Multimedia Primary Source Discussion Set
9/11 and the War on Terror

URL: https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/war-on-terror

Teaching Tips
The sources in this set provide insight into how Americans responded to the September 11 attacks – both at a personal and political level. While the clips provide some valuable information about the September 11 attacks and War on Terror (including the US military invasion of Iraq), students will get the most out of these sources if they are first given a background lesson or reading on these topics. The primary value of these public media sources is that they illuminate different American experiences and perspectives in relation to 9/11 and the War on Terror. Thus, by watching these clips, students can gain a deeper understanding of the political debates that roiled American politics during the Bush Administration.

Background Information
Before engaging with this resource set, students should be familiar with the following:

- The terrorist attacks on September 11 and their impact on American life
- The causes and impacts of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq
- U.S. practices and policies during the War on Terror, including surveillance, detention of enemy combatants, and “enhanced interrogation”

Essential Question
How can the United States respond to the threat of terrorism in productive ways that respect human rights and civil liberties?

General Discussion Questions
- What psychological impact did the September 11 attacks have on Americans?
- How did the fear of another deadly terrorist attack shape public sentiment and government policy in the years after 9/11?
American Archive of Public Broadcasting
Multimedia Primary Source Discussion Sets

- To what extent were the surveillance, detention, and interrogation practices of the Bush Administration justified?
- The Bush Administration was confident that they could quickly oust Saddam Hussein and usher in a stable transition to a new democratic government in Iraq. What social and historical factors help explain why there was instead a deadly insurgency and sectarian civil war?
- While there was widespread support for the Bush Administration immediately after 9/11, Americans ultimately became bitterly divided over War of Terror policies. What were some core disagreements between supporters and opponents of the War on Terror?
- Should the U.S. try to use its military power to overthrow authoritarian regimes that might threaten the U.S. and replace them with democratic governments?

Classroom Activities

1) **Topic: September 11 attacks and their aftermath**

Have students watch the following clips:

- [News Coverage on September 11 (2001)](https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/war-on-terror)
- [Americans React to the 9/11 Attacks (2001)](https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/war-on-terror)
- [Prejudice Against Muslims and Arabs in the Aftermath of 9/11 (2001)](https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/war-on-terror)
- [The Climate of Fear After 9/11 (2002)](https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/war-on-terror)

Ask students questions like:

- What were some aspects of the September 11 attacks that made them so traumatic for Americans?
- Why did many Americans lash out at Muslims, Arabs, and others who looked like the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks?
- Two of the prevailing emotional responses to 9/11 were fear and anger. What was it about the September 11 attacks that prompted these reactions? How might these responses have shaped the U.S. political and military responses after 9/11?

Extension Activity: Ask an older friend or family member about their memories of the September 11 attacks. Where were they on that day, and what do they remember about it? What do they remember about the way Americans initially responded in the weeks and months after the attacks?
2) The War on Terror

Have students watch the following clips:

- Prejudice Against Muslims and Arabs in the Aftermath of 9/11 (2001)
- Bush Defines the War on Terror (2001)
- Bush Administration Continues “Enhanced Interrogation” Despite Internal Opposition (2009)
- Two Law Professors Debate the Legality of the Patriot Act (2003)

Ask students questions like:

- What seem to be some defining principles articulated by George Bush about how his administration would carry out its “War on Terror”? How does he portray the traits and goals of our enemies?
- What made the “War on Terror” different from a conventional war against another nation and its military?
- What arguments were made to justify singling out Muslims and Arabs for extra searches and extra attention from investigators? What counter-arguments were made regarding why such practices would be unjust?
- Why did the Bush Administration (and the vast majority of legislators in late 2001) believe it was necessary to enact a law like the Patriot Act? What would critics say in opposition to the Patriot Act? What would defenders of these surveillance practices argue in response to these critics?
- Why did the Bush Administration believe it was necessary to indefinitely detain “enemy combatants” at places like Guantanamo Bay and use “enhanced interrogation” techniques? Why might critics say that these practices were wrong in both humanitarian and strategic terms? What would defenders of these practices argue in response to these critics?
- Where would you “draw the line” on these issues? In the effort to stop terrorist attacks, what practices are acceptable or unacceptable? Wise or unwise?

Extension Activity: Have students create a short newspaper “op-ed” as if they are an American living in 2005. Their task is to make an argument about the wisdom and morality of the Bush Administration’s surveillance, detention, and “enhanced interrogation” practices. They could consider questions like: Are these practices constitutionally justified? Morally acceptable? Effective as a means to fight terrorism? What steps should be taken to identify potential terrorists? What detention and interrogation procedures should be used with captured “enemy combatants”?

https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/war-on-terror
3) The War in Iraq

Have students watch the following clips:

- Debating the Invasion of Iraq on the Brink of War (2003)
- American Soldiers Discuss the Sunni Insurgency (2005)
- The Outbreak of Sectarian Civil War in Iraq (2006)
- U.S. Public Opinion Turns Against the Iraq War (2007)

Ask students questions like:

- What seems to have been the rationale for invading Iraq? Why might the September 11 attacks have helped create a climate in which - there was political support for this invasion?
- Why did the War in Iraq devolve into a deadly insurgency and a sectarian civil war? (What are some features of Iraqi society and - history that help explain these developments? How did the U.S. invasion and post-occupation policies help create conditions that explain the unrest?)
- When the war began in 2003, 70% of Americans thought invading Iraq was the right decision. By late 2007, that number had fallen to 36%. What were some factors that help explain why so many Americans turned against the war?
- A large minority of Americans continued to support the Iraq War through the course of the conflict. What points would these supporters have made in defense of the War in Iraq?
- The Iraq War is often compared to the Vietnam War. What makes the two conflicts similar? What makes them different?

Extension Activity: After watching these clips and having students do some additional research to prepare, hold an in-class debate set in 2007 about the Iraq War. Divide students into “defenders” and “critics” of the war, and have them debate two distinct questions: (1) Was it the right decision for the U.S. to invade Iraq? (2) Should the U.S. immediately withdraw all troops from Iraq?

After debating those questions, charge the two sides with crafting a compromise plan in which (1) political stability could be restored in Iraq, and (2) American troops could be gradually brought back to the US.

https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/war-on-terror