Ethical Issue: 9/11 Tragedy-
The Smithsonian Website Memorialising a Tragedy

By Brooke Gudgeon
The Smithsonian Website

- http://www.si.edu - Smithsonian Website Link

- Smithsonian 9/11 link: http://amhistory.si.edu/september11/

- The Smithsonian Website has changed a lot over the years since the 9/11 tragedy in America

- They was a lot of public outcry about memorialising the objects and stories of the 9/11 due to their sensitive nature

- Why do you think the public responded largely to the memorialising of the 9/11 tragedy?
The most common responses were

- Disrespectful to the victims and families
- Demeaning the value of the event
- Disrupting the lives of the victims families
- Insensitive
You may have seen this image before

- It was the most famous 9/11 photograph taken by Richard Drew, Associated Press photographer at 9.41am.

- Although it was published on the front page of ‘The New York Times’, many were disgusted by this… calling an outrage and disrespectful.

What are your thoughts on the ‘Falling Man’?

- Do you think it was ethically appropriately to put it on the front page of a newspaper and why?
Censorship

• ‘The Falling Man’, a graphic photograph discouraged and censored in America to prevent disrespect to the 9/11 victims and their families

• Although in 2003 ‘The Esquire’ re-approached this issue with defiance

• http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN
‘Tumbling Woman’

- Sculpture designed by Eric Fischl

- http://artfromtheashes.blog.sbc.edu/2012/02/27/eric-fischls-tumbling-woman/

- Fischl was forced to remove his sculpture from the museum after public outrage

- His response in an interview with David Rakoff brought up a new perspective, raising an important issue among tragedies:

  “I hate this idea that there are some people who have a right to express their suffering and others who don’t, that there are those in this hierarchy of pain who own it more than you do. It’s not necessarily about witnessing firsthand that makes the experience.” (Fischl, 2012)

Check out his website below:

What is your view on Fischl’s Sculpture?
Following on from Fischl's view

• What gives the curators of the Smithsonian 9/11 Exhibit the right to curate such a tragedy?

• In order to address this issue, curators have recorded their input and made it accessible to the public on this website:
  
  • http://amhistory.si.edu/september11/collection/curators.asp
Smithsonian’s Aims

Our Mission
The increase and diffusion of knowledge

Our Vision
Shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world

Our Values
Discovery: Explore and bring to light new knowledge and ideas, and better ways of doing business
Creativity: Instill our work with imagination and innovation
Excellence: Deliver the highest-quality products and services in all endeavors
Diversity: Capitalize on the richness inherent in differences
Integrity: Carry out all our work with the greatest responsibility and accountability
Service: Be of benefit to the public and our stakeholders
About the Collection

At the National Museum of American History, the attacks of September 11, 2001, affected us personally and professionally. Shortly after the attacks, we began discussing what our role as a museum should be and concluded that we had a responsibility to document the events of September 11 in the National Collections.

The immediacy and deadly nature of the events posed particular collecting challenges. We worried about appearing ghoulish in the face of bereavement, about important material deteriorating or even being thrown out, and about whether we understood enough about the events to document them for posterity. And we knew we would have to be selective—we cannot collect everything.

The collection we present on this site represents a work in progress. It embodies the best efforts of staff across the National Museum of American History to document and preserve a wide range of stories about September 11. Each object, as material evidence of the attacks and their immediate aftermath, is a piece of a large and complex story. The collections will grow as we gain historical perspective and a greater understanding of the events of September 11.

Donating to the Collection

Soon after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History began collecting objects to document and preserve the material record of this important event in American history. The immediate collecting priorities focused on the attacks, the response and rescue efforts, and the commemoration that followed.

The assembled collection may expand somewhat over time. The National Museum of American History would be pleased to consider donations of additional material. While we have been offered many objects related to the attacks and to the numerous responses from around the world, we cannot accept everything. If we do not accept an artifact, we might be able to direct the offer to another institution: we are working with a consortium of museums to document and preserve a selection of objects and responses.

If you have an artifact that you would like to donate, please contact the Museum's Office of Curatorial Affairs at 202-633-3376 to obtain the proper procedure for donating items to the collections. It is Smithsonian Institution policy not to accept unsolicited donations, so please do not send any items directly.

We are also working with the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, which has established an internet archive related to September 11.
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How do you think the tone portrays the event and influences you as a viewer?
**New York Fire Department material**

**Description:** This collection of New York Fire Department (FDNY) equipment recovered from the debris of the World Trade Center includes a door and tail light panel from a crushed fire truck, two axe heads, and two firefighter’s pry bars.

**Context:** When the first hijacked plane crashed into the World Trade Center, the New York Fire Department immediately responded. Officers set up a command center in the lobby of the north tower and bravely rushed up the stairs to rescue the trapped occupants and put out the raging fires. When the towers collapsed, numerous trucks were crushed, and 343 members of the New York Fire Department were killed.

This door is from a FDNY rescue pumper truck destroyed in the World Trade Center collapse. The truck belonged to Squad One of Brooklyn, part of FDNY’s Special Operations Command, an elite group of firefighters who respond to unique fire and emergency situations. Squad One lost 12 members on September 11.

**Supporting Materials**

- **Axe heads**
  Two axe heads, their handles burnt away, were recovered from crushed New York Fire Department trucks destroyed by the collapse of the World Trade Center.

- **Fire truck before door collection**
  Brooklyn Squad 1 fire truck before the door was removed for collection by the National Museum of American History. The door was marked “11” by the police before it was taken to the Staten Island recovery site.

- **Shield of New York Fire Department Brooklyn Squad 1 truck.**

- **Poster honoring NYFD fallen**
  Poster honoring the 343 New York Fire Department firefighters killed at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Transcript: NEW YORK CITY FIRE DEPARTMENT MEMBERS WHO MADE THE SUPREME SACRIFICE IN THE LINE OF DUTY.

**Related Objects**

- New York Fire Chief’s equipment
- Firefighter’s pry bar
- NYPD patrol car door.
- Port Authority police memorial
- PASS Alarm
New York Fire Department Material

- How significant would you say this object is?
- What is its intent?
**Firefighter doll**

**Description:** This doll caricature of a female firefighter was recovered from the rubble of the World Trade Center.

**Context:** A popular tourist destination and retail space, the World Trade Center had many stores. On the observation deck located on the 107th floor of the south tower were three souvenir shops, and in the underground arcade connecting the towers was a mall with over 70 shops. While the identity of the store that was selling this toy remains a mystery, the doll itself is a sad reminder of the many rescue workers who perished in the towers' collapse.

<< BROWSE MORE OBJECTS
Firefighter Doll

- What do you think is the significance of this object and how is it relevant to the 9/11 Incident?
Clothing worn during World Trade Center escape

Description: Maria Cecilia Benavente, an employee of Aon Risk Services, Inc., wore this clothing as she evacuated her 103rd-floor office in the south tower of the World Trade Center.

Context: The fate of the occupants of the upper floors of the World Trade Center’s south tower was determined, to a great extent, by their immediate reaction to the first plane crash into the north tower. Maria Cecilia Benavente quickly evacuated her office on the 103rd floor of the south tower, descending the stairs to the 78th floor “sky lobby,” where she caught an express elevator to the ground. To move more quickly down the 25 floors of stairs, she took off her shoes and hiked up her long skirt.

Seventeen minutes after the north tower was hit, hijackers crashed United Airlines flight 175 into the south tower, cutting off the escape path for almost all who remained above the 78th floor. Fifty-six minutes later, the entire building collapsed, killing 175 Aon employees and about 425 other office workers in the building.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Skirt and sweater
Skirt and sweater set worn by Maria Cecilia Benavente as she escaped from the south tower of the World Trade Center.

Aon Risk Services employee Maria Cecilia Benavente

"...We have convinced her that these shoes would be welcome here at the museum..."
David Shayl
September 11 Collecting Curator, Museum Specialist, Division of Cultural History

<< BROWSE MORE OBJECTS
Phone Calls of 9/11

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=se38c1QSoIg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=se38c1QSoIg)
- 2.13
- Melissa- 2.38-2.50
9/11 Memorial Website

• Stories of 9/11

• http://www.911memorial.org/911-events-day
9/11 National Postal Museum

- The events significance and large impact has led to a variety of museums:
  - The National Postal Museum
    - [http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/resources/6g1_WTC.html](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/resources/6g1_WTC.html)
  - The National Museum of American History
    - [http://amhistory.si.edu/september11/](http://amhistory.si.edu/september11/)
  - 9/11 Memorial
    - [http://www.911memorial.org/visit-911-memorial](http://www.911memorial.org/visit-911-memorial)
Aims

• “The National Postal Museum remembers and honors the people employed in the World Trade Center Towers and the Pentagon, the emergency responders, airline passengers and others from all walks of life who were killed in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. [sic]” (Smithsonian, 2009)

• “In 2002, Congress directed the Smithsonian Institution in Public Law 107-117 to "collect and preserve...artifacts relating to the September 11th attacks." A number of postal related artifacts connected to the attacks are in the National Postal Museum’s permanent collection in order to preserve the memory of the victims and that devastating attack on the American homeland. [sic]” (Smithsonian, 2009)
9/11 Museum Blog


• http://postalmuseumblog.si.edu/2011/09/chronology-9-11.html


• http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/resources/6g1_WTC.html


• http://www.smithsonianchannel.com/sc/web/home
Patriotism and Tone

• The tone of Smithsonian website:
  
  • Impersonal
  
  • Evocative
  
  • Patriotic
  
  • This allows the website to meet its intended audience and portray an implied message that the patriarchy of America allows this to move past the trauma of tragedies as one community, sharing their experiences and providing each other with support.
9/11 Website

- They have separated the 9/11 Memorial from the Smithsonian website, creating: http://www.911memorial.org

- It opened May 21st this year.

- The old Smithsonian display was closed
Documented Public Outcry

- https://blogs.stockton.edu/amst5005/files/2013/01/Boehm-Privatizing-Public-Memory.pdf

- The main theme Boehm highlights is censorship

- “Smithsonian…has left indelible marks on the nation’s repository of historical memory.” (Boehm, 2013)

- “…public disputes about interpretations of national history, post-9/11 patriotic fervor largely silenced voices that attempted to criticize U.S. acts of violence against foreign nations.” (Boehm, 2013)

- “congressional hearings, this time deliberation—and outrage—has remained largely hidden behind institutional walls, only occasionally spilling over into the media and academic journals.” (Boehm, 2013)
9/11 Smithsonian Debates

• The Cost of Admission debate
  • http://museumminute.wordpress.com/2013/05/09/the-cost-of-memory-the-911-museum-admission-debate/

• Visitor interaction with Smithsonian Museum
  • http://www.sites.si.edu/exhibitions/exhibits/archived_exhibitions/september_11/main.htm
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