



Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898 (The History of NYC Series)

By Edwin G. Burrows, Mike Wallace

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To European explorers, it was Eden, a paradise of waist-high grasses, towering stands of walnut, maple, chestnut, and oak, and forests that teemed with bears, wolves, raccoons, beavers, otters, and foxes. Today, it is the site of Broadway and Wall Street, the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty, and the home of millions of people, who have come from every corner of the nation and the globe.

In Gotham, Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace have produced a monumental work of history, one that ranges from the Indian tribes that settled in and around the island of Manna-hata, to the consolidation of the five boroughs into Greater New York in 1898. It is an epic narrative, a story as vast and as varied as the city it chronicles, and it underscores that the history of New York is the story of our nation. Readers will relive the tumultuous early years of New Amsterdam under the Dutch West India Company, Peter Stuyvesant's despotic regime, Indian wars, slave resistance and revolt, the Revolutionary War and the defeat of Washington's army on Brooklyn Heights, the destructive seven years of British occupation, New York as the nation's first capital, the duel between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, the Erie Canal and the coming of the railroads, the growth of the city as a port and financial center, the infamous draft riots of the Civil War, the great flood of immigrants, the rise of mass entertainment such as vaudeville and Coney Island, the building of the Brooklyn Bridge and the birth of the skyscraper. Here too is a cast of thousands--the rebel Jacob Leisler and the reformer Joanna Bethune; Clement Moore, who saved Greenwich Village from the city's street-grid plan; Herman Melville, who painted disillusioned portraits of city life; and Walt Whitman, who happily celebrated that same life. We meet the rebel Jacob Leisler and the reformer Joanna Bethune; Boss Tweed and his nemesis, cartoonist Thomas Nast; Emma Goldman and Nellie Bly; Jacob Riis and Horace Greeley; police commissioner Theodore Roosevelt; Colonel Waring and his "white angels" (who revolutionized the sanitation department); millionaires John Jacob Astor, Cornelius Vanderbilt, August Belmont, and William Randolph Hearst; and hundreds more who left their mark on this great city.

The events and people who crowd these pages guarantee that this is no mere local history. It is in fact a portrait of the heart and soul of America, and a book that will mesmerize everyone interested in the peaks and valleys of American life as found in the greatest city on earth. *Gotham* is a dazzling read, a fast-paced, brilliant narrative that carries the reader along as it threads hundreds of stories

into one great blockbuster of a book.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Like the city it celebrates, *Gotham* is massive and endlessly fascinating. This narrative of well over 1,000 pages, written after more than two decades of collaborative research by history professors Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, copiously chronicles New York City from the primeval days of the Lenape Indians to the era when, with Teddy Roosevelt as police commissioner, the great American city became regarded as "Capital of the World." The sheer bulk of the book may be off- putting, but the reader can use a typically New York approach: Those who don't settle in for the entire history can easily "commute" in and out to read individual chapters, which stand alone nicely and cover the major themes of particular eras very well.

While *Gotham* is fact-laden (with a critical apparatus that includes a bibliography and two indices--one for names, another for subjects), the prose admirably achieves both clarity and style. "What is our take, our angle, our *schtick*?" ask the authors, setting a distinctly New York tone in their introduction. No matter what it's called, their method of weaving together countless stories works wonderfully. The startlingly detailed research and lively writing bring innumerable characters (from Peter Minuit to Boss Tweed) to life, and even those who think they know the history of New York City will no doubt find surprises on nearly every page. *Gotham* is a rarity, reigning as both authoritative history and page-turning story. --Robert McNamara

From Publishers Weekly

A tome matching the size of its subject, this doorstopper (the first of a two-volume history) more than justifies the 20 years Burrows and Wallace spent on itAnot to mention the space it will take on the nightstands of New Yorkers actual, former, future and presumptive. Its massive size permits the inclusion of details, minor characters and anecdotes of everyday life that vibrantly communicate the city's genesis and evolution. The authors have synthesized histories from various perspectives Acultural, economic, political, etc. Ainto a novelistic narrative, providing the context for stories of the diverse denizens who shaped the city. Both New York academics (Brooklyn College and CUNY, respectively), Burrows and Wallace have produced a historical work that merits the term "definitive" yet still manages to entertain. Underneath reasoned academic prose lies a populist bent, unflinching in relating ugly events and describing the unsavory behavior of prominent figures; in its original sense, "Gotham" denotes a town of tricksters and fools, and this book is full of both. Vague documentation may, on occasion, frustrate the academic reader, but such quibbles should be left to professional historians. The rest will read with pleasure and await the companion volume's promised appearance in the year 2000. 160 photos and linecuts and 15 maps not seen by PW. 40,000 copy first printing.

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From Library Journal

As grand-scale and ambitious as New York City itself, this book was 20 years in the making, but anyone interested in American or urban history will find it worth the wait. The authors, both New York academics, start with the teeming islands and waterways Europeans first encountered in New York harbor and move right up to the consolidation of the five boroughs to create "an imperial city." An almost frightening amount of research went into preparing the highly detailed text, but the result is a real saga that proves why New York is still the greatest city in the world.

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Users Review

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Luisa Johnson:

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Victor Dinh:

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