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Storied Children: Exploring the Child in 9/11 Narratives

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies

by

Jessica Marie Martinez-Tebbel

2017
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Storied Children: Exploring the Child in 9/11 Narratives

by

Jessica Marie Martinez-Tebbel

Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Juliet A. Williams, Chair

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, are narrated as a critical moment in United States history. This dissertation is about that narration—the story of 9/11, and the affective nationalisms that accompany that story, as it is told to, through, and around the figure of the child. With this research, I examine the figure of the child. I consider the child as an icon within 9/11 narratives, an audience for a story of national trauma, and a creator and mobilizer of cultural production and its corollary affective nationalism. I examine what role the figure of the child plays in the production of a national imaginary organized around a shared condition of grief, loss, and terror, or, alternatively, of hope and futurity. I ask what a critical examination of the figure of the child within 9/11 discourses reveals about the gendered, raced, and classed production of American nationalist sentiment.
The dissertation of Jessica Marie Martinez-Tebbel is approved.

Purnima Manekar
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2017
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The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, are narrated as a critical moment in United States history. In the years that have passed, the event has been narrativized and memorialized in innumerable ways. The story has been told in numbers, centering the nearly three thousand people killed in the event, or the even greater death toll of the wars that emerged from the reactive conservative, militaristic agenda of the Bush administration. It has been captured in images—live footage of the second plane hitting the World Trade Center as smoke billowed from the North Tower; stirring photographs of the Tribute in Light that has lit the New York skyline each year on the anniversary of 9/11 with the spectral presence of the fallen towers. In a captivating way, 9/11 has been chronicled through embodied iconography, legible figures of American woundedness and perseverance moving through its retellings: the heroic firemen, police officers, and rescue workers; the dead, their bodies falling from the sky or disappeared into rubble, their faces taped to walls collaged with the missing; the survivors, emerging from ash, hunched, stumbling, carrying each other; and, notable for my work, grief stricken widows and their frightened, fatherless children.

The story of 9/11 has been written and spoken in myriad ways for diverse audiences. In this research, I examine the figure of the child in 9/11 narratives. I consider the child in its many roles: as an icon within 9/11 narratives, an audience for a story of national trauma, and a creator and mobilizer of cultural production and its corollary affective nationalism. What does a critical examination of the figure of the child within 9/11 discourses reveal about the gendered, raced, and classed production of American nationalist sentiment in the contemporary moment?
This research is rooted in feminist and cultural studies of nationalist narratives and attachments. My analysis is organized around three critical focal points. I begin with a discussion of the ways “the children of 9/11” and “9/11 babies” are represented in media discourses and popular culture, particularly in profiles published at the time of the tenth anniversary of the attacks. I then explore children’s picture books about 9/11, and the lessons they hold about iconographies of childhood and pedagogies of nationalism. Finally, I examine the affective resonance of children’s cultural production as it is circulated at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, focusing on an exhibition of children’s artwork. Through these analyses the child is brought to the fore, rendering visible how both the literal and figurative child are mobilized in the construction of national feelings.

Theoretical Foundations: Affective Communities

This dissertation interrogates the production of affective nationalism. In this section, I explore the theoretical foundations of this project by bringing affect studies into conversation with more traditional accounts of nationalist feeling and sentiment. Because my project is considering affective nationalisms as they are produced through the discursive representation and circulation of the figure of the child, I am particularly interested in affective economies, the labor of representation, and the ways in which these forces can work to bind individuals together, or to alienate them. The physical and ideological communities that emerge from these affective economies are integral to this project.

Raymond Williams theorized structures of feeling as a way to excavate the “affective elements of consciousness and relationships.” Building upon Williams’ insight, feminist and
queer studies scholars have taken up affect studies to explore the political and analytic consequences of shared feelings and experiences. Some, including Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant, have used this framework to explore the formulation of community and isolation. These affective experiences, I contend, are critical to the structure of nationalisms.

Benedict Anderson proposes that the nation is “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”3 Anderson underscores the ways in which the nation is a formation cohered through a sense of community derived through exclusivity and a narrative of fraternity. He writes, “The nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”4 This imagining and community making, which Ahmed and Berlant also theorize, clearly demonstrates the affective dimension of nationalism.

Thinking through affective national communities requires a consideration of the movement of emotions and bodies within affective economies. In her foundational framing of affect, Sarah Ahmed writes, “So rather than asking ‘What are emotions?’, I will ask ‘What do emotions do?’ In asking this question, I will not offer a singular theory of emotion, or one account of the work that emotions do. Rather, I will track how emotions circulate between bodies, examining how they ‘stick’ as well as move.”5 Ahmed’s approach elucidates both corporeality and the labor of affect. The notion of the affective economy, however, makes clear that affects do what they do—they circulate and stick—beyond the limits of bodies. Ahmed notes that language and objects circulate as well, saturated with value. She observes, “Rather, I am tracking how words for feeling, and objects of feeling, circulate and generate effects: how they move, stick, and slide. We move, stick and slide with them.”6 Discussing both bodily and
object economies of affect, Ahmed sets the stage for discussions of community and isolation, as well as representation, affective labor, and emotional economies.

Affects are not solitary experiences; rather, they involve the mediation of social, cultural, and political spaces and energies. As such, affect also engages and activates feelings of community and, at times, isolation. According to Teresa Brennan, social kinship is evidenced by both successful and attempted restriction of negative affects. These affective interventions recall Benedict Anderson’s account of citizens imagining themselves in communion with a broader national community, an important aspect, whether implicitly or explicitly, of the texts I explore in this project. Brennan argues that we attribute this desire to a socially constructed kindness, but that there is in fact something beyond and underneath its force that surpasses the notion of kindness. She writes that a desire to staunch negative affect is a willful selflessness that involves “seeing the other in a good life, giving them the good image, streaming one’s full attentive energy toward another and another’s concerns, rather than one’s own.”7 Brennan’s theorization draws a distinction between true benevolent kindness, which she marks as love, and behavioral constraint governed by social codes.

It is certainly true that an authentic desire to intervene into the affective experience of others, blocking, absorbing, or limiting their exposure to negative affect reveals a deep sense of communal affective attachment, which could be conceptualized as love. But it is also true that the simple withholding of negative affect in the name of cultural normativity also reveals community. Whether we are bound by shared love and respect, or decency and obligation, an affective community is created. And importantly, Brennan’s suggestion that affective community
involves seeing each other in “a good life” elicits analytic connections to Berlant’s discussion of communal optimism.

Likewise, we might be seen as bound together in affective community by our optimistic attachments. In her recent book, *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant considers the ways in which all affective attachments are imbued with optimism for a shared experience. When we want something, what we really want is the fantasy of what that object would mean in our life—we desire promises and possibility. In conversation with this text, we might consider a shared sense of optimism as an impetus for a kind of affective community, centered on the promise of a good life, or happiness. There is a sense of community in striving toward this promise. That optimism, she argues, can be characterized as “cruel” under a variety of circumstances. According to Berlant, a cruel optimism occurs when we attach to an object (or person, or scene) that is impossible or toxic. As an analytic, Berlant offers that cruel optimism is “an incitement to inhabit and to track the affective attachment to what we call ‘the good life,’ which is for so many a bad life that wears out the subjects who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it.” Berlant specifies that this is not merely a matter of psychological trauma; rather it is the daily condition of laboring toward the production and reproduction of an alleged good life.

Arguing that the normal conditions of life are of “the attrition or wearing out of the subject,” Berlant notes that there are “specific implications for thinking about the ordinariness of suffering, the violence of normativity, and the ‘technologies of patience’ that enable a concept of the *later* to suspend questions about the *now*.” Success and happiness are constructed as imminent, emerging. Berlant writes we are bound to the idea of the good life so thoroughly and
viscerally, that we “can almost remember being alive in it.”¹¹ This is the strength of the poetics and temporal pull of the affective experience of cruel optimism.

I am particularly interested in the ways in which the circulation of affect can foster a sense of isolation. Berlant is clear that her theoretical perspective embraces the notion of shared affective experience. And yet, the social contact zone of affective experience clearly does not preclude the feeling of solitude or loneliness. In discussing homosexuality, Berlant invokes the notion of “the labor of social mourning.” She argues that this phrase is “about what must be remain veiled in order that a scene of social belonging may still be endured.”¹² Berlant describes this as a scene in which someone is actually “ejected” for the purposes of maintaining a social order. Here, the maintenance of a community necessarily entails that some are rendered illegible or made invisible. The creation of affective community compels isolation and exclusion.

Often, a sense of isolation derives from the space between an anticipated feeling and our actual lived experience. Sara Ahmed suggests that happiness circulates, in part, in its attribution to certain objects. We feel alienated, she theorizes, when these objects fail to bring us the happiness they promised. Ahmed writes, “When we feel pleasure from such objects, we are aligned; we are facing the right way. We become alienated—out of line with the affective community—when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good.”¹³ We may attempt to recuperate the value of happiness via correction, Ahmed explains. But if we fail, the self-doubt that emerges increases the resultant isolation. Ahmed calls this alienated subject an “affect alien,” and argues that their isolation is compounded by the ways in which they disrupt affective narratives, disturbing not just their own experience, but also the lives of others and the very construction of cohesive, binding ideologies.¹⁴
The power of affect to cohere binding narratives or to challenge them is important, particularly in conversation with affective nationalisms that value the illusion of bodily and emotional autonomy. Affect is a bodily experience; it engages the body in its entirety. It is social and emotional, physical and physiological. The experience of affect is an experience of acting and being acted upon. Sometimes it is passive or idle. Sometimes it is laborious. In opening her text, Teresa Brennan aptly inquires, “Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and ‘felt the atmosphere?’” She recalls this common experience, and argues that it deserves analytic attention. The rise and centering of the neoliberal subject, Brennan argues, has resulted in the impulse to contain people’s energies within their skin, to argue that they go no further.

Brennan argues that affect is not just shared, but transmitted. She is trying to “capture a process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect.” People interact with their environments and those that surround them, and with consequence. Ahmed and Brennan both use the term impression. For Ahmed, this is a highly ephemeral process—we press upon our environments, they leave impressions on our skin. Because for Brennan affects are judgments, her use of the term is more face value: Impressions are our judgments of the affective environment we encounter. Brennan argues that it is equally significant that affects have “an energetic dimension,” by which she means that they have the capacity to “enhance or deplete.”

Here, Brennan’s analysis becomes particularly provocative. She argues that the transmission of affect results in depletion “when one carries the affective burden of another.” In Brennan’s analysis, this usually involves the atmospheric register with which she opened her text. While I agree with the significance of this social, spacial, temporal manifestation of
affective community, I suggest that that affective burden extends beyond these parameters of interaction, into a labor of representation.

Groups of people, I argue, come to embody the prospect or fear of an affective value, and this translates into a kind of labor. And, if affect itself is both psychic and bodily, as Brennan suggests, this labor is similarly dualistic, or, perhaps, calls into question the boundaries between the two. For example, the specter and embodiment of early death results in the multi-faceted affective labor of certain bodies—notably, the working class, women, people of color, and, of course and especially, the overlaps of these non-unique identity groupings. In considering the obesity epidemic and poverty, Berlant asks, “What does it mean to consider the ethics of longevity when, in an unequal health and labor system, the poor and less poor are less likely to live long enough to enjoy the good life whose promise is a fantasy bribe that justifies so much exploitation?” What this means, for my analytic purposes, is that these bodies perform affective labor in duplicate or triplicate. They labor toward the ever-waning good life, and they labor in symbolic reproduction. Berlant too recognizes this “symbolic negativity.” Their images are circulated in headlines and headspaces as representations of (sometimes failed or failing) hope and futurity, as gluttony and laziness, as cautionary tales. And, I contend, in the sociality of affective contact zones, they feel the weight of that labor.

The ways in which moods and atmospheres can be generative may speak to another element of affective labor. Ahmed details the ways in which people can engender affective changes, altering the space they occupy and reorienting the bodies within it toward or away from a given scene or object. She observes that in addition to expressing negative feelings, people can change the tone of a given space, or they can confirm their participation in a shared experience.
Ahmed writes, “Expressing bad feeling can even become habitual in certain times and places, as a way of belonging to an affective community.”22 Positivity is similarly affective and generative. One might endeavor to bring the tone of an event up, or to express their shared enjoyment of a given social encounter.

This generativity, however, can also be compelled by social, political, or cultural observation. In these instances, it clearly indexes an affective labor. Further, the strain of this work may be mapped on certain bodies, in keeping with racial and sexual politics. The “happy family,” for example, in addition to being an affective object that Ahmed notes holds legible promise, is supported by a taskforce of laborers.23 In the privileged heteronormative family, the roles of mother, father, daughter, and son each carry specific responsibilities. These roles extend beyond household and family narrative maintenance (folding laundry, winning football trophies), and into the work of the regeneration of a beloved affective narrative in the public sphere (embodying selflessness, engendering masculinity).

In contrast, the desire to conceptualize affects as contained within individual bodies may also further this analysis. The desire to deny affective generativity and sustain a neoliberal view of the individual, Brennan argues, is also tied to the idea of the self-possessed, meritocratic social citizen. Brennan ties the feeling of affective singularity to social suspicion. She writes, “By encouraging attitudes of suspicion, by (worse) encouraging the idea that a privileged class, sex, race, or caste is free of dissembling, emotionality, or stupidity, one comes to overvalue one’s capacities.”24 These judgments, Brennan argues, can be tied to scapegoating and to social, cultural, and political othering. This kind of scapegoating and othering is evident in post-9/11 national affects, which mapped suspicion and deviance onto certain bodies with an increasing
fervor fueled by nationalist fear and righteousness. Our processes of social detachment can also index our fictive assessment of ourselves as affectively free. Brennan writes, “By examining the affects experienced in judging another, one learns a great deal about how the illusion of self-containment is purchased at the price of dumping negative affects on that other.”

Insofar as this self-conceptualization depends upon the “propelling forward” of affect, it is a labor we are requiring of others.

Finally, it is telling that Ahmed connects the affective experience of alienation directly to labor and capitalism. She discusses Marx’s contention that the laborer is alienated from the product of their work, and the worker as “living capital.” She writes, “Alienation is both an alienation from the products of one’s labor—a kind of self-estrangement—and a feeling-structure, a form of suffering that shapes how the worker inhabits the world.”

This speaks directly to the kind of affective labor I am theorizing. Consider again the example of the worker within the “happy family.” If one of these laborers is an “affect alien,” they will find themselves (like Marx’s laborer) increasingly estranged from the product of their labor and thus increasingly dissatisfied as time passes. Symbolically reproducing a familial narrative as an object of happiness, and continuing to fail in attaching appropriately to this object, a dissatisfied wife and mother, for example, will labor in the creation of both a normative affect and her own unhappiness. This is just one example of the ways in which affect forms an economy. The figure of the child, in this formulation, might play myriad and contradictory roles, for example, as both the product of reproductive national labor and an embodied ideological taskmaster, requiring not just care, but *mothering*, a binding and disciplinary affective formation. Here, the child is the linchpin of the national heterosexual matrix. The mother produces the child, but the child also produces the mother.
Ahmed articulates affective economies, in which certain affects circulate in objects and signs, as accruing affective value.\(^{27}\) In her discussion of hate crimes, she utilizes this concept in order to explore “how the movement between signs of hate affects the bodies of those who become the objects of hatred.”\(^{28}\) Ahmed’s invocation of “living death” in this analysis heightens the stakes of my labor analysis. If the burden of representation translates into the specter of death, the zoetic enactment of death in daily life, surely the result is an undertaking of a weighty representational labor.

Berlant’s focus on the temporality of affective experience reveals a way in which the experience of grief might necessarily entail a yearning for either past or futurity. In her discussion of yearning for intimacy, Berlant describes a yearning for a future promise of closeness, in which a date or friend comes to understand our life experiences. For Berlant, this envisioning creates a future “where living takes place.”\(^{29}\) Utilizing this same framework, we might posit a similar imagining that reconstructs a past intimacy as the site of living, and that locates the real agony of grief in the realization that the future does not hold this scene. In this way, grief creates a feeling of solitude in the present, while constructing a sense of community in both the past and future. Narrating 9/11 as a critical moment, for example, marks it as an interruption of national community that rhetorically creates both a romanticized past that deserves mourning and an idealized future worth fighting for.

While the death of a loved one can make for murky analytic fodder in its rawness, the death of a stranger might make some aspects of affective processes visible. The making of the death of a stranger into an intimate event (a necessity in post-9/11 political discourse) depends upon a coherent affective attachment to the deceased, or rather, the sense that the deceased
shared attachments to the same affective objects. Utilizing discourses of love, Ahmed reasons, the media can translate strangers into people you “could have loved, that you would have an affinity with, as sharing some form of kinship, likeness, or proximity with you.”

This construction of loss depends upon the temporal pull of a past that never was, based upon a conjecture of a fondness that might have been, as correlated with a shared affective connection. Likewise, this affective connection might extend to the family and broader community of the deceased stranger. Recognizing the grief one might feel at the loss of one’s own child, for example, might allow for an affective bond with the parents of any deceased child.

This mourning-making draws into question the distinctions between mourning and melancholia. Ahmed argues that Freud’s early differentiation, as theorized in his iconic “Mourning and Melancholia,” has become more analytically flexible with time. However, there remains a cultural interest in identifying “good and bad” ways of mourning. She writes, “The melancholic may appear as a figure insofar as we recognize the melancholic as the one who ‘holds onto’ an object that has been lost, who does not let go, or get over loss by getting over it.” This figure comes to stand in not just for emotional unhealthiness, but also for an ethical failure to cohere to an affective community standard.

Affective community and isolation, then, can approximate a disciplinary process with regard to mourning. If, as Ahmed theorizes, our affiliation with an affective community is premised upon our shared orientation toward objects, it stands to reason that this applies to lost objects. Ahmed clarifies, “So if an affective community is produced by sharing objects of loss, which means letting objects go in the right way, then the melancholic would be affect aliens in how they love: their love becomes a failure to get over loss, which keeps them facing the wrong
way. The melancholics are thus the ones who must be redirected, or turned around.”32 This reorientation would result in the resolution of affective discord, and the return to community.

The temporality of remembering may also be consequential with regard to normalization or pathologizing of kinds of mourning. Ann Cvetkovich advocates a specific kind of oral history memorialization, which documents anecdotes, as opposed to life narratives or death stories. This commemoration privileges a moment, a space of impact, or an affective memory. Resisting the designation of melancholia, Cvetkovich writes, “Gathering oral history is itself a form of mourning, a practice of revivifying the dead by talking about them and revivifying the moments of intimacy that are gone…because mourning is not punctual and need not come to an end in order to avoid pathology or to overcome trauma, and because the dead stay with us, it is important to keep the historical record open.”33 This kind of memorialization has occurred extensively with regard to 9/11. Stories about babies born to 9/11 widows stand out as activating this kind of revivification, wherein the person mourned is carried into the future through the life of the child.

Distinguishing modes of grief as healthy or unhealthy, normative or pathological, is not the only way in which affective communities govern mourning practices. Ahmed’s focus on emotion models and social bodies is especially pertinent to a discussion of communal grief and the experience and ascertaining of authenticity. Discussing the death of Princess Diana, and the affective response of the community, she writes, “Both the ‘inside out’ model and the ‘outside in’ model assume the objectivity of the very distinction between inside and outside, the individual and the social, and the ‘me’ and the ‘we’. Rather than emotions being understood as coming from within and moving outwards, emotions are assumed to come from without and
move inward. An ‘outside in’ model is also evident in approaches to ‘crowd psychology’, where it is assumed that the crowd has feelings, and that the individual gets drawn into the crowd by feeling the crowd’s feelings as its own.” The ways in which community can involve the compulsion to engage certain modes of social response, Ahmed argues, can come into tension with the desire of a community to police its boundaries by assessing sincerity.

This concern speaks to the ways in which participation in both communal mourning and media frenzy may be compelled in part by the desire to partake of a genuine experience of affective connection. “Feelings become a form of social presence rather than self-presence,” Ahmed maintains. “In my model of sociality of emotions, I suggest that emotions create the very effect of the surface and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside or an outside in the first place.” The analytic weight of outside/inside extends to outsider/insider, and the import becomes clearer still in Ahmed’s discussion of the role of communication and authenticity. She notes, “Shared feelings are at stake, and seem to surround us, like a thickness in the air, or an atmosphere. But these feelings not only heighten tension, they are also in tension. Emotions in their very intensity involve miscommunication, such that even if we feel we have the same feeling, we don’t necessarily have the same relationship to that feeling.” This tension recalls the internal contradictions of assessing affective community, as well as my previous discussion of ascertaining authenticity in emotions.

National Families

The nation is a social construction that has taken many forms. It has been theoretically conceptualized as cohered through borders, bodies, identity formation, and shared ideological
commitments. Feminist and other scholars have theorized that these formations emerge, particularly in times of crisis, not just as political phenomena, but also as disciplinary ideological regimes or “nationalisms,” i.e., forms of ideological commitments.

Responding to a gap produced by androcentric frameworks, feminist scholars have taken up the task of theorizing nationalism as a gendered phenomenon. Anne McClintock succinctly argues that “all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous,” observing that nationalisms bind citizens to structures of power within nations and the technologies with which they are maintained. Feminist interventions have illuminated the ways in which family, as both social formation and a discursive device, has structured conceptualizations of women within nationalist discourses. Whether women are represented as embodying cultural or biological reproduction, or the metaphorical and territorial limits of the nation, family is implicated. Here I consider some key theoretical feminist texts in order to consider the ways in which the figure of the family is central to the production of nationalist affect.

An important contention in the literature is that the family is the space of social indoctrination with regard to succumbing to hierarchical power structures. Patricia Hill Collins writes, “In particular, hierarchies of gender, wealth, age, and sexuality within actual family units correlate with comparable hierarchies in U.S. society. Individuals typically learn their assigned place in hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and social class in their families of origin. At the same time, they learn to view such hierarchies as natural social arrangements, as compared to socially constructed ones. Hierarchy in this sense becomes ‘naturalized’ because it is associated with seemingly ‘natural’ processes of the family.” Collins maintains that naturalized hierarchies are just one way in which familial logics are mapped onto national
politic discourses. She offers that birth order, for example, can be correlated to a politics of immigration and citizenship, in which both power and value are located in elder members of the national family. Further, Collins emphasizes that the ideological and physical boundaries of both family and nation are policed and defended through legislation and, when necessary, violence—gendered violence in particular.40

Family and nation are also rhetorically allied through the use and mobilization of the concept of home, which has been richly theorized by feminist scholars.41 Home, the space of the family and nation, is seen as private, safe, and exclusionary. It is a physical and emotional territory that is narrativized as providing comfort, respite, and love. When the familial or national home fails to provide actual sanctuary, blame is generally placed on outside influences and forces, keeping the mythical ideal intact.42 This fabled version of home-life also recalls feminist analyses of public and private spaces and roles. Given Collins’ centering of the family as a “privileged exemplar of intersectionality,” it is clear that whether homes and nations provide safety and comfort, and at what cost, is intensely dependent upon race, class, sexuality, and gender.43

Collins also explores the significance of biological kinship in the construction of family, and the ways in which blood ties relate to the construction of nation. She observes that blood ties are central to racialization and locating outsiders based on dubious claims related to physical appearance, and that privileging blood kinship is of great utility in promoting heterosexism and controlling female sexuality.44 Control of women’s sexuality and the politics of family planning are particularly important, according to Collins. She writes, “Just as women’s bodies produce children who are part of a socially constructed family grounded in notions of biological kinship,
women’s bodies produce the population for the national ‘family’ or nation-state, conceptualized as having some sort of biological oneness. In this sense, family planning becomes important in regulating population groups identified by race, social class, and national status. In this way, an analogous logic has been used to cohere the kinship of the national family. Collins notes that this model has been used less frequently in theorizing nationalism in the United States, due in part to a boastful attachment to a national narrative of meritocratic equality, wherein “regardless of race, national origin, former condition of servitude, and color, all citizens stand equal before the law.” Despite this patriotic fantasy, blood kinship remains part and parcel of nationalist affect in the United States, visible in discussions of adoption, immigration, and racial purity.

The analytic connections between sexual control and familial and national reproduction are significant. Nira Yuval-Davis argues that the struggle for reproductive freedom is tied to the notion of the national gene pool, and accordingly that “control of marriage, procreation and therefore sexuality would thus tend to be high on the nationalist agenda.” The fervor of political tensions around issues including access to birth control and abortion, gay marriage and adoption reveal that procreation and sexuality are high on political agendas, with both conservative and liberal camps grounding their positions in claims of ethical futurity.

Yuval-Davis also discusses that women are often theorized as the site of cultural reproduction, a notion that casts analytic weight to both home and family. She explains, “because of the central importance of social reproduction to culture, gender relations often come to be seen as constituting the ‘essence’ of cultures as ways of life to be passed from generation to generation.” I contend that this “burden of representation” has reified the slippages between nation and family, mother and citizen. This kind of conceptualization turns women into a kind
of embodied synecdoche, wherein a mother is the mother of the collective, and a woman’s propriety and purity is the sanctified potential of a nation, guaranteed by its collective morality.

Attention to this kind of gendered nationalist imaginary intensifies in times of crisis, accelerating and accentuating the production of nationalist affect. Cynthia Enloe argues that, in times of national crisis, women can come to symbolize the vulnerability of a nation, particularly to “defilement and exploitation.”⁵⁰ In this way, women are used to justify militarism, war, and the creation of legal states of exception in the name of national security. Enloe argues further that women are objectified through these processes, characterized as “the nation’s most valuable possessions; the principle vehicles for transmitting the whole nation’s values from one generation to the next.”⁵¹ This is a powerful means of familial nationalist affect production, achieved by subsuming women in tropes of cultural transmission, embodiment, and reproduction. Enloe’s suggestion is reflective of the ways Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias connect women to nationalism, as national symbols and reproducers of culture.

Women do not only teach and transfer the cultural and ideological traditions of ethnic and national groups. Very often they constitute their actual symbolic figuration. The nation as a loved woman in danger or as a mother who has lost her sons in battle is a frequent part of the particular nationalist discourse in national liberation struggles or other forms of national conflicts when men are called to fight “for the sake of our women and children” or to “defend their honour.”⁵²

A call to action in defense of a nation may be more affectively impactful when it resonates with a desire to protect one’s family. The rhetorical overlaps and mutual construction of family and nation result in increased traction on both fronts.
In interrogating the relationship between family and the production of nationalist affect, it may also be useful to consider ways in which family has been constructed as engaging national value. Patricia Hill Collins gestures toward the rise in “family values” rhetoric that occurred in the 1990s, and argues that this development emerged from conservative political discourse, citing former vice president Dan Quale specifically as jumpstarting the term’s circulation.\(^5\)

Family values, Collins observes, is a term that marks a particular social archetype, one premised on normativizing ideologies about what a family should be and how it ought to operate within a national system. A startling array of power structures is implicated in this construction. Collins explains,

> Formed through a combination of marital and blood ties, ideal families consist of heterosexual couples that produce their own biological children. Such families have a specific authority structure; namely, a father-head earning an adequate family wage, a stay-at-home wife, and children. Those who idealize the traditional family as a private haven from a public world see family as held together by primary emotional bonds of love and caring. Assuming a relatively fixed sexual division of labor, wherein women’s roles are defined as primarily in the home and men’s in the public world of work, the traditional family ideal also assumes the separation of work and family.\(^4\)

As Collins articulates, heteronormativity, juridical and cultural kinship structures, labor and economic systems, and of course, disciplinary structures of sex and gender permeate the construction of a family and its values. Collins continues that lucidity and intelligibility “[confer] legitimacy not only on the family structure itself but on children born into it.”\(^5\) Through interactions with governmental institutions, this construction of family becomes disciplinary in itself.
Collins’ deconstruction of the family as a national value is particularly useful in understanding the productive work of labor, both in the traditional sense and affectively. Collins specifically references the wage-earning market in discussing the masculine, patriarchal, public role within the construction of the family. She also discusses the feminine, private, maternal care work of motherhood. While both of these roles could be further parsed in terms of the affective labor that exists in the burden of representation, this project draws attention to the neglected question of the affective labor performed by narratives of the child. Having been marked as legitimate, and thus put into circulation as a nationalist subject, what does the child, as a figure, do? In what follows, I suggest that the child’s representational utility is enabled by its status as an enigma, simultaneously spectral and fixed in the realm of the body, both essentialized and conceived as a blank slate, teachable, innocent, both worthy of and necessitating protection. The child always glances backward and forward, toward its own construction and the future being made for it as it labors in the seemingly apolitical tedium of growing up.

The most obvious representational role of the child may be that of a subject not-yet-become, one who must submit to authority. McClintock writes that “the family image came to figure hierarchy within unity as an organic element of historical progress, and thus became indispensable for legitimating exclusion and hierarchy within nonfamilial social forms such as nationalism, liberal individualism and imperialism.” This analysis allows for hierarchy to be conceptualized as not just compatible with unity, but as necessary in order for a group of people to navigate systemic issues and challenges in league together. The synthesis of the needs of the whole requires that individuals recognize their positionality, ceding power as required.
Significantly, Collins argues that an intersectional analysis of familial power structures reveals the ways in which age emerges as salient within this matrix. “Gender and age,” she explains, “mutually construct one another; mothers comply with fathers, sisters defer to brothers, all with the understanding that boys submit to maternal authority until they become men.”

These familial power dynamics are naturalized, and mapped onto the national familial body. As a result, the reaffirmation of gendered and age-based power structures comes to endorse a powerful representational discourse in which the child can be made to stand in for any population deemed incapable of understanding or navigating a given situation. Liisa Malkki has argued that the child, feminized and innocent, is rhetorically made to stand in for humanity itself. Utilizing children as embodied metaphors allows for non-normative racialized and sexualized subjects, for example, to be cast as immature, underdeveloped, and incapable of caring for themselves or understanding the consequences of their actions.

Legitimating paternalism, however, is about more than disciplinary power. It is also about naturalizing familial narratives of time. Anne McClintock argues that that family provides a metaphorical “genesis narrative for national history,” made all the more powerful by the construction of family itself as natural, apolitical, and enduring. McClintock writes, “The evolutionary family thus captured, in one potent trope, the idea of social discontinuity (hierarchy through space) and temporal discontinuity (hierarchy across time) as a natural, organic continuity. The idea of the Family of Man became invaluable in its capacity to give state and imperial intervention the alibi of nature.”

Utilizing the example of the family tree, McClintock argues that time is thus “domesticated,” presented as familial, organic, linear, and inevitable. Within this framework,
familial figures also come to embody divergent rhetorics of temporality. Women, McClintock observes, become “the living archive of the national archaic,” while men are seen as “embody[ing] the forward-thrusting agency of national ‘progress.’” McClintock specifically notes that women are seen as “childlike,” but does not directly address the role of children themselves within this temporal analysis. Childhood and femaleness may be discursively imbricated in that women are infantilized and children are feminized, but there is also the promise of futurity in the construction of children. Male children hold the promise of future progress, and female children hold to promise of future cultural ballast.

**Telling Stories**

This dissertation examines the child as a critical site for the production of nationalist affect in 9/11 discourse. I am interested both in the ways children are represented in 9/11 narratives and how these narratives speak to the child. I examine media profiles of the “children of 9/11,” and children’s picture books, exhibits, and educational materials from the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. Through these explorations, I ask what role the figure of the child plays in the production of a national imaginary organized around a presumptively shared condition of grief, loss, and terror.

This study has been developed in conversation with feminist scholarship on nationalism. Feminist researchers like Ann McClintock, Patricia Hill Collins, and Nira Yuval Davis have aptly examined the role of familial metaphors and imagery in advancing and circumscribing raced and gendered national scripts. While familial and national reproduction has been central to these analyses, strangely the child as a real, embodied, consequential figure has not been
centered in these conceptual works. Studying the way children have been implicated in the production of post-9/11 nationalism may generate new understanding of contemporary US nationalism.

This project also engages with scholarship that is concerned with the cultural mediation of nationalism and citizenship. The aforementioned scholars are a part of these discussions, as are many others, including Jasbir Puar and Lauren Berlant. Given her conceptualization of infantile citizenship, Berlant’s work is particularly relevant. According to Berlant, infantile citizenship is a trope frequently appearing in fictional narratives of nationalism, and one that is experienced as immediately relatable to many citizen’s lived experiences. In Berlant’s conceptualization, the infantile citizen is an innocent child or naïve adult who journeys through an ambivalent encounter between America as a theoretical identity and America as a site of practical politics.64 This study provides an opportunity to extend Berlant’s theorization, considering national pedagogy and the role of childhood innocence in mediating citizenship with the context of a pivotal moment in US history.

This study also is pertinent when considered alongside recent works by queer theorists like Lee Edelman and Kathryn Bond Stockton who have centered the figure of the child in their analyses. Both Edelman and Stockton utilize the child as a kind of analytic mirror, a figure through which to consider questions of reproductive futurism, queerness, and neoliberal subjectivity. The innocent child, a figure conceptualized as both a fantasy of memory and projected futurity in these texts, exists in my research as an icon, an audience, and a figure of cultural production and circulation. As an in-depth case study of the child, my research is well positioned to enrich these discussions.
Given that I consider the child in the shadow of death and destruction, it is fitting that Stockton also links childhood to spectrality. Stockton writes, “The child is precisely who we are not and, in fact, never were. It is the act of adults looking back.” In this way, the child is a fantasy of what was and has been, but the child is also a fantasy of what could, should, or will be in the future. I contribute to this discourse by considering the child as queered by grief. Stockton asks to whom the child turns when they find they cannot relate to their peers. In this case, it may be that they turn to a vision of their lost childhood reflected back to them by adults who are entranced by the specter of their own innocence. With this research I attend to the links between fantasy, spectrality, and the nation.

Methodology & Interpretive Approaches

This project considers the ways a specific set of cultural texts construct the child within nationalist discourses produced in response to 9/11. The materials I analyze include news reports, articles, human-interest stories, and other media coverage related to children and 9/11, as well as books written for children and artwork produced by children.

These various texts warrant scholarly analysis because they reflect the political and social climate following the September 11 attacks and, as such, are revealing cultural artifacts. According to Patricia Lina Leavy, “cultural artifacts do not simply reflect social norms and values; texts are central to how norms and values come to be shaped.” In this way, the public discourse surrounding children and 9/11 does not just inform the public, but is implicated in the very formation of the affective nationalisms it is understood to reflect or represent.
A feminist analysis then attends to the language and ideological underpinnings of representation. It does not accept any form of representation as politically neutral or objective. To do so would be to accept the ideological attachments of a given representation unexamined, and thereby render them politically benign. Leavy notes that “by bringing a feminist lens and feminist concerns such as women’s status, equality, and social justice to the study of…. symbolic culture (multimedia images and representations), feminist researchers employ content analysis in very unique ways and ask questions that would otherwise go unexplored.”67 Acknowledging the cultural significance of these representations is the first step in embarking upon the research.

In approaching diverse cultural texts, I employ an inductive and deconstructive content analysis. According to Leavy, feminist scholars can utilize postmodern ideologies of deconstruction “by exposing what is absent within a representation, what is taken-for-granted, and what is centrally located versus what is forced to the peripheries.”68 Using this deconstructive method in conjunction with an inductive model, I locate the themes that emerge as being prominently featured (or prominently absent) from the texts. All of the texts I consider, whether news stories or children’s books, are cultural productions that contribute to narrativization and historicization of 9/11. I consider these texts, in all of their diversity, to be significant in political discourse, and am therefore invested in exploring their ideological underpinnings.

In her book Haunted Houses, photographer Corrine May Botz captures and chronicles spectral histories in domestic spaces. Her introductory chapter, “The House Remembers,” discusses the ways in domesticity, femininity, and spectrality are linked. Botz argues that “the notion of hauntedness activates and highlights the home, revealing the hidden narratives and
possibilities of everyday life.’” The presence and presentness of these histories in spaces of home and family feel salient with regard to this project. I utilize the notion of spectrality as a part of my epistemological approach to the construction of spaces and relics of national remembrance and mourning.

Avery Gordon discusses haunting as a methodological paradigm in her unconventional sociological work *Ghostly Matters*. Gordon writes that ghosts are an unusual, foreign topic for social analysis and for academia. It could also be argued, however, that ghosts and their hauntings are in some ways mundane. They are historical, domestic, and common. More specifically, the undercurrents of domestic life (and often death, bodies, mourning) often have been relegated to the realm of the feminine, cast as women’s knowledges, both affective and corporeal, sometimes secreted and at other times erased or ignored. In this way, feminist scholarship may be uniquely positioned to explore spectrality, and to utilize it as theoretical lens. Feminist scholarship is engaged with the contours of the everyday political.

Considering the notion of haunting requires that we interrogate the role of the ghost. Gordon cites philosopher Frigga Haug in arguing that the ghost itself can be seen as an epistemological conduit, a summoner. Once seen (or glimpsed, felt, observed in absence), it calls forth the narratives and memories that are shadowed, outside “the margins of the story [that] mark a border between the remembered and the forgotten.” Botz positions the ghost as trespasser. She writes, “The ghost is an interloper that undermines the notion of the house as private and contained, which is why in horror movies the ghost must be evacuated. Haunted houses are emblematic of Freud’s notion of the uncanny, when the security of the home is rendered frightening and unfamiliar by outside forces, repressed events, or memories.” In
Botz’s theorization, ghosts are experienced as potentially threatening because they impugn the sacred illusion of domestic invulnerability. She also details three primary kinds of ghosts encountered in her narrative/photography project, all of which resonate with the themes of this project as well. Specifically, Botz describes ghosts that return to comfort the bereaved, ghosts that have been wronged and seek justice or vengeance, and ghosts that are simply stuck in time, repeating their moments in purposeless futility. All of these ghosts are troublemakers, crossing boundaries of metaphysical and emotional spaces and betraying rules of time and territory in the pursuit of their own goals. These spectral forces draw home inhabitants into the dusty, shadowy corners of basements, attics, and closets, casting light into shadows and unsettling spaces and objects long abandoned. This itself may be the work of the feminist researcher, and in this way the ghost is an ally.

Gordon contends that epistemologically, haunting can alter the course of research in beneficial ways. She observes, “Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the costly aspects of it. This confrontation requires (or produces) a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge.”

Gordon is explicit that our ways of knowing can be altered by considering spectrality, and contends that it is thus of methodological utility. She suggests its application in the exploration of matters that are affectively thick. Gordon continues, “It is often a case of inarticulate experiences, of symptoms and screen memories, of spiraling affects, of more than one story at a time, of the traffic in domains of experience that are anything but transparent and referential.” In this way, she contends, the researcher is positioned to uncover the spectral aspects of a given analysis.
Hauntedness and hiddenness mark central methodological issues in this project. At the time of the event, media coverage of 9/11 was inescapable. The level of attention it received created a different kind of concern. As Gordon explains, “Hypervisibility is a kind of obscenity of accuracy…. No shadows, no ghosts. In a culture seemingly ruled by technologies of hypervisibility, we are led to believe not only that everything can be seen, but also that everything is available for our consumption… we are led to believe that neither repression nor the return of the repressed, in the form of either improperly buried bodies or countervailing systems of value or difference, occurs with any meaningful result.” Gordon explains that this misrepresentation of value and difference makes it more difficult, if not impossible, to fully grasp the consequence of power differentials in action. This is particularly salient given the hypervisibility, indeed inescapability, of a monolithic 9/11 narrative, one which actually lamented certain improperly buried bodies while giving little attention to bodies critically imperiled. This thematization of haunting is useful for this project on multiple levels. The event of 9/11 continues to haunt the US imaginary, recurring both in its anniversary and also called upon in political rhetoric as a constructed memory of national vulnerability and national unity. And, importantly, the reaction to 9/11 has included an intensification of a will to understand political trauma through the invocation of the dead and public displays of affect often considered private.

This study crosses disciplinary boundaries to analyze gendered national grief in an interesting and innovative way. In exploring the way national grief is represented, framed, discussed and memorialized, and the ways in which the child becomes a critical site around which a discourse of collective affect is constructed, I excavate the meanings produced by portrayals of nationalist affect within texts created in the social and cultural context of the United
States after 9/11. Methodologically, I focus in this project on texts that are evidently engaged in the act of representation—whether they are news reports, fictionalized stories, or children’s artwork. While there are equally worthwhile questions that could be answered in interviews, surveys, or focus groups with women and men about their feelings in the aftermath of the tragedy, my interest is in the way 9/11 affect is produced, rather than how individuals narrate their own experience of it.

**Fables and Folktales**

The first chapter of this dissertation presents an in-depth exploration of media representations of the “children of 9/11” and “9/11 babies.” Focusing on profiles published in the popular media in anticipation and memorialization of the tenth anniversary of the attacks, I explore the ways in which the child functions as a national icon of grief and a signifier of national reproductivity. These human-interest stories provide a framework for public grief, marking the desires of the nation regarding memory, family, and the future. I consider how the metaphor of the national family figures into the discourse surrounding children and 9/11, as well as how normativities of romantic love, national and family reproduction, gender, sexuality, and parenting cohered through grief narratives and memory.

While the first chapter is concerned with narratives about children, the second chapter addresses children as the audience for pedagogical interventions that construct affective nationalisms through representations created for their consumption, specifically, picture books. These books provide a unique opportunity to think through pedagogies of both nation and crisis, revealing how not just nationalism, but childhood itself is constructed through storytelling. Prior
studies, primarily in the field of children’s literature studies, have examined the archive of children’s picture books about 9/11. I engage existing analyses and further develop key themes and ideas in this literature, while also examining works that have not yet been considered and raising new questions about the significance of race and gender in the construction of affective nationalisms.

The final chapter examines the exhibition of children’s artwork on display at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. The collection includes cards and gifts created by US children and sent to first responders and 9/11 charitable organizations, as well as art projects completed at America’s Camp, a summer camp for children who lost loved ones on 9/11, and which also have been displayed in secure areas of the Pentagon. Anchored in an exploration of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum—the primary site of 9/11 public memorialization, this chapter elucidates the meaning and significance of children’s cultural production.
CHAPTER 1

9/11 Kids: A Media Analysis

Baby Boom

Approximately one hundred and twenty babies were born to 9/11 widows in the year following the attack. These children, as well as those who knew the parents they lost, are icons of 9/11 victimhood, and they are frequently discussed in narratives of the national family, national futurity, grief, and memory. In a profile for CBS News, journalist Cynthia Bowers writes, “They’ve been called ‘The Children of 9/11,’ youngsters who waited in vain for a parent to come home 10-years ago Sunday night, or who never knew their lost parent at all.” All of these “children of 9/11” have been the focus of many human-interest stories, books, and memorial reflections of 9/11, and have been used as a referent with regard to other national events tied to 9/11 and/or national grief, including the killing of Osama bin Laden. In this chapter I consider the production of nationalist sentiment that emerges from human-interest stories and media coverage of the children of 9/11 and 9/11 babies. I also introduce the concept of national reproductivity as it arises in popular media coverage related to births and babies, and in comparison to the minimal media coverage of children and pregnant women who were killed on 9/11.

In this chapter I identify commonalities and differences among and between representations of 9/11 children, locating the themes that emerge to shape a post-9/11 nationalist discourse. I ask what role children play in the distinctive post-9/11 discourse that emerged in the
wake of that event. How are normativities related to ideas of romantic love, national and familial reproduction, gender, sexuality, and parenting deployed in this narrative, and to what effect?

In the wake of 9/11, predictions emerged that the United States would experience a rise in birthrates after the requisite nine months had passed, a baby boom echoing the one that followed World War II. The prediction of an influx of babies speaks to the ways in which US nationalism is infatuated with the family and reproduction. A post-disaster baby boom would evidence the ability and desire of the nation to create in the face of destruction. Statistically, this baby boom never materialized, but human-interest stories continued to surface that utilized individual women and their children to bolster an evidently fictive narrative. In one CBS news report, an obstetrician and professor at Long Island College Hospital wagered that the terrorist event motivated people to action. “This was kind of a wake up call for people. They saw the towers burning. And they got home and they said, ‘You know, it’s never going to be the right time. We should start now.’” Interviews with expectant couples focused on how they were influenced by 9/11. One couple from Houston designed their daughter’s name to have the initials NYC. Another woman spoke about the emotions she felt at the time her daughter was conceived. “You’re so happy that you’re safe in bed and your husband is alive,” she shared. She hoped that their daughter, to be named Grace, would be a beacon of hope in a tumultuous time. While these stories are presented as emblematic of a broader trend, they were not. The presumption of a baby boom, nonetheless, continued to circulate, populating the news with stories focused on gratitude and feelings of uncertainty overcome by the healing powers of reproduction. In these stories, Americans find emotional footing and help the nation return to a state of safety by focusing on the future and populating that nation with 9/11 babies. The imagined baby boom is a sign of US resilience.
While pregnant 9/11 widows had a place in the public discourse, pregnant women who died in the attack were largely absent from discussion. Though receiving little media attention, some pregnant women are memorialized at the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. There are eleven women listed on the memorial with mention of unborn children. The phraseology is notable, given that “unborn child” is a laden and contested term particularly in feminist analyses, one that confers personhood upon the fetus in ways that have been used to police reproductive freedom and to justify state control of women’s bodies. Setting this aside, these inscriptions do not reflect the totality of pregnant women who died on 9/11, as inclusion of the pregnancy within the memorial is dependent upon the next of kin having knowledge of a pregnancy and a desire to publically share the information. Nonetheless, by engraving the words “and her unborn child” alongside these victims’ names, the museum gives striking prominence to pregnant bodies that is not shared in the media, which has largely ignored the fact of pregnant victims.

The inclusion of unborn children in the memorial is a direct gesture toward a familial future undone, and a centering of what was lost. Joe Daniels, president of the 9/11 Memorial, notes, “It’s a special part of the memorial. It reinforces that message about the whole project that the folks were just like us, that they were about to start these lives….It reminds us that they were who we are.” In this way, he claims that the women whose pregnancies are officially memorialized are not marked through their pregnancies as exceptional, but rather as quintessentially ordinary. It is the mundane materiality and relatability of the pregnant body that is intended to resonate at the memorial. And yet, figuring the pregnant body this way in memorialization speaks to the place of women in national imaginary. Opting to highlight the reproductive function of women’s bodies within the memorial might suggest that the non-
pregnant woman is insufficient to instigate national grief or outrage. While the museum frames their inclusion as a humanization of pregnant women victims, the unborn children memorialized at the museum are actually a polestar, a crystallization of the innocence and vulnerability of 9/11 victims.

The Littlest Victims

The eight children who died in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, all of whom were passengers aboard hijacked flights, are also included in the memorial. Interestingly, these child victims do not feature prominently in 9/11 rhetoric, despite the ways in which the figure of the innocent child can be readily mobilized as necessitating protection and retribution. While popular media coverage of the children of 9/11 victims was ubiquitous, I was unable to locate a single article focusing on child victims of 9/11 in a widely circulated, high-visibility media outlet. Instead, the only two articles I located focusing on what they call the overlooked “littlest victims” appeared in Christian faith news and culture blogs, one published in December of 2001, and the other just before the tenth anniversary. This absence in mainstream media indicates that perhaps the bereaved child is a more palatable national symbol than the deceased child despite the sense of injustice and urgency that accompany their loss. It may be that the deceased child represents a grief pushed to despair. Maybe, in the case of a crisis like 9/11, the locus of the iconography of the child is as a referent to the reproductivity of the mother and nation, fueled by the child’s own potential and embodiment of futurity.

Notably, while the children who died on 9/11 did not receive widespread media coverage, Christina-Taylor Green did. On January 8, 2011, just months after the tenth anniversary of 9/11,
United States Representative Gabrielle Giffords gathered with constituents in a supermarket parking lot. The event, “Congress on your Corner,” was an opportunity for constituents to interact with their elected representative, to discuss policies and legislation, and to get involved in the political process. The occasion turned tragic when Jared Lee Loughner, in an apparent assassination attempt, opened fire into the crowd. Nineteen people were shot, six were killed, and Giffords was critically injured. Among the deceased were United States District Court Chief Judge John Roll; Representative Giffords’ Community Outreach Director, Gabe Zimmerman; and nine-year-old Mesa Verde Elementary School student council president Christina-Taylor Green. Green was one of the babies featured in the book *Faces of Hope: Babies Born on 9/11*, published just before the first anniversary, meant to carry a message of hope and innocence.9

In the aftermath of this tragic incident, responses in media and from the public reflected the anxiety and grief of a nation reeling from the shocking eruption of violence and concerned with the state of contemporary political discourse. As politicians including President Barack Obama and former Alaskan governor Sarah Palin weighed in on the debacle, the narrative that emerged figured this kind of violence as aberrant but nonetheless potentially viral. The grief narrative constructed by media coverage generally, and President Obama’s speech at the memorial specifically, featured a celebratory script of American nationalism and a disassociation of American politics from the philosopher Achille Mbembe’s conception of the necropolitical, the power of the state to deploy death both within and beyond its borders as a mechanism of political control. Further, they enacted a deployment of grief narratives toward a manageable and desirable public affect. They did so by centering the familial relationships of all Loughner’s victims, weaving them into romantic and nostalgic American stories, and by specifically casting
Christina Taylor-Green, a child born on 9/11 and taken in an act of violence, as a beacon of hope and icon of futurity cut short.

In President Obama’s genuinely moving eulogizing of the six people who were killed that day, he reflected on Judge John Roll’s juridical service, noting that he had stopped to see Giffords on his way home from Mass, which he attended every day. He told the story of Dorothy “Dot” Morris, whose husband of fifty years, a former Marine, tried to shield her from the gunfire. He was not successful, but Dorwan Stoddard was when he dove atop his wife and saved her by sacrificing himself. President Obama talked about Phyllis Schneck, a talented quilter who, although a Republican, was fond of Giffords and wanted to get to know her better. He described Giffords’ staffer Gabe Zimmerman as having died doing what he loved—helping people. And he ended with Christina-Taylor Green, a smart, athletic, generous child of just nine years.10

Christina’s mother described her as a “real girly girl” decked out in glittery sneakers on the day she died. The coroner’s report, which Loughner’s defense team would argue was too prejudicial to be admitted at trial, noted her birthstone jewelry—“yellow metal earrings with blue stones are in place.”11 In his memorial address, President Obama noted, to applause, “If there are rain puddles in heaven, Christina is jumping in them today.”12 She was an athlete—a dancer, swimmer, and gymnast.13 The many news articles written about this 9/11 baby who died as collateral damage in an attempted political assassination are as replete with physical descriptions of her girl-body as they are with wistful and fulsome praise for her optimism, her faith in democracy, and her intellectual curiosity. The affective power of the corporeal seems concentrated in descriptions of a young child, brimming with possibility. Christina-Taylor Green was tragically killed at the age of nine. A statue erected in her memory would be in, part, from
steel taken from the World Trade Center, woven into the skirt of an angel. Relics from the Pentagon and the Pennsylvania field where flight 93 crashed were also incorporated. In the aftermath of that her death, her story was widely circulated in a way that stands apart from the children who died on 9/11.

The Children of 9/11

In contrast, children of 9/11 widows, born both before and after 9/11, received a great deal of media attention in popular outlets. Representing the hope and promise of the future in the face of loss and political uncertainty, these children and their mothers were featured in photoshoots with Diane Sawyer, television interviews and magazine covers, and eventually a documentary. As infants they were a powerful sight. Describing the ways in which 9/11 mothers were presented as a flattened site of national regeneration, Women’s Studies professor Ruby C. Tapia writes in *American Pietàs: Visions of Race, Death and the Maternal*:

> All indices of difference—different facial and bodily expressions, different manners and colors of dress, different racial and ethnic presentations—are flattened by the “cover” of sentimentalized maternity in the service of patriarchal, national resilience. These markers of difference are blurred, as well, by the hypervisible and uniform(ed) products of their patriotic maternity: brand-new babies, collectively clad in whiteness.

These hypervisible children were a common sight in the months after 9/11, and would resurface in similar representations around anniversaries of the attack, reminding the public of our increasing temporal distance from 9/11, and its enduring affective closeness.

To identify media reports about these children and the meaning to be made of their role in national mourning and memory, I conducted Google searches using the phrases “children of
9/11,” “9/11 babies,” and “9/11 kids,” phrases that did not receive wide circulation in hard news sites such as the New York Times, but are evidenced in soft news publication on CNN, NBS, the LA Times, the Daily Mail, and similar publications. Recognizing that most results were from the years 2011 and 2016, published in anticipation or remembrance of the tenth and fifteenth anniversaries of the attacks, respectively, I decided to focus my chapter on the tenth anniversary in order to offer a coherent snapshot of memorialization.

I looked at fourteen news stories that circulated in 2011. There were nine similar stories that circulated in 2016, marking the fifteenth anniversary of 9/11. The decrease in stories published in the mainstream press may signal an interest in moving away from situating the grief in the bodies and memories of these children as they grow older and more politically aware, and become citizen-actors themselves. These anniversaries provided popular media outlets such as People Magazine, CNN, NBC, the LA Times, and the Daily Mail opportunities to revisit previous coverage of the children of 9/11, and provided new interviews and photographs with them. During times of intensified reflection, media coverage facilitated both the memorialization and the (re)narrativization of the event. The significance of this coverage of the children of 9/11 is evidenced in its repetition. These phrases and the children they push into discursive visibility remained prevalent in other popular media sources. Resurfacing again and again, they signal a return to a specific mode of mourning and remembrance, creating a cultural archive worthy of interrogation.

Representations of widows and their babies serve to simultaneously influence and guide nationalist mourning. By centering familial loss in mourning narratives, the story of tragedy becomes one of a family violently impeded upon. Feminine victims are left vulnerable in the
absence of the masculine protectors who have been taken away, and the affective connection to
the national loss becomes one in which the feeling of family supersedes the feeling of citizenry.
In this way, heteropatriarchal familial national values are reinforced. This is most evident when
considering the maternal body, which is the center of Tapia’s project. These mothers, she argues,
are hitched to the project of procreative national memory regardless of the tenor of their
representation. Tapia writes, “comparatively analyzing the figuring of the widow of 9/11 types as
sympathetic maternal and/or outspoken and (un)patriotically politicized illumines the ways in
which specific imaging practices fix these and other women’s positions relative to their proper
roles as reproducers of the nation through the bodies and memories they carry, host, revise, and
recover.”
This analysis is apt, but what are we to make of the other bodies in these photos, the
babies that help to flatten the differences Tapia describes?

The child as analytic figure has been explored by a variety of theorists, from Jaqueline
Rose in The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction, to Catherine Bond
Stockton in The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century. Interdisciplinary
scholar Claudia Castañeda argues in her 2002 book, Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds, that the
child is figured as an icon of potentiality and incompleteness, and that these features are what
make the child accessible to being continually remade through analytic figuration.
While Castañeda takes as given that there is a relationship between the figuration of the child and the
actual child, she sets aside that relationship in her analysis. This study requires me to continually
travel the distance Castañeda accepts. What meaning can be made of popular media coverage of
9/11 children? These children’s stories and images are circulated in the service of American
nationalism and memorial grief, and their lives, losses, and embodied innocence are being
mobilized. The child in this analysis is both figurative and real—just as I am concerned with the
meaning being made from these forms of representation, I am also talking about the experiences of actual children.

While these representations facilitate mourning, they paradoxically also hold the narrative of death at arm’s length. Describing death and violence in both fictionalized and documentary modes, Vivian Sobchack articulates, “Safely contained by narrative, often represented in hyperbolic forms and structures, they titillate and offer a mediated view that softens the chaotic randomness and ferocious threat they present in the real world in which we live.”21 What softer lens could there be for the specter of death than the emblem of a sea of babies wrapped in white blankets, held in their mothers’ loving arms? Sobchack writes that “unlike death [birth] affirmatively signifies the entrance into conventional culture, into social order and value systems, into a representable world and a world of representation. Birth, for us (and possibly for all cultures), is the sign to begin all signs.”22 The traumatic loss embodied in the living victims of 9/11 translates grief, despite its intangibility, into a perceptible form. When combined with the ways in which these grief narratives are presented in the public realm, as mediated melodrama, they remain titillating and are rendered, if not toothless, as comfortably distant as possible.

**Memory, Family, Futurity**

As I discuss in the introduction, feminist theorizations of nationalism are built upon an examination of the parallel power structures in the family and nation. Similarly, family and nation are constructed as persistently oriented toward the future, and dependent upon the reproductive labor of women. Berlant brings together the concept of national futurity, crisis, and
fear in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. She uses the term “hygienic governmentality” to designate the attempts of a normative public’s endeavor to control the national symbolic. As in the case of the vague and unending War Against Terror in the aftermath of 9/11, Berlant explains that “this involves a ruling bloc’s dramatic attempt to maintain its hegemony by asserting that an abject population threatens the common good and must be rigorously governed and monitored by all sectors of society.” This surveillance is motivated and supplemented by the deployment of national symbolism and narratives anchored in a dual temporal gambit, one that calls upon a national memory of an idyllic nostalgic past and the promise of a prosperous shared future. Berlant notes that threat and surveillance are part and parcel of an on-call state of emergency, one that allows for an enduring state of exception.

As an example of how the memory-family-futurity trope functions to regulate political discourse, Berlant explores the representation of immigration in a 1985 *Time* magazine special about immigration entitled “The Changing Face of America.” She discusses the familiar contradictions that emerge within the crisis discourse surrounding immigration: that immigrants are a threat to an abstracted American value system, often because of perceptions of dangerously liberal or conservative sexual mores; that they will take up too many resources, either by being lazy, incapable, unproductive economic drains, or by accumulating too much in their greedy excess. Berlant illustrates that these elements of crisis are, in part, impasioned precisely because of the ambivalence of white, middle-class American anxieties regarding national formations and immigration.

She argues that immigrants represent these apprehensions, but they also simultaneously embody the power of American nationalism. “That is,” Berlant explains, “immigration discourse
is a central technology for the reproduction of patriotic nationalism: not just because the immigrant is seen as without a nation or resources and thus as deserving of pity or contempt, but because the immigrant is defined as someone who desires America.”[25] The upshot of this suggestion is its connection to an imagined national memory, an origin story that erases the realities of racism, exploitation, slavery and genocide in favor of a story about families bravely pursuing freedom. As Berlant explains, Time pairs photos of hopeful immigrant families as they arrive in the United States with a professed organizational commitment to refurbish Ellis Island, linking national memory and futurity with the literal bodies of new immigrants. She argues that these photographs are meant to make clear that the immigration ‘wave’ is no mob, but actually a series of families.”[26]

This narrative of a new citizen on a pilgrimage of national learning is echoed in Berlant’s conceptualization of infantile citizenship. Berlant illuminates the infantile citizen through the pilgrimage to Washington D.C., where they must enact the “patriotic performance” of reconciling their American identity at the intersection of national memory, structural power, and symbolism.[27] The theory of the infantile citizen builds upon the overlapping (and mutually constitutive) structures of family and nation by arguing that “while citizens should be encouraged to love the nation the way they do their families and their fathers, democracies can also produce a special form of tyranny that makes citizens like children, infantilized, passive, and overdependent on ‘the immense and tutelary power of the state.’”[28] The infantile citizen is one who believes in the fantastic national imaginary of a nation that protects and advocates for its citizens, ignorant of what Berlant describes as

a particular conflict about identity that is currently raging in the United States: between a patriotic view of national identity, which seeks to use identification with the ideal nation
to trump or subsume all other notions of personhood, and a view that is frequently considered unpatriotic and victim obsessed, in which citizenship talk takes as its main subject the unequal material conditions of economic, social, and political struggle and survival.  

The second figuration is primarily concerned with the experiences of marginalized communities, on whom the onus is placed to embody a generalized desire for the nation. The infantile citizen is desired by the nation, and the pinnacle of their pilgrimage is the moment of revelation stemming from the inevitable conflict which reveals the gap between their imagined fantasy of American idealism and the cynical knowledge of an adult citizen, who admires, pitieds, and desires the infantile citizen’s naiveté. Given the widespread media coverage of the children of 9/11, I consider their narrativized iconography alongside the idea of the infantile citizen.

Infant Citizens

On September 9th, 2011, Diane Sawyer introduced a group of 9/11 kids as the World News Persons of the Week. “Nearly ten years ago I first started gathering together the babies who were born after their fathers were lost on 9/11,” she began. “Well, those babies are now nearly ten years old. It is the developmental age at which children do begin to realize that death is forever, but also that it’s possible to live in the light of someone you’ve never met.” Sawyer describes the first gathering of these babies, in August 2002, as a dramatic feat, an “Olympic event.” Flashback footage from Sawyer’s ABC primetime special *63 Reasons to Hope: The Babies of 9/11* shows pink-cheeked babes crying in carriers, tug-of-warring teething rings, crawling at a camera lens with laughing baby-babble. An overhead shot of a photograph being staged shows the collected babies in a group—fourteen across in some places and five rows
deep, in matching infant seat carriers. They are completely encircled by their collected mothers, some of whom are trickling inward, offering comfort objects to their children. The finished photograph shows Sawyer crouching in the center of the back row, one child on each knee. One rambunctious baby in a red onesie is escaping their carrier, crawling backward. The background of the photograph is bright white, as are the sheets covering the baby carriers, and most of the infants’ faces.

Sawyer cuts to an updated photograph of her in the center of a group of young children. “All those babies,” she says, “are babies no more. Now, almost ten years old!” There are just twenty-three children in the ten-year anniversary photo, down from sixty-three infants at the one-year anniversary, though this attrition is not addressed in the Persons of the Week video package. Instead, the audience is offered flashback footage of babies and ten-year-old children. Narrating images of herself playing with a laughing red-haired baby and then embracing the same young girl, now lanky and tall with chipped pink nail polish, Sawyer describes, “Morgan Rodriguez then, and now all grown-up—still wearing her dad’s firefighter medallion.” Following Morgan, a freckled boy named Kevin first appears as a chubby-cheeked baby all in white, then a chatty toddler with bright blond hair exclaiming, “My daddy’s name is Kevin and I’m Kevin, Kevin-Kevin!” In his tenth anniversary appearance, he is spindly and pensive in a crisp blue collared shirt.

These sequences evidence the material changes in these 9/11 babies. They are growing, becoming people who are aware of what this gathering is and what it means. They also evidence Sawyer’s emotional connection to these families, making a claim to a broad familial connection. In the background of these interviews the remnants of what appears to be a brunch are scattered
on tables, vestiges of an ersatz family meal. These kids have come, Sawyer narrates, with their small fists holding tight to treasured family heirlooms. One smiling girl with hair streaked purple and blue holds up a bundle of ID lanyards, relics from a time before she was born when a dad she never met worked as a set carpenter for touring musical acts. They have their fathers’ clothing, sports equipment, and photos in which they can trace their own faces. These children, Sawyer tells us, cherish nothing more than being told that they are reflections of their fathers. A series of smiling kids affirm this. A girl with her blond hair pulled back in a pink plastic clip chirps, “She said that he was free spirited, and she said that I was too.” A cautious African American boy with a tender smile and small oval glasses shares, “Sometimes I ask does he look like me? She says yes. I look exactly like him.” Robert Atwood, a little boy with side-swept chestnut hair fights his emotions when describing looking at a picture of father and then in the mirror. “He…It’s…looking in the eyes,” he gulps, before telling Sawyer that he sometimes dreams that you can bring a person back to life. But then, he says, he wakes up. His mom, just off camera, reaches into the shot for his hand.

Sawyer stresses that these gatherings she holds are a comfort to the kids, who find a sense of camaraderie here. Phelan Halloran, a confident girl with full cheeks and wavy hair shares that she feels supported by the friends she has here. “I don’t think I would get along without these girls who help me get through it.” They are the BFFWAD, she says. Best Friends Forever Without a Dad. Danny Soulas, a dimpled boy with a scraped chin agrees. “I don’t feel like I’m the only one who’s had that before to them. Like these guys will know how it feels.” Sawyer wraps up the segment by speaking of 9/11 kids as living memories of their dads. “And for nearly ten years, you can hear them say it in this room,” she says. “When you want to talk to dad just look inside your heart. And remember that all the life he gave you is in your life to come.” The
segment fades out with a slideshow of photos of children alongside the fathers they resemble as the band Lonestar sings. The song is from the perspective of a father who wants his children to know they are never without him. “And so we choose the life of the children of 9/11,” says Sawyer, closing the segment.

This World News video package, one of the media representations that I examined, is a microcosm of the themes that emerge from the collected popular culture archive. Sawyer brings our attention to the innocence of the children and the ways in which they are changing and growing; she highlights their family lives and their ties to the nation; and she invites us to their grief. Other profiles delve deeper into the courtship narratives of the parents of the children of 9/11, their feelings about the public nature of their loss, and more. Below, I explore the themes that emerged from this data set, exploring the narrative they weave about 9/11 children, bereaved emblems of American innocence and futurity.

Physical Spaces

Many 9/11 children discuss the physical spaces of ground zero, the Twin Towers, and New York City as meaningful to their stories. Eamon Stewart visited his father’s new office on the 92nd floor of the World Trade Center with his family. Eamon recalls being amazed by the grandeur of the building. “I remember looking out of the window and thinking: ‘Wow! I can see everything!’ and being so blown away by how far up in the air it was.” The towers were ubiquitous in the New York City skyline, and iconic. And when they fell their absence was haunting. Philip Sherwell, in his profile of 9/11 babies for The Telegraph, draws upon the physicality of this architectural shift to link the buildings and embodied loss. In profiling
Elizabeth Turner, who was seven months pregnant when she lost her husband on 9/11, he writes, “She desperately tried to reach him by mobile phone, to no avail. Then, 102 minutes after American Airlines flight 11 trapped 164 staff and guests in a restaurant renowned for one of the greatest views on the planet, the tower collapsed and Mrs. Turner's life seemed to crumble with it.” But Elizabeth Turner has rebuilt her life, and it was important to her that her son, William, have a sense of New York as a city that his father loved, as well as the place that he died. She says that in addition to visiting ground zero and the WTC Tribute Center, “I also wanted William to see New York because it was Simon’s favourite city, so this was showing him a part of his Dad. So we did a lot of fun stuff like going to a Broadway show and up the Empire State Building and eating and shopping.”

Just as the twin towers of the World Trade Center were iconic, the space that they left remains meaningful for children and families of 9/11 victims. Kaila Starita, for example, feels very connected to ground zero. This, the sixteen-year-old says, is where she feels the closest to her father. “This year, she hopes to be among the 9/11 family members called on to read the names of the dead at the annual ceremony there.” The ceremony is meaningful for many 9/11 children. Caitlin Longone also spoke of her plans to attend the tenth anniversary ceremony, after which the then new 9/11 museum would be open to families. Says Caitlin, “We'll spend some time just quietly at the site of the towers, thinking about my daddy, because that's his grave, really. His body was never recovered, so that's where he lies.” For Caitlin, ground zero is a space for remembering and being thankful for her father.

Drew Depalma, one of the oldest 9/11 children interviewed, was a teenager when his mother was killed. He was interviewed as part of an undergraduate journalism project based at
Rutgers University, which was covered by CNN at the ten-year anniversary. Depalma stands out among those interviewed because he does not express a connection to ground zero, and says he does not feel close to his mother there. He does, however, cling to some piece of the physical space. “A friend gave him an iron cross pried from a metal beam from the World Trade Center. He keeps it in a drawer.”

Reporter Ann O’Neill observes that the World Trade Center was important to the undergraduate student who interviewed Depalma. The student’s parents’ love story is wrapped up in that building—it is where they met, where they broke up, and where they reunited. For her too, the towers falling felt deeply personal.

The CNN coverage of the Rutgers 9/11 research project is particularly interesting in that it both tells the intimate stories of children of 9/11 victims and reflects upon the affective experiences of the undergraduate students who interviewed them. In this way, it lays bare the pedagogical imperative of these grief narratives. One Rutgers student, Travis Fedschun, divulges to CNN’s Ann O’Neill that he wanted specifically to interview someone who had not previously shared his or her story publically. Further, he explains that accessing such intimate information gave him what he feels is the best possible education on 9/11. O’Neill writes, “Because of the project, Fedschun said, ‘I now know he was an avid golfer, could probably fill an entire room with his tie collection and would spend extra time out in the yard watching his kids play. I think that's a much better understanding than simply reading (about 9/11) from a textbook.’”

Fedschun’s perspective can only be true within a narrative of 9/11 that casts it as an intimate event rather than a political one. It necessitates that storytelling about family and love exceed all other aspects of historicity.
For some, the public stories, written on the body of the city of New York, impinge on the possibility of mourning privately. Austin Vukosa feels grateful for the memories he has of his father, knowing that his younger brother, who was a toddler on 9/11, has none. Austin’s parents’ story is also caught up in the buildings and bridges of New York. His parents met in Lower Manhattan, and his father died there. In between, they lived in Queens and Brooklyn. The city is their love story just as it was his father’s salvation story. Alfred Vukosa, who hailed from Croatia and Yugoslavia, spent a year in a refugee camp before making his way to New York.41

Strong Dads and Sweet Moms

Unsurprisingly, all the articles feature touching descriptions of the deceased parent. Grief narratives coming out of 9/11 have always featured love stories as well as depictions of strength, generosity, and heroic patriotism. In the years following 9/11, these stories came primarily from widows, and they have always been politically significant. Love stories do much more than introduce the audience to women and their lost husbands. For example, Ann O’Neill writes in an article subtitled “the 9/11 generation finds its voice,” of Timothy Hargrave—“T.J. to his brother and friends, ‘T’ to Patty, the girl he’d been sweet on since grade school and later married.”42 This nostalgic American love story creates an affective tie to the event of 9/11 wherein feeling American means caring for and nurturing the bereaved. If the love stories leave any question as to whether the men who died were valuable US citizens, descriptions of their masculinity and patriotism offer clarity. The masculinity of these fallen men, and the femininity of their widows, creates the perfect framework for understanding and receiving their stories. These are women who need and deserve protection, a sentiment that echoes feminist analyses of nationalism.
Indeed, feminist theorist Susan Faludi argues of the 9/11 widows that “their fragility and dependency went a long way to magnifying their heroic mates. The more fragile the wives seemed…the more formidable and potent their husbands.” This was certainly true in the first years following 9/11, and even in the turbulent years just following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. But it is worth considering whether a rhetorical shift emerges near the tenth anniversary of the attack, as well as whether engaging the children of 9/11 in storytelling impacts the significance of these stories. After all, ten years after the events of 9/11, the state of United States aggression abroad in the name of defense against terrorism is such that I am routinely told by undergraduate students (who were young children at the time of the attack) that they think of war as a primarily politically historical or foreign concept. In particular, the perpetual state of war that the United States has been engaged in for most of their lives does not register for them as war.

Regardless, these narratives do involve both love stories and loving memorialization that can be mobilized in the service of nationalist affect. Halley, who was five years old when her dad died, describes her dad in very adult terms. She says, “I feel very proud of my dad and what he did on 9/11; I think we all do. He was very funny, and he was a born leader; he was always the person in control. He was very good at making decisions, and people respected his decision-making and trusted him. So I can see why he did what he did on board that plane.” This is something of a jarring description coming from a girl who knew her father only when she was very young. It feels like inherited memory, the stuff of family legend. These are the stories that Halley has been told about her dad, and she has become the vehicle for the story. He likely was all of those things, but these are not the memories of a five-year-old.
In contrast, Caitlin Longone was twelve when her dad died, and has a stronger memory of the day. She recalls returning home from school and watching the news on television, knowing that her dad was there, though she didn’t see him. She says, “We knew our daddy was a New York firefighter and we knew he would be in there somewhere, helping people, just like he was always in emergency situations helping people. He’d been in lots of dangerous places before and he’d always come home.” Caitlin describes her childlike faith that her dad could not possibly be harmed. His bravery and strength would see him though, and allow him to see others through, too. Even when she realized he wasn’t coming home, Caitlin found strength in her dad’s passion for service. “I’m so incredibly proud of him: he died being the best person he could possibly have been, and that’s pretty special. When you’ve got to go, it’s not a bad way to go.” He had known, she says, that his job was dangerous. But the risks were worth it to him.

Alexa Smagala’s dad was also a firefighter. Alexa was born a few months after her dad died, and she believes that he looks out for her when she needs a nice day. On her birthday, she says, “he doesn’t make it snow.” Alexa expresses more conflicted feelings about her dad’s bravery on 9/11. She says, “I don’t like listening to the story of what happened to my dad. I know it was his job, but I wish sometimes he wasn’t so brave. When I see the people running from the building that day, I know my dad was telling them to get out.”

Other memories shared are more strictly celebratory. Rodney Ratchford was eleven when his mom died. He describes her as both sweet and tough. Says Rodney, “She was amazing, my mama—the sweetest person, but really tough, too. We always used to say that you'd never want to be against my mum in a war, because she’d always be on the winning side—every time.” Jill Gartenberg Pila describes her nine-year-old daughter Jamie has having her father’s personality.
“She makes everyone laugh. She’s very friendly. If there’s a kid in the class who needs extra help, she’s the first one to do that—and that was Jimmy.” Pila makes clear that her daughter carries forward the legacy of her father’s kindness and emotional generosity. Where some descriptions call upon the vulnerability of the 9/11 child, Jamie Pila becomes a symbol of a certain future in her self-sufficiency.

There are a few foreign-born 9/11 victims described in the articles, and love—for the city of New York, and for their families—is an important part of the way they are framed. Michael Stewart is described in ways that feel traditionally masculine and classically American. Stewart, writes Ed Pilkington for The Guardian, “was a hands-on dad, big on sport, the kind who wrestles with his kids and takes them on outdoor adventures. Born in Belfast, he had moved to New York in 1981 to marry Eamon’s mother, Diana, a New Yorker he had met while he was at Stirling University.” Meanwhile, immigrant Mohammad Chowdhury is described somewhat differently. Chowdhury, who is among the 32 Muslims killed in the attack, is described in his family-oriented faith, and his love for New York. In the profile for The Telegraph, Philip Sherwell writes that Chowdhury was “a Bangladeshi-born American who loved his adopted city,” observing that although he left before the sun rose for his job at Windows on the World, where he worked as a waiter, he took the time to say goodbye to his sleepy daughter, and to pray with his wife, Baraheen Ashrafi, who was nine months pregnant.

Each of the profiles of the children of 9/11 feature loving descriptions of the parent they lost, whether offered by journalists, widows, or the children themselves. Within the chosen stories, the reader is offered a glimpse not just of an adored parent, but one that fits within a framework of national desirability. The few moms who were lost were sweet and patient, and the
dads were tough and strong. The immigrants in particular loved the United States and the city of New York. They worked hard and they loved their families. These stories make clear the stakes of those who are grieved—they were worthy of national love.

The Kids (And Their Moms) are Alright

Just as the articles and interviewed children were likely to discuss the beloved traits of the lost parents, there is widespread discussion of the bereaved parents, who were likely to be widows. ABC describes the collective group of widows who were expecting children as a “sad sisterhood of pregnant of women.” CNN’s Ann O’Neill describes one woman as “unexpectedly a single mother.” In a time of tremendous loss, grief, and unimaginably stressful familial transitions, these shifts in status carry social weight. For The Telegraph’s coverage, Philip Sherwell dramatically details that more than 100 women were pregnant when they lost their partners on 9/11. He writes of their children, “The first were born just days after the disaster, the last nine months later to mothers who did not even know they were pregnant at the time of attacks. Some women endured miscarriages, one even went into labour during her husband’s memorial service. These nine-year-olds are living legacies to the men lost that day, fathers they would never know.” The widows themselves are also a legacy, one that speaks to moving forward as the tenth anniversary approached.

Anna Clare Burnett, age 13, is happy that her mom has a new partner. “And now I like it for my mum that she’s got someone,” she says. “I always used to notice how she was on her own at couples’ events at school…and now she isn’t, she’s half a couple, and that's really good for
It speaks to the pervasive iconography of the traditional family that young Anna Clare previously thought of her widowed mother as “half a couple,” but also the malleability of notions of family that she celebrates her mother’s new union. Alexa Smagala feels similarly. Her mother Dena was pregnant with her on 9/11, and as the tenth anniversary approached she was excited about life with her new younger sister and her soon-to-be stepdad, Bill. “Now it’s not just me and Mommy. It’s me, Sophia, Mommy and Billy. He gives me piggyback rides. I love having him in my life.”

Ariel Jacobs Dick, a nine-year-old boy who goes by the name Gabi, speaks to a similar flexibility in family structure, describing himself as feeling split in two. Gabi’s “new dad” adopted him when he was in second grade, but they were, Gabi says, already a family—making it official was really just a name change. “Instead of feeling like I have two dads, I feel like I am two Gabis. When my dad is on a business trip and isn’t here, I feel like I’m the first Gabi, who lives with his mom and is an only child. When my dad is here, I feel like the second Gabi, who has two brothers, an older stepsister and—how do I say this?—an adoptive dad.”

Robyn Higley also engages in family-math when describing her new family formation. “I would have loved to have known my daddy, Rob, but I’ve always felt that I have a dad. Rick is totally my dad. I adore him. His mom is another grandmother, so I have three grandmothers. It’s just more family for me to love,” she says.

The mothers also discuss the need to move on. 9/11 widow Elizabeth Turner describes her path from grief as tinged with anger, and oriented toward the future out of sheer necessity. She shares that she came from a large family and wanted to create one of her own, continuing, “And now I’d been transformed from a happily married pregnant career girl into a single parent
widow. I just kept thinking how unfair it was that this had happened to me. I got very angry at the cards I’d been dealt.”

Turner frames a positive future as the only equalizer to the grief she has experienced, and she says it is important that she shares this with her son. “I tell him we can stop the cycle and leave a positive footprint by trying to counterbalance the awful things that happen in life. We all live in this little planet and we have nowhere else to go, so in the end we have to get on.”

Mary Danahy’s story echoes Elizabeth Turner’s. Six months after Grace was born, Danahy says that her older daughter Alison asked her “Mommy, are you ever going to stop crying?” That was the turning point. I knew I had to pull myself together.

Moving on sometimes involves conflicted feelings. Amanda Lee, mother of Allison and Amanda, aged nine and twelve in 2011, feels the weight of guilt seeping into the happiness she feels. She explains,

When Dan died, I never thought I’d ever be happy again. And now today, I’m happier than I ever imagined I could be. Sometimes I feel guilty. When I look at pictures of the girls…I am amazed at how happy they look. If I didn’t know better, I wouldn’t know anything was out of the ordinary. It wasn’t easy to create a happy world when my world had crumbled. I am proud of myself for that. Chris is upbeat, kind and funny, all the qualities Dan possessed. They even share the same birthday.

Lee calling upon the notable similarities between her new partner, Chris, and her husband, Dan, creates a feeling of comfort in her choice to move forward. Her family is still anchored in the happiness she shared with her husband. This sense of propriety is echoed in other narratives. Vycki Higley-Pratt shares that she believes her husband would have supported her decision to move on. “He didn’t want me to be alone if something happened to him. Both my husbands knew each other. We had mutual friends and even went camping together once. I think Rob would be okay that I remarried. I thought it was right because I wanted to secure the children.”

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Here, Higley-Pratt brings up another justification for moving forward—that of providing a stable life for her future. While none of these women should feel the need to justify their decision to move forward, it is unsurprising that they might. In the wake of 9/11, the respectability of 9/11 widows was a critical rhetorical device, and the spectacle of their grief was very public. Those on the far right, like political pundit Ann Coulter, also criticized some.

It is salient, then, that another theme emerging from this small archive is one of permission—that is, the permission to move on. Given that 9/11 widows have also often been criticized in the media—for everything from being too politically engaged to dating too soon—these narratives create a framework for respectability. Deceased patriarchs are cast as having granted permission for their families to move forward, making it more palatable to the general public. Fifteen-year-old Madison Burnett says she has considered what her father would have wanted for their family. She says, “One thing I think about a lot is: what would my dad want for us now? What he'd have most wanted is simply for us to be happy, I think. He would have wanted my mum to remarry, and he would have wanted our lives to turn out pretty much as they have now.”

This is well-trod territory in this coverage. Mary Danahy says that the needs of her girls usurped the reticence she had about remarrying. Her second husband, Andy, she says was “exactly what the girls needed.” Though all three of Danahy’s daughters call Andy Dad, he is closest to Grace, who never met her biological father. Danahy explains, “She really needed that father figure and just bonded with Andy right away. She understands that Daddy Patrick is her biological dad but loves to do special things with Andy. They always share the couch, and she does the ice-cream run with him. She’s his buddy.”
And the permission granted from patriarchs long gone to let life move forward is extended not just to their widows, but to their children. The Herold family, with three girls left behind, recently took a family vacation “where Lyndsey and Ashley helped plot Jen’s surprise marriage proposal from her longtime beau. ‘My dad,’ says Jen, ‘would approve.’”

The futurity promised by forming new familial bonds is critical to folding this grief into national time.

These grief narratives of 9/11 children, particularly those who were born to 9/11 widows, serve to activate a protective affect toward them. They are described as shadows of their dead fathers, as small, sad, and intensely vulnerable. In his profile for The Telegraph, Philip Sherwell writes of Elizabeth Turner, an executive at Channel 4 News in London, who watched the towers fall form inside a studio knowing all along her husband was in the north tower. Writes Sherwell, “And inside her as she watched the flames burst out of the gashed sides of the two skyscrapers, trapping everyone on the upper floors with no chance of escape, was their unborn son.” This emotionally evocative description positions Turner’s future child as a vulnerable object of future national desire.

A related common element of these anniversary narratives was the discussion of having a person who stepped in to fill the role of the missing parent, whether that person was a new partner, another family member, or a mentor. Notably, there was no explicit discussion of girl children needing guidance or male role models, rather this discussion was primarily about the perilous journey to learn the rites of boyhood without a father.

Some found that there was nobody who would pass on this gendered knowledge. This is how Patricia Wotton describes her experience of parenting her nine-year-old son, Rodney.
Though Wotton tried to accompany her son as he pursued traditionally masculine experiences, she found that gendered expectations made it difficult. She shares,

> The lack of male bonding in Rodney’s life has been difficult. We tried Boy Scouts for two years. I was the only woman there, but Rodney didn’t feel comfortable with that. I try to fill in the gaps, but no matter how hard I try, I can’t replace a male. Sometimes kids can be mean. Someone asked him why would he watch football if he didn’t have a dad. He felt excluded because all of the boys watch football with their dads. I told him I could teach him. I told my son that he was part of something big. I said because of what he went through as a child, he can do great things one day.68

For Rodney’s part, the absence of his father has left him with a sense of longing. He sleeps at night with a stuffed dog that his dad bought for him before he was born. And he finds that he thinks about his dad when he feels angry. “I don’t really know why,” he says. “Probably because he would take my side.”69 Rodney’s older sister Dorothea has few memories to share with him. She was just two years old when their dad died. Like Rodney, David and Stephen Hobbs didn’t find a male mentor to step in for their father, and miss him when they lack masculine guidance, like when they taught themselves to shave. They share that they have felt his absence when “walking off the field after a game, the other players all have their dads there to talk about a bad call or a good game.” Their mom, they say, is ill-inclined to discuss their games. She “just wants to know what I want for dinner.”70 In this narrative, maternal care is cast as insufficient in the face of the desire for masculine parenting.

Some looked to relatives to fill this gap in gendered socialization. Austin and Adam Vukosa, who were 7 and 2 when their dad died, that person was initially their grandfather Sam. “He took them to basketball games and the movies. But at home, he often broke down in tears thinking how he—a man who had survived the Nazis and escaped Communism—lost his son in
the land that gave him refuge.\textsuperscript{71} Around the time that Sam died, Austin was matched with a mentor through the nonprofit Tuesday’s Children. His mentor, Brian Malone, goes “bowling and sailing with him, teaching him how to tie a tie and shave, and even giving him a book that he described as ‘a thousand things every guy should know.’”\textsuperscript{72} In some cases, one sibling helps another learn these things. Peter Negron was 11 when his dad died. Writing for \textit{People Magazine}, Cynthia Bowers describes him as “a boy torn between grief and a desire to be there for his two-year-old brother, Austin.” Peter says that he has tried to impart the knowledge he gained from their dad in the eleven years he had him onto his younger brother. “I’ve tried to teach him all the things my dad taught me, how to ride a bike, catch a baseball and work hard in school.”\textsuperscript{73} Still, there was a lot left for Peter to experience without the guidance of his dad. Specifically, he says, “I wish my dad had been there to teach me how to drive, ask a girl out on a date.”\textsuperscript{74} He hopes that his dad would be proud at the kind of men he and his brother are becoming, and of his efforts to mentor his brother.

Others found that a remarriage provided the opportunity for male mentorship that they sought. When Haven Fyfe-Kiernan remarried, her new partner, Dan, worked hard to forge relationships with her two sons, treating them just has a biological dad would. Later, when he decided to legally adopt them, they had a big conversation about the possibility of changing their names. Parker, who never met his dad, often looks to his older brother, Jackson, before he makes a decision. In this case though, he knew right away that he wanted to hyphenate his name like his mom. Jackson, who is two years older than Parker, decided he wanted to keep his name the same. The couple opted not to hyphenate the child they had together, giving him only Dan’s last name. Says Dan of their configuration of names, “It’s kind of neat. We’re truly a blended family.”\textsuperscript{75} Kids who spoke about their new step-parents and families are clear that the new people
in their lives are not substitutes for the father they lost, even if they never knew him. For Grace Danahy, the guidance offered to her by her mother’s husband, Andy, brings her closer to the father she lost. She explains, “I like feeling close to my Daddy Patrick. When my mom said he liked bike riding, I asked that day if I could learn to ride a bike. My dad, Andy, taught me how to ride on the weekends in the school parking lot.” For Grace, it is as if she has two dads. “I never really think of my new father as a stepdad. I just think of him as my regular dad, but I don’t forget Daddy Patrick. Every night I pray, and sometimes I talk to him and tell him, ‘Good night.’”

Talking About the Bad Guys

Across these collected articles, discussions of the political causes of 9/11 are slim. For some, the subject comes up only through vague references to bad people. Anna Clare was quite young at the time of 9/11, and she describes remembering a phone call from her dad during which she wasn’t allowed to talk to him. “Then,” she says, “later that day, my mum told us all that he had died: she said a bad guy hijacked the plane.” A BBC article offers some specificity in its introduction, naming those responsible as Al-Qaeda.

Many older children profiled in articles, however, are grappling with the death of Osama bin Laden, who was killed in the late spring before the tenth anniversary of 9/11, on May 2, 2011. Annette Vukosa describes hearing her teenage son cry himself to sleep the night he learned of bin Laden’s death. Austin Vukosa spent days researching bin Laden online, and discussed his death with his peers in his religion class who were conflicted about the feeling of celebration. They wondered if bin Laden could be forgiven. Austin didn’t think so. “How can you forgive
somebody like that? He clearly didn’t care about what he was doing. To forgive somebody, they have to be sorry. He didn’t care.”

A similar debate took place amongst campers at Project Common Bond, a camp run by the nonprofit Tuesday’s Children. The camp used to focus on children related to those killed on 9/11, but has expanded to include any children who have lost family members to terrorism internationally. “In the mornings, campers attend classes and group discussions on peacemaking and conflict resolution. This year’s theme was dignity: how terrorists took it away; how they can reclaim it; and how they can encourage it in others.”\(^7\) And the year of the ten-year anniversary, campers spent a lot of time talking about the death of Osama bin Laden. “The responses have been wide-ranging, said Monica Meehan McNamara, a family therapist and scholar who designs the curriculum for the camp. Some said they were happy and wanted to celebrate, while others argued another killing wouldn’t solve anything,” reports New York’s local NBC affiliate. For some, the feeling is simply one of relief. Camp counselor Marie Clyne, who lost her mother on 9/11 shares, “‘It was kind of like, Finally, the bad guy is gone,’ she said. But, she added, ‘I see both sides.’”\(^8\)

Thea Trinidad, who was ten at the time of the attack, echoes Austin’s anger at the callousness of bin Laden. “The thing I’ve found hard to live with, through the years, is the thought that my dad’s death was planned—that it was a murder, and that the murderers plotted for so long, and that they cared so little for the people whose lives they were going to take, or their families,” she says. But Thea is careful to put responsibility specifically on the terrorists who committed the act, and not to turn her anger into prejudice. She clarifies, “I don’t hate people because they’re a certain religion or from a certain part of the world, but I hate the people
who were involved—especially Osama bin Laden. His death earlier this year was certainly
deserved: but, on the other hand, it didn't bring my dad or anyone else back.”

The Hobbs children were eight, ten, and twelve when their dad was killed. They too were
very emotional when they learned of bin Laden’s death. A few days later, the three siblings
marked the significance of the death by planting a tree in their father’s memory. Stephen, the
middle child shares, “I think all of us try not to dwell on the bad stuff. We appreciate life and
what we have, because we know our family is not invincible.” Eamon Stewart had a parallel
emotional experience, but reflects on it somewhat differently. He recalls, “I found out through a
text from my brother, and I immediately felt dizzy. I felt I was going to fall over. All the
emotions I felt on 11 September came rushing back.” When Eamon reflects on the tragedy in
his past, it is his endurance that stands out to him. “Ten years on, Eamon has a message for the
people who took his father from him: ‘They haven’t won. I’m still here. I haven’t been crushed
by this. Whatever they were hoping would happen to me, it didn’t,’” writes journalist Ed
Pilkington. “He also has a message to the child that he was on the morning of 11 September,
2001. ‘If I could tell my 11-year-old self something now, it would be this: ‘It will be all right.”

International Experiences

It is striking how few of the collected articles provide any international grounding or
perspective. Four of the articles are culled from news sources based in the United Kingdom, but
just one describes a feeling of international grief. The BBC’s video package introduces the story
of William, a boy in London born after his father died, this way, “When Al-Qaeda destroyed the
Twin Towers more than 60 fathers of unborn children were among those killed. The pain of
growing up without a dad isn’t confined to New York. The long shadow of 9/11 extends to Britain, too.”

This is the only mention in the collected articles of victims or 9/11 babies who are not United States citizens. However, one other article does discuss the shared experience of grief related to other instances of political violence. An NBC article about the summer camp Project Common Bond discusses that the camp includes children from multiple sides of many conflicts, including both Israelis and Palestinians, and children from both unionist and nationalist families in Northern Ireland who grieve family killed by the Irish Republican Army. One of those teenagers, Richard John Hill, says, “That was entirely new to me. I can’t explain how powerful that was.” Despite the complex political divides at the camp, all campers share the experience of having their lives marked by tremendous violence. “It’s so simple here,’ said Julie Griffin, 19, whose father was killed on Sept. 11. ‘Everybody just gets it.’” At this camp, they have grief in common, and can shed the national iconography they otherwise carry.

Many of the profiles feature family members of victims who discuss a knowledge of the world around them, or a desire to know the world differently. Eamon Stewart, now a young adult, expresses a deep interest in international politics. “Beyond the grief I really want to know what happened and figure it out for myself.” Two women who were pregnant when widowed by 9/11, Susan Retik and Patti Quigley, became close friends. Though they struggled as single mothers, they “also embarked on a voyage of discovery, learning about Afghanistan and the plight of the hundreds of thousands of fellow widows created by decades of conflict.” The two women formed the charity Beyond the 11th, which gives money to support literacy and economic support programs for these widows. Susan Retick was awarded the Presidential Citizen’s Medal by President Barack Obama for her efforts.
It was more common for familial survivors to discuss receiving international support. Andrew Russin gave birth to twin daughters just four days after the towers fell. Though the anniversary of 9/11 is a difficult memory, she also describes it as bringing memories of overwhelming and widespread emotional support.

It began on the 14th when hundreds of people came to my home with candles in a vigil. All these people who had never known me but saw this hugely-pregnant woman were giving me their support. A waitress in a diner sent me a $10 bill as all she could afford. A French woman wrote to offer us her apartment in the south of France. A cab company in Germany collected donations and sent 1,000 euros. "It is impossible to describe how generous people have been. Even at that terrible time, it gave me such hope. A handful of totally atrocious people did something unspeakable that day, but here was the evidence that the world is overwhelmingly full of wonderful people."

Russin describes the people who offered her support during that time as family, saying that she has come to know and remains close with many of them. Russin’s narrative is one that extends the familial narrative outward.

**Emotional Indemnity**

Compensation is a sensitive subject with it arises in these anniversary profiles. The September 11\textsuperscript{th} Victim Compensation Fund, established by congress in the weeks following the attack, provided funds to victims who suffered physical harm or the families of deceased victims.\textsuperscript{92} Compensation for families was a controversial issue that received widespread media coverage. The structure of the fund received a great deal of criticism, establishing payouts based on anticipated lifetime earnings with both a minimum award and a cap meant to mitigate the vast gap in settlements between white- and blue-collar workers who died side by side. Families of
high-earning victims felt that payouts, which averaged around 2 million dollars, were inadequate. Families of low-earning victims, many of whom received the minimum payout of $250,000, balked at the inhumanity of a structure that valued the loss of life in such terms.

It is this critique, the view that compensation could be nothing but inadequate in the face of the enormity of the loss, that echoes across this data set. Annette Vukosa, whose two young children lost their father on 9/11, says that people sometimes ask whether she received a large settlement, and expressing resentment about the question, along with inquiries regarding whether or not she has begun to date again. “I’d give any amount of money to have my life back,” she said. “I feel sorry seeing these boys without a male influence in their lives often enough. Watching them grow up, my heart aches for them,” she shares in her interview with the New York Times. Vukosa is not alone in linking the question of compensation with that of moving on. In an NBC News profile, 9/11 widow Andrea Russin declines to discuss whether she is currently dating or desires to remarry in the future. Journalist JoNel Aleccia writes of this reluctance, coupling it with the refusal of Russin, who did not return to work after her husband died, to share the details of the settlement that, in part, supports her children. “I got a fraction of what my husband’s life was worth,” Russin reports. These, according to Aleccia, are the “intimate details” to which the public feels entitled with regard to 9/11 survivors, who grieve publicly and are supported by their communities.

The children of 9/11 victims express feelings of frustration about compensation too. Caitlyn Longone, who was twelve years old when her dad died, resents friends who seemed to covet the financial payout she received. “There’s a long tradition in my family of public service—they didn’t earn a lot, in fact, my dad had to hold down two jobs, as both a cop and a
part-time firefighter, to make enough money for our family,” she shares. Her family struggled with money, and the stability provided by the compensation fund was a new experience. “Suddenly, I was the girl who could afford a new car when she passed her test, and who could go to university and live away from home. What made me mad was my friends who I knew were jealous of those things. I mean, do they think I’d rather have the cash than have my daddy back?” Longone’s experience, like those of Russin and Vukosa, is one wherein knowledge and inquiry of compensation seems to call into question the authenticity of her grief.

Public Grief

Of course, a primary topic of discussion is simply grief. The children profiled, and often their mothers, share stories of how they came to an understanding of their loss. Almost universally, that includes a great deal of magical thinking in the early hours after the event. Corbin Mayo shared that he continued calling his father’s cell phone for weeks, refusing to believe that he was gone until his remains were found. Others share similar stories of genuinely believing that their parent would come home, months and even a year later. Rodney Ratchford describes the anxiety of hoping his mother was among the survivors, unconscious, lost in the chaos of the tragedy. Even that dark hope grew less likely over time. Casey Hargrave waited for her father to walk through their front door right up until the memorial service the family held for him. Even then it was not the finality of memorial that led her to accept his death. It was seeing her mother cry, for the first and only time. For some, this imagining was really an act of make-believe. Twins Ariella and Olivia Russi, who were born in the week after 9/11, would imagine that their father was away on “a long, long, LONG business trip.” And Eamon
Stewart only came to accept that his dad was gone at his mother’s insistence. He refused to believe it until, one day, his mother came to him and said, “We have to give up, it’s over.”\(^{103}\)

Only then did he allow himself to begin to grieve his father.

For some children, accepting the probable death of their parent meant letting go of an idea of their infallibility. Thea Trinidad’s family thought of her father as so strong and capable, they held out hope that he would be among the survivors. They spoke to him briefly on the phone from inside the building, and when he ended the call he told them he was going to find a way out. They were watching the television coverage when, not long after, the towers fell. Thea tells *The Independent*, “I remember crying and screaming, but my mum was saying to me that my dad was the sort of person who’d always find a way out, and that he’d have made it down before the collapse. But I guess that in our hearts we knew that wasn’t very likely.”\(^{104}\) And, of course, some of the children of 9/11 are children of rescue workers who were used to having their parent in dangerous situations and out of touch for long periods of time. Caitlin Longone experienced her father, a firefighter, as brave and dogged. He saved people, and he always came home. At school, when she first heard about the attack, she comforted another girl whose father worked in the Twin Towers, telling her that her own dad was a firefighter, and he’d be there helping people. When her dad didn’t return from work, Caitlin and her brother continued to go to school, believing that their dad was simply working, and could not reach out. She says, “It was only when it got to a week after the attack that I started getting unsure. But in a way, I was numb to it—it was simply too big a thing to contemplate, that he might never be coming back.”\(^{105}\)

Sons in particular are described in their grief as stoic, angry, and eventually,
ambitious. Given that most of the parents who died on 9/11 were fathers, this attention to the boy children might be perceived as an attempt to reconcile national masculinity. We know already that these profiles were interested in the loss of the father and masculine role model, wondering who would teach these boys how to be men. This narrative investment in their grief attends to the masculinity they will carry forward. CNN’s Ann O’Neill describes one set of siblings, Marisa and Eddie Allegretto, and the ways in which their lives shifted after their dad died. “The loss of their father hit the Allegrettos so hard that they abandoned the pursuits they’d enjoyed with him. Marisa quit dancing, and Eddie quit sports, focusing instead on his grades. He felt the heavy burden of being the man of the family at 11.”

Marisa and Eddie would later find ways to return to the hobbies they enjoyed as children. At the time of the ten-year anniversary Marisa was working as a dance teacher, and Eddie was studying sports casting. Nonetheless, there is a narrative focus on Eddie’s shift to masculine responsibility.

There is often a discrepancy between grief narratives as they are perceived and as they are experienced, and this discrepancy often exacerbates discrepancies in already existing gendered grief narratives. Drew Depalma’s mom, Jean, a partner at Marsh & McLennan, had recently divorced from his dad. He was a teenager, and wasn’t spending a lot of time at home. According to CNN’s article, “As a result, he can’t point to a final conversation or special day with his mother. She was just there one day, and gone the next. Her remains were never recovered, so there’s no gravesite to visit, and he gets no sense of her presence at ground zero.” He does not feel connected to the site or haunted by her memory in the way other children do. And he didn’t cry when she died, not for the entire first year. “People told him he was brave and stoic, but inside he was numb.” Drew abandoned his plans to go to college out state, unable to bring himself to leave his family. He went to Stevens College in Hoboken,
married his high school sweetheart, and is building a family and a future. He thinks of his mom every day, he says, but he knows she would want him to move on.  

In the case of younger children, a focus on sadness is more common. Recall the affecting story of Austin Vukosa, shared by David Gonzalez in the *New York*. After Austin’s mother, Annette, finally told her seven-year-old son that his dad was gone, the two didn’t talk about him very much. Then, tiny Austin approached his mom with an idea. “I have a plan,” he told her. “We can be together with Daddy when we die. If we cut our wrists, we’ll die and we’ll all be with Daddy again.” Despite this devastating memory, by 2011 Austin had shifted “from a bereft little boy to a hyperambitious beanpole of a 16-year-old.” In the time between 9/11 and its tenth anniversary, spending time with all kinds of people, “stand-ins and mentors” who helped him grow. Still, his growing up is framed as primarily a personal feat. Gonzalez describes his story as that of “a child who grew up fast and focused, picking himself up, realizing early on that the boy truly is the father to the man.” And despite the support he has received, Austin sees himself as an individual who can rely only on himself. “I push myself to do what I do, from running to taking all these ridiculous Advanced Placement classes,” he says. “I don’t have anything to fall back on. I have to do this by my own hands.” Austin runs on the track team, and he says the sport is about “mental toughness.” Though it’s painful, a runner pushes through. That’s how they prove their strength.

These collected articles are profiles of the children of 9/11, and testaments to their grief, their growth, and their forward momentum. For this reason, most of the parents who appear talk primarily about their kids and focus less on their own experiences. Elizabeth Turner stands out in this regard. In her interview with the BBC, Turner juxtaposes her grief to that of her child’s,
noting of her son that “William didn’t know Simon. He knows of him and he knows of him as his dad. And so it’s almost like his grief is about the loss of not having a father.” This acknowledgment is very different from most of the parental reflection, and it is apt. For the very young children of 9/11, including the babies born in the year after, their grief is not of the person they lost, but the idea of them—the role they would have played in their lives, and the idealized family they didn’t have a chance to experience. But that loss is also brought into focus by the media attention these children receive—the family that they might have had becomes more idealized, the father figure increasingly iconic. And this is also true for older children who do remember their fathers. Their loss is crystalized by the narratives, the meaning of that loss is mediated.

This collection of articles has at its heart a paradox—it is an archive of popular media coverage wherein the children interviewed almost universally express discomfort and unhappiness with their inability grieve in private. Austin Vukosa describes feeling that the event of his father’s death is inescapable. David Gonzalez writes for the New York Times that, “In a city like New York, where the broken skyline attests to the staggering losses of that day, there are a decade’s worth of reminders. Even the park where he used to play catch with his father has been renamed in honor of another 9/11 victim.” Austin feels the weight of the public spectacle of 9/11. He says that when most people lose a parent, it’s a private experience. But 9/11 is a shared memory and “people talk about it all the time.” For Austin, this makes it much harder. He tries to keep his connection to the event private, for fear that he’ll be seen only as a child of 9/11. One of Austin’s close friends told the New York Times reporter that he didn’t know how Austin’s dad died until they had been friends for more than a year.
The fear that public grief is what makes them different, or that it will become something that feels like their entire story, is common in 9/11 children. Corrine Hargrave’s mother remembers her coming home from fourth grade in tears when a peer introduced her to a new student by saying, “That’s Cori, and her father was killed on September 11.” Beyond even a jarring social interaction like that one, though, the three Hargrave sisters try to avoid the subject of 9/11 entirely. “They don’t like when the topic of 9/11 comes up in history class, and they don’t like explaining themselves to strangers. For Cori and Casey, the transition to high school was difficult because everybody wanted to know their story. Their friends knew, and that was enough. They didn’t want to be the 9/11 poster children.”

Their mother Pat tries to remind them that this is just one thing about them.

The feeling that grieving as a 9/11 child sets one apart from their peers is one that persists even in the face of support. Eamon Steward, who was eleven at the time of 9/11, describes feeling unintentionally “ostracized” regardless of what kind of attention was paid to him after his father died. He says there were some peers who he felt gave him “weird or silent looks” and those who would say, in kindness, that they were sorry about his dad. Eamon says, “The thing I wanted more than anything else was to be treated like anybody else and to have some normalcy return to my life. It’s hard for a bunch of 11-year-old kids to wrap their heads around the fact.” Regardless of the intentions of the people around him, he felt singled out a time when he wanted to feel like everyone else.

It isn’t just the publicity that accompanies yearly anniversaries that makes these children uncomfortable, it is also the repeated coverage—and accompanying video footage—of the day their parent died. As the anniversary approached, some were dreading “the repeated replays the
planes, the impacts, the fireballs, and the collapsing towers.” These images bring back memories of the attack, and the origin of their grief. Marisa Allegretto remembers watching the footage in school the day her dad died. “Seeing the burning towers, the traumatized survivors, and the helpless jumpers was all too much,” she recalls. Kaila Starita looks forward to participating in the memorials at ground zero and still feels that the television footage is too difficult. “She says she won’t watch the television footage of planes flying into the towers and that she’ll never feel any closure.” And sometimes, publicity and the footage combine. Lauren McIntyre’s mom says that in 2010 she and her daughter saw a news segment that talked about 9/11 kids who look like their dads. “When they flashed her picture on the screen, she thought it was so cool at first, and then she started crying.”

A few children share experiences of being comforted by sharing their stories, or of the ways in which the public nature of the event led to a kind of support that might not have otherwise arisen. Alison Lee, who never met her biological dad, decided in 2010 to share the story of her dad with her class for show-and-tell. She says, “I brought in a snow globe of New York City. I wanted to bring it in because it reminds me of my first daddy. I told them my dad’s plane crashed into the twin towers. I was nervous but it made me feel better. I got to share my story with everyone. Before that, only my best friend knew.” For Alison, sharing this connection to her “first daddy” makes her feel more connected. And Madison Burnett, whose sisters discuss their feelings of discomfort with their public loss, recalls a striking manifestation of physical support after the towers fell. Though she does not remember most of the day, she says, “What I do remember—much later—is looking out of the window when it was dark, and seeing that our neighbours had formed a human chain around our home, to stop the TV
cameramen and journalists getting near to us.”128 This memory of support is one that relies on the shared national tragedy, as well as the media fascination with the bereaved.

The complicated experiences of grief are shared among the anniversary profiles. Phillip Sherwell writes in his article for *The Telegraph*, “For their mothers, they were not only raising children without their fathers, they were also raising 9/11 babies, the youngest victims of terrorist atrocities that are forever carved into the world’s consciousness—a very public but at the same time deeply intimate tragedy.”129 This collection of articles attests to the continued connection to these children as figures of nationalism and a link to the collective feeling of grief. In some ways, the disavowal expressed by both mothers and children of embodied representation makes them a more useful national symbol. Their reticence is a reflection both of their innocence and the authenticity of their experience.

**The Stuff of Memories**

The journalists writing these anniversary tributes and the surviving parents they interview repeatedly cast the children of 9/11 as memory-holders, even as the children themselves express fear that they are already forgetting. Interviewed by CBS, Christy Ferer, 9/11 memorial board member, contends, “These are the people who are going to remember 9/11 for the longest. They’re going to outlive us and so will their memories of what happened on that day.”130 Because so few 9/11 children relate their memories of 9/11 to political structures, this narrative of memory is one that ties the event irrevocably to the affect of loss, and a tenuous one at that. Like many 9/11 children, Jackie Hobbs, who was twelve at the time, worries about time stealing
memories away. “There’s already so much I don’t remember about my time with my dad. My biggest fear is that it will all fade away,” she says.

People Magazine’s profile casts the children’s physical existence as proof that life goes on. In this story, the children themselves are embodied national memories. People describes, “They were just newborns, and yet they brought comfort to their widowed mothers and became symbols of hope for a nation reeling over the tragedy of September 11. Now 10 years later, the milestones of their young lives—the first days of school, the dance recitals, the baseball games—have served as proof that life carries on even in the face of unthinkable loss.” Many of the articles concretize this connection by reflecting on the ways in which the children physically resemble the parents that they lost. CNN describes Corinne Hargrave, the oldest child of the late Timothy Hargrave by focusing on the crown of dark curls she shares with her father. People interviews nine-year-old Alexa Smagala, who shares “I always ask my mom to see pictures of my dad and me, but then I remember there aren’t any. That makes me sad. People say I can curl my tongue like him, raise my eyebrow and tell jokes like him. Everyone says I look like him. I think so too.” Jacqueline Milam remembers for her son, who never met his father. “He wasn’t born yet and didn’t get the chance. I wish they could have had a moment; I would give anything for that. I do see a lot of their dad in my kids, especially in my son. He looks just like his father. He smiles like him.” These reflections are scattered all across the anniversary profiles—descriptions of children as living memorials to their fathers, carrying the legacy of not just their families, but of 9/11 and national loss, forward.

Another common thread that emerges is the discussion of not having memories. For some, there is a feeling they know their parents, and feel close to them. JoNel Aleccia writes for
NBC, “For children like Ariella and Olivia, who never met their father, and their brother, who was only a toddler, memories of their dad have been constructed from family photos and videos and stories told by their mother, family members and friends.” They know what he looks like, and they have learned what he loved when he was alive, and through this, they feel they know him. Ariella wrote a poem for the book The Legacy Letters: Messages of Life and Hope for 9/11 Family Members, in which she expresses that she feels her father is always with her, just as she is always with him. Fran Furman, the director of counseling for Tuesday’s Children, says that “it can be traumatic not to have memories,” and that these constructed memories provide a needed comfort. Lauren McIntyre constructed memories of her father with herself in them, as her mother tells People Magazine. When corrected by her older brother, she would simply respond, “He would have liked me.”

Mary Danahy describes for People Magazine the artifact that her daughter Grace uses to anchor herself to Patrick, the father she never met—it is a photograph of him holding her older sister when she was a newborn. “I think Grace likes to imagine he is holding her,” Mary says. This photograph has replaced the ultrasound photo she used to keep in her bedroom, which comforted her because it was the only way that her dad had seen her. Grace is not alone in this imagining. Nine-year-old Rodney Wotton does the same. “I have one favorite picture of him. You can only see the sky and Dad,” he says. “Sometimes I imagine being there with him.” For the 9/11 babies who never had a moment to share with their dads, building memories from artifacts allows them to write themselves into the past, if not their dads into the future.

There is a thread of haunting that carries through many of these collected stories of 9/11 children. A few years after her father died Corinne Hargrave, the one who has her father’s head
of dark, curly hair, found a photo of her dad, one in which their resemblance is striking. He is sitting on wide white stairs, resting his feet on red brick, tilting his chin to the camera. “This picture haunts Daddy,” she said to her mom, pointing to the wrought iron lettering centered on the top staircase. They spell out the address of this building, reading Nine Eleven. Above them, a door is barely visible. Her mother, Pat, remembers the day she took this photo, when she and Tim were a young couple. They were dating, and they’d taken a trip to Wildwood, chasing a beach day and finding that it wasn’t inviting. Instead, they’d wandered streets of Cape May, looking at the painted Victorian homes. Tim posed for this photo, and she’d kept it because “he was so good looking.” As Ann O’Neill writes for CNN, “their whole lives lay ahead of them.” She did not know what it would look like when she took the photo, but their daughter did when she found it. For her, it was haunted from the start.

In some of these narratives, the theme of haunting emerges through a discussion of reconciling the death of the parent through burial. Eamon Stewart’s family was able to bury some of his father’s remains, which were identified at ground zero. They laid him to rest at a cemetery near the family home. Eamon believes that the ability to have a funeral and burial for his father was crucial to his family’s ability to grieve. When they attended the commemoration of the third anniversary, he says, “You could tell which families had recovered remains and which hadn’t. The ones that hadn’t would be making little clumps of dirt in the ground and some kind of structure or form. Seeing that made me realize how lucky our family had been—at least we were able to bury him properly.” Thea Trinidad shares a similar experience, though for Thea there was also some sadness in finally burying her father. She explains, “About a year later we got a call to say they’d found his remains. We’d hoped for that, but, of course, it was heartbreaking, too. We already knew he’d never be back, but this was the final certainty, and it
was tough to bear. But at least we were able to bury him. There’s a closure in burial.” Both Eamon and Thea feel that the closure they received through burial allowed them to grieve their fathers while feeling less tethered to and haunted by the physical absence of a body.

For the families whose loved ones were not recovered from ground zero, there is no reconciliation through burial. For young children, this may be particularly confusing. Dena Smagala tells People Magazine that she has always offered comfort to her daughter Alexa by talking about her father. “I’ve been telling her ever since she was born that her father is with her. She’ll ask, ‘How come I don’t have a daddy?’ and I say, ‘Daddy is up in heaven,’ and she’ll say, ‘Oh yeah.’” Alexa recalls that when she was younger she knew her dad had passed away, and wondered where he was buried. She shares, “One time, a few years ago, I asked my mom when we passed a cemetery if Daddy was buried there. Mom said no and that she’d tell me when I get older. Now I know.” Like young Alexa, Rodney Ratchford also had to come to terms with his mother’s death without the comfort of burial. Rodney’s grief took him to dark places, and he found himself struggling with the person he was becoming. He explains, “Because I was so full of anger, I didn’t care about anyone else….If my mama had been there, who knows what would have happened? But my mama wasn’t there, and I was all messed up inside.” When he began to make peace and change his life, he knew he needed to have the closure that Thea Trinidad discussed, but his family were not able to recover his mother’s remains. “They never found her body, but she has a grave. It’s a symbolic thing, a place where I can go to think about her and to talk to her. I hope that, if she’s looking down on me, she’s proud of me.” Even for families without a body to bury, there may be comfort in the cemetery as a space for grief to live.
On Childhood and Time

These collected articles cannot help but brush up against the idea of childhood, and the expectations of what children can and should know, experience, and understand. One of the reasons that the children of 9/11 hold an affective appeal is because of the expected contrast between the idealized innocence of childhood and the complicated knowledge that comes with experiencing death. Here, there is an intersection with time as each anniversary provides a signpost for the child growing to an increased understanding of their own grief and the role they play in the national memory of a political trauma. Writing for The Guardian, Ed Pilkington describes these children as “a rarefied club—the society of 9/11 children. Almost 3,000 boys and girls under 18 lost a parent in the attacks, passing the events of that terrible day and the 10 years that have come since through the peculiarly distorting—or perhaps clarifying—lenses of childhood.” Whether this lens distorts or clarifies, it resonates deeply through the articles.

This conflict emerges in these articles primarily because of the way in which the lens of the article itself contrasts with the assertions of an interviewed mother. The People Magazine article exclaims, “The horror unleashed that September morning reverberates to this day in stump speeches, airport security lines and seemingly endless foreign wars. And many of these children of 9/11 have begun to grasp that their fathers’ stories are part of something much bigger.” In the same paragraph, Jenna Jacobs-Dick says that her son Gabriel “doesn’t really want to know about 9/11 because he’s just busy being a 9-year-old.” Similarly, Andrea Russin describes that she has endeavored to make sure that her twin daughters, Olivia and Ariella, born just four days after 9/11, have “normal childhoods.” She explains that her girls spent the summer before the tenth anniversary and their tenth birthdays swimming, playing, going to camp, and looking
forward to their birthday party. Still, Olivia tells NBC News’ JoNel Aleccia that she sometimes feels incomplete because she doesn’t have her dad, and that she thinks about this when she thinks of her birthday. “Your mom has to be there, but your dad should be there.”

Though Andrea Russin describes her daughters’ birthdays as “more than normal,” her daughter’s interview reveals an awareness that these parties are missing a component that she feels ought to there.

These feelings of dissonance can emerge at any time. Some parents share stories that reveal how jarring it can feel to confront this grown-up knowledge. Elizabeth Turner describes one such experience in her interview with Philip Sherwell for *The Telegraph*. “One day we were reading a book about airplanes and turned the page and there was a section about 9/11. William asked, very matter-of-fact, ‘Is that where my Dad died?’ At one level, he’s just a normal nine-year-old boy who likes Harry Potter and eating pizza, but he’s also a nine-year-old boy whose father died in the World Trade Centre.” Sherwell writes that this kind of inquiry surpassed the kind of question any child who doesn’t know their parent might ask. It reflects knowledge of political turmoil and violence that can feel incongruent with what is expected of children.

The innocence of childhood is often folded into the retelling of 9/11 memories, and can bring into light the ways in which the passage of time changes things. Lyndsey Herold tells the *New York Post* that she didn’t understand it when it happened, and that as a result, her feelings of loss have become sharper as she’s gotten older, though she tries to remember the time she had with her dad. Eamon Stewart says that he remembers feeling sad, but also wanting to play. “I cried. I just remember crying and my mum hugging me. Then a friend came in and asked me what I’d like to do more than anything. I said I wanted to play soccer, so that’s what we did, we went to play in the park. That’s all I remember of that day.” And he both misses his dad and
continuously reflects on the things that he’s missed, all the milestones of childhood he’s passed without his father. “The logical phases of my life—all of them, since I was 11—my dad hasn’t been there for me and he’ll continue not to be there.” As Eamon grows up, he accumulates experiences without his father, and so accumulates a sense of loss.

There is also extensive discussion about the concept of time—how it feels for it to pass, and how this loss these kids have experienced disrupts their notion of time in complicated ways. The passing of time is ever-present for the families, as graduations, birthdays, marriages, and countless other milestones come and go. People Magazine describes these missed moments “as proof that life carries on even in the face of unthinkable loss.” And every year, a ubiquitous memorialization marks another year—a reminder to never forget. For the families of 9/11 babies, there is the foundational paradox of 9/11 as a time of both death and birth. It brings Andrea Russin great comfort that her daughters’ birthdays fall so close to the anniversary. She can temper her grief over the death of her husband, Steve, with her celebration of her daughters’ births.

There is, of course, the ways in with 9/11 was a disruption in time, a diversion that threw their lives off the expected path. Elizabeth Turner and her husband “met in 1997, married in 1999, and conceived their first child early in 2001.” They believed that “everything was great, everything was on course.” And then, in a day, all of their plans changed. For some, it’s as simple as growing up faster, of surpassing the expected timeline of emotional development. Lauren Erker, who was twelve when her dad died, says that she and her younger brother matured before their peers, arguing, “I think we grew up a lot faster than our friends. We don’t get as upset at the little things, because we’ve already experienced the worst.”
Many approach time by discussing that its passage is insignificant when it comes to alleviating the consequences of 9/11. Within this framework, time may be conceptualized as either immobile or circular. Andrea Russin explains, “Every day is the day after September 11th for us. We have a good life now, but we have a very different life.” She also notes that she doesn’t want her children to think of the death of their father as an anniversary because his absence is a part of their everyday lives. Baraheen Ashrafi expresses the same sentiment about her life with her son Farqad. “Every day is September 11 for us. Every day we are without Mohammad.” Conversely some, like Lauren Erker, share their disbelief so much time has passed. The memories are voracious and unfading. “I can’t believe it’s been 10 years,” she shared with Jeane MacIntosh for the New York Post. “It seems like it was just yesterday, I remember it so distinctly.” For the families of 9/11, September 11th can be every yesterday, and every day, and every tomorrow.

Many articles discuss what, if any, meaning can be made from big anniversaries, and some discussion—with little self-reflection or awareness on the part of the news outlet—of whether the anniversary coverage is useful to those who mourn. Eamon Steward feels that the ongoing coverage contributes to the day’s endless reach. He contends, “There’s no closure, no true finality. It’s such a continuous story there’ll always be something reopening wounds.” Chris Wieman mourns his mom on each anniversary, thinking of it as “another year of moving forward, of trying to stay positive.” For Chris, as time passes he experiences an increasing authenticity in those who support him. At the beginning, sympathy brought a significant quantity of short-term supporters, who have faded away with time. Chris, though, sees the value in continuing to memorize the day, which he does not want to see forgotten. “But I do think it’s important that future generations of kids know what happened. I don’t want it to become
overlooked, for people to one day say, ‘Oh, it was just another day.’ Because it wasn’t.” But for the children who attend the summer camp for Project Common Bond, the tenth anniversary was not a central focus. There was a community art project, “painting a mailbox that will be installed at the 9/11 Memorial at Ground Zero, serving as a symbolic receptacle for messages of peace from around the world.” As big anniversaries approach, there may be an increase in public and media attention, but for the families, it’s just another year.

Fran Furman, who works with the organization Tuesday’s Children, articulates that for these families, their whole lives have been shaped by that day, and for children that can literally be so. She explains, “Ten years to them is different than ten years to an adult. You are talking about their entire life.” In this way, the temporality of 9/11 is anchored in the lives of these children, reaching both backward and forward through time.

Infantile Citizens in Living Allegory

Berlant locates the seductive appeal of the infantile citizen in their untarnished optimism. “No secular or human power has yet affected its course, and the notion of a natural course implicitly assures that the United States will extend into the infinite future,” she writes. The children and babies of 9/11 embody a pivotal contradiction within this formulation. On the one hand, their existence completely belies the premise as their course has been entirely shifted from modal notions of citizenship by a human power characterized as both supremely malevolent and principally secular in the form of a completely unwarranted terrorist attack on American values. On the other, their living, vulnerable bodies demonstrate the abiding, surviving legacy of the
United States stretching out toward the future against all odds. These children embody life in the shadow of death, and this is the basis for their mobilization in the media.

The stories of these babies and orphaned children enact a rhetorical device that Berlant describes as “[t]he overorganizing image or symbolic tableau.” These portraits of nationalism are energized at times of crisis in order to contour public narratives. They “erase the complexities of aggregate national memory and…replace its inevitably rough edges with a magical and consoling way of thinking that can be collectively enunciated and easily manipulated, like a fetish.” In these, the most prominent media representations from the tenth anniversary of 9/11, the themes of representation that emerge to structure the (re)memorialization of crisis reveal these ways the fetish of the national family.

One commonality among these representations was a conflicted relationship to media itself. At best, the children of 9/11 confess an ambivalence toward the media, and some report a deep resentment. But in Berlant’s theorization, the intrusiveness and ubiquity of the media signal their analytic significance. She writes, “In these conditions of uneven development, the work of media in redefining citizenship and framing what can legitimately be read as national becomes more, not less, central to any analysis of political identity in postmodern American culture.” And importantly, the sweeping symphony of representation is intrinsic to the construction of not just memory, but a sense of national belonging in general. Berlant explains,

The performance of mass media-orchestrated political culture reveals the official or normative national culture industry to be a system of meaning in which allegory is the aesthetic of political realism at every moment of successful national discourse. Allegorical thinking helps to provide ways of explaining the relation between individuals’ lives, the life of the collectivity, and the story of the nation form itself. Though their stories are a component of this allegory-as-aesthetic, many report dreading the
annual replay of the violent footage of their father’s deaths. Others share their dislike of having to discuss 9/11 every year, and even more share that they resent feeling that their grief for their fathers belongs to a public audience.

Coverage of the children of 9/11 often troubles the idea of the child generally. In the case of the 9/11 child, the lost parent serves to reorient and fix the child toward a nebulous future, one in which they lack the necessary guidance to be made an adult, and the innocence to remain a child. This leaves the child of 9/11 in space of in-between. This conundrum is also manifest by kinking the imaginary of time, in that it disrupts the child’s notion of being. Jackie Stacey and Erica Burman write,

If the child is the part that stands for the whole, or the microcosm that condenses the yet-to-be, or the embodiment of projected adult fantasies, then its figurative power cements together history and biology. The child thus becomes pivotal in the determining relationalities between past, present and future which constitute these linear temporalities of conventionalized narratives of progressive becoming.

There is very little explicit discussion of the nation in these collected articles. When the United States, patriotism, or the national imaginary do arise in discussion, it tends to be in the framework provided by the journalist, rather than by the parents or children interviewed. Oftentimes, these references invoke the feeling of the nation toward the children at hand. Cynthia Bowers says in her coverage for CBS News, “Many of the young people Sunday said they wanted their missing parent to be proud of them. On the 9/11 anniversary, they earned the pride of the nation.” In another iteration, for People Magazine, the children and their mothers are symbols of hope for the future.
When the mothers or children broach the subject, it takes the shape of a conversation about being a part of history. Jill Gartenberg Pila says that her daughter Jamie is a confident girl, who “knows she is a part of history, and she’s okay with that.”\textsuperscript{182} And Robyn Higley, who was born after 9/11, says that she enjoys participating in the 9/11 memorial service. “I like people knowing that I am growing up being part of history. My friends at school help me. My best friend sat next to me at the lunch table on 9/11, and we looked at my necklace, which has a picture of my dad on it. I usually only wear it on that day.”\textsuperscript{183}
CHAPTER 2

Telling Stories: Children’s Picture Books about 9/11

Setting the Scene

This archive is an intersection of the mundane and the absurd. When I discuss this project with people for the first time, I am met almost unilaterally with intrigued disbelief that these texts exist at all. People are surprised to learn that so many children’s books about 9/11 have been written, and they are intensely curious about their content. A children’s book about political violence and grief feels misaligned with the expected composition of childhood and its artifacts. Children’s picture books feel like a known entity; they are common and beloved. They are also generally seen as simple, ordinary, and apolitical. The texts in this archive, however, undertake a project of both emotional and national education. With varying degrees of transparency around intentionality, they enact a pedagogy of doing nationalism; they teach children what it means to feel American in a time of national grief.

That the project of these texts reads as explicitly political and thus as exceptional, however, should not necessarily mark these texts as outside the norm of children’s lives and literature. Rather, it should draw attention to the ways in which the child and her world are continually and insistently coded as politically innocent. In this way, an interrogation of this archive can be an impetus to questioning the boundaries of the political, the limits of innocence, and the dubious construction of childhood. Just as the overtly political tone of these texts stands out from the more covert ideological agendas of the genre, to undertake this project I need breach the norms associated with the consumption of these books by taking them seriously. As
Lauren Berlant writes of the diverse and quirky cultural artifacts she uses to analyze the political interplay of public and private life in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, “I read these mainstream documents and discourses of the nation not as white noise but as powerful language, not at ‘mere’ fiction or fantasy but as violence and desire that have material effects.”

Similarly, I contend that the books in this archive offer a meaningful glimpse into the imbricated worlds of nationalism and childhood.

Despite the surprise expressed when I first begin to discuss this project, children’s picture books in fact have long been ideological projects, both implicitly and explicitly. I remember scouring garage sales as a young girl for books from the *Sweet Pickles* series. With titles like *Accusing Alligator*, each book had a lesson for self-improvement—in the case of the titular alligator, taking responsibility for one’s own mistakes. This kind of text, one which aims to cultivate positive traits and values in children, and to help them learn to recognize and manage less socially acceptable tendencies, is familiar to anyone who remembers their early reading experiences or spends time with children’s bookshelves. They are also overtly instructive and necessarily political, though most are generally accepted as somewhat benign, sometimes despite clear investments in sexist, classist, and heterosexist ideals.

Additionally, children’s literature does not simply mirror the realities of children’s lives back to them in narrative form, rather it also constructs a version of reality meant to inform their experience of their world and their own identity. Children’s literature scholar Perry Nodelman discusses the representations of children’s domestic lives in picture books and the ways in which they diverge from children’s lived experiences. Children in picture books tend to live strikingly sanitized lives. They are often depicted eating unblemished fruit from immaculate tabletops and
high chairs. They play with antiquated toys like tops and trains pulled from wooden toy boxes, none of which show any signs of wear or disrepair. Their clothes and homes are clean and bright and happy. Nodelman contends that these images are intended to provide a kind of moral education by conveying these characteristics as attractive and desirable. But they also convey a willingness to construct childhood with wishful thinking and nostalgia. Nodelman writes, “In other words, the conventional implications of these images act to teach a child an image of childlikeness that most children would not otherwise know.”² In the case of the picture books I consider, the “childlikeness” being taught is one immersed in a scene of crisis. It is an image of a child encountering idealized grief and national tragedy.

Picture books have also long been used as a platform to begin discussions with children regarding their personal experiences of trauma. Before entering academia, I was in charge of the children’s programming at a domestic violence shelter. In coordinating the children’s support groups and resources I encountered a diversity of bibliotherapy picture books for children who have experienced family violence (these include *A Family that Fights* by Sharon Bernstein, *Mommy’s Black Eye* by William George Bentrim, and Ty Hochman Buffalo’s *Hear My Roar: Lungin’s Broken Family*). One of the projects of these texts is children’s safety, and in this way they recall the abundance of picture books that address the specter of childhood sexual abuse (*Some Secrets Should Never be Kept* by Jayneen Sanders, and Kimberly King’s *I Said No!,* for example). But these books are also always story-telling, and the values that are reflected within their pages are analytically significant. In the case of domestic violence picture books, I often experienced them as being too deeply engrained in normative gender roles for my comfort, and too prescriptive of a mother’s response to domestic violence to be productive in the context of helping mother and child connect in the stressful transitional space of the shelter. Regardless of
my perception of their utility within the children’s program I ran, these books were written for and were at home in the very political and intensely intimate space of the domestic violence shelter, and they are explicitly doing the work of narrating trauma for children.

There is also a long history of children’s picture books doing the work of nationalism. From stories of the first Thanksgiving that never mention settler colonialism, to the crowd of beloved characters—Eloise, Corduroy, Curious George, Snoopy, and Elmo, to name a few—who can be found waving the flag of patriotism in stories of Independence Day parades, to Lynne Cheney’s Patriotic Primer alphabet book, literature for children is steeped in American nationalism. These books are overtly political, but discussion of them is not met with the surprise I encounter when discussing my project, in part because they do not threaten the perceived innocence associated with childhood. To the contrary: the assumption is that these books tell happy stories, and that they will be unilaterally received by happy children. Here, the concept of political innocence collapses into the ideal of childhood happiness, and the project of nationalism within these books becomes invisible.

But there are also many picture books offering political interventions around historical national trauma. I have encountered a small but significant archive of picture books narrating children’s experiences in Japanese internment camps (Ken Mochizuki’s *Baseball Saved Us*, Yoshiko Uchida’s *The Bracelet*, Amy Lee-Tai’s *A Place Where Sunflowers Grow*). In researching this chapter, I encountered picture books about slavery, school segregation, Native boarding schools, and orphan trains. Each of these books evidently is engaged in national storytelling around trauma and crisis in the United States, but I speculate that these texts are largely dispossessed of political charge because they register as merely historical.
Although there is a strong history of children’s literature addressing war and political conflict, much of it is aimed at an older audience, specifically adolescents who are already grappling with their place in the world. Children’s literature scholar Kristine Miller contends that children’s war literature has been a historical necessity. In writing about children’s literature during the Second World War, Miller describes that children’s books were a critical tool to occupy the minds, imaginations, and the time of the children who were evacuated from their homes after the bombing of Britain, and many of the books they read dealt explicitly or implicitly with the trauma of the political conflict the children were living.³

The project of children’s war literature is similar to that of war literature for adults. Miller explains that the general project of war fiction is to solicit in its audience not an avoidance of the violence and trauma and war, but rather critical thinking about the destructive possibilities of war.⁴ For Miller, the story’s protagonists “model the process of identifying and articulating the place of individual citizens within the social and political context of a world at war.”⁵ Children’s literature, she argues, makes this project visible in that, at least to adults, the pedagogical agenda of the text is less obfuscated. Adult and child war literature differs, however, in the emotional distance the stories provide for their readers. Miller writes, “Magnifying and generalizing present-day problems in the imaginative space of history or fantasy, children’s war literature trains young readers to make at a distance the same meaningful connections between wartime private and public life that more experienced readers can make at close range.”⁶ Miller explains that the difference between children’s literature and adult literature is, in this regard, stark. Adult war literature is often explicitly and intimately violent, spurring on the part of the reader a complex contemplation of the consequences and meaning of wartime violence within their homes and their nation.⁷
In consideration of the space between wartime books for adolescents and adults, it makes sense that books addressing political conflict for young children would use a correspondingly softer lens. Miller explains that “Because children bring to their reading a much less developed sense of either the self or its social communities than adult readers do, they need fiction not to shock and awaken them to possibilities but instead to teach them how to construct both personal and social identity in an unstable and war-torn world.” These aims are also evident in the texts I consider, albeit on a smaller scale. The picture books considered here do not address an unstable and war-torn world, rather scared families and communities, and the connections made to the wider world are limited and intentional. This also seems to be true in the one picture book Miller considers in her exploration of World War II children’s literature. She discusses the picture book *The Gremlins* by Roald Dahl, which follows the protagonist Royal Air Force pilot Gus as he encounters the mischievous Gremlins, eventually training them to assist in war efforts by helping to repair British planes they might otherwise have destroyed. Miller observes that the reader is meant to see Gus as a hero, and then to recognize his role within a broader national framework, which include the “heroic RAF pilots alongside whom he has fought and will now continue to fight but also of all the child readers who learn with him to love and respect the gremlins.” However, the gremlins also make tangible and negotiable the problems that RAF pilots encountered in their wartime lives, from engine troubles to navigation issues. In anthropomorphizing these issues into small troublemakers who can be trained to be helpers, Dahl emphasizes the childlike traits of the adult pilots. His story is one of men who engaged in magical storytelling to come to terms with serious concerns, creating characters that embody their problems and can be befriended and trained to be allies. In this way, the wartime story
shifts to one of friendship and problem solving. Sanitized and safe for a child reader, it maintains a softer lens for a similarly political and pedagogical project.

Circulating Archives

In some ways, this is an archive in motion. There are two timelines of its significance. One is cyclical and the other is long, linear, unyielding. Each new September brings with it the promise of (re)memorialization, a ritual retelling of that September. In this isochronal loop, the weight of meaning is granted again and again to texts like these, some with original publication dates hovering near the anticipated date of remembrance, others carrying a shiny seal denoting an anniversary edition. But each year 9/11 also becomes less extant and more historic, and these texts are in some ways already relics of a recent past. Some books in my collection were purchased used, pulled from library circulation. The red slash on their plastic covers reflects their journey from library shelves to sidewalk book sale to my living room and, with that passage, a fading utility. Their moment has passed.¹⁰

The national iconography of childhood, however, is not at risk of losing analytic significance. This moving archive, by which I mean both stirring and itinerant, maintains its merit. Surely these picture books are caught up in the “tangled cluster” of Berlant’s “national symbolic,” doing the work of creating national fantasy, and in this way they remain salient.¹¹ The children these texts conjure and speak to also function as rhetorical proxies, providing a space to consider the child in crisis in all its ever-changing contemporary forms. While I am here primarily concerned with the child called forth by these texts—the grieving child, the child
standing afraid in new knowledge—there are also connections to other imperiled national child-subjects.\textsuperscript{12}

At the center of this chapter is the child-citizen intended as the audience for these books, a child poised for a casual lesson in national feelings. Here the analytic figure of the infantile citizen discussed in the previous chapter emerges again. As previously discussed, Lauren Berlant offers the infantile citizen as a way to theorize the ideal of “patriotic personhood in America,” a citizen whose faith in the nation is innocent, devoid of complex political reckoning, and lauded.\textsuperscript{13} The infantile citizen, Berlant argues, opens a space of possibility by highlighting the ruptures in national fantasy. Though those in the political know may lampoon their political confidence, it also activates nostalgia for a trustful democratic conviction that is solidified as the idealized form of national subjectivity.

Berlant herself focuses on fetal personhood as a way of mapping infantile citizenship onto current political discourse, observing that the unborn can serve as a “stand-in for a complicated and contradictory set of anxieties and desires about national identity.”\textsuperscript{14} Here, I consider a similar duality. While the infantile citizen may be an infantilized adult with a naïve faith in the aspiration and ability of the nation to serve the interest of the common man, the child in this chapter is one whose innocence is made to bear the weight of national projections of righteousness. These books function as pedagogies of nationalism, mediating a moment of impact between the child and the nation in crisis.

This chapter focuses on children’s books that explicitly address 9/11. In focusing on these texts, I do not make claims about their representativeness of popular sentiment, nor their widespread circulation.\textsuperscript{15} However, these books function as a resource for considering different
possible conjurings and constructions of the relationship of innocence, nation, mourning, and mortality. Though my initial intention was to examine works of fiction about 9/11, seven of the twelve books under consideration here claim to be inspired by personal experiences. All of the books I consider are picture books written for a young audience, generally between the ages of four and ten. They are not explicitly educational texts. The lessons and ideologies they teach are embedded in the stories they tell, framed as historically relevant cultural narratives, or emotional stories of comfort and healing.

I am not alone in my interest in children’s books about 9/11, which have been addressed by a handful of other scholars publishing in other fields, including English, Education, and Childhood Studies. The existing research of scholars has provided a rich foundation for this chapter. Some of the books I have chosen to focus on here are explored in other research, while others have not. Similarly, other researchers have chosen to delve deeper into texts that are within my archive but not my analytic focus. Some of this research, like that of Agustín Reyes Torres, Jo Lampert, and Paula Connolly, should be addressed directly in order to make clear the ways in which it relates to this chapter.¹⁶

Language and literature scholar Agustín Reyes Torres critiques 9/11 children’s books in his article “The Emergence of Retrogressive Discourses in post 9/11 Picture Books.” In this piece, Torres examines three picture books in particular: On That Day: A Book of Hope for Children by Andrea Patel; There’s a Big, Beautiful World Out There! by Nancy Carlson; and It’s Still a Dog’s New York: A Book of Healing by Susan Roth. Torres also includes the nonfiction work September 11th, 2001: A Simple Account for Children by Nancy Poffenberger, contending
that the text is so explicit in its political agenda that it reads to him as parallel to the fiction books he examines alongside it.\textsuperscript{17}

Torres is primarily concerned with what he considers to be a “strategic essentialism” within the texts that echoes the framework provided by Gayatri Spivak to examine subjugated communities.\textsuperscript{18} He argues that the books he examines reinforce patriotism by encouraging children to set aside their differences and consider themselves a “homogenous collective” to hold in opposition to an equally essentialized other—in this case, the Arab terrorist.\textsuperscript{19} Objecting to the ways in which the texts disengage with what he sees as optimal “cultural interaction,” Torres argues that the authors have recreated their own political anxieties and misapprehensions.\textsuperscript{20} The most compelling demonstration of Torres’ argument is linguistic—the three picture books he considers slip between singular and group pronouns within their texts, alternately gesturing toward the reader (you) and creating a community among readers (we/us). Patel’s \textit{On That Day} does this most clearly, asking for example, “Is there anything we can do to make the world right again?”\textsuperscript{21} In reaching out to the reader directly and with the use of communal language, Torres argues that Patel is laying a framework of \textit{us} for which the \textit{them} is necessarily implied—the group of people responsible for having made the world wrong in one demonstration of violence.

Otherness and difference are also narratively constructed in the books Torres examines. In \textit{It’s Still a Dog’s New York}, Roth accomplishes this through a piece of dialogue between two protagonists, Pepper and Rover. Rover suggests that if the two pups should encounter any sad animals—cats or dogs alike—they should cheer them up. When Pepper reminds his friend that they never talk to cats, Rover responds, “At a time like this, maybe we should.”\textsuperscript{22} Meanwhile, Carlson’s \textit{There’s a Big, Beautiful World Out There!} has many similarities to the collection of
children’s trauma books I referenced earlier. It carries a much more general message—that fear can inhibit a person, denying them the experience of joy—which it accomplishes by laying out a set of experiences that children might fear, including thunderstorms and people who look different than them. Torres aptly argues that the inclusion of difference serves to naturalize bias. While this is true, children are unlikely to first encounter the fear of difference in this book, and importantly Big, Beautiful World does not narratively engage 9/11, opting instead to note on its closing page that the book was written on September 11th, 2001. In this way, without an intervention by an adult a child reader is unlikely to apply conclusions about individual difference to the political crisis of 9/11.

I contend then that Torres relies upon his inclusion of Poffenberger’s book, a patriotic treatise that marks itself as apolitical, in order to cement his conceptualizations of the self and other being articulated within the texts. While September 11th, 2001: A Simple Account for Children (which I consider to be outside of my archive) specifically describes that there are groups of people with malevolent intentions toward the United States, none of the fiction picture books come close to such an explicit description of otherness.

In his work, Torres draws upon the works of English Professor and children’s literature scholar Paula Connolly’s 2008 article “Retelling 9/11: How Picture Books Re-Envision National Crises” and pedagogy and literary studies scholar Jo Lampert’s 2010 book Children’s Fiction About 9/11: Ethnic, Heroic, and National Identities. Lampert’s work is the only book-length inquiry into children’s fiction about 9/11, though importantly, her definition of children’s fiction is rather broad, including comics and a series of chapter books.
Like Torres, Lampert is concerned with identity construction. Lampert’s textual analysis of a select group of picture books alongside Young Adult fiction focuses on the formation of ethnic identity, national identity, and heroic identity. Her archive includes the three picture books Torres examines, *Big, Beautiful World, On That Day,* and *It’s Still a Dog’s New York,* but also includes Lynn Jonell’s *Bravemole* as well as two of the books that I center in my analysis, *Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J. Harvey* by Maira Kalman and *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers* by Mordicai Gerstein. She discusses ethnic and national identities as collective identities, concerned with how people see themselves in relation to broader communities. Still, she stresses that these identities influence how the individual is constituted within a community.

Lampert’s analysis of national identity was clearly influential for Torres. Lampert articulates that although multiculturalism is aggressively performed in Patel’s *On That Day: A Book of Hope for Children* and Carlson’s *There’s a Big, Beautiful World Out There!,* a central white subject emerges. Both books’ illustrations feature a diverse cast of characters; *On That Day* features a literal rainbow circle of brown hands grasped together in unity. However, Lampert observes, “though multicultural in its diversity, here is the alterity of the Other, a mildly threatening group, with a particular pig-tailed blond girl looking suspiciously to her left, toward a black boy at the center.” For Lampert, the *us* and *them* that emerge from her chosen texts do so by struggling to enact multiculturalism while simultaneously defining the good post-9/11 citizen. Importantly, even if successful in enacting multiculturalism, the national identity prescribed by these texts is, Lampert argues, one that centers the United States. She writes, “The majority of these 9/11 books for young people are… predictably American in every way: their authorship, their implied readership, and their focalization, their orientation to the world.” This
is a complex claim, one for which a thorough analysis is limited by the archive Lampert chooses. I agree that 9/11 picture books center the United States and write a version of the tragedy in which the world is oriented toward the US. However, this sentiment would be given greater depth with the consideration of texts excluded from Lampert’s archive, including *14 Cows for America* by Carmen Agra Deedy and *September Roses* by Jeanette Winter, which I consider in this chapter. These stories find international subjects, including foreign tourists, immigrants, and African villagers, experiencing 9/11 as bystanders or witnesses, and offering an array of supportive gestures in shared grief. They provide an opportunity to glimpse the ways in which the story of 9/11 does more than center the United States. The written memorialization offered in the archive of children’s picture books demonstrates the acceptable roles available for a non-US subject to participate in US national grief. The exclusion of these books makes for a troubling and analytically restrictive boundary.

Lampert looks primarily to Maira Kalman’s *Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J. Harvey* and Lynne Jonell’s *Bravemole* in her analysis of the construction of heroic identities. Both books titular heroes are small and brave—the retired John J. Harvey, returned to action to help put out fires, and the “very ordinary” Mole who becomes a Bravemole in the face of in unprovoked attack on his community. In both stories, ordinary characters become heroic by responding to tragedy with selfless bravery.

In the case of *Bravemole*, the protagonist is linked to working class masculinity. Mole is a hardworking construction worker. His home and his job are ordinary. He loves his family “in the usual kind of way—which is to say, very much.” Mole is thankful for his life, and expresses that gratitude to the Overmole in the sky. When dragons viciously attack the molehill he calls
home, Mole finds that nobody knows what to do, including those who aren’t just ordinary moles—Smartmoles, Bigmoles, and Starmoles are equally scared and helpless. When he steps in to help, he is lauded as a Bravemole. His bravery spreads, and in the end, he considers that his entire community, indeed the whole world, is made up of Bravemoles.

For Lampert, it is the humility that precedes the bravery that signals working-class masculinity and heroism in *Bravemole*. In thinking through this representation of working-class masculinity, Lampert quotes media and culture scholar Marta Sturken. According to Sturken, the celebration of working-class masculinity in the wake of 9/11 represented a shift in US discourse. She argues, “The emergence of the working-class male hero follows several decades in which working-class masculinity has been all but invisible in the public arena…working-class masculinity has been under siege for decades….After 9/11, this tainted image was all but erased, though at the cost of many lives.” Lampert agrees, highlighting that it was the ordinary Mole who became the hero, rather than the moles that had been celebrated for other kinds of success.

Confoundingly, Lampert concludes that the heroism of Bravemole also offers a “sensitive side” to offset the expected “toughness” of the representation, as though family and Christianity have not always been facets of working-class masculinity in the US.

In her important article “Re-telling 9/11: How Picture Books Re-Envision National Crisis,” children’s literature scholar Paula T. Connolly examines aesthetic representation in the genre. Connolly provides a comprehensive (at the time of publication) overview of the canon of 9/11 children’s literature. Connolly discusses that the challenges of representing 9/11 for children include balancing the desire for authentic representation with concerns for standards of appropriateness for children, and observes that many 9/11 picture books (*On That Day*, for
example) are primarily concerned with moral education, places against an abstract background of the terrorist event. Fewer (Fireboat and September Roses) offer detailed representations of the attack, providing a clear context and sharing a story of someone’s lived experience.31

Opting to depict or evade the violence of 9/11 has consequences for how the story frames political engagement of the child reader. The conflict Connolly addresses is clear—showing the planes hitting the towers, for example, might anger some consumers for causing fear or distress, while avoiding the image averts one of the most ubiquitous and material experiences of the event.32 She observes that ultimately only two picture books opt to illustrate the explosive moment of impact. Both, September Roses and Fireboat, are books whose protagonists are bystanders who offer tangible or emotional support. Neither is about a 9/11 victim, and as Connolly concludes, this distance “allows child readers a measure of separation from the depicted violence, and since the stories are ultimately about the possibilities of positive input and restoration, the authors are able to balance that ending with direct visual and verbal descriptions of the attack.”33 For Connolly, the fact that the restorative work of the protagonists is varied suggests to the child reader that neither the characters in the book nor they themselves are responsible alone to repair the damage done. In this way, the books offer comfort.34 In contrast, On That Day offers only broad moral lessons of unity, which in turn “positions the young reader as a symbol of redemptive innocence and an outlandishly powerful Romantic Child who can repair the world and ultimately end terrorism.”35 Neither approach provides an international or political context to the event. While some stories use a historical lens to frame New York as a city with a long history and in implied enduring future, none frame the US or terrorism within a global context.
Global Sympathies

The most commercially successful of these books is *14 Cows for America*, written by Carmen Agra Deedy and illustrated by Thomas Gonzalez. A *New York Times* bestseller in 2010, the book tells the story of Wilson Kimeli Naiyomah, who also collaborated on the text. Naiyomah was a student in the United States travelling in New York on 9/11. A native Kenyan of the Maasai tribe, Naiyomah was moved to offer his cow—a sacred symbol in his community—as a gesture of comfort and solidarity with the United States. When he returned to Kenya to share his experience and ask his tribal elders to bless his offering, his community came together to offer 14 cows in a ceremony attended by a US diplomat.

*14 Cows for America* opens with the words, “The remote village waits for a story to be told. News travels slowly to this corner of Kenya.” The illustration, in rich and earthy pastel and watercolors, is of a man’s feet in sneakers crossing a vast field of grass at dusk. He carries a walking stick. This is Kimeli Naiyomah, who has been traveling in the United States and is bringing a story home to his people. The next page shows Maasai children running toward Naiyomah, “with the speed and grace of cheetahs.” Most of them are dressed in traditional shuka cloth garments, in contrast to Naiyomah’s khaki pants and Stanford University jacket. After speaking with tribal elders, Naiyomah gathers his tribe beneath an acacia tree to share the story he has brought them, a story that “has burned a hole in his heart.” The illustration shows the enraptured listeners surrounding Naiyomah, now in traditional clothing. His hands are in the air as he conjures the story as if by magic. Jewel toned sky whirls above him. When the story is finished, Naiyomah knows his people will be moved.
After Naiyomah tells the story, the Maasai people learn of his desire to give his only cow to the United States as a gift. They contribute more cows, wanting to do their part to help. At the ceremony where the American diplomat receives the cows, he marvels at their “tribal splendor.” The villager elders bless fourteen cows, and present their gift. The book closes with the story of 9/11 reflected in the eyes of a young boy. The illustration depicts the right side of a young boy’s face. Within his sharp, focused eye we can see a reflection of the World Trade Center Twin Towers. The North Tower is ablaze. The accompanying final text reads, “Because there is no nation so powerful it cannot be wounded, nor a people so small they cannot offer mighty comfort.”

There is a second picture book that uses the lens of a non-citizen to tell the story of 9/11. September Roses by Jeanette Winter is also inspired by true events, though she notes before the story begins that she took some liberties, writing the book in the Spring of 2002 from her memory and imagination, comparing the story to actual events after she was done. September Roses is told in the first person by a narrator who has come across a display of roses. A young person informs her that the roses were placed here (in Union Square, though this information is not provided until the end of the story) by two sisters from South Africa. South Africa is very far away, “across the ocean, over mountains, and beyond the desert”. The sisters live there together and they have greenhouse. Their lives are full of flowers, and they have been working on a design for a flower show in New York.

The sisters pack 2,400 flowers and fly to New York, “dreaming of their flowers.” The illustrations are very simple drawings in watercolor and marker. An airplane flies through the sky, approaching New York. Bright pink and yellow roses float amongst the clouds. The
following image shows the sky after the towers have been hit. Black clouds tinged with red  
bellow out from the multicolored buildings. After this page, the illustrations shift to black and  
white. The text reads, “There were tears enough to fill an ocean.”

The sisters are stranded at the airport with their roses with nowhere to go, until a kind  
stranger offers them a place to stay. To repay his kindness, the sisters offer the man their roses.  
He drives the sisters to Union Square, where New York residents are gathering and creating an  
impromptu memorial. The candles on the page are yellow, and mark the return of color to the  
illustrations. The sisters begin laying their flowers on the ground. “When the sisters step back,”  
the text reads, “there lay the fallen towers.” The book’s final page shows the narrator’s tears  
falling on the roses.

These two books, in which Africans offer grand gestures of goodwill to the United States  
after 9/11, are the only two picture books in this archive that provide any international context to  
their stories. Though Wilson Kimeli Naiyomah collaborated on the commercially successful 14  
Cows for America, neither this book, nor September Roses, is authored by writers from the  
regions depicted in the stories. The effect of the global context offered is not to situate the grief  
of the United States within a framework of global struggle, nor is it to attempt an explanation for  
the terrorism experienced. Rather, these stories offer their reader a chance to center the political  
turmoil and sadness of the US by framing an international community as deeply and exclusively  
sympathetic. These texts envision the grief experienced by the US through the empathy of people  
who are, to varying extents, exoticized and othered by the stories and illustrations. 14 Cows for  
America, in particular, offers striking representations of the people who are offering their
sympathy. The Maasai are depicted as warriors, gazing unflinchingly at the reader through the illustration.

Back to the Future

Written and illustrated by Mordicai Gerstein, The Man Who Walked Between the Towers takes a different approach to the subject of 9/11. The book tells the story of Philippe Petit, a street performer renowned for completing an illicit high wire walk between the twin towers of the World Trade Center in 1974. Gerstein’s compelling and immersive story is one that provides a frame for the 9/11 by telling a historical story of the towers and the city, referencing 9/11 only in its final two pages. The Man Who Walked Between the Towers won the Caldecott Medal in 2004. In his acceptance speech, Gerstein shared that though he had been considering a story inspired by Petit since the 1980s, it was after 9/11 that the book idea began to take shape. He explained, “The towers were part of my home, my furniture. Over the years I’d seen them in different light and weather from different parts of the city. I’d passed them on my morning runs, and painted watercolors of them in the evenings. The idea came to me that instead of concocting a fictional parallel to Philippe’s walk, I should tell the story of what actually happened; it was less believable and therefore more truly wonder-ful!” For Gerstein, the towers were both mundane and extraordinary, both “furniture” and a site of danger and mischief.

The Twin Towers are the protagonist of this story, the first characters to whom we are introduced. The first page reads, “Once there were two towers side by side. They were each a quarter of a mile high; one thousand three hundred and forty feet. The tallest buildings in New York City.” A watercolor illustration takes up most of the page, and features the towers rising far
above the rest of the New York skyline set against a pleasantly cloudy blue backdrop of sky. Petit is a tiny figure in the lower left corner of the photo, gazing up at the towers with his hat in his hand. The towers are featured in nearly every illustration in the book. Their physical immensity is emphasized with two foldout sections—one that makes the illustration three pages wide, and one that makes the illustration three pages tall, requiring the reader to turn the book sideways. On each of these foldouts, the illustrations extend all the way to the edges of the page, with the text overlaying the artwork. The sheer immensity and power of the towers is clearly conveyed.

Petit is introduced on the second page as a young man and a street performer who rode a unicycle, juggled, and walked tightropes. Petit, the book tells us, saw the buildings and was transfixed. He was drawn not the to towers themselves, but to the possibilities offered by their architecture. The book reads, “He looked not at the towers but at the space between them and thought, what a wonderful place to stretch a rope; a wire on which to walk.”

Petit is depicted as something of a rascal; sportive and brave. He knows from his experience with a similar feat at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris that he will not be given permission to do this high walk. He hatches a plan and sneaks into the unfinished south tower dressed as a construction worker, perilously setting up his wire with the aid of some supportive and wily friends. The task was fraught with missteps and took all night. By dawn, he was nearly ready.

The description of Petit’s high walk is laden with powerful imagery and loaded language. In the center of the three-page-wide foldout the text reads, “Out to the very middle he walked, as if he were walking on the air itself. Many winds whirled up from between the towers, and he
swayed with them. He could feel the towers breathing. He was not afraid. He felt alone and happy and absolutely free.” People on the street saw him on the wire, “dancing.” They found it terrifying, beautiful, and astonishing. Petit is depicted as having a mastery over the dangerous physical task he has undertaken and the authorities that would stand in his away. Though police come and attempt to arrest him, he plays for almost an hour, until he is “completely satisfied,” his freedom assured as long as he remains on the wire. When he is finally arrested, Petit is sentenced to perform in the park for children.

After this section of the text, one of the final pages reads only “Now the towers are gone.” The starkness of the white page stands out from the chaos and darker colors of the previous illustrations. Opposite the text is a full-page illustration of the New York skyline without the twin towers. The text on the final page tells us that they are there, “in memory, as if imprinted on the sky. And part of that memory is the joyful morning, August 7, 1974, when Philippe Petit walked between them in the air.” The colors in the accompanying illustration are subdued and pleasant; it is autumn and the leaves have fallen from the trees. The towers are present, behind the clouds.

*The Man Who Walked Between the Towers* approaches 9/11 as if by sleight of hand—9/11 is invisible, and then it is presented with a flourish. It was there all along, hidden from the sight of the reader. The towers are present and then they are gone, present still in our memory and, an adult reader knows, projected with light into the sky every autumn as the leaves fall. Before his walk, Petit looked upon the towers and was enraptured by the possibilities of the space that fell between them—space that is now filled with a museum and memorial.
The emotions that circulate in the book, both regarding the acts committed by Petit and around the towers themselves, are analytically significant and politically important. Between the towers, Petit experiences freedom from the control of the authorities that would have prevented—and prematurely ended—his feat. He was inspired by the possibilities in the space between the towers, which he conquers. He is in danger but he is unafraid. The onlookers, however, are terrified. They are also mesmerized by the beauty and risk at play. The illustrations convey the dizzying heights, the drama of the experience. They feel urgent. It may be that attaching these emotions to the towers is a way to write over some of trauma associated with them.

The book also clearly functions as a way to enter a conversation about the events of 9/11. This book was written for children between the ages of five and eight. When a child encounters the page that says simply, “Now the towers are gone,” they are very likely to ask why. The book offers no answer, leaving complete control of that conversation to the parent, teacher, or librarian who is facilitating the reading. It does, however, offer a conclusion about the fate of the towers by confirming that they live on in memory. The text also performs the narrative resurrection upon which it insists. Children who encounter this text are likely to have not known about the towers before they read this story. Within its pages they are introduced to the towers and experience them as a site of possibility, risk, and exhilaration before learning of their demise. Finally, they are assured of the towers enduring memory at the book’s close. The tower’s history and future are simultaneously constructed within the story. This temporal slippage in some ways capture’s Petit’s perspective on the towers. He has said, “I don’t see time begin and end. In my head, the Twin Towers are still alive.”

Written and illustrated by Maira Kalman, *Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J.* 

*Harvey* also begins in the past. *Fireboat* deals directly with the events of 9/11, using an old fireboat as the narrative device through which to tell the story. *Fireboat* won the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award. In an acceptance essay, Kalman writes, “For me, New York City was, is, and always will be the epicenter of energy on planet earth. I wrote the book on the subway.”

It is fitting then that Kalman situates this story in time and space by describing the “amazing things…big and small” that were happening in 1931, most of which involve New York City. In setting this scene, Kalman deliberately elides the historical political crises and social tensions of the thirties in order to cultivate a vision of bustling, celebratory, urban Americana. She describes the construction of the Empire State Building and the George Washington Bridge, as well as the 611th homerun hit by Babe Ruth in Yankee Stadium and the vernacular of the jazz scene. If *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers* is an homage to the twin towers, *Fireboat* is a song for the city. The illustrations are playful and vibrant, filling the pages and folding the text into their contours.

The launch of the John J. Harvey was one of the exciting things happening in 1931. The Harvey was the “largest, fastest and shiniest fireboat of them all,” and the book details the technologies aboard the marvelous boat, and the abilities they imparted. It also describes the Harvey’s crew, illustrated as a multiracial group of “brave” men. The Harvey fought fires in the piers, depicted as bustling. But as the years passed, the city began to change. Kalman writes, “The Twin Towers were now the tallest buildings in New York City. The piers were closing.” Just as spaces of commerce were shifting, so too was the utility of a boat like the Harvey. Considered “old and useless,” the fireboat was about to be sold for scrap when a generous group of friends decided to buy it just to have fun.
The friends repair the boat. Just as all of the technologies were previously described, the repairs are similarly portrayed in both text and illustration, until finally, the Harvey is ready to be taken out on the water by the new crew. These scenes are happy and active. Each member of the crew has a job, including “welding,” “helping,” “fixing,” cooking,” and “being very proud.” Despite the updates and life on the boat, “everyone said, ‘The Harvey is a nice old boat, but she could NEVER be used to fight a fire. NEVER.’” The Harvey’s usefulness remains in doubt.

The next page stands in contrast the previous pages. Though the book is otherwise filled with bright sketches bursting with primary colors, the page that describes 9/11 is completely black. It reads, in part, “But then on September 11th, 2001 something so huge and horrible happened that the whole world shook.” The next image comprises a two-page spread. Though it is brightly illustrated, its simplicity sets it apart from other illustrations in the book. It is spare where others are chaotic. “Two airplanes,” it reads, “crashed into the Twin Towers. CRASHED, CRASHED, CRASHED into these two strong buildings.” The next illustration returns to chaos, depicting the explosive impact of a plane into one of the towers. The book describes that the buildings fell, and that many people were hurt and many people died, though it uses the phrase “lives were lost.” The picture that accompanies the text is violent and evocative. The illustration is startlingly graphic, showing the towers completely taken over by red and black flames.

Pulling away from the dark descriptions of the fall of the towers, the book describes the reactions of the people of New York. A page illustrated with the pages of all kinds of citizens, including police officers, teachers, children, and then-mayor Rudy Giuliani, reads, “Everyone was terrified. But people were brave.” Many of the people on the page would be overtly described as heroes in other texts, or are easily identifiable as important, like firefighters and
teachers. That others are included, like cooks, parents, and children, turns the page from a description of heroes responded with bravery to one in which all people are responding as a community. This message is affirmed on the opposite page, which features the owners of the Harvey going about their mornings before the planes hit the towers. They are drinking tea, reading, and walking a dog. But when they saw what happened, they all spring into action. They want to get to the Harvey and help.

Though they intended to use the Harvey to transport people to safety, when a fire broke out in the harbor the fire department called on the Harvey to help. The illustrations are expansive and chaotic, but the Harvey sits in the middle of back-to-back two-page spreads, helping day and night to fight the fires. The second illustration depicts the Harvey at night. The text tells us that four days and nights have passed, and the illustration conveys this temporal shift with soft grey sketches of firefighters in various poses surrounding the boat. The suggested movement within the illustration gestures toward the passage of time, while also feeling eerily spectral. Some of the firefighters fade into the darkness, while others hover over the water or inside the flames, out of proportion to the boat in the center of the image.

The text conveys the sadness and the urgency. It reads, “They worked and cried. They fought until the fire was under control.” When the fire is under control, the owners of the boat could go home. They had experienced something terrible, but they were proud of what they had done, and Harvey was a hero. The fireboat was given a National Preservation award. The final pages of the book emphasize that the Harvey was ultimately useful despite its age. This is an important theme. The issue of the Harvey’s utility is addressed several times in the text, and each time it is explicitly linked to its age. Less explicit but equally important is the way in which its
perceived decline in utility is linked to the changes in the city. Things like the shift in commerce centers from the piers to the World Trade Center represent a kind of progress, and the discussion of the Harvey’s utility feels like a veiled critique, or at the very least, a notable and rhetorically important nostalgic atmosphere.

In its closing pages Fireboat marks heroic death as exceptional with the words, “The heroes who died will be remembered forever.” Finally, the book’s last page informs the reader that the owners of the Harvey have also “found a little tugboat to adopt.” In front of a serene New York skyline without the twin towers, the John J. Harvey moves through the water, followed by a tiny tugboat.

Both Fireboat and The Man Who Walked Between the Towers anchor their explorations of 9/11 in a deeper past. The former accomplished this by opening its pages with facts about New York when the John J. Harvey fireboat was launched in 1931, and the latter by telling the story of Philippe Petit’s high walk between the twin towers in 1974. This rhetorical strategy is also employed by at least three other 9/11 picture books. The Little Chapel That Stood by A. Curtiss historicizes a chapel located near the towers that served as a gathering place for rescue workers and volunteers, claiming that George Washington worshipped there. The eponymous pear tree at the center of The Survivor Tree by Cheryl Somers had notably “lived” in World Trade Center Plaza for more than two decades. The story of the priest who is the subject of He Said Yes: The Story of Father Mychal Judge by Kelly Ann Lynch begins in the 1930s, when he was a child.

That so many 9/11 picture books anchor their narratives by tying them to a deeper past suggests that they may be thought to have more resonance with a historical approach. Lauren
Berlant argues that reproduction and generationality oriented toward the future provide adult citizens with a way to imagine an investment in the nation, to situate themselves in the futurity of a system that would otherwise seem irrelevant. Here, there is a parallel construction in storytelling for children that reaches backward, a reassurance of the stability in the future based in the certainty of the past. English scholar Kristine Miller describes that some children’s literature provides this historical foundation by employing time travel as a story-telling mechanism. She writes that, “In doing so, child protagonists conceive of themselves in relation to an old rather than a new world order. This fiction recognizes the disorder of post 9/11 Western culture and thus employs ghosts to represent the present-day fear of lost identity under a reign of terror, teaching young protagonists to confront and overcome that fear.” Historical storytelling may also undergird the pedagogical project of the picture books, insinuating the national proselytism working within the text.

The Child is Father of the Man

And, there are other temporal flexures to be considered. These picture books are, as discussed, telling explicitly political stories and, in doing so, defying expectations for their genre. It is worth considering the possibility that they are, in some ways, not for the reader they claim to seek. Though these books take the form of children’s literature and occupy children’s sections in libraries and bookstores, they may be, in some ways, intended for an adult audience. In The Case
of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction, cultural theorist Jacqueline Rose argues the desires of adults are central to children’s literature. She writes, “It will not be an issue here of what the child wants, but of what the adult desires—desires in the very act of construing the child as the object of its speech.”44 Rose interrogates the role of adult desire in her critical exploration of the many manifestations of J.M. Barrie’s story of Peter Pan.45 She urges the reader to ask how the child functions within the story, and even why the child is present in the text to begin with.46 While that means asking what the adult storytellers (both the author of the text and the adult facilitating its reading) want of the child audience, it also means considering the possibility that they imagine themselves as the audience for the text, desiring the experience of participating in national pedagogy both as a learned teacher and as a traumatized child of the nation.

In considering this possibility, another text provides a provocative lens. In the Shadow of No Towers by American cartoonist Art Spiegelman is a genre-straddling book. It is a collection of serialized comics previously published in the German Newspaper Die Zeit; it is also a graphic novel and a memoir. Notably for feminist children’s literature scholar Michelle Abate, it is also a board book. Board books, those thick cardboard tomes with slick, shiny pages impenetrable by drool and baby gums, are usually found tucked into diaper bags and on front-facing bookshelves in daycare centers. Abate argues that, in opting to publish his book in this format, Spiegelman made physically material the core thematic elements of his text, namely an affective and temporal collapse of childhood and adulthood in the face of trauma.47

The interplay between childhood and adulthood in No Towers manifests in a variety of ways. At its core, Spiegelman’s project is an exploration of the feelings of powerlessness that he
felt after 9/11. Abate links this narrative of losing control to the defenseless and politically impotent positionality of children, observing that this rhetorical link is laid bare in illustration—Spiegelman repeatedly draws adults in the book, including himself, as children in moments of despair. He also includes depictions of the ways in which children experiencing their own trauma and fear in the aftermath, as well as reprints of several comics that explore the relationship between the child and the state. As Abate observes, Spiegelman is dealing directly with “the ways in which young people have served paradoxically but consistently as victims, pawns, and rallying points in times of national crisis.” No Towers grapples with adulthood and childhood not as fixed stages of life, but as fluid experiences and, importantly, as political concepts. It therefore makes interesting company for the books I explore in this chapter. While other books discussed in this chapter are ostensibly for children but very much addressing topics considered to be adult, No Towers is a book for adults that engages childhood both as a frame and rhetorical device. The infantile citizen emerges here in a reworking of the adult, transported back to childhood to be remade in a new age of terror.

It is, however, the physical form of No Towers that most interests Abate and brings this text to the fore for me. Board books are such a distinct form of childhood literature they cannot help but invoke the child in the experience of reading them. Abate insists that this materiality centers the concept of the child in Spiegelman’s text. And, in her formulation it is the durability of the book that resonates with the childlike experience of reading it.

The heavy cardboard anticipates both their mental state and their possible physical responses: they can throw, tear, or gnaw No Towers without harming it. As a consequence, a powerful but tacit irony pervaded Spiegelman’s text: the sturdy materiality of No Towers is designed to withstand the expressions of stress and anxiety that are responses to the failure of materiality at the World Trade Center on 9/11.
Here, Abate draws a correlation between Spiegelman’s description of himself—as out of control of his emotions—and the excess of emotions he prepares for in his reader. And, before and beyond the hysterics (or, perhaps, tantrum) he foretells, the experience of reading the book recalls a childlike physicality. The book itself is large and unwieldy, and holding it in your hands does not feel the same as reading any other book. As Abate suggests, its cumbersome shape suggests intentionality. She observes, “Most narratives downplay their own physicality, striving to get their audience to forget that they are holding a tangible object and instead to lose themselves in the process of reading.”

Spiegelman made a different choice, one that deprives his reader of even a sense of mastery of the experience of reading. When I read it for the first time, I lay on my stomach across my living room floor with its mass out in front of me, and I remembered what it felt like to spread my parent’s Sunday paper on the floor and read the comics.

Spiegelman’s graphic novel and the collection of children’s picture books about 9/11 provide two poles of experience—in one, a set of books defying the expectations of children’s literature, offering “adult” political knowledge, and in the other, a book for adults wrapped in the trappings of childhood. These texts both engage in pedagogies of nationalism, and, in doing so, trouble the boundaries between adulthood and childhood. The citizen, after all, is always in a state of ductile subservience to the nation. And, these texts are narrating national trauma, which may further facilitate temporal confusion.

Children’s picture books about 9/11 allow adults to encounter both the nation and childhood in a way that facilitates a feeling of mastery over their own trauma. Within the pages
of the book, an adult is provided a mechanism to recall their own optimism and political naiveté; to embody, however temporarily, an infantile citizenship. In *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*, Jacqueline Rose argues that “talking to the child is, therefore, an act of love, but it is also a claim on the child, a demand made on the child as a means of holding it fast.” In this archive we find that it is not just the child, but childhood itself that is desired.

Perhaps most importantly, these picture books offer glimpse into a moment of impact between the child and the nation, one that is highly mediated. Children are introduced to nationalism through a lens of *feeling* rather than citizenship, even in a moment of overt political crisis. In teaching the child what it means to *feel* American in a time of tragedy, the child is protected from encountering the work of the nation as one of contractual responsibility. Recall for example Connolly’s discussion of those picture books that show protagonists offering solace and support to victims of 9/11, sometimes as a rhetorical device to soften the effect of graphic depictions of the event itself. She suggests that these books convey to children that they will not bear the responsibility to solve the problems of violence or terrorism, an absolution granted to the protagonists in the story and, correspondingly, the reader. This amnesty however, may work to also convey a larger message about citizenship and political involvement. The emotional generosity of the protagonists in the books is not just a social good; it is also sufficient to mediate their crisis with the nation. Whether they have helped put out a fire in the harbor, entertained a crowd of children by walking on a wire, or created a sculpture of roses in Union Square, the characters in the story have reconciled the emotional upheaval of their grief and their political uncertainty.
CHAPTER 3

The Child at the Museum: Representations of Childhood at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum

Field Notes

My previous chapters have explored the child in relationship to the event of 9/11, first as the subject of national inquiry, embodying and representing grief at a time of memorialization, and second as the desired audience of national story-telling, being held fast, tied to an artifact of recollection and record-keeping. In my final chapter, I turn to the child as a creator, examining children’s cultural production within the space of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. This archive, perhaps more than those explored in previous chapters, has the ring of veritas. The works are those chosen as the primary referent to childhood in the space designated as a space of remembrance. But there is also more to consider about the role of familial and national reckoning and the performance of remembering within the space of the museum. Visitors are guided through a (re)learning of memory. In this space of national pedagogy, of instructive affect, perhaps all visitors are positioned as student and, correspondingly, child.

I visited the museum aware that my research agenda would affect my experience, as would many other factors. I brought to the museum a notebook and pen, and I also carried my own anxieties, vulnerabilities, and grief. The former sometimes drew glances of from other museum visitors; the latter was true of everyone I who descended into the ground below the footprint of the towers. In an effort to unfold the affective processes taking place, this chapter takes a more narrative approach than previous chapters. Within it, I consider temporality as a mechanism of affective (dis)orientation, familial iconographies, and the positioning of childhood.
as a powerful, complicated mode of citizenship, one that can be made hypervisible or disappeared at will.

National Feelings

My first visit to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum is flush with feelings. The trip is overfull of important experiences cutting across the quadrants of my life. I am a new doctoral candidate, a scholar on my first research trip. I am a girlfriend being brought home, a newcomer unsettling well-worn family routines in a cozy Greenwich Village apartment. The stakes feel high. I am delighted and unsure and very cold. It is the middle of November, forty-seven degrees Fahrenheit, windy and wet. My coat is too thin and my suitcase is full of dresses, but my boyfriend’s mother started knitting me a scarf the moment our flight from Los Angeles landed and it is already pulled tight around me. Just a few weeks have passed since the anniversary of my father’s death. The autumnal chill has called the memory to my body.

This trip is brimming with excitement and anxiety; it is also awash in grief. The catalyst for this trip was research, and my time at the memorial is my primary goal. The fumbling awkwardness of meeting old friends, familial bonding and photo album tours, and nights spent in a childhood bedroom have been combined as a measure of cost-saving and convenience. The tertiary agenda involves using a fistful of restaurant gift certificates my boyfriend purchased in a bereaved haze at a cancer charity auction just after the disease took his father. I unearthed them a few weeks before our flight, resurrecting them from the drawer in which they had been forgotten as easily and wearily as they had been purchased. Though all were expired, the vendors have agreed to honor them as a gesture of good will, and we will need to use them all in our short
visit. The extravagant meals have cast an odd and giddy shadow on our travels. Tonight when I leave the museum, we’ll share a meal with his best friend at Tribeca Grill, the restaurant where my boyfriend’s family celebrated his Bar Mitzvah. We are opening doors. We are weaving our stories together. We are remembering and grieving our fathers. He is giving me directions to take the subway to the 9/11 Museum and Memorial, a place he cannot bring himself to visit. He watched the towers fall from his high school band room. He can’t come with me, but he can tell me how to get there. My feelings are expansive. They make me feel small.

It is my first time taking the subway alone, my first time doing anything in New York on my own. Relishing the break from the intense social elements of my trip, I put in my headphones and try to feel cosmopolitan on the empty subway train. Emerging from the station, the energy on the street is frenetic. There are tourists everywhere and none of them have any idea where to go. Streets are being blocked off. Crowds are being herded away. Twenty minutes ago, while I was exchanging nice-to-meet-you’s and thanking quirky West Village legend Kenny Shopsin for the banana pancakes at Essex Street Market, a cable holding a scaffold at One World Trade Center came loose. Juan Lizama and Juan Lopez, two window washers who had been cleaning windows on the south side of the newly opened “Freedom Tower,” are now trapped, dangling near the 68th floor. The 9/11 Memorial and Museum has been temporarily closed. There are whispers and worry. There is a rescue underway.

I find my way to St. Paul’s Chapel of Trinity Church. This chapel, the oldest in Manhattan, is the subject of the picture book The Little Chapel That Stood, which recounts in rhyming verses the building’s historical national significance. This is the church where George Washington came to pray after his presidential inauguration. It was also used as a meeting place.
during ground zero rescue missions. The structure was not damaged in the attack because a very old sycamore tree deflected most of the debris. A sculpture of the tree’s roots sits in front of the church in tribute. I know there are memorial exhibits inside, but the building is closed today. A few people wander the attached cemetery. I sit for a while, scrawling sentence fragments in my notebook, and then join the throngs trying to make their way to the museum, which has been reopened. The window washers have been rescued. They are thankful to God, and to the fire department, and to America. “This job…is everything for my family. That’s why I said, ‘God Bless America.’ I am very happy I am living here,” affirms Juan Lizama, who would like to return to work as soon as possible.²

I fall easily into a stream of people and follow the crowd. We are weaved around the block, into an office building, up a set of stairs and down another and then back outside. There is a high security presence and a trembling sense of anxiety. The feeling that we have almost witnessed a crisis in this space is a haunting one, reverberating back in time. But the feeling dissipates with the flock as we spread out onto the memorial grounds, freed from the barricades. Something different is happening here.

Where the twin towers of the World Trade Center used to stand there are now two large, square reflecting pools. The perimeter walls of the pools are waterfalls. The water rushes down the sides, into the pool and then pummels into the ground. It is beautiful and very loud. This is what we have all come to see, making our pilgrimage to this site of monumental national injury. The trek to this space is in some ways similar to that described by Berlant in The Queen of America Goes to Washington City. Berlant explores the journey a citizen takes in an attempt to “grasp the nation in its totality,” which is, in her theorization, Washington DC.³ She posits the
capital city as “a place of national meditation, where a variety of nationally inflected media come into visible and sometimes incommensurate contact.” This memorial and its accompanying museum certainly provide ample opportunity for a meditative pursuit of national identity and loss and an unyieldingly aggressive level of media saturation unlike I had ever experienced. If Washington DC is a place to “live fully both the ordinariness and the sublimity of national identity,” this is an excursion into the exceptional and dire, a site of trauma and grief.

The outer edges of the reflecting pools are engraved with the names of the people who died in the event we are here to remember. They are grouped in “meaningful adjacencies,” reflecting where they were when they died, and who was alongside them. Clusters of names reflect workplace departments, airplane seat assignments, and sometimes families. My fingers run across the inscription naming Patricia Ann Cimaroli Massari and her unborn child. There are nearly three thousand names; they go on and on. It’s spectacular and devastating. The rushing water is like a siren song, pulling us to the edges of the pools. We physically encircle these names and trace them with our fingers. A sign informs me that visitors are invited to touch the memorial names panels. I wonder if in doing so we are being encouraged to offer our body to this name, to lend it our corporeality. Maybe it is a kind of haunting. Or perhaps the name is offering us an opportunity to glimpse the specter of our own mortality and possibility of being mourned by the national family in addition to our own. Haven’t each of us come here, after all, to feel sad?

I do feel sad, and I also feel quite cold and a little restless. I am anxious to get inside the museum, but first I take in the shifts in the crowd as the space becomes thick with bodies, filling up again after it was emptied this morning. Many people seem contemplative and quiet, tracing
the names on the panels as I did, as we were invited to do by the sign in the walkway. I see someone run their hands along the panels as they walk, pausing at a birthday rose placed alongside a name. They breathe deeply, and continue walking. Others however, are experiencing this place differently. There is a boisterous energy among families, a group discussing lunch plans and whether or not to try to see the Statue of Liberty today. (No, they decide. Maybe it will be warmer tomorrow.) There are smiles and laughter. There are cellphones. There are smiling photos and selfie sticks.

But what do we make of those people who are not performing reverence here? What of the couples that wrap their arms around each other in front of the reflecting pools, camera phones turned on their own faces, and the parents who lift their small children into the air for a photo that will contain both their small bodies and the whirling water behind them? These people have not, apparently, come here to feel sad. They came here to have been here, and to record that pilgrimage. These photos are Twitter bound, hashtagged #911memorial and #neverforget. This is its own kind of spectacle, one that does not necessarily feel ideologically out of line at a memorial that has a gift shop where one can purchase a baby onesie designed to look like a New York Fire Department uniform and an American flag Christmas ornament. These moments are casual here, but there is also widespread shaming of these selfie takers, from think pieces in the New York Times to snarky coverage of the issue on Gothamist and tumblr. This shaming enacts its own, very disciplinary, pedagogy of nationalism. But are these incompetent citizens or are these actions of ideological resistance? Inside a national space that commands a very specific performance, perhaps there is space for dissent, whether accidental or intentional.
I came to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum to wander and observe, to take in the museum as it is offered. I want to try to have the experience the museum wants me to have, but I have also come (just like every other person here) with an agenda. I am here to think consciously about nationalism, generationality, and family iconography. I am interested in familial figures in this space, especially that of the child. The child is already everywhere. The child is being held above the memorial’s edge for a family photograph. There are children’s names hidden among the engravings under my fingertips. Rescued window washer Juan Lizama has children, and they are in his gratitude for his dangerous job and dramatic rescue. Elementary school students in blue and tan uniforms are filing past me, rambunctious children on a field trip.

There is a familial reckoning in the act of naming this kind memorial does—and the 9/11 Memorial and Museum is deeply invested in the act of naming. In naming the victims the memorial takes the place of the mother and father and, correspondingly, the state. It speaks the name of the lost child in love, as a parent does. It officially records the death, as the state does. In Berlant’s theorization, the “perfect boundedness” of an engraved name offers a rhetorical end, a way to contain the narrative of the person it represents, while also guaranteeing a futurity in the form of national memory. She writes of the imagined father memorialized at the Wall at the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial, “The monument makes the father’s life public: only the immortalizing impersonality of U.S. citizenship can bring…resolution, happiness, and peace. Engraved in monumental time, it is as though his physical self were only now truly dead, a name and not a living story, while in contrast his national self still lives in a state of pure and enduring value.” Berlant, however, is referencing a slightly more distant past. The Vietnam War and 9/11 are both events that have been publically rhetorically contested, bringing questions of what it
means to be and to feel American to the fore. 9/11 is the more recent polemic. I have not found a New Yorker who is neutral about this memorial.

The name panels at the 9/11 Memorial offer a different kind of remembering than that of the Vietnam memorial. The differences in physical design are significant in themselves. The Wall, memorializing those who served in the Vietnam War, points toward both the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial in order to create a physical gesture toward national historical context. The walls of that memorial are physically imposing, long and between eight and ten feet tall. They are glossy and reflective. Visitors, who see their own reflection, leave any remembrances at the foot of the wall.

The reflecting pools of the 9/11 Memorial invite visitors to envelop them. The names panels are at chest height, so that most adult visitors to the memorial gaze down upon them. Children, as I have mentioned, must be lifted to see the memorial. The names cut through the façade so that roses and flags can be places directly into the letters. The memorial staff put out a white rose to signify a birthday, and many visitors rest flowers and mementos atop the names themselves. Beyond the engraved perimeter walls, the water is in constant movement. While the memorial does reflect the “perfect boundedness” Berlant references, these design elements make the names feel alive, a dynamic that is dramatically reinforced inside the museum.

After passing through post-9/11 airport style security, I take the escalator downstairs, past two iron columns salvaged from the wreckage of the twin towers. The museum is underground, beneath the memorial. Its two primary exhibition halls are contained inside the footprints of the towers, directly beneath reflecting pools. I paid in advance for a guided tour, but my ticket time has been pushed back because of the museum’s temporary closure. I wander on my own before
returning to have the more curated and narrated experience the museum has on offer. Most of the visitors are quietly reverent. An older man in a VA baseball cap is visibly emotional. A cluster of teenagers sits on the floor against one wall, visibly bored. Another field trip files past.

I gather with my group for my guided tour. A wall to my left summarizes the attack, noting that two billion people, around one third of the world’s population, is thought to have witnessed the attack directly or through media coverage that day. We are beckoned down a dimly lit hallway bathed in blue light, our footsteps echoing noisily. I feel rude. We pass a huge photograph of the towers, and a segment of writing on the wall that explains what happened on the morning of September 11, 2001. We are at the beginning of a story. This segment of the museum moves through the attack chronologically, narrated by the tour guide. The temporality of the guide’s language used is constantly shifting. At one moment he is describing the extreme clarity of the blue sky, described by airline pilots as “severe clear,” a challenging weather condition in which to fly because the lack of clouds causes eyestrain. “It was a beautiful morning,” the guide reports. “In sixteen minutes the plane is going to hit the north tower.” He shifts to discussing what the victims experienced in the aftermath, the chaos and confusion, and the haunting absence of the space the towers left, and then back again. The plane is still about to hit the tower. We are inside a linguistic temporal spiral. In this hallway, 9/11 is a terrible, devastating, and urgent memory and it is always about to happen.

Just as I finish writing, “temporally enveloped” in my notes, the guide specifically instructs us to feel that we are not stuck in time. “Their goal was to freeze people in the moment of terror,” he says of the hijackers. “But the opposite happened. We are moving forward in solidarity in this space.” A few people in my tour group nod gravely, but I’m not sure it feels that
way. We are underneath what some now consider sacred ground. I can see the roots of the box columns that used to stand here, the remnants of the slurry wall and a battered concrete staircase. This museum was, controversially, designed specifically to preserve the footprints of this event, to cement this space in the time of attack. It was not permitted to move forward, to develop with the city around it. It is a rainy November afternoon. In sixteen minutes the plane is going to hit the North Tower.

The bulk of the guided tour is spent on a chronology of the day, the architecture of the World Trade Center Twin Towers, and the mangled building remnants within the museum. As we entered the museum, descending into the ground via escalators, we passed two giant, bruised steel columns that were once a part of the North Tower. We then proceeded down a massive cement ramp, meant to gesture toward the ramps necessary to build the Twin Towers, and those utilized to remove debris and remains after the attack. It was on this ramp that we experienced our looping chronological telling of attack, both from our guide and the media installations. One of the installations, culled from the museum’s oral history archives, plays audio-recorded memories of 9/11 in 28 languages. Huge standees are placed strategically so that we need to weave through and around them. They show nearly life-sized photographs of bystanders looking toward the towers, their faces scared, confused, devastated. We make our way past them, as though we are ourselves escaping something.

From the bottom of the ramp, we can see into Foundation Hall. At its center is the “Last Column.” The final column to be removed from ground zero, this massive steel beam is papered with missing posters and covered in spray paint, marker, and stickers. The Port Authority Police Department marked the beam with blue spray paint and the number of bodies that recovered, and
the New York Fire Department followed suit. Visitors added their initials and messages of prayer; a police officer has affixed their uniform arm patch. It is a relic of the building and also of the recovery process. We are directed to pay attention to the remnants of the box columns that were once the exterior of the towers, which have been cut off at their bases. They convey the scale and strength of the buildings as they were. Our guide draws us to the slurry wall, a retaining wall that survived the attacks. Its strength was designed to hold back the Hudson River, and it is included in the museum in honor of the victims. The slurry wall endures, as do the memories of the people lost that day, we’re told.

These physical remnants anchor us in the corporeal reality of the event that took place here, and the buildings that were destroyed. Cinema and Media Studies scholar E. Ann Kaplan posits in *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Culture* that the physical absence of the towers is itself a visual trauma, one with gendered symbolic implications. Kaplan contends that the absence of the towers might be read as comparable to the infant’s loss of the mother or as a symbolic castration. She writes, “The images haunted one waking and dreaming. American culture was visually haunted by the repeated still unbelievable shots of a huge plane full of people plunging into a seemingly impenetrable tower, and bursting into fabulous orange flames.” The trauma Kaplan describes lent a sense of urgency to the contentious discussions of how to rebuild. The idea of the demolished towers as a symbolic castration feels particularly salient, given that many of the proposed designs included rebuilding the towers or improving on them in scale.

Ultimately, One World Trade Center, dubbed the Freedom Tower, was erected adjacent to the memorial. This is where Juan Lizama and Juan Lopez were trapped in the incident on the
morning of my visit. Kaplan writes that the design of the tower was to offer hope alongside the more mournful memorial. The memorial had not been completed at the time of Kaplan's book. In describing the plans as they relate to the Freedom tower, Kaplan describes, “The movement of people down into the site respects the nearness of death on the site, and the lighting will be appropriate to mourning. But people will in turn emerge back into the light with the Freedom Tower offering a symbol of hope.” But the Freedom Tower might also be considered a monument to our revenge fantasies and the feeling of castration Kaplan discusses. The tallest building in New York City, it is a glittering spectacle above the memorial site. At any moment there are dozens of tourists aiming cameras at the sky, shaking their heads at the inability of the still image to capture the building’s imposing scale. Notably, the small display that was added to the museum after the killing of Osama bin Laden some eight months after the museum opened contains a single mottled brick extricated from his destroyed Islamabad compound. This small battered stone, offered as a tribute to bin Laden’s fall, rests amid massive remnants of steel cast as enduring testaments to the towers.

It was challenging for the city to arrive at a plan for rebuilding at ground zero, and to determine a design for the memorial Kaplan discusses that the memorial site is unusual in its specificity and the intensity of grief. She compares the memorial to Nazi concentration camps at Auschwitz and Dachau, in that the site of memorialization is also specifically the site of the tragedy, noting that space the museum sits on was once essentially a crematorium. At the time of her book, Kaplan wondered if the memorial might not do the work of pedagogy. She ponders, “Perhaps lacking (as far as I can tell) is a properly pedagogical aspect to the memorial. If this is lacking, most likely it is because New Yorkers may not agree about the political message to be learned…It is perhaps for this very reason that so much of the writing about 9/11 has focused on
individuals and on personal loss—a focus that many object to as ‘sentimental.’” I disagree that
the memorial lacks a pedagogical bent. Its pedagogy is deeply imbedded in the museum,
including in its attention to individual loss.

After we have descended the ramp and before we enter the Founders Hall, the guide has
our group stop to observe artwork in the Tribute Walk, a giant wall and walkway featuring a
rotating collection of large-scale artwork in honor of 9/11 victims. We are also guided through
the Memorial Hall, where we view the beautiful installation by Spencer Finch, “Trying to
Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning,” which features 2,982 individual
and unique blue watercolor tiles, one for each victim. Inside this display, remnants of iron from
the towers have been forged to read, “No day shall erase you from the hands of time.” Behind the
wall emblazoned with this quote from Virgil’s *Aeneid* lies a repository accessible only to
victims’ families. It holds the unidentified human remains recovered from ground zero.

We are deposited outside the Memorial Exhibition hall to complete the museum tour on
our own. The Memorial Exhibition Hall is located entirely inside the footprint of the South
Tower, and is a space both focused entirely on the individual losses Kaplan discusses, and
engaged in the familial reckoning through naming I previously discussed. To enter the Memorial
Exhibition Hall you must first walk its perimeter. We are directly below the South Tower
memorial we saw outside, and the sound of the waterfall above us drowns out the ambient noise
of the museum, highlighting the audio track piped into the walkway—people speaking the names
of loved ones who died in the attack. Inside the hall, the walls are completely covered from floor
to ceiling with photographs of victims. There are console tables where visitors are invited to page
through the photos. If you select one and lift a speaker to your ear, you will hear a story about the
pictured person told by someone who knew and loved them. Visitors can select victims based on their photos, or search for them by name. At the center of the hall is a small, dark room. Here, visitors can sit and watch individual faces fill an entire wall as their names are read aloud.

In this space, the distance between private and public space collapses. The naming practices happening here are both familial and social, but the storytelling is an earmark of familial mourning. A few small display cases in the room hold personal items of victims donated by families. The family of an engineer has offered his pencils and a protractor. Their ordinariness makes them magnetic. Every person who walks past draws toward them, lifting their fingers toward the glass. Visitors to this exhibition hall are invited to witness not just the event of the attack, but to sit in the memorial hall and witness the grief of the families. This is collective mourning as immersive spectatorship. I am not sure how to properly engage, but I participate. I look for women who are similar to me and imagine myself being grieved. I search Martinez and listen to stories about people who share my name. I look for photos of men who look like fathers and think about my father and my boyfriend’s father. I think about the children of these men, the differences and similarities between the things we grieve. I scroll guiltily, macabrely through the photographs until I find the image of a child. I am relieved to find it has no accompanying audio file.

Everyone is quiet in the memorial exhibition hall. No photography is allowed and nobody is breaking the rules. The space feels respectful, many visitors are emotional. There are several people crying. Sometimes I am crying. But I am also uncomfortable. The way that familial grief and national grief are collapsed here seems to suggest that one need only have been loved, to have had a family, in order to be successfully folded into a postmortem national belonging. The
former seems unfair and the latter feels like a lie. If among the three thousand who died there is someone who was unloved, or who is without a family to tell their story, their utility as a mechanism of national storytelling and mourning is diminished in this space. This feels like a cruelty. And the suggestion that anyone’s death can be mobilized, folded into a narrative of national belonging feels similarly cruel. Somewhere in these photographs there are faces of people who longed to feel loved by this nation. A willingness to dispatch someone’s death in a message of national unity is not a warm, useful, or generous act of inclusion for someone who is gone. This affective resonance of the Memorial Exhibition is a testament to the pedagogical bent of the museum. Its focus on individual stories is a critical component of the pedagogy.

Inside the footprint of the North Tower is the Historical Exhibition. Just outside its doors, a plaque warns that visitors should exercise discretion. It may not be appropriate for guests ten years of age and younger. The first section of this exhibition is a winding maze through displays conveying the chronology of the events of 9/11 again, this time in detail. After one last glimpse of the towers before the attack against the clear blue sky, I am completely surrounded and enveloped by video of news coverage, the sounds of sirens, and visuals of the planes hitting the towers. To my left, a television screen shows Matt Lauer interrupting his interview of Richard Hack to share the breaking news of something happening at the World Trade Center. From up ahead, audio of first responder reports play, looping over each other. This space is dark, aggressive and exhausting. I feel claustrophobic and overwhelmed. This physical space and its looping temporalities recall the earlier guided descent down the ramp. I have been brought forward and back in time again, given distance from the violence of the event only to be returned to it.
I make my way through the maze of news coverage, emerging to find myself in a room that holds at its center a large-scale reproduction of the towers. This space moves visitors back in time again, anchoring us in a discussion of the time before 9/11. The walls of this room are completely covered in photos of the twin towers as they were—plastered on postcards and t-shirts, standing in the background of old photographs of tourists and smiling wedding parties. The towers, this room tells me, were everywhere, a symbol of this city. Beyond this room, I encounter an exhibit about the evolution of Al-Qaeda and bin Laden, the timeline of the 9/11 plot, and, softly, the intelligence failures that might have prevented it.

Then, suddenly, it is after 9/11 again. Here there are battered relics of everyday life. Smashed and twisted bicycles, a singed wallet spilling credit cards. In one corner an entire store window display of autumn clothing, the racks coated in debris and dust. And here, in this room, I see explicit evidence of children, both as objects of worry and agents of cultural production.

The teddy bear, a longstanding symbol of childhood and affection, is well represented. A display case contains a pink teddy bear holding a small card identifying her as an Oklahoma Hope Bear. It indicates that these bears were distributed to New York children on behalf of survivors of the Oklahoma City bombing, who remember what it was like to feel both afraid and cared for. These bears were distributed at the family assistance center at Pier 94. A photograph depicts the bears on display alongside missing posters, available for families to take as consolation after journeying with hope to add their loved one’s face to the collage of the missing.

Another display case holds items left at Union Square and eventually collected by the New York Historical Society and the NYC Department of Records. There is a small, makeshift sculpture of the Twin Towers represented by two wooden dowel rods held in a small tin by red
candle wax, the word “hope” written on one, and the same sentiment in Spanish, “esperanza,” on the other. Sitting alongside the sculpture is a tissue box decorated with blue hearts and the word “empathy,” a tree of paper cranes, and tattered American flag emblazoned with the message “We are strong, we will survive.” Beside these items sits another teddy bear. Someone has written in black and red permanent marker on the bear’s white shirt, “To the children who lost mommies and daddies, we kiss your tears with love.”

There is also a display of items sent to the New York City firehouses as gestures of comfort and support. At the center of the display are three hand-sewn teddy bears with button eyes. There are also paper award ribbons attached to buttons reading “USA HERO” and “You’re a Number 1 Hero NY” in children’s handwriting, decorated in red, white, and blue. There is a collection of small trinkets – a felt star with a rose at the center, a small flag made with braided plastic craft tubing, nine small paper boxes with drawings on every side. A few children have sent drawings and construction paper firemen’s hats. And some have sent letters. A child named Phillip has written to say, “Now Batman is not my hero you are my hero. I am glad you saved many people.”

Among other artifacts from the city after 9/11, a poster offering mental health services for children is on display. It has a picture of a child’s craft project—a flag made of scraps of torn construction paper. It is captioned, “A bad thing happened and then all the flags came out. — Tallia, age 4.” Nearby are two works donated by The New York University Child Study Center. Both look to have been completed in tempura paint. “Nervous” by eleven-year-old Merica Noel Suga depicts an American flag that reaches to every edge of the paper. At the center, in girlish bubble letters decorated with polka dots, she has written, “NERVOUS” in all caps and a rainbow
of colors. An untitled work by eleven-year-old Shanaz Begum Rahman shows the two towers standing in a field of grass. An American flag stands beside them, nearly as tall. The sky behind them looks like sunset, bathed in yellow, pink and blue. It is dotted with thick black clouds. Across the sky, Rahman has written, “On Sept 11 I was at school when I head about the tragedy. I felt Pain.” Scattered in the clouds and grass, the words “darkness,” “no love,” “pain,” and “broken” are repeated over and over. The grouping of these artifacts suggests the reading the artwork as therapeutic, separate from the children’s artwork displayed as gestures of support for rescue workers.

God Bless America

Most of the children’s artwork on display in the museum was sent to St. Paul’s Chapel, which is directly across from the memorial. The church, which was undamaged by the attack, was a gathering place for first responders working rescue and recovery at ground zero. Workers ate, slept, cleaned up, and worshipped at St. Paul’s for the duration of the rescue and clean up effort, and St. Paul’s reports that it received cards, letters, and artwork from all over the world. The display of children’s artwork in the 9/11 Museum’s Historical Exhibition is culled from their collection, and is the first and central exhibit in the museum’s section on relief centers.

The artwork is encased in a long display well below eye level. The display rises only to my chest, and I have to crouch down to look closely at the artwork, as though I am bending to meet the eyes of a child. Because this exhibit hall is not recommended for children, there are few visitors for whom this art is seen at eye-level. This manipulation of the viewer’s body serves either to underpin the asymmetry between the artist and audience, or, perhaps, to cast adults in
the stature of children in a way that recalled Spiegelman’s text in the previous chapter. The works are pressed between two pieces of glass, obscuring their original form. Some have visible creases at the center and may once have been folded as cards, but they could also have been folded when they were mailed to the chapel, or for storage before they were given to the museum. If there is any writing or illustration on the backside of these pages, it will not be visible.

The first exhibited piece is drawn in crayon on a piece of white printer paper. It features a smiling, bow-legged fireman in grey overalls, black boots and a red hat. He wears a red backpack and holds an American flag with both hands. His skin is the white of the paper. The flag has the requisite seven red and six white stripes, but no stars. A thin, bold, black crayon has drawn the line below him that represents the ground, and the words “God Bless America.” Several of the children’s works feature this phrase. Like Juan Lizama, the window washer imperiled across the street on the morning of my visit, the young artists know the power of these words.

A vibrant American flag dominates a regular sheet of printer of paper. Painted in layered watercolor, the flag has three red stripes and two white, indicated by the absence of paint against the paper and delineated by a thin pencil outline. Fifteen stars are lined up in rows and carefully encircled with paint. The flag has pale beams coming off of it, as if it were the sun. Below, the twin towers stand. Carefully sketched in pencils, they have rows of windows, and one is topped with a radio antenna just as the north tower was. They are washed over in grey watercolor. A small dark smudge to the far left of the page might represent a distant and approaching airplane,
or it might be a trace of an artist’s fingerprint. It is signed as “From Andrea.” She has signed it twice for clarity, but the writing is fading and I cannot make out her last name.

Another work features a tall, carefully drawn American flag with four red and three white stripes, as well as one large yellow star in pencil, crayon, and marker. A fireman stands next to the flag in a red shirt and yellow trousers, as well as a red and yellow hat with a black plaque on the front. He is smiling. At his side, a black dog looks left. In a band of red across the top of the page, the artist has written, “Thank you for helping New York, and make sure the dogie stays safe.” Below, in blue, “I love you!!” And finally, in red letters on the white background, “God Bless America!”

Religious sentiments in these collected works extend beyond blessings for the nation. They also include prayers for rescue workers. A piece of white construction paper oriented horizontally with a heavy crease down the center is decorated in red, black, and blue marker. On the left of the crease, a roughly drawn American flag occupies the upper corner. It reaches all the way to the edge of the paper, its proportions suggesting the flag’s edges may be outside the frame of the page. At the bottom center, a heart is drawn in red and blue. Between the two drawings, it reads “Who ever reads this you must belive in yourself.” To the right of the crease the artist has written “God Bless All of the firefighter and the E.M.T.” Inside a red heart are the words “we all love the helpers.”

Sam School of West Bar Christian Academy (Grade: 5th, the artist notes), writes to share a Bible verse in similarly new cursive. “a bible verse” [sic] reads the orange script. Below, in green and blue: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Their will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. Revelation 21:4.” To the
right, a rectangular American flag with two white stripes and two gray, presumably to distinguish them from the white paper. “God” is written below in block letters, along with a large B and L, but, apparently upon realizing space was running short, “bless” is hastily scrawled above and “America” below in smaller print. Sam School has added also included an optimistic postscript. “PS: Write Back.”

Another horizontal sheet of faded white construction paper features two rescue vehicles in crayon, one on either side of a faint crease. On the left, crooked red rectangle forms a fire truck atop two black circles representing tires. A grey ladder angles out from the left side, with a small, almost stick figure fireman in black overalls positioned on the very top rung. He holds a black fire hose, aiming a hearty stream of water at a fire much smaller than the truck. On the right, a grey/black rectangle forms another vehicle. The red cross at the center indicates an ambulance. Above it, the words “We are praying for you. Keep up the good work.”

The religiosity evidenced in the artwork emblematizes the Christian underpinnings of American nationalism, which is particularly pronounced when juxtaposed with the representations of Muslim faith in the museum. The first explicit discussion of religion takes place via the discussion of Islamic fundamentalism. The museum does contain a display discussing hate crimes in New York after 9/11, but it is overwhelmed by the works privileging the idea of national unity. Audio of President George W. Bush plays on a loop, proclaiming that terrorists betray the fundamental values of the Muslim faith. The result is a writing over of the experiences of Muslim Americans and immigrants, a remembering that insists upon an affect of unity endorsed by conservative political leadership. The display of religious sentiment in the children’s artwork re-centers Christianity, buffered by the presumed innocence and candor of
childhood. It does not acknowledge that the religious patriotism of many of these works rely on the construction of racial different and matrices of exclusion.

**Tragedy**

Many of the exhibited works are dramatic visual depictions of the trauma and violence of the attack, sometimes startling to observe in the craftwork of children. A vertically oriented piece of white construction paper is illustrated in crayon with a graphic depiction of the towers in flames. Two uneven towers stand side by side. Alongside each is a simply drawn dark grey airplane surrounded by puffy clouds of black smoke. Sharp red blades of orange-red fire jut out in triangles from the top and side of each building, just as the windows are filled in with red above the third row from the ground. To the left of the buildings, an American flag stands almost half as tall as the tower. Its four thick stripes cross in front of the building. To the right, three faceless firemen in yellow suits, black boots, and red and grey hats are facing toward the doors of the towers. Chaotic scribbles of grey fill the page.

Quite dirty and creased down the middle, this work has been exposed to the elements. On the right of the page, the artist has written a message across lines they have penciled in themselves with the help of a ruler. “To America,” is written across the top of the page. Below, “Thank you for helping the people in the WTC tragedy in our country America.” The left side of the page depicts ground zero. The bottom third of the page is a tangle of gray, rubble piled high. Two small men with shovels stand at the center, amid three large construction vehicles. The
artist has written “tragedy” above the image, with three arrows pointing at the drawing. At the center of the page is an American flag, with nine stripes and small dots representing stars. In large writing across the top, “I am proud to be an American.” At the bottom, it signed Sony, Grade 2, Our Lady Help of Christians, a parish on Staten Island.

A red piece of tag board features seven three-dimensional rectangular buildings of various sizes drawn in pencil and crayon. The two tallest buildings loom large on the page. Representing the twin towers, the top windows are darkened. Each building has a singular antenna centered on its roof, likely echoing the telecommunications antenna that used to sit atop the north tower. In the foreground, the statue of liberty in profile reaches righteously not just up but forward, her arm stretched toward the towers. All of the structures hover above a deep, dark band across the bottom of the page, likely representing the Hudson river.

On blue construction paper, another young artist has drawn the twin towers in flames. This illustration is primarily in pencil, with colorful accents done in crayon. The towers lean slightly away from each other, orange flames are spread across the front of the buildings and emerge from their rooftops, approaching the all-black flag planted atop one tower. A sole plane approaches the towers from the left. To the right of the towers, three emergency vehicles approach in ascending size. On top, a police car. Below that, an ambulance with a stripe of red on its hood. At the base of the towers sits a fire truck, the red crayon pressed firmly to make a dark, concentrated hue. Three hash marks indicate headlights or a siren oriented toward the towers. A blast of grey water is aimed at the middle of the towers, an empty ladder reaches toward its peak. Above the towers, the picture reads, “To Fire Dept. Who risked there lives in the Twin towers.”
A small piece of white tag board is divided in half. On the left, against a white background, an eagle in profile looks right. Outlined in pencil and colored in crayon, the bird is little more than an outline, its brown plumage colored in clumsy crayon strokes. His very expressive eye is trained on the Statue of Liberty, which is centered on the right side of the page. Lady Liberty stands in the foreground of a much more detailed scene. We see the ground of Liberty Island beneath and around her, and beyond that the New York harbor. A small boat rests in the water. She is green, the ground beneath her is gold, and the water is a rich blue. Everything beyond the shore is grey. A rough skyline is centered by a tall plume of smoke that reaches to the top of the page.

In one work, a dramatic, all-crayon illustration, the twin towers fill almost the entire page. They are drawn with an abundance of uneven windows. Some of the windows are empty, and some contain faceless people, their arms stretched wide. Flames billow from black marks on the right sides of both buildings, smoke filling the sky above. On the ground, beside each tower, a lone white and faceless fireman stands, holding a hose that sprays blue water up the side of the building. Their arms reach toward the sky. To the left, the edge of a fire truck is visible in the frame, a black ladder reaching to the middle of the building. The fireman on top of the ladder has a red face. He too is reaching up toward the sky.

An extremely striking work shows the Twin Towers in peril. Though a bright yellow sun is prominently placed in the upper right corner of the page, the entire sky is blanketed in billowing grey smoke. The north and south towers, differentiated by the radio antennae are ablaze. As red, orange, and yellow flames erupt from roof and highest floors, the fire is shown to be spreading to lower and lower floors through the windows, which are also tinged black with
smoke. In red, black, and blue letters—a twist on the patriotic red, white, and blue—the words “God Bless” stretch across the top of the page, while “America” is written vertically, occupying the space between the burning towers.

These works, presenting in vivid colors and sharp angles the trauma and violence of children’s observations about 9/11, serve as a contrast to the expectations many would have of representations of children and childhood. They punctuate the display, offering glimpses into childhood fears and anxieties. In doing so they offer a complex view of the child, simultaneously surprising and familiar. Though the works are startling in their representation of anguish, the traumatized child is a recognizable figure, one readily circulated in political rhetoric.

Heroes in Action

Some of the artwork engages in storytelling, framing the national trauma within a more accessible childhood lens. One work features a soldier in a confrontation with a terrorist, drawn in pencil and marker. “Hand yourself over and nobody gets hurt,” the soldier says, pointing an abstract weapon (a gun? A baton?) at the terrorist. His clothes and hat are green, his boots are tall and black. He is smiling. “Stand back, I’ve got a sword,” the terrorist responds. The terrorist is wearing a dark green shirt and black pants, and wears a black head covering as tall as his torso, which is perhaps meant to be a turban. He brandishes a diamond shaped-sword with a thick, curved cross guard and hilt. While the soldier is in profile, facing the terrorist, the terrorist is facing out, and appears to be leaping, arms swung wide. His eyes are thick and dark, his mouth blends into his beard. In a thought bubble above his head, lightning strikes a gravestone that
reads “Here lies Bin Laden.” On the other side of the page, a repetitious incantation in variable text size and color reads,

    your effort
    your effort,
    hard work
    hard work,
    and nice work
    and nice work

Below this, an American flag billows backward, blowing to the left of its pole. On the far right of the page, the work is signed with the full name of the child artist.

A drawing in marker on white construction paper shows a smiling firefighter and his dog rescuing victims at ground zero. Two people lay side by side on even ground surrounded by black scribbles. “Help,” one of them calls. A dog on a leash calls back, “bark.” Behind them, a yellow excavator’s claw is reaching toward the ground. Billowing black smoke rises around them, forming a chaotic, threatening cloud at the top of the page. The cloud is cut through with yellow lines signaling thick sunbeams emitting from a vast, swirling sun, the words, “thank you” emblazoned across them. The clean lines of the people and construction equipment stand in sharp contrast to the tumult of the tangles of smoke and sun as they meet in the sky.

On a sheet of tan construction paper, another letter and illustration offer support. Anthony writes, “Thank you all at Ground Zero for a good job and a very good American spirit. Keep up the good work!!” The dots of the exclamation points are made into a smiley face. Underneath his
message, Anthony has drawn an American flag, and to the left a very detailed scene in pencil. A fireman, a policeman, a boy, and a dog are holding hands as they ascend a hill. At the top of the hill there is a castle, an American flag at its peak. In its shadow on the hill, faintly drawn, are the twin towers, a medical cross, and a bold of lightning. The sky is shaded grey. The American flag beside it leaps off the page in comparison to the ashen illustration.

Other works express admiration for the heroic work of first responders and rescue workers. On a simple sheet of weathered piece of white construction paper, a child has written “Thank you,” and “Hope it get’s Dun” on the left. The right side of the paper reads “To the police and Firemen / I Appreciat For All you Do.” Below this sentiment, a simple black, yellow, and white hat reads “Police,” while a tall red hat with a faint emblem is inscribed “FD.”

A piece of weathered, dirty, tan cardstock is illustrated with a large red fire truck in crayon, marker, and pencil. The following message is written on the bottom half of the page in pencil:

I appreciate your help
for the world trade centers.
I think you are very
caring.

Name: George.

The top half of the page is filled with the drawing of the fire truck. The truck’s ladder is raised toward the top of the page; it is equipped with two grey hoses. A faceless peach-skinned fireman can be seen through the window.

On a piece of red paper, a child named Adam has also drawn straight pencil lines on which to print his message of support. He writes,
Dear NYC Firemen + Paramedics,

I think you are brave people because your working day and night hoping to find someone in the rubble of the Trade Centers. You are people who don’t give up. I hope you find somebody alive in the mess. Keep your hopes up and you will find someone.

Your friend,

Adam

Beneath his letter, Adam has carefully drawn two rescue vehicles in crayon and pencil. On the left he has drawn a fire truck, complete with a ladder and bucket lift. Inside the bucket lift, a firefighter wears a red hat and wields a fire hose. And on the right, a white ambulance with a paramedic behind the wheel and a red light atop the vehicle.

There are two cards sent specifically for construction workers doing clean up at ground zero. One, a short and wide sheet of tan cardstock, is labeled “To Operating Engineer” and signed from Vincent, a second grader at Southold Elementary. The card contains a marker and crayon drawings of an American flag on a wooden flagpole, a firemen’s hat, and two Christmas trees. The other, an illustration in marker on red cardstock, reads “Happy Holidays international operating Engineers Local 14 and 15.” One side of the card depicts the towers, a small square drawn between them. The other shows a backhoe driving over black earth, a man in a hardhat at the wheel.

The spelling and writing on the next work are those of a beginner, and take some time to parse. Those with experience enjoying the works of new writers would find however, that his message was one of gratitude to the rescue workers for helping at ground zero. He hopes too that when they are done cleaning up the mess they will “ficss it up” because he never got to see the Twin Towers, and he would like to. On the right sight of the page he addresses his letter “From
L.J. to ______,” though he did not opt to fill in a recipient. Below this, it looks as though someone has helped him to draw the shapes of the Twin Towers—large rectangles filled with rows of small squares, and L.J. has colored them in with bold strokes of grey crayon. He has also drawn two people smiling next to them. Their three-fingered arms are stretched wide.

Also addressing the cleanup efforts, Justin Paul Orendor’s drawing is of an American flag flying under a blue sky and a yellow sun atop a green hill. “Thank you for cleaning up New York City,” he writes. Below, in larger letters, he adds, “Good luck!” On the right side of his paper he has included what is presumably a large self-portrait. He wears a red shirt and has short blonde hair, and smiles a toothy grin. He has also written, “God Belss Ameica,” and included his phone number in case anyone would like to call.

Visions of heroism vary widely in these works. The rugged, working class masculinity of construction workers and clean up crews are presented as heroic and represented in boxy big-wheeled trucks, as is the predictable heroism of police officers and, most commonly, the New York Fire Department. But heroism is also represented in the figure of soldier, enacting a melodrama of retributive justice. This militaristic valor is juxtaposed with the cartoonish villainy of the terrorist, shadowed in dark features and wielding a sword. Here, support for the militarized response that followed 9/11 is safely ensconced in the work of a child, perceived as outside the realm of the political.
Several of the displayed works express love for the workers, and offer emotional support. In these works, young artists may reference holidays or address the possibility that the rescue workers may feel upset. In these works, the children are reaching out as though the recipients have a personal, familial relationship. In one work, paper cut into the shape of a wide, round heart and colored purple with marker looks almost like a valentine. At the center of the heart, Arika Bennit has drawn a self-portrait. The girl in the drawing stands with her arms stretched wide and up, like a child reaching up for a hug. Her hands are rounded off beyond the sleeves of her pink shirt, the purple of her pants delineated from the purple background only in outline. She has brown hair and a smiling face, and the bubble above her head exclaims, “I Love you guys!” The exclamation point is a small heart with a dot below. Off to the right she has written, “this is what I look like.” Below this clarification, a blue heart is imbedded in the larger heart. Above it, Winnie the Pooh has been stamped in red ink. On the left side of the heart, she has written, “I am very very mad / who even did this. Should be ashamed of themselves. Love Arika Bennit.” The valediction and name are written in block letters. Another heart shaped card carries a message of comfort and security. Against a violet backdrop and alongside an American flag, the artist has written, “Because of you I feel safe. Love, Shannon Biehl.”

The message of comfort in an enthusiastic letter of support written on white paper is dated by its holiday greeting. “Happy Thanksgiving!” the writer exclaims, in what appears to be newly practiced cursive accented with puffy exclamation points. She continues, “You are real heroes! Thank you for cleaning up! You saved a lot of lives. Thank you!” Below this letter, a long-snooted, black polka-dotted cow stands on a neat field of trim grass. “Good work!,“ he moos, his words arching over his head to frame his body.
Rebecca Maclean, Grade 4, of St. Katherine of Siena School in Philadelphia, PA has signed her work of art. She has drawn a large, three-dimensional tissue box, green with pink, red, and blue flowers. A blue tissue peaks out the top. Rebecca has written across the front of the box, “Maybe you need a friend / Maybe you need a tissue / But there’s no one like you / Thank you.”

Another piece conveys the passage of time. This young artist illustrates a complete rescue scene, one that may not even be related to 9/11. The sky is grey-blue and the sun in shining above a fire truck outside a tall building with lots of windows. A faceless fireman sits in a bucket lift on the top of a long ladder. Another fireman is inside the very detailed truck, which has been drawn to include a stored ladder, exterior equipment compartments and even a ladder number—101. A rescue helicopter hovers above, ready to assist. There is only one building, which shows no point of impact or fire, and there is no airplane to indicate this is a 9/11 rescue. Across the top, the artist has written, “Merry Christmas” in red and green letters, along with a small Christmas tree.

A simple message of anonymous consolation is scrawled across red paper. “Dear rescue workers,” the letter reads. “It was very brave + great that you saved some people. It’s not your fault if you couldn’t get to some people.” There is a consistent message of gratitude in these worlds of art. In a handwritten letter on a piece of stationary featuring the presidential seal, a student of Mary Carrigan Middle School named Amanda expresses her own thankfulness. Before discussing her fears for her aunt who retired just before the attack, Amanda writes, “I thank you for what you did when the terrorists attacked the World Trade Centers. I think that you rescue
workers are the bravest people I have ever knew of. You should get an award for ‘The Most Wonder-ful Rescue Workers Ever.’”

Repeated references to holidays in the artwork signal the continued support of rescue and recovery workers as time passed, but they also call the idea of the national holiday to the fore. The anniversary of the attack has come to function as its own kind of national holiday, one centered on patriotic grief and remembering.

**Memorial Feelings**

These collected works of art are the primary chosen representations of children and childhood in this museum of national trauma. They represent a microcosm of the artwork created by children after 9/11, which has been displayed in schools and public spaces across the country, and particularly in New York. The exhibition provides an important glimpse into the figure of the child during a national trauma, providing a distillation of pervasive issues of race, class, gender, and childhood. Notably, all of the representations of heroes in their artwork are men, and they are also all white. Girls were more likely to speak of love than boys in their written messages. Importantly, they reveal that children are not as innocent of violence as some might anticipate. Many of the works feature striking representations of trauma and fear.

The museum also provides an opportunity to think through childhood in a different capacity. In what ways does the museum invite visitors to step into the role of student, and, in the process of memorialization, of child of the nation? As discussed in previous chapters, memory, futurity, and family are often tied together as a national narrative. In the preceding, I have
suggested that the 9/11 Memorial and Museum functions as a stand-in for the pilgrimage to the capitol. Families and tourists venture to the museum to experience national feelings, to reconcile their own feelings and memories at the site of a national trauma. The museum facilitates this journey in every way, guiding visitors through the event of the attack, weaving them through bystanders. We are made to recall our own experiences in front of a television, watching the towers fall. At this museum, visitors find the emotional redress offered by the capitol’s “monumental time.”

As Berlant theorizes, in the nation’s capital, a citizen encounters structured representations of national imaginaries: honesty, as in the Lincoln Memorial, the decidedly masculine patriotic honor of the Washington Monument, or the harsh unending ubiquity of death at the Vietnam Memorial, a monument which, tellingly, is claimed to make no political statement about the war it memorializes. These national journeys, Berlant argues, provide a roadmap for navigating the difficult affective and temporal slippages of private life and citizenship. These stories, she writes, “argue that contact with the monumental nation can turn a citizen’s infantilizing rage, anger, and crazy-making feelings of betrayal into calm, stabilized, mature or adult subjectivity, ready to ‘let go of the past’ and, with amnesiac confidence, face the prospect of the present.” Berlant explains that the stone monuments baring names of the dead represent the silence of the collective traumatic memory, and can provide a place to symbolically leave the trauma behind. The monument, then, stands for the shared burden of a painful past to be overcome.

The closing sections of the Historical Exhibition at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum reorient the visitor in a frame of nation, family, and futurity. This section focuses on
volunteerism and community organizing after the attack. In one photo, a woman and her grandchildren sew quilts for 9/11 victims’ families. In another photograph, an ethnically diverse Girl Scout troupe is pictured smiling, thumbs up. They are gathered around a table that is, perhaps, a clothing drive. The photograph is offered as an example of the work done after Congress designated September 11 as a National Day of Service and Remembrance.

**Feeling Small**

In order to absorb the exhibition of children’s artwork, to record my observations and their descriptions, I have claimed a bench directly across a walkway. I walk back and forth between the display and the bench, alternately hunched over writing and pressed my aching back against the wall behind me. I cannot help but to have noticed the way people engage with the display. Some nod grimly, peering downward at the display situated below their eye line. Some bend as I do, examining in close detail. And some glance at the artwork and then look across it, as the exhibition offers them the possibility of doing by its very design. They see the artwork, and then pull themselves past it, to other facets of relief centers. The design of the exhibition allows for the child to be centered in the experience of the museum, her artwork and reflections on 9/11 captured as worthy of preservation. But the child can just as easily be made invisible, glanced past—seen, but not heard. This could be read as an undermining of the figure of the child within its own exhibition, a reification of familial hierarchy. Made small.
In her conceptualization of citizen-encounters with monumental time, Berlant explores the embodied experience of affective smallness. She further addresses the frailty of bodies, conveying the image of a woman in the film *In Country* encountering her father’s name at the Vietnam Memorial. Specifically, she notes that the woman and her grandmother, who are attempting the ritual of tracing her father’s name from the epitaph, “can barely stay on the ladder for all the intense bodiliness their touch enkindles.” I doubt anyone who has visited this memorial remembers its scale as anything less than overwhelming. But there is more to the power of these kinds of monuments and the ways in which their staggering and sometimes devastating expanse have the capacity to move a person to feel small. In the experience of this embodied smallness, recuperation is offered via the weaving one’s story back into the larger fabric of a national imaginary. The citizen tourist who travels to this museum may desire that experience, or it may be a component of the coercive nature of museumized memory. Regardless, this recuperation means relocating one’s experience within the national past and future.

Importantly, just as “monumental time” engages the national subject in a moment of temporal plait, so too does a doctrine of imminent or emergent threat. The language of imminent threat can be seen in everything from biological warfare to pandemic illness to gay marriage. In crisis discourses, any of these tragedies could tear apart the very fabric of our nation at any moment, and in each we often hear the child called upon as an innocent. Describing this vigilance, political scientist Melinda Cooper writes, “the relentless nature of coevolving emergence irresistibly engages us, despite ourselves, in a form of permanent warfare, a guerilla counter resistance without foreseeable end, against a threat whose precise ‘when’ and ‘how’ we can only speculate on… we need to prepare for the unexpected; learn to counter the unknowable,
the virtual, the emergent.” Imminent threat allows for the further conflation of state systems and intimacy, as well as the hyper regulation of certain bodies for the duration of a crises-based state of exception without a foreseeable end.

Cooper describes the ways in which these temporal modes are reflected in a way of thinking about a national subject. Recalling a speech in which former President Bush interpreted the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as “a threat against life itself,” she articulates the temporal slippage he conveniently created. Cooper writes, “In an interesting confusion of tenses, the unborn emerge from Bush’s speech as the innocent victims of a prospective act of terrorism while the historical legacy of the nation’s founding fathers is catapulted into the potential life of its future generations. Bush’s plea for life is both a requiem and a call to arms: formulated in a nostalgic future tense, he calls upon the American people to protect the future life of the unborn in the face of our ‘uncertain times’ while preemptively mourning their loss.” Cooper’s project is one of the valuation of biological life as a commodity that can be conceived as creating a national surplus or debt. This speaks directly to the ways in which crisis affects gender dynamics, as well as concerns of race and class. Whose bodies are speculatively banked upon, censured, or subdued in order to ensure the reproduction of the nation?

As you exit of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, a bright white gift shop beckons visitors. It is filled with trinkets and ephemera stamped with American symbolism and New York skylines. There are jackets resembling fire department uniforms for dogs, scarves printed with flags, a tiny baseball cap embroidered NYPD with the emblem of a police badge sized for an infant. There is a wall of artwork, plates, napkins, and other home goods, inviting you to bring this space of memory into your own home. In writing of the affect of home, Kathleen Stewart
laments, “Home is where the heart is. But take one foot out of the frame and things get sketchy fast. At the unwanted knock on the door, or the sudden ring of the phone at night, you can feel the uncanny resemblance between the dazed state of trauma and the cocooning we now call home. The home cocoon lives in a vital state—open, emergent, vulnerable, and jumpy.”

Perhaps it is, rather, that the vital state lives within the home cocoon, rendering all of intimate life jumpy, visible, and vulnerable. In space that memorializes national trauma, visitors are reminded of the possibility of their own death. This crystallization of threat to national and familial safety propel us toward the love of the nation that would both protect us from harm, compel defense, and promise an enduring legacy. The museum is a dramatic space in which we enact romantic, familial drama.
Conclusion: Learning National Feelings

In undertaking the research for this dissertation, my central goal has been to consider the role of the child in national storytelling about 9/11. I have pursued this inquiry not only to expand knowledge about a ubiquitous national trauma in the United States, but rather to parse the ways in which the figure of the child—as an actor, an icon, and an agent—has circulated at a time of heightened affective nationalism. What can be learned about contemporary American nationalisms by taking seriously the ways in which childhood and children, both metaphorical and real, are central to how the story of a national crisis has been told? I have utilized Lauren Berlant’s conceptualization of the infantile citizen to break open the rhetorical divide between the child and the adult in this realm. The infantile citizen, an adult with an idealized relationship to the nation, lays bare the complicated desires of the citizen upon the state. I have asked what an actual infantile citizen, a child citizen in a critical moment of contact with very adult national rhetoric, reveals.

I opened this dissertation by discussing the images that have been used to chronicle 9/11 in national history, focusing in particular on the bodies who move through our retellings: the triumphant working-class masculine heroics of police, firemen, and rescue workers; the ghosts who haunt each anniversary, lost fathers, brothers, and sons; and the survivors, widows and children around whom a retributive and protective American nationalism has been upheld. Each of these figures is a reflection of the national family; they all reflect raced, classed, and gendered values that permeate the large-scale domestic sphere of the nation and the small-scale domestic scenes of family homes.
My focus has been the child. As I discussed in my introduction, the labor and representational force of the mother and father have been more well attended than the labor of the child. I have asked what, once constructed as a legitimate national figure, the child does. The child is an enigma, at once fixed in her body and spectral in her development. The child is essentialized and conceptualized as a blank slate, innocent, vulnerable, and worthy of protection. Childhood is constructed in memory, and so the child always looks both backward and forward, toward its own making and the future being made in its name. I have considered the child as an icon of grief in retellings of 9/11, as an audience for the story of national trauma as told through picture books, and as producers of cultural production. Each of these endeavors has offered an opportunity to glimpse the child in new light.

In the first chapter, my analysis of the anniversary profiles of 9/11 kids demonstrates that the child, because of her vulnerable, protected class within the family, provide a permissible way in which to focus on grief while also positing the future as enduringly precarious. This memorial mourning-making recalls the issue of melancholia. The child, in her state of exceptional loss, is exempted from critique of her grief practices far beyond what is permitted of the widow. Because the child is centered in these representations precisely to provide platform for revisiting grief and trauma, she evades any risk of classification as embodying melancholia. Undertaking the labor of affective representation, the bereaved child, a product of reproductive national labor, steps into the role of ideological taskmaster, conjuring familial grief, the specter of the father, and the responsibility of a nation to offer support.

In my second chapter I parse role of children’s picture books as surreptitious mechanisms of national pedagogy. I doing so, I reveal the ways in which both the nation and the
child is constructed through the act of story-telling. The archive of 9/11 picture books create a
narrative of 9/11, one that interrupts national community and lends an urgency to both the past as
a site of national violation and personal fear, and the future as a landscape of possibility where
the nation and family can be safely actualized. The child, encountering stories that require
intervention by an adult, embodies a role of submission and hierarchy.

In the third chapter I demonstrated the ways in which the affects that stick to the child,
and the opportunities that creates for cultivating attachments to the nation on the basis of feelings
of vulnerability, protection, innocence, and hope within the space of the museum. The artwork
on display is generative of a familial affective nationalism, however, it reasserts the submissive
role of the child in execution. Because the exhibition of children’s artwork is displayed in such a
way that the visitor to the museum can easily look over and past the artwork if they desire, the
child functions as a metaphor for futurity exclusively if that is the affective experience the visitor
is pursuing.

Pedagogies of nationalism have emerged as central in every chapter. In chapter 1, I
delved deep into media representations of the children of 9/11 at the time of the tenth anniversary
of the attack. These profiles, insistent in their repetitive presence in popular media outlets, center
the experiences of children who lost a parent, usually a father, on 9/11. Some of these children
knew their fathers and remember them, some have photos of lived experience they cannot recall,
and some were born after their parent was gone. The stories they tell are echoes of each other.
They share their discomfort with media coverage of 9/11, and their reluctance to be the subject
of rampant media attention, celebrities of tragedy. They talk about their families, the ways in
which they have moved on, always with gestures to the spectral approval of the family member
who is no longer there. They talk about their grief, their anger and sadness at the loss they have had to endure. For the most part, they do not talk explicitly about politics—the political agendas that led to the attack, the war that followed, or the ways in which 9/11 continues to be a political talking point.

The grief narratives laid out in these profiles are rife with gendered understandings of parenting, mourning, and familial responsibilities. Their omissions are equally telling in terms of the role of race, class, and sexuality in national storytelling. Ultimately, however, the pedagogies of nationalism that circulate around these profiles are not about the grief of the bereaved children, but rather the ghosts they conjure, and those they do not. As I discussed, the bereaved child functions in public discourse as a useful mechanism of remembrance, one that is oriented toward a modal citizenship that is protectionist and wary of vulnerability. The dead child, in this case, is rendered completely invisible, lacking entirely in the capacity to invoke national reproduction and, accordingly futurity. The bereaved child, an ideal signifier of national precarity and insecurity, brings forth the role of romantic love, familial devotion, and reproduction within the nation. In doing so, these grief narratives reinforce the structural inequalities of race, class, and gender, that the nation reproduces in its idealized citizen families.

In my second chapter, I examined pedagogies of nationalism as they emerge in children’s picture books. This archive of texts has been considered within the field of children’s literature, which has ably revealed the capacity of these texts to reproduce racist and sexist ideologies in the simplification of complex issues for a child audience. My analysis expanded upon that foundation, excavating the implications of the role of African non-citizens within under-examined texts, and the ways in which these books reinforce for children the centrality of
American experiences. In attempting to avoid framing foreign figures as threatening and dangerous, these texts position non-Americans as a depoliticized, empathetic supporting cast.

Putting the picture books in conversation with Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers*, I also explore the possibility that children’s literature about 9/11 isn’t for children at all, but rather for the adult readers who will guide children’s encounters with the texts. I argue that the texts offer an opportunity for adults to play out desires to encounter childhood and their own trauma as knowers, and therefore to reconcile their own feelings of national vulnerability. In this way, this archive of picture books constructs both nationalism and childhood within the stories they tell.

The most important insight to emerge from this analysis, however, is that these picture books mediate a critical moment of impact between the child and the nation. In doing so, this moment of contact is shifted from one of child citizenship to one of national feelings, which is to say that even in exploring national and political crises, these texts position children to encounter their national identity as a way of feeling. Here, the pedagogy of nationalism is one that teaches the child how to feel American, rather than how to encounter their nation as a citizen steeped in contractual rights and obligations.

In the final chapter, I narrate my own experience encountering the 9/11 Memorial and Museum at a time of personal emotional upheaval. Utilizing this affective encounter as an anchor, I articulate the way the museum operationalizes childhood and family in its memorial processes, and offer an in-depth exploration of it’s primary focus on childhood—a display of thirty-one original works of art by children collected by St. Paul’s Chapel. The circulation of these materials is a testament to their potent political charge. These materials are not just the
locus of childhood representation at this important national memorial, they have previously been displayed in secure areas of the Pentagon and, in their original figuration, were meant to provide inspiration to first responders at the center of a spectacular display of national heroics. This archive of children’s cultural production, artifacts of child citizens, has been circulated in spaces imbued with incredible political power, and speak directly to the weight of childhood as rhetorical consideration.

This chapter explored at length my first visit to the museum, but I have returned again and again in the process of thinking through this project. On my second visit, I guided my sister and her friends, all United States Marines, and felt the weight of disciplinary patriotism in our adventure. On my third visit, I was led by a rentable audio guide, narrated by Robert de Niro, who punctuated the script with personal memories of the city of New York. On my fourth visit, I followed the audio guide suggested for children and families, narrated by Clara Neubauer, a New Yorker born on September 11, 2001. It was recorded when she was ten years old. As Clara explains, “All around the United States and the world, people showed how good they could be by helping each other in any way they could. So what my birthday really reminds me of is not the terrible things that happened that day, but the love, kindness, and courage we’re all capable of, even in the worst situations.” I have sat in the all of the exhibitions for long periods of time, thinking about this work and watching people pass by. In my many pilgrimages to the museum I have thought through what it means to be guided in our encounters with memory, trauma, and the nation. The guides we encounter function as maps to find our way through our own national feelings. These are pedagogies of nationalism. They teach us how to encounter our own experiences of trauma, our own memories, and our own childhoods.
Introduction Endnotes


4 Ibid., 7.


6 Ibid., 14.


9 Ibid., 27.

10 Ibid., 28.

11 Ibid., 30.

12 Ibid., 187.


14 Ibid., 49.


16 Ibid., 2.

17 Ibid., 3.

18 Ibid., 6.

19 Ibid., 6.


21 Ibid., 105.

23 Ibid., 45.


25 Ibid., 119.


28 Ibid., 55.


31 Ibid., 139.

32 Ibid., 141.


36 Ibid., 11.


39 Patricia Hill Collins, “It’s All In the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation,” *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 64.

40 Ibid., 66.

41 See e.g. Mohanty (2003), Martin (1994), and Pratt (1988).

43 Ibid., 69.

44 Ibid., 69–70.

45 Ibid., 75.

46 Ibid., 70.


48 Ibid., 43.


51 Ibid., 54.


54 Ibid., 63.

55 Ibid., 63.


57 Patricia Hill Collins, “It’s All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation,” *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998):” 65.


59 Childhood has also been theorized as a romanticized humanity outside of politics by scholars such as Sharon Stevens and Chris Jenks, who discusses that childhood emerges from industrial capitalism as a as a space protected from labor and sexuality.

Ibid., 65.

Ibid., 66.

Ibid., 67.


Ibid., 224.

Ibid., 230.


Ibid., 25.

Ibid., 16.

Chapter 1 Endnotes

1 I do not know how many babies were born to non-US 9/11 widows, and I have been unable to find this data.

2 More than three thousand babies were born on 9/11, and these children have also been featured in similar media. Margaret Webb Pressler, “Born on September 11, 2001,” *Washington Post*, September 11, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/born-on-september-11-


5 Ibid.


8 Except in the case of a contingent of conservative Christians who, in conflating the fetus and the dead child, are accustomed to this maneuver.


16 I used Google as my primary search engine to capture as broad as possible an array of sources and stories. I used the search terms “children of 9/11,” “9/11 babies,” and “9/11 kids,” and collected all stories from recognizable popular media outlets.

17 I refocused my search to articles published between August 1 and November 11, 2011, which reduced search results to fewer than 30 results for “9/11 babies,” 50 for “9/11 kids,” and 110 for “children of 9/11.” I carefully reviewed the first several pages of results, omitting hits from smaller blogs, regional affiliates outside the New York area, and niche publications.


22 Ibid., 233.


24 Ibid., 196.

25 Ibid., 195.

26 Ibid., 198.

27 Ibid., 25.

28 Ibid., 27.

29 Ibid., 27.

30 Ibid., 27.


32 Ibid.


35 Ibid.


39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.


44 Moorhead, “9/11 Ten Years On.”

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.


48 Ibid.


57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.


60 Ibid.


62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid. 

127


69 Ibid.


72 Ibid.


74 Ibid.


76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.


80 Ibid.


84 Ibid.


87 Ibid.


90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.


100 Ibid.


105 Ibid.


107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.


111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.


117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.


120 Ibid.


122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.


127 Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.


147 Ibid.


149 Ibid.


152 Ibid.


154 Ibid.


158 Ibid.


161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.


170 Ibid.


174 Ibid., 48.

175 Ibid., 48.

176 Ibid., 31.

177 Ibid., 48.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Chapter 2 Endnotes


4 Ibid., 273.

5 Ibid., 273.

6 Ibid., 273.

7 Ibid., 274.

8 Ibid., 274.

9 Ibid., 275.

10 I identified the picture books I examined initially by searing for resources available to parents, including lists available from Common Sense Media and Huffington Post, and then by searching Amazon. The books I focus on in this chapter are:


12 The bullied child, the immigrant child, the child whose racialization precludes innocence and safety.


14 Ibid., 6.

15 These books were published between 2001 and 2011. A snapshot of Amazon rankings reveals their diverse levels of commercial success.

16 See also Paula Connolly, Anastasia Ulanowicz, and Richard Flynn.


18 Ibid., 123.

19 Ibid., 124–25.

20 Ibid., 135.

21 Ibid., 129.

22 Ibid., 132.


24 Ibid., 24.
25 Ibid., 50.
26 Ibid., 44.
27 Ibid., 4.
32 Ibid., 288.
33 Ibid., 288.
34 Ibid., 294.
35 Ibid., 299.
Richard Flynn discusses this illustration as one that avoids the moment of impact, but I experience this image as very tense, scary, and anxiety-ridden.

Miller, Kristine. “Ghosts, Gremlins, and ‘the War on Terror’ in Children’s Blitz Fiction.” Children’s Literature Association Quarterly, Volume 34, Number 3, Fall 2009, pp 272 – 284.


Ibid., 22.

Ibid., 22.


Ibid., 50.

Ibid., 60.

Ibid., 47.

Ibid., 49.

Ibid., 47.


Chapter 3 Endnotes


4 Ibid., 25

5 Ibid., 199, 725.


13 Ibid., 13.

14 Ibid., 147.

15 Ibid., 147.


20 Ibid., 33.


22 Ibid., 152–53.

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