

There are moments that stay with us. Some of them are personal, and some of them are shared. September 11, 2001 is one of the collective memories—many of us watched the same television coverage that day, and we shared the sense of shock and horror, as well as overwhelming grief and mourning. Yet the day also divided our country into, as our president told us, those who are “with ‘us’” and those who are “with the terrorists.” But ‘us’ is vague and abstract (although it clearly implies ‘in support of military action’), and there is such a large expanse of gray in between supporting the terrorists and supporting war.

On September 11th, I arrived at work at 9 AM, as usual. Just as I was turning on my computer, I heard Erik, our Office Manager, yell. Thinking that he had dropped something on his foot or hit his head, I went into the front office. He directed my attention to the television, and I watched the replay of the first plane crash. Minutes later, most of our staff members and interns were in the front office, watching live as the second plane crashed. No one knew what to say, to think, to do, so we all sat, paralyzed, in front of the television. Sut, MEF’s Executive Director, told us that we were free to go home, and some of the staff did, but most of us stayed. Personally, I wandered between the television in the front office and the production studio. In the studio, our three televisions were tuned into different channels—Fox, MSNBC and CNN. That’s where I was, surrounded by television screens, when the second tower came down.

Since critically analyzing media is MEF’s focus, we watched the news coverage carefully in the days that followed. We watched ‘terrorism experts,’ high-ranking military officers, and government officials on the major news stations, and we grew concerned about the voices that were missing. Where were the intellectuals, especially progressive academics, who have been analyzing U.S. intervention in the Middle East, the Gulf and Central Asia for years? Where were the voices of Afghan feminists who experienced the Taliban’s treatment firsthand? Where were the voices of civil rights and global justice activists?

We heard ‘experts’ talk about the importance of preserving freedom in one breath and, in the next, support proposed laws that would seriously curtail civil rights. We live in a supposed democracy, yet there wasn’t an open debate, at least in the mainstream media, about the United States’ response. Why were some voices heard and others silenced?

At MEF, we are wary of the power of media conglomerates. In a time of war, it becomes frighteningly evident that some people’s right to free speech is honored more than others. On September 13th, the MEF staff gathered to discuss what we could and should do. We decided to launch a web-based response, [Beyond the Frame: Alternative Views on the September 11th Atrocities](#), to make the voices of dissident thinkers and activists available via streaming video and audio, as well as in transcript form; anyone with an Internet connection has free access to this information. We began on September 19th by interviewing [Noam Chomsky](#).

Our regular production schedule was thrown off-kilter by our decision to go ahead with this project, but once we recognized the need for a broader debate, we couldn’t turn away from it. As a result, many of our resources were redirected, and all of the staff and interns at MEF have been involved, in one way or another. At this time, we have completed twenty-eight interviews, and we will be conducting more in the coming months. Conceived in a deep commitment to democracy and civil rights, [Beyond the Frame](#) is opening up the discussion and giving voice to the inadequately addressed perspectives of gender, race, socioeconomic status, global inequity and human rights. It is our intention to provide full access to viewpoints not represented in the mainstream so that the American public can think for themselves and formulate an opinion based on all the information, not just the “policy line.”