

## Visit report 5/10/16: 9/11 Memorial & Museum

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Today already fifteen years ago disaster struck in New York City. About 3000 Americans did pass away on 9/11/2011, making it one of the deadliest events in the American history. Two billion people are estimated to have watched live television broadcasts of the event worldwide. The attack was carried out by 19 Al-Qaeda terrorists, mostly coming from Saudi-Arabia.

When walking towards the 9/11 Memorial site, it is notable that the area has been developed into a place of more grandeur than ever before when looking at the brand new One World Trade Center. When looking back at ground level, two fountains designed according the grid outline of the Twin Towers come into sight, remembering people on the vastness of the towers. First thing standing out at the entrance of the Museum itself are the safety precautions that are being taken. Every individual did have to pass a full body scan in order to enter the museum. The museum itself is located below ground level; partially below the grid of the Twin Towers. The first floor was designed in a very bright way, letting as much sunlight in as possible. The downstairs part of the site is designed in a much darker way, to prepare people for the ambiance of the bottom part of the museum.

The challenge that the designers of the memorial and museum faced, was letting people feel the event like if they were present when it happened. A staircase has been built to bring the visitors slowly from the first floor to bedrock level. The museum achieved to make the 9/11 event very tangible for visitors. One example is a piece of the original retaining wall – build to keep seepage water out of the original building site – which has been restored and replaced to the museum. But there are lots of other artifacts from the disaster site present, ranging from twisted steel beams to abandoned fire trucks. Another impacting piece are the blue tiles hanging at one of the walls, each unique colored tile representing one of the lives lost. Something that was very striking to see was an initiative from the Governor of the State of New Jersey, who did found the New Jersey Family Assistance Center to support the families of the 700 victims that lived in New Jersey. Personal messages, photographs and drawings about the grieve from both adults and children were exposed to show the human side of the disaster. And questions being raised like; Where were I when it happened? Why didn't they escape while I did?

Construction of the Twin Towers started in 1966. After spending one billion dollars it has been finished in 1970. Featuring 110 stories and holding the record of the highest building in the world, the project was the grandeur of New York City. The 2001 terrorist attack was actually the second attack on the WTC, since it has already been attack in 1993 by a massive 1200 pounds of explosive in its car parking, killing six people. The demolition and dismantling of the site after 9/11 took 10 months, totally cleaning 1.8 million tons of debris.

It is interesting to reflect on the post disaster reaction of New York, the USA and the world as a whole. First reactions being very bottom up, citizens and volunteers trying to make a difference within a community based approach. Natural leaders stood up and took the initiative. Mayor Bloomberg did characterize this by saying the following: 'On the worst day of our history we were on our best'. Companies and firms involved during the very first post disaster period didn't use any contracts to regulate finances and liabilities, they just started working. This can probably be considered to be unique in the USA. The federal government did also make a big contribution; investing 20 billion dollars into the cleaning project and congress passing the 'health and compensation act', providing financial compensation for individuals suffering injuries relating to cleaning work of volunteers, police men, fire fighters, soldiers and citizens. The disaster did also impact the foreign political policy of the USA, characterized by the actions taken by George W. Bush

and formulated in the following quote: 'The people that knocked down these buildings will soon hear from us'. The response from the British was very remarkable, during a ceremony at the Buckingham Palace they changed their standard routine and played the US nation anthem in memoriam of the event. All in all, the 9/11 disaster did impact a whole generation of people for the rest of their lives, the USA as a country and the world as a whole.