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## **GOTHAM**

By **GEORGE J. MARLIN**

A History of New York City to 1898  
By Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace  
Oxford University Press, 1,383 pages, \$49.95

Most New Yorkers have one thing in common--the old ethnic neighborhood. Poles, Jews, Hispanics, Asians, Irish, Italians, and Germans blend with the cosmopolitan environment when working in Manhattan. But when they return at day's end to the neighborhoods of Greenpoint, Williamsburg, Jackson Heights, Flushing, Woodside, Bay Ridge, and Ridgewood, they return to a way of life consistent with their cultural heritage.

As youths in those neighborhoods, we were parochial and protective of a turf that was often nothing more than a piece of concrete sidewalk or stoop. There were stickball, punchball, boxball, and scooters made of wooden milk crates. The most athletic would boast how many sewers they could punch their Spalding rubber ball. (Manhole covers are about 75 feet apart, so a ball that hit two sewers traveled about 150 feet.) Growing up in the neighborhoods also meant being initiated into virtues of family, education, discipline, hard work, and loyalty.

Regrettably, many outsiders can't grasp the significance of the ethnic neighborhood or how its citizenry operates. Many wrongly view it as a breeding ground for racism, narrow-mindedness, and rudeness. They don't understand that neighborhoods are self-contained life centers that promote an environment that protects human values and repulses state domination of human behavior.

In their monumental first volume (20 years in the making) City University of New York professors Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace demonstrate that New York City has been a confederation of ethnic neighborhoods since its founding. Their history confirms G. K. Chesterton's observation during his lecture tour in the 1920's: "New York is a cosmopolitan city, but it is not a city of cosmopolitans. Most of the masses in New York have a nation, whether or not it be the nation to which New York belongs. They are exiles or they are citizens, there is no moment when they are cosmopolitans. But very often the exiles bring with them not only rooted traditions but rooted truths."

From its inception, New York was a city of ethnics that led the way in trading, maritime shipping, municipal and corporate finance, banking, transportation, manufacturing, shipbuilding, the arts, and dining. New York gave us Peter Minuit of the Dutch West India Co., who in 1626 purchased Manhattan for \$24 to ensure a safe neighborhood for his company employees; Peter Stuyvesant, who in the 1640s built the first public works and food and financial markets; John Peter Zenger, who founded The Weekly Journal (1735) and in the courtroom established the principle of freedom of the press; Alexander Hamilton, who in 1784 chartered the city's first bank and in 1801

