NO PREP

# A Nation United

## American Unity After 9/11

**Includes:** Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

### A Nation United: American Unity After 9/11

**The Flags Come Out**

In the days after September 11, 2001, Americans reached almost unanimously for the same object: the flag. Walmart alone sold roughly 116,000 American flags on September 11 itself — against about 6,400 on the same date a year earlier — and a quarter million more the next day, until manufacturers simply ran out and backordered the country, adding factory shifts and still failing to keep pace. Flags sprouted from porches, pickup trucks, highway overpasses, storefronts, and

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**Singing on the Steps**

The unity reached the least likely place in America: Washington. On the evening of September 11, about 150 members of Congress — Republicans and Democrats who had spent the year in bitter partisan combat — gathered shoulder to shoulder on the Capitol steps for a press statement. When it ended, someone began singing 'God Bless America,' and the leadership of both parties sang it together, unrehearsed, on national television. The moment previewed a season of governance unlike any in modern memory. Three days later, the Senate approved the authorization to use military force against the attackers' network 98 to 0; the House passed it 420 to 1. Emergency funding for recovery and the airline industry moved almost without objection, and in October the Patriot Act, expanding surveillance powers, cleared the Senate 98 to 1 — votes whose near-unanimity is almost unimaginable in ordinary times. The public mood matched the Capitol's. President Bush's approval rating rocketed to about 90 percent, the highest Gallup had ever recorded for any president, and approval of Congress itself — usually mired below half — soared past 80 percent, while trust in the federal government reached levels unseen since the 1960s. Political scientists call this the rally-round-the-flag effect: a crisis that threatens the whole nation temporarily collapses partisan divisions, because citizens close ranks behind their institutions. New York's mayor Rudy Giuliani, steady and omnipresent in the crisis, became 'America's mayor' with support across party lines. For a season, the usual question of American politics — which side are you on? — had only one answer.

**Lines Around the Block**

Americans did not just feel united; they acted on it, immediately and physically. Within hours of the attacks, lines formed outside blood banks — lines that wrapped around blocks and lasted for days, ultimately yielding hundreds of thousands of donated units, far more than hospitals could use — so many that donors were asked to schedule appointments for later months, and many did. The money followed the blood. Charitable giving for 9/11 relief reached an estimated

2.8 billion dollars, much of it in the first months — at the time, the largest outpouring for a single event in American history. Two-thirds of American households reported contributing something. Ten days after the attacks, dozens of the country's biggest stars performed 'America: A Tribute to Heroes' from bare, candlelit stages — a telethon simulcast on more than thirty networks that raised roughly 200 million dollars for victims' families. The help came in trucks as well as checks. Ironworkers, welders, nurses, chaplains, and construction crews drove toward Manhattan from across the country to volunteer at Ground Zero, and communities along the highways cheered the convoys like liberating armies. Restaurants fed rescue workers free for months; schoolchildren in every state mailed cards, quilts, and coins, and hardware companies donated boots, gloves, and respirators by the truckload. Researchers who track civic behavior recorded measurable jumps that autumn in volunteering, trust in neighbors, and trust in government — numbers that had declined for decades suddenly bending upward. Grief, it turned out, had a direction: toward one another, and for once the statistics and the stories agreed.

**Answering the Call**

For some Americans, unity meant a changed life rather than a donated afternoon. Military recruiting stations reported a wave of walk-ins in the weeks after the attacks — including retirees asking to re-enlist and September 11 widows' brothers carrying photographs — and while the overall enlistment numbers rose only modestly, the stories behind them entered national legend. None traveled further than Pat Tillman's: the NFL safety walked away from a multimillion-dollar contract with the Arizona Cardinals in 2002 to enlist in the Army Rangers with his brother, declining every interview request because he insisted he was no different from any other soldier — a decision that cost him millions and bought him nothing but obscurity, which was precisely the point. His death in Afghanistan in 2004 — and the Army's shameful initial concealment that friendly fire had killed him — made him a symbol twice over: of the era's sacrifice, and of the honesty its heroes

deserved. The surge toward service ran far beyond the military. Applications to fire departments and police academies climbed; Teach For America and AmeriCorps saw applications multiply in the years that followed; and pollsters found young Americans expressing more interest in public service careers than any cohort in decades. Commentators began calling them the '9/11 Generation' — young people whose adolescence was marked by the attacks and who translated the memory into enlistment papers, teaching contracts, nursing degrees, and city council runs. Unity, in other words, was not only a mood. For a measurable slice of a generation, it was a career decision.

**How Long Did It Last?**

The hard question about the unity of 2001 is the one historians still argue: how deep did it go, and where did it end? Its limits appeared early. Even as flags rose, Muslim, Arab, and Sikh Americans faced harassment and hate crimes from neighbors who saw enemies instead of fellow citizens — a stain that showed 'united' never quite meant everyone. The seamless bipartisanship in Washington lasted longer, but not long: within two years, the Iraq War, civil liberties fights over the Patriot Act, and an approaching election restored ordinary partisan combat, and Bush's record 90 percent approval slid back to earth. Political scientists note that every rally-round-the-flag surge decays; 9/11's was simply the largest ever measured — though what decays is not always lost. Yet it would be wrong to call the unity an illusion. It produced real things: billions in relief, a rebuilt Lower Manhattan, careers of service, and a memory that still sets the standard for what American solidarity can look like. In 2009, Congress designated September 11 a National Day of Service and Remembrance, deliberately converting the anniversary into the country's largest annual day of volunteering — an institution built to make the feeling repeatable. Each September, millions pack meals, repair schools, and donate blood in memory of the day the country briefly moved as one body. The unity of 2001 was temporary, imperfect, and unequally

shared. It was also real — and the fact that Americans keep reaching back for it may be the most honest measurement of what it was worth.

**Key Information: American Unity After 9/11**

| Detail | Information |
|---|---|
| Flag sales | Walmart sold ~116,000 flags on 9/11 alone (vs. 6,400 a year prior) |
| Capitol steps | ~150 members of Congress sang 'God Bless America' together |
| War authorization vote | Senate 98-0; House 420-1 |
| Presidential approval | About 90% — the highest Gallup ever recorded |
| Charitable giving | Roughly $2.8 billion for 9/11 relief |
| Celebrity telethon | 'America: A Tribute to Heroes' raised ~$200 million |
| Pat Tillman | Left the NFL in 2002 to enlist; killed in Afghanistan in 2004 |
| Day of Service | September 11 designated for national volunteering in 2009 |

**Case Study: The Convoy Stops in Bedford**

**Ruth Kowalski, 58, had owned the Starlite Diner off the interstate in Bedford, Pennsylvania for twenty-two years when the convoys started rolling east — ironworkers from Ohio, a crane crew from Indiana, retired firefighters from Kentucky, all heading for the smoking pile in Manhattan. The first table of volunteers tried to pay; Ruth turned their money away and taped a handwritten sign inside the window: RESCUE AND RECOVERY EAT FREE. Word traveled up the highway on CB radios. For six weeks her booths filled with dusty men and women going to Ground Zero or coming home hollow-eyed, and regulars began leaving twenty-dollar bills 'for the next table.' A pickle jar by the register, labeled simply NEW YORK, filled three times over and went to the Red Cross. "I couldn't dig and I couldn't donate blood — bad veins," Ruth said years later. "But I could make meatloaf. Everybody had a something. The country ran on everybody's something that fall." The sign from the window is framed now, hanging over booth four, and every September 11 the diner still feeds first responders free.**

1. How does Ruth's 'everybody had a something' philosophy reflect the forms of unity described in the reading?

_____

_____

2. Ruth's diner sits far from New York. What does her story show about who participated in post-9/11 unity?

_____

_____

**Multiple Choice**

1. What happened to President Bush's approval rating after September 11?
    a) It fell sharply as Americans assigned blame to leaders
    b) It stayed roughly the same as before the attacks
    c) It was not measured during the national crisis period
    d) It rose to about 90 percent, the highest ever recorded

2. What did about 150 members of Congress do on the Capitol steps on 9/11?
   a) Sang 'God Bless America' together
   b) Held an emergency vote on military war funding
   c) Observed a silent candlelight vigil for hours
   d) Announced the creation of the TSA agency

3. Which fact shows that post-9/11 unity had real limits?
   a) Flag manufacturers completely ran out of all supplies nationwide
   b) Blood banks across the nation received more donations than usage
   c) Muslim, Arab, and Sikh Americans faced harassment and hate crimes
   d) Celebrity musicians and actors performed nationwide at relief shows

**Matching**

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| 1. ___ Rally-round-the-flag effect | A) Young Americans who turned the attacks' memory into service careers |
| 2. ___ 9/11 Generation | B) NFL player who left football to enlist and died in Afghanistan |
| 3. ___ Telethon | C) Annual designation converting September 11 into national volunteering |
| 4. ___ Day of Service | D) Broadcast fundraiser where stars raised about $200 million for families |
| 5. ___ Pat Tillman | E) Surge of public support for leaders when a crisis threatens the nation |

**Fill-in-the-Blank**

1. On 9/11 alone, Walmart sold about _____ American flags.

2. Members of Congress sang 'God Bless _____' on the Capitol steps.

3. President Bush's approval rating climbed to about _____ percent.

**Short Answer**

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. What evidence shows Americans pulled together after 9/11? Give at least three examples from the reading.

_____

_____

_____

2. Why did the unity of late 2001 fade, and was that fading inevitable? Explain your reasoning.

_____

_____

_____

3. The reading calls the unity 'temporary, imperfect, and unequally shared' — yet real. Defend or challenge that judgment.

_____

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