



**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
STANDARD LEVEL
PAPER 1**

Monday 9 May 2005 (afternoon)

1 hour

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the passage carefully and then answer all the questions.

Texts in this examination paper have been edited: word additions or explanations are shown in square brackets []; substantive deletions of text are indicated by ellipses in square brackets [...]; minor changes are not indicated.

*Extract from Cheryl Mattingly, Mary Lawlor & Lanita Jacobs-Huey, “Narrating September 11: Race, Gender, and the Play of Cultural Identities”, **American Anthropologist** 104(3):743-53 (2002).*

The September 11 tragedy was an unthinkable event that riveted the American public and provoked personal storytelling. In public discourse, it split time into a “before” and “after”. The planes and pictures of those melting towers created a horrifying instance of time lifted out of the ordinary stream of things. Such times are particularly worthy of a story and September 11 offers
5 a place to examine the *cultural work of stories* by provoking the rethinking and reworking of cultural identity.

We explored the way September 11 was experienced by Los Angeles-dwelling African-American single mothers, from low-income backgrounds. [...] Some had stable jobs and college educations. Others had been homeless and on drugs. The women’s first reactions did not challenge public
10 media stories of America as the victim of the murderous actions of demented foreigners. [...] Suddenly, America was not safe and it abruptly became unthinkable to proceed as though life were normal. The stories the women told demonstrated a shared identity both with one another [and] with the rest of public America.

However, the women’s stories quickly departed from America’s public collective personal story.
15 In contrast to the public story, for the women September 11 was [just] one more frightening event, much less horrific than other events they had experienced. Because of racism [and] poverty, they faced bigger terrors on a daily basis. The women were saying that September 11 was not so unique, it had not sliced time into a “before” and “after” in the way that other experiences had in their own lives. Their sense of these events as continuous with the ongoing violence in their lives
20 highlighted their separation from America because of race and class. [...]

As they told their stories, the women began to voice a new moral perspective. [It included] protecting children as a key task of mothers, a general rejection of violence [...], and the reiteration that the September 11 events had not changed the world for American blacks, who have long been the victims of violence.

25 This led to an identification with other peoples of color on a global level because of a shared history of victimization by whites. Many of the women did not accept official versions of the terrorists as madmen. Their scepticism over the media portrayals offers further evidence of their marginal position as Americans. During such moments in the discussions their position as blacks became the most important characteristic of their cultural identity. One of the women, Stella,
30 hypothesized that being black allowed for greater compassion towards the terrorists than whites would have. She stated, “as a black person in America, I [can] see the broader perspective; probably as a white person, my reaction would have been ‘go and nuke them!’ But as a black person, I think I have a little more empathy for the people.” She then linked the white American reaction to the Islamic terrorists to the white American reaction to black Americans. In this move,
35 she invoked another powerful “imagined community”, a broad international diaspora consisting of peoples of color. From this perspective, black Americans are more fundamentally connected to

this global “community” than to white Americans. Through a common experience of oppression, peoples who are otherwise extremely different come to share a common identity. [...] To be black is to be someone who both does and does not belong to America.

- 40 [However,] the women’s role as mothers was even more powerful than their disconnection from America, and challenged it. [...] In talking, their frequent self-positioning as mothers was connected to the rejection of violence as a solution to the September 11 attacks. [...] One woman, Nadine, said, “I noticed that men and women have different views, as far as what we were experiencing, and how it should be handled all the females were like, more killing is not
- 45 going to make it better. And men were like, the testosterone was on high.” [...] In her protective maternal role she refused to support America’s war. [However, as the mother of a Marine] she [stated]: “I am proud of him...”. Her role as mother [once again] connected her to America.

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1. What similarities to and differences from mainstream America do the women express through their stories? [6 marks]

 2. Discuss in your own words what the women’s sceptical response to the media representation of September 11 tells us about their understanding of the global context in which these events took place. [6 marks]

 3. Compare the way in which the black American women construct their identity with the way in which a group you have studied in detail constructs its identity. [8 marks]
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