

GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEW ESSAY

TRAGEDY AND TRANSFORMATION IN NEW YORK CITY

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GOTHAM: A History of New York City to 1898. By EDWIN G. BURROWS and MIKE WALLACE. xxiv and 1,383 pp.; maps, ills., bibliog., index. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 0195116348; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 0195140494.

THE HISTORICAL ATLAS OF NEW YORK CITY: A Visual Celebration of Nearly 400 Years of New York City's History. By ERIC HOMBERGER. 192 pp.; maps, bibliog., index. New York: Henry Holt and Company, Owl Books Imprint, 1998. \$22.00 (paper), ISBN 0805060049.

INVISIBLE NEW YORK: The Hidden Infrastructure of the City. By STANLEY GREENBERG. xi and 90 pp., ills., notes, bibliog., index. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 0801805945x.

MANHATTAN IN MAPS, 1527–1995. By PAUL E. COHEN and ROBERT T. AUGUSTYN. 176 pp.; maps, bibliog., index. New York: Rizzoli Press, 1997. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 0847820521.

NEW YORK: A Documentary Film. Written by RIC BURNS and JAMES SANDERS; directed by RIC BURNS; produced by LISA ADES and RIC BURNS. PBS Video, 1999. \$139.98 (DVD); \$99.98 (VHS).

NEW YORK: An Illustrated History. By RIC BURNS, JAMES SANDERS, and LISA ADES. xv and 575 pp.; maps, bibliog., index. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 0679454829; \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 0375709681.

RECONSTRUCTING TIMES SQUARE: Politics and Culture in Urban Development. By ALEXANDER J. REICHL. xii and 239 pp.; ills., bibliog., index. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 0700609490; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 070060-9490.

SELLING THE LOWER EAST SIDE: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City. By CHRISTOPHER MELE. xvi and 361 pp.; maps, ills., bibliog., index. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 0816631816; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 0816631824.

WATER FOR GOTHAM: A History. By GERARD T. KOEPEL. xiv and 355 pp.; ills., notes, index. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 0691011397; \$17.95 (paper), ISBN 0691089760.

By destroying the World Trade Center towers in Lower Manhattan, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 reminded us yet again of the fragility of great cities. Their concentration of people and activities has always made cities vulnerable to disruption by terrorism, warfare, natural disaster, technological breakdown, social disruption, and other forces. As a preeminent global symbol of U.S. financial power,

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media influence, and cultural dominance, the very skyline, the profile, of New York City became a prime target in the acts of savagery directed against America, eclipsing even the assault on the Pentagon, near the seat of national government. New Yorkers reacted to the 9/11 tragedy with an emotional outpouring of solidarity for the victims, often reflected in the poignant memorialization of public space (Figure 1).

In addition to the carnage of nearly 3,000 lost lives, the World Trade Center attacks destroyed or severely damaged nearly 30 million square feet of office and retail space in Lower Manhattan, forcing 100,000 of the area's workers to relocate to other areas (Figure 2). The crippled public transportation infrastructure, which will take years to rebuild, put the Financial District's remaining 270,000 jobs at risk. New York City's economy stands to lose roughly \$83 billion and 57,000 jobs over three years, according to an economic impact analysis by the New York City Partnership and Chamber of Commerce (NYCP 2001). As the Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Corporation debates various proposals for rebuilding "Ground Zero," it serves us well to ponder the historical geography of America's largest city.

In recent decades a growing literature has focused on the role of New York City as one of the dominant "command centers" in an integrated world economy (Abu-Lughod 1999; Godfrey and Zhou 1999; Sassen 2001). The "global-city hypothesis" posits that such transnational centers articulate financial transactions, corporate decision making, advertising campaigns, mass-media networks, legal and other services, and other political-economic functions (Friedmann and Wolff 1982; Friedmann 1995). The increasing dependence on such leading financial and corporate service sectors has come to dominate redevelopment agendas in restructured downtowns (Fainstein 1994; Godfrey 1995, 1997). An associated "dual-city hypothesis" asserts that the rise of the financial and corporate service sectors, along with the decline of urban industry and union employment, has exacerbated socioeconomic inequality in this and other global cities (Mollenkopf and Castells 1991; Sassen 1998).

The disruption of the stock market and financial services in Lower Manhattan after 9/11 raised questions anew about the viability and even the desirability of concentrating corporate activities in such pivotal central business districts. In fact, New York's international visibility masked a long civic preoccupation with the city's economic viability in an age of urban flight and corporate decentralization. Since World War II corporations have been leaving New York for lower-cost regions, and by the time of the city's virtual bankruptcy in the mid-1970s many pundits had written off America's largest center as a decaying, if somehow quaint, relic of the past. The subsequent financial revival and cultural efflorescence, which now appears to have peaked in the late 1990s, partially obscured the prolonged periods of economic stagnation, political ineptitude, crime, and social unrest of the past. At the current moment of transition in New York City's fortunes, it is instructive and even reassuring to review a series of notable books and an epic-length public television documentary calling our attention to the city's historic tragedies and transformations.

Recent urban histories remind us that New York's contemporary prominence was never assured in advance. In fact, the city's saga exhibits a variety of unpredict-