



CONCOURS CENTRALE-SUPÉLEC

Anglais

MP, PC, PSI

2012

4 heures

Calculatrices interdites

L'usage de tout système électronique ou informatique est interdit dans cette épreuve.

Rédiger en anglais et en 500 mots environ une synthèse des documents proposés. Vous indiquerez avec précision à la fin de votre synthèse le nombre de mots qu'elle comporte. Un écart de 10% en plus ou en moins sera accepté. Votre travail comportera un titre comptabilisé dans le nombre de mots.

Ce sujet propose les 3 documents suivants :

1. « Day's End », article paru le 27 août 2011 dans le *New York Magazine*, accompagné de deux photographies;
2. la critique du livre « The Submission », parue dans le *International Herald Tribune* du 17 août 2011;
3. un extrait du roman « Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close » de Jonathan Safran Foer, publié en 2005.

L'ordre dans lequel se présentent les documents est aléatoire.

New York
NEWS & FEATURES

Day's End

The 9/11 decade is now over. The terrorists lost. But who won?

by Franck Rich

Aug 27, 2011



Mid-September 2001

(Photo: Peter Funch)

[...]

Three red-letter days in 2011 have certified the passing of the 9/11 decade as we had known it. The first, of course, was the killing of Osama bin Laden. We demand that our stories have beginnings, middles, and ends. While bin Laden's demise wasn't the final curtain for radical-Islamic terrorism, it was a satisfying resolution of the classic "dead or alive" Western that George W. Bush had dangled so tantalizingly before the nation in 2001, only to let the bad guy get away at Tora Bora. Once bin Laden was gone, he was gone from our politics, too. Terrorism has disappeared as a campaign issue; the old Bush-Cheney fear card can't be found in the playbook of the GOP presidential con-



August 5, 2011

(Photo: Benjamin Norman/The New York Times/Redux)

tenders. Ron Paul's isolationism increasingly seems like his party's mainstream while the neocon orthodoxy of McCain-Palin looks like the cranky fringe.

The other red-letter days were August 5 and 6, with their twin calamities: the downgrading of America by Standard & Poor's and the downing of a Chinook helicopter by the Taliban, making for the single most fatal day for Americans in Afghanistan. Among the fallen in that bloodbath were 17 Navy SEALs, some of them members of the same revered team that had vanquished bin Laden¹. Yet their tragic deaths were runners-up in national attention next to our fiscal woes. America may still ostensibly be a country at war with terrorists, but that war is at most a low-grade fever for

the vast American majority with no direct connection to the men and women fighting it. The battle consuming our attention and our energies these days is the losing struggle to stay financially afloat. In time, the connection between the ten-year-old war in Afghanistan and our new civil war over America's three-year-old economic crisis may well prove the most consequential historical fact of the hideous decade they bracket.

THE hallowed burial grounds of 9/11 were supposed to bequeath us a stronger nation, not a busted one. We were supposed to be left with a finer legacy than Gitmo and the Patriot Act. When we woke up on September 12, we imagined a whole host of civic virtues that might rise from the smoldering ruins. The New Normal promised a new national unity and, of all unlikely miracles, bi-partisanship: The still-green president had a near-perfect approval rating for weeks. We would at last cast off our two-decade holiday from history, during which we had mostly ignored a steady barrage of terrorist threats and attacks. We would embrace a selfless wartime patriotism built on the awesome example of those regular Americans who ran to the rescue on that terrifying day of mass death, at the price of their own health and sometimes their lives.

What arrived instead, sadly enough, was another hijacking—of 9/11 by those who exploited it for motives large and petty, both ideological and crassly commercial. The most lethal of these hijackings was the Bush administration's repurposing of 9/11 for a war against a country that had not attacked us. So devilishly clever was the selling of the Saddam-for-Osama bait-and-switch that almost half the country would come to believe that Iraqis were among the 9/11 hijackers. No less shabby, if far less catastrophic, was the milking of 9/11 for the lesser causes of self-promotion and product placement by those seeking either power or profit. From the Bush-reelection campaign ad with an image of a flag-draped stretcher carrying remains at ground zero to the donning of flag pins by television anchors and pandering politicians, no opportunistic appropriation of 9/11 was too sleazy to be off-limits.

[...]

IN retrospect, the most consequential event of the past ten years may not have been 9/11 or the Iraq War but the looting of the American economy by those in power in Washington and on Wall Street. This was happening in plain sight—or so we can now see from a distance. At the time, we were so caught up in Al Qaeda's external threat to America that we didn't pay proper attention to the more prosaic threats within.

In such an alternative telling of the decade's history, the key move Bush made after 9/11 had nothing to do with military strategy or national-security policy. It was instead his considered decision to rule out shared sacrifice as a governing principle for the fight ahead. Sacrifice was high among the unifying ideals that many Americans hoped would emerge from the rubble of

ground zero, where so many Good Samaritans had practiced it. But the president scuttled the notion on the first weekend after the attack, telling Americans that it was his "hope" that "they make no sacrifice whatsoever" beyond, perhaps, tolerating enhanced airline security. Few leaders in either party contradicted him. Bush would soon implore us to "get down to Disney World in Florida" and would even lend his image to a travel-industry ad promoting tourism. Our marching orders were to go shopping.

From then on, it was a given that any human losses at wartime would be borne by a largely out-of-sight, out-of-mind, underpaid volunteer army and that the expense would be run up on a magic credit card. Even as the rising insurgency in Iraq began to stress American resources to the max in 2003, Bush doubled down on new tax cuts and pushed through a wildly extravagant new Medicare entitlement for prescription drugs to shore up his reelection prospects with elderly voters. David Walker, then the comptroller general, called it "the most reckless fiscal year in the history of the republic." But Americans took the money and ran, and the same partisan voices now screaming about deficits in Washington remained mum as the cascade of red ink soared into the multitrillions.

By portraying Afghanistan and Iraq as utterly cost-free to a credulous public, the Bush administration injected the cancer into the American body politic that threatens it today: If we don't need new taxes to fight two wars, why do we need them for anything? But that's only half the story in this alternative chronicle of the decade's history. Even as the middle class was promised a free ride, those at the top were awarded a free pass—not just with historically low tax rates that compounded America's rampant economic inequality but with lax supervision of their own fiscal misbehavior.

It was only a month after 9/11 that the Enron scandal erupted, kicking off a larger narrative that would persist for the rest of the decade. The Houston energy company was a corporate Ponzi scheme that anticipated the antics at financial institutions, mortgage mills, and credit-rating agencies during the subprime scam. Enron had also been the biggest patron of Bush's political career, and so the president dutifully promised a crackdown, with a new "financial crimes SWAT team" and "tough new criminal penalties for corporate fraud." But this propaganda campaign was no more reality-based than the one that would promote Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. Once the Enron collapse became old news, federal regulatory agencies and law enforcement were encouraged to go fishing as the housing bubble inflated and banks manufactured toxic paper that would send America and the world into a ruinous dive rivaling bin Laden's cruelest fantasies.

It is that America—the country where rampaging greed usurped the common good in wartime, the country that crashed just as Bush fled the White

House—that we live in today. It has little or no resemblance to the generous and heroic America we glimpsed on 9/11 and the days that followed. Our economy and our politics are broken. We remain in hock to jihadist oil producers as well as to China. Our longest war stretches into an infinite horizon. After watching huge expenditures of American blood and treasure install an Iran-allied “democracy” in a still-fratricidal Iraq, Americans have understandably

resumed their holiday from history where it left off, turning their backs on the Arab Spring.

Thanks to the killing of the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks and the scattering of Al Qaeda, at least no one can say, ten years later, that the terrorists won. But if there’s anything certain about the new decade ahead, it’s that sooner or later we will have to address the question of exactly who did.

¹ This article has been corrected to show that 17 Navy Seals were killed by the downing of the Chinook helicopter in Afghanistan, not 22.

Wrestling with America’s post-9/11 traumas

The Submission. By Amy Waldman. 299 pages. *Farrar, Straus & Giroux*, \$26; *William Heinemann*, £12.99

BY MICHIKO KAKUTANI

[...]

Ms. Waldman, a former reporter for The New York Times, imagines what would happen if a jury in charge of selecting a ground zero-like memorial were to choose, from among the many anonymous submissions, a design that turns out to have been created by a Muslim-American architect.

Though this may sound, in summary, like a contrived, high-concept premise, Ms. Waldman not only captures the political furor and media storm that ensue, but also gives us an intimate, immediate sense of the fallout that these events have on the individuals involved. They include: Mohammad Khan (or “Mo,” as he’s known to family and friends), the architect whose winning design brings him notoriety and condemnation instead of praise; Claire Burwell, a wealthy widow and the families’ representative on the jury, whose early championing of Mo’s design later gives way to nagging doubts; Paul Rubin, the jury’s pragmatic chairman, who’s eager to find a politically viable solution to the whole situation; Sean Gallagher, a protester, whose brother died in the attacks; and Asma Anwar,

an illegal Bangladeshi immigrant whose husband was also a victim.

Writing in limber, detailed prose, Ms. Waldman has created a choral novel with a big historical backdrop and pointillist emotional detail, a novel that gives the reader a visceral understanding of how New York City and the country at large reacted to 9/11, and how that terrible day affected some Americans’ attitudes toward Muslims and immigrants.

[...] In these pages she charts how one decision or choice can turn into a billiard ball, ricocheting at unexpected angles and creating chain reactions — especially when it’s been put in play in a tinderbox of ethnic, religious and regional politics, and its impact has been magnified and distorted by the echo chamber of 24/7 news media coverage.

In this case the precipitating event is the jury’s choice of a memorial design referred to as “the Garden,” a rectangular space, divided by perpendicular canals, planted with real trees and steel ones (made from salvaged scraps of the original buildings brought down by the terrorists) and surrounded by a “white perimeter wall,” on whose interior the victims’ names would be listed. Claire lobbies for the Garden, despite objections from other jury members that it is “too beautiful,” too sentimental, too obviously a symbol of healing. The rest of the jury eventually comes around to sup-

port her choice, partly because of her impassioned arguments, partly because of the emotional authority she embodies as the families’ representative.

When word leaks that the winning choice was designed by a Muslim, a nationwide uproar follows, reminiscent of the real-life one last year over plans to build a mosque near ground zero. The jury is dismissed as a bunch of elitist Manhattan artists, oblivious to the nation’s feelings. The leader of a group named Save America From Islam calls the garden a “martyrs’ paradise” that’s been smuggled into the memorial like a Trojan horse. Muslim women are assaulted, their headscarves pulled off in random attacks, and mosques are desecrated around the country.

As for Mo, he suddenly finds himself “analyzed, judged and invented” by strangers. Raised in Alexandria, Virginia, by parents who emigrated from India in 1966, Mo had “barely been to a mosque in his life.” His parents “made modernity their religion,” and Mo was, “if not an atheist himself, certainly agnostic, which perhaps made him not a Muslim at all.”

A graduate of the Yale School of Art and Architecture and a member of a prestigious architectural firm, Mo is a talented yuppie with all-American dreams of success. When the jury waffles on its selection of his design, and it is suggested that he either withdraw or somehow alter it, he

grows indignant and increasingly angry. Death threats, pickets and photographers force him to leave his apartment, while denunciations from imams — who accuse him of blasphemy — rain down upon him as well.

The pretentious intellectual squabbles over the choice of the memorial; the cynical attempts by politicians to position themselves on the debate; the tactical maneuverings of special-interest groups; the cascade of inflammatory commentary from pundits on the right and left; and the speculation, lies and rumors fueled by the Internet — all are deftly conjured by Ms. Waldman.

Ms. Waldman tends to favor sympathy over satire when it comes to limning her characters' feelings and motivations, with the notable exception of the fictional New York Post reporter Alyssa Spier, who is portrayed in over-the-top terms as a mercenary tabloid hussy, willing to distort and sensationalize the facts in order to promote her own career. Alyssa asserts that "the problem with Islam is Islam," and goes out of her way to avoid being fair and balanced, including trying to influence Claire's attitude toward Mo.

Although the evolution of Claire's thinking about the memorial may not make that much

sense to the reader — this and the cartoony portrait of Alyssa are the novel's two big flaws — Ms. Waldman does an affecting job of showing how people who have lost relatives in the terrorist attack are trying to grapple with their own confusion and conflicting emotions, even as they find themselves caught up in a political conflagration. Indeed, it is Ms. Waldman's ability to depict their grief and anger that lends this novel its extraordinary emotional ballast, and that reminds us how inextricably linked the personal and the political, the private and the public have become in our post-9/11 world.

(The narrator is a nine-year old boy whose father was killed in the World Trade Center terrorist attack on September 11, 2001.)

When Mom tucked me in that night, she could tell that something was on my mind, and asked if I wanted to talk. I did, but not to her, so I said, "No offense, but no." "Are you sure?" "*Très fatigué*," I said, waving my hand. "Do you want me to read something to you?" "It's OK." "We could go through the *New York Times* for mistakes." "No, thank you." "All right," she said, "all right." She gave me a kiss and turned off the light, and then, as she was about to go, I said, "Mom?" and she said, "Yes?" and I said, "Do you promise not to bury me when I die?"

She came back over and put her hand on my cheek and said, "You're not going to die." I told her, "I am." She said, "You're not going to die any time soon. You have a long, long life ahead of you." I told her, "As you know, I'm extremely brave, but I can't spend eternity in a small underground place. I just can't. Do you love me?" "Of course I love you." "Then put me in one of those mausoleum-thingies." "A mausoleum?" "Like I read about." "Do we have to talk about this?" "Yes." "Now?" "Yes." "Why?" "Because what if I die tomorrow?" "You're not going to die tomorrow." "Dad didn't think he was going to die the next day." "That's not going to happen to you." "It wasn't going to happen to him." "Oskar." "I'm sorry, but I just can't be buried." "Don't you want to be with Dad and me?" "Dad isn't even there!" "Excuse me?" "His body was destroyed." "Don't talk like that." "Talk like what? It's the truth. I don't understand why everyone pretends he's there." "Take it easy Oskar." "It's just an empty box." "It's more than an empty box." "Why would I want to spend eternity next to an empty box?"

Mom said, "His spirit is there," and that made me *really* angry. I told her, "Dad didn't have a spirit! He had cells!" "His memory is there." "His memory is here," I said pointing at my head.

Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*
New York: Penguin, 2005, p. 168.