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In Another Sesquicentennial

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In Another Sesquicentennial

Abstract

On Tuesday, Jake wrote asking who controls the memory of 9/11. The ownership of memory is such an interesting thing. This tenth anniversary was an interesting event, fraught with conflicted memory and different voices. It was intriguing to watch all of the slight conflicts which emerged last week leading up to the ceremonies on Sunday morning. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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Comments

Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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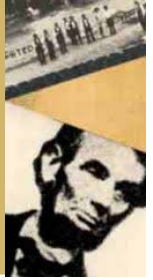
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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

www.civilwarconnect.com



THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2011

In Another Sesquicentennial

On Tuesday, [Jake wrote](#) asking who controls the memory of 9/11. The ownership of memory is such an interesting thing. This tenth anniversary was an interesting event, fraught with conflicted memory and different voices. It was intriguing to watch all of the slight conflicts which emerged last week leading up to the ceremonies on Sunday morning.

It has also been interesting to see the Civil War analogies to which a few folks, particularly [John Hennessy](#) and [Kevin Levin](#), have pointed, viewing Civil War memory as an interesting case study of how 9/11 might be commemorated and memorialized in coming decades and centuries.

Coincidentally, I have been picking away for a few weeks now on a small thought experiment, inspired by the hot morning I spent at Manassas in July. What could the sesquicentennial of an event like 9/11, an event we have collectively sworn to "never forget," look like? Envision it as a simple piece of science fiction, like reaching forward through a hole in time 150 years and plucking out a news story on the anniversary commemoration of the attack on the Pentagon. And like all Science Fiction, it is more about the events of the present than the events of the future.

As Rod Serling, master of Science Fiction said in his introduction to the *Twilight Zone* episode "In Praise of Pip":

"Submitted for your approval..."

"The Defining Moment of Modern America"

Attack Anniversary Commemorations Draw Modest Crowds

Thomas Farquard for the Washington Post, Sunday, September 12, 2151

A crowd of about 650 people gathered at the west wall of the old Pentagon on Saturday morning to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the attack of September 11th, 2001. Dignitaries from District government, as well as the Commonwealth of Virginia were present.

"The men and women who fought the fires in these old walls on that day in September were brave, honest and hard working Americans," Virginia Governor Chauncey Williamson told the crowd. The Pentagon was in Virginia in 2001 when the attacks took place. The District of Columbia Statehood Act of 2076 transferred the land back to District control.

"The attack that happened here sent a shock wave through the world," the Governor remarked, "For two

decades, wars were fought over the question of what our nation's role in the world should be." Governor Chauncey said the unity seen in the years after the attack was a "blessing born from the heart of a tragedy."

District of Columbia Governor Samuel Williams, whose great-great grandfather was mayor of the city when the attacks took place in 2001, said that, "the lessons of so long ago are still relevant today." Quoting President Malia Obama, Williams reminded the crowd that, "America is fundamentally a good nation, with good intentions, good people and good morals. But we drift outside of our boundaries sometimes and need to stop to re investigate who we are."

Carter Smithson said he came to the Pentagon to honor his ancestor who died when the plane hit the building in 2001. Smithson, a clerk at the State Department, was dressed in the uniform of a 20th century army officer. "I represent my great-great-great grandfather today. These are the same types of clothes he wore when he died that day."

Smithson saw the small crowd as discouraging. "I wish more people had come out to commemorate both the awful tragedy and the unity that came out of it." Smithson sees America as a "stronger nation, more united" in the wake of 9/11.

On the opposite side of the park, Gerald Willson talked to the public about those who boarded the planes and fought for their freedom. "They were protecting their way of life," Willson told the crowd. "They were fighting for a cause they thought just."

Willson, an investment banker from Rockville, MD wore a headscarf and carried the chosen tool of the Islamic fighters on board the aeroplanes, a small knife called a "box cutter."

"I do this to make sure that the story gets told," Willson said. "Liberal historians want to focus so much on the causes of the war. They say these men were fighting to destroy America." But Willson feels the men were fighting, "in a revolution to ensure that their nations weren't tampered with." Willson said we need to, "remember the bravery of the people who fought on both sides on nine-eleven."

Anne Gerald, a systems analyst from Arlington saw the event differently. "Today is about the Americans who died here," she commented. "The men on the planes were not freedom fighters like some want to portray them, but simple murderers."

The park along the west wall of the Old Pentagon Commercial Park is open daily, sunrise to sunset and accessible from Pentagon Metro station.