



Lucien G. Canton, CEM  
Emergency Management For The 21st Century

Emergency Management  
Solutions



Lucien Canton is a nationally recognized expert on strategic planning for crisis and disasters. A popular speaker and lecturer, he is the author of the best-selling *Emergency Management: Concepts and Strategies for Effective Programs* used as a textbook in many higher education courses.

Prior to starting his own company, Mr. Canton served as the Director of Emergency Services for the city and county of San Francisco and as an Emergency Management Programs Specialist and Chief of the Hazard Mitigation Branch for FEMA Region IX.

Lucien G. Canton, CEM (LLC), is a management consulting firm specializing in the development of effective solutions to crisis planning.

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## Remembering September 16<sup>th</sup>

### *Lessons From the Terrorist Attack in New York City*

**F**oreigners believing in strange ideologies try to force their beliefs on others through terrorism. Bombings and assassinations occur throughout the world and eventually reach the United States. A major terrorist attack takes place in New York City, resulting in a backlash against specific ethnic groups and leading to major changes in law enforcement, intelligence collection and immigration laws.

Sound familiar? No, I didn't get the date wrong. The events I'm describing actually took place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, culminating in an explosion on Wall Street on September 16, 1920 that killed thirty-eight people and wounded and maimed many others. It was the worst terrorist attack in the United States until the 1995 Oklahoma City attack.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, open immigration had led to an influx of foreign nationals, a number of whom were anarchists, socialists and communists. At the same time, workers seeking to improve their conditions lacked a unifying belief system. In addition, dynamite, introduced commercially in the US in 1885, offered a new, powerful

weapon that was cheap and readily available. Taken together, these three factors proved an unfortunate combination of circumstances that led to considerable violence.

The anarchists were particularly dangerous as they firmly believed in the use of bombings and assassinations as legitimate weapons of social change. For years they had waged a campaign in Europe that had seen the assassination of Czar Alexander II of Russia in 1881 and King Umberto of Italy in 1900. By the late 1800's, they were operating in the United States. In 1886, a bomb thrown at a rally in Haymarket Square in Chicago led to the death of a policeman and ultimately to the hanging of four anarchists and the suicide of a fifth on charges of conspiracy. In 1901, President McKinley was assassinated by an anarchist. On June 2, 1919, a coordinated conspiracy led to explosions in seven cities in the United States.

It was the Wall Street bombing of September 12, 1920, however, that caused the most outrage. On that morning, a wagon parked in front of the Morgan Bank exploded. In

addition to the explosive, the wagon also included a quantity of lead sash weights that had no purpose other than to maim and kill. The horror of the attack made it a high priority investigation for the Justice Department's Bureau of Investigation (later the Federal Bureau of Investigation), the New York Police Department and a number of private detectives. By the time the investigation was closed, two Bureau directors had lost their jobs and reputations, the Justice Department was forced to disband its General Intelligence Division, and J. Edgar Hoover was in charge of the Bureau of Investigations. The Justice Department was able to get legislation passed that restricted immigration and allowed the deportation of subversives. The bomber or bombers were never identified.

Aside from being an interesting historical footnote, why should we remember the Wall Street bombing?

If we examine the context of the 1920 attack, we find many parallels to our current war on terror. These parallels are striking both in terms of the perceived enemy and in the reaction it provoked. As a terrorist group, anarchists were definitely what we would call a credible threat. They had been active in Europe from the 1860's with a program of assassination of key political figures and industrialists before coming to the United States. They specifically viewed terrorism as the primary weapon in their arsenal and encouraged members to bomb and kill. The lack of immigration controls allowed them to enter the United States and our freedoms allowed them to recruit and encourage others.

The government reaction to anarchism is equally instructive. The first BOI Director in charge of the bombing investigation, William J. Flynn, fixated on Italian anarchists, to the exclusion of any other leads. William J. Burns, the second, favored Russian Communists and took potentially unethical action to prove his point. Unfortunately, the government also saw fit to bend the Constitution to combat the perceived threat. The anarchists hanged in connection with the Haymarket incident were never actually connected to the crime itself. In 1919-1921, the Justice Department orchestrated a series of raids that led to the questionable deportation of over 500 suspected anarchists. Sacco and Vanzetti, two anarchists, were executed for murder in 1927 in what many historians believe was a miscarriage of justice.

By the mid 1920's, anarchist violence disappeared rather abruptly. This was partly due to the rise of Soviet-led communism which rejected individual acts of terrorism and partly the result of the Palmer raids having caused many anarchists to go underground or voluntarily leave the United States. By 1924, haphazard immigration policies were replaced by rigid quotas that heavily restricted Italians and eastern European Jews. Perhaps most importantly, the labor movement finally began to win the federal protections it needed, eliminating the fertile breeding ground for violence.

So the lessons we can take from the Wall Street bombing of 1920 are simple. We cannot allow a crisis to force us to over react nor can we allow our prejudices to control our actions. We must continue to be guided by our principles and ethics, no matter what the situation.

Additionally, the solution to terrorism often lies not in overt action against the terrorists but in eliminating the conditions that give rise to terrorists.

There is nothing new under the sun. If it's happened before, it will happen again and as emergency managers, we must be grounded in history. In the words of George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Further reading:

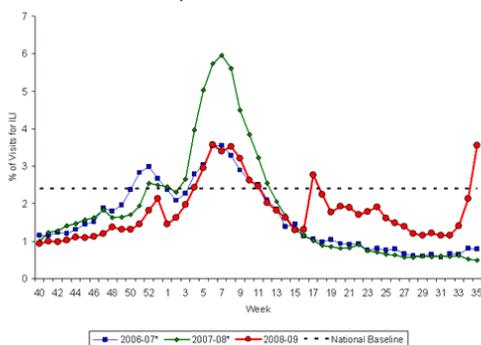
Gage, B. (2009). *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terror*. New York: Oxford University Press.

## Pandemic Update

There's good news and bad news on the pandemic front. The bad news is that if you don't already have your pandemic planning done, you're out of time. If you look at the graph below, you'll note a significant uptick in reports of influenza-like illnesses, suggesting that this year's flu season is already underway.

You can get more information from the CDC at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/>

Percentage of Visits for Influenza-like Illness (ILI) Reported by the US Outpatient Influenza-like Illness Surveillance Network (ILINet), National Summary 2008-09 and Previous Two Seasons



\*There was no week 53 during the 2006-07 and 2007-08 seasons, therefore the week 53 data point for those seasons is an average of weeks 52 and 1.

More bad news: a national survey of businesses by the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) found that only one-third of those surveyed believe they could sustain their business without severe operational problems if half their workforce were absent for two weeks due to the flu. You can read the full report at [http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/files/H1N1\\_Topline\\_9.9.09\\_Final.doc](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/files/H1N1_Topline_9.9.09_Final.doc)

There is some good news, however. Reports from the southern hemisphere suggest that while H1N1 is now the dominant influenza strain in most parts of the world, studies have detected no signs that the virus has mutated to a more virulent or lethal form. In addition, studies from Australia indicate that the flu vaccine is effective with only one shot rather than the two originally projected, which means more vaccine to go around. DHHS is expecting the first shipments to be available about a week ahead of schedule.

### WHAT'S NEW?

*I had to migrate to a new blog page, so if you're not receiving my latest blogs, make sure you're pointed to the new page. You can sign up under the **Free Resources** section on my website, [www.luciencanton.com](http://www.luciencanton.com)*

*Please feel free to send me your comments on this issue of **Emergency Management Solutions** or suggestions for future topics.*