Remembering 9/11: 5 Years Later

Contributed by Lorenzo Vicini
Last Updated Monday, 09 October 2006

It was the event that defined our generation. A half decade ago, most Americans woke up to just another day while most of us were getting ready for another day at high school. The morning papers were covering the latest news on the Chandra Levy case. Just how innocent was Gary Condit? If those names don't ring a bell, you're not at fault – the Chandra Levy case would very rapidly disappear from headlines all over the world. The world abruptly changed on September 11th, 2001. What we saw that morning was unlike anything Americans had ever seen before. It hit close to home – much closer than the attack on Pearl Harbor did. We were caught off guard.

As Americans, we had always felt a sort of invincibility towards the rest of the world. Yet, the terrorist attacks on American soil shattered that nonexistent cloak of invincibility and left us as a nation in utter shock and disbelief.

As a senior in high school, I could have never imagined that an event such as this would take place in my lifetime. After all, it was very easy to read about the defining moments of past generations and the struggles they faced while always thinking in the back of my mind that I was fortunate to live in the period of "Pax Americana". Minor conflicts such as the First Gulf War or Desert Storm (as I remember it) were just that – minor ones. Yet, September 11th became the next chapter in our history books. What was previously the post-Cold War Era became the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 periods.

Now, the five-year anniversary is upon us. A lot of questions have been answered and even more still remain. How far have we come since that fateful day? More importantly, what do we remember about the events that took place? I'm sure many of us could pinpoint the exact time and location of where we were when we first heard the news. Yet, in the midst of all this, have we still forgotten?

While many would scoff at the idea of us already forgetting about 9/11, I caution you to stop and think about that for a second. I know that we recognize the date and even might take a moment of silence, but I believe that most of us have let the poignant images and actions of that day fade from our memories. Sure, we all remember the sight of the World Trade Center towers collapsing to the ground. Some of us even can vividly recall the plane that struck the Pentagon and of course the heroics that thwarted the final plane from reaching its destination by crashing in Pennsylvania.

But what has September 11th become other than a date frequently mentioned in passing? I remember thinking after the first anniversary had passed how long it would take before 9/11 loses the impact it had that first year. Instead of a period of reflection, September 11th has become a sickening launching pad from politicians and people on both sides of the aisle. It is all too easy for one of these politicians (Democrats and Republicans alike) to try and use the date for their benefit. The media can also be blamed for its grouping of 9/11 with other present events. You can rarely read an article now about 9/11 that does not reference another conflict that is going on right now. September 11th was its own event – it should be mentioned that way.

Now there are films out covering 9/11. It was only a matter a time. After all, only a month or so afterwards, the entertainment industry was salivating over the idea of producing such a story and placing it on the big screen. Who would get the rights to the story and who would be the first to go ahead with its development? Obviously, one year was too quick to put something out. Yet, here we stand five years later and several movies have already covered the tragic events. I should clarify that I am not stating that any sort of movie or film depicting 9/11 is wrong. Rather, the motives behind the development of such a movie are questionable. One can claim that these are for the sake of those who gave their lives on that day – but is that the truth? Or does that person see a paycheck? After all, such a story would quickly bring in money. The point is this: We should be remembering September 11th for what happened. The lives lost in New York, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania should never be forgotten. What we saw was a nation whose qualities, values and character – which had always been talked about in the past (namely, the World Wars) – come to fruition on that day and the weeks and months following. America and the rest of the world saw our resolve and our strength in the midst of fear and uncertainty. We had done it in the past and we did it again. The unprecedented levels of unity in our nation were incredible and it is sad that it took a tragic event to bring us together. Yet, five years later, we are perhaps more divided than ever. This September 11th, take a step back and reflect on the day that defined our generation. Are we taking those lives that were lost for granted? Remember them – we owe them that much at the very least.