

9/11 Still Governs Us. That Is Why It Must Remain Open.

A quarter century later, September 11 still authorizes war, surveillance, secrecy, and the politics of permanent emergency. That alone is reason enough to reject democratic closure without full adversarial scrutiny.

By Franc DeBuc

September 11, 2001 is not only a historical event. It is still a governing premise.

The wars that followed it, the surveillance powers justified by it, the expansion of executive authority, the culture of secrecy, and the politics of permanent emergency all continue to derive moral and political force from the public story told about that day.¹

That alone is enough reason to keep 9/11 open to serious scrutiny.

This is not a call for cultic doubt. It is a call for democratic discipline. No society should allow the event that reordered its legal, political, and moral life to become functionally untouchable. The more consequential the event, the higher the standard of transparency should be.

The issue is not whether 9/11 was investigated at all. It was. The issue is whether the inquiry and record-handling process were sufficient to justify permanent closure.

They were not.

That does not mean every critical claim is true. It does mean the public was asked to live under a level of certainty that the process itself did not earn.

Some of the reasons are procedural, not speculative. The Commission itself was created more than a year after the attacks. Evidence-handling controversies remain part of the historical record, including the recycling of substantial quantities of structural steel within months of the disaster while the early FEMA engineering study still described itself as preliminary and called for more detailed investigation. Important technical and operational disputes never achieved stable adversarial legitimacy. Significant records remain partially released, redacted, or difficult to audit in full.²

This does not prove orchestration. It does prove that administrative settlement should not be mistaken for democratic closure.

That distinction matters because of what came next. 9/11 did not merely wound the nation. It reorganized it. The event became the moral engine of the post-9/11 order: expanded war powers, widened surveillance authorities, a larger homeland-security apparatus, and a durable politics of emergency.³

Here precision is essential. Exploitation is not authorship. Benefit is not identity. Exploitation is not orchestration.

But exploitation still matters. If a crisis becomes the basis for a new political order, citizens have every right to ask how much of the response was improvised, how much was prepared in advance, and which institutions were best positioned to convert trauma into durable power. Those are not fringe questions. They are basic questions of legitimacy.

A responsible reopening would not begin by declaring the official account false. It would begin by acknowledging what is settled, identifying what remains contested, and releasing what is still unavailable. That means full release of still-withheld relevant records where lawful, transparent technical review of disputed structural and operational questions, adversarial comparison of official and critical models, and sworn testimony where the public record remains materially unstable.⁴

This is not revenge. It is repair.

A democratic people cannot permanently reorganize itself around an event it is discouraged from re-examining. If 9/11 still governs us, then the public retains the right to inspect its evidentiary foundation in full.

That is the issue now.

Not whether the event was tragic. It was.

Not whether the official record exists. It does.

But whether the public was ever given the kind of transparent, adversarial, evidence-centered process that an event of this magnitude required.

A society that cannot re-examine the event that still governs its politics is not fully self-governing. It is living inside inherited closure.

Selected Notes

1. Authorization for Use of Military Force, Pub. L. 107-40, 115 Stat. 224 (Sept. 18, 2001); USA PATRIOT Act, Pub. L. 107-56, 115 Stat. 272 (Oct. 26, 2001); Homeland Security Act of 2002, Pub. L. 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135 (Nov. 25, 2002).
2. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, FAQ (Commission created Nov. 27, 2002); FEMA, World Trade Center Building Performance Study: Data Collection, Preliminary Observations, and Recommendations (FEMA 403, May 2002); Danielle Jackson, "60,000 Tons of World Trade Center Steel Recycled," Waste360, Jan. 31, 2002.
3. See note 1 above.
4. For structured public-record access and archival release models, see Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552; President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992, Pub. L. 102-526; and National Archives, "The President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection."