

David Berman
Augusta Brown
Lower Manhattan Recovery Studio
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MEMORIALS AND REDEVELOPMENT AFTER TERRORISM: THE RESPONSES OF OKLAHOMA CITY AND LONDON

A Comparative for New York City after September 11th

Introduction

In the last decade, two cities have faced what New York City is currently deliberating: following a massive terrorist attack, how does the City memorialize the victims (Oklahoma City) and rebuild a predominately financial business district (London)? Separately, the attacks on Oklahoma City and London are not a complete picture of the issues presented to Lower Manhattan following September 11th. Like New York, Oklahoma City confronted a large death count produced by extremists. Yet Oklahoma City's recovery was centered largely on the construction of a memorial and was generally absent of the large-scale financial repercussions and business community diaspora which has befallen New York. With London, the bombings of the Baltic Exchange and central financial districts of Docklands (1992, 1996) and Bishopsgate (1993) challenged financial organizations on where to physically locate, new organizational forms, employing new communications medium, and how the city can produce an environment conducive to preserving the community. This debate has been brought to the forefront post-September 11th. However unlike New York, the attacks on London killed only four people and were designed to disrupt commercial activity and not significant casualties.¹ It is through a collective examination of both Oklahoma City and London that we gain a historical context that presents a point of reference for juxtaposing New York's dialogue and plans for memorializing and redevelopment with cities that have previously experienced such challenges.

¹ The 1993 bombing in Bishopsgate was deliberately scheduled for a Saturday when the number of persons in the district would be minimal

London

From 1992-6, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) sponsored a series of bombings in London's financial communities of Bishopsgate and Docklands. The objective of the attacks was to rupture the finance community and destabilize the English economy. While fatalities and injuries were low the physical damage was significant. The Bishopsgate attack damaged 72 buildings, rained 500 tons of glass onto the streets, resulted in insurance claims of \$1.2B and estimated intangible costs of \$525M²; insurance covered only 65% of losses. Small businesses suffered dramatically with most having no contingency planning and many eventually closing. Damages to infrastructure resulted in sustained regional inaccessibility and large occupancies.

Following Bishopsgate, financial organizations (i.e. Deutsche Bank, Willis Corroon, and the Baltic Exchange) were faced with a new paradigm: how to decentralize operations to protect information and maintain productivity in the anticipation of future attacks. Associated issues included financial considerations and the value of proximity. Chiefly, questions were raised about strategic centralization.³ As a result, many London financial organizations have relocated entirely or partially out of the central district to the suburbs and Docklands, though Docklands had been victim of a prior attack and would subsequently be again. With the Docklands attacks, financial institutions were further pressed to continue distribution with a new onus of distribution of distributed systems. Thus the question of "a balance between geographic separation and accessibility" has become a new issue of resolve (Banking Technology Online).

Following the bombings was the emergence of a new industry: disaster recovery. Firms, notably Guardian IT and Comdisco, located themselves in proximity to financial organizations to assist in disaster planning as the London financial community adopted a guideline of preparation and contingency. Structurally, buildings have upgraded to offer greater protection and soundness. Window glazing and structural retrofitting (specifically thickening walls) are common features organizations seek when looking for new space or upgrading existing locations. Additionally, a "ring of steel" has been constructed around both Bishopsgate and Docklands. Legislatively, the Government has financially taken a "lender-of-the-last-resort" position deferring all claims to insurers. As a result, insurance costs continue to climb.

² For reference, the cost of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing was approximately \$525M

³ See Dr. Jonathan Liebenau's presentation to Columbia's Institute for Tele-Information, November 2001

Following September 11th, the Greater London Authority issued a report on planning London's skyline and on the construction of tall buildings. The report dictates that tall buildings present a competitive advantage for creating affordable office space, produce infrastructure, status, and build community. Further, the report offers the need and desire of the financial community to cluster together to "concentrate sufficient activity to support ancillary activities ranging from associated commercial activities such as printing, copying and office servicing, to leisure activities such as clubs, pubs, restaurants etc. The report cites Docklands has a successful model.

Oklahoma City

On April 19th 1995 the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City was bombed causing 168 people to die, hundreds more were injured physically and thousands more emotionally. The need to react to this horrible event was immediate. Impromptu memorials were created all over the disaster zone and people quickly began speaking of how they could develop a permanent memorial.

In the first step after the bombing of the Murrah building the then Mayor appointed a 350-member Memorial Task Force "charged with developing an appropriate memorial to honor those touched by the event." This Task Force included the various stakeholders of the event; family members of those killed in the bombing, survivors of the blast and the volunteers who helped in the recovery. From the summer of 1995 until spring 1996 the Task Force used this time as a listening period where they gathered families, survivors and the general public, to listen to their ideas about what the memorial should be and following this period developed a mission statement for the development of the Memorial. In September of 1996 the Task Force officially became the Oklahoma City National Memorial Foundation, charged to determine the plan for design, construction, administration and maintenance of the memorial.

Subsequently 11 subcommittees were developed each dealt with different aspects of the memorial development process. These committees then spent approximately eight months gathering ideas from family members of those who were killed, survivors and people across the country. Those involved made strong efforts not to talk about what the memorial would look like exactly, but rather to focus on what the complex should feel like, and what the experience would be like. They came up with their wish for the memorial complex in terms such as,

“Remembrance, Peace, Comfort, Recognition and Learning” to name a few. It was also determined that the wishes of the “Families/Survivors Liaison Subcommittee” were to be given the greatest weight in the planning process.

Their next step was to gather design concepts for the outdoor memorial and an international design competition was commenced. There were over 624 entries submitted from all 50 states and 23 countries, which were all put on public display. This group was narrowed to five and finally in July 1997 the final design was chosen for the outdoor memorial.

In March of 1999, they developed a report outlining three main goals for development of a memorial: First, to develop an outdoor memorial on the Murrah building site. Second, to create a Memorial Center Museum to tell the story of the events of April 19, 1995. Lastly, to develop the Oklahoma City National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism, to deter and prevent terrorism and to mitigate its effects.

The outdoor memorial was dedicated on April 19th 2000 on the 5th anniversary of the bombing. The Memorial Center was later dedicated on Feb 19th 2001.

Summary

The scale of the events on September 11th were like nothing we have ever seen before making it very difficult to know how to start down the path of rebuilding, both physically and emotionally. However, by looking at both Oklahoma City and the events in London we can begin to learn about what form our rebuilding process should take. In these modern day tragedies the need to rebuild and memorialize has become an immediate one forcing decisions to be made at a much more rapid rate than in the past. Whether or not this need for an immediate response is good or bad is not at issue but rather to make sure that the appropriate voices are listened to and that the right plan is developed.

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London

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