Reflection Pool, Field of Chairs, and many other aspects of the memorial that are examples of the idealized Oklahoma citizen. Chapter 10, “Responsibility and Hope,” and the memorial itself, function to situate the final perceptions of visitors to focus back on the idealized citizen. Visitors were invited to simulate the attack as if they were a part of the horror, thus traumatizing them. After this trauma is resolved, the journey ends like it began, outlining the character of Oklahoma’s citizens to highlight that even in the face of evil and trauma, altruism and goodness will prevail, shown through the idealized Oklahoma citizen that the visitor has now been invited to become.

## Critical Reflections

In times of turmoil and deep trauma, we create entities to look up to and revere to cope with the fear of the future. This gives us the opportunity to cast out what it is that causes us fear and anxiety and move forward to a comfortable future. However, when does this blanketed justice hinder our ability to truly grow? Although the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum does a great job of exalting the citizens who met tragedy with kindness and care, its representation and framing of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols stalls the community's ability to grow and attend to the real nature of the problem. The simulation of this space so deeply affects visitors, it is difficult to view the problem with clarity as it invites visitors to view McVeigh and Nichols as the representatives for all domestic terrorists. Thus, by casting them out, the problem is solved. However, this is not the case. Domestic terrorism has continued to plague the United States long after the Oklahoma City bombing, as seen in The Boston Marathon bombing, the Charleston Church shooting, the Orlando nightclub shooting, the Escondido mosque fire, and the Poway synagogue shooting, just to name a few. At what point does the dehumanization and placement of blame on an individual or group stunt our ability as a nation to grow and become self-reflective? Clearly the threat did not stop with the execution of Timothy McVeigh. There must be more to unpack. However, the structure of this space stunts this dialogue before it can begin as the trauma created through the museum's material features too strongly invites visitors to act from fear just like the citizens with which they closely identify.

Historically, the process of identification and division focuses primarily on the symbolic features of a text, as expressed by Kenneth Burke (1969). However, the materiality of a text is equally important as it evokes sensations that cannot as easily be ignored. Where a visitor can, at

times, ignore symbols, material features affect individuals at such a carnal level, the process of identification and division becomes almost impossible to ignore. When a visitor hears screams of terror accompanied by the chaos of a falling building, the sense of oneness with those who experience it first-hand is extraordinarily powerful.

## FROM TRAUMA TO PATRIOTISM

“The 9/11 Memorial & Museum attests to the triumph of human dignity over human depravity and affirms an unwavering commitment to the fundamental value of human life”  
(Museum Mission Statement).

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 are among the darkest events in US history, and their effects on the American citizenry have been lasting. Responsible for 2,983 deaths and 25,000 more injuries, these attacks traumatized the nation and started the War on Terrorism that shaped the American political landscape and guided US foreign policy for the next decade. The 9/11 Museum works to preserve the history of both the attacks on the World Trade Center in 1993 and 2001 and to commemorate the individuals who lost their lives. In this chapter, I argue that the 9/11 Museum evokes the combined affects of trauma, melancholia, and pride by inviting visitors to experience an increased sense of patriotism through identification with an idealized “American.” It accomplishes this identification through compelling multimedia exhibits, material remnants of trauma, artifacts of heroism, and implacability, while also evoking division through its representation of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda.

To illustrate how this space evokes these combined affects, I will be focusing primarily on the museum space, but not the surrounding 9/11 memorial. I recognize that the memorial performs a crucial framing function with respect to the museum, and that most visitors come to the space of the museum having seen the memorial, which dominates the landscape like a huge, gaping wound. That having been said, unpacking the memorial would require sustained attention on its own, and that is simply beyond the scope of this chapter and thesis. This chapter proceeds in two stages. First, I outline how the space’s symbolic and material nature functions

rhetorically. Second, I unpack the implications this museum and museums like it have on the field of communication studies.

## **Identifying America**

The space of the 9/11 Museum functions to affectively traumatize visitors by immersing them in death and destruction. According to Amy Sodaro (2018) the museum “attempts to inspire moral transformation and action ... through the use of experiential, affective exhibitionary strategies intended to encourage empathy with the victims, survivors and families of 9/11” (p. 172). This immersive experience pushes visitors to identify with those who experienced these horrors firsthand, ultimately setting them up to symbolically cast out the “evil” Other who orchestrated this attack; this Other is named in the exhibit “Revealed: The Hunt for Bin Laden.” To clarify how this space is functioning, first, I discuss how visitors move through the space; second, I unpack the art found within the space; third, I outline the historical exhibit and its use of highly affective audio exhibits and artifacts of heroism; and fourth, I discuss the remnants of trauma found throughout the museum and its implacedness.

**Outline of the Museum.** Visitors enter the space through the pavilion where they descend down to the main portion of the museum, “which is located at bedrock, seven stories below the ground ... highlighting the archaeological remains of the buildings. Whichever way the visitor goes, [they are] met in the pavilion by skeletal remains of the WTC buildings, two “tridents” that are staggering in scale” (Sodaro, 2018, p. 176). Visitors then begin their journey in the first official portion of the museum, which is a long hallway dedicated to photographs of the two towers before they were decimated. Sodaro (2018) shares how the next portion of the space brings visitors to “a stunning viewing platform overlooking the immense slurry wall,

which was constructed to hold back the waters of the New York Harbor from the World Trade Center buildings. Surrounding it in the cavernous Foundation Hall are scattered massive artifacts” (p. 177). This portion of the space highlights the cavernous immensity of the buildings. After taking in the enormity of the slurry wall and the remains of the buildings, visitors descend onto another viewing platform dedicated to viewing the enormous art installation, *Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on that September Morning*, which I unpack shortly. Finally, “descending one last set of stairs alongside the remnant of the “Vesey staircase” they arrive at the soaring Foundation Hall (Sodaro, 2018, p. 178). I refer to Vesey Staircase as the Survivor Stairs, as they were used by many people to escape the burning buildings. Thus the visitor begins a sort of personalized reenactment. The staging is such that visitors are themselves fleeing, trying to escape the Tower. Following this descent, visitors are in the main portion of the museum dedicated to small exhibits, art installations, remnants of trauma, and the main historical exhibit where they can move around in any order they please (Figure 5.).

**Impactful Art Exhibitions.** One of the most compelling multimedia exhibits found in the 9/11 Museum are the art installations, which depict the experiences surrounding the attacks. Although there are countless art pieces throughout the museum, I focus on three that are particularly compelling: “Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning” by Spencer Finch, “Looking South” by Daniel Kohn, and “A Banner of Compassion” by Sarah Orvin’s fourth grade class. These art installations are visual representations of the experiences of the persons who perished, the employees of Fiduciary Trust Company International that was located on floors 90 and 94-97, and fourth graders from Porter Gaud Lower School in Charleston, South Carolina.

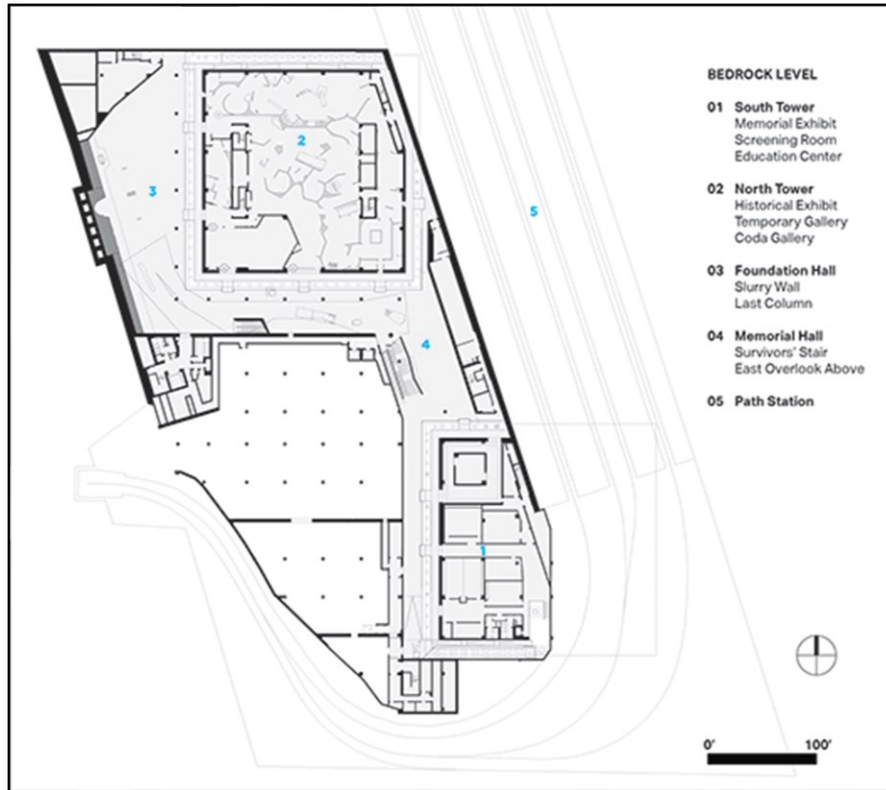


Figure 5. Map of 9/11 Museum

“Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on that September Mourning” was created to commemorate the 2,983 people killed as a result of both 9/11 and the attack on February 26, 1993 (Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning: National September 11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.) (Figure 6.). This work of art represents the voice and point-of-view of every single individual who lost their life in the World Trade Center. This piece of art is one of the museum’s most recognizable installations as it is found in cavernous Memorial Hall, which connects the main exhibitions halls (Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning: National September 11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.). The museum’s website describes the artwork stating:



The piece is comprised of 2,983 individual watercolor squares—each representing a victim of the 2001 and 1993 attacks—and symbolizes the idea of memory. Many remember the beauty of the clear blue sky on the morning of 9/11. But, our own perception of the color blue might not be the same as that of another person. However, just like our perception of color, our memories share a common point of reference. Within the larger art installation is the quote “No Day Shall Erase You From the Memory of Time” from Book IX of The Aeneid by Roman poet Virgil. Each letter was forged from recovered World Trade Center steel by New Mexico artist Tom Joyce. (Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning: National September 11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.)



Figure 6. Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on that September Morning

This work of art invites visitors to view each square as a unique and special part of a collective body. It suggests the idea that although all of these individuals are unique beings, they are a part of a greater whole. By portraying the point-of-view of each individual who lost their life, the art installation evokes melancholia by humanizing those who lost their lives, making them more than just a name. Visitors have the entire room to stand and look at *every single* square that represents *every single* life lost thus inviting them to become one with the victims and those effected by the attack. This causes the heavy feeling of trauma and melancholia as they

share in the sheer nature of loss surrounding 9/11. This, paired with the letters forged from the steel of the towers, creates the notion of a collective identity that will take the past and use it to become a piece of history that will stay in the public's memory forever, evoking pride for human's resiliency to heal, to take the trauma of the past and the loss of life to move forward. By highlighting the resiliency of the idealized American, visitors are more inclined to look towards this entity as a frame of reference for their lives.

"Looking South" was created to pay tribute to the 89 employees and seven contractors of the Fiduciary Trust Company International, who were killed during the attacks. This work of art portrays the view employees had as they looked out of the Tower before it was decimated (New on View: 'Looking South' Painting Donated by Fiduciary Trust: National September 11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.). The museum's website describes the painting stating, "the oil-on-canvas painting by New York-based artist Daniel Kohn recaptures the views from the South Tower of the World Trade Center which, until 9:59 a.m. on 9/11, had long been occupied by Fiduciary Trust" (New on View: 'Looking South' Painting Donated by Fiduciary Trust, n.d.). This four-story tall painting depicts a bright blue sky and the hustle and bustle of a busy day in New York City. The painting invites visitors to experience the last view that 96 victims had before they lost their lives, drawing them in, to step into the shoes of the employees and take in the view they looked at every day. This evokes melancholia due to the closeness visitors have towards the victims, calling them to stand and mourn the loss of life as they look at the past. By standing in the figurative shoes of victims, visitors are invited to identify with the fallen employees and those who risked their lives to try to save them

The artwork created by fourth graders from Porter Gaud Lower School in Charleston, South Carolina, will be referred to as "A Banner of Compassion" for the purpose of this chapter.

“A Banner of Compassion” was created as a way for children to cope with the aftermath of 9/11 (Figure 7.). This banner shares the voice of the children affected by these tragic events.

According to the museum website:

[Sarah Orvin] asked her class... to draw pictures and write patriotic messages to help themselves heal. Their creations included images of the attack sites prior to 9/11, poignant notes to first responders inscribed in brightly colored hearts, and patriotic symbols like the American flag and the Statue of Liberty. The students’ drawings and messages were then copied and painted onto a large canvas banner. (After 9/11, a banner of compassion from a group of fourth-grade students: National September 11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.)



Figure 7. A Banner of Compassion

This artwork highlights the support of Orvin’s fourth grade class, but also symbolizes the support of the nation towards the victims and first responders of 9/11. The bright heart-shaped messages, depictions of brave first responders, and other brightly colored drawings beckon visitors to view the aftermath of the attacks with a childlike positivity. These children saw the resiliency of the American spirit and knew the nation would move forward. This evokes a deep sense of pride and leads to the development of a stronger sense of patriotism.

The use of art within this museum works to highlight the perspectives of victims and the childlike hope of a nation, and to affectively traumatize visitors to urge them to identify with the resilient American who moved past tragedy to rebuild. The space uses these art pieces to show the trauma of the attacks to highlight the weight of a renewed spirit.

**Historical Exhibit.** The historical exhibit, which is dedicated to the act of retelling the history of the attacks, holds some of the most affectively convincing features of the museum. In this portion of the museum “all senses are to be focused on re-experiencing—or, for those who were not there or too young, experiencing—9/11. And while the pavilion and Foundation Hall are all characterized by their sweeping scale, suddenly the museum is cramped, claustrophobic, chaotic and uncomfortable. Thus begins the 9/11 experience” (Sodaro, 2018, p. 180). Sodaro (2018) shares how this space is functioning stating:

Through images, documents, videos, artifacts and a constant din of overlapping audio background, the museum endeavors to show the visitor how the bright September morning was shattered. The exhibit is anchored by a timeline documenting the 102 minutes of September 11, 2001, from the time the first plane hit the north tower at 8:46am until the north tower collapsed at 10:28am. The timeline snakes along the walls with details about what was happening in the sky and on the ground, ticking off the minutes, taking us from Lower Manhattan, to the Pentagon, to Shanksville, PA and back to Lower Manhattan. Surrounding the timeline, the senses are assaulted by images of destruction—the airplane slamming again and again into the south tower, flames leaping from the gaping holes in the buildings, people screaming and running for their lives, the north tower collapsing over and over again. (p. 180)

These features function both to traumatize visitors and to push them to identify with idealized patriotic Americans. Although this exhibit has various features that deeply move visitors, for the sake of time I concentrate on the audio features and artifacts. These exhibits’ function to invite visitors to symbolically experience the attack and also to see resiliency in the face of the trauma.

Audio recordings are used liberally in this space; visitors will find them in virtually every exhibition area. According to Amy Sodaro (2018) the most noteworthy portion of the space is its audio recordings, “from recordings of the hijacked airplanes’ cockpits, to voicemail messages from family members who never made it home, to news reports and individual remembrances, the experience of the museum is predominantly audio” (p. 184). She goes on to outline the design of the space, sharing how “lead designer Jake Barton described the museum as a “listening experience” and indeed this is central to not only the experience of the historical exhibit but the larger goals of the museum’s creators” (p. 184). The ability to give a voice to diseased victims is a moving feature unique to this space. Sodaro shares that “to hear the museum is to be taken to Lower Manhattan on that terrifying morning to experience the confusion, fear and chaos for oneself ... the potency of sound and voice is acutely felt in the museum” (p. 182). First, I will discuss the audio of those experiencing the events. Second, I will discuss the exhibit, *Reflecting on 9/11*, which is dedicated to museum visitors’ testimonies.

There is one particular voicemail left by an individual in World Trade Center Two that is one of the most compelling features of the museum in its entirety. Visitors hear Bradley Fetchet give his parents a call on the morning of September 11, 2001, approximately ten minutes after the first plane hit World Trade Center One (Remembering Bradley Fetchet at the 9/11 Memorial: National September 11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.). After speaking with his Father, he leaves a voicemail for his mother stating: “Hey Mom, it’s Brad. I just wanted to call and let you know...that a plane crashed into World Trade Center One. We’re fine, we’re in World Trade Center Two. I’m obviously alive over here, but obviously a pretty scary experience...you’re welcome to give a call. I think we’ll be here all day...Love you” (Remembering Bradley Fetchet at the 9/11 Memorial: National September 11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.).

Within minutes of that call, the South Tower was hit. The impact zone was below Fetchet's office, leaving him trapped and unable to escape (Remembering Bradley Fetchet at the 9/11 Memorial: National September 11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.). This voicemail invites visitors to become closer to the victim. He is no longer merely a name on a list of thousands. He is a tangible human being sharing his final words to his loved ones, and knowing how history unfolds, visitors are invited to imagine both the trauma Bradley faced as well as the trauma his parents endured after the second tower fell. This voicemail creates a deep anxiety, similar to that of viewers watching a tragic film they had already seen before; however, this time it is real. Visitors know what will happen to Bradley if he stays in the building but are powerless to inflict any change. They are invited to identify with a young man, trapped in a destroyed building, who they could not save.

Next, this space invites visitors to move from the feeling of trauma to that of melancholia, which is a deep type of depression and mourning in which people stay attached to what they have lost (Zizek, 2000; Biesecker, 2007). As visitors process the intense audio, they are inclined to feel an intense mourning, which creates melancholia. The use of audio that was meant for Brad's mother promotes unity with his family. This unity invites visitors to experience a deep weight of sadness towards the victim ultimately leading them to take part in mourning Bradley's death. Now that visitors are invited to become unified with the Fetchet family, they have an increased sense of pride towards these idealized Americans who rushed toward the decimated towers. This is strengthened by seeing the various ways individuals tried to save victims, displayed before and after hearing the audio clip, and also by seeing how families of the victims had these intense feelings of trauma and melancholia but were still able to move forward to help others and rebuild.

There are many other audio clips that share similar traumatic and melancholic undertones that move visitors. Some that have individuals starting to say, “See you tomorrow” only to stop halfway through and finish with, “I just love you.” “Visitors can hear the recordings from the hijacked flights’ black boxes and the calls made by the flight crews and passengers to their loved ones and to air traffic controllers. One can follow Flight 93 to its heroic end in a Pennsylvania field” (Sodaro, 2018, p. 182). These audio recordings are paired with quotes of first-hand accounts of people recalling their experience. One account that is particularly traumatic is the recollection a witness has towards a woman jumping from the buildings:

She had a business suit on, her hair was all askew...This woman stood there for what seemed like minutes, then she held down her skirt and then stepped off of the ledge...I thought, how human, how modest, to hold down her skirt before she jumped... I couldn’t look any more. (Sodaro, 2018, p. 182)

The incredibly traumatic and melancholic audio recordings invite a simulated trauma which, in turn, strengthens visitors’ pride. They invite patrons to experience the nature of true disaster and loss, only to share all of the ways Americans overcame these struggles. By hearing the voices of the victims, people feel pride more thoroughly, ultimately pushing them to identify with these idealized Americans.

After experiencing the voices of the victims, the *Reflecting on 9/11* exhibit invites visitors to share their own testimonies in the form of memories, opinions, and personal stories (Exhibitions, n.d.). Visitors are invited to memorialize their own voices in the museum to become a part of history, deepening the feeling of unification by allowing visitors to become an actual artifact in the museum. It also allows visitors to see hundreds of different recollections of the same event, allowing them to symbolically experience the attack from multiple perspectives.

This digital archive encourages visitors to view themselves as a part of a collective entity who all experienced trauma and loss, showing that despite the experiences of 9/11, idealized Americans can move on as a cohesive unit, thus instilling in a greater sense of patriotism visitors.

These recordings invite visitors to identify with the victims, to somewhat experience what they experienced, to feel what they felt, and to ultimately mourn their loss. These feelings function to incite trauma, then melancholia, and ultimately pride, which all work together to evoke a higher sense of patriotism and to view the idealized American with reverence.

In addition to audio, artifacts play a huge role in any museum, and the 9/11 Museum is no different. According to its website, the museum has acquired more than 70,000 artifacts that, “document the fate of victims, survivors, and responders” (The Collection, n.d.). These artifacts lead visitors to become more attached to the victims of the attacks. The artifact found in the historical exhibit that is one of the most compelling of the museum is the bandana belonging to Welles Remy Crowther. The museum website outlines the story of the red bandana and the man who wore it:

When hijacked Flight 175 hit the World Trade Center’s South Tower, people on the 78th floor sky lobby huddled together, frightened and confused. There was no escape as far as they could tell. Then, a man with a red bandana covering his nose and mouth suddenly appeared from the wreckage and smoke. He spoke in a calm voice and guided them to a stairway, leading them to safety. The man in the red bandana made three trips to the sky lobby, saving as many people as he could, until the burning building collapsed. (Remembering the Man in the Red Bandana: National September 11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.)

The red bandana symbolizes a human’s selflessness. Crowther was an everyday person who sacrificed his life for the lives of others. This artifact invites visitors to mourn his loss as well as seek to become more like him. This creates the dichotomy of melancholia and pride as they are



deeply mournful of the loss of an exemplary person but are also full of pride that someone like him existed. The bandana's material nature allows visitors to feel the loss of the man who wore it, while its symbolic nature allows them to use it to spark patriotism and the will to help others.

**Material Remnants of Trauma and Implaceness.** The material nature of this museum space is vital in constructing its narrative. Throughout the space, visitors see the remnants of the destroyed buildings and artifacts of victims who could not escape the towers in time. Before even stepping foot in the space, the patrons experience New York and feel the life of the city. All of these material qualities affect visitors and work to strengthen their sense of patriotism, leading them to identify with the idealized "American" constructed by the museum. In the following section, I first discuss the remnants of the two towers, and, second, examine the landscape in which the museum is situated.

Throughout the museum space, there are many different remnants of the destroyed towers. The two I focus on are the pieces of warped steel and the Survivor's Stairs. There are many large pieces of warped steel throughout the museum. These are pieces that were retrieved out of the rubble of Ground Zero (Figure 8.). They stand tall and imposing, to be examined, and the damage taken in by all who observe them. The planes tore through the towers and managed to completely twist and warp pieces of steel that weighed many tons. These pieces invite visitors to imagine something destructive enough to cause this type of damage. This process of envisioning evokes trauma due to the nature of re-living the crashes. Visitors see the planes crash through the buildings and imagine the sounds of warping steel. This makes the attack more immediate for those who saw the event endlessly replayed on their televisions but did not experience it firsthand. This affect then shifts to the that of melancholia, as they think of the

people who experienced it directly and lost their lives. Visitors are invited to mourn the individuals who died due to the steel warping, which led the buildings to fall.



Figure 8. Warped Steel

This sense of imagining is shared in relation to the Survivor's Stairs that are on exhibition in the beginning of the museum (Figure 9.). Before individuals move into the main portion of the space, they walk down a staircase that stands side by side the remnants of the staircase located at the edge of the elevated World Trade Center Plaza (About the Museum: National September 11 Memorial & Museum: National September 11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.). According to their website these stairs, "provided an unobstructed exit for people fleeing the site" (About the Museum: National September 11 Memorial & Museum, n.d.). These stairs are accompanied by a photograph of people rushing down to safety. They allow visitors to simulate the experience of the individuals who used these stairs to survive. Patrons must walk next to the staircase if they

are to enter the main portion of the museum. This forces them to walk the path of survivors, creating the multi-layered affect of trauma, melancholia, and pride almost simultaneously.



Figure 9. Survivor Stairs

First, visitors are to feel traumatized by simulating the survivors' sense of urgency to escape. Second, visitors are to feel melancholia surrounding the idea of individuals who could not make it to the staircase. Third, visitors are to feel a sense of pride created by the simple idea of survival. People took these stairs and were able to survive and move on from the tragedy. The Survival Stairs function both materially and symbolically because they are tangible evidence of survival and now are used to symbolize the survival of the American spirit which in turn increases an individual's sense of patriotism by pushing visitors to identify with the idealized American.

Finally, the fact that the museum is located in New York City at Ground Zero completely shapes the way individuals interact with the space. The landscape a museum is in shapes the mental framework of visitors. Before guests set foot inside, they take in the material nature of the city as well as the memorial. They see the New York City skyline, hear the honking of taxis, and, at least for a second, feel the energy of what it was like to walk into the towers on an average day. In addition to experiencing New York, they also see the two gaping scars left as the remains of the fallen towers. The memorial functions to highlight the absence of two landmarks that *were* the New York skyline. In television shows and blockbuster movies, individuals who had never set foot in New York City, or had even left the town they grew up in, had internalized the iconic skyline—until one day they were gone. Before even stepping foot into the museum, visitors are invited to feel the absence of the towers. Like many other aspects of this space, this allows visitors to step into the shoes of the victims of the attack. Visitors now interact with the artifacts, photographs, audio recordings, and other aspects of the museum with this experience in mind. The audio experience is even narrated by New York native Robert DeNiro who retells the events through the voice of a true New Yorker born and raised in Greenwich Village. More than just being able to simulate the feeling of New York on September 11, New York City is also a symbol of the American Dream. This was one of the reasons the hijackers chose this location. Therefore, having the museum in the exact location of where the event happened, works to show the gravity of the attacks as well as how New York and America as a country moved forward and grew in spite of them.

Overall, the museum's material remnants of trauma and implaceness are used to both show the trauma and destruction of 9/11, to evoke a deep sense of melancholia towards the inconceivable loss of life, and to symbolize America's resiliency. They are evidence of our

inherent ability to regain strength in the eyes of mourning. By having visitors see the true nature of destruction, they are giving the opportunity to also see how the country has moved forward.

### **Division from Evil**

The museum evokes trauma, melancholia, and patriotism to invite visitors to identify with the idealized American whose resiliency in the face of trauma demonstrated what makes Americans these larger-than-life heroes. However, identification is always division is compensatory to division. The features of the space I have outlined above conveyed the sheer tragedy and devastation of the events of 9/11 and show the horrors perpetrated against the American people. However, the exhibit “Revealed: The Hunt for Bin Laden” gives a face to the perpetrator thus further pushing visitors to divide from the “evil” other and identify with “true” Americans. Although the combination of visitors experiencing trauma and representations of patriotism invite division due to the invitation to divide from the perpetrator of this trauma and identify with the “patriots,” this specific exhibit is dedicated to naming the evil thus strengthening the division.

This exhibit is strategically ordered to chronologically outline the government’s role during the ten-year hunt for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, telling “a critical and powerful story of how the United States intelligence, military, and federal law enforcement came together after 9/11 with a single-minded focus to bring one man to justice” (Revealed, n.d.). According to the museum’s website, the exhibit is separated into six sections, all depicting a period of time following the attacks (“Digital Exhibition: Revealed: The hunt for Bin Laden: National September 11 Memorial & Museum,” n.d.).

The first section, “Warning Signs,” outlines the rise of bin Laden and al-Qaeda stating, “In 1996, bin Laden declared a jihad, a religiously sanctioned war, against the United States, leading to violent al-Qaeda attacks on American interests overseas. Ultimately, bin Laden believed a devastating strike on American soil would convince the U.S. to withdraw from the Muslim world” (“Digital Exhibition: Revealed: The hunt for Bin Laden: National September 11 Memorial & Museum,” n.d.). They go on to further outline the government’s role in these threats, sharing that although they were monitoring it, they did not consider al-Qaeda a priority (“Digital Exhibition: Revealed: The hunt for Bin Laden: National September 11 Memorial & Museum,” n.d.). This section of the exhibit works to situate visitors within the history of both organizations ultimately creating the dichotomy of good versus evil.

The second section, “First Boots on the Ground,” is dedicated to President George W. Bush’s authorization of CIA operatives to launch operations in Afghanistan to combat al-Qaeda and its ally, the ruling Taliban government (“Digital Exhibition: Revealed: The hunt for Bin Laden: National September 11 Memorial & Museum,” n.d.). According to the website,

The U.S. military began operations in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. By early November, approximately 100 CIA officers and 300 U.S. Special Forces were on the ground. International partners also provided troops. By December 2001, intelligence and military forces had tracked Osama bin Laden to the Tora Bora cave complex in Afghanistan’s Spin Ghar mountain range. During a weeks-long battle with al-Qaeda, bin Laden escaped. (“Digital Exhibition: Revealed: The hunt for Bin Laden: National September 11 Memorial & Museum,” n.d.)

This section of the space functions to portray the American government as avenging heroes fighting for the very fabric of the American dream, who are against their antithesis, the overwhelming evil of al-Qaeda and bin Laden who ultimately escaped “judgment” day.

The third section, “Forging A New Strategy,” focuses less on bin Laden and more on the tracking of al-Qaeda. According to the website,

More intelligence and better integration were key to fighting al-Qaeda. Intelligence and law enforcement officers now deployed alongside troops overseas to help plan special operations. Raids increased in frequency and importance. Materials recovered from these missions, along with aerial imagery, information from detainee interrogations as well as local allies, and other sources, produced a flood of intelligence, all of which needed to be shared and analyzed rapidly. When a lead to bin Laden’s location finally emerged in 2010, the U.S. applied a decade of knowledge and experience against the ultimate high-value target. (“Digital Exhibition: Revealed: The hunt for Bin Laden: National September 11 Memorial & Museum,” n.d.)

The space utilizes this section to highlight the work done by the government to combat organizations like al-Qaeda, portraying the diligence of American troops and the progress technology made towards fighting this foreign threat. This invites visitors to view government officials and their increased surveillance with a reverent eye as they are working to combat the “evil” other from which they are being pushed to distance themselves.

“Following A Lead” and “The Debate, The Plan, The Raid,” the fourth and fifth sections of the exhibit are dedicated to the lead on the probable location of Osama bin Ladin and the process of government officials confirming the lead and planning and executing the raid.

According to the website,

... a special operations raid emerged as the best opportunity to confirm Osama bin Laden’s presence at the compound. President Obama ordered planning for the raid while continuing to evaluate the risks with his team. After asking his advisers for input, he approved U.S. Naval Special Warfare Development Group (DEVGRU), also known as SEAL Team Six, to carry out the operation. The SEALs prepared for their mission by conducting rehearsals at replica compounds built in Nevada and North Carolina. President Obama formally authorized the raid, which occurred on May 1, 2011 (Pakistan Standard Time). (“Digital Exhibition: Revealed: The hunt for Bin Laden: National September 11 Memorial & Museum,” n.d.)

This portion of the space functions as a resolution towards “today’s” evil. Visitors are invited to identify with the heroic Americans who eradicated the foreign evil further strengthening the division. However, the exhibit does not end with the resolution. Its last section is dedicated to the unforeseen future threats that have yet to come.

“A Story With No End,” is the sixth and final portion of this exhibition. The website states that this section focuses on the lack of a true resolution.

The death of bin Laden offers no tidy conclusion to the story of al-Qaeda or of terrorism generally. His successors and others remain faithful to his vision of a religious war. Al-Qaeda is active and continues to plan attacks, while affiliated organizations and radicalized individuals plot their own strikes. Bin Laden’s fanatical beliefs did not die with him. Until people are no longer willing to kill or die for these ideas, the threat will persist. Even so, a determined network of intelligence, military, and law enforcement officers across the globe, well-practiced in their methods, works tirelessly to counter the terrorist threat. (“Digital Exhibition: Revealed: The hunt for Bin Laden: National September 11 Memorial & Museum,” n.d.)

Despite the official expulsion of the “evil” other, this space invites visitors to keep hold of their anxieties surrounding foreign terrorism. However, now they have a hero to identify with in the form of the idealized American citizen who “works tirelessly” to keep Americans safe.

This chronological exhibit allows visitors to simulate the decade devoted to capturing bin Laden, for a moment stepping into the shoes of soldiers and government officials. Sodaro (2018) shares that this exhibit glosses over the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq sharing how if they were discussed it was:

...in the context of the “Global War on Terror” as a justified response to the attacks and with a focus on celebrating the heroism of American troops. The museum’s discussion of the US’s use of torture is limited to the inclusion of “enhanced interrogation” in a list of



words related to big questions accompanying 9/11 and, similarly, the PATRIOT Act is briefly described in neutral terms. (pp. 183-184)

This portion of the exhibit functions to justify the policies and actions enacted by the government (Sodaro, 2018, p. 184). Beyond the chronological depiction of history, the material artifacts and audio recordings of military members, law enforcement, and intelligence officers within the space further invite visitors to identify with these idealized Americans by creating a tangible tie between themselves and these “larger than life” heroes. Examples of these material artifacts include the detailed model of bin Laden’s compound used in the planning of the raid (Figure 10.) and an Operation Neptune Spear challenge coin gifted to the museum by C.I.A officer “Maya” who positively identified the body of bin Laden (Challenge Coin, n.d.). The model allows visitors to visualize the planning portion of the hunt through the perspective of the President and high-ranked officials. This invites visitors to become one with those involved in the planning process, thus leading visitors to identify with these idealized Americans. The challenge coin commemorates the operation that led to the death of bin Laden.

One side of the coin marks the U.S. date on which the operation occurred: May 1, 2011. The other side shows a red “X” mark. After 9/11, President George W. Bush kept a list in his desk of key al-Qaeda operatives still at large. Whenever one was exposed, arrested, or killed, he would make a red X mark through the assailant’s name. Osama bin Laden’s name was at the top of the list. (Challenge Coin, n.d.)

This coin symbolizes the fall of one of many threats to the United States and invites visitors to put their faith in these “heroes” who continue this fight to keep them safe further strengthening their reverent view of Americans. This coin symbolizes the fall of one of many threats to the United States and invites visitors to put their faith in these “heroes” who continue this fight to keep them safe further strengthening their reverent view of Americans.



Figure 10. Model

## Critical Reflections

The material nature of this museum and memorial is incredibly unique and moving. The combination of hearing victims' last words shown through voicemails and remnants of the colossal trauma people faced, are perfect reflections of how the material nature of sites of public memory can move beyond words, something that is exceedingly important when the tragedy itself is too difficult to explain. The 9/11 Museum and Memorial is a prime example of how to rebuild and reestablish morale in the face of loss, trauma, and hardship. This museum invites visitors to gain a deeper sense of patriotism by highlighting the nature of survival. Researching this specific text can inform scholars on both human nature after massive tragedy, as well as how institutions react to disaster. However, this text also highlights the effects of establishing an "us"

versus them mentality that manifests as Americans versus everyone else. This mentality leads to negative perceptions of any individual who does not fit within the American mold which has detrimental effects on the future. After all, understanding public memory helps individuals understand the collective, which in turn can shape the future.

## IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The preservation and commemoration of horrific acts of terrorism is imperative, and the process of understanding sites that engage in this is equally important. As the preceding analytical chapters highlight, the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum and the 9/11 Museum both commemorate horrific acts of terrorism by constructing an idealized heroic citizen for museum patrons to identify with in order to cope with the natural anxieties surrounding terrorism. Burke (1969) tells us that identification is compensatory to division and these museums work to create an “evil” other in relation to the idealized citizen to cast out, to further support the security visitors feel in relation to the identification. These labels are created through the intense recreation of trauma through these spaces’ material and symbolic features that viscerally push visitors to experience what the attacks might have felt like. This trauma, in turn, invites visitors to view the survivors and first responders through a reverent lens, thus urging identification.

As the extant literature suggests, places of public memory respond to present-day anxieties all while functioning as a tie to both the past and the future. These museums function to accomplish a wide array of tasks. First, they work to curb the present-day anxieties US Americans have surrounding both domestic and foreign acts of terrorism. Second, they work to preserve the memory and history surrounding these events by functioning as something citizens can figuratively hold on to, all while allowing them to gain a sense of belonging through the communal aspects of these spaces.

In addition, public memory is animated by affect, which is apparent through the material features of these spaces that move visitors at a bodily level. It is the material features of both

spaces that evoke simulated trauma that, in turn, invites identification and division and ultimately shapes the ideal Oklahoma Citizen or American. Without the affectively moving sections of these spaces, the museum experience would not be nearly as impactful or have as lasting consequences.

The Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum and the 9/11 Museum function in a very similar capacity in response to terrorism. They both utilize the affect of trauma to urge visitors to identify with an idealized figure who is a larger-than-life representation of a hero. When discussing these differences, I first outline the aesthetic similarities and difference of these spaces, and then I move on to the thematic similarities and differences.

This affect of trauma is caused by the same features found in both museums. Each space utilizes audio testimonies from victims, material remnants of trauma, and implacedness to craft this affect. The victim's testimonies give a voice to victims, allowing visitors to see a more humanized account of the events that transpired. The material remnants of trauma, such as artifacts and rubble, shape visitors' perceptions of the events, urging them to see the devastation of the attacks. Lastly, each of these spaces is found in the same location where the attack took place, strengthening the simulated experience of being there. These commemorative spaces and those like it use these features to place the individuals being remembered in a reverential spotlight. This simulated trauma, found in both spaces, works to honor the victims by allowing visitors to experience their stories, and the commemoration process, in turn, creates an idealized figure for visitors to aspire to emulate. This idealized figure is crafted as a figurative Band-Aid for anxieties brought on by fear.

Despite the aesthetic similarities found within both of these spaces, there are many features that diverge. First, the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum functions as a

more enclosed space with strict boundaries. In contrast, the 9/11 Museum functions in a more fluid manner with intangible boundaries. This difference is caused by the context in which visitors come to these spaces. The Oklahoma City bombing is not as familiar of an attack, therefore the museum needs to start from the ground up in the process of their commemoration. This is vastly different than the context in which visitors come to see the 9/11 Museum. This event is so ingrained in American history, and arguably world history, that it is almost impossible for a visitor to not have some form of prior knowledge of this attack. Therefore, the space can be more fluid when retelling this historical moment. These differences show how context deeply affects the way spaces are designed.

The other major difference between these two spaces is in relation to their experiential landscapes. Although both sites utilize the actual site of the attacks, which allow visitors to simulate the trauma, Oklahoma City as a landscape is not nearly as important of the museum experience as New York City is for the 9/11 Museum. The Twin Towers were such a prominent feature of the New York City skyline that their absence itself evokes trauma. Visitors have seen and interacted with this skyline through television and films without even having to leave their homes. When visiting this site, the sheer absence of the enormous iconic buildings is deeply traumatizing, and visitors cannot interact with the rest of the museum without feeling the weight of this absence. Additionally, the memorial functions to highlight the gaping scars left in the landscape of New York City, which just furthers the weight of absence. Although remnants of the blast in Oklahoma City play a large role in how visitors experience the museum, it is functioning at a much smaller level. In regard to the 9/11 Museum, visitors cannot separate the traumatic absence of the towers, and the embodied experience of being in New York City, from their experience of the museum.

Next, there are some major thematic differences found within these sites in relation to the process of identification and division. Through this identification process, these commemorative spaces inherently invite visitors to divide from an “evil” other who represents an overwhelming threat. Each museum has a portion of its space dedicated to enacting justice against this “evil,” thus, leading to the process of casting them out to restore order. Both spaces invite and advocate for division, however, the process of defining the “other” from which visitors are to divide is inherently different and consequential. When the threat is domestic, as seen with the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, the “other” is one or two individuals whose own personal failings went against the rules and norms citizens agreed on as Americans. The national identity with which visitors are invited to identify is grounded in community, traditions, and neighborliness.

In contrast, when the threat is foreign, as seen in the 9/11 Museum, the “other” is seen as an entire ethnic group. The act of naming the “other” in this way affirms the identification around whiteness and Christianity. Not that the idealized Oklahoma Citizen is raceless, but it is functioning at a different level. There is an appeal to national character and its whiteness and the Christian religion that inherently classifies people who fit within that mold as somehow better and more *ideal*. Where the domestic “other” perpetrated an attack on human decency, the foreign “other” enacted an attack on the American way of life. The Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum invites visitors to cast out the “evil” other of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols and to go back to normal as if there were no more threats, a process that is problematic within itself as seen through the increasing numbers of domestic terrorist attacks happening almost daily. In contrast, the 9/11 Museum’s creation of the dichotomy of Americans versus everyone

else, paired with the general rhetoric surrounding the attacks, has created a rise in the mistreatment and threats towards brown bodies.

The level of influence museums have on citizens makes their messaging incredibly important. They may seem harmless sites that simply retell history, but their larger impact has greater significance. Are these institutions covering up larger systemic problems? Are they causing harm to innocent human beings? Going forward, researchers need to investigate these questions because these institutions greatly influence how citizens think about terrorism, which subsequently influences public policy on immigration, security, and a host of other issues. In the future, research conducted in relation to acts of terrorism needs to be of the utmost importance. These issues are not going away by simply casting out one perpetrator of an attack; the issues are much more ingrained in our culture. In 2021, there was the attack on the US Capitol, an Atlanta spa, and a Boulder grocery store. It is clear that the problem of domestic terrorism did not go away when Timothy McVeigh was put to death. It is imperative scholars research the rhetoric surrounding acts of terrorism to combat larger issues. As for the issues surrounding the problematic push for division from an entire ethnic group, the 9/11 Museum highlight the dangers of this form of rhetoric. Another instance of this problematic division is evident in the mistreatment of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. The language used in relation to AAPI citizens, especially in relation to the Coronavirus, has labeled them as “other,” leading “true” Americans to cast them out. In turn, there have been increased levels of violence toward this ethnic group as shown in the Atlanta spa shooting. It is apparent through these occurrences that rhetoric is incredibly influential and can cause lasting damage. Therefore, it is crucial that sites of public memory are as ethical as possible and do not further the problem.



Through critical research, like I have outlined in previous chapters, these issues can be brought to light.

In addition, not only does this research shed light on the commemoration of acts of terrorism, it also informs research on identification and division. Burke's (1969) concept of identification is largely focused on the symbolic aspects of a text. However, this study shows the importance of materiality in the process of identification. The affective properties of a text have just as much or if not more effect on the process of identifying with one another. Eliciting visceral reactions like trauma allow individuals to form bonds that are not easily ignored. So much so, that these two spaces so deeply evoke the affect of trauma for their visitors that the process of self-reflection and growth is stunted. This reaction is caused by the material features of these spaces; therefore, it is imperative that when scholars utilize identification and division within their research, they attend to both its symbolic *and* material features.

Lastly, despite the importance of this research, in light of Coronavirus, scholars are needing to be more creative with their methodology. Overall, this work is incredibly important to understanding acts of terrorism but how research is ultimately conducted is changing and scholars have to adapt with these barriers. Due to the travel constraints, attending to the embodied nature of these sites is challenging. Rather than not researching these sites at all, scholars need to adapt with the shifting times. Even when society returns to normal, the Coronavirus showed us that things are not permanent. They are constantly changing and evolving, like we have seen before the virus with virtual museum spaces, and researcher's methodology needs to adapt to these changes. As the conditions of society change, so does their modes of communication. And to ignore these changes would stunt scholarly growth.

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