

An aerial photograph of a park featuring a series of parallel green stripes separated by grey paved paths. The stripes are planted with young trees and mulch. People are seen walking and sitting on the paths. The overall scene is bright and open.

# **NEW YORK** **after 9/11**

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# **Conflict and Change**

## **New York City's Rebirth after 9/11**

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**9/11** was a world-historical event. It is therefore of little surprise that so much attention has been paid to its impact on American society and global affairs. What has been less studied is 9/11's direct impact on those persons most directly affected by the World Trade Center's destruction: the residents of New York City and Lower Manhattan. By using *New York Times* articles as data, this chapter surveys the lived experiences of New Yorkers in 9/11's aftermath, focused in particular on the five years that followed this horrifying event and the 2010 controversy surrounding the so-called Ground Zero Mosque.

We begin this chapter by sketching out how scholars have defined the concept of a disaster and the idea that, in a disaster's wake, a community resumes its prior equilibrium or adapts to a new one.<sup>1</sup> We then identify various priorities that consumed post-9/11 New Yorkers, noting how some of these priorities quickly came into conflict. Specifically, we found that New Yorkers were initially concerned with whether life would return to normal, before shifting their focus to concerns over the physical rebuilding process and the political struggles that such recovery entailed. We then compare these findings with the controversy over the so-called Ground Zero Mosque several years later. Finally, we describe a new equilibrium that emerged among New Yorkers directly and indirectly affected by 9/11, which is still being shaped to this day.

## Understanding Disaster

American sociologists began systematically studying disasters during World War II through military-funded research that focused on civilian populations' response to large-scale bombings.<sup>2</sup> Disaster research accelerated in the 1950s when the National Academy of Sciences National Research Council began supporting research on large-scale natural and technological crises.<sup>3</sup> Despite six decades of research on populations' responses to disasters,<sup>4</sup> sociologists continue to develop and debate the meaning of the term "disaster."<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps Charles Fritz's 1961 definition of disaster remains the most prominent as an event "in which a society, or a relatively self-sufficient subdivision of a society, undergoes several dangers and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted and the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of the society is prevented."<sup>6</sup> According to Fritz, disasters inevitably: (1) threaten biological survival, including subsistence, shelter, and health; (2) disrupt the normal order of things, including a society's divisions of labor, authority patterns, cultural norms, and social roles; (3) threaten values, shared definitions of reality, and communication mechanisms; and (4) modify motivations within social and cultural systems. Elaborating on Fritz's definition, Russell Dynes identified seven central elements of disaster: (1) an event (2) located in time and space (3) in which a community (4) undergoes severe danger (5) and incurs losses (6) so that the social structure is disrupted (7) and the fulfillment of all or some of its essential functions is prevented.<sup>7</sup>

Stanley Cohen has additionally focused on how disasters disrupt the normal order of things.<sup>8</sup> According to Cohen, after such events a "community either recovers its former equilibrium or achieves a stable adaptation to the changes which the disaster may have brought about."<sup>9</sup> Kai Erikson has further explored this idea.<sup>10</sup> After studying a disastrous flood at Buffalo Creek, West Virginia, Erikson concluded that persons affected by disaster undergo (1) the sense that the disaster will never end; (2) the feeling of vulnerability from having lost a sense of immunity to misfortune; (3) a changed sense of oneself, including how one relates to others; and (4) a changed view of the world that now includes a sense of life's utter precariousness. Erikson, like Cohen, argues that it is not disaster, per se, that leads to change, but it is "how *people react to them* rather than *what they are* that give [such] events whatever traumatic quality they can be said to have" (italics in original).<sup>11</sup>

## September 11 in the *New York Times*

Few disasters in United States history compare to the 9/11 attacks, which affected communities throughout the country and the globe. This event took the lives of passengers and crew aboard four hijacked airplanes in New York City; Arlington, Virginia; and Shanksville, Pennsylvania; workers and visitors at the World Trade Center; military personnel at the Pentagon; and people who later died from exposure to toxic wreckage resulting from the attacks.<sup>12</sup> But of the almost 3,000 fatalities that resulted from the attacks on New York City and Washington DC on 9/11, most (93 percent, over 2,800 deaths) occurred in a single community, Lower Manhattan.<sup>13</sup>

Post-disaster 9/11 scholarship concerning New York City has largely focused on (1) the short-term dynamics at the macro level, as the city as a whole moved from shock to solidarity;<sup>14</sup> (2) the longer-term dynamics focused at the individual level, particularly individual bereavement, trauma, and PTSD;<sup>15</sup> (3) Islamophobic bias and violence directed at people perceived to be Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim;<sup>16</sup> and (4) evaluations of technical aspects of the 9/11 attacks from the perspective of specific professions, such as technology, security, and mental health.<sup>17</sup> Far fewer studies have focused, as we do, on the years-long trajectory of this tragic event in the lives of New Yorkers after 9/11.

## Researching Post-9/11 New York City

To study how New Yorkers responded to the events of 9/11, we worked from an archive of *New York Times* articles that one of us (Opatow) gathered from September 2001 until five years later when stories of everyday New Yorkers' responses to 9/11 became less prominent in the news. These news articles offer unparalleled insight into the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and provide information on those affected by the attacks, and how the attack impacted everyday lives in many different spheres of society. We recognize that such articles are not free of bias, as people with fewer resources and who do not affect the flow of profits and corporate agendas may get less attention in the news.<sup>18</sup> And, as we discuss in the following section, media interest in once-newsworthy topics fades dramatically over time.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, after 9/11, newspapers offered unparalleled access into New Yorkers' immediate and long-term responses to this event. Specifically, the *New York Times*, a newspaper of record with a long-established reputation for meeting high journalistic standards,<sup>20</sup> devoted significant space to New York City and Lower Manhattan in the aftermath of 9/11, offering rich and detailed accounts of 9/11 and its effects on the city.

To conduct this study, we first constructed an archive of *New York Times* articles focusing on the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks in New York City. By the three-year mark, we had collected more than three thousand articles. By 2006 this topic became less frequent in the news, and we therefore decided that this was a natural stopping point. Working alongside research assistants,<sup>21</sup> we sorted the articles from this five-year period using an iterative process of coding, discussing, and recoding the articles to create a set of categories encompassing diverse topics and levels of analysis, from individuals to neighborhoods, institutions, agencies, and the city as a whole. Prominent categories included: fear of terrorism, rescue and recovery, changes in routines, death, health, injury, economic loss, the families of people who died, the victim compensation fund, replacing the World Trade Center, rescue and recovery crews, economic impacts, Lower Manhattan restoration and redevelopment, emerging memorials, and 9/11 in the arts. Based on this, we ultimately developed a set of six overarching categories: (1) compensation; (2) World Trade Center rebirth; (3) narratives about everyday lives; (4) fear, health, and quality of life; (5) emerging memorials around the world; and (6) artistic works on 9/11.

For this chapter, we report on one category, World Trade Center rebirth. This category centers on New York City's journey from damage to regeneration, reporting on how New Yorkers sought to recover in 9/11's aftermath and how this was understood and enacted at the personal and civic levels. It thus offers a nuanced and unique account of the physical, psychological, and civic challenge New Yorkers faced as they sought to rebuild their own lives as well as the World Trade Center site (dubbed "Ground Zero") and lower Manhattan.<sup>22</sup>

Replicating the collaborative and interactive process used in our initial coding of all the articles, we identified eight subcategories for World Trade Center rebirth:

1. Professional/architectural planning ( $n = 176$ ): Articles dealing with professionals (other than politicians) directly involved with rebuilding the World Trade Center, including the buildings, landscape, and urban design surrounding this project.
2. Political issues ( $n = 131$ ): Articles describing the political climate that emerged in the rebuilding process. These focused on specific political figures (e.g., mayors, governors, senators, etc.) and political struggles at city, state, and federal levels that arose over various projects.
3. Business/economy ( $n = 94$ ): Articles focusing on the rebuilding of New York City's economic infrastructure, the reopening of

- restaurants and retail stores, the revival of tourism, and financial aid from the state and government to businesses and industries.
4. Return to normality ( $n = 83$ ): Articles focusing on New Yorkers attempt to recover from 9/11 while also recognizing that their lives had irrevocably changed.
  5. Citizen participation in planning ( $n = 65$ ): Articles focused on public participation in the rebuilding process.
  6. Sadness/melancholy ( $n = 33$ ): Articles focusing on New Yorkers' emotional trauma, sadness, and sense of paralysis, as well as articles recounting how individuals, communities, and organizations had difficulty functioning optimally or moving forward after 9/11.
  7. Cleanup ( $n = 19$ ): Articles focusing on the removal of bodies from the World Trade Center site, the discovery of bone fragments and personal items in the debris, and health hazards resulting from the World Trade Center's collapse.
  8. Progress and deadlines ( $n = 16$ ): Articles focusing on the disparities between project completion dates and progress on the ground.

We then charted the frequencies of these eight categories using 30 percent as a viable cutoff point to designate dominant categories for each year (see Appendix A). The most dominant categories that emerged were: return to normality (33 percent, 2001), business/economy (31 percent, 2001), professional/architectural planning (31 percent, 43 percent, and 40 percent, 2002–2004 respectively), and politics (44 percent and 42 percent, 2005–2006 respectively). Interestingly, we also found that the dominant categories shifted over these five years. The next section describes these findings year by year.

## **Year by Year: World Trade Center Rebirth**

### *2001: Return to Normality and Business-Economic Recovery*

In the fifteen weeks after September 11, we found that return to normality and business/economy were the dominant categories in newspaper articles focused on the rebirth of the World Trade Center. Indeed, almost two-thirds of the articles during this time centered on these two categories. Initially, the desire to return to normality was the most prevalent category. This category rapidly declined, however, with most such articles occurring in the first few weeks (Week 1 = 11; Week 2 = 13; Week 3 = 12; Week 4 = 5; subsequent weeks = 1). Thus, this was a topic of intense but

ultimately fleeting concern, a change we analyze in greater depth in the following subsection.

The other major category to emerge after 9/11 focused on business and the economy. In the fifteen weeks following 9/11, one to two articles per week were published on this topic. These articles largely featured themes of resilience, as businesses attempted to bounce back and move forward despite damages, challenges, and the social and economic upheaval caused by 9/11. Indeed, each move forward was often portrayed as a victory or a symbol of New Yorkers' defiance against their attackers. As we describe in the next section, many business-focused articles in 2001 specifically related to entertainment as an indicator of New York City's recovery, resilience, resourcefulness, and vitality.

#### *2002–2004: Professionals/Architectural Planning*

Professional/architectural planning was the dominant category for the rebuilding process for three years, from 2002 to 2004. In 2002, these articles centered on competing visions for constructing the Ground Zero site; downtown's redevelopment and restoration; and the selection of consultants and design teams for the project as a whole and for specific elements of the redevelopment process. In 2003, conflict first began to emerge over how to reshape downtown and who should do it. Many articles here discussed professionals and architectural planning for rebuilding the Ground Zero site and appraisals of the proposed designs. In particular, the articles featured architects David Childs and Daniel Libeskind and their competing visions of redevelopment of the World Trade Center site. In 2004, conflicts among architects, politicians, and the leaseholder, Larry Silverstein, were especially prominent in the news.

#### *2005–2006: Political Issues*

For the fourth and fifth years after the 9/11 attacks, political issues came to the fore. These articles included: politicians vying to lead the rebuilding effort; the complex approval process for the Trade Center rail hub; controversies concerning the Freedom Museum; Mayor Michael Bloomberg's vision for rebuilding; the reconsidering of prior building plans; the collision between design and expense; the unclear role of oversight agencies; and the selection of a joint venture in order to build the PATH rail station.

In 2006, news articles on the rebirth of the World Trade Center focused on the allocation of post-9/11 funds; the clash over redevelopment

of the Ground Zero site between US Senator Charles Schumer and Mayor Bloomberg; New York Governor George Pataki's attempts to revive talks on construction and his dealings with World Trade Center Leaseholder Larry Silverstein; summits convened to discuss Ground Zero plans; the resignation of the memorial chief at Ground Zero; disputes over World Trade Center tenant deals; and plans by the United States and New York State governmental agencies to occupy Freedom Tower.

### **Analysis: Shifting Concerns, Conflicts, and Challenges, 2001–2006**

The preceding discussion identified the shifting terrain and a variety of challenges and conflicts in the five years following 9/11. A deeper analysis also found that five key themes emerged over this time in (loosely) sequential order, which we explore in this section. The shifting dominance of these challenges and concerns reveals complex tensions set in motion after the World Trade Center's destruction.

#### *Theme One: Normality and Change*

As described in the previous section, in 9/11's immediate aftermath, the news first concerned peoples' desire for things to get back to normal. The shock of 9/11 prompted existential and practical questions: What does it mean for things to be normal? Will normality return by resuming one's routine daily activities and social relations? Or is something else necessary, such as rebuilding what has been lost? And does returning to normality ultimately disrespect those who were killed?

In the weeks after 9/11, news articles traced different ways of resuming normality from small everyday activities like sketching or eating salad in the park<sup>23</sup> to taking part in larger social events such as movies and football games.<sup>24</sup> In these articles, people prized what had been familiar and taken for granted, and they found a sense of mastery, even triumph, in doing what previously had been routine.

Too much normality, however, was also seen as problematic.<sup>25</sup> For example, New Yorkers questioned such basic things as whether it was okay to laugh, or whether this was inappropriate given recent events. Individuals consequently wondered what matters were frivolous and thereby possibly a misguided preoccupation, or whether embracing some frivolity was helpful to dispel a sense of despair, fear, or helplessness.<sup>26</sup> These articles reported that New Yorkers were continually plagued by such questions but very few of the articles (or personal narratives) provided any answers.

*Theme Two: Entertainment and Solidarity*

A second theme that emerged in the *New York Times* articles in 2002 was the connection between solidarity and popular entertainment. Immediately after the attack, the city lacked reliable communication and transportation networks, increasing individuals' sense of isolation and anxiety. As theaters, sports events, nightclubs, and museums reopened one by one, the news cheered the return of the liveliness they contributed to a beleaguered city.

Although these destinations offered distraction, perhaps more important, they allowed people to be closer to one another. Indeed, these communal events engendered a sense of camaraderie even when those gathered had little in common besides having lived through the experience of 9/11.<sup>27</sup> Initially, media executives assumed that the collective psyche would be easily offended, frightened, or traumatized by violent entertainment.<sup>28</sup> But regardless of such content, cultural events seemed to distract, soothe, and alleviate persons' boredom, dread, and repetitive thoughts.<sup>29</sup>

Initially, news articles principally focused on the public's return to such venues. Over time, however, the articles began focusing on cultural practitioners themselves. Various jazz musicians, for example, were featured as describing their reluctance to leave their family or even play music.<sup>30</sup> Other entertainers expressed caution about evoking audience sensitivities, memories, and fears connected with September 11.<sup>31</sup> Performers also attempted to "carry on in ways large and small," organizing blood drives or volunteering to take part in ongoing rescue operations at Ground Zero.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, as detailed in the previous section, this emphasis on entertainment faded from the news early in 2002, only a few months after 9/11. At this point, news articles concerned the architecture and design competitions surrounding Ground Zero,<sup>33</sup> and by 2003, these competitions became a public spectacle in themselves, pitting particular designers and their advocates, often prominent politicians, against one another.<sup>34</sup>

*Theme Three: Socioemotional Versus Economic Concerns*

A third sequential theme was the struggle between socioemotional and economic values, which became evident as people looked ahead to the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site in 2002. Social psychologist Morton Deutsch has observed that socioemotional and economic values inevitably conflict. The former focuses on the "solidarity relations among group members," and the latter on "external tasks" and "problem solving."<sup>35</sup> In other words, as journalist Alan Murray has suggested, commemorating

loss and accruing capital may constitute discrete and potentially opposed societal priorities.<sup>36</sup>

This tension between these value systems emerged in 2002 in lower Manhattan when designs for the new World Trade Center site raised fears that a purely commercial building would disrespect those who had died.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the six earliest designs of the new World Trade Center embodied this fear: These designs were vehemently opposed by the public not for aesthetic or functional reasons, but due to the large proportion of space allocated for offices.<sup>38</sup> As a victim's relative remarked, "we got what was there before,"<sup>39</sup> apparently disappointed by the replication of the original World Trade Center's commercial purpose along with its utilitarianism and (assumed) lack of heart.

Perhaps remarkably, these criticisms resulted in a quick shift by city and state officials. The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, for example, which had endorsed the original six designs, agreed to reduce and revise these proposals.<sup>40</sup> The six designs in the initial competition were then scrapped in favor of a new public competition and revisions to the process that would make it less opaque.<sup>41</sup> The next set of designs garnered more public approval, but the public's response to them was mixed. Nikki Stern, whose husband had been killed on 9/11, lamented that this round of designs "involved a lot more design and creativity," but did not yet reconcile how to balance commemorating the lives of those who died with the goal of commercial development.<sup>42</sup>

We thus see the emergence of two issues here. First is the supposed heartlessness and depersonalization of economic decision making, which is driven by the bottom line rather than a concern for suffering and loss. The interests of developers and businessmen were in stark contrast with what the families of those killed on 9/11 and what the larger public saw as an appropriate memorial.<sup>43</sup> The second issue is an ironic refutation of what the original World Trade Center actually stood for: to foster trade on a global scale and incorporate a significant amount of office space in order to do so. In other words, the World Trade Center epitomized "hard economics."<sup>44</sup> In contrast, the same site post-9/11 was being held to a higher standard. Unlike the original World Trade Center, the new site was expected to transcend business interests and the cold agglomeration of capital to attend instead to social relations and the commemoration of loss.

#### *Theme Four: The Fading Public Voice*

A fourth theme that emerged in the World Trade Center's rebirth was the role of the public voice and its eventual disappearance. The salience of the

public voice can be traced throughout all five years after 9/11. Nevertheless, as explained in the previous section, public influence reached its apex in 2002 and 2003—in the early part of the design process—before being displaced in the news by attention to various political leaders.

Immediately after 9/11, the *New York Times* featured a multiplicity of different voices, from affected downtown street vendors to victims' spouses.<sup>45</sup> At first, no voice was treated by the *New York Times* as paramount, and thus no person or group was seen as speaking for the public as a whole. Rather, the public was viewed as united in its shock, grief, and desire to resume normality.

As decisions about the rebuilding process gained ascendancy, however, this sense of solidarity and egalitarianism faded and victims' families held the greatest sway. Wives of those who perished on 9/11 were most prominently featured in the news, with their grief seen as providing a moral clarity that transcended petty politics or individual self-interest.<sup>46</sup> But, by the middle of 2003 even the voices of victims' families were effectively sidelined. Certain persons from the public (e.g., survivors or victim's family members) were selected for some planning committees or commissions and their voices were occasionally mentioned in the news.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the *New York Times* principally focused on prominent individuals tasked with the site's rebuilding, whether Governor George Pataki or architects Daniel Libeskind and David Childs.<sup>48</sup> As the process became enmeshed in negotiations and political maneuvering and the focus moved to questions of logistics and technical expertise, the public voice became less and less prominent.

#### *Theme Five: Priorities and Power*

The final major theme we found to emerge in the 9/11 rebuilding process was, unsurprisingly, power. The city remained relatively peaceful following 9/11, with little looting or violence. At first, shocked political leaders appeared to offer the public little more than avuncular advice such as to "go to the theater."<sup>49</sup>

As we described above, however, in 2003 and beyond political dynamics took center stage in Lower Manhattan. Conflicts erupted over dueling design conceptions for the new World Trade Center site, as politicians aligned themselves with particular architects and became champions of specific visions for Ground Zero.<sup>50</sup> This was further complicated by the interests of the World Trade Center's leaseholder, Larry Silverstein; the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the site's owner; the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, which had administrative control

over the World Trade Center site; New York State Governor George Pataki; and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg.<sup>51</sup>

Eventually, the initial hopes for a simple consensus gave way to more coercive methods to resolve intransigent conflicts, such as when Governor Pataki declared a midnight deadline for the disputing parties to reach agreement.<sup>52</sup> Such tactics effectively eliminated public input and attempted to force more powerful individuals to compromise on their preferred rebuilding goals. Although eliminating transparency and public engagement may have expedited the rebuilding process, it also may have prevented other issues from being raised by a broader set of stakeholders with a range of interests in the World Trade Center site.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Park51 Controversy**

Although the preceding five themes emerged in the half-decade following 9/11, it was unclear, without further inquiry, whether they remained germane as the post-disaster period later unfolded. To determine whether such issues persisted beyond 2006, we therefore focused on another event directly linked with 9/11 that generated a significant amount of news coverage: a highly-publicized controversy in 2010 surrounding the development of Park51 in Lower Manhattan, the so-called Ground Zero Mosque. In the following section we describe this controversy, discuss the five themes analyzed in the previous section and their relevance to this event, and, to further broaden our understanding of post-9/11 conflict and change, compare how these themes manifested themselves in the first five years after 9/11 versus in the debate over Park51.

#### *A Brief History of Park51*

Although the Park51 Islamic Community Center was known to many as the “Ground Zero Mosque,” it is neither at Ground Zero nor is it technically a mosque. Consequently, we use its official name, Park51. The site consists of two adjacent buildings located at 45–47 Park Place and 49–51 Park Place between Church Street and West Broadway in Lower Manhattan, two blocks (600 feet or 180 meters) north of the World Trade Center site.<sup>54</sup>

Modeled on the 92nd Street Y, a nonprofit cultural and community center in Manhattan, Park51 was originally named “Cordoba House” and planned as an interfaith community center open to all New Yorkers, regardless of religion. Park51’s planners wanted its thirteen stories to “rise two blocks from the pit of dust and cranes where the twin towers once

stood, a symbol of the resilience of the American melting pot.<sup>55</sup> They initially envisioned a building with two floors for Muslim prayer space. Other floors would house a five-hundred-seat auditorium, a theater, a performing arts center, a fitness center, a swimming pool, a basketball court, a childcare center, an art gallery, a bookstore, a culinary school, and a restaurant.<sup>56</sup>

The center's construction was first reported as controversial in the *New York Times* in May 2010, when a normally uneventful community board meeting turned into a raucous hearing debating whether a supposed mosque should be built at Ground Zero.<sup>57</sup> This conflict over the two buildings' proposed usage soon erupted into a media firestorm driven by anti-Muslim groups and politicians who seized on this controversy. Although many New Yorkers were appalled by what they saw as the Islamophobic views concerning Park51, some also expressed reservations about building an Islamic cultural center so close to Ground Zero.<sup>58</sup>

After media attention to the controversy diminished and the development plans cleared the normal regulatory hurdles, construction on Park51 began. Nevertheless, new obstacles to the project soon emerged. In 2011, a rift developed between Park51's developer, Sharif El-Gamal, and the imam associated with the project, Feisal Abdul Rauf. El-Gamal and Rauf clashed over the future of the project, leading Rauf to eventually step down, only to have his replacement resign three weeks later for making homophobic remarks.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, on September 21, 2011, a surprisingly quiet and controversy-free photo exhibit marked the official launch of Park51 in a makeshift gallery space on the ground floor of 45–47 Park Place.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, Park51's troubles persisted. Later that year, the landlord of one of the buildings, Consolidated Edison, demanded \$1.7 million in back rent from the developer, initiating a dispute that further endangered the proposed plans.<sup>61</sup> After the rent dispute was resolved, ongoing fundraising shortfalls plagued the project.<sup>62</sup> As this is being written (January 2018), plans for the site now consist of luxury apartments ranging in price from approximately \$2 to 41 million.<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, this forty-three-story apartment complex is expected to open in 2019 alongside a much scaled-down three-story Islamic museum and public plaza.<sup>64</sup>

### *Thematic Analysis of the Park51 Controversy*

#### NORMALITY AND CHANGE

As described in the prior section, in the first five years after 9/11, the theme of normality and change was reflected in the tension between

persons' desires to return to normal while appropriately honoring the memory of those lost. By 2009, New Yorkers had eight years to resume their lives. Perhaps for this reason, the early plans to develop Park51 were not controversial. Indeed, they drew "encouragement from city officials and the surrounding neighborhood," with a spokesman for the mayor quoted as saying "If it's legal, the building owners have a right to do what they want."<sup>65</sup>

This sense of civic calm was not to last, however. Five months later, stoked by Internet commentators and right-wing websites, Lower Manhattan's Community Board No. 1 was inundated with calls and emails concerning the proposal, the majority of these from outside New York City.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, the community board hearing that followed erupted into a four-hour heated debate over the appropriateness of the plans, between those who claimed the community center would represent a beacon of tolerance and those who claimed that it would offend the memories of the persons killed on 9/11.<sup>67</sup>

As local questions of neighborhood planning were transformed into national and international debates on the nature of Islam and the legacy of 9/11, New Yorkers were therefore thrust back into the meaning of the attacks and away from ordinary questions of city administration and bureaucracy. Although certain New Yorkers believed the "Ground Zero Mosque" was an affront to those killed by Islamic terrorists, other New Yorkers were nonplussed by the plans and saw the opposition as amounting to "hysteria."<sup>68</sup> They emphasized that the neighborhood had long included a storefront mosque and also had such disreputable institutions as "a strip joint, a porno store and a government-run bookie operation."<sup>69</sup> Because of the Park51 controversy, New Yorkers once again scrutinized normal patterns of urban life and varied kinds of social activities for their ethical significance. Thus, people were forced to grapple with what was right to do in the "sacred ground" surrounding Ground Zero, and what routines of life would permanently alter as a result of 9/11.

#### ENTERTAINMENT AND SOLIDARITY

During the first five years, the theme of solidarity and entertainment was illustrated by articles discussing the public's return to cultural and social events before shifting to a focus on the public spectacle of design competitions themselves. The controversy over Park51 provided a similar spectacle. What could have been a local decision regarding the approval and development of a cultural institution by a community board was transformed into an uproar and media sensation virtually overnight. As

opponents of Park51's supporters became louder, various right-wing politicians and anti-Muslim groups increasingly made media headlines, from Pamela Geller, the founder of an Islamophobic website and the Stop Islamization of America/the American Freedom Defense Initiative,<sup>70</sup> to the pastor of a small Florida church who threatened to burn copies of the Koran.<sup>71</sup> For many people living in New York City, the controversy was galling. An analysis of the news articles on Park51 in that period found that many New Yorkers, particularly those who lived close to the site, were not likely to oppose its construction and viewed the opposition as antithetical to the inclusionary ethos embedded in what they viewed as New York values and American ideals.<sup>72</sup>

Interestingly, each side relied on a sense of collective solidarity to legitimate its cause. Many of those who supported Park51, like Mayor Bloomberg, appealed to an abstract notion of "American values," arguing that moving the site would insult American Muslims and damage the nation's standing.<sup>73</sup> Those opposed appealed to a vision of America under siege. Pamela Geller positioned Park51 as a sign of Islamic ideological encroachment on American soil,<sup>74</sup> illustrated in advertisements she submitted to the New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority for display on city buses that linked Park51 to the 9/11 attacks by calling it the "WTC Mega Mosque."<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, politicians like Ilario Pantano, a Republican candidate for the US House of Representatives in North Carolina, campaigned on the Park51 conflict, claiming that it "stirred voters in his rural district hundreds of miles away from Ground Zero."<sup>76</sup> Although both sides appealed to America's collective identity, they therefore did so by advocating for entirely different outcomes and articulating differing conceptions of American priorities, ideals, and identity.

#### SOCIOEMOTIONAL VS. ECONOMIC CONCERNS

In the first five years, the theme of socioemotional versus economic concerns reflected the tension and conflict that emerged between an emphasis on the economic bottom line versus memorialization of 9/11. This theme was also manifest in the Park51 controversy with the eventual eclipse of economic concerns as advocates and critics of Park51 appealed to socioemotional concerns. Opponents argued that the center should not be built because the World Trade Center included not only the "the immediate buildings, but large swaths around them that . . . aren't measured in meters or yards, but in emotional sparks."<sup>77</sup> Proponents, like Mayor Michael Bloomberg's "voice began to crack" as he spoke for the importance of religious freedom as a core American value.<sup>78</sup>

Besides the public controversy, the tension between socioemotional and economic concerns also played out in the rift between the project's developer, El-Gamal, and its religious leader, Imam Rauf. The two ultimately disagreed over the project's size, its commercial nature, and whether it should primarily appeal to Muslims or all religious groups.<sup>79</sup> Whereas El-Gamal particularly stressed Park51's economic potential, Rauf principally sought to create a viable community center.<sup>80</sup> Their disagreement eventually led to Rauf's stepping down, and El-Gamal coming to prioritize Park51's real estate potential. In 2017, the revised plans for Park51's cultural and religious spaces shifted from a thirteen-story community center with prayer space and public event spaces to a forty-three-story apartment tower with multimillion-dollar luxury apartments and a scaled-down three-story Islamic museum and public plaza next door.<sup>81</sup>

#### THE FADING PUBLIC VOICE

The Park51 controversy, from its inception, involved a mixture of positions and voices. The *New York Times* commissioned a poll of New Yorkers' views on the subject and found that two-thirds of participants wanted the site relocated to a less "controversial" area.<sup>82</sup> Family members of those lost on 9/11 were also portrayed as "weigh[ing] in" against the project.<sup>83</sup> Park51 was described, for example, by Sally Regenhard, the mother of a firefighter who died on 9/11, as "sacrilege on sacred ground."<sup>84</sup> At one point, an ex-firefighter gained prominence after (unsuccessfully) suing to give landmark protection to the site in order to prevent Park51 from being built there.<sup>85</sup>

Ultimately, however, politicians and other prominent public figures from both sides of the issue dominated the conversation over Park51, like that over the rebirth of the World Trade Center. These included Mayor Bloomberg (for), New York State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (against), New York State gubernatorial candidates Rick Lazio and Carl Paladino (both against), US President Barack Obama (for), former US Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (against), US vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin (against), the Koran-burning pastor Terry Jones (against), the Dutch politician Geert Wilders (against), and the aforementioned congressional candidate Ilario Pantano and prominent anti-Muslim blogger Pamela Geller (both against).<sup>86</sup> As these prominent voices came to dominate the news coverage, they acted as stand-ins for the public at large. Thus, whereas Gingrich would claim that "the average American just thinks this is a political statement" and "an aggressive act that is offensive,"<sup>87</sup> Bloomberg remarked that "we would be untrue to the best part of

ourselves—and who we are as New Yorkers and Americans—if we said no to a mosque in Lower Manhattan.”<sup>88</sup>

#### PRIORITIES AND POWER

Inevitably, as it did for the World Trade Center site, matters of power surrounded the controversy over 9/11. Ironically, however, none of the three most prominent voices surrounding the project—despite all their maneuverings—achieved their purported goals. The Islamic Community Center’s Imam, Feisal Abdul Rauf, left the project after disputes with El-Gamal, the project’s developer, and thereafter had to maintain his support for the project from the sidelines. Pamela Geller, perhaps the most vocal opponent of the “Ground Zero Mosque,” succeeded in preventing a community center from being built, but now decries the fact that the site will contain an Islamic museum.<sup>89</sup> Finally, El-Gamal, the project’s developer, eventually settled for building a vast apartment complex and a much scaled-down Islamic museum, recognizing that he will need to create his initial vision in a different location.<sup>90</sup> This all stands in contrast to the World Trade Center site, where, while ideas for what should be constructed differed dramatically, everyone agreed that *something* should be built. Park51 lacked any such fundamental consensus. Furthermore, the conflict surrounding Park51 illuminated one legacy of 9/11 with the growth of anti-Muslim ideologues seizing upon a local zoning question to kindle controversy far beyond the boundaries of Lower Manhattan.<sup>91</sup>

### Comparing the First Five Years after 9/11 and Park51

In the first year following 9/11, the *New York Times* focused on everyday New Yorkers’ desire for things to return to normal. In particular, New Yorkers initially questioned whether their desire to move on and reconstruct their lives disrespected those who had died. During this period, entertainment venues, including movies, theaters, or sports arenas, were especially popular ways for New Yorkers to connect with one another. Over time, however, the abstract idea of returning to normal was eclipsed by more pragmatic concerns, such as the mechanics of actually rebuilding the World Trade Center site. At first, some victims’ relatives were portrayed in the *New York Times* as public representatives and tangibly affected the rebuilding process, leading to a proliferation of new designs and pledges to honor the fallen. Nevertheless, our analysis of articles published in the *New York Times* suggested that attention to the public voice significantly waned over time. In the fourth and fifth years following 9/11, prominent designers and

elected officials engaged in conflict over the fate of World Trade Center site, and such persons thus came to determine the future of Ground Zero.

The controversy over Park51 echoed these themes, as proponents and opponents of the Islamic community center fought over whether allowing this site to be built in Lower Manhattan somehow dishonored the dead, with the “Ground Zero Mosque” used as a spectacle for election-eering politicians and Islamophobic agitators to foment vitriolic opposition and insert themselves into national news coverage. The question of public voice also arose here, with community members and victims’ relatives initially given space to express their approval or disapproval towards plans for the site. As in the first five years after 9/11, however, politicians, pundits, and inflammatory ideologues who appealed to the public interest but acted semiautonomously eventually eclipsed these voices. Nonetheless, as opposed to the World Trade Center site, where prominent voices at least agreed that something should be constructed, Park51 eventually fell victim to the incompatible interests surrounding it.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, we believe that this study provides (at least) three lessons for those interested in the nature and ramifications of large-scale disasters on those people and places most affected. First, and perhaps most important for future scholarship, is the recognition that the longer aftermath of a disaster is a multifaceted event and cannot simply be understood by viewing a single affected community, as many 9/11 studies have done; through short-term dynamics at a broad level; or through gathering the many individual traumas. Rather, as we have sought to do here, one must also understand the common priorities that emerge in a disaster’s aftermath, and how these priorities are debated, contested, and shape everyday experiences and lived interactions. In other words, studies of disaster must focus on people at individual, group, and collective levels.

Second, we hope to have shown that newspaper articles, despite their limitations, offer a rich and unparalleled resource for those studying such everyday experiences and lived interactions. As the first draft of history, newspapers describe particulars of events and lives, offering detailed accounts of individual and civic challenges and responses that can be analyzed over time. Thus, the *New York Times* coverage of the five years after 9/11 and for the Park51 controversy allowed us to trace the post-9/11 trajectory as key issues emerged and underwent change, offering insight into how disasters can play out temporally.

At the same time, this methodological approach, guided by thematic coding that identified prominent topics in the news, may have missed topics that were also important and of concern to groups that are typically underrepresented in media discourse. For example, here we did not discuss the striking disparities in death compensation that disproportionately benefitted families with high rather than low-wage earners<sup>92</sup> and disbursements to some kinds of businesses over others,<sup>93</sup> issues that would have been situated in our “compensation” category. Our study’s categorization therefore streamlined but also narrowed our focus, which we ultimately see as a both limitation and a contribution of our work: Rather than start with a priori categories that would have limited our exploration of the news, we used the news articles themselves to develop these categories.<sup>94</sup> Guided by frequency statistics, these categories then permitted us to trace the larger post-9/11 trajectory, and reveal details about how people, as individuals and groups, experienced New York City after this cataclysmic event.

Finally, this chapter both confirms and complicates Stanley Cohen’s thesis that following a disaster, a community either “recovers its former equilibrium or achieves a stable adaptation to the changes which the disaster may have brought about.”<sup>95</sup> As we have shown, immediately following 9/11, New Yorkers desperately sought to resume normality and regain a former equilibrium. At the same time, they feared doing so would disrespect the memory of those lost on 9/11. This tension emerged in the disparity between socioemotional and economic values as rebuilding the World Trade Center commenced, and reemerged once more in the Park51 controversy between those who felt that building an Islamic Community Center was disrespectful to the memory of the tragedy and those that felt such a project was an affirmation of core American values. Ironically, this resulted in the return of a sort of normality as somewhat familiar economic and political conflicts returned to dominate the public discourse.

As this study and the rest of the chapters in this book show, however, this new equilibrium provided a host of novel complications and uncertainties all of its own, concerning debates over American ideals and identity, the meaning of Islam,<sup>96</sup> and how to properly commemorate and respect a site of great horror. For example, Park51, as a “planned sign of tolerance,”<sup>97</sup> will not be constructed as a monument to New York City’s cosmopolitanism and inclusionary ethos. As this vividly illustrates, although various factions attempted to influence the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan, at the forefront of this process was a combination of vested economic interests and debates over the role of those striving communities and individual stories that make up the tapestry of this vibrant city of immigrants.

## Appendix A

### *Breakdown of Subcategories by Year*

#### *New York Times* Articles: "World Trade Center Rebirth"

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Totals
1	20	50	54	30	12	10	176
Professional/ architectural planning	R=11.36% C=15.27%	R=28.41% C=31.06%	R=30.68% C=42.86%	R=17.04% C=40.00%	R=6.81% C=20.00%	R=5.68% C=15.87%	R=99.98% C=28.57%
2	13	35	19	11	26	27	131
Political issues	R=9.92% C=9.92%	R=26.72% C=21.74%	R=14.5% C=15.08%	R=8.40% C=14.67%	R=19.85% C=43.33%	R=20.61 C=42.86%	R=100% C=21.27%
3	40	18	8	9	6	13	94
Business/ economic	R=42.55% C=30.53%	R=19.15% C=11.18%	R=8.51% C=6.35%	R=9.57% C=12.00%	R=6.38% C=10.00%	R=13.83% C=20.63%	R=99.99% C=15.26%
4	43	18	11	6	2	2	82
Return to normal	R=52.44% C=32.82%	R=21.95% C=11.18%	R=13.41% C=8.73%	R=7.32% C=8.00%	R=2.44% C=3.33%	R=2.44% C=3.17%	R=100% C=13.31%
5	2	22	24	7	6	4	65
Citizens' participation in planning	R=3.08% C=1.53%	R=33.85 C=13.66%	R=36.92 C=19.95%	R=10.77 C=9.33%	R=9.23% C=10.00%	R=6.15% C=6.35%	R=100% C=10.55%

6	Sadness/ melancholy	5	7	5	8	4	4	33
7	Cleanup	R=15.15% C=3.82%	R=21.21% C=4.35%	R=15.15% C=3.97%	R=24.24% C=10.67%	R=12.12% C=6.67%	R=12.12% C=6.35%	R=99.99% C=5.36%
8	Progress and deadlines	R=31.58% C=4.58%	R=36.84% C=4.35%	R=5.26% C=0.79%	R=10.53% C=2.67%	R=10.53% C=3.33%	R=5.26% C=1.59%	R=100% C=3.08%
Totals		6	7	1	2	2	1	19
		R=12.5% C=1.57%	R=25% C=2.48%	R=25% C=3.17%	R=12.5% C=2.67%	R=12.5% C=3.33%	R=12.5% C=3.17%	R=100% C=2.60%
		131	161	126	75	60	63	616
		R=21.27% C=100.04%	R=26.14% C=100%	R=20.45% C=100.09%	R=12.18% C=100.01%	R=9.74% C=99.99%	R=10.23% C=99.99%	

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## Notes

1. This chapter is not meant to provide any sort of exhaustive literature on the topic of “disaster.” Rather, its purpose is to provide some background context for the sections that follow. For more extensive information on the topic of “disaster,” see, e.g., Fischer, 1994; Gist, Lubin, and Redburn, 1999; Prince, 1920; Reyes, 2006; Stehr, 2006.

2. Thornburg, Knottnerus, and Webb, 2007.

3. Ibid.

4. Drabek and McEntire, 2003.

5. Dynes, DeMarchi, and Pelanda, 1987.

6. Fritz, 1961, 655.

7. Dynes, 1970.

8. Cohen, 1972.

9. Ibid., 23.

10. Erickson, 1994.

11. Ibid., 229; italics in the original.

12. Stelman et al., 2008.

13. 9/11 Commission, 2011.

14. See, for example, DiMarco, 2007; Foner, 2005; Greenberg, 2003; Linenthal, 2005.

15. See, for example, Boss, 2004; Carll, 2007; Coates, Rosenthal, and Schechter, 2003; Danieli, Dingman, and Zellner, 2005.

16. Amer and Bagasra, 2013; see also “Living in Houses without Walls: Muslim Youth in New York City in the Aftermath of 9/11” in this book.

17. See, for example, Northouse, NetLibrary Inc., and Computer Ethics Institute, 2006; Prose, 2008.

18. Ortiz, Myers, Walls, and Diaz, 2005; see also Downs, 1972.

19. McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith, 1996.

20. Earl, Martin, McCarthy, and Soule, 2004; Martin and Hansen, 1998; Salles, 2010.

21. With appreciation for the work of Jerry Fletcher, Sarah Gyrog, Vicki Myers, Lorraine Phillips, and Sarah Woodside.

22. See “Mirrored Reflections: (Re)Constructing Memory and Identity in Hiroshima and New York City” in this book; see also Low, Taplin, and Lamb, 2005; Low, 2004.

23. Kirk Johnson, “For a City Still in Shock, Picking up Life’s Routine,” *New York Times*, September 20, 2001.

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32. Ibid.
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34. David W. Dunlap, "Architects' Clashing Visions Threaten to Delay World Trade Center Tower," *New York Times*, October 23, 2003; David W. Dunlap, "After Year of Push and Pull, 2 Visions Meet at 1,776 Feet," *New York Times*, December 26, 2003.
35. Deutsch, 1982.
36. Ibid.
37. Edward Wyatt, "Six Plans for Ground Zero, All Seen as a Starting Point," *New York Times*, July 17, 2002.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Charles V. Bagli, "Trade Center Leaseholder Braces for Battle; Proposed Land Swap and Changed Developmental Plan Imperil Silverstein," *New York Times*, August 17, 2002.
41. Edward Wyatt, "7 Design Teams Offer New Ideas for Attack Site," *New York Times*, December 19, 2002.
42. Edward Wyatt, "Fewer Offices, More Options in Planning for Ground Zero," *New York Times*, October 10, 2002.
43. Ibid.
44. Wyatt, "Six Plans," 2002.
45. Johnson, "For a City," 2001.
46. Cf. Patrick D. Healy, "Leading Donors to Pataki PAC in 2004 Included Developers of Ground Zero," *New York Times*, January 22, 2005.
47. Patricia Cohen, "Laying Unidentified Remains to Rest," *New York Times*, June 4, 2012.
48. See, for example, Patrick D. Healy and Charles V. Bagli, "Pataki and Bloomberg Endorse Changes in Ground Zero Tower," *New York Times*, May 5, 2005.
49. Pogrebin, "At 'Phantom,' Empty Seats," 2001.
50. Healy and Bagli, "Pataki and Bloomberg Endorse," 2005.
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52. Ibid.
53. For a more detailed analysis of the political struggles in the rebuilding of One World Trade Center, see Mollenkopf, 2005; Sagalyn, 2016.
54. Javier C. Hernandez, "Vote Endorses Muslim Center Near Ground Zero," *New York Times*, May 26, 2010.

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58. Sweeney and Opotow, 2013.
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60. "Photo Exhibit at Park51," *New York Times*, August 8, 2011.
61. Matt Flegenheimer, "Islamic Center and Mosque Near Ground Zero Imperiled by Rent Dispute," *New York Times*, October 16, 2011.
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64. Ibid.
65. Ralph Blumenthal and Sharaf Mowjood, "Muslim Prayers Fuel Spiritual Rebuilding Project by Ground Zero," *New York Times*, December 8, 2009.
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81. Kaysen, "Condo Tower to Rise."
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83. Michael Barbaro, "Debate Heats up about Mosque near Ground Zero," *New York Times*, July 30, 2010.

84. Hernández, “Planned Sign of Tolerance.”
85. Colin Moynihan, “Ex-Firefighter Argues against Proposed Muslim Center,” *New York Times*, March 15, 2011.
86. Sweeney and Opatow, 2013.
87. Barbaro, “Jewish Group Opposes Muslim Center.”
88. Jim Dwyer, “The Impossible Mayor of the Possible,” *New York Times*, August 18, 2013.
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