

The Limits of Branding: The World Trade Center, Fiscal Crisis and the Marketing of Recovery*

MIRIAM GREENBERG

Introduction

In the months following the attacks on the World Trade Center [WTC], New Yorkers' loss has been presented in two quite distinct ways. On the one hand, they've had to grapple with the immensity of what was lost in material and human terms. On the other, they've had to confront the loss of something less tangible but apparently no less profound: that of the Twin Towers as symbol. In the media and in conversation, the buildings are repeatedly described as something akin to 'the soul of New York'. Filmmaker Ric Burns, whose blockbuster documentary *New York* featured the buildings in recurring aerial shots of Manhattan, explained, 'We've lost loved ones and friends, and we've lost the buildings, which stood for so much vitality. That's why we're so obsessed with the trade center and its image' (Marks, 2001: A1). Commentators from Tom Brokaw to Rudolph Giuliani to President Bush have called on all Americans to come to New York and spend money as a way of 'restoring the symbol of the city' that was lost when the towers fell.

The towers' symbolism also seems to have motivated the terrorists' choice of targets. Osama bin Laden, in his internationally broadcast remarks of 7 October, celebrated the attack on the WTC and the Pentagon as simply: 'the destruction of America's greatest buildings' — and by extension the symbols of America's power. Many assumed that this spectacle of destruction was designed explicitly to instill terror in the most universally symbolic terms possible, and to have it recorded by thousands of cameras and broadcast within minutes to screens worldwide.

Whatever the motivation, the symbolic damage worked. In purely economic terms, it is this symbolic loss which reached out beyond the 16-acre site in Lower Manhattan and shook the confidence of investors, tourists and citizens here and around the world. It sent deep and enduring shock waves throughout global stock markets far surpassing the cost of replacing the office space, jobs, or even gold bullion stored within the buildings. And it helped to send the city itself into a dive rivaling its 1975 fiscal crisis, costing some 150,000 jobs and between \$83–\$100 billion in overall projected economic impact in the year following the attacks.¹

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1 A range of reports came out with varying projections of overall economic impact. The New York City Partnership (2001) projected \$83 billion lost. Former Comptroller Alan Hevesi projected \$100 billion by 2002. His report noted: 'The impact on the travel industry, tourism, and entertainment has been

This was due to a combination of factors, but high among them was the damage to the city's long cultivated commercial image — or *brand* — as inviolate global finance center and tourist destination. New York's situation is far from unique, as many other 'tourist cities' saw their economies crash in the months following the attack.² However, while other cities have recently been seeing 'modest recovery', New York's combined infrastructural devastation and dependence on a flagging, image-sensitive sector are still costing jobs and income (Eaton, 2003).³

Thus, the attack revealed the huge amount of financial and political power such branded images now wield over New York, and the immense, unseen work involved in maintaining them. In the weeks following the attacks, thousands of movies, commercials, business logos, postcards and tourist guides that pictured the towers suddenly found their message radically revised — and had to either edit out this now tragic symbol, or leave it in and allow for the new association. Beyond the shocking hole in the skyline, people suddenly became aware of the ubiquity of the towers in the commercial media. While polls revealed that most New Yorkers had never actually visited the WTC, the image of the towers had become interchangeable with the image of their city in marketing and media consumed by people around the world.

How did these two buildings attain such global recognition, as both icon and target? Why *these* two buildings, completed less than 30 years ago, in a city with so many buildings older and more venerable? And why should New York, one of the world's most culturally diverse and proudly working-class cities, be symbolized by these bland monuments to global finance? In this article I seek to address these questions through a combination of historical and textual analysis. Building on my own archival research on New York City branding campaigns going back to the late 1960s,⁴ I trace three increasingly ambitious stages in the branding of the WTC. In the first phase, beginning in the late 1960s, the developers used simple ads featuring the project's sheer monumentality in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to sell the buildings and launch the broader financial redevelopment of Lower Manhattan. Next, in the wake of the fiscal crisis of 1975, the towers were used by New York City and State economic development agencies in larger, more successful campaigns to recast the city's global image, attract tourism, and briefly revive the local economy. In the third stage, following the stock market crash of 1989–92, the public sector pulled back from marketing, while corporations based in New York, or wishing to associate their business or product with the city, began to capitalize on the brand value of the towers in their own marketing. Finally, by way of conclusion, I will address our current moment, when a broad-based effort to 'rebrand' the site of the fallen towers, and the city as a whole, has been undertaken by a coalition of city, state and private-sector marketing groups. Ultimately, I aim to explore the power, and limits, of branding as a mode of urban economic development.

especially severe' (2001: 11). Comptroller Thompson confirmed the loss of 150,000 jobs one year following September 11th (2002).

2 See Walsh (2001). This is particularly true of Sunbelt cities like Las Vegas and Houston that have been the fastest growing regions of the past two decades. Walsh explains: 'The most dramatic effects are already being felt in cities most heavily dependent on air travel and the lodging industry: tourist sites catering to fly-in visitors, major convention centers and cities whose airports serve as hubs for the big airlines. The damage is compounded in cities that also have important financial activity'.

3 According to Gardyn (2002: 36), this recovery has been achieved by smaller cities which have explicitly branded themselves as relatively safe cities in direct comparison to New York.

4 This historical research has been carried out mainly at the New York City Municipal Archives, as well as the New York State Archives and Empire State Development Corporation Archives in Albany.

The symbolic financialization of downtown

Some of the poorest people live in conveniently located slums on the highest-priced land [in Manhattan]. On patrician Fifth Avenue, Tiffany and Woolworth, cheek by jowl, offer jewels and gimcracks from substantially identical sites ... A stone's throw from the Stock Exchange, the air is filled with the aroma of roasting coffee; a few hundred feet from Times Square, with the stench of slaughter houses. In the heart of this 'commercial city' on Manhattan Island south of 59th Street, the inspectors in 1922 found 420,000 workers employed in factories. Such a situation outrages one's sense of order. Everything seems misplaced. One yearns to re-arrange the hodgepodge and put things where they belong. (Regional Plan Association, 1929–31: 33).

From the 1920s through the 1960s, Lower Manhattan was targeted for redevelopment by the Regional Plan Association (RPA), a board made up of the city leaders in finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE), in a number of plans to restructure the greater metropolitan region around a downtown central business district.⁵ The RPA took the role of a 'good government group', and proposed rational planning strategies to modernize the infrastructure of the tri-state region, and thereby facilitate economic development, i.e. building arterial highways and transportation hubs, communication networks, housing etc. As such, Lower Manhattan performed a necessary, centralizing function.⁶

Yet RPA's FIRE-based leadership also aimed, through zoning and urban design, to transform the region's mode of economic development and the image it presented; i.e. to restructure a mixed-use industrial and commercial district into the orderly center of a white-collar, service-based, global metropolis.⁷ The fact that Downtown was already a thriving center of world trade only offended the 'sense of order' envisioned by the RPA. This dynamic waterfront had evolved over three centuries into the center for many of New York's longest-running industries, from tanning to beer brewing, coffee roasting to maritime, and by the middle of the twentieth century, the electronics industries of 'Radio Row'.⁸ All of this had grown up symbiotically with the docks and

5 These elite families included the Rockefellers, Pratts and DeWinters. Much of the research on the role of FIRE elites in reshaping New York's planning priorities in order to build the WTC, and on the (perhaps overly emphasized) pivotal role of the Rockefeller family and Chase Manhattan Bank, was done by Robert Fitch (1993). Other interesting background can be found in Eric Darton (1999).

6 In this sense the RPA was much like other such regional planning advisory groups in US and European cities which formed in the early decades of the twentieth century, concerned with imposing rational order on the chaos that resulted from rapid urbanization and industrialization (see, e.g., Boyer, 1990: Chapter 8).

7 As Peter Hall has pointed out (1988: Chapter 2), unlike its more socialistic British counterparts, US city and regional planning of this period was dominated by the 'City Beautiful' movement – a movement emphasizing aesthetic form over social function. Here symbolic, monumental town centers took priority over, for instance, affordable housing for the working classes, since property owners and businessmen, who influenced such planning, were concerned with protecting property values and maintaining social order. Such planning often resulted in countering the associations' purported populist goals.

8 In 1962, Oscar Nadel, a leader of the Downtown West Businessmen's Association, estimated that 1,400 commercial enterprises doing an annual business volume of \$300 million and employing 30,000 people were located in the 30-block site (Ruchelman, 1977: 25). In addition, the waterfront was home to the city's largest outdoor fish and vegetable market, the Washington Market, which 'overflowed' with international produce: 'caviar from Siberia, Gorgonzola cheese from Italy, hams from Flanders, sardines from Norway, English partridge, native quail, squabs, wild ducks, and pheasant' (Work Progress Administration, 1934, cited in Ross, 2002: 123). Since the nineteenth century it was also known as 'Little Syria', and was the nation's oldest Middle Eastern community – the base from which generations of traveling salesmen set out to the US hinterland to introduce then 'exotic', 'oriental' products like spices, silks and clove cigarettes (Bayoumi, 2002). As Andrew Ross points out (2002: 123): 'It is sobering to recall that all of [Little Syria's] commercial goods and practices virtually continuous with the storied Levantine trade of the Ancient World, predated the Twin Towers' incarnation of a new kind of global trade – largely driven by financialization and the intangibles of stock valuation'.

warehouses of what was, until its destruction in the 1970s, the most important commercial port on the Northeastern seaboard.⁹ The RPA's goal was to completely raze this 'hodgepodge', and re-zone the land to create 'one enormous central business district' radiating out from Wall Street, and ultimately extending over much of Manhattan. This, planners held, would radically transform the city's function and image and 'put things where they belong', thus inspiring investment, drawing finance capital, and stabilizing rents otherwise at the mercy of a chaotic, mixed-use neighborhood.¹⁰ In short, the RPA sought to rationalize both the land-use and the symbolic value of Lower Manhattan along class specific lines.¹¹ It was believed that creating a uniformly affluent image of the city would yield a perception of order that would undergird wider economic growth.

While the original 1929 plan was shelved with the Stock Market crash, it was picked up again on the tide of the post-second world war boom, and came to fruition in the plans of 1968 and 1969, under the sympathetic administrations of Mayor John Lindsay and Governor Nelson Rockefeller. Many of the same families still dominated the board of the RPA, still dreamt of a post-industrial New York anchored by a 'center for world trade' in Lower Manhattan, and still stood to profit enormously from its impact on the value of downtown real estate. Ultimately, the deal would be sealed through the political might of the New York and New Jersey Port Authority (PA), a public corporation established by Robert Moses through which public monies could be marshaled to fund massive projects ostensibly in the 'public interest' but without direct public oversight. When even diehard developer Moses opposed the appropriation of his agency and federal 'slum clearance' grants for the sake of high-end office space, he was overridden by Governor Rockefeller, who finally had him removed from office soon thereafter (see Caro, 1975; Fitch, 1993).¹²

These local development forces represented a broader 'neoliberal' consensus emerging in the late 1960s and early 1970s that argued against state regulation of large-scale production in partnership with organized labor, and for a 'flexible' global economy based in finance, services and the free market.¹³ While responding to market factors such as recession, global competition and technological improvements in communications and transport, such wide-scale deindustrialization could not have

- 9 While containerization was to wipe out many longshoremen jobs in the 1970s, not all US ports chose to completely close in response. Indeed, modern ports have remained economic assets and job producers for those cities in the northeast, southeast and west that chose to maintain them into the era of increased global trade.
- 10 Zoning changes would bring immediate, practical results for the Rockefellers and other landowning board-members, for whom the conversion from industrial and commercial to Grade A office and residential space meant as much as a 1,000-fold increase in land-rents.
- 11 While building on the tradition of the City Beautiful movement, such attention to rational class stratification anticipated Le Corbusier's model of the 'radiant city' (see Hall, 1988: Chapter 2).
- 12 The actual cause of Moses' removal is a subject of some debate. Robert Caro sees Moses becoming controversial when he sought to expose the risk to shareholders and the city posed by Governor Rockefeller borrowing billions in public bonds, underwritten by his brothers' bank, to fund the expansion and future merger of the PA's Triborough Bridge Authority with the MTA. As he points out, this practice of borrowing on margin to fund current operating expenses was indeed to prove fiscally fatal. Robert Fitch, who finds Caro lax on the dealings of the RPA, would like to associate this risky transport plan with the larger lower Manhattan financial district plan, and the latter with Moses' fall from favor.
- 13 For discussion on neoliberalism see, on the right, Milton Friedman (1979), and on the left, David Harvey (1989). For its adherents, this model is referred to simply as 'globalization', and presented as an inevitable, if sometimes painful, form of social progress, and as a natural evolution of market forces over and against the nation state. However, as detractors have demonstrated, the way this neoliberal process has played out over the last 20-30 years has often been as unnatural as one could imagine, and far from withering away, the state has grown *more* implicated in economic affairs as a result. As Harvey points out (2001) this has been the case in global cities, where governments have simply shifted their role from 'managerial' to 'entrepreneurial'.

happened without active state intervention — in a sense a new form of regulation on behalf of finance capital. The plan to build a center for world trade in Lower Manhattan is a spectacular case in point — as it marshaled the power of the state on behalf of private developers to counter market tendencies. This was most evident in two facts. First, as mentioned above, this site was still a thriving center of world trade — albeit one based in the global exchange of commercial goods rather than services. And second, the market for office real estate was then avoiding Downtown, preferring to settle in midtown where it had already established a regional and national center (Marcuse, 2002).¹⁴ To counter these tendencies, the PA followed the RPA plan, proposing the destruction of an estimated 30 blocks and 30,000 blue collar jobs in order to build four ‘superblocks’ for the downtown central business district. Atop these blocks it sought to construct the world’s tallest office towers, with 9 million square feet of office space, thus forcing a shift in the office rental market from Midtown to Downtown, and instantly transforming Downtown’s symbolic presence in the city’s skyline — and in the world’s imagination.

The key symbolic element was to be architectural — following the lead of mid-century modernist skyscrapers which used buildings themselves as corporate advertisements. After initial approval of the plan in 1962, the PA hastily assembled a World Trade Planning and Design Division to choose architects who could realize its ‘two main objectives’: to design a building that would be ‘visible and identifiable throughout the world’, and one encompassing ‘sufficient space to pay for itself’ (Ruchelman, 1977: 46). Ultimately, these two goals were understood to be linked: ‘the quality of tallness was to be valued [because] it gave the structures greater visibility which would make it easier to attract tenants’ (*ibid.*: 48). Thus they chose designers skilled in modern monumentalism: lead architect Minoru Yamasaki, designer of the United States Pavilion at the Seattle World’s Fair, and associate architects Emory Roth and Sons, designers of more than 60 different skyscrapers in Manhattan since the second world war, including the Pan Am Building.

Given the emphasis placed on architectural symbolism, it is perhaps not surprising that a broad-based media campaign was not deemed important to sell the project, except insofar as it directly targeted potential tenants. The following is an excerpt of the opening passage from the PA’s brief promotional booklet, which it circulated in the business press, to trade associations, and to regional news outlets:

The World Trade Center, with its gleaming twin 110-story towers, will add a new symbol of international trade to the world-famous Manhattan skyline ... The great Trade Center ... will be recognized throughout the nation and the world as a focal point for the convenient and efficient administration of all phases of international trade (PA, 1966: 1).

Aside from the full page advertising inserts taken out in the *New York Times* real estate section (e.g. PA, 28 February 1971), this optimistic, bland copy was the main promotion carried out on behalf of the project until its completion. This and the general lack of concern for ‘public relations’ indicates the planners’ confidence that they would meet no significant opposition, and as such also revealed their short-sightedness. For a wide range of critics and activist groups quickly rose up against this massive project — and effectively used the media in their fight, becoming the dominant voice in the debate over the WTC for the local public.

Not surprisingly, some of the plan’s angriest opponents were other private realtors, who saw the towers eating up 30% of office space in Manhattan. In addition to pushing vacancy rates from roughly 0 in 1970 to 14.5% by 1977, Midtown realtors’ powerful Downtown rivals were given tax-breaks and a 5% financing advantage, leading many to organize against what they saw as an ‘anti-competitive agenda’ corrupting the real

14 As Peter Marcuse (2002: 155) has clearly stated, in reference to the historic role of Midtown: ‘the notion that New York City’s office sector is dependent on its location in Lower Manhattan is a myth’.

estate market.¹⁵ This agenda had no fiercer critic than one Theodore Kheel, unofficial spokesman for the Midtown real estate lobby, who went on a decade-long crusade against the PA. Brandishing hyperbolic Cold-War rhetoric, he repeatedly stole the media spotlight to expose the downtown monopoly as ‘creeping socialism at its worst’, ‘the PA’s Berlin Wall’, and ‘the biggest blunder since the construction of the Maginot Line’, and called for the Center to be ‘sold and the proceeds channeled in mass transit’, and then torn down so as to ‘create a park in its place’ (Moritz, 1970: 36; Prial, 1973: A1; *Sunday New York News*, 15 June 1975). Kheel chose particularly symbolic events, like the first opening of the towers (Moritz, 1970) and their dedication by Governor Rockefeller (Prial, 1973), to make his excoriating declarations.

Kheel and the real estate lobby were far from alone. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the plan met massive political opposition from local residents, labor unions and community activists. The neighborhood’s organized workers and residents refused to be bought out and fought displacement through highly publicized class action lawsuits and demonstrations. Urbanists and preservationists Jane Jacobs, Louise Huxtable and Lewis Mumford deplored the loss of the ‘livable city’ to the antisocial tyranny of modernism, and published scathing articles about the plan.¹⁶ This sentiment was echoed on many of the city’s editorial pages, where rather than ‘the pioneer in a great new age of skyscraper construction’ the Center was decried as ‘the Pied Piper in a stampede of white elephants to the boneyard’ (Collins, 1972).¹⁷ State legislators held public hearings criticizing the PA for the ‘impropriety’ of investing public money into ‘wasteful and lavish ... semiprivate restaurant facilities’, and called for legislation requiring the PA to divest itself of the WTC and pay more attention to ‘its basic responsibility — mass transportation’ (*New York Times*, 30 January 1976: 58).¹⁸ City planners, with tragic prescience, put out reports criticizing the design of ‘cities [with] extensive construction of tall buildings’ for potentially worsening congestion, environmental conditions and public safety (Ruchelman, 1977: vii).

Yet, while activists may have won the media battle, they lost the development war. In the end all aesthetic and structural criticism, political resistance and countervailing market inclinations were to no avail. Critics were ignored, and residents, workers and small property owners forced out through the powers of eminent domain, as the city went ahead and bulldozed the neighborhood. The towers were finally completed in 1977 for a price of \$900 million, five years behind schedule and \$500 million over budget, creating a public finance fiasco that dragged New York deeper into debt.¹⁹ Throughout the 1970s the majority of the WTC’s publicly financed units remained unsold, and if not for the PA itself renting 56 floors — 1/4 of the total space — the project would have remained almost entirely empty. As a result, the States of New York and New Jersey, renting space above market rate, and getting nothing back in taxes, sank excessive millions of public

15 The main group representing Midtown realtors was the Committee for a Reasonable World Trade Center, led by Lawrence A. Wien, head of the syndicate that owned the Empire State Building.

16 Jane Jacobs’ critique of this development grew out of her overall critique of modernist ‘giantism’ and its effect of ‘killing the street’ (1961). See also M. Christine Boyer (2002: 117) who cites *New York Times* architecture critic Michael Lewis’ obituary of the buildings: they made of ‘a spectacular site but a lackluster performance, at best a colossal piece of minimalist sculpture, so ran the consensus’.

17 See also: ‘Shall We Tear Down the World Trade Center?’ (*Sunday New York News*, 15 June 1975) and ‘Troubled Towers: New York Port Unity Battles Big Problems at its Trade Center: Complex Still in Red, Irks Employes (sic), Realty Rivals; Will Most Tenants Stay?’ (*Wall Street Journal*, 3 July 1975).

18 Hearings and a suit were brought by State Senator Franz S. Leichter, a Manhattan Democrat, and Assemblyman G. Oliver Koppell, a Bronx Democrat.

19 Reading news accounts of the opening ceremonies, it seems journalists themselves enjoyed pointing out ironic contradictions. At the Governor’s dedication in the ‘purple-carpeted lobby’ of the North Building, Nixon’s Labor Secretary was scheduled to read the president’s statement hailing the Center as a ‘major factor for the expansion of the nation’s international trade’, but refused to cross the picket line of the PA’s own striking PATH workers. Meanwhile, Austin Tobin, 30-year CEO of the PA, whom Rockefeller called ‘at the head of the list at making the \$900 million project possible’, declined to attend the fractious ceremonies, ‘citing the rain’ (Prial, 1973: A1).

money into this 'white elephant'.²⁰ Meanwhile, the huge buildings' maintenance costs so far exceeded receipts that new lines of credit had to be advanced by the city and state simply to keep them open and running at a loss (Rothmyer, 1975: 1). All this was at a time when the city was hemorrhaging manufacturing and commercial jobs, the bedrock of its middle- and working-class communities, due both to global competition and to active government policies of de-industrialization, such as those that had re-zoned this port neighborhood in the first place. This created additional demand for the city's relatively generous allocation of social welfare and public services, increasing the strain on city finances. Compounding this was a recession-laden, anti-urban federal government, which heavily subsidized suburbanization while divesting aid from cities. Thus, many have argued that the multi-million dollar public debt incurred in building and maintaining this new symbol of Downtown's financial might contributed heavily to the city's spiraling fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s.²¹

The fiscal crisis as image crisis: the WTC as a symbol of survival

In 1975, the city finally went bankrupt and was unable to cover basic operating expenses like transportation, sanitation, education and policing. The federal government under President Gerald Ford initially refused to bail the city out, essentially blaming it for its own problems. Those who could fled to the suburbs, further undermining the city's tax and job base. For many of those left behind in what now became known as the 'inner city', unemployment, particularly among the young and people of color, skyrocketed, and crime also began to rise. All of this led to an image of New York far more 'disorderly' than the RPA framers could have imagined in their worst nightmares.

New York had long served in the popular imagination as the symbol of the modern city in all its contradictions — from the working-class, polyglot 'Gotham' of the radical ethnic press; to the sophisticated 'New Rome' of modern art and high fashion; to the violent, brooding 'Naked City' of film noir. Yet now, with mounting social and fiscal crisis, a single urban imaginary was beginning to circulate more than others: a racist, post-apocalyptic vision of 'asphalt jungle' and 'horror city' widely disseminated through films, TV and public discourse, situating 1970s New York as the apotheosis of the 'urban crisis' (Kael, 1971; Beauregard, 1993; Sanders, 2001; Austin, 2001).²²

20 Kaiser (1976: 33). If the PA had chosen to occupy the \$30 million building it had built for new offices at 1166 Avenue of the Americas, vacant since 1974, it could have saved \$4.2 million a year in rent. Similarly it was found that the New York State was being charged above market rates for its offices.

21 Where the final blame lay for New York's fiscal crisis has been a topic of considerable debate, and is beyond the scope of this article. Many on the left believed it was due to 'corporate welfare' and the rapacity of banks and political insiders, arguing that financiers deliberately provoked the need for 'austerity' to discipline the city's government and force it to rein in public spending and unions (see, e.g., Tabb, 1982; Lichten, 1986). The generally 'liberal' position blamed the city's excessive social spending at a time when the state and federal government were retrenching (see Morris, 1980). And a range of conservative critics in politics and the mainstream media saw it as part of a larger urban crisis brought about by its primary victims: unionized labor, the poor and people of color (see Beauregard, 1993). Susan Fainstein's (2001: 93) summation, while not addressing causes for expenditures, such as the greater demand for social welfare, seems a fair assessment of the city's bind: 'Essentially the fiscal crisis resulted from the effort to sustain a strongly interventionist public sector within a situation of economic contraction without greater support from the national and state governments. Interventionism comprised both large subsidies to capital, in the form of infrastructural investment to support new development, and major guarantees of social welfare. The costs of government were further expanded by relatively high total compensation for municipal employees' (my emphasis).

22 See in particular the spate of movies — from *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) to *Superfly* (1972), *Death Wish* (1974), *The Warriors* (1979), *Escape from New York* (1981), and *Fort Apache, The Bronx* (1981) — that showed poor black and Latino communities as incurable cesspools of vice spreading virus-like through streets and subways to infect the rest of the city.

And yet, anomalously, alongside these apocalyptic visions rose the gleaming towers of the WTC. Edward Sorel (1975: 69) captured the surreal contrast in a spoof in *New York Magazine*. Asking the question: 'With New York on the brink, can epic recapturings of its decline and fall be far behind?', he designed mock movie posters for future flicks like '*Metropolis of the Damned*', '*The Garbage also Rises*' and, for a grand finale, '*The Towering Insanity ... starring David Rockefeller*', in which the banker's mammoth head looms with a maniacal grin over the teetering towers (see Figure 1). The promo reads:

Here at last is a truly original screenplay — a disaster movie in which the horror comes from watching not the destruction but the *erection* of a skyscraper. You guessed it, it's the incredible story of the World Trade Center! Action packed machinations that will leave you breathless! Mile high spectacle with suspense on every floor! David Rockefeller gives his usual suave performance as a banker who builds the city's tallest building only to discover no one wants to rent floor space in it. But — clever plot — his brother turns out to be the Governor, and all ends happily when hundreds of state agencies are moved in and the bank cleans up. A heartwarming morality play just in time for the holiday season.

In the eyes of New York City's embattled local government and vulnerable upper classes, such negative imagery was seen as contributing to the broader social crisis. Like so many other cities facing government cut-backs and recession, New York's leadership felt compelled to join in the mounting inter-urban competition to retain and attract new markets in financial services, real estate, entertainment and tourism — all extremely volatile, image-sensitive industries. Yet, it was argued, because of New York's status as 'media capital of the world', representations of local crime and fiscal crisis were blown out of proportion on a global scale, making it harder for New York to compete.

Under the guidance of an emergency regime of supra-governmental decision-makers like the Municipal Assistance Corporation and Emergency Financial Control Board, headed by leaders in banking and finance, the city's new approach to recovery prioritized image and investor confidence over public city functions. On the one hand, the city imposed austerity measures and 'planned shrinkage' policies that further cut city services, particularly in the outer boroughs, primarily effecting union workers, poorer communities and communities of color (Bellush and Netzer, 1990; Wallace and Wallace, 1998). On the other hand, largely under the auspices of the city's Office of Economic Development (OED) and the state's Urban Development Corporation (UDC), the city adopted business friendly development programs. One aspect of this, which was to accelerate in the 1980s, called for billions of dollars in give-aways — including tax breaks, subsidies, development grants and zoning changes — to the real estate industry in order to stimulate rapid growth in high-end office and residential space in Manhattan.²³ And, starting in the late 1970s, the city also began to institutionalize and subsidize mass marketing as a strategy of urban development for the first time.

To accomplish this goal, the city transformed itself into an entrepreneur. It seized upon the latest corporate marketing techniques and joined forces with business leaders to package and sell the image of New York as a global brand. In the process, it was hoped, the deepening social and economic crisis would be both obscured and, ultimately, ameliorated. This was a new approach to economic development, not because people hadn't tried to market New York City before— this was the home of Coney Island and the Great White Way, after all. Yet these earlier forms of *urban boosterism* were undertaken by individual entrepreneurs and were ancillary to the overall urban economy, while the current mode of *urban branding* was centrally managed by city and state agencies along with professional marketing firms,

23 See Fainstein (2001: 55–62) As she points out later (2001: 95), under Koch: 'The achievement of economic growth and fiscal solvency was substituted for service provision as the test of government legitimacy'. As to the appropriate measurement of such economic growth, according to Fainstein, that became equated with real estate development.



Edward Sorel's mock movie poster played on the spate of New York horror films coming out at the time, but shifted the focus from street-level vice to upper-level mismanagement. In so doing, it captured the prevailing public sentiment about the WTC, completed at huge cost as New York City was teetering on the brink of fiscal crisis.

Figure 1 Towering Insanity illustration (source: Edward Sorel, 'Preview of Coming Attractions', *New York Magazine*, 30 December 1975, with kind permission of Edward Sorel)

'integrated' across a range of public and private initiatives, and as such became a main engine of economic growth.²⁴

This is evident in the report by Mayor Abraham Beame and the Department of City Planning, *Economic Recovery: New York City's Program for 1977–1981* (New York Department of City Planning, 1976). The report signaled two substantive shifts in the city's mode of economic development. One was the call for a new Office of Economic Development that merged previously separate offices like Cultural Affairs and Budget and Finance under one roof, thus streamlining business services, corporate retention, and 'shredding red tape' for businesses in their dealings with the city. The second, related to the first, was what Beame called in his report 'the marketing of the city'. Citing the 'paradoxical' fact that, unlike so many other cities in the country, 'the home of the world's largest, most energetic communications and marketing industries should beat its own drum so seldom and so softly', the report announced the establishment of 'a comprehensive marketing program' funded by city, state and private business.²⁵ Its three goals were to 'convey New York's advantages as a place to do business and to stress the City's positive attitude toward business'; 'encourage companies to locate in the City and to stay and expand here'; and 'attract more tourists and conventions' (*ibid.*: 34).

The report went to great lengths to legitimize this major new expenditure in the midst of belt-tightening in every other arena of public funding, particularly given that it was going into an area in which many assumed government had no necessary role:

Until recently, New Yorkers tended to assume that business would take care of itself and that the City's size and natural strengths would function as an automatic magnet. Many leading business groups paid little attention to events outside their own industries. The financial crisis in particular has changed many of these attitudes — spurring the City's determination to become a self-promoter and enlisting the loyalties of local businessmen (*ibid.*).

Such 'local businessmen' were to be the CEOs of Fortune 500 global corporations located in New York, and their 'loyalties' entailed considerable sunk investments in the city's economic base. From my research I have identified three main ways in which the city enlisted private sector support for marketing itself: through public and quasi-public city and state agencies devoted to cultural and economic development, such as the state's Urban Development Corporation (UDC) and the city's Office of Urban Development (OED); through the city and state subsidization of the private commercial booster, the Convention and Visitors' Bureau (CVB);²⁶ and through corporate-led 'civic groups' and 'public-private partnerships' with influence on the public sector, like the New York City Partnership (NYCP) and Association for a Better New York (ABNY).

Thus the city and its CEOs helped raise millions to hire media, marketing and PR executives, many of whom were also based in New York and sat on the boards of the above organizations, to coordinate 'integrated' media campaigns that would present an investment, tourist and consumer-friendly image of New York. As to why CEOs would want to get involved in such an effort, Lew Rudin, CEO of Rudin Management, a real estate development firm and one of ABNY's founders in 1975, explained:

24 For more discussion of how urban branding differs from traditional boosterism, see Greenberg (2000). For a recent discussion of various strategies of public-private 'integration' via city branding campaigns, and the extent to which such campaigns have become de rigeur for cities across the country, see Gardyn (2002).

25 As a point of comparison the report states: 'Philadelphia, for example, last year launched a three-year marketing program to attract new businesses supported by \$1.2 million in private subscriptions from fifty companies and \$495,000 in funds provided by the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation, a quasi-public agency. In recent months, the 'New Philadelphians' have written to many New York firms inviting them to come on down' (New York Department of City Planning, 1976: 34-5).

26 All of these agencies were streamlined and renamed in the mid 1990s. The UDC was merged with other Department of Commerce agencies, and renamed the Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC) in 1994. OED, created by Beame in 1976, was renamed the Economic Development Corporation. And the CVB became 'NYC&Co'.

We were already losing the ball when in the mid-70s the credit rating of the City slipped and the public image went south with it. The rest of the world seemed to look upon New York as an urban jungle inhabited by surly, beleaguered natives . . . On Johnny Carson every night you would hear jokes about muggings in Central Park. Well, we couldn't move our buildings across the bridges. Our assets are in New York. So I decided to create a civic group.²⁷

In this effort, the new trade towers were seized upon as the perfect, unambiguous logo for a globally resurgent Big Apple. Yet to achieve this, a campaign was needed to change the public perception linking the towers to the fiscal crisis — i.e. to transform the 'white elephant' into the 'white knight'. This was to involve a masterful separation of the interior of the buildings, still largely empty and losing money, from their gleaming exterior, presented as a symbol of resurgence. Harkening back to the original, symbolic intentions of the RPA, the site's use value as a provider of jobs and goods was to be downplayed, emphasizing instead its exchange value as an image of social and economic order, which could translate into higher real estate values and future investments.

Thus, initially, the WTC, while unable to find tenants, focused on getting tourists to come downtown to visit the new observation decks — in competition with the more famous Empire State Building in Midtown. In 1975–6, at the onset of the fiscal crisis, the PA spent \$225,000 hiring an ad agency to create a marketing campaign that turned the World Trade Center's roof into a vehicle for transcending economic woe.:

"Come up to the top of the world" a Trade Center promotion says immodestly. "The world's highest observation platform." . . . "You can't be down when you're up" goes the slogan, with its unmistakable reference to the local fiscal blahs. The slogan has been used on television and radio, and on municipal buses²⁸ (Moritz, 1976: 4).

Simultaneously, the PA took out ads in business and travel magazines that associated tourist entertainment with financial travel. Above a birds-eye photo of the towers, the headline hovers: 'Gold Bars & Chocolate Bars, High Stakes and Thick Steaks, Bedrooms & Boardrooms: Business & Pleasure Begin at the World Trade Center' (see Figure 2). The CVB extended this theme in its first nationwide 'Big Apple' campaign, in which the towers appear on posters, pamphlets and guides (see Figure 3).²⁹ A sparkling WTC rises above the Brooklyn Bridge at night, as Mayor Ed Koch and Loews Corporation CEO Preston Robert Tisch remind tourists: 'You'll find the Big Apple to your taste whether you're here for pleasure, for business, for a convention, or for a shopping trip' (CVB, 1976). Finally, the CVB and ABNY joined the city to plan a US Bicentennial celebration called 'Operation Sail', bringing thousands of historic boats down the Hudson and past the new Lower Manhattan skyline, creating a dramatic visual, broadcast nationwide, of the modern, festive Port of New York (see Figure 4).

27 On ABNY's web-history (ABNY, 2002), Lew Rudin, founder and still CEO, explains the 'advocacy group's' beginnings: 'We had to change our ways, become user friendly. We decided to bring people here to meet and speak to New Yorkers'. By the latter he meant the now famous 'ABNY breakfast meetings' at which outside VIPs could meet ABNY members — 'a cross section of 300 important New York entities', largely leaders of FIRE and media industries. In conclusion, and listing a number of concrete examples, the history page explains: 'In addition to creating public forums for policy decisions through these breakfasts and meetings, ABNY has been influential in helping to shape policy behind the scenes'.

Similarly David Rockefeller created the NYCP in 1979, seeing it as a necessary means through which the private sector, and particularly CEOs, could take a leadership role in both promoting the city's 'business climate' and shaping policy. 'In retrospect', he mused, 'the best thing that happened to New York may have been the famous 1975 *Daily News* *Headline*, 'Ford to City: Drop Dead!'. That really got our adrenaline going' (1986: 122–3). It seems his enthusiasm for this new role may have shifted his allegiance from the RPA to the NYCP.

28 The article continues: 'Not to be upstaged the Empire State Building did some rare radio promotion in the pre-Christmas period, also using some current events sloganeering: "If you've had it with New York then look at it this way"'.²⁹

29 The campaign was originally created by the CVB in 1971, but only got the funding it needed in 1976.

**GOLD BARS & CHOCOLATE BARS,
HIGH STAKES & THICK STEAKS, SIGHTS
& SITES, BEDROOMS & BOARDROOMS:
BUSINESS & PLEASURE BEGIN
AT THE WORLD TRADE CENTER.**

Did you know you could dine on the best past this side of the iceberg at the World Trade Center, atop the just about anything among 83 stories and food again in Manhattan's largest enclosed mall, while to business meetings from your ticket, enjoy a sightseeing high you've never experienced in quarter mile high, 24-hour till the very hours, follow the million-dollar action of the Concourse II on Exchange and on and on... all here at the incredible 'Vertical City'!

Start with the view. Even jaded New Yorkers find themselves charmed by the 360-degree view from the world's highest outdoor observation platform. Or try gourmet observations in great meals with a great view often seen from offices the world is our quarter-mile high. Here of course, one of the three great dining experiences around Windows on the World. If you haven't got the view window, we've got 34 great places to eat, including the best food choice for under \$5 you'll find anywhere. Nearby or around several corners, the fabulous South Street Seaport, Financial Towers, where Blackout no made his famous address. This is not any other place—Chris's dining—like the lovely Little Italy, the new Elia, Mediterranean of Tribeca and more.

Whenever you're coming from—the South, a business trip or upper Broadway—you ought to be going to World Trade Center country club, fitness, dining.

The Deck 1,300-944 every day. 40 200 adults, 40 50 children and senior citizens. For information on the Observation Deck at the World Trade Center call (212) 486-7597.



**NEW YORK BEGINS
AT THE WORLD TRADE CENTER**

THE PORT AUTHORITY

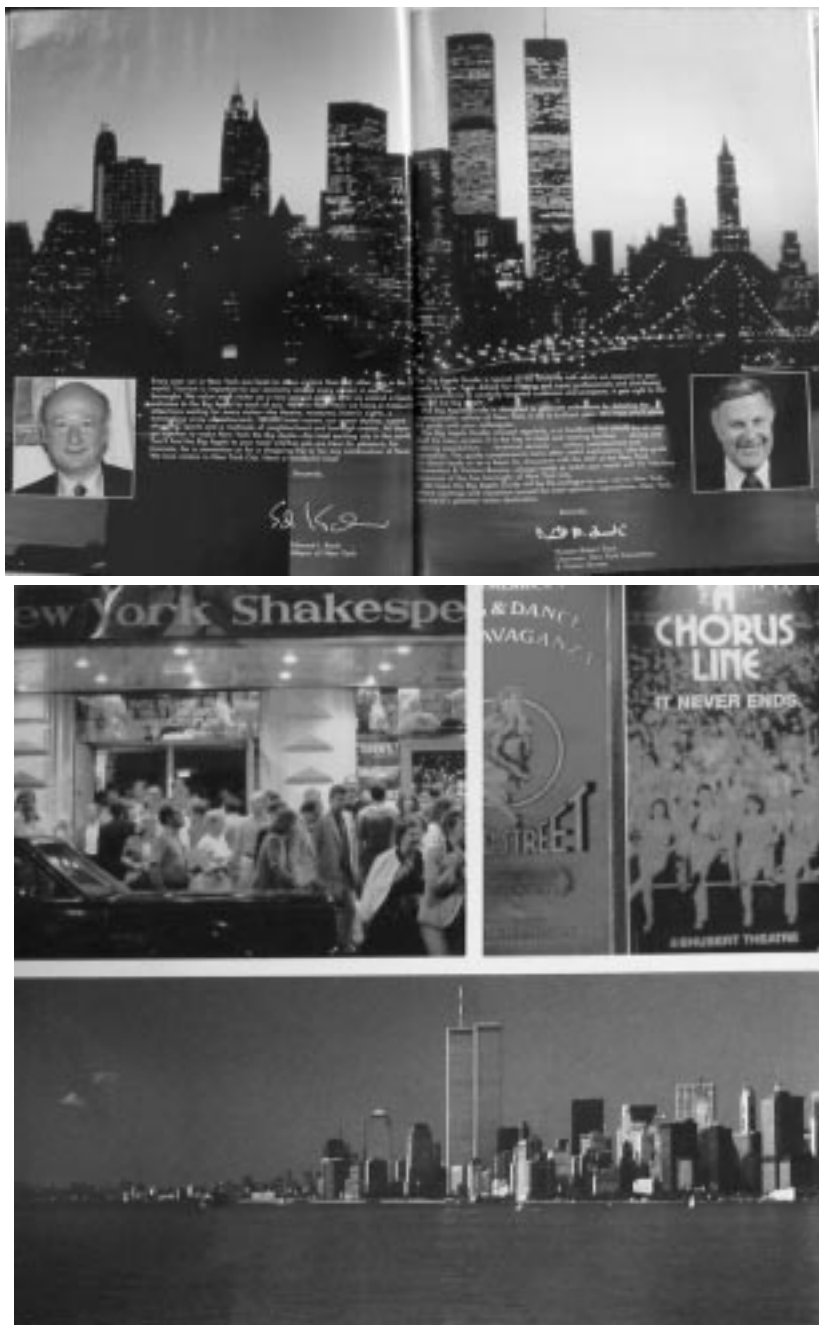
In the wake of the fiscal crisis, the Port Authority began marketing the WTC as a safe, 24-hour 'Vertical City' within which visitors could work, play and shop.

Vertical City ad PANY-NJ (source: New York Convention and Visitors Bureau, *The Big Apple Guide* 1985, JWJ Enterprises, New York. With kind permission of the Port Authority of New York-New Jersey)

Figure 2 Port Authority marketing

The city's expensive image-marketing did not go uncontested. Angry public sector workers, facing widespread lay-offs, created their own 'Fear City' campaign, targeting the upcoming bicentennial events and reminding the world of the city's ongoing crisis. The *Daily News* reported: 'Off duty cops and firemen warn tourists arriving here that they are about to enter 'fear city' (by meeting) incoming planes at Kennedy and LaGuardia airports, and trains at Grand Central Terminal with crime statistics' (Patterson, 1975). Though the crime statistic pamphlets the police and firemen handed out — emblazoned with a menacing WTC by night — was part of a brief stunt, it was strategic. Charles Gillett, CVB president, feared such 'adverse publicity might work against the bureau's effort to change the city's image' (Maitland, 1975). As he expressed it:

Our campaign has been to make people think of New York City as the Big Apple, not the asphalt jungle . . . Good things happen here but there's no question that the fear-city campaign did terrible damage. News of that was carried around the world. In Germany, there were front-page headlines that read, "New York Police Warn Visitors Not to Come to New York." It's a black eye for the city, and we're hoping it will be resolved.



The CVB extended this theme in its first nationwide 'Big Apple' campaign, shown here in a series of ads from the late 1970s through the late 1980s, in which the towers were used to market Manhattan as a whole as both business and entertainment destination.

Big Apple Ads with Koch and Tisch (source: New York Convention and Visitors Bureau, *The Big Apple Guide* 1985, JWJ Enterprises, New York. © NYC&Co)

Figure 3 Big Apple campaign

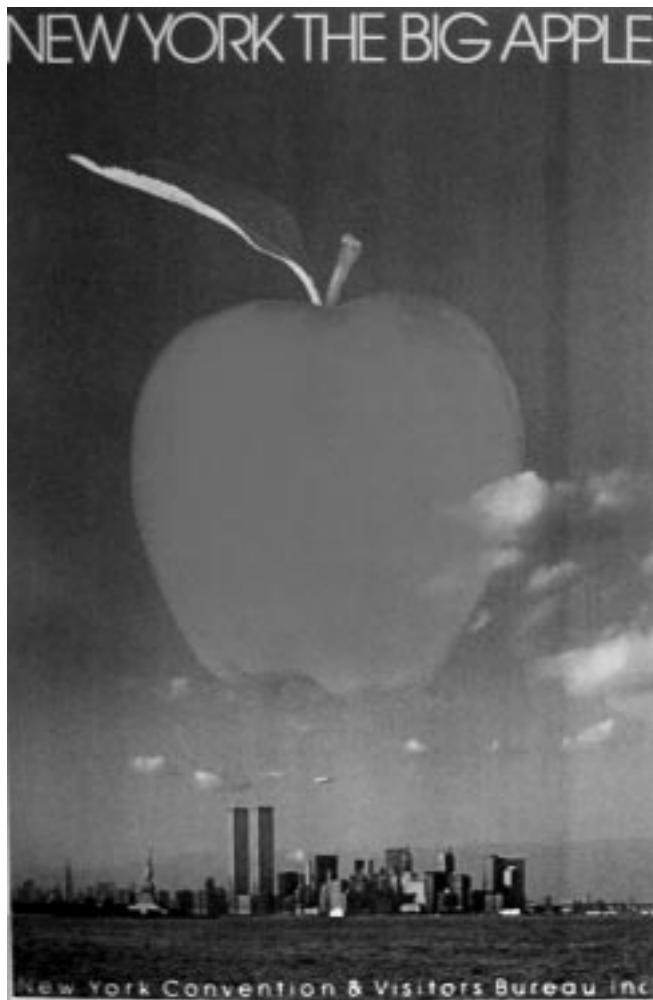
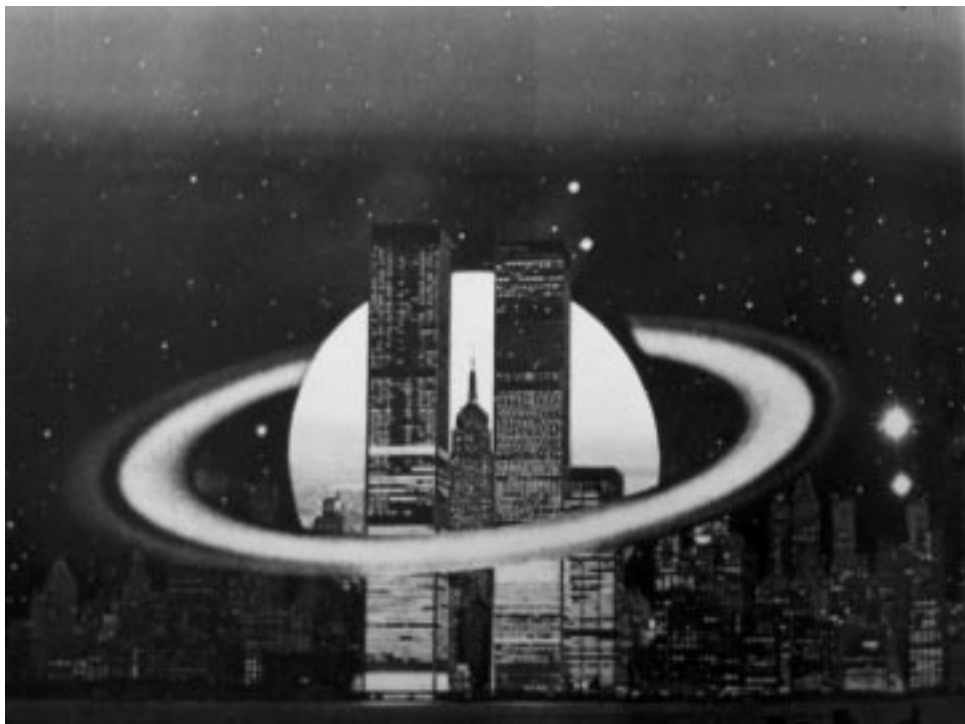


Figure 3 Big Apple campaign

When resolution came it was not in the form of substantial deals for the police or firemen, but in stepped up marketing — namely ‘I Love NY’, the city and state’s first professional, internationally syndicated TV, radio and print campaign. In 1976, the State Department of Commerce for the first time used its *entire* tourism budget to hire a professional market research firm, Consumer Behavior Incorporated (CBI).³⁰ CBI conducted a study revealing consumers’ perception that, on the one hand, New York City was difficult, expensive and dangerous to visit, and on the other, that Broadway theatre and ‘nightlife’ were some of the most popular tourist attractions in the country. Thus, in 1977, a year of blackouts, rioting and massive lay-offs, New York increased its tourism budget from \$200,000 to \$4.3 million and hired the advertising firm Wells, Rich & Green to design an upbeat, Broadway-oriented campaign. Additional support was provided by ABNY and NYCP, while the CVB provided travel agents and new package deals for ‘theater weekends’ and vacations linking the city and the state. Milton Glaser, the designer of the campaign’s smart and simple ‘I ♥ NY’ logo, was also layout editor of the hip, successful *New York Magazine*, created in 1969, and applied

30 I am indebted for this insight to the former ESDC librarian of tourism research, Craig Wakefield.



The CVB's official Bicentennial Book used the changing port and skyline of lower Manhattan to represent both the US' and New York's triumphant evolution, picturing 'historic New York' on the front cover and 'modern New York' on the back cover (i-ii). The towers were also used in the campaign's official logo (iii). Operation Sail, begun in 1976 and repeated in 1986, made great use of this contrast (iv-vi)

Figure 4 Bicentennial campaign



Bicentennial images (sources: i-iii New York City Bicentennial Corporation, 'Historical Portrait: New York City, 1776-1976' 1975. Official Commemorative Edition, Dexter Press, New York. With kind permission of the New York City Municipal Archives; iv-vi Operation Sail 86 photos. Charles Flowers, *The Tall Ships: A Salute to History*. [The Official book of Operation Sail] 1986, Vendome Press, New York. With kind permission of Joel Greenberg, photographer)

Figure 4 Bicentennial campaign

techniques of the urban lifestyle genre to media spreads selling the city to a young, affluent consumer.³¹

According to the author's content analysis of the campaign ads and guides, images of life and culture above 96th Street or across the East River were largely omitted, while the city's 'attractions' primarily focused on three elements: Fifth Avenue shopping, Broadway theater and 'the new downtown nightlife' around the WTC (see Figure 5). The towers also featured in PR events, perhaps most dramatically the opening celebration of Valentine's Day, 1978 (New York State Department of Commerce, 16 February 1978). Governor Hugh Carey unveiled the new Broadway-themed TV commercial with the cast, including stars of 'A Chorus Line', 'The Wiz', 'Annie', 'Grease' and other current hits.³² Then the party moved to Studio 54 for a Valentine's Dance to the new 'disco version' of the 'I Love NY' theme song, along with 'hundreds of colorful and interesting people who keep NY alive at night'.³³ And for the grand finale, buildings across the city lit up to spell 'I ♥ NY', most prominently the WTC, the only building with the logo visible on the skyline, thus creating a widely circulated image used in later commercials and promotions.

In one year, the campaign stimulated an 11.8% increase in travel receipts and \$4 in tax revenue for every \$1 spent on the campaign, and figures continued climbing through the 1980s (CBI, 1978). The US Travel Data Center reported that based on sampling six private New York State attractions, including the WTC, the volume of visitors increased 56.7% between 1976 and 1977 (New York State Department of Commerce, 10 April 1978).³⁴ In response to this data, state funding for marketing rose to \$15 million in the early 1980s, the highest of any state tourism campaign at the time (ESDC, 2002). The CVB's budget rose to \$2 million over the same period.³⁵

The new development strategy seemed successful: Manhattan's 'tourist bubbles' from 96th Street to the WTC saw rapid economic growth, and Wall Street, basking in the glow of the resurgent towers, was on the rise.³⁶ Under jubilant booster Mayor Ed Koch, the newly branded image seemed to have banished the 'asphalt jungle', and newcomers, investments and corporate headquarters were indeed attracted back to the city in climbing numbers.³⁷ Thus, when Koch appeared on the cover of *Time* (15 June 1981), his arms raised in a double-fisted victory salute above the Lower Manhattan skyline, and the banner headline 'America's Mayors: Politics of Survival' stamped across his body, the WTC was associated with the rebound of the entire city (Koch, 1984) (see Figure 6).³⁸

31 *New York Magazine* also produced some of the campaign's first tourist maps and guides, which it provided as inserts as well as separate editions, and also ran 'I Love NY' ads prominently in its pages.

32 The commercial itself, shot on a Broadway theater stage, used the New York City skyline as the background stage set in most scenes, with the WTC at the center of this set. Governor Carey announced at the luncheon that 32 million would see the ad, the first of hundreds to be produced by the agency.

33 These included many local film, TV and art stars such as Carrie Fisher, Mariel Hemingway, Andy Warhol, and Gilda Radner – of the new, hugely popular late night TV show, *Saturday Night Live*.

34 Meanwhile, visitor volume based on similar samplings at the nation's private attractions was up only 0.1% in the fourth quarter.


35 The CVB is supported jointly by member dues and city funding.

36 For discussion of the rise of 'tourist bubbles' in New York and other cities, see Judd (1999).

37 While campaign marketing between New York City and Upstate was split close to 50/50, since New York attracted the vast majority of tourism, city officials argued they deserved more. Nonetheless, according to market research, 'top of the mind' awareness of the campaign, nationally and globally, was still associated with New York City, more so than Upstate (Davidson-Petersen Associates, 1984).

38 Mayor Koch also chose a reworked version of this image for the cover of his autobiography, *Mayor: An Autobiography* (1984). The original *Time* cover appears in the book, with the caption: 'Here I am towering above the City of New York like a colossus. This was taken from a boat in the East River with me teetering at the edge of the rail'.

New York City... Come Visit the World



The world of fashion. Fine dining. Culture and the arts. Broadway. Nightlife. Sightseeing. Shopping. New York. The only city with the best of everything...the world has to offer.

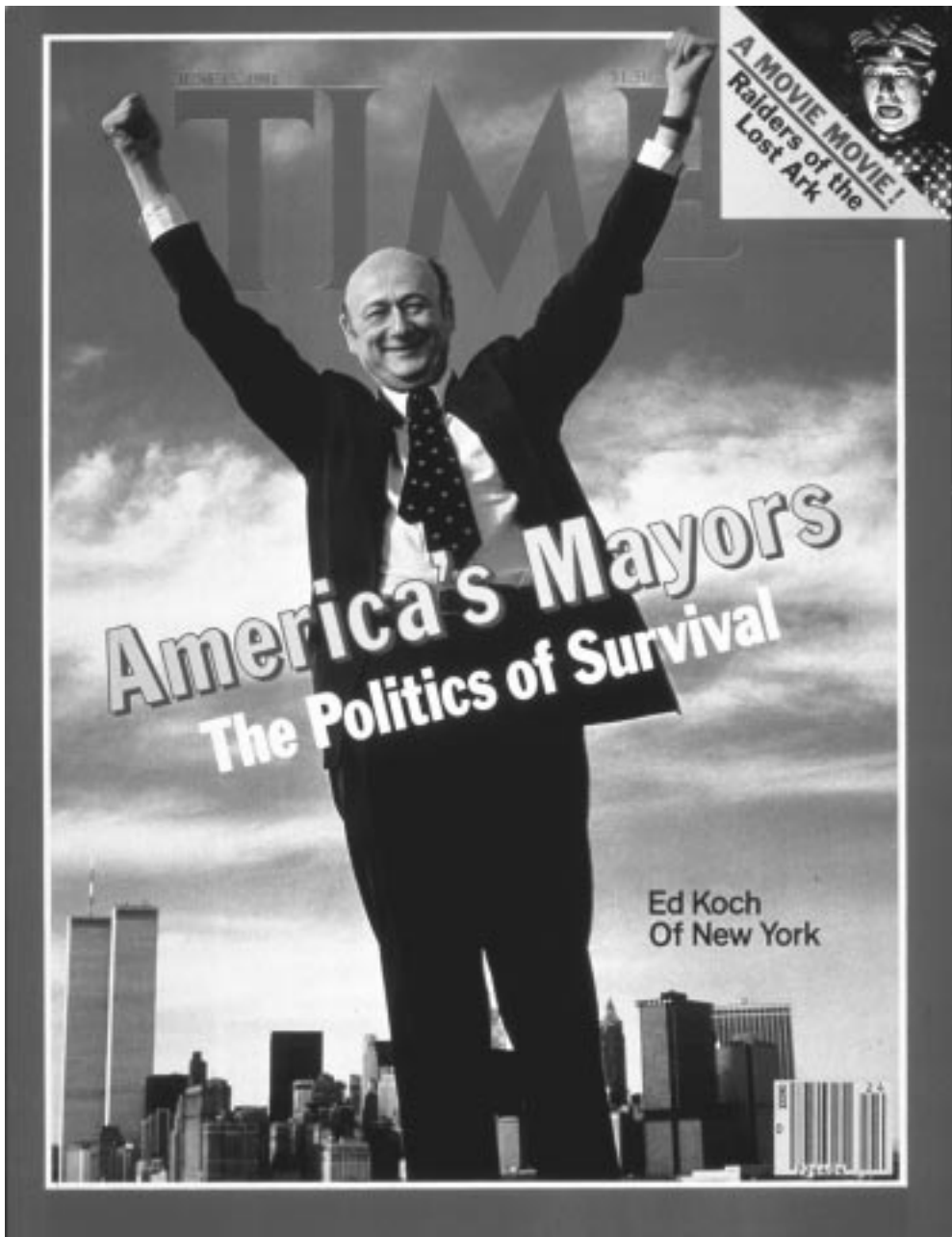
For New York City travel planning information, call 1-800-NYC-VISIT. When in New York City, stop by the NYCVB Visitor Information Center (Seventh Ave. at 53rd Street) for the most comprehensive FREE travel information available today.

I♥NY
New York Convention & Visitors Bureau: 810 Seventh Avenue, New York NY 10018, 212-464-1200, fax 212-245-5445
<http://www.nycvisit.com>

NYCVB

Aside from street-level images of shopping and Broadway, the CVB and ESDC used the Lower Manhattan skyline most frequently to represent the city's attractions in their national and international 'I Love New York' campaigns from the 1970s through the 1990s.

Figure 5 I♥NY ad (source: ESDC, 1992. © NYC&Co)



Mayor Ed Koch, great promoter of New York City and himself, helped set up this famous shot, symbolizing the city's and his own resurgence, by standing on the railing of a boat so that his upraised fists would parallel the trade towers. He also recreated this image for the cover of his autobiography (Koch, 1984).

Figure 6 Koch triumphant (source: *Time*, 15 June 1981. © Time Life Pictures/Getty Images)

Marketing the WTC as global brand in the 1990s

The stock market crash and recession of 1989–92 hit the burgeoning tourist industry, and the city, extremely hard. Along with the business services, this sector saw many of the gains made in the previous decade wiped out. Given how central both became to New York City in the 1990s, this caused damage to the job market and overall economy greatly disproportionate to their size. This gave the new administrations of Mayor David Dinkins and Governor Mario Cuomo little latitude to increase a vastly scaled-back tourism budget.³⁹

This bleak economic picture, combined with a number of global market factors, provoked the corporate sector to start branding the city independently. Changes in the global media market, such as deregulation, digital convergence and massive corporate mergers, greatly enhanced the power and scale of those media conglomerates and advertising superagencies that established headquarters in New York City.⁴⁰ This made New York a global media capital on an entirely new scale, with ‘media and communications’ passing up business services as the city’s largest private-sector producer of new jobs (CBC, 1998). Meanwhile, this sector, as many observed, was merging with tourism and entertainment to create an even more powerful industry cluster (e.g. ESDC, 1998). New York’s tourism industry took advantage of these developments through landmark conventions and campaigns bringing the media elite together with leaders in global travel, hotel, restaurants, entertainment and finance, as well as with cultural and economic development agencies.⁴¹ This initiated a new phase of accelerated, private-sector led urban branding.

Republican Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Governor George Pataki, taking office in 1993 and 1995 respectively, served as catalysts in this corporate-led stage. The EDC continued the Koch tradition, granting massive tax-breaks and other giveaways to keep corporations in the city. And through pressuring city council, Giuliani, in coordination with the NYCP and ABNY, reduced the contentious hotel-tax, thus making New York more competitive for highly lucrative conventions with the rest of the country.⁴² Armed with increased public-private financing, Lower Manhattan developers embarked on monumental, exclusive projects, including the World Financial Center, Battery Park City and South Street Seaport, attempting once again to make downtown a 24-hour financial and entertainment district. The CVB was transformed into the hipper ‘NYC&Co.’, with an increased budget, more mayoral oversight and new global reach.⁴³ Joining forces with Downtown Alliance, *New York Magazine* and other corporate partners, it hosted a number of special packages centered around attracting tourists and conventions to the new downtown. And it featured the trade towers — often complimented by the Statue of Liberty in the foreground — in the majority of images in promotional packages, including post-cards, videos, Official NYC Maps, Guides and Travel and Meeting Planners (see Figure 7).⁴⁴

Giuliani’s reprisal of Koch’s ‘quality of life’ campaign focused intensively on cleaning and policing public spaces to prevent the appearance of disorder, thus making

39 According to the CVB (1999), hotel occupancy rates, a common indicator used to determine the tourist industry’s strength, declined from over 80% in the late 1980s to 67% by 1991, a level not seen since the early 1970s. Convention business declined 33% over the same period. Koch had scaled back funding from \$15 to \$3 million during a boom market. Dinkins raised it, by 1992, to \$7 million.

40 These were to include the largest such corporations in the world, including AOL-Time Warner, Viacom-CBS and Bertelsman, and in advertising, Omnicom and Interpublic.

41 In particular the ‘New York Tourism 2000’ Conference (CVB, 1992).

42 An initial attempt to eliminate it entirely lasted briefly but was rejected by the city council.

43 While funding for the CVB/NYC&Co rose and fell over the decade due to disputes with the mayor’s office over strategy and operating costs, among other things, it increased overall to \$10 million by 1999.

44 Similarly, the ESDC’s slide show, ‘Global New York’, marketing the State for global tourism, used the WTC as the main image representing New York City.



As of August 2001, NYC&Co had chosen the towers for its Official NYC Map, Official NYC postcard, and two out of four of its Official NYC Guides for Fall and Winter. Most of these had gone to press by September 11th. The towers were also the most prominent landmark in bureau slide shows, videos and meeting planners.

Figure 7 NYC&CO promotions of 2001 (sources: *Official NYC Map*; *Official NYC Postcard*; *Official NYC Guide August 2001*, NYC & Company, New York. © NYC&Co)





Figure 7 continued

such spaces amenable to both tourism and mainstream media production, both of which increased exponentially under his watch.⁴⁵ This was facilitated by influential Midtown and Downtown Business Improvement Districts that hired private contractors for sanitation and security.⁴⁶ At the same time, many of the largest media corporations, like Conde Nast and Viacom, helped put what was now known as the New Times Square on the map, erecting ‘branded buildings’, the facades of which they featured in magazines and live broadcasting along with the bustling, cleaned-up streetscape. And the Mayor’s Office of Film, Television and Broadcasting saw a 150% increase in the number of films, television series and commercials shot on location in New York between 1992 and 1999. Many of these productions were located in a wealthy New York, usually signified by an establishing shot with the WTC in the background, and multiple references to Wall Street (MoFTVB, 2000). These films then circulated globally, thus feeding back into the tourism industry.

According to a marketing imagery survey, by the late 1990s the WTC became — along with old standbys like the Statue of Liberty and Broadway/Times Square — one of the three most officially photographed symbols of New York.⁴⁷ The classic New York skyline shifted away from Midtown to Downtown, as the WTC became the city’s branded icon. New York’s contending urban imaginaries, from ‘Gotham’ to ‘Asphalt Jungle’, or even the ‘colorful nightlife’ of early ‘I Love NY’ commercials, were largely expunged. In their place a sanitized urban imaginary, combining old images of ‘cultural capital’ with a modish, wealthy lifestyle, came to play a pivotal role in a larger development strategy. Seeking to boost real estate values and tourist revenue, New York used this strategy to recast itself as a global site for investment, play and consumption.

Yet the clean, glossy image of the Twin Towers contrasted starkly with the social divisions rising in their shadows. The neoliberalism era of the 1970s–1990s that they ushered in also saw the unprecedented rise of inequality along lines of class, race and geography — both in this city and around the world. With a deregulated service economy concentrated at the high and low ends of the skill and income spectrum, New York’s widening socio-economic gap became as dramatic as those in many global cities of the developing world. According to Fiscal Policy Institute statistics for this 30-year period (2002), while the poorest fifth of the city’s population lost 21% of their income, the richest fifth’s increased by 43%. Indeed, the income of the richest 5% increased by an astounding 67%. Ultimately, this top fifth was earning roughly half of the entire income generated by the city.

Unlike New York’s earlier ‘gilded age’, when New York’s photographers, journalists and filmmakers sought to capture both ‘the sunshine and shadow’ of the capitalist city (Hales, 1984), the subjective realities of the rising underclass remained largely ignored by New York’s mainstream media in the 1970s–1990s. This was not because ‘counter branding’ media, as I have called it elsewhere, was not being created at the grassroots. On the contrary, the 1970s and 1980s saw the flowering of neighborhood based media and arts movements, which took advantage of new consumer media in creative response to the struggle to survive in a deteriorating city (Greenberg, 2003). The rise of graffiti writing on New York subways in the early 1970s is just one important example of this backlash. As Joe Austin (2001: 4) says in his recent history: ‘Writers saw themselves as embodying an (illegal) urban beautification and education program for a fading city bent on denying its own magnificent cultural dynamics and destroying its own ‘local color’, both figuratively

45 In terms of the CVB’s reported market impact (1999), annual tourist visits went from 16 to 28 million, tourist spending from \$1 to \$20 billion, and jobs in the sector from 80,000 to 500,000 over the 1990s. In addition to streamlining procedures at the MOTVBF, his administration helped break the 1994 strike by the stage and set union, thus enticing a growing number of productions with lowered costs and more compliant labor.

46 For the role of such agencies in maintaining urban entertainment destinations like the New Times Square, see Hannigan (1999: 139–40).

47 This survey was conducted by the author at the NYC&Co photographic archives.

and literally. In taking the trains, writers created a new mass media, and in that media they “wrote back” to the city’.

Yet such iconoclastic images and texts were scrupulously edited out of the increasingly controlled urban image presented in official media. Given the city’s growing dependence on its ‘cleaned-up’ image, this act of youthful rebellion and self expression was seen as tantamount to a full blown ‘urban crisis’ in the eyes of City Hall, inspiring a two decade, \$500 million ‘War on Graffiti’. Over the course of the campaign, graffiti writers evolved from ‘juvenile delinquents’ to ‘terrorists’; and graffiti from a misdemeanor to a criminal offense. ‘Anti-graffiti coalitions’ were institutionalized across city agencies; ‘image enhancing’ citizen actions were sponsored citywide; anti-graffiti ad campaigns were launched; and paramilitary technologies were developed to clean the trains and secure the yards. This multimillion dollar assault on a few hundred kids with spray paint by a cash-strapped city was vigorously defended and financially supported by the MTA, the *New York Times* and ABNY, all of whom saw graffiti as an assault on ‘quality of life’ that increased crime and triggered economic crisis (Austin, 2001; ABNY, 2002).⁴⁸

Their idea, both reactionary and postmodern, was that collective order is based in surface appearance as opposed to social and economic conditions. As such it was an extension of the RPA’s demand for a ‘sense of order’ in the visual urban fabric, and a prelude to the ‘Broken Windows’ theory embraced by the Giuliani administration. According to this theory, promoted by the Manhattan Institute, crime in a neighborhood will continue to increase if the visual evidence of minor infractions is left unchecked.⁴⁹ Regardless of whether increased poverty and joblessness may have caused them, such minor infractions were met with increased policing rather than new social programs. This helped maintain the image of a tourist-friendly city free of petty crime — with all of its race and class-based associations — while ignoring the root causes of such problems.

Thus, the World Trade Center as branded icon of this *new* New York was a highly ambivalent symbol to say the least. The city’s ‘broken windows’ were indeed fixed, and a ‘sense of order’ maintained, attracting outsiders and their money in droves. Yet the increase in the beauty and power of New York as a brand for global consumption coincided with the decrease in the real standard of living for most of its own citizens. Not surprisingly, the financial district never became the 24-hour entertainment destination envisioned, for while tourists and traveling businesspeople may have accepted the WTC as the center of New York, it certainly wasn’t experienced as such by the majority of those who actually lived and tried to survive in the city.

A similar contradiction in the symbolic significance of the WTC emerged globally. For insofar as it was successfully branded as the symbol of New York’s, and by extension America’s, rising power, so too did it come to represent the inequalities and injustices so many associated with the US dominated, neoliberal ‘New World Order’. Thus, in retrospect, it would seem that the more prominently the Twin Towers appeared as a globally branded icon, the larger they loomed as scapegoat and target.⁵⁰

48 As Austin (2001: 146) puts it: ‘Writing on the walls were in effect (seen as) assaults and riots waiting to happen’. This common sense was tested when, in 1984, using razor wire, guard dogs and infrared sonar, the city finally reached its goal of ‘graffiti free’ subways (in a ‘historic achievement’ publicized worldwide), and crime on the subways actually worsened. Thus, it seems crime was not simply a response to visual cues, but to escalating unemployment and citywide recession, which remained unchecked.

49 For an elaboration of this theory see Kelling and Coles (1996). For a critical view on how policies based on this theory exacerbated race and class tensions in New York, see McArdle and Erzen (2001).

50 Thus, countering the post-September 11th association of the WTC with American values of freedom and justice, David Harvey (2002: 60) offers a different interpretation: ‘For those with a more jaundiced view of what neoliberal globalization and market freedom have really been about in these last few years, the towers ... symbolized something far more sinister. They represented the callous disregard of U.S. financial and commercial interests for global poverty and suffering; the militarism that backs authoritarian regimes wherever convenient ... the insensitivity of U.S.-led globalization

Conclusion: re-branding New York in the wake of September 11th

We're going to imaginatively, aggressively, and relentlessly market our cultural attractions and all our competitive advantages ... We're confident (this) will win us attention from businesses around the world that are looking for new markets and opportunities for growth. And we'll take advantage of our brand. New York is the best-known city on the planet. Our skyline is recognized worldwide. News from our streets reaches homes around the globe. At last count, more than 340 songs have been written about New York. Yet, as a city we've never taken direct coordinated custody of our image. By changing that, we can realize additional city revenues immediately (Mayor Michael Bloomberg, State of the City Address, 2003).

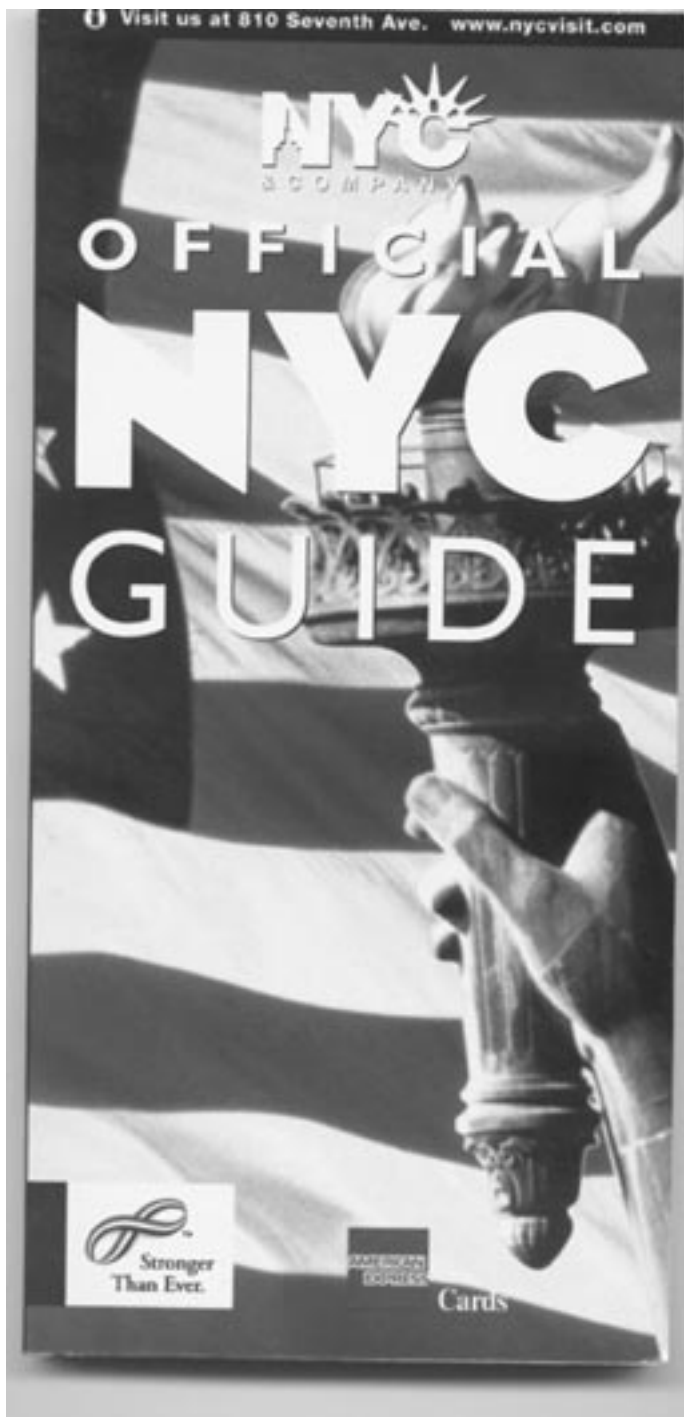
As discussed above, the massive loss of employment and revenue New York continues to suffer following September 11th has been far greater than could be explained by the loss of the WTC's buildings and jobs alone. Rather, the damage to the city's brand image as inviolate center of global finance and entertainment, which, as I have argued, was epitomized by the WTC, has extended far beyond the site of the attacks, gravely effecting financial and tourism markets. While such marketing has attracted tourist and investment capital vital to the city's economic growth in the last 30 years, these sectors are among the most volatile and image-sensitive, and during crises — whether 1975, 1989, or today — a downturn can cause economic damage vastly disproportionate to their size. This, combined with retrenchment by a recession-laden state and federal government, has led to a spiraling debt and a replay of the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s. Thus, now is a time to critically reexamine brand marketing as a central mode of urban economic development. In addition, the tragedy precipitating the current crisis has led many victims' families and concerned New Yorkers to urge the city not to commercialize their grief.

Yet, rather than diversifying the regional economy or respectfully scaling back marketing, the current development approach appears similar to that of the 1970s: using public funds for integrated brand marketing campaigns — or as Mayor Mike Bloomberg phrased it above, taking 'direct coordinated custody of our image'. One of the main recovery strategies is now to 're-brand' the WTC site, and thereby the city as a whole, and to offer economic incentive to shoppers, tourists and corporations tied in to September 11th. As reported in the *Wall Street Journal* (Shalit, 2001: W17), 'for the city's official marketers New York isn't just a wounded city, but a challenged brand ... [and] like all challenged brands, it needs ... an overarching scheme to reposition itself in the American popular consciousness'.

These marketers include, once again, NYC&Co, ESDC, NYCP, ABNY and the new Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC). With the assistance of major media and marketing firms, they have convened groups such as New York Rising and the Crisis Communications Committee. Their re-branding effort originally fell into two camps, the 'pile fetishizers' and the 'pile minimizers', with the former seeking to market quasi-spiritual pilgrimages to 'ground zero' and the latter seeking to downplay the tragedy itself and focus on New York's victorious spirit (Shalit, 2001). A balance was tentatively struck, with efforts to emphasize the city's unflinching strength and patriotism in the face of tragedy, while also capitalizing on the flood of sympathy evoked by the attack.⁵¹ But ultimately the balance

practices to local cultures, interests, and traditions; the disregard for environmental degradation and resource depletion ... irresponsibly selfish behavior with respect to a wide range of international issues such as global warming, AIDS, and labor rights; the use of international institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for partisan political purposes; [and] shallow and often hypocritical stances with respect to human rights and terrorism'.

51 This merged approach, leaning towards the 'pile minimizers', was very likely informed by a three-part nationwide market research report begun immediately following September 11th, and purchased by ESDC (DK Shifflet & Associates Ltd, 3 December 2001 and 15 February 2002). In it different 'traveler types' were identified according to their reaction to events, ranging from 'focused business travelers' to 'the sad and anxious'. Over three months, the numbers of trips taken by the former, mostly male upper income earners, were found to increase, while those of the latter, mostly low to middle income earning women, were slightly decreasing.



The cover of the Official NYC&Co Guide was changed by October 2001 to a composite image of US flag and liberty torch, completely disassociated from the city skyline. This was accompanied by ESDC's official 'Stronger Than Ever' logo (bottom left).

Figure 8 Post September 11th patriotic New York City (source: *Official NYC Guide* August 2001, NYC & Company, New York. © NYC&Co)

shifted away from excessive sympathy. While ESDC helped fund a multimillion-dollar 'ground zero viewing platform' on Church Street, they forbade Milton Glaser from using a newly created logo — 'I ♥ NY More Than Ever', with a black mark over the heart — as a charity fund-raising device. As David Catalfamo, ESDC senior deputy commissioner, explained, 'We think the heart of New York is bigger and stronger than ever. We don't want to show a damaged heart'. Instead they launched two campaigns: a 25th anniversary version of 'I ♥ NY', emphasizing Manhattan shopping and entertainment, and 'New York Stronger than Ever', accompanied by a red, white and blue infinity symbol (see Figure 8). As Glaser responded 'There isn't a lot of poetry in politics or marketing' (Purnick, 2001).

This upbeat yet macabre approach appears successful. The city has attracted a growing wave of 'patriotic tourism', channeling two dozen meetings to New York at least in part because of September 11th, including the two biggest and most coveted tourist industry conventions (Scott, 2002).⁵² According to the Downtown Alliance, the WTC observation deck used to attract an average of 1.8 million visitors a year, while its ruins are on pace this year to double that, drawing 3.6 million.⁵³ As a recent *New York Times* article noted: 'the fallen trade center site has done what it could not do when standing: turn the financial district into one of the city's top attractions' (Blair, 2002: B1).

Re-branding has been catalyzed by Mayor Bloomberg, himself a brand marketer *par excellence*. Bloomberg was founder and CEO of the eponymous Bloomberg LP, one of New York's biggest global financial media corporations.⁵⁴ He is a billionaire without any prior political experience, who participated in no mayoral debates, but won office largely by spending \$75 million of his own money on marketing (the most spent on any political race in US history short of that for president). As a business strategy, he has long understood the value of extending a brand name — naming his company, the terminals it produces and the content it distributes via web, radio and TV, after himself.⁵⁵

Echoing financiers' response in 1975, Bloomberg seeks to combine intensive marketing with tax breaks for businesses to address the current crisis.⁵⁶ In collaboration

52 This strategy differs from Oklahoma City, a recent target of domestic terrorism, which purposely never sought to profit from the attack through tourism. Tourist industry conventions attracted to New York for 'patriotic symbolism' include the American Society of Tourist Agents and the Travel Industry of America's 'International Pow Wow'. As William Maloney, executive vice president of ASTA explains (Scott, 2002): 'New York is a metaphor for our industry ... It was the symbolism of helping our compatriots in New York, but also the symbolism that travel agents must lead the way to travel. Travel is an inherent right, and we cannot let it be taken away'.

53 This would approach the average annual number of visitors for the city's two major tourist attractions, the Metropolitan Museum of Art – 4.6 million – and the Statue of Liberty – 4.2 million, when open.

54 While Bloomberg stepped down from his management position when he started running for office, he still owns a 72% stake in Bloomberg LP. Merrill Lynch, underwriter of the city's bonds, owns another 20%. Both could be forced to sell their stake by the city's Conflict of Interest Board.

55 When his company recently donated 35 'Bloomberg' terminals to be used in his public 'bullpen' at City Hall, the press noted that such 'product placement ... would make any marketing director salivate' (Wyatt, 2002). This incident revealed 'how difficult it will be to separate Mr. Bloomberg's (mayoralty as a whole) from the company that bears his name'. According to Wyatt, Mr. Bloomberg and his company 'will receive no direct financial advantage from the city's use of the terminals – and as a donation the terminals will violate no conflict of interest rules'. Yet Kenneth T. Jackson, an associate professor of business ethics at Fordham said philanthropic efforts like donated products 'could create 'reputational capital' even if it does not show up on the balance sheet'.

56 Unlike earlier campaigns like 'I Love NY' which stressed affordability, Bloomberg seeks to brand New York as a 'luxury product' for exclusive consumers. As a *Times* article reports (Cardwell, 2003): 'Addressing an audience of corporate, cultural, government and labor leaders attending an economic conference at Rockefeller University that was closed to the press, Mr Bloomberg said the city needed to act like a private company and strengthen its brand to market itself better to those businesses that can afford it'.

with reinvigorated CEOs of the NYCP,⁵⁷ he has accelerated the corporate retention strategy of Giuliani's EDC, allowing \$5.5 billion of the \$20 billion in federal aid to go to corporate tax breaks, regardless of whether companies actually stay in the city, or had ever intended to leave in the first place (Bowles, 2001; Bagli, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2002).⁵⁸ And at his recent 'State of the City' speech, Bloomberg announced plans to establish a position of 'Chief Marketing Officer' to oversee all promotion and marketing efforts.⁵⁹ These efforts include having the EDC organize a 'roadshow' to promote New York worldwide, and ongoing marketing to win the 2012 Olympics in international competition.⁶⁰ Facing a new fiscal crisis complete with federal and state retrenchment and double digit unemployment, his administration is poised to attempt a replay of the 'recovery' model of the 1970s: imposing austerity measures and extracting concessions from unions, while cutting business taxes and marketing the dream of a pleasurable and profitable city to an affluent global audience.

To return to questions posed at the start of this article: How can we make sense of the global recognition the WTC has attained as a symbol of New York City — a city so culturally diverse and proudly working class, and with so many buildings older and more venerable? Clearly, in the wake of September 11th, it is understandable, and appropriate, that New Yorkers should feel a familial sense of loss with the death of these two buildings. They were an integral part of the fabric of the city for thirty years, whether loved or unloved, and now a huge hole is left in the sky where they stood, along with the memory of thousands of lost lives. But it should be remembered that before that fateful day, they weren't venerated in this way by most New Yorkers, who had little reason to even visit them, and who were excluded from the starkly rosy version of the city that they came to signify. They were used by some 50,000 workers from financial agencies, securities firms, corporate back-offices, maintenance and food service companies, and visited by tourists seeking a spectacular view. They were quite ordinary, even bland buildings — if not for the fact that they were among the tallest in the world, and that the image of their facades were reproduced in thousands upon thousands of globally distributed media images. From SUV commercials to TV sitcoms, guidebooks to blockbuster films, they were pictured so often, and marketed so strategically, that to people around the world they became like a brand logo for an affluent New York City, and a preeminently powerful United States.

While brand marketing has shown its power to attract tourism and investment for New York City over the last 30 years, it has also shown its limits. In the same way that the WTC could successfully market its facade while its interior remained under-utilized, so too the re-branded city may continue to attract tourists, without adequately addressing or ameliorating underlying economic disparities. We are reminded that while branded logos may be effective marketing tools for cities, or for shoes, they purposely reveal precious little about the material reality behind the commodity which they promote. Now, as everyday New Yorkers become invested in the process of redevelopment to a degree unheard of in recent decades, and as the city enters a new

57 For a discussion of how locally-based global CEOs, including David Rockefeller, became more involved in promoting New York again after September 11th, going to Washington to lobby for funds, see Kolker (2001).

58 While Bloomberg and his Deputy Mayor, Daniel L. Doctoroff, have claimed to discontinue Giuliani's corporate incentive strategy, this has yet to be proven. For example, after Bear Stearns threatened to move to New Jersey last year, complaining of high property taxes in Downtown Brooklyn, the city sought to keep the investment bank without an incentive (unlike the \$75 million incentive package the Giuliani administration gave them in 1997). It was recently disclosed, however (Bagli, 2003), that the bank received a \$4.8 million deal to extend their property tax exemption.

59 Their sales pitch will be that 'New York is the world's second home — a place where people from literally anywhere, if they have a dream and are willing to work — can succeed'.

60 Having the EDC run a marketing 'roadshow' would involve this city agency taking on a job historically performed by the CVB and ESDC, thus further professionalizing publicly funded urban marketing programs.

fiscal crisis, the limits of branding must be taken into consideration in order for a more equitable and sustainable process of recovery and rebuilding to occur.

Miriam Greenberg (mgreenbe@pratt.edu), Department of Social Science and Cultural Studies, Pratt Institute, 200 Willoughby Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11205, USA.

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