

Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: a history of New York City to 1898* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. xxiv + 1383. 158 figs. 25 maps. £30; \$49.95)

Gotham represents the culmination of a 20-year scholarly collaboration between Burrows and Wallace. Their mammoth work ambitiously chronicles the transition from a glacial carved landscape inhabited by native Americans to the sprawling urban metropolis of New York, which, on the eve of the twentieth century, appeared poised to become the 'capital of the world'. Defining it as a city of 'capital and commerce', Burrows and Wallace argue that the history of New York has been indelibly 'shaped by its shifting position in an evolving global economy' (p. xvii). In 1626 the Dutch reputedly purchased Manhattan Island from the Lenape Indians for a meagre \$24 worth of trade goods, a transaction which ushered in the development of the area as a Dutch trading post. Under British rule from 1664, European wars, religious conflicts, and the sugar (or 'white gold') trade influenced the character of the city. However, the major portion of *Gotham* (nearly 1,000 pages) considers the development of New York following the American Revolution. Charting the rise of the city as a mercantile and industrial centre, the authors describe how, after the mid-nineteenth century, New Yorkers facilitated expansion into the American West by financing canals and railways, while cementing the city's place in world trade with innovations such as steamships and telegraph communications.

Burrows and Wallace seek to 'present a picture of urban life as a rounded whole' (p. xvi), and adroitly weave together the economic development of the city with its political, social, cultural, and intellectual life. From sewers to skyscrapers, high society to poor immigrants, *Gotham* offers an exhaustive and entertaining journey. The book examines the role of leading politicians and industrialists; it also delves deep into the city, examining characters such as Washington Irving, who coined the 'Gotham' label in a series of witty articles on contemporary affairs during 1807. Using colourful examples, the hidden voices, and indeed the vices, of the city are explored, from the activities of the 'Sons of Liberty' (an organization representing New York's middle and labouring classes) in the American Revolution, to Gallus Mag, nineteenth-century female robber, worker at the Hole in the Wall tavern, and pickler of human ears. Burrows and Wallace present a city which allows room for both Herman Melville's depictions of menacing urbanity and Walt Whitman's celebratory prose.

Gotham offers a definitive history of New York, written in a detailed, yet accessible style, which will appeal to popular and academic audiences alike. However, given the in-depth nature of the work, historians may be disappointed by the provision of a general reference section rather than numbered citations. Although, as Burrows and Wallace suggest, detailed references would have consumed too many pages in an already lengthy work, the absence of footnotes inhibits academics from taking their own detours through past city streets. *Gotham* ends, or more accurately pauses, in 1898 with New York's municipal consolidation, leaving readers to hold their breath until the publication of volume 2 (a project undertaken by Wallace) on the twentieth century. Akin to the lively city the authors so vividly describe, their urban project also represents a 'work in progress'.

University of Bristol

KAREN WILLS