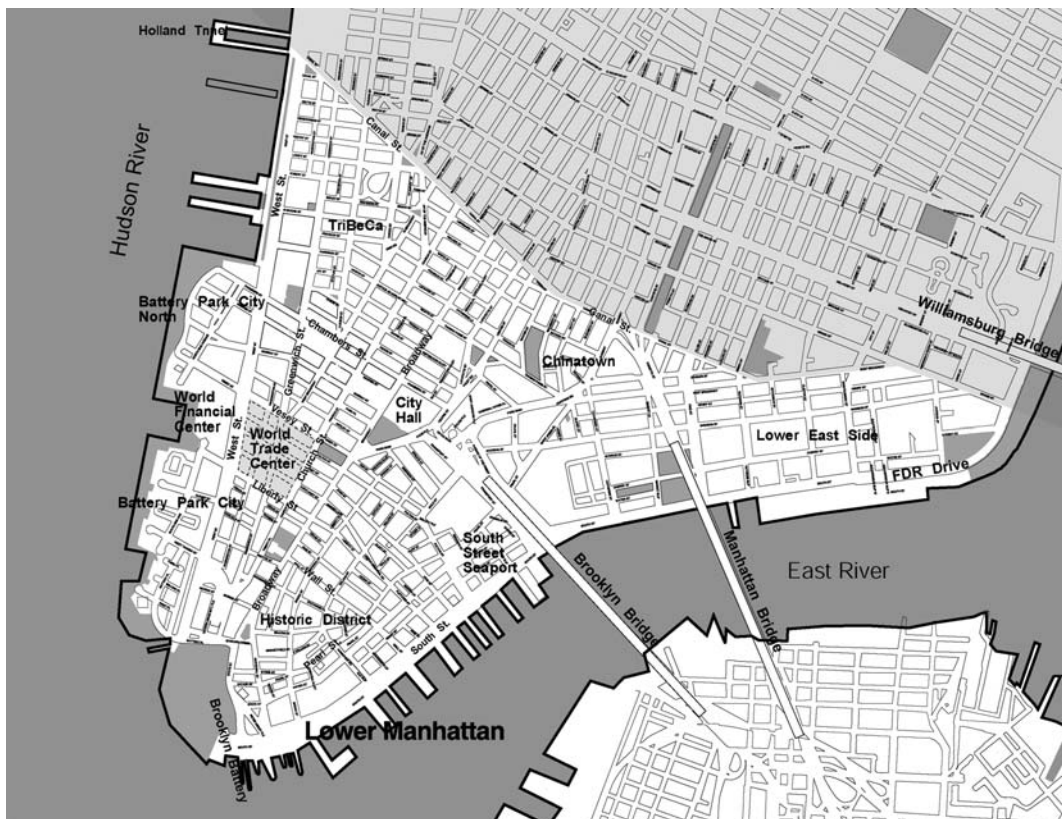


Rebuild Downtown New York, which is administered by the Regional Plan Association.

Context

Lower Manhattan is the historic heart of New York City. During the American Revolution, New Yorkers burned the city to the ground in order to save it from British occupation. At its centre is Wall Street, the historical centre of America's financial world. Designated a special historic district by the city, Lower Manhattan's narrow streets and crooked blocks predate the automobile, and are edged by a mix of many small-scale historic buildings, churches, graveyards, and tall 20th century buildings (Figure 10.3). West Street (a six-lane highway) borders the southern tip of the triangular-shaped district, which includes the historic commercial core of New Amsterdam (New York's original name), Wall Street banking and commercial centre, and the Battery where cannons once protected the harbour.

Figure 10.3
Lower Manhattan.



The WTC site is adjacent to this historic district. Across the street is Battery Park City, which was built in the 1980s in the area where ships once docked. Constructed on landfill formed in part by the dirt dug up from the WTC site, it is a major residential, business, and recreation area. North of the WTC site is the city's civic centre and TriBeCa, an affluent family neighbourhood consisting mostly of converted and elegantly rehabilitated warehouses and industrial buildings. To the east are the South Street Seaport (another historic district), and Chinatown.

To form the WTC, 12 historic blocks were bulldozed and combined to form a single super block. Two streets, Washington and Greenwich, running north–south were blocked and three streets, Fulton, Dey and Courtlandt, running from east–west were truncated. The WTC site was an anomaly in both its heartless destruction of historic sites and the audacity of its towering heights. That audacity came to symbolize New York City (and America) as a global centre of business and finance.

As the city expanded north, the size of its streets and blocks became larger and, consequently, so did the mass and size of its buildings. Elegant skyscrapers like the Woolworth Building sprung up in the early 1900s, creating a lively contrast with the older structures. This mixture of height and mass still characterizes Lower Manhattan. It is within the context of these images that we considered the revitalization of Lower Manhattan, the reconstruction of the WTC site and other destroyed buildings.

Economic and societal changes

Downtown Manhattan began to decline as an office centre in the 1920s and 1930s. The WTC was built to reverse that trend, but it was not successful. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, astute property owners converted many older office buildings to residences. Together with the conversion of the surrounding industrial buildings into artist lofts, family-sized apartments, and the construction of the Battery Park City neighbourhood, a new residential downtown was born alongside and interspersed among Wall Street office buildings. Before September 11, there was a negative impact on the quality of life in this new, emerging 24/7 community due to a lack of civic amenities and integrated transportation. It was a fledgling, mixed-use community caught between urban land uses of the 20th century and the emerging ones of the 21st century.