

Comparing 09 11 world trade center to the triangle shirtwaiste fire of 1911

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& Number: Comparisons (9/11 and 1911) 24 June There are more similarities than differences when we compare the events of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the disastrous fire of 1911 concerning a shirtwaist factory in New York. Both are unmitigated man-made calamities which claimed a disproportionately high number of human lives, most of them innocent victims from avoidable circumstances.

The tragedy at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory occurred on a late afternoon when about 500 employees (mostly women) were about to leave their shift. They were all looking forward to a good sunny Saturday on March 25, 1911 and many had just collected their pay on fateful day from their boss at the Asch Building. Back then, safety measures incorporated in today's workplaces were not yet in place as mandated by legislation and there was only one fire exit for all of them in case of an emergency (McNeese 7). There had been a similar fire just a few weeks earlier but it was a small fire and easily contained; this time, the fire was much larger. About 100 people were burned to death (79 were young Jewish women) and another 50 died when they jumped to their deaths from the burning upper floors of the building. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks targeted the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York which resulted in a total of 2,752 victims (343 firefighters and 60 police officers included who were first responders). Many of the victims were trapped inside floors as the elevators failed to function due to the extreme heat generated by the burning jet fuel. In addition, many people escaped to the upper floors but eventually jumped to

their deaths in the similar fashion as those women who jumped from the Asch Building nine decades earlier. The number of deaths could have been prevented from rising if adequate safety measures had been put in place by the authorities, again similar to what happened during the 1911 fire.

Performance - the firefighters actions immediately during and after both fires leaves a lot to be desired although nobody can fault them if this was so. In the Triangle Shirtwaist site, there was not much they can do as they lacked the necessary equipment (such as ladders) even if the fire just lasted a mere 15 minutes. In the Twin Towers case, firefighters were similarly in the same situation as the two buildings were skyscrapers and beyond their reach also. The lack of proper coordination such as setting up a command and incident system center contributed a lot to the confusion in both cases and may have contributed to many unnecessary deaths.

Scope of Tragedy - both fires claimed a disproportionate number of foreign workers. In the shirtwaist factory fire, most of the fatalities were young women who were either of Italian or Jewish descent (mostly immigrant laborers) while the dead in the Twin Towers also had a high number of foreigners among them, as the two buildings housed a good number of offices in which nationals from some 70 countries reported for work on that morning. It may be a bit disconcerting to note that a good number of people had watched the spectacle as if they were once-in-a-lifetime events (indeed they were!) and see people jumping to their deaths. It seared the nations psyche and some individuals who watched were truly traumatized by them.

Reaction of the Nation - prior to the fire at the factory back in 1911, working conditions were horrendous as these garment factories were sweatshops in

the true sense of the word. At that time, there was no strict enforcement of labor laws and safety regulations. The reactions of politicians, labor union organizers and the general public was to pass legislation which had banned these dangerous and unsanitary work conditions. In the terrorist attacks of 9-11, there was a reaction of feelings of vulnerability among the citizenry. This in turn led to the crafting of a new mentality which was the global war against terror. Additionally, it caused Americans to be security conscious as we experience today in airports. Fire prevention is now evolving in New York City by being more efficient and user-friendly to firefighters too (Hashagen 241).

Works Cited

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