



Written by [Steve Bonta](#) on September 11, 2026

The Legacy of 9/11

Twenty-five years ago today, I was a brand-new employee at *The New American* magazine, on the job less than two weeks. The very first order of the day on September 11, 2001, was a quick planning meeting with our editor, Gary Benoit (a quarter-century later, he is still our editor, and occupies the very same office!).

It was just past 8:00 a.m. Central Time when Gary's wife called him to say that a plane had just crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City. We both assumed that some kind of small private plane was meant, and finished our brief meeting before going downstairs to have a look at the television. We were transfixed by the sight of what was unfolding almost 800 miles to the east. Not one, but two gigantic aircraft had just slammed into the Twin Towers in what was obviously a deliberate, carefully planned attack.



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With the technology of the day, we began recording everything as it appeared on CNN, which, we felt, would probably represent the most establishmentarian version of what was happening. I watched in real time as first one and then the other tower collapsed in a hellish conflagration of dust and fire that enveloped most of Lower Manhattan and snuffed out thousands of lives in an instant. I saw the shock as news came in of a plane hitting the Pentagon, of another going down in a field in western Pennsylvania (not far from where I grew up), and even of a car bomb targeting the State Department. This last report turned out to be false, like much of the frantic reporting and feverish narrative that characterized that awful event.

Within hours, the skies over Appleton, Wisconsin, usually busy with regional air traffic, fell silent. Normal activities ground to a halt as millions of pairs of eyes were transfixed by the apocalyptic scenes unfolding in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania. Official Washington shut down, and government leaders scurried into hiding, unsure of what else might be coming. By evening, I had watched members of Congress break into an impromptu rendition of "God Bless America," as the enormity of the event became apparent. I had seen Henry Kissinger opine that the response to the attacks would need to be "integrated" (meaning, "coordinated by global authorities"). I had witnessed the late collapse of 7 World Trade Center. And I had seen President Bush vow revenge on the perpetrators of the attacks and those who supported them.

One of my colleagues at *The New American*, the late William Norman Grigg, immediately wrote a brilliant essay titled ["Will the Laws Fall Silent?"](#) wondering whether this terrible event would lead to serious compromises of American liberty in the name of national security. And it is this, 25 years later,



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that remains the most potent and dangerous legacy of 9/11. Beyond the death toll, the destruction of property, the economic havoc, and the global conflict unleashed by the “War on Terror,” there is the permanent disfigurement of American law, the tragic breach of checks and balances, and the extraordinary constriction of individual liberty, coupled with the enormous expansion of federal power, that continues to this day.

Americans not yet born on September 11, 2001 are dismayed at the Flock cameras, the online profiling and surveillance, the almost complete end to privacy, and many other features of the increasingly dystopian world we now inhabit, yet fail to realize that much of the modern “surveillance state” got its start after 9/11, thanks to laws like the ironically named PATRIOT Act and the creation of the Orwellian Department of Homeland Security.

Nowadays, it is taken for granted that the government is watching your every move — digitally, at least. Stories of innocent citizens placed on watch lists, or having their assets confiscated, no longer have the power to shock for being so commonplace. But Will Grigg — although he did not live long enough to witness the rise of AI and other specifics of the modern surveillance-state regime — predicted all of it 25 years ago, which is why we have seen fit to republish his essay on this solemn day.

It is proper that we mourn the lost and celebrate the many heroes created on that day, from the Todd Beamers and Jeremy Glicks who actually fought back, to the hundreds of firemen and civilians who sacrificed their own lives guiding others out of the burning towers. We honor them all as national heroes.

But for their heroism not to have been in vain, in the long run, we must also rouse our liberties from the long slumber that the events of 9/11 brought about. America will always have foes, but if we surrender our liberties — won by the no-less-heroic exertions of generations past — the time may come when we will no longer have the will or the means to stave them off.



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