

Edinburgh Napier Lecturer's Boston Blog



Kate Smith is Programme Leader for the BA Journalism in the School of Arts and Creative Industries at Edinburgh Napier University and she is spending part of the summer in Boston. We asked her to blog for us while she is there so this is the first of what we hope will be many blogs!

Boston Strong by Kate Smith

My first week as Fellow at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism here at Harvard University has been interesting.

My last lengthy stay in the States was 2007 and Obama's America seems very different. Recovery from the recession is noticeable and apart from a few stalled construction projects such as the totemic Filene's store in the Downtown area of Boston, where the teetering cliff-like facade has been preserved whilst plans for the planned skyscraper have stalled, the energy and industry is very different than six years ago. The mood is optimistic. Such good recovery from the recession offers hope for the UK, and the lesson of emerging with more, and not less, social protection in place perhaps also offers a salutary counterpoint to Cameron and Osborne's austerity measures.



Filenes (Creative Commons)

There is further dignified recovery from the recent Boston marathon bombings on Patriots' Day. The temporary memorials in Boylston Street, west of Copley Square were removed last week and there is public debate about archiving these and creating permanent memorials. There is also respectful coverage of the ongoing recovery of the survivors. The civic pride in Boston is obvious and unlike, say New York, each individual seems to take responsibility for the city they

love. Tee-shirts and banners declare 'Boston Strong' and although feelings about the bombings obviously run deep, the stoicism and great sense of pride are Boston's true badge of honour.

There was also a special election last week in this liberal cradle. Newly-minted as Secretary of State and already on his fifth visit to Israel-Palestine, the election for John Kerry's former seat returned Democrat Edward Markey to the Senate in a brief election with a low turnout. On its 'consensus not gridlock' ticket the election may foreshadow the themes of the forthcoming Presidential election in 2016. Like Chicago, politics runs in the veins here. Restaurants sell Joe Biden 2016 burgers which perhaps indicate the partisan leanings of the majority of the people. Part of the civic pride is drawn from the legacy of the famous sons, the Kennedys, including most recently their Senator Ted Kennedy, the Liberal Lion. That Martin Luther King studied at Boston University is also important to Bostonians.

Lastly, the trial of alleged mafia boss 'Whitey' Bulger grips the imagination of the city. Perhaps the inspiration for Jack Nicholson's character in the *Departed*, Bulger's case speaks of a bygone era of Irish-American gangsters and turf wars. Like the Boston Tea party, the era is now rehabilitated as part of the founding story of Boston and the former Massachusetts Bay Colony. What really matters here though, is the future and aiming at the horizon is what really makes Boston Strong.

Giving history its place yet not being trapped by it. Stoic defence of its reputation as the catalyst of revolutionary ideas and the cradle of Liberal ideals, even in the face of violence, seems to capture the essence of Boston.