

The Eleventh Day: The Ultimate Account of 9/11
by Anthony Summers and Robyn Swan.
Doubleday, 2011.

Last September 11th dawned and the world was reminded of the terrible events that had taken place in America a decade before. The passage of ten years seemed extraordinary, for the events were and are as fresh in the mind, and in the mind's eye, as if they had happened yesterday.

To mark the anniversary of a day that changed the world forever, the husband and wife team of Anthony Summers and Robyn Swan have written a definitive work on the events of that day, divided into seven parts; Attack, Distrust and Deceit, America Responds, Plotters, Perpetrators, Twenty-Four Hours, and Unanswered Questions.

The events of the day are described first, in all their horror and destructive power, and reading them one is reminded of the senseless waste of life and the damage done to families, companies, the US Economy and much more by the four aircraft brought to earth by Al Qaeda terrorists. Much of this material has been covered by others, though the perspective of a decade enables Summers and Swan to reflect in greater depth and to include details – such as the numbers of those in the rescue surfaces who have died or succumbed to serious respiratory illness because of what they were exposed to when the Twin Towers burned and then collapsed – unavailable to earlier authors.

The meat of the book however is parts 2-7, which look at events before 9/11, especially the planning by the terrorist group and the manifest failings of the Western intelligence services, and the aftermath. One of the most bizarre aspects of the latter is the degree to which people in the USA, and around the world, not just in Arab countries, almost instantly refused to believe that what they had really seen was a terrorist attack attributing it either to the US government or to an Israeli/Jewish plot. Conspiracy theories are hard to disprove, and those who espouse them are immune to reason, but the authors demolish the arguments against 9/11 being no less and no more than what we witnessed, an attack by Muslim extremists on the United States.

Another aspect of this book that is particularly intriguing is the analysis of how the Bush White House handled 9/11, the day itself and the response to it. The authors show how the seeds of America's disastrous engagement with Iraq, already sown in neo-con minds, were legitimated and emboldened by the impact of 9/11 with the consequences of which the entire world is aware.

The Eleventh Day is a powerful record, beautifully written and immaculately researched, of a truly historic day, and it will stand for some time as the definitive account of what took place a little over a decade ago.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh