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### Attacks bombard America's psyche

#### Next steps may determine Americans' psychological direction

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WASHINGTON

Patty Grooms of Fairfax Station, Va., lies awake at night -- midnight, 1, 2 o'clock -- listening to the rumble of fighter jets patrolling the Washington skies and wondering what form another terrorist attack might take. Contaminated drinking water? Poisoned air?

Ken Manges, a psychologist who works on the 18th floor of a Cincinnati high-rise, has been counseling some patients by phone because, he says, they've developed skyscraper anxiety.

Uzo Dike, a 33-year-old legal assistant in Chicago, has sat transfixed at his television, shedding more tears than he has since his mother died when he was in high school.

And Ramin Saeedpour, a Nashville chiropractor of Iranian descent, has a new fear to add to all the others. As he sat at a traffic light last week, someone sprayed his car with red paint-gun pellets. When he got to work, he heard that some tenants in his building were asking if he could be a terrorist posing as a chiropractor.

The casualties that resulted from the terrorist attack on this nation are still being tallied, counted in numbers so horridly high they beg for new words in our vocabulary to describe our grief. But there is another type of casualty that, in many ways, is proving incalculable: the psychological havoc that has been wreaked on a nation that was just sitting down to a cup of coffee when all semblance of life's routine was suddenly shattered.

"It's not just being afraid of planes," says Todd Gitlin, professor of culture, journalism and sociology at New York University. "Something deeper got cracked -- the illusion that America was protected by oceans. That's a deep illusion in American history. And it's an illusion we cherish."

President Bush, in his address to the nation last week, said he recognized that "many citizens have fears tonight" but asked for Americans to be "calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat."

Still, along with American flags and red-white-and-blue ribbons, the pervasive loss of that sense of invulnerability has been showing up everywhere since Sept. 11, tinged with profound sadness and unspeakable anger.

Some are defiantly carrying on with their daily routine and future plans, refusing to let terrorists gain a

foothold on their lives, but scores of Americans are canceling trips and staying close to home and their families.

"Now that we're entering this war era, I don't want to leave my kids," says Grooms, a mother of three young girls, who canceled a trip to Hawaii she and her husband had planned for next month. Her 9-year-old daughter tearfully begged her not to go.

Gun sales are up. Flight attendants are looking for new occupations. Innocent, unattended packages, misinterpreted remarks or even suspicious-looking people are resulting in evacuated buildings, malls and airplanes everywhere.

A car alarm is accidentally tripped in the parking lot of a nursery school, and mothers who have just dropped off their children frantically rush back in, fearing -- they don't even know what, just some horrible calamity.

"The diabolical elements of this attack are wondrous to behold," says Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David M. Kennedy of Stanford University. "It makes you wonder how much the terrorists anticipated the reverberations in not only the economy, but people's way of life and sense of security."

A Pew Research Center poll showed that -- since the attacks -- nearly half of all Americans have had difficulty concentrating and one in three have trouble sleeping at night. Nearly seven in 10 are praying more, and nearly three out of four are frightened watching television reports.

### **Historical parallels**

Because the devastation on American soil was unprecedented, and the U.S. retaliation is just beginning, the long-term consequences for our way of life and state of mind aren't knowable yet.

"Whether Sept. 11 becomes a hinge of history the way Pearl Harbor was depends on the way events unfold," says William Galston, director of the University of Maryland's Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy. "Pearl Harbor changed everything. Vietnam changed everything. Desert Storm changed nothing."

Galston says Pearl Harbor led to a sustained national commitment that called on all citizens to reorganize their lives and lasted long enough to insinuate itself into the marrow of our society. "It was not the event. It was the way the country responded that changed everything," says Galston, a former Clinton White House aide. "There's no question this was a huge shock to our national system, but I'm not yet persuaded the response to this will be as far-reaching or long-lasting as Pearl Harbor."

There are some parallels. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, where 2,403 Americans were killed, was thought to have destroyed the nation's sense of impregnability at the time, much like the recent strike.

And just as Americans rushed to enlist in the military back then, so too have we seen a rush of patriotic feeling, with Americans contributing money, time and blood and, especially in the case of young adults, connecting with their country in ways they hadn't before.

"I did not realize how deep my patriotism runs until right now," says Debra Olsen, whose mother was a nurse at Pearl Harbor and who sees the intense nationalism of her parents' era re-emerging around the country, even in the Phoenix, Ariz., hair salon where she works.

Dr. Paul R. McHugh, chairman of the psychiatry and behavioral sciences department at the Johns

Hopkins University, says that while wars and serious domestic crises often cause fear and depression, they can also spark a sense of common community and a decline in suicide and crime rates.

But in a case such as this, he says, where so little is known about whom we're fighting, why we're under attack, how we'll wage the war and how to define success, people need as much information as possible from their leaders if any anxiety is to be relieved.

Some, however, say their confidence in the government has been rocked -- by the apparent intelligence failure and by what Dave Lentz of King of Prussia, Pa., calls the "let's-get-'em" mentality.

A laboratory instrument salesman, Lentz says that if the nation doesn't examine whether there was something in its actions or foreign policy that provoked such hatred toward America, "then we're not even at square one."

"To ask the question at this point is to be unpatriotic," he says. "It pains me that we're not even going to get that reality check out of this. I have that fear -- that we're not even going to ask the question -- layered on top of fears about 'What's next?' "

Experts who have studied the effects of terrorism in other countries say the violence -- and anticipation of violence -- is just the tip of the iceberg in fostering anxiety. "It's not just the attack that takes a toll, but the feeling that people around us hate us," says Ariel Merari, head of Tel Aviv University's political violence research unit.

But he says that eventually, most people carry on as they did before. A Tel Aviv University study last month found that, despite recent suicide bombings, 62 percent of Israelis said they had not changed their day-to-day behavior.

"Initially, people may refrain from getting on a bus or going to a shopping mall, but that only lasts a few days, and then they stop looking over their shoulder all the time," says Merari. "People carry on because they have to."

What's more, Merari says, the worry does not seem to affect general health. "Israel is fourth in the world for longevity," he says. "Fear does not kill you."

But some psychologists say that, beyond the short-term jitters that are keeping a whole nation on heightened alert, such anxiety has the potential to create a volatile, if not dangerous, situation for our culture and society -- and our humanity -- down the road.

Rona M. Fields, a psychologist who has studied the effects of terrorism on children in Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Israel and other war-torn areas, says that, particularly among young people, the interest in revenge can become obsessive.

"Youngsters can be so traumatized by violence that when they get older they look for leaders who promise retribution," says Fields. "You see a decrease in a peace movement among this generation that lives with terrorism."

Now, she predicts, many Americans will seek outlets for their anger.

"I'm not expecting suicide bombers, but a lot of people who want vengeance will find ways to express their rage and their hate," Fields says. "What we're building towards here are multiples of Timothy McVeigh."

Already, there are some who are seeking to avenge the deadly hijackings by harassing or even attacking Arab-Americans and Muslims. Several killings are being investigated as hate crimes. And even on a remote island in Puget Sound -- at the other end of the country from where the terrorist attack took place -- a teen-ager was arrested last week for pouring gasoline on and preparing to torch the lawn of a Bosnian Muslim family.

The insecurity is powerful enough that many Americans say they would welcome a society that is more guarded.

A Los Angeles Times poll taken soon after the attack found overwhelming support for random police stops of anyone "who may fit the profile of suspected terrorists." And a Gallup Poll last week found that 86 percent of the public supports requiring every person going into an office building or public

place to pass through a metal detector. Most, however, do not support government surveillance of mail or e-mail or phone taps.

"Even being the liberal that I am, I'm willing to give up some freedoms," says Rich DeLucia, a retired history teacher in Davie, Fla., a suburb of Fort Lauderdale where some of the hijackers had lived. "I don't want to change our society, but some things are going to have to close up."

Even mass entertainment is reflecting this sense of nervousness. Last week, Clear Channel Communications urged its 1,170 radio stations nationwide to refrain from playing 150 songs.

The attacks have led to a fair amount of soul-searching. Pop culture itself seems to be wrestling with its very existence and identity -- Jay Leno and David Letterman wrung their hands over how to be funny now -- just as Americans have struggled to perform jobs that suddenly seem trivial.

One Orlando businessman who creates exhibits for theme parks sought guidance from his rabbi about how to dream up fun ideas in the midst of such a tragedy.

### **'Live your lives'**

Mark Crispin Miller, a media studies professor at New York University, says he believes the national trauma could in fact bring a more sober tone to American entertainment.

"We may see a bit less of the reflexive jeering, the facile irony that has characterized so much of our media for the last 20 years," he says. "I wouldn't be surprised if we saw less interest in reality programming, because a pretend ordeal seems a little silly when people are going through an authentic one."

Americans wonder what their lives will look like once the immediate shock of this attack passes.

In his speech Thursday night, Bush urged them to return to their old routines -- "to live your lives and hug your children."

For now, those old routines don't feel the same. Everything is operating at a heightened level, whether it's nervousness or depression or gratitude.

"All the things I fell in love with about my wife are just kind of amplified now," says Uzo Dike, the Chicago legal assistant. "When I saw those big towers come down, they made all my feelings for the

people I love become even more clear."

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