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“The Cities Rise Again” discusses the phenomenon of cities, destroyed or damaged by natural and human causes, have throughout history rebounded and flourished. The authors call cities “durable artifacts” of humanity.

The authors cite urban disaster factors: scale of destruction, human toll (death, displacement), cause (natural vs. human, accidental vs. deliberate), economic (and socioeconomic). The impact of a disaster is not based merely on scale, but what meaning the disaster holds for survivors.

The authors introduce an interesting point: there is a good literature base for discussing post-disaster reconstruction, but little exists regarding reconstruction following human-inflicted catastrophes. There is also very little study on cross-cultural comparisons. This difference would be interesting (and relevant) to examine in the context of the Global War on Terror, an environment in which the American homeland is no longer immune to attack.

With the exception of small-scale terrorist attacks, America has not had to cope with post-conflict urban reconstruction since the Civil War, nearly one hundred and fifty years ago. In terms of death and destruction, the Oklahoma City '95 and New York '01 events were orders of magnitude smaller than WWII Warsaw or Hiroshima, but they were no less important to the American people as the large-scale destruction during WWII was to those nations. How can they be compared, if not by death toll or destruction? How does recovery differ between acts of war and acts of terrorism? With so many social, economic, natural, and political variables, how can recovery be measured?

Recovery is affected by relief organizations, activist groups, businesses and insurance companies, equity (or inequality), as well as emergency response agencies. Even the ways traumatic events are memorialized is complicated. It is perhaps as the author suggests, a way of getting “through” events, not over them. The chapter two summary proposes rebuilding as an act of protest. They also draw distinction between physical recovery and emotional/cultural recovery, which is important. Recovery cannot be separated from history or politics.

Recovery can be thought of in four phases: Emergency response, restoration of the restorable, reconstruction of the destroyed, and reconstruction for commemoration/development. Included within these main phases are the psychosocial coping strategies of the society. Recovery also depends on extent of damage, resources, predisaster conditions, and leadership. Politics and posturing are entwined here also. For example, Pentagon leadership focused media attention on resumption of normal DoD activities within the building almost immediately after the 9/11 attack. This was an effort at both providing a source of strength and stability for the American people, and an act of defiance to terrorism. The rapid reconstruction of destroyed areas of the building and restoration to pre-attack structure further demonstrated DoD resolve (and perhaps reinforced government legitimacy). Response to a natural disaster would likely have been much different. Reconstruction efforts would still be in the bidding/red tape process inherent in US government construction projects.