



# **The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940 (Historical Studies of Urban America)**

*Max Page*

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"It'll be a great place if they ever finish it," O. Henry wrote about New York City. This laconic remark captures the relentlessly transitory character of New York, and it points toward Max Page's synthetic perspective. Against the prevailing motif of a naturally expanding metropolis, Page argues that the early-twentieth-century city was dominated by the politics of destruction and rebuilding that became the hallmark of modern urbanism.

The oxymoron "creative destruction" suggests the tensions that are at the heart of urban life: between stability and change, between particular places and undifferentiated spaces, between market forces and planning controls, and between the "natural" and "unnatural" in city growth. Page investigates these cultural counterweights through case studies of Manhattan's development, with depictions ranging from private real estate development along Fifth Avenue to Jacob Riis's slum clearance efforts on the Lower East Side, from the elimination of street trees to the efforts to save City Hall from demolition.

In these examples some New Yorkers celebrate planning by destruction or marvel at the domestication of the natural environment, while others decry the devastation of their homes and lament the passing of the city's architectural heritage. A central question in each case is the role of the past in the shaping of collective memory--which buildings are preserved? which trees are cut down? which fragments are enshrined in museums? Contrary to the popular sense of New York as an ahistorical city, the past--as recalled by powerful citizens--was, in fact, at the heart of defining how the city would be built.

Beautifully illustrated and written in clear, engaging prose, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan* offers a new way of viewing the development of the American city.

Winner of the Spiro Kostof Award of the Society of Architectural Historians, 2001, for the best book on architecture and urbanism.

"An excellent, multifaceted analysis of the process of urban development-not the inevitability of development but the choices individuals, organizations, and developers made that transformed Manhattan. The politics of place was, Max Page convincingly argues, an ongoing battle to define and thereby control the evolving shape of the city."--David Schuyler, author of *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing 1815-1852*

"Max Page transcends the usual dichotomy between those who glorify destruction for the sake of change and those who would avoid both at all cost. The sizeable borderland between architecture and preservation reveals new dimensions about science and history, innovation and memory, the cities that have been, and those yet to come."--Gwendolyn Wright, author of *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*

"A sober, humane explanation of how and why New York City became a place of continuous rebuilding. . . . For real or armchair New Yorkers, the whole package is a treat."--*Kirkus Reviews*

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