



THE CENTER OF THE WORLD

NEW YORK: A DOCUMENTARY FILM 3x60



International

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Spanning more than 50 years, from the end of the Second World War to the present, *The Center of the World* traces the origins and development of the twin towers, the controversies and challenges that surrounded their rise into the sky, and the complex relationship of the project, the city and the nation to the global economic dynamic that gave the World Trade Center its name and its rationale.

The Center of the World also recounts the terrible events of September 11—exploring the meaning of the attacks, and the attempt to rebuild and recover from them. “Hundreds of millions of people around the world are changing the way they live because of what happened at the World Trade Center,” observes historian Kenneth T. Jackson.

To understand what happened on that terrible September morning in 2001, Burns reaches back to the fall of 1946—when the idea of a “world trade center” was first conceived—as a new global order based on world trade was taking shape in Washington and New York, looking at the extraordinary individuals who propelled the project forward more than a decade later.

The film also presents the extraordinary story of the towers themselves: the bitter political controversies surrounding their planning and development, the daunting engineering challenges of their design and construction, and the tenuous first years of their operation. The towers faced both the threat of financial insolvency and the scorn of critics, who mocked the massive buildings as “a standing monument to architectural boredom” and “the largest aluminum siding job in history.”

But in the final two decades of the 20th century the towers emerged triumphant. Though New Yorkers might look upon the complex as “the biggest shadow-casting pieces of real estate downtown,” Niall Ferguson observes, “for the rest of the world ... it came to be the quintessential expression of globalization.”

That status made the World Trade Center a fatally attractive target for terrorists—as became clear in February 1993 when a 1,500-pound bomb exploded in the basement garage of the North Tower, killing six people, injuring more than a thousand and inflicting serious structural damage. “More than any symbol in America,” notes Paul Goldberger, architecture critic for the *New Yorker*, the towers “said to the world not just, ‘This is America,’ but ‘This is a modern place—this is a place of the 20th century.’ And that made them a very potent target.”

The Center of the World comes to a deeply moving climax as the events of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath put into play, in new and harrowing ways, every theme and issue in the city’s four-century-long history: commerce and diversity, capitalism and democracy, globalization and the creation of a new kind of multi-cultural society.

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AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

CREDITS

Executive Producer: Mark Samels

Producers: Marilyn Ness and Ric Burns

Director: Ric Burns

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