

9/11 and The New Anti-Semitism



by Phyllis Chesler

On September 11, 2001, at about 11am, I walked over to my computer and typed the sentence: "Now we are all Israelis."

Always, it begins with the Jews. Afterwards, Osama bin Laden called the assault on America "blessed attacks" against the infidel...the new Christian-Jewish crusade." He explained that the Twin Towers had fallen because of American support for Israel.

War and a new kind of antisemitism had been declared. I had no choice but to write this book: *The New Anti-Semitism*.

I was not a direct victim on 9/11. I did not personally know anyone who was killed that day in the World Trade Center or

the Pentagon. I was at home, in Brooklyn, transfixed before the TV set, watching it live as it continued to happen, and I did not move from my spot. I knew that when I got up, nothing would ever be the same again; I would no longer feel safe in my native city or country or in the world; I would not longer be able to assume that life as I'd known it—with all its illusions—would continue. How could it?

At 8:45 A.M. and 9:03 A.M. two planes (American Airlines flight 11 and United Airlines flight 175) hijacked by Islamic terrorists, crashed into the World Trade Center. At 9:17 A.M. the Federal Aviation Administration shut down all New York City airports, and for the first time in history, all American airports. At 9:30 A.M. President Bush announced that the country had been attacked by terrorists. At 9:43 A.M. a third hijacked plane (American Airlines flight 77) crashed into the Pentagon. At 9:45 A.M. the White House was evacuated. At 10:05 A.M. the south tower collapsed. At 10:00 A.M. a center of the Pentagon collapsed and a fourth hijacked plane (American Airlines flight 93) crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. At 10:13 A.M. the United Nations was evacuated. At 10:28 A.M. At 10:54 A.M. Israel evacuated all Israeli diplomatic missions to the United States. At 12:04 P.M. the Los Angeles airport was evacuated and closed. And at 1:27 P.M. the city of Washington declared a state of emergency.

At 4:25 P.M. the American Stock Exchange, the New York Stock Exchange, and the NASDAQ announced they would remain closed on September 12th. By late afternoon, the wind began to carry bits and pieces of charred paper, smoky scraps of metal, bits of unidentifiable debris into my neighborhood in Park Slope, less than two miles from Ground Zero, and the air smelled of scorched souls, acrid and agonizing. It was a sickening combination of industrial fuels, hate, and human cries; it burned my throat and my eyes and my mind. I will never forget it. Nor will I forget the small impromptu shrine that instantly and instinctively arose nearby: flowers, candles, an

American flag, and a small umbrella to shield this makeshift memorial from the elements—I paid my respects there almost every day for more than a year.

The firehouse on Union Street is located two blocks away from where I lived. They lost twelve firefighters out of twenty-five on that day. For months afterwards, the firehouse was ablaze with lit candles and flowers. Wordlessly, tearfully, people brought baked goods and left small donations; bagpipes pierced the Brooklyn air with sonorous grief at funeral after funeral for these suddenly missing firefighters.

They will never come back—not one of them—and we will never see their like again. I made it a point to read each of the obituaries published in the New York Times very slowly. I thought about each person, tried to visit with them posthumously, grasp who they were, their hopes and achievements. I felt sorry for those who left children behind—and for who had no children. I did not focus on women over men, or on whites over blacks, or on Jews over non-Jews, or on Americans over non-Americans. I focused on them all, equally. Now, they all belong to me and I am part of their legacy.

I survive them. We all do. In their place and for their sakes we must find the courage to stand up to evil as best we can; there are many ways to do so. We owe it to them to speak softly, act wisely, and to listen respectfully to those with whom we disagree. From now on we will be pleading their case—and the case of all civilians everywhere who are now hostages to terror.

9/11 has continued for a long time; it is still happening; it is not over yet.

I find it extraordinary that I am writing a book about a new plague of antisemitism, one that is so intimately connected to the events of 9/11. Who would ever have thought that such a

work would be necessary in the 21st century?

But I must speak out. Something awful is happening to the world's Jews. If the daily violence and demented propaganda against them is not effectively countered, I fear that the Jews may again be sacrificed to a world gone mad and in search of a sacred scapegoat.

This excerpt from my book "The New Antisemitism" was written between 2001-2002 and published in book form in 2003.

[The author now lives in Manhattan and continues to write and write and write on this subject.]