

Terrorism: Danger, or Hype?
Reading & Questions for Discussion
 by Gord Sellar

Some Americans have a tendency to overstate the importance of events in American history, as if they are important worldwide. However, since the beginning of the twentieth-century, major events in American history have had worldwide repercussions. This is not only because of America's relative power, but also because of the nature of the modernized world globalization, and mutual economic and political interdependency, are all part of why American history impacts so much on everyone's history.



Author Bruce Sterling described¹ how the central event of the twentieth-century was the first successful detonation on a nuclear weapon during tests by the US military in 1945. All of twentieth-century history before it – World War I, the Great Depression, the Soviet takeover of Russia, the centuries-long flow of immigrants from Europe to America (among them Einstein and several others involved in the Manhattan Project), Japanese expansionism, the rise of Nazism in Germany, the bombing of Pearl Harbour – all led quite naturally to the development of the most powerful weapon of mass destruction (WMD) ever seen.

Likewise, Sterling pointed out, for most of the rest of the twentieth century, we have struggled to deal with this new technology. From the development of, and anxiety about, nuclear power to our attitudes towards war and science, from the Cold War to our present, seemingly unipolar world, the image of a mushroom cloud has constantly hung in our imaginations, not only in America and the USSR, but worldwide. In fact, the effects have been particularly painful in places like Korea, Afghanistan, and Vietnam.



Lately, though, some Americans have begun to talk about a new “defining moment” in world history. Just as people used to remember what they were doing when they heard the news about JFK or Park Chung-Hee's assassination, now many people describe remembering what they were doing when they heard about the World Trade Center attacks. By simply by saying, “nine-eleven”, people know you are referring to the terrorist attack on New York and Washington.

In America, sweeping changes have been made in terms of rights to privacy, free speech, dissent, and the powers of the police and government. Iraq – a country unrelated to, and hostile towards al Qaeda – is now under American occupation and undergoing what may be best described as a civil war. Many experts believe that the Middle East is much less stable that before. The effects so far have not been isolated to America, either. Korean troops are present in Iraq. If you board a plane in Korea, you are subject to a whole new set of post 9-11 regulations and to rigorous inspections, and these days you cannot even carry bottled water onto a plane.

9-11 may not *emotionally* be a defining moment to non-Americans, but sometimes it seems as if the effects of that day are inescapable no matter where on Earth you happen to live.

Questions for Discussion:

Be careful to distinguish between facts and opinions in your discussion.

1. What do the underlined words/phrases mean? Explain in your own words.
2. Do you remember what you were doing when you heard about 9-11? How did you feel about it at the time?
3. Do you agree that 9-11 has had widespread effects, even in Korea?
4. Has 9-11 (or the world's response to it) affected you personally? How do you feel about any effects you've experienced? What effects do you imagine will come in the future in Korea?

1 (In his novel *Zeitgeist*)