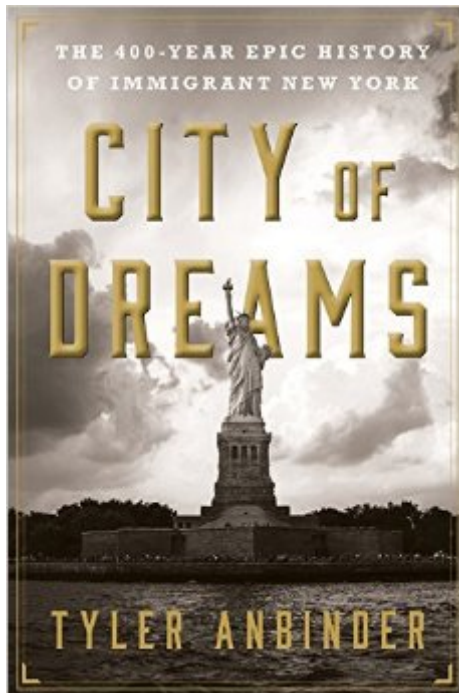


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City Of Dreams: The 400-Year Epic History Of Immigrant New York



Synopsis

A defining American story, never before told with such breadth of scope, lavish research, and resounding spirit With more than three million foreign-born residents today, New York has been America's defining port of entry for nearly four centuries, a magnet for transplants from all over the globe. These migrants have brought their hundreds of languages and distinct cultures to the city, and from there to the entire country. More immigrants have come to New York than all other entry points combined. City of Dreams is peopled with memorable characters both beloved and unfamiliar, whose lives unfold in rich detail: the young man from the Caribbean who passed through New York on his way to becoming a Founding Father; the ten-year-old Angelo Siciliano, from Calabria, who transformed into Charles Atlas, bodybuilder; Dominican-born Oscar de la Renta, whose couture designs have dressed first ladies from Jackie Kennedy to Michelle Obama. Tyler Anbinder's story is one of innovators and artists, revolutionaries and rioters, staggering deprivation and soaring triumphs, all playing out against the powerful backdrop of New York City, at once ever-changing and profoundly, permanently itself. City of Dreams provides a vivid sense of what New York looked like, sounded like, smelled like, and felt like over the centuries of its development and maturation into the city we know today.

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A Peek into City of Dreams

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Immigrants admiring the Statue of Liberty as their steamship arrives in New York Harbor. Just eight months after its unveiling, newcomers viewed the colossal statue as a symbol of

the very reasons why they had immigrated, even if native-born Americans did not yet associate the monument with immigration. This garment worker, photographed by Lewis Hine around 1908, appears to be carrying finished clothing from her workplace back to a contractor. Italian day laborers on Sixth Avenue, photographed in 1910 by Lewis Hine. The produce market on Mulberry Street, looking north toward Canal, photographed in about 1900.

Historian Tyler Anbinder has written quite a narrative of a town that has become the icon for the immigrant. This is a book that may take a week to read and soak up as it is full of information. He covers all the topics from the countries of origin to the people's reasons for emigrating and the kinds of jobs they get when they come here. Religious persecution and economic suppression were the two most common reasons immigrants came here in the beginning, but more are coming now because of political instability. Immigration was and still is the cause and effect result of political, religious and economic events in the country of origin. Not all wanted to make New York their permanent home; some returned after the political situation back home had been settled. But many did settle in New York and started their own histories. These immigrants then became the rock for future generations of their families, but they also often became the newest group distrusting the next wave of immigrants. In the 400-year history of immigration, the ethnic groups coming to the city may have changed, but they transformed through hard work, education, and taking part in the political process. The experiences the immigrants of any generation live are very similar to immigrants from 100, 200 and 300 years ago. Successful immigrants are noted throughout the text, but Anbinder stresses that all of them save the original English settlers all experienced discrimination in their living and working habits of some sort. When possible, Anbinder gives references to historical places by also mentioning new landmarks that have taken over destroyed buildings. The story is very much the same in every immigrant group. They come to New York to get jobs, avoid persecution, and take whatever they can get to survive. They fall victim to older ethnic groups who understand the assimilation process. Once they settled in and understood the "American way of life," they learn to speak up. If their needs are not met, they riot. In the 1840s it was Catholics who wanted their own schools and beer drinkers wanted their right to drink on Sundays. These changes often became federal law. For this reason Anbinder has focused his narrative on the largest immigrant groups that came through the ports over the decades. By the end of the book the reader sees the changes in the city's ethnic make-up from a western European mixture to an Asian, Mexican and south American mixture. Anbinder begins the history with 1632 when Dutch fur traders were on what is now Manhattan Island. It was never the Netherland's intent to settle the American

continent for land, unlike England. The Dutch were coming for the lucrative fur trade, much like the French were coming for the same reason further north and west. But when the English settlers started enveloping the Dutch around Manhattan, things became more dramatic. The Dutch stayed, brought in more Dutch, all while the English were also coming and multiplying alongside the Dutch and the natives. Then the English finally outnumbered the Dutch, but the Dutch architecture and language persisted for another generation before English became the dominant language early in the 18th century. The first 100 pages of this 570-page tome covers the formation of the colonies into one Americanized country speaking English. The English would be the primary group of immigrants until the 1840s, when famine and rebellion struck Ireland and Germany. Interesting to note that the fungus that struck Ireland's potatoes originated from exported potatoes from the US. The fungus happened to thrive better in the wetter, colder climate of Ireland. For almost two decades, just up to the Civil War, the Irish and Germans were the primary immigrants coming, and they both fielded regiments and soldiers for the Union Army. Many Civil War songs originated as Irish fighting songs. New York initially saw an economic boost with the start of the Civil War as many immigrants wanted to fight to preserve the Union that had given them economic opportunities. What Anbinder does very well is transition from one topic to the next with each chapter. While the Civil War did create an initial economic boom to the city, by 1862 the death tolls were starting to sink in. Chapter 12, "Uprising" now focuses on the varied classes of immigrants. Still primarily English, Irish and German with some freed slaves, the city's people hosted one of the deadliest draft riots up to that point in American history. The riots gave way to a political conscience that has only strengthened in the city since. Anbinder also notes that the strikes and riots in New York in the 1860s did not give jobs to freed slaves. Those jobs went to other whites, yet the fear of freed African slaves taking jobs away from whites (especially the Irish) remained to fester in a growing nativist sentiment that lived on through early in the 20th century. The end of the Civil War also brought a change in the immigration patterns. Chapter 13, "Transition," now starts a more political focus of the immigrants coming to New York. The Democratic Party was now on the rise, and with it "Boss" William Tweed and Tammany Hall, that old staple of local politics originally created to help poor immigrants. Ironical, notes Anbinder, that the fall of Tweed and Tammany Hall was the result of another immigrant, German-born Thomas Nast and his political cartoons in Harper's Weekly. The Gilded Age was now in full swing and immigration and the Industrial Age were at a rise because of events happening in eastern Europe. This is where Anbinder's own American history begins, with his great-grandparents coming from Ukraine. Jews and Italians were now the growing group of immigrants to New York, but the ruling English speakers from England insisted on more stringent laws to keep non-white,

non-Christian immigrants out. The growing city and industrialization continued to lure immigrants early in the 20th century. New York City now encompassed all five boroughs of Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island. The crowding, however, created health hazards with the cramped tenements and lack of proper hygiene. Jacob Riis's photographs of the poorest of the poor helped bring reforms to building and street codes, and even helped bring safety codes to factories that were death traps when fires broke out. A world war and black migration from the South helped expand the city's population with its own native-born people, making affordable housing even more difficult to find. The passing of the National Origins Act of 1924 curtailed immigration to New York, and it especially affected immigration from China and Japan. Puerto Ricans were now coming to the city, squeezing out other ethnic groups. Restrictive laws brought on the rise of illegal immigration in the 1920s that continues today. New York was where legal immigrants came through, but many others shipped off to other lesser-known ports or crossed in via Canada and were known as "smuggled aliens." Anbinder also mentions the Chinese "Snakeheads" who have smuggled Chinese into New York for many decades, always at a profit. The last 100 pages covers the years from 1924 to present and focuses more on laws and statistics rather than as immigrant groups. World War II and then the Korean and Vietnam wars saw a need to be more tolerant of Jews and other religious groups, and Anbinder gives plenty of graphs showing the change in ethnic groups into the city. Since the 1960s, the largest groups of immigrants are from the Dominican Republic, China, Jamaica and Mexico, with Mexico and other south American countries' peoples growing as well. New York City has 8.5 million people, of which 3.2 million (37%), are immigrants. This is the same percentage as it was in 1900. The last chapter, "Today," focuses on the post 9-11 immigration of Muslims into New York, a subject that is not covered extensively elsewhere. The largest Muslim population is from Pakistan and Bangladesh, ethnic groups that suffered the most with deportations after 9-11 but which have rebounded since and continues to grow. But as these groups grow, many of the wealthier ones move out of the boroughs to settle in larger homes with better schools for their children. This type of migration will continue for future immigrant groups. There is a lot of information in each chapter. The research is over 100 pages of newspaper and magazine articles, bibliographies, journals. Archival illustrations and photographs are included. If there is one flaw to this book is that each chapter at times feels too informative. Anbinder does not always start a new subtopic within a chapter with italics or subtitles, and it's not always easy reading for the casual history aficionado. This book, however, is highly recommended for people who are fascinated with American immigration like I am, whose American history begins in 1910 when my paternal grandparents emigrated from Lithuania. The same complaints that people have today of new

immigrant groups have been the same complaint for the last 400 years. I upgraded this to five stars because I discovered that there will be many photographs in the final edition.

This is an absolutely amazing history of immigrants to New York City, a book to treasure and to dip into from time to time as another part of the grand mosaic of America unfolds. The research is evident on every page, and the notes very convincing. Living in New York City, one cannot but treasure the incredible richness of immigrants here -- over 800 different languages here -- and over 25% of our residents speak English as a second language. Reading this book encouraged me to visit the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island (including a side trip to the defunct hospital on the New Jersey portion of Ellis Island -- a true treasure). We had a superb personal guide, who put flesh and bones on many of the immigrant experiences, including an almost universal reaction by arriving immigrants that enough was enough -- no more immigrants -- they almost invariably "slammed the door behind them, and tried to lock it." Anbinder reflects that political reality, and tells the story of how immigrant groups worked within their cultures to build political power within the City and as they moved on, outside into America as a whole. An amazing story, one that continues today. Robert C. Ross
August 2016

I started this book thinking I had a decent idea about the backstory of New York City's immigrant experience, and I was very wrong - I maybe had 25 percent of the information and knowledge contained in here, and I might be giving myself too much credit. It's incredible the history and stories that Tyler Anbinder has woven together into this sprawling history. Colonial history was most interesting - because I'm in Boston, I've always been of the "Plymouth Rock" side of things (my first American ancestor arrived in 1631!), and I totally never think about NYC as a Dutch colony in the middle of the British outposts. Of course I knew about Peter Stuyvesant, but in theory, not with any real awareness. So right from the start the book filled in blanks. The story of how the Irish became the preeminent immigrant society was fascinating. As clearly horrible as slavery was in the 1800s, I can understand why many people didn't really see the evil - their own lives were so brutish and nasty that the idea of a slave actually getting food they didn't have to scrounge for probably didn't seem so bad! It reminds me a little of people who see welfare as a "free ride." They don't see the true pain of being trapped in that lifestyle - nobody WANTS it. But in an era when indentured servitude was basically the same thing, and with many immigrants forced into that, I can see where slavery was not something worth fighting for. The sections on the Jewish and Italian immigrants were interesting for different reasons - it made sense how the communities formed such insular bonds,

but also kind of sad that at least early on they weren't interested in any sort of assimilation - they were here to work, provide for their family, and exist in their own neighborhood. But in the tribal context of the era, it made sense. The whole book is filled with similar up-close examinations of past attitudes and history - it was thrilling and intense. Five stars for research and storytelling - and I'm giving it four stars not because there was any flaw, but because it was SO dense and SO demanding that I can't say I loved the experience - it was work! But very rewarding, and any lover of history will be enthralled. A really great achievement.

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