

# Big City in Little Pieces

*By Bill Kauffman*

**An American in New York**



he enduring cinematic visage of New York City belongs not to King Kong or Woody Allen but rather to John Travolta, who in *Saturday Night Fever* forsook his family and home in Brooklyn to cross the bridge to Manhattan. On one side was clan, faith, family. On the other was the promise of wealth, glamor, and sex with girls who don't go to church and don't feel at all guilty about it.

Travolta's desertion of Brooklyn is presented as a graduation we are supposed to applaud. After all, a Manhattan transfer is the beginning of enlightenment—just ask those who manufacture so much of America's image of itself from offices in Manhattan.

With four of New York's five boroughs located on islands (only the Bronx is on the American mainland), bridges are in some ways all that connect our country to its most atypical city. New York has always been the antithesis of inland America. It is a port, with all that entails: prosperity, a transient and polyglot population, vice and depravity, a sense of action and bustle and excitement. It is "like a munificent dung hill, where every thing finds kindly nourishment, and soon shoots up and expands to greatness," wrote Washington Irving, who created Diedrich Knickerbocker, the Dutchman who was New York's emblem for so many years. (Today the emblematic Knickerbocker is Latrell Sprewell, the coach-choking professional basketball player.)

In the weeks after September 11, 2001, the bridges between New York and America were fortified. So great was the outpouring of sympathy for the besieged city that even inveterate Yankee-haters found themselves pulling for George Steinbrenner's mercenaries in last fall's World Series. At my village's crossroads, volunteer firefighters collected donations for the city in their fluorescent hats. I threw in a tenspot every time, remembering, churlishly, how in our time of need New York had done nothing of the kind for us. Thirty years ago, nearby Attica State Prison was bloodied by a revolt, which directly touched a far higher percentage of local people than the 9/11 crashes did in New York. The widows and orphans of the slain guards were not showered with flowers and quilts and charitable millions by the touched hearts of Manhattan; their gift was scorn and mockery, encapsulated in Al Pacino's chant "Attica! Attica!" in the transvestite bank robbery classic *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975). Whatever kindnesses we in the hinterlands have extended to Manhattan in the wake of that black day in September are emphatically *not* in return for past favors.

The visitor who enters New York via train is disgorged into the magnificently restored Grand Central Station, with its ceiling depicting the constellations, pinpricks of light

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that must substitute for the night sky Manhattanites cannot see through the light-haze and the skyscrapers.

In the 1880s, Manhattan was the site of the first serious debates over height limits for buildings. Critics argued that skyscrapers were unhealthy in two ways. In case of disaster, the upper floors were charnel houses (as we have lately relearned). And even absent fire or explosion, the towering structures block sunlight, contributing to a general urban sickliness, opponents complained. New York being New York, the builders won, and out of Irving's dung hill

arose an urban cordillera whose peaks ranged from the impressive (the Chrysler Building) to the pointless (the Empire State Building) to the assertively ugly government boondoggle that was the Twin Towers, also known as "the largest aluminum siding job in the history of the world."

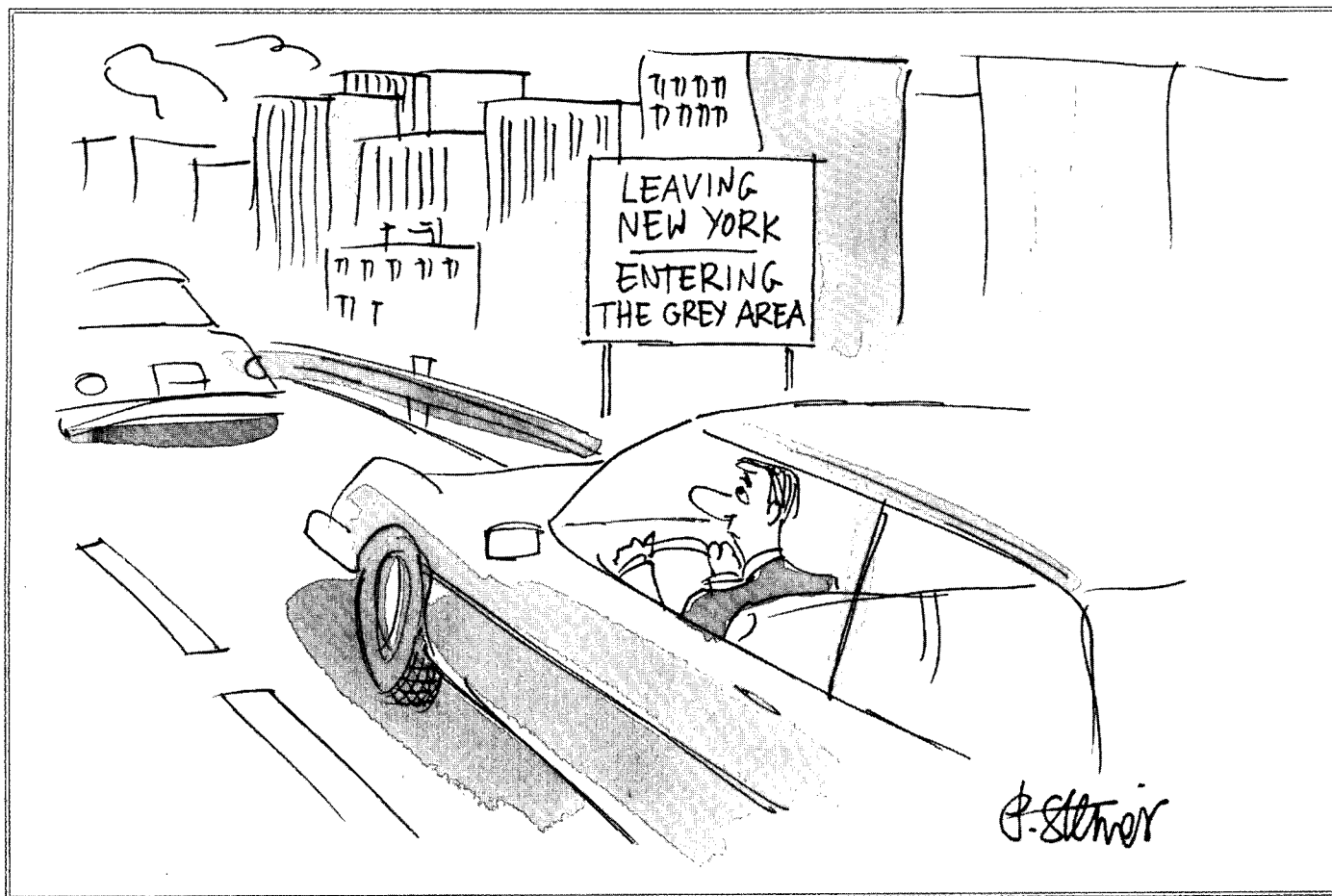
The outsider is still overwhelmed by the din and anomie of New York: the jackhammers and honking cabs and people who won't look you in the eye. (And, these days, the street banners and store window signs reading, "Fight back NY! Go Shop!") For every valorous fireman there is a neurotic hypochondriac straight from "Seinfeld" badgering her pharmacist for Cipro. For now, flags fly from stoops and skyscrapers; even the window of the *Village Voice* displays Old Glory. Whether or not the colors would fly had the hijackers crashed their planes in Philadelphia or Boise is another question—one to which I think we all know the answer.

For all the "we're-in-this-together" spirit kindled by the September attack, New York remains a city of strangers in which even the most genial apartment dwellers do not know their neighbors. Civic attachments are nigh impossible when you and the fellow down the hall do not even speak the same language; the state, perforce, will be the arbiter of your disputes.

The famed New York incivility, as many New Yorkers have told me, is a natural response to the environment. The urban dweller must shut down his senses lest he suffer an overload. So he has perfected the art of ignoring the disconsolate failures listlessly passing out "20% Off Hair Styling" fliers to indifferent passersby in front of every sun-blocking skyscraper. Dorothy Day saw the face of Christ in each of these men and women, as well as in sisters and brothers a lot worse off, but Dorothy was a saint.

Thinking of saints, I walk up Fifth Avenue to St. Patrick's Cathedral. Therein I am made melancholy by olive-skinned men offering devout petitions to Our Lady of Guadalupe, and by the pretty Irish and Italian Catholic girls lighting devotional candles as their eyes brim with tears. So much sadness and loss, even here. Life on an inhuman scale, I am reminded, does not make one any less human.

The statuary of New York is a delight for lovers of literature



and history, recalling a day when poets were read by someone besides other poets. In Central Park, Fitz-Greene Halleck sits amidst the elms, fastidiously, fenced off from the hoi-polloi. Behind the New York Public Library, a granitic William Cullen Bryant overlooks the greensward of Bryant Park, once known as "Needle Park" in another Al Pacino movie, his ears stopped to the *sotto voce* dope offerings. For 51 years, Bryant edited the *New York Evening Post*, urging upon New Yorkers the policies of "free commerce, free speech, free soil." Remarkable as it now seems, nineteenth-century New York was the hotbed of American libertarianism. It was the cradle of the most radically anti-government faction of any major party in our country's history, the Loco Focos of the 1830s. These Jacksonian Democrats—who even opposed state regulation of weights and measures—denounced not only government meddling but also the "soulless, cadaverous, unmanly aristocracy of Wall Street."

In the end, City Hall and Wall Street won out, and the freedom-loving Loco Focos disappeared. But the city always remained mutable, early to raze and eager to rise, and appalling to those of a traditionalist bent. Henry David Thoreau believed "The pigs in the street are the most respectable part of the population." A newsman named Walt Whitman said the place is "characterized by an unparalleled fierceness in money-chasing." Edgar Allen Poe, by contrast, positively burred: "The city is brimful of all kinds of legitimate liveliness—the life of money-making, and the life of pleasure."

By "city," Poe meant Manhattan. The island was New York City. Until 1898.

**T**he bridge that carried John Travolta away from Brooklyn made the huge, imperial version of New York inevitable.

Across the East River from Manhattan once grew beautiful Brooklyn, "the city of homes and churches." Brooklyn had affordable houses, healthy air, and an Anglo-Protestant character not unlike that of New England. Manhattan's tenements and jerrybuilt towers were eyesores to sophisticated Brooklynites. (Edgar Allen Poe, bless his contrarian heart, despised Brooklyn's architecture. "I know few towns which inspire me with so great disgust and contempt. It puts me often in mind of a city of silvered-gingerbread," he wrote. "In point of downright iniquity—of absolute atrocity...I really can see little difference between the putting up of such a house as this, and blowing up a House of Parliament, or cutting the throat of one's grandfather.")

Brooklyn's men on the make were not satisfied with their pretty and insular city. They saw dollar signs on the opposite shore of the East River. And so, with the aid of a \$65,000 bribe to Manhattan's Boss Tweed, was born that extraordinary feat of engineering known as the Brooklyn Bridge. David McCullough, in his history of the great bridge, summarized its promises: "Property values would soar.... Merchants could expect untold numbers of new customers as disaffected New Yorkers flocked



across the river to make Brooklyn their home. Manufacturers would have closer ties with New York markets. Long Island farmers and Brooklyn brewers could get their wares over the river more readily. The mail would move faster."

By 1890, a quarter of a million people were passing over the Brooklyn Bridge every day. The pokey "Brooklyn Ferry" memorialized by Walt Whitman was all but sunk.

German-born John Augustus Roebling, who fathered both the bridge and the man who would supervise its construction, imagined that it would "allow people of leisure, the old and young invalids, to promenade over the bridge on fine days, in order to enjoy the beautiful views and the pure air." The promenade still inspires awe, even if the exhaust-stinking air is impure. But the bridge that was going to put Brooklyn on the map ended up putting it out of existence.

You see, too many young men of the East had taken the eccentric New York editor Horace Greeley's advice and gone West. Chicago was swelling like President Cleveland's waistline; if it kept annexing suburbs, it might soon replace New York as America's largest city.

New York needed more people. Brooklyn needed access to New York's plentiful water supply. Queens, The Bronx, and Staten Island needed New York's municipal services. Combination was in the air. A New York lawyer named Andrew Haswell Green lobbied tirelessly for the cities and villages of the region to merge into one enormous city of Greater New York. "Cities are the crowns...of empire," declared Green, who was the law partner of Samuel Tilden, the Democratic governor and New York lawyer known as the "Great Forecloser."

Brooklyn patriots, gathered in the League of Loyal Citizens, argued that their home should remain "a New England and American city." They spoke of local self-rule and community pride, while the consolidators thrummed their siren song of "Progre\$\$ Progre\$\$ Progre\$\$.

Andrew Haswell Green had the classic progressive's contempt for any value not reducible to charts or tax tables. He dismissed Brooklyn patriotism as "senile sentimentalism... which vainly strives to stay the wheels of beneficent progress by a display of flags and banners, the din of brass bands and other claptrap." (Green would be sorely disappointed in post-9/11 Manhattan, with its makeshift—and moving—memorials to the dead, rife with flags and banners and even invocations of the Deity.)

In the pivotal 1894 referendum, what became the five boroughs of New York voted for union. Only in Brooklyn was the debate fierce; by the narrowest of margins, 64,744 to 64,467, Brooklynites voted to dissolve their proud city. Desperate resis-

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tance delayed consummation of the marriage, but on January 1, 1898, Brooklyn, the fourth-largest city in the country, was swallowed whole. Andrew Haswell Green's "wheels of progress" have rolled over Brooklyn ever since.

Bird Coler, the first comptroller of the imperial New York City, chirped his vision of what consolidation meant in a language that can only be called ravenous. Bird foresaw a day when "all divisional lines have been forever obliterated, and there is no Manhattan, no Brooklyn, no village by the sea, no localized settlement upon the Sound, no isolated community upon the hills of the Hudson, but one grand and

glorious New York." On such visions are tyrannies built. Or as one later, longer-haired, dystopian dreamer of One Homogeneous Blob warbled, "Imagine there's no country..."

Dreamy sons of Brooklyn have since tried to divorce their mother from the lech across the river, testing Daniel Webster's dictum, "Because a thing has been wrongly done, it does not follow that it can be undone." Columnist Pete Hamill often decries the "Big Mistake" of '98. Novelist Norman Mailer, the self-proclaimed "left conservative," ran for mayor in 1969 on a "Power to the Neighborhoods!" platform that would have made New York City the 51st state while stripping it of almost all its functions and devolving control to the most local level. The *New York Times* gravely counseled against liberty and decentralism, as it always does. The proposal was "demagoguery," lectured the *Times*, which is a severe way of saying "popular." For his trouble, Mailer got 6 percent of the vote.

No man more perfectly embodied Imperial New York than Robert Moses, who from a series of official and quasi-official perches spent half a century paving, razing, and evicting with ruthless efficiency. Moses built the expressways that scarify the five boroughs and the bridges that connect them: In all, he was responsible for an incredible 627 miles of road in and around New York City. Like the suburban federal judge who destroys working-class neighborhoods with busing orders, Moses sat blissfully distant from the wrack and ruin of his acts, never even learning how to drive himself. (This comparatively common New York anachronism never deterred city residents from telling *others* how to drive. For years, the speed limit on upstate highways was limited to an absurdly low 55 miles per hour due to a bloc of Gotham legislators who didn't know a clutch from a kvetch.)

In *The Power Broker* (1974), the utterly devastating biography of Moses which appeared shortly before its subject died, author Robert Caro calculated that "close to half a million" people were evicted by Moses's highways plus urban renewal and

building projects. "He tore out the hearts of a score of neighborhoods, communities the size of small cities themselves, communities that had been lively, friendly places to live, the vital parts of the city that made New York a home to its people," wrote Caro. Remarkably, most of those people moved with no more resistance than a grumble: Living in Imperial New York had made them pliant and spiritless.

Moses's "greatest pleasure," noted Caro, was "the imposition of his will on other people." This has been the besetting sin of political New York since the demise of Moses's patron, Governor Al Smith, the last states' rights presidential nominee of the Democratic Party. Through sheer numbers, New York imposes its will.

Perhaps America needs a reciprocity agreement with New York City. In the words of the college campus, we could use a little more tolerance and diversity. Mayor Ed Koch, one of the city's livelier politicians of recent years, lost the 1982 Democratic gubernatorial primary to Mario Cuomo after hizzoner imprudently told an interviewer, "This rural America thing—I'm telling you, it's a joke." The hicks, he had heard, had to "drive 20 miles" in a "pickup truck" just to "buy a gingham dress or a Sears, Roebuck suit."

I was among the affronted rural New York Democrats who responded by voting for that sanctimonious windbag Cuomo. Stupid me. I hadn't the wit to understand Koch's bluster as a sort of charmingly abrasive Manhattan provincialism. But then, when do the provincial Manhattanites ever extend the outlanders an equivalent tolerance? Poor John Rocker was almost run out of baseball for his pungently frank assessment of the riders on the Queens subway.

So how about it, New York: We'll accept Kochian putdowns of the world beyond skyscrapers if you'll permit the Rockers to have their say. Deal? Of course it's no deal. You run the networks, the newswEEKlies, the major dailies. The next John Rocker won't simply be harassed by every media outlet in America; he will be indicted for hate thought. In New York, tolerance is compulsory. They shoot horse's asses, don't they?

Each of us holds in mind his own New York City. Koch and Rocker, Henry James and Walt Whitman, all describe the same place, but where one sees heaven, another sees hell. Some mourn a lost city, others extol the roil and moil.

There are those who dread New York's mass immigration as enfeebling, and those who salute it as invigorating. Henry James was offended by the "monstrous, presumptuous interest" of New York's immigrants. They came in such numbers that "we, not they, must make the surrender and accept the orientation. We must go, in other words, *more* than half-way to meet them; which is all the difference, for us, between possession and dispossession." James pronounced himself "haunted...

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in the New York streets" by "this sense of dispossession."

A century later, John Rocker complained, "You can walk an entire block in Times Square and not hear anybody speaking English. Asians and Koreans and Vietnamese and Indians and Russians and Spanish people and everything up there. How the hell did they get in this country?" Rocker has an antecedent in Sinclair Lewis's novel *Dodsworth* (1929), where Ross Ireland, an Iowa-bred foreign correspondent, despaired of returning to New York City. "When you see a real old-fashioned American face on

the street, you wonder how he got here."

Scott McConnell is the former editorial page editor of the *New York Post* and a prominent immigration restrictionist; his skepticism of multiculturalism got him booted from the paper. I asked him if it isn't odd that he is living at Huddled Masses Central; he replied that in New York (as opposed to, say, Miami or Los Angeles) no one immigrant group dominates social life and public discourse. Gray-bearded New Yorkers are not forced to learn Farsi or Gaelic in order to negotiate their way through a city day. This is not to say that politicians don't pander: The traditional fealty paid Ireland and Israel by New York's hacks has more recently been extended to Puerto Rico, and one assumes that homages to the Dominican Republic and other exotic places will follow close behind.

The Middle American who wanders New York struck by the foreignness of the place might reprove himself with William Cullen Bryant's rebuke of the Know-Nothings: "It is possible to love our country in too narrow and selfish a spirit. Those who maintain with us the right of all men who adopt our land...to enjoy the same political rights as if born among us, love their country for what she is, a land of refuge, and not for what the illiberal and inhospitable spirit of some would make her, a land where he to whom the world allows no other home must always remain an alien and a stranger."

Fair enough. But I'll be damned if New York seems American.

**I**gnoring New York City's vastness, there are those who love little pieces of it. Such was Dorothy Day, who founded the Catholic Worker movement in the Depression and whose eventual sainthood within the Catholic church seems inevitable. Feeling "haunted by God," Day lived the gospel through hospitality houses where she and her Catholic Workers fed, clothed, and befriended New York City's poor.

Geoffrey Gnehu, who eulogized Day at her 1980 funeral, did double duty as CW chaplain and as an editor of the *Catholic Worker* newspaper (still only a penny a copy!). Geoffrey is an accomplished painter whose subjects include Day and other CW regulars, and the shops and scenes of his neighborhood in the East Village. The Worker clientele, he notes while walking

me around the Worker world, is changing. The face of Christ, which looked like toothless Irish winos and grizzled layabouts in Dorothy's day, has become younger, darker, and more likely to belong to a junkie than a drunk.

At one of the Worker houses, I read a wall-tacked memorial for "Sister" Jeanette Chin, a "holy fool" in the unambiguously favorable meaning of the phrase. Sister Jeanette, who died last year at the age of 70, was an old streetlady given to wearing nun's garb—despite the technicality that she never did take the vows. To Sister Jeanette's picture is appended her favorite saying: "I vote for Jesus because Jesus votes for everybody." RIP, Sister—even though Jesus would get creamed in a citywide election.

Another New York neighborhood patriot entertained us in Bay Ridge—the furthest reach of Brooklyn, facing Staten Island across the Verrazano-Narrows bridge, and mirroring the Island's familial, ethnic conservatism. Bay Ridge hosts the headquarters of the Conservative Party of New York—largely because it hosts party chairman Mike Long's liquor store, located just one block away, wherein deals are made near the Madeira.

"There's an element of the city that no one speaks for—that's what we do," says Long.

The Conservatives, writes George Marlin in his newly published history of the party, were born in the early '60s as "the guardian of working-class New Yorkers" who "love family, neighborhood, country, and God." This might sound like boilerplate, but in the gargantuan New York City of the time it was downright reactionary. Governor Nelson Rockefeller had announced in his 1959 inaugural address that "Our neighbor-

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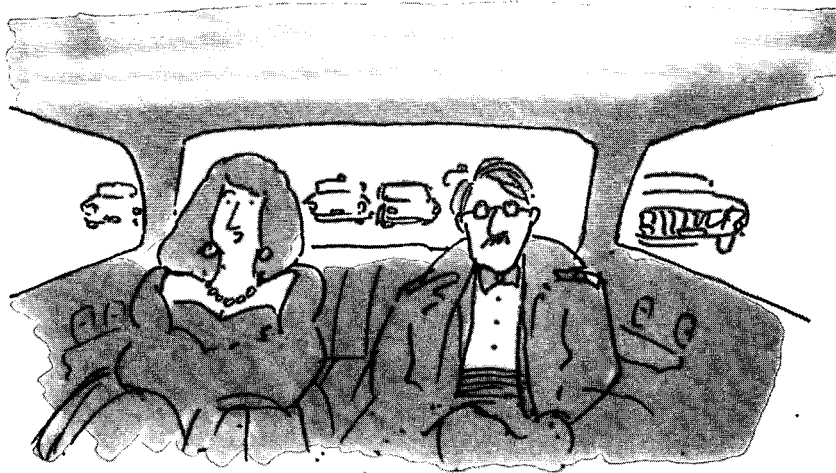
hood is the world," which was news to Bay Ridge and Flushing and Harlem.

The party's rapid growth in New York City, and then across the state, culminating with the election of Conservative James Buckley to the U.S. Senate in 1970, was one sign that the natives were getting restless. The '60s were a boom time for healthy dissent in New York. Some neighborhoods fought Robert Moses and the planners. The historic preservation movement was born. And men with surnames like Mahoney, Doherty, and Maltese—Hayek readers and "Al Smith Democrats"—took on New York's me-too party system. Voters benumbed by choiceless elections featur-

ing Rockefellers and Harrimans and Javitses finally had a "go-to-hell" line on the ballot.

The Conservatives began as an urban party, heavily Catholic, which made the party a tougher sell to rural upstate Protestants. The Conservative voter was caricatured as Archie Bunker of Queens, though the details are all wrong. The essential dishonesty of "All in the Family" was revealed in its theme song, where the unaccountably Protestant Archie yearns for the velvet rule of Herbert Hoover. The real Archie would've been an Irish Catholic Democrat, a New Dealer despite certain Al Smithian reservations about the socialist eggheads surrounding FDR. But blue-collar ethnic Democratic discontent is one of those subjects that television cannot broach, rather like feminine hygiene products in days of yore. How much easier it was for the upper-class liberals of Manhattan to disdain the good Conservatives of Queens and Staten Island as crypto-fascists with bad taste in furnishings.

Current chairman Mike Long is a feisty and likable man, though the party has grown uncomfortably close to the GOP. It supports the Rockefeller Republican George Pataki for re-election this fall, to the dismay of old-line Conservatives who pine for the romantic long-shot candidacies of the party's heyday. George Marlin, author of the party history, is the former CEO of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the Conservative Party's 1993 candidate for mayor. (He ran against Rudy Giuliani, whose star now blazes so brightly that he is, to borrow H. L. Mencken's line, the leading candidate for the next vacancy in the Trinity.) Marlin graciously spent a day showing us "the little green patches, the neighborhood shops" that warm his Chestertonian



*"What a bizarre sensation! I've never gone to Queens before without a cabful of luggage."*



heart. He and the party leadership have a distinctly un-Rockerish view of immigrant New York; Marlin sees "the new immigrants—Koreans, Hispanics, Chinese, Indians, and Pakistanis"—as the Conservative future. We'll see.

I think of Marlin's "little green patches" as we walk the wending way of Greenwich Village. This was the most salubrious spot in early Manhattan due to its excellent drainage. From the start, the Village was marked by "individuality" and "picturesqueness," wrote Thomas Janvier; it was "agreeably free from the foul odors and the foul humanity" of the rest of Gotham.

If Greenwich has lost some of its fragrance, it remains "a real village," asserts resident Kirkpatrick Sale, the radical ecologist and historian. What is the author of the decentralist opus *Human Scale* (1980) doing in a place so manifestly built on an inhuman scale? "I live in the part of New York which airplane pilots call The Valley," says Sale, because the buildings are dwarfish by Manhattan standards and "trees can still be higher than buildings."

While to an outsider the very name Greenwich Village conjures up Sodom and Gonorrhea, as Archie Bunker should have said even if he didn't, Sale loves it for being a neighborly oasis in the concrete and steel desert of Manhattan. Its "winding, crazy little streets and eighteenth-century homes" harken back to "when Greenwich was still an independent village." (The burg had its own post-1898 independence movement, launched in 1916 at the Stanford White-designed Washington Arch. Its leader was Gertrude Drick, whose habit it was to pass out calling cards reading "Woe," so as to be able to say "Woe is me.")

"Much of the Village is still on the human scale," says Sale, who has lived in the same four-story brownstone for 37 years. His daughter and granddaughter now share his apartment, making it an old-fashioned three-generation household of the sort almost never found in white Manhattan. In the Village, one is struck by the almost complete absence of children, even as finicky men and costive women escort their sweated dogs at aubade.

New York may well remain the Imperial City. But there is another way. Staten Island, by far the smallest and least urban of New York's boroughs, has trees, Republicans, and no subways. It joined Greater New York in 1898 and almost immediately had second thoughts. By 1900, patriots had formed the Staten Island Separation League, which swelled with members when in 1916 the city's sanitation department assigned a garbage dump to the piquantly named Fresh Kills area of the island. In time, Fresh Kills held 80 percent of the city's garbage. Robert Moses's 1964 Verrazano-

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Narrows Bridge brought not John Travolta but crime, crowding, and other blessings of urban life to Staten Island. Discontent spread.

"What we ought to do is tear down the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and get back to life the way it used to be," said 68-year-old retiree Katharine Winter several years ago. Heeding Winter, Staten Island tried to repeal Robert Moses and Imperial New York in one glorious swoop during the 1990s.

Within New York City, Staten Island had been kept from utter nullity by the Board of Estimate, on which each of the borough presidents had an equal vote,

rather as the U.S. senator from Rhode Island has the same vote as a senator from California. In 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the board violated the one-man, one-vote principle. Thereafter, Staten Island was stuck with just three representatives on New York's 51-member city council.

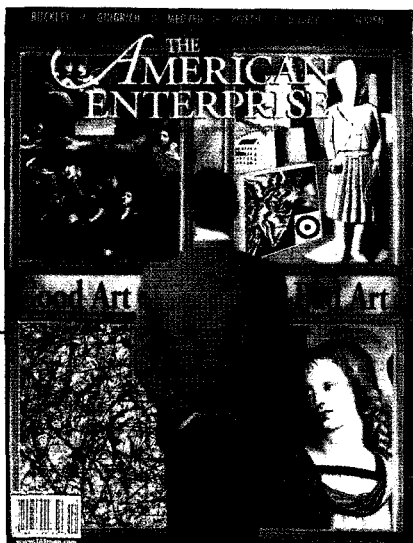
Staten Island's 400,000 citizens had one last, best hope: independence. In 1993, led by the "George Washington of Staten Island," the scholarly Republican-Conservative State Senator John Marchi, islanders voted two-to-one for freedom. (The *Times* editorial page rebuked the secessionists for their "passions.") State Assembly Democrats, however, insisted that the secession request had to come from the entire city, not just Staten Island. Meanwhile, Republicans, having just elected Rudy Giuliani thanks to the votes of Staten Islanders, were not all that eager to cut loose the island and its GOP voters, either. The free Staten Island movement drifted into limbo.

But defense of New York's independent patches of green, which had passed from Mailer to Marchi, next shifted to Maltese. Queens State Senator Serphin Maltese, a founder of the Conservative Party, proposed a secessionist referendum for his borough. Perhaps imperial New York will not last forever.

Men and women who truly love their little piece of New York have often looked kindly upon secession. John Tierney of the *New York Times* has recently revived the idea of an independent Brooklyn; Jane Jacobs, the influential urban writer, agrees that "Brooklyn and the other boroughs would all be better off on their own.... Big bureaucracies can't allow for the diversity and the experimentation that are essential to cities."

Novelist Thomas Wolfe, a displaced North Carolinian, once wrote in Brooklyn's famed dialect, "It'd take a guy a lifetime to know Brooklyn t'roo an' t'roo. An' even den, yuh wouldn't know it all." Wise New Yorkers protect their little green patches of the city for just this reason. They'd rather live on a block with neighbors than spend their days crossing bridges.





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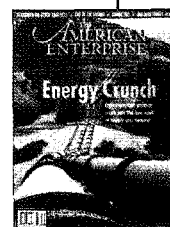
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# Ground Zero for Big Government

By Fred Siegel

**Special interest politics and the porkbarrel were invented in New York City**

Over the last century, only one mayor of New York City—Rudy Giuliani—was opposed on principle to the growth of government. And after eight years in office even Giuliani left the city with 31,000 more workers than he came in with, plus a per capita debt twice as large as the average of other big American cities. New York City's 8 million people owe \$42 billion in outstanding debt, while the entire state of California, with 35 million people, owes \$25 billion.

There is an intimate connection between New York's bloated workforce, its colossal debt, and its mayoral politics. In a metropolis where no one group has ever been strong enough to dominate city hall, our mayors—whether dapper or dumpy, mild-mannered or menacing—have consistently used the city budget to paper over class, racial, and ethnic antagonisms. The result: a constantly expanding city government.

In the 1920s, "Gentleman" Mayor Jimmy Walker's solution to New York City's tensions was to legalize Sunday baseball, boxing, and movies. Promoted to mayor by Tammany Hall—the city's legendary Irish Catholic political machine—Walker was a snappy songwriter and Broadway Boulevardier who symbolized New York in the Jazz Age of the '20s. He rarely



allowed his job to interfere with his social life, and he paid his personal bills with contributions from people who did business with the city.

Walker paid the city's bills by borrowing from the banks. By 1932, explains historian Martin Schefter, "one third of the entire city budget was devoted to debt service," and the municipality's total debt, conveniently financed by Wall Street just a few blocks from City Hall, "nearly equaled that of all the 48 states combined." The city, which had to borrow from banks just to pay the

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