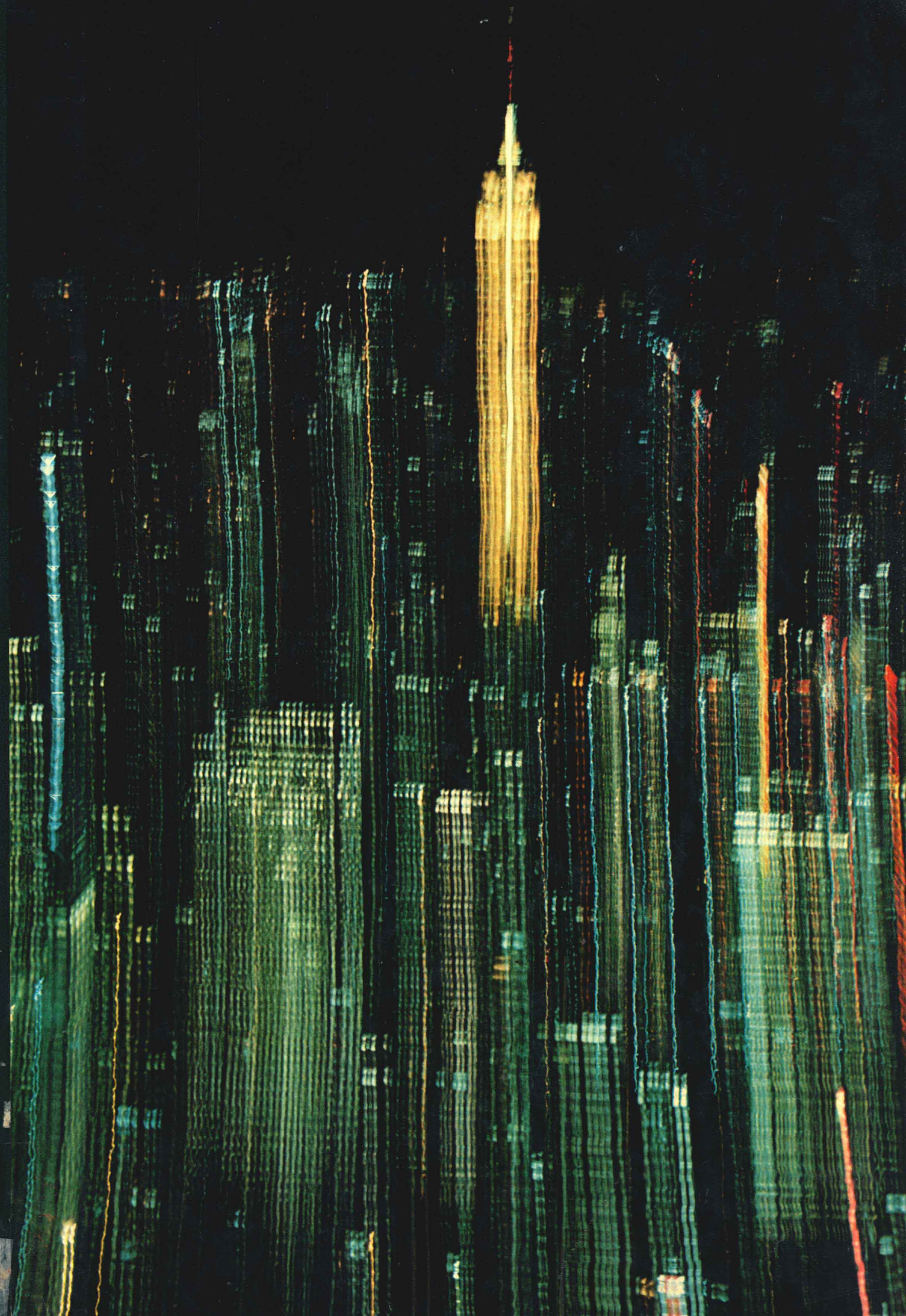


THE GREAT CITIES / **NEW YORK**



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NEW YORK

By Anthony Burgess
and the Editors of Time-Life Books

With Photographs by
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The Author: Anthony Burgess was born in Manchester, England, in 1917 and educated there, chiefly by Catholic priests but also by secular professors at Manchester University. He wanted to be a musician and also a newspaper cartoonist but became a teacher instead—both in England and in the dwindling British Colonial Empire. Invalided home from Borneo, he became a full-time writer. Since 1956 he has published more than 30 books. Of these *A Clockwork Orange*, filmed in 1971, has been the greatest popular success. Burgess composes music and his third symphony was performed in Iowa. He knows New York City well, having taught at Columbia University and City College, as well as at near-by Princeton.

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Cover: New York's electric dynamism is captured in an interpretative photograph of the midtown area, with the Empire State Building glowing at its centre. To achieve the light-streaked effect, the photographer elevated his tripod while making a time-exposure.

First end paper: A hazy afternoon sun shines on the grid-patterned cross-town streets of mid-Manhattan, running ruler-straight between the regiments of skyscrapers.

Last end paper: Gaunt warehouses with bricked-up windows stand blank and silent near Manhattan's West Side waterfront.



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The Real New York

My problem is, I think, mainly a stylistic one: *how* to write about New York City. The only verse-form that seems proper—free yet biblical, lyrical yet catalogic—was long ago pre-empted by the New York poet Walt Whitman to express the surging vigour of 19th-Century America; besides, this is a prose age. To use prose, however, is to be seduced, unless I keep my head, into echoing the overblown hyperbole of Madison Avenue, since the only alternative seems to be the chill monody of statistics. But this is a lover's book, so I shall risk the purple; and since this lover is also an Englishman, I shall blush occasionally at exhibiting too much emotion and so attempt the detached manner of a Gibbon.

I propose, then, to be as honest as it is possible for a lover to be; and I will be *very* honest at the outset, foregoing the usual authorial stance of calm and competence. I have written and published more than 30 books, but I have approached none of them with the fear and trembling I bring to my present task.

My first impressions of New York were emotive and very limited, as befits a slowly dawning love affair. When I was a boy in Manchester, my image of America was inevitably gained from the movies I saw. In the 1920s, my great epoch of movie-going, I was dealt a dumb monochrome America consisting of five provinces: the Wild West, Southern California, Chicago, some generic university town and New York. New York itself was reduced to one locale—the island of Manhattan—and the city's other four boroughs must forgive me if I concentrate in this first chapter on the source and focus of so much of my childhood fantasy. Manhattan was chiefly skyscrapers, easy for a youngster to draw, and no other place in the world expressed itself in such simple hieroglyphs. Doodling for me was very often just drawing a sort of Manhattan skyline. I knew New York: it lay in my pencil box.

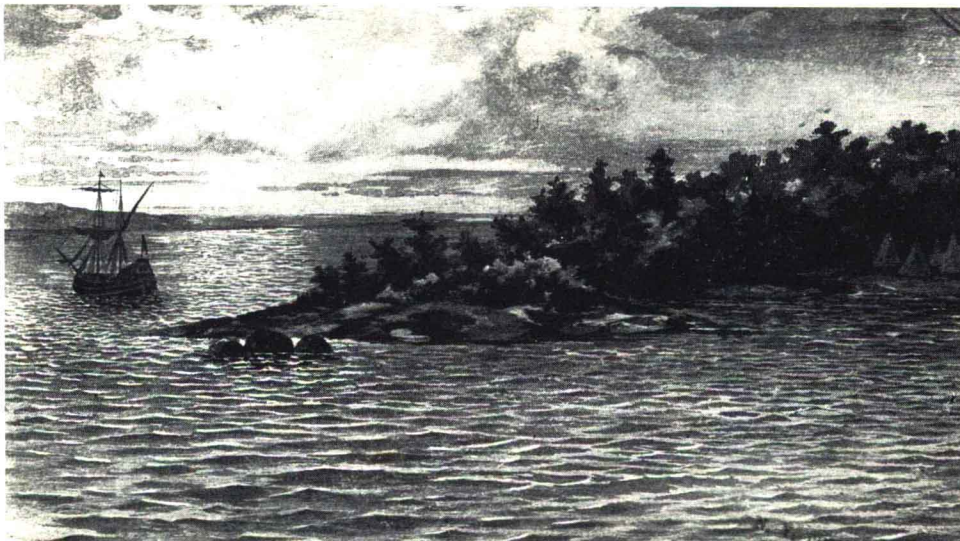
But then the talking-films arrived and for a time I no longer knew it. The growling or booming or scratchy dissonances of these early movies disclosed to the British that America had a different sound from England, and that the sound of New York was particularly and horribly alien. The city was further diminished to a single street—Broadway—and was inhabited exclusively by wisecracking, hardboiled chorines and desperate song-and-dance men. But as the talkies talked more, and sang and danced less, New York grew familiar again and even began to provide me with the basic parameters of metropolitan life. There was jungle toughness, but also

Hardened to the hazardous ways of his world, a New York City cab driver bites on the stump of his cigar while waiting for a traffic light to change. About 12,000 licensed cabs, painted yellow for visibility, cruise the city's streets, their drivers as willing to listen to their passengers' troubles as to tell their own.

sophistication, glamour, chic, wit. I had not yet visited London, although I assumed that in a London restaurant you waited for a table behind a velvet rope and were eventually allotted one by somebody Latin called the “maiter dee”. You surely drank highballs in London and it was not to be doubted that ice clinked in everything. (“Ice?” a London barman said to me when I at last reached a London bar. “Where would I get ice from on a day like this?”) London lawyers, I supposed, looked like Melvyn Douglas, had offices in penthouses and in court said, “Your witness.” I thought of London’s Underground as similar to the New York Subway and, when I first used it, was astonished at its actually being so clean and orderly.

The time came when New York displayed itself to me through literature, but a time later still showed how inadequate that literature was. No writer I know of has ever succeeded in exhibiting the whole panorama. Most writers on New York have found it easier to create a city of their own than to reproduce the reality. As a result, the images of New York recorded in the popular arts seemed—and still seem—truer than those in books.

In the clichéd imaginings of the Old World the New World is chiefly New York—restless, febrile, neurotic, brutal, endlessly creative, endlessly destructive, prizing the new for novelty’s sake, bizarre in its cultural and racial variety; Irish cops with night-sticks, Jewish impresarios with cigars, slums and penthouses, champagne air in a killing climate, perpetual decay and perpetual rebirth. But if the reality, when we meet it at last, shows how impotent all art must be when faced with the task of fixing the city on paper or even film, it also demonstrates that we who are born to the Old are not entirely wrong in believing that anything is possible to the New. If you imagine something that Old logic says cannot exist—say, cabbage stewed in double cream and saffron, or a one-legged black Armenian poetess whose father’s name was O’Shaughnessy—you are likely to find it, or at least go searching for it, in New York.



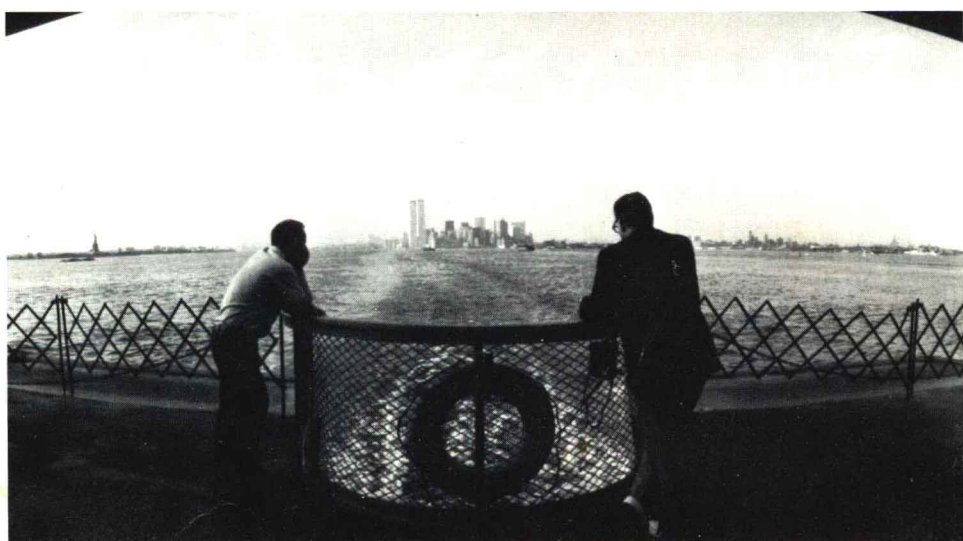
A 19th-Century print suggests how the tree-clad tip of Manhattan island looked to its discoverer, Henry Hudson, in 1609. His ship, the *Half Moon*, lies to the left. The English navigator, on a voyage of exploration for the Dutch East India Company, was the first to bring back to Europe a full account of the landlocked harbour and its rich hinterland.

Away from the city, I sometimes wonder whether I am remembering a dream or an actuality. Were there really three men playing Bach on clarinets on Broadway near 96th Street, while a mugged man's blood drained unheeded into the gutter? Perhaps it was only two clarinetists and perhaps there was not much blood. I am pretty certain that, coming home from a party at four in the morning, I found a bearded thug following me down Columbus Avenue, running when I ran, catching up to say that he disagreed with something I had written on the poetry of Andrew Marvell. Speech and appearance are not necessarily, as they are in London, a guide to the man within. Nor is trade identifiable with vocation: in a new world a man is always trying to be a new man. An immigration officer who processed me at Kennedy Airport sent me the typescript of a highly experimental novel; I once got a taxi-driver a Broadway audition, if not a role. There is a phantasmal quality about New York's image, appropriate to a water city. It is as if events are borne along on a swift tide.

My uneasiness about how to describe New York is matched by a certain guilt about the continuing honeymoon quality of my relationship to it, or her (Ezra Pound described the city as "a maid with no breasts . . . slender as a silver reed"). I have never shivered on Ellis Island with an immigrant's thin overcoat and cardboard suitcase, nor been desperate over the rent of a cold-water flat, nor even, as yet, been soundly mugged. My first visit to New York came when I was mature and already had something of a small literary reputation, and I arrived to warmth and the flesh-and-blood continuation of friendships already begun by letter.

I found the place kinder and softer-spoken than the movies had taught me to expect. I was prepared for toughness and rudeness but got little of either, perhaps because of my own cautious politeness. I was lucky in my first taxi-driver, who kindly confided that the British, though effete, had various moderately fine gentlemanly qualities. I stayed at the Algonquin,

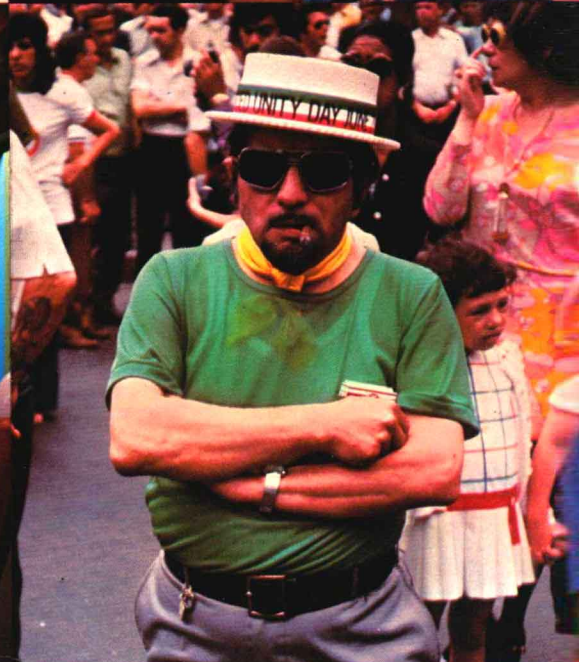
Where the first Dutch settlement once stood, the skyscrapers that crowd Manhattan's narrow southern point now rise hundreds of feet into the air. Seen over the broad stern of a departing Staten Island ferry, they mark out Manhattan from New Jersey (left) and the shores of Brooklyn (right) stretching north-eastwards towards Queens.

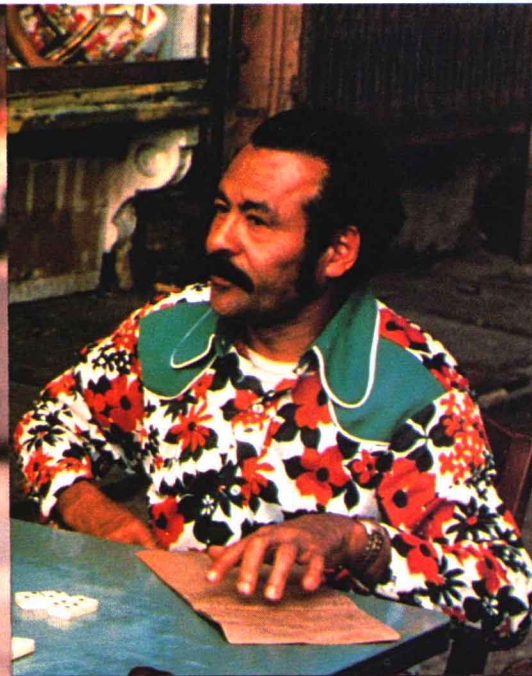
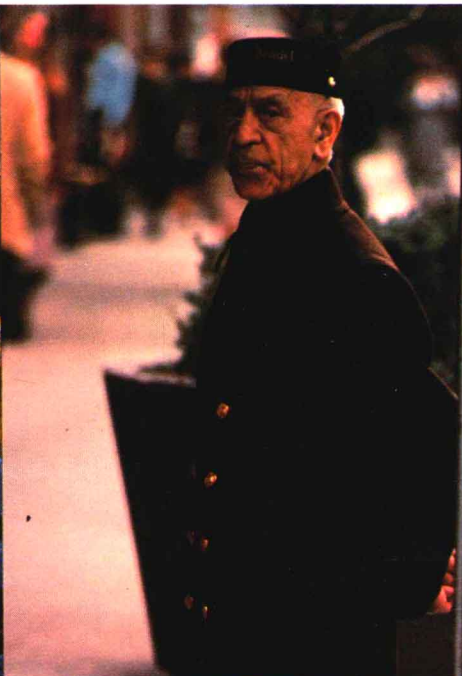


The Faces of the City

You can believe there is such a thing as a typical New Yorker—until you get to New York. But a day or two of observation suffices to prove the inhabitants' infinite variety.

Throughout its history the city has impressed observers by the endless mixture—racial, social, political, cultural—of its population, drawn continually from every country of the world and from every corner of the United States. For, if a happy-shirted Puerto Rican (top right) is a typical New Yorker, so is a melancholy black from Harlem (bottom row, second from right); so is a bow-tied art-lover at a smart party (same row)—or for that matter, any of the others in this photographic mosaic. From such a wealth of types the unique gift of New York to its people is conjured: the freedom and the opportunity to be fully and vividly themselves. And it is one of the secrets of the lasting spell of the city that there are as many real New Yorkers as there are people in New York.





just off Fifth Avenue, which is fond of writers and has a cosy British ambience. Until recently it was obligatory to wear a necktie in the Blue Bar.

The time was to come when I should have an apartment of my own on the West Side or commute from New Jersey, undergo the black man's hate, face the enmity of the young, be involved in the tooth-and-claw life of the Broadway theatre. But I have always felt at home in New York, more so than in London. In New York City the essential human condition is not masked, as in England, by an intricate class structure; your accent is not held very much against you; your concern with making a living is everybody's concern. The towering solidity of the architecture is one thing; the insubstantiality of a man's place in the stone canyons is quite another. New York is a displaced persons' camp. I—a writer always in exile, an Englishman whose grandmother was a Finnegan from Tipperary, a sort of medievalist in a mechanized world—am a paradigm of displacement. New York has to be my preferred city.

I remain, however, whether I like it or not, a product of British history, disposed to look for Englishry in a city whose *lingua franca* is a kind of English, and whose history in part belongs to the dead Empire of which I was once a subject. If the Italian, Giovanni da Verrazano, was the first explorer to sight the terrain in 1524, the Englishman, Henry Hudson, was the first, almost a century later, to sail into its harbour, pressing up the tidal river that now bears his name, searching—like all explorers of the Renaissance—for a westward route to the Indian spicelands. I carry a mild traditional resentment of Dutch enterprise and aggression, and find it hard to forgive Hudson for navigating on behalf of the Dutch East India Company, instead of Britain's King James I. It was Hudson's report of a great sheltered harbour and an infinitude of potential farmland that brought the colonists from Old to New Netherland, and led Peter Minuit, director-general of what was to become not only New York but also Connecticut, New Jersey and Long Island, to that mad purchase of Manhattan from the Algonquin Indians—the unassessable wealth of the future for a few trinkets.

But of course New York—or rather New Amsterdam—had to be British sooner or later. There was the need to secure geographical continuity between the existing British colonies in North America, and New Amsterdam was an interrupting alien fist. In the 1660s Britain and Holland were great maritime competitors. If a Dutch fleet could sail up the Thames, a British one could sail up the Hudson. In 1664 the city was taken without the firing of a single shot and renamed not for Old York but for James, Duke of York, King Charles II's brother. It all went so well because the Dutch preferred alien rule to the tyranny of their own one-legged governor, Peter Stuyvesant. However, that tendency to racial fusion so characteristic of the city (in spite of periodic bouts of raging xenophobia), that refusal to reproduce slavishly in the New World the nationalistic rivalries of the Old, forbade that New York be a mere colony for very long. Dutch and

A daring construction worker high above Manhattan works on the steel skeleton of the towering Empire State Building as construction of the 102-storey structure nears completion in 1931. New York's tallest building for 40 years, the Empire State was superseded in 1971 by the twin towers of the World Trade Center, each 110 storeys tall.



English—best thought of in, say, 1690 as just “New Yorkers”—joined amicably in resenting the autocracy of the British Crown. It has never been easy to think of royal New York; to enter Manhattan even now is to board a kind of pirate ship. Was not Captain Kidd one of the city’s leading citizens, a respected pewholder in the Trinity Church he helped to build?

Commercial sharpness, hatred of bureaucracy, a somewhat shady spirit of independence, a tolerance of freebooting, an ethical easiness unthinkable in New England—these attributes appeal to the independent artist in me if not to the stern Englishman. And it is very much the writer in me who is stirred by the story of John Peter Zenger (neither Dutch nor English, but a German turned good New Yorker), publisher and editor of the *New York Weekly-Journal*. In the 1730s it was he who made the first American stand for the freedom of the Press by publishing scathing attacks on the colonial administration. Jailed for libel, he fought like a true New Yorker, continuing to edit the *Journal* from his cell. Powerful commercial interests chafing at British rule gave Zenger their support and the brilliant Philadelphia lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, championed him in the courts, prevailing on the jury to ignore the judge’s directive and return a defiant verdict of Not Guilty.

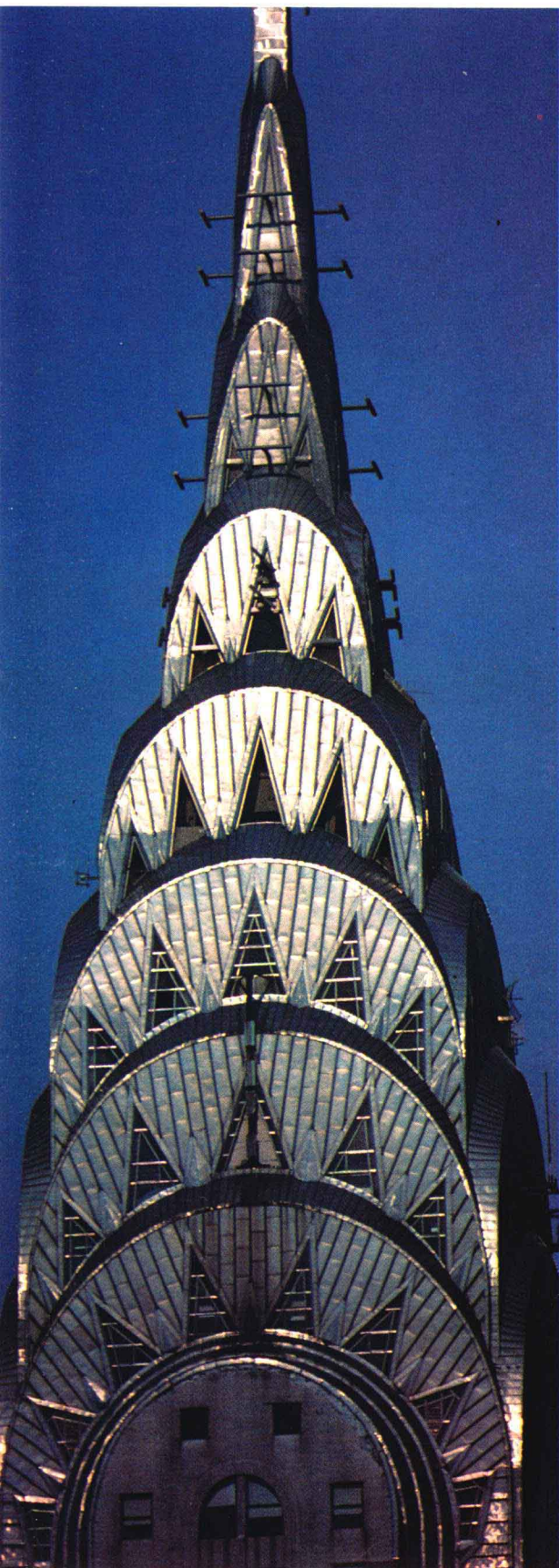
In 1774, the local Sons of Liberty, inspired by the example of their fellow Patriots in Boston, staged their own “tea party”; and the provincial governor, Cadwallader Colden, reported to London: “The present political zeal and phrenzy is almost entirely confined to the City of New-York.” It is said that the first blood of the fight for independence was spilt in this city—in January, 1775, when one of the Sons of Liberty was killed by a Redcoat. Here, as an Englishman, I am expected to waver in loyalty, but one of my ancestors was killed by a British soldier—in the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, when a protest meeting of Manchester workers was cut down by Hussars. My resentment of that makes me a kind of New Yorker.

Is there any Englishry left in the city? There are certainly Englishmen who, immigrants as much as the Poles and the Puerto Ricans, are nevertheless not easy to dig out from the main mass of first-language English speakers. It is, of course, the language itself, along with a sort of English literary tradition, that stands as the only true inheritance from the land that James, Duke of York, was to rule as king and be driven from as tyrant. And that language, in its New York form, has become not merely autonomous but perhaps the major dialect of world English. Any visiting English writer feels the comparative effeteness of his own medium: it is achieved, finished, already approaching petrification, while the English of New York is always on the forge.

For the rest, the culture of England enjoys no pre-eminence in this city. English pubs, taverns and eating-houses are to be found; but, like the cafés and restaurants dispensing French cuisine, they are mere oases of exotica. England has been swallowed up, as has Holland; and of Holland there are not even many linguistic memorials. If, in New York, I remain an Englishman, it is only as others remain Lithuanians and Basques. Indeed, in this city that bears so English a name, the English claim to primacy is weaker than most; for the English have a sin to expiate of which none of the other component peoples can be held guilty: that of presiding over the near-destruction of New York. It happened during the War of Independence, when there was not really very much to destroy—an agglomeration of old Dutch and new English dwellings at the southernmost tip of the island of Manhattan, with a population of 20,000 or so. Strategically, the British were right to capture New York from the American rebels. Here was the Hudson River, extending almost to Lake George, which in turn led to Lake Champlain, which emptied into the Richelieu River, which in its turn emptied into the St. Lawrence—a kind of great water-line to use as a knife for cutting the American forces in two and isolating New England. Here, too, was the island of Manhattan itself, an admirable winter barracks for the invading troops, easily protected by the Royal Navy, which was powerful, while the American Navy was non-existent.

It is a bizarre imaginative exercise to dig down and look for the naked city of the fighting of the autumn of 1776. There is General George

The tip of the 77-storey Chrysler Building climbs skywards in all its shiny Art Deco magnificence. Completed in 1930 at the height of the Depression, the building was one of the first skyscrapers to make use of metal sheathing to dynamic effect.



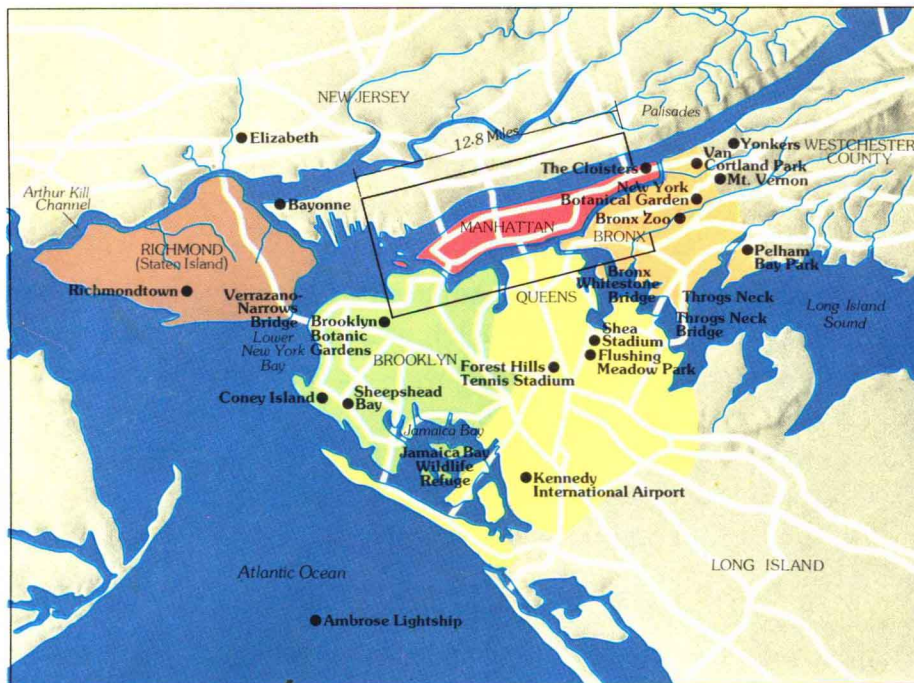
Washington, at dawn on September 15, on what is now 161st Street, looking south towards a small Dutch settlement called Harlem, round about 125th Street, where the British were expected to attack. There is General Sir William Howe, the British commander, planning the final dispositions of his 23,000 Redcoats and 9,000 German mercenaries. Five British frigates are at Kip's Bay, at the foot of East 34th Street, and near 89th Street and East Avenue the British are trying to silence the nine-gun American battery at Horn's Hook.

By evening, New York's defenders had succumbed to the vastly superior British forces and the following month Washington was forced to retreat across the Hudson. Six days after its capture, the city was ravaged by fire and, although the British had least to gain by destroying their valuable prize, they naturally got the blame. "Providence or some good honest fellow," gloated Washington, "has done more for us than we were disposed to do for ourselves."

A second mysterious blaze broke out in 1778 and, when the British finally marched out of New York five years later, much of it still lay in ruins. But recovery was quick. In 1785 the resurgent city became for a single heady year the capital of the American nation and the first presidential inauguration—of that great non-New Yorker George Washington—took place there. Demoted from national to state capital, New York lost even that doubtful honour in 1797. It was obviously destined to become a different kind of metropolis.

But this is to dwell on ancient wrongs and past glories, and here I am more concerned with present reality. I remember that Manchester schoolboy dreamily doodling his city of towers, for in those towers the dream and the reality meet. The architectural glamour of Manhattan derives, like many kinds of beauty, from an enforced limitation. Like Venice, it is set upon by water. The Hudson and East Rivers and Upper New York Bay seem, at first glance, to define it as a smooth-sided peninsula, but the slim knife of the Harlem River separates it from the northern mainland. Unlike Venice, however, Manhattan has a firm foundation of solid rock, essential to its architectural monoliths. To expand, it sought the air, defying the old view of power, which measured territorial greatness by the square mile, and leading us to a new science-fiction vision in which the world can be ruled from a few square yards if the superstructure is high enough. We can think of a whole nation housed in a single skyscraper, of an army mobilizing in rhythmical elevator-loads.

What sight can touch that incredible skyline, seen from Upper New York Bay or when riding in from New Jersey? And yet it is a beauty of forced compression, since Manhattan has no monopoly of skyscrapers, only a tighter line-up of them. Manhattan also has charm, if charm is the quality you find in beauty unself-conscious and uncontrived. It is the work of many



Big, Big, Big Town

New York may be the world's heaviest city, as well as one of its largest. Certainly no other area of comparable size supports such a concentrated weight of concrete and steel as does the skyscraper-jammed island of Manhattan (below), which can carry its man-made burden only because nature provided a foundation of very hard bedrock. Thus the Empire State Building and all the other mammoth wonders of modern architecture are rooted deeply in the past—planted in rock formed more than 400 million years ago.

But Manhattan, with its soaring towers, is only one of the city's five water-edged boroughs (left), each of which is made up of many neighbourhoods of varying ethnic character. Taken together, they encompass an area of 320 square miles and are home to seven and a half million people.



architects and builders, each concerned with his own creation, each blissfully unconcerned with the whole. Thus every human scale is exhibited, from the squat two-storey shack to the topless tower, and it is the cramming together of so much diversity that gives Manhattan its enchantment.

The twin-towered, 110-storey World Trade Center is in the Wall Street area, but so is Captain Kidd's Trinity Church. The International Building, on a corner of the massive Rockefeller Center complex, looks across Fifth Avenue at the neo-Gothic grandeur (or is it horror?) of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Manhattan reveals its most startling aspect when one looks down from some high vantage point at Central Park, especially in spring. Its thawed blue waters and young greenery are completely surrounded by a stone army of buildings—a ragtime army made up of dwarfs and giants, looking with a kind of distracted benignity at this thing called Nature.

The skyscraper is as much to be associated with Chicago as with Manhattan, but New York was the first to build high; and the Equitable Life Assurance Society's five-storey building, finished by Gilman, Kendall and Post in 1870, was a giant for its time. Then came William Le Baron Jenney's structural innovation: the inner iron frame, which cut out the need for massive foundations and enabled architects to invoke classical (meaning Greek) precedents. Sheer height—in itself perhaps a vulgarity—began to be an aspect of form.

New York's Graham Building, designed by Clinton and Russell and finished in 1898, followed the threefold division of the Greek column: base, shaft and capital. The base was a lobby and a place for banks; the shaft a simple pattern of identical offices; and the capital, made up of attic floors, had a projecting cornice at the top. The importation of other European traditions produced, as always in Manhattan, a piquant marriage of ancient and modern. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Building, finished in 1909 by Napoleon Le Brun, was inspired by the Venetian campanile. The 60-storey Woolworth Building, which was created by Cass Gilbert in 1913 and held the record for nearly 20 years as the world's tallest building, turned European Gothic into New York Gothic.

Manhattan really got down to skyscraper business in the 1920s, the era of boom. The greatest structures—like the 77-storey Chrysler Building of William Van Alen and the 102-storey Empire State Building of Shreve, Lamb and Harmon, with its seven miles of elevator shafts and floor space for 20,000 workers—were ready by the early years of the Great Depression. Then came humbler 40-storey edifices, responding to a new spirit of sobriety and economic caution. There also came concern about the effect of the gorgeous monsters on common civic amenity. People had to live, walk and work in the dense shadow of the man-made mountains, and life in a dark canyon can be dispiriting. In the business area, it is said, a man has to buy a newspaper to find out if the sun is shining. After the First World War a fresh kind of skyscraper sprang out of zoning laws that required the height

