Oral History and 9/11

Objectives:

You will:
1. Explore the human dimension of the September 11 attacks by conducting an interview.
2. Consider the benefits and limitations of using oral history to learn about the past.
3. Assess your own views on September 11.

Discussion Question:
1. What is oral history? Why is it important? What can we learn about a moment in history by asking questions of people who lived through it?
2. What do you know about the attacks of September 11, 2001? What happened?
3. Why are the attacks significant? How did people around the world react to the attacks?
4. What might you learn from people who remember the attacks? For example, what different information could you learn about September 11 from: a firefighter who worked at Ground Zero in the days and weeks after the attacks? The husband of a person who lost their life in the attacks? An airline security official who was working at the time of the attacks? A security advisor to President George W. Bush? A teacher in the Middle East who watched the attacks on TV? A police officer in Scranton, PA?

Preparing for an Interview—you will be interviewing someone you know about September 11. You will use “Remembering September 11.” Take a few minutes to think about whom you would like to interview. Think about the kind of information you could learn from the experiences and views of the person you’re interviewing. You are to brainstorm three additional questions you want to ask, and write these questions on the handout.

POST-INTERVIEW DAY – In groups you will analyze the “Considering Oral Histories” handout. You are to share with the group what you learned from the interview and what your interviewee’s experiences and memories of 9/11 were. You are to record your answers on the handout.

We will then discuss the interviews as a class. Discussion questions to guide us:

1. Did the interview subjects share any common memories, experiences, or attitudes?
2. How did people’s experiences differ?
3. Did you learn anything new about 9/11 from conducting these interviews?
4. Ten years ago, 9/11 was a highly emotional topic for people across the country. Do you think that’s still true today?
5. Do you think that the fear of terrorism that emerged in the US after 9/11 shaped public opinion and policy making at the time (e.g. the wars in Iraq [2003–present] and Afghanistan [2001–present]? If so, how? If not, why not? Does the fear still exist today?
6. Do you think that conducting interviews about individual’s experiences is a valuable way to learn about history? What are the benefits of oral history? What are the limitations?
7. REFLECTION:
   a. do you have any memories of the attacks?
   b. Have your attitudes toward the attacks changed over time?
   c. Did the interview change your outlook about the attacks?
Remembering September 11

Instructions: In addition to the thousands of individuals who lost their lives on September 11, countless people from the United States and around the world were deeply affected by the attacks. Their experiences are a part of the history of September 11. To gain a deeper understanding of September 11, you will be asked to interview someone who vividly remembers this event. The subject of your interview could be an older sibling, relative, or family friend.

Since September 11 is a painful and emotional memory for many people, sensitivity and respect on your part are essential. Try not to interrupt as people tell their stories. You may find it helpful to make an audio or video recording of your interview. In the course of the interview, you should seek answers to the questions below. Be prepared to discuss the results of your interview in class.

1. Name of interviewee:

2. What were you doing on September 11, 2001? How did you find out about the attacks?

3. What was your immediate reaction to the attacks? What memories are most vivid?

4. What do you remember about the response of people in the United States? The international community? The U.S. government?

5. Do you consider September 11 to be a pivotal event in your life? In the history of the United States? In world history? Did September 11 change things? (For example, your personal life? Your views of the United States and the world?)

6. What did you think about terrorism before the attacks? Did the attacks change your view on terrorism? If so, how? Do you feel the same way today?

7. Do you think that September 11 offers any lessons for people in the United States?

Additional Questions:
1.

2.

3.