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Framing September 11: A Conference Introduction

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On September 25, 2002, the American and Canadian Studies Department of the University of Birmingham held a one-day symposium on the events of September 11, 2001. Organised by Professors Scott Lucas and Liam Kennedy, Ali Fisher and James D. Boys, the event was an attempt to examine the day's events in a multidisciplinary fashion. And we believe that it succeeded.

Drawing on a wide range of contributors, the day was a chance for many of the new post graduate students to integrate with those who had been around a little longer and to air opinions and thoughts on the day's tragic events and its repercussions. No staid lecture series, this was an attempt to engage in a two-way dialogue between the presentation of ideas and the feedback of response. Such an ambition depends upon both engaging presentations and an audience willing to participate and contribute not only to specific topics, but to the day overall. Thankfully, both criteria were met with abundance.

Professor Liam Kennedy kicked off the day by leading a discussion based around the photography of September 11, in a paper entitled: "[After September 11: Photography, Memory and Cultural Diplomacy.](#)" Using a number of projected images, he conveyed the photographer's art in capturing not only a moment in time, but also a sense of terror and determination that emanated from Ground Zero. This was not an attempt to portray the horror of the event, but to examine and discuss how photography can be utilised as a tool of state propaganda.

One of the day's highlights was a discussion led by Dr. David Ryan of De Montfort University entitled "[Image, Rhetoric and Nationhood.](#)" Dr. Ryan examined the response of the Bush Administration to the attacks of September 11 and the desire for instant reactions. The rush to patriotism was highlighted as a particular element of September 2001, and the manner in which New York was embraced by the nation and the world in the aftermath of the attacks. Dr. Ryan was critical of the administration's capacity to learn from the events that shook downtown Manhattan and suggested that rather than alter thinking within the White House, the events of September 11 were utilised as an excuse to accelerate American unilateralism. It must be said that there was little in the way of disagreement with this thought, as Dr. Ryan captured the sentiments of many who were present.

Finally, Professor Scott Lucas led a discussion group on the effects of US Cultural Diplomacy (never call it propaganda, only bad guys use propaganda!) His paper, "[With Us or Against Us: Cultural Projection and US Foreign Policy After 9-11.](#)" highlighted the American government's manipulation of TV schedules and programme content. Prof. Lucas led the discussion to cover the response to September 11 in films, music, television and news coverage. The dynamic session produced some interesting examples of cultural responses to the attacks. From musical offerings by Bruce Springsteen and Bon Jovi, to the discussion of how the attacks shaped not only the content of movies (such as *Spiderman*, which involved the digital removal of the twin towers from the Manhattan skyline and the re-released *E.T.*) but also the release pattern of blockbuster films such as *Collateral Damage* and *The Sum of all Fears*.

The day was rounded out by a reception, made possible by the kind support of AMATAS, The Americanisation and the Teaching of American Studies Project, run by Dr Alan J. Rice of the University of Central Lancashire. The event was a success beyond the aspirations of the organisers and forms only the first in a series of events to be run by the Department this academic year.

This issue of the 49th Parallel is dedicated to the conference of September 25 and carries the aforementioned papers by Drs. Ryan and Kennedy and by Prof. Lucas. In addition it carries two papers written by members of the Post Graduate community. Maria Ryan's ["Inventing the "Axis of Evil": The Myth and Reality of Intelligence and Policy Making after 9/11,"](#) and James D. Boys' ["Assessing Clintons Culpability for September 11,"](#) continue the discussion to new and interesting ends.