

“A Collective Act of Memory: Remembering 9/11”

9/11 Memorial Service

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

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IU Auditorium

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All of us know the story. On the morning of September 11, 2001, at 8:14 a.m., American Flight 11 was hijacked, and at 8:46, it was flown into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Around 8:45 a.m., United Flight 175 was taken over enroute from Boston to Los Angeles, and at 9:03 it was flown into the South Tower. Between 8:51 and 8:54 a.m., American Flight 77 was hijacked, and at 9:37, it was crashed into the Pentagon. And at 9:28 a.m., United Flight 93 was hijacked enroute from Newark to San Francisco. The passengers on that flight heroically resisted their hijackers, and the plane went down around 10:03 a.m. in an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, only twenty minutes' flying time from Washington, D.C.

These words are chilling in their simplicity and fail to convey the full measure of the devastation that was wrought that day. No words can fully convey that devastation.

Here on the Bloomington campus between those tragic times of 8:14 and 10:03 a.m., over 27,000 students and professors were gathering to continue the hard work of education and research. As it does today, that work focuses with great intensity on understanding the world around us. It is predicated on the notion that, together, we can improve that world. At the heart of education and research, then, is a profound hope for the future.

That day seemed to give all of us a choice about our future. We could close our doors for protection and self-preservation. Or we could continue the hard work of education and research to which IU faculty, students, and staff have been dedicated for nearly 200 years.

All of us knew, there was no choice. Closing doors does not offer protection, and turning away from the world has never been an option for those dedicated to the journey of intellectual discovery. So with doors open and eyes on the future, we have moved forward together. To paraphrase President Lyndon Johnson, we should venture out of our safe harbors to continue the process of discovery upon which progress in our society is based. ¹

And we have continued our journeys. In the humanities, in the social sciences, the sciences and elsewhere, the fundamental work continues to be done, at times with an increased sense of urgency that helps deepen and expand our knowledge of other cultures, of human motivations for good and for bad, and how to better secure and protect our way of life.

Our students have been actively engaged in honoring those lost on that devastating day through 9/11 Scholarships established by the IU Student Foundation.

This fall, faculty, staff, students, and the entire community have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of this tragedy and others through the College of Arts and Sciences' Themester fall topic: Making War, Making Peace.

All this will help us yet further grasp the immensity of the tragedy of 9/11, seeing it in context for the epochal event that it was. But it will also illuminate how we

¹ Remarks delivered at the University of Michigan, May 22, 1964, Commencement Ceremony
<http://www.liblib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/640522.asp>

must strive tirelessly to better understand the world to reduce rancor and suffering.

Together, we have worked to find words to express this unspeakable tragedy, but sometimes words still fail us. Leonard Bernstein once said that “music . . . can name the unnamable and communicate the unknowable.”² So today we turn to music as we remember those who were lost that day ten years ago.

We are grateful to the musicians from Jacobs School of Music, including Heidi and Kevin Murphy, who are giving their first performance as the newest members of the Jacobs School faculty. We are also grateful to the Office of the Provost for all that it has done to arrange this memorial service, and to Les Lenkowsky, Professor of Public Affairs and Philanthropic Studies, who has served as chair of a campus committee that helped plan our commemoration of this anniversary.

I should also mention our deep and abiding gratitude for the active military personnel, military veterans, members of the police force and firefighters who are IU faculty members, staff, and students, and who are willing to put themselves in harm’s way to protect others. They are among the heroes we have gathered to honor today.

And we are grateful that all of you are here to share in this collective act of memory.

Today’s commemoration event calls for thoughtful reflection and not for applause. So before we move to the next musical performance, please stand to a moment of silence. Think for a moment about where you were that Tuesday morning ten years ago today, and remember the heroes and loved ones we lost that day.

² Bernstein, Leonard. *The Unanswered Question: Six Talks at Harvard*. The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976. Page 140.