



Western Michigan University
ScholarWorks at WMU

WMU President Edward Montgomery

Office of the President

9-11-2017

9/11 Memorial Event

Edward Montgomery
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/montgomery>



Part of the Higher Education Administration Commons

WMU ScholarWorks Citation

Montgomery, Edward, "9/11 Memorial Event" (2017). *WMU President Edward Montgomery*. 5.
<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/montgomery/5>

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of the President at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in WMU President Edward Montgomery by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



2017 9/11 Memorial Event
Bronson Park
Monday, Sept. 11, 2017
Remarks by
WMU President Ed Montgomery

Opening

Good afternoon. Thank you, Lori, for your warm welcome. I appreciate the thoughtful words of reflection offered by Rabbi Spivak, Mr. Franklin's remembrances, the beautiful music, and the gathering together of community. Judge Lipsey, Monsignor Osborn, members of our Fire, Public Safety, and honored service members - Thank you for inviting me to be here and share in this important remembrance about a seminal moment in our nation's history and the mark it left on all of us.

In December 2016, Time magazine and the Pew Research Center conducted a survey asking more than 2,000 adults to identify the 10 historic events of their lifetimes that have had the greatest impact on the nation. The attack on 9/11 was the No. 1 response by some 76 percent of those surveyed--men and women from every ethnic and generational group and from every region of the nation. The overwhelming majority pointing to 9/11 included 59 percent of the "silent generation," 70 percent of baby boomers, 79 percent of Gen Xers and 86 percent of millennials.

Those are incredible numbers, reflecting an event that will live in memory for as long as those who were alive that day are able to tell the story. But that figure will begin to wane soon. I work in an academic environment, for instance, in which the students we attract now--the customers we serve--have no first-hand memory of 9/11. Our incoming freshmen this year were infants when the terrorist attacks occurred. Next year's freshmen were not yet born when the 9/11 attack took place.

That's why events like today's gathering here in Bronson Park are so important. They give those of us who vividly remember a chance to reflect and honor the memory of those lost. And they give young people a chance to witness how deeply the fear and uncertainty of that day was felt and how strongly we are united in that memory and in our determination to overcome the evil that was the root of that act.

Personal recollections.

Until 9/11, my pick of important historical events would have been – like many of my contemporaries – the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Moon Landing, and the start of a new millennium in the year 2000. On any of those significant milestones, I could tell you exactly where I was and what I was doing when the news first hit the airwaves. That memory was pushed to the background by 9/11.

On that day, as I drove to my office and heard the first reports of a plane hitting the World Trade Center, I could only imagine that something must have gone terribly wrong with air traffic control systems.

In the ensuing days and weeks, we learned much more about the vulnerability we all feel when faced with a national tragedy or crisis. We came away with strength and resolve - we set aside petty differences to come together in a touching display of national unity, pride, and strength. Simple kindnesses and thoughtful gestures helped to ease new pathways through uncommon ground. New profiles of courage and heroism emerged – many embodied in our service men and women – who are joining us here today.

In the face of tragedy and vulnerability, we often display our best selves – not for our own benefit or profit, but for the betterment of humanity. My sincere hope is for us to lead with compassion for one another – without having tragedy as the catalyst to change our mindset and behavior towards one another.

The WMU experience

Now, as the president of Western Michigan University and a member of the Kalamazoo community, I have a new set of 9/11 memories and tales of impact that have become important to me as well. On our campus, it takes no time at all to ask about 9/11, and quickly hear the intense memories of how it impacted WMU.

Sept. 11, 2001, and the immediate aftermath touched Western Michigan University deeply. That day, our training planes from the College of Aviation were in the air all around the state and were forced to land at the nearest airport when the FAA ordered all planes out of the sky. Classes and public activities were canceled, but our campus community remained largely on campus and came together for a candlelight vigil in Kanley Chapel.

The immediate shock of the events was compounded in the following days when the campus community learned that one of its alumni was on the plane that hit the Pentagon. We then learned the 22-year-old brother of one of our students perished at his new Cantor Fitzgerald job as a trader on the 93rd floor of Tower I. Another alumnus told a harrowing tale of his descent from the 70th floor of Tower II. For the WMU community, those became personal connections to the people who perished and the hundreds of rescue workers who gave their lives trying to rescue them.

As one of the nation's top pilot training centers and home to an international pilot training center in 2001, WMU's College of Aviation was visited by the FBI on Sept. 12 and was briefly the focus of hours of national media coverage as the country learned that the terrorists had trained at U.S. flight schools. Our program, of course, was quickly exonerated and just as quickly removed from the limelight, but the campus was left needing to wrap its arms around and protect a group of frightened and confused young

pilot trainees from the United Arab Emirates They were processing the tragedy from their own perspective and feeling alone and very far from home.

Closing

Wherever you were that day, the events took their toll and left an imprint. But remembrance has a positive impact. We remember the lives lost, celebrate their enduring legacies, and gather to reflect with those who have carried on in their memories.

Thank you for coming together today to remember and to help remind us all that when our most cherished values are attacked we can and do present a united face to ourselves and the world.

I would like to thank the members of the 9-11 Remembrance Committee for the invitation to be with you today – Janine Dales, Matt Elzinga, Richard Fuller, Patricia Glerum, Don Jarzambek, and Lawrence Wenke.

(About 6.5 minutes)