

AUTHOR: Keith Cassidy

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Gotham: A History of New York to 1898, by Edwin G. Burrows and *Mike Wallace*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1999. xxiv, 1,383 pp. \$42.00 U.S.

This book is a major achievement in historical scholarship, entirely worthy of its Pulitzer Prize. It promises, moreover, to become a classic work, influential for decades. Its enormous bulk -- 1,236 pages of text, two indices (subject and name) and a bibliography of well over 2,000 items -- at first glance appears excessive, particularly since it only covers the city up to the amalgamation of the boroughs in 1898. In fact the reader soon becomes aware that it is entirely appropriate to its subject. The centrality of New York to the history of the United States, and its role by the early twentieth century as one of the world's great cities, is made fully evident in this volume.

However, this is not just a book for historians of New York, nor even of the United States: all historians can learn from the authors' skillful integration of recent social histories into their narrative framework. The work flows so smoothly, and the tone is so lively, that the reader is tempted to insufficiently appreciate the intelligence with which this task is carried out.

Respecting their decision to use the narrative form, Burrows and Wallace proclaim that "Our book will journey along through time, taking each moment on its own terms, respecting its uniqueness" (p. xvi). Acknowledging that every history is a construction, they ask, "So what's our take, our angle, our shtick?" (ibid.). In answer they announce that it is to take all aspects of the city's life -- economic, social, cultural, intellectual, and political -- and make connections among them. The boldness of this goal is striking. Given the explosion of specialized studies in recent decades, their stated intent to "suture these partial stories together and present a picture of urban life as a rounded whole" (ibid.) is breathtaking. That they have largely succeeded is even more so.

Most cities have myths about their origins, and in two of the tales about New York the authors find keys to its character. One is the series of whimsical stories by Washington Irving, in which he dubs it "*Gotham*" -- an English village renowned in the Middle Ages for the folly of its inhabitants. In doing so he underscored the stories' picture of "Manhattan as a city of self-important and foolish people" (p. xi). There was another side to the tale, however, for the folly of the Gothamites was often portrayed as a ruse, designed to deceive credulous outsiders. It was the latter interpretation which made the pseudonym acceptable to New Yorkers.

The better known tale is that New York was purchased for \$24.00 from the Indians. While it is clear that some kind of bargain was struck, the classic story is far from factual. However, "mere facts are beside the point," and the tale lives on "because it ratifies the popular conviction that deal driving and sharp practice and moneymaking and real estate lie somewhere near the core of New York's genetic material" (p. xv). Indeed it points to the fundamental fact that New York would rise, not as a centre of religion, nor of military or governmental activity, but as a commercial centre. The book traces "the nature and consequences of that development" (p. xvii).

The authors deny any intent to impose an "overarching plot line or tidy thesis." but they do have a "central conviction" that shapes the book, namely that New York is not understandable by looking solely at events taking place within its boundaries, because its connections to the wider world are at its heart. Not that the city was determined by external forces, but rather that they provided the context within which "the men and women of New York, in conflict and compromise, repeatedly reshaped their city" (p. xvi).

Several levels of analysis arise from this perspective. At the highest is New York's position "in an evolving global economy" (p. xvi). The New York area was early drawn into the emerging imperial world system, at first as a backwater, but assuming a far more prominent role once it was part of the British Empire. After Independence it became the new nation's "premier linkage point between industrializing Europe and its North American agricultural

hinterland" (p. xvii). After the Civil War it became the chief agent of the nation's industrialization and the centre of corporate control. In the early twentieth century it was a rival of London; by mid-century it was the undisputed centre of the world economy; in recent decades "a more decentered transnational capitalism" has lessened its power, but it remains the "most prominent among a handful of world cities" (p. xviii).

The next level of analysis is New York's relations with the rest of the nation. Here it has traced a "bell-shaped trajectory" (ibid.). It rose in importance over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a fact manifested in the practice of identifying sections of New York with major aspects of the American economy and social and cultural life: Wall Street, Madison Avenue, Broadway, and Fifth Avenue are prime examples.

The city became "envied and emulated" but also "feared and resented" throughout the nation (xviii). With the New Deal and the Cold War, however, power flowed to Washington and to the regional rivals of New York in the south and west.

The shifts over the centuries in New York's relations with the global and national economies prompted repeated changes in its internal economic arrangements. These shifts provide the book with its five divisions: "Lenape Country and New Amsterdam to 1664"; "British New York (1664-1783)"; "Mercantile Town (1783-1843)"; "Emporium and Marketing City (1844-1879)"; and "Industrial Centre and Corporate Command Post (1880-1898)".

While these divisions provide the larger structure of the book, the authors note that as the city is followed year by year "a more sinuous rhythm demands consideration: the alternation of peaks of prosperity with troughs of hard times that dominated the experience of everyday life" (p. xx). These patterns manifest themselves not only in the texture of people's lives, but also in the built environment, as renewals of prosperity drew on new styles of architecture and new technologies, with each period leaving fragments behind for posterity. One of the many strengths of the book is precisely this awareness of the living presence of the past in the city's physical structures.

The city's story is unfolded in sixty-nine chapters, each a marvel of synthesis. They would be impressive just as a compendium of scholarship, but they are far more. While they deal with topics as diverse as politics, immigration, sex, industrial growth, transportation, reform, sanitation, entertainment, poverty, and race, they do so in a way that shows the linkages between them and tells the story of a city, not a set of isolated studies. The reader comes away from each of the five large divisions of the book with a sense of what it must have been like to experience the city as a resident, aware of different aspects of life, but also seeing them as part of a larger reality.

What becomes apparent as well is the enormous dynamism of New York life: this is truly a city which never rests. The city's vitality is well matched by the authors' lively and engaging writing style. They modestly dismiss this as "a relatively easy task" given the city's "intrinsically dazzling" story (p. xxii), and indeed the stock of colourful characters and incidents is impressive. However, their own light touch is apparent in such observations as that after the demise of bull and bear baiting by 1820, "cockfighting continued, as did ratbaiting, a blood sport even more suitably scaled for urban life" (p. 486). Their treatment of the Rev. Charles Parkhurst's anti-vice crusade provides them with rich material. Thus when Parkhurst went in disguise to explore New York's sinful secrets, he was accompanied by "a dandy whose initial notion of deep cover was to put on last year's suit" (p. 1,168).

While this is a jointly authored book, the switch from one section to the other is seamless. Edwin Burrows took primary responsibility for Chapters One to Twenty-Six, while *Mike Wallace* did the rest, and the Introduction. Both edited and contributed to the chapters produced by the other. A second volume by *Mike Wallace* will appear soon, which will carry the story up to the end of the twentieth century. Inevitably there are a few glitches, but the errors that do occur are of little consequence. More annoying is the system of referencing. Each chapter is divided into sections, and the citations for those sections consist simply of an alphabetical list of the books and articles used in the section. Finding the source of a particular fact or quotation can be a considerable challenge. As well, while the maps in the book are good, there could be more of them. These are ultimately minor problems. What is notable is the degree to which the authors have succeeded in fulfilling their vision of the role of history.

For them, history can be useful as well as entertaining, but it must avoid the traps of being a saga of a rise to greatness, or a tale of decline: "straight-line scenarios, whether optimistic or pessimistic, usually pose false questions and offer false alternatives. Our hope rather is that a history that respects the complexity of human affairs can offer well-grounded insights into our current situation" (p. xxiv). This they have produced. Everyone can learn much from this remarkable volume.

ADDED MATERIAL

Keith Cassidy, University of Guelph