

Edwin G. Burroughs and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford, 1999).

By David Bartelt

Gotham, the name originally given to New York City in Washington Irving's *A History of New York* (1809), is a social, political, and economic history of New York City. Irving sought to create an "epic pedigree" (p. xii) for the city; Burrows and Wallace, in contrast, have created an epic volume that sets forth the social, political, and economic themes shaping New York, from its days as a settlement of Lenape Indians to the end of the nineteenth century. It also serves as a backdrop for a future work on twentieth century New York. By now, this Pulitzer prize winning work has become known as a background piece for the PBS series on the history of New York, and in its own right as a significant contribution to the craft of urban historians. Its range of sources is exemplary, and its ability to develop a narrative flow of the city's development will set a high standard for future historical analyses of specific cities.

The range of this work is extensive. Its length, 1236 pages of text, with another 69 page bibliography is daunting, suggesting that its most frequent use will be as a reference work or as a source of readings for a variety of topics and/or time periods. Nonetheless, the work has the integrity of a complete piece, one that sets its parameters clearly at the outset and continues through the end of the nineteenth century.

Burrows and Wallace suggest in their introduction that New York's "municipal history" was determined by the ways in which "the men and women of New York, in conflict and in compromise, repeatedly reshaped their city" (p. xvii). They did so against a backdrop of forces that framed the emergence of the city, particularly its shifting position in an increasingly global economy, and the relationship of cities in general, and especially New York, to the largely agricultural nation of seventeenth to nineteenth century North America.

New York, like many cities, continually reshaped its municipal boundaries, experiencing a variety of governing mechanisms over its history from colonial administration through the contested relationship between machine bosses and reformers. The political life of the city is described as a mix of civic necessity, morality plays, and opportunism. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of this work is the way in which it integrates the political evolution of the city to a recurrent rhythm of poverty and prosperity (as well as its coexistence).

Gotham is organized around five major eras: "Lenape Country and New Amsterdam to 1664"; "British New York (1664-1783)"; "Mercantile Town (1783-1843)"; "Emporium and Manufacturing City (1844-1879)"; and its eventual emergence as an "Industrial Center and Corporate Command Post (1880-1898)". The presentation, while broadly set as a temporal narrative, does not adhere to rigid time lines, but uses these themes to

ground detailed discussions of day to day life, business and politics.

Several overarching themes appear and reappear across these periods: the continual efforts to devise a civic space, a governance system, and a public infrastructure that would facilitate urban expansion are always present. But this work also includes the intertwining of religious ideologies, social conflicts, immigration, and cultural diversity that have become synonymous with American urban life, set against the backdrop of an omnipresent, shifting sphere of economic activity in markets, shop floors, and offices. These are common themes in many urban histories; less commonly seen are some of the ways in which disease, fires, and wars were recurrent events that were pivotal in shaping the city's development, as were the emergence of centers of recreational activities, such as clubs, fraternal societies, parks, taverns, gambling establishments, houses of prostitution, and race tracks.

Throughout the 69 chapters of this book, one additional theme recurs—the ways in which the degree and complexity of social stratification altered its economic, racial, and ethnic configurations, and over time, evolved into the mix of wage and property inequality that formed the basis of the labor movement at the turn of the twentieth century. If nothing else, this volume serves to remind us that many American cities had pre-industrial origins that shaped its history before the development of the factory floor and wage labor. Also striking in its presence in this history is the attention that is paid to gender inequality and the gendered nature of social spaces that emerged over the entire period of this history.

This is a complex, often sprawling, volume to contend with. Its chapters range from detailed discussions of significant events to global sweeps of empire and commerce. In effect, the authors suggest that the history of any city is one made by real actors responding to the press of both external and internal events. This creates a layered public sense of the city, in which monuments and public spaces become backdrops to the often gritty realities of day-to-day life.

This work does not fit neatly within any one conceptual paradigm. It does provide great detail about the city as a site within which cultural production, mass consumption, political economy, physical geography, infrastructure constraints and opportunities, the balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces, density and open space, nativists and immigrants, scoundrels and the civic-minded, and sinners and their would-be saviors all interact and play their parts in creating a series of stages upon which succeeding generations of New Yorkers play their parts.

I encourage would be readers to go beyond Gotham as a reference work and treat this as an example of how to write a history that reflects the often unwieldy nature of a city's development. At the same time, it is properly understood as a work that provides readers with the basics of the city's past, all the while inviting them to pursue particular themes in greater detail and providing the sources to do so. As such, specialists in one or another area will inevitably look for more detail than can be provided in such a work, no matter its breadth. The coauthors' clear sense of admiration and appreciation for the city of New

York implicitly draws attention to this one city, limiting the discussion of a growing of urban America as the context for the city's development. But the urban system, while it could have been explored more specifically, is clearly beyond the scope of this work. The regional development of the US is noted, but largely as providing support for New York's emergence at the head of an emerging urban hierarchy.

Indeed, it is difficult to read Gotham without noting the contrast, even the tension, between New York and the rest of the nation that appears rooted in the dependency and socio-political identity of the US. Burrows and Wallace point to the growing dependence of many other urban economies on the central role that New York played in the finance and administration of urban economic development across the US; New York also played a role as the iconic American city in a national symbology that stressed agrarian and small town themes. In this sense, the history of New York provides both optimism and pessimism for the urban future. But as the authors point out in their introduction, "Gotham is not about ransacking the past for evidence of Spenglerian decline or Panglossian progress" (p. xxiv).

In conclusion, let me recommend Gotham as both a methodological tour de force of urban historical research, an engaging narrative of New York's development and a substantial reference work on both New York's and the nation's pre-twentieth century urban development.

ADDED MATERIAL

David Bartelt
Temple University

REFERENCE

Irving, W. (1809). History of New York from the beginning of the world to the end of the Dutch dynasty. Chicago and New York: Belford, Clarke and Company.

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