

The price of patriotism

Megan McCormick experienced the patriotic fervour that swept across the States post 9/11, and thankfully found it unrepeatable in the UK last summer.

They are images that will remain forever etched into our memories and our history: the towering identical buildings spewing smoke across Manhattan, business workers fleeing from the plummeting debris, the top of a number 30 double-decker bus blown off, people covered in burns and blood emerging from the underground stations. We all sat glued for days and weeks to our television screens watching these images, waiting for information, answers and perhaps a reason. But largely they did not come. Of course politicians, policemen, and the news, among others, tried their best to give us something to work with. But these were mostly speculations and ab-

stract concepts. We never got a definite “this is why it was done, this is why it couldn’t be stopped, and this is what we can do to keep it from happening again”. Reactions to the lack of information and the uncertainty of the future were different for each person, but in particular, between those on either side of the sea. I was on the west coast of the Atlantic on September 11, 2001 and on the east coast of it shortly after 7 July 2005. Each side of the ocean had their own ways of reacting and dealing with the attacks on their countries.

Every American can tell you where they were on September 11, 2001. Ask them about it and they will recall the day

with precise detail and emotion - it’s a story they’ve shared before and they’ll share many times again. But

ask them about the weeks after the disaster and the responses will be different. Some will tell you it was a time filled with patriotism and pride, when Americans pulled together as one to unite against the people trying to destroy their country’s way of life. Others will tell you that it was a time when fear and prejudices ran rampant, when at least nine people were murdered as a result of hate crimes against Middle Easterners.



A scene like this could be seen in cities all across America



There was a surge of patriotism that began in the days following 9/11, people adorned everything, including themselves, with all things American. There was, in fact, something reassuring about driving down any street in any town in America and seeing an endless sea of red, white and blue. It was a scene that became the norm throughout the country, whether in New York or in Omaha. The flags, the signs and the ribbons meant patriotism and unity after such a devastating event. But as fear

and prejudice escalated, the colours and symbols of patriotism became more of a demand than the norm. I realised this the moment I drove by a flagless house and casually thought to myself, “now what’s wrong with them, where’s their flag?” Without even noticing, I had gotten caught up in the same post-9/11 ultra-patriotism that was inflicting the majority of America’s citizens. Our overwhelming feelings of fear, sorrow and pride had instantly turned the entire world against us, leaving very few to be trusted. A flag in the front yard meant a patriotic American, but a man with brown skin or a turban meant a terrorist.

Americans breathed sighs of relief as we watched Middle Easterners being detained, getting pulled out of airport lines for questioning and being harassed while walking down the street. At least nine murders and many more hate crimes were happening against Middle Easterners across the country. The first murdered in retaliation of 9/11 was a man who was mistaken for Muslim because he was wearing a turban. People were ignorant, confused and scared, and the government and the media were only feeding off of this and making things worse. We became 24-hour news addicts, obsessed with whether today was a red or orange alert

day. Trust in our neighbours fell while trust in the president skyrocketed. It was a strange time that was filled with patriotism and fear: emotions that would eventually become key to the support of a controversial war.

And it was this war that brought Britain to the forefront as important American allies. But while a large amount of Americans were rooting on the war, a large amount of British were protesting it. I was in America on 7 July 2005 and just like 9/11, I spent the day glued to my screen. But the news was different this time. Soon after the attacks, there were discussions about how this proved the need for the war. Many suggested that this would not only mean that the British public would support the war, but also that the rest of Europe might sign on. And to Americans it made sense. We figured that if they experienced an attack firsthand then why wouldn’t they react the way we did? So when I boarded the plane for London, I thought I was heading to place much like America after 9/11. But this wasn’t quite the case.

Britain was not in the state of panic, nor in the state of utter patriotism that I had come to expect. There was, of course, outrage against what had happened, but this hadn’t escalat-

ed into fearing your own neighbours as had happened in the United States. A major difference seemed to be that, while there were hate crimes against Muslims in the UK because of 7/7, there was also widespread outcry against them. There was a demand for their protection and people reacted to the injustice of the crimes. It seemed that Americans were just too scared to react to these injustices in their country, they were concentrating on the terrorism attacks and everything else took second seat to it. The United States never had such a major attack on its soil, but the UK had and they knew how to better deal with the issues that arose in the aftermath.

America is finally beginning to take a step back and look at the issues that came out of 9/11. The US public is once again questioning the government, demanding that injustices be abolished, and thinking twice about the war that they were once so ready to fight. They are gaining back the balance that Britain seemed to hold on to during and after 7/7.

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London was not covered in Union Flags after July 2005

