

Olympics Take Away

Revisiting East London: On Second Thought

by Charles Strohmer

By the middle of the provocative Opening Ceremony (OC) for the Olympics two weeks ago, I was having a gut reaction and immediately blogged about it, with a provocative title itself: [Nightmares in East London](#). For reasons too obvious to need mentioning, gut reactions should afterward be engaged by the careful thinking of others who are 'in the know.' So I hoped get some insider-thoughts from the UK, and I did. If you haven't read the conversation between 'Chris' and 'Charles' in that blog, you may want to do that before you go any further into this post. I'm writing this on Sunday, the last day of the Olympics.

One thing I've learned is not to blog about an OC in the middle of an OC! In an email from England a week into the Olympics, my friend Carrie commented that it seemed most Brits took a certain pride in confounding people all around the world about the OC, in leaving them wondering what it was all about. To her, 'the view of ourselves as 'eccentric, wacky, slightly weird but creative' was strengthened as a result of it all.'

On a more serious note, I've been reminded that the OC for an Olympics sits within the bigger picture of the entire Olympics, which sits within the yet bigger picture of the host culture. I know quite a bit about this particular host culture from years of personal experience, but not having been there for a few years, I confess to some ignorance of the current ethos. What hosting the Olympics has meant on so many levels to the people of UK is what I missed by not being there.

For one thing, it has stimulated an economy suffering greatly from what has been called the worst double-dip recession in 50 years. Carrie also wrote that Olympic fever has gripped the country, so much so that tickets for the Paralympics were nearly all sold out. She also loved the children's choirs that played a large role in the OC, 'especially the choir with mixed hearing and hearing-impaired children.'

An educator, she noted the theme of these Olympics, 'Inspire a Generation,' which was strongly promoted in the British commentary, but not in its American equivalent. She reminded me of the many leading, community programs that she and her family and colleagues and many others have been at the center of, in churches, in education, in Romania, in Africa, to inspire hope in deeply practical ways for the next generation. 'The theme 'Inspire a Generation' is close to our hearts,' she wrote. 'Everyone is asking: how can we build on what the Games has brought to Britain in terms of getting the whole nation, especially the youngsters, up and out of their seats! There has been a big push with regard to sport in schools in the build-up to the Games.'

I hope she's right in her conclusion that 'something has shifted in the nation during the Jubilee and now the Games. It will be our job to keep that burning in communities, schools, and clubs. I do believe it could make a difference to many kids who will be inspired by it all.'

I now find much more to applaud.