



Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City

By Tristram Hunt

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From Manchester's deadly cotton works to London's literary salons, a brilliant exploration of how the Victorians created the modern city

Since Charles Dickens first described Coketown in *Hard Times*, the nineteenth-century city, born of the industrial revolution, has been a byword for deprivation, pollution, and criminality. Yet, as historian Tristram Hunt argues in this powerful new history, the Coketowns of the 1800s were far more than a monstrous landscape of factories and tenements. By 1851, more than half of Britain's population lived in cities, and even as these pioneers confronted a frightening new way of life, they produced an urban flowering that would influence the shape of cities for generations to come.

Drawing on diaries, newspapers, and classic works of fiction, Hunt shows how the Victorians translated their energy and ambition into realizing an astonishingly grand vision of the utopian city on a hill—the new Jerusalem. He surveys the great civic creations, from town halls to city squares, sidewalks, and even sewers, to reveal a story of middle-class power and prosperity and the liberating mission of city life. Vowing to emulate the city-states of Renaissance Italy, the Victorians worked to turn even the smokestacks of Manchester and Birmingham into sites of freedom and art. And they succeeded—until twentieth-century decline transformed wealthy metropolises into dangerous inner cities.

An original history of proud cities and confident citizens, *Building Jerusalem* depicts an unrivaled era that produced one of the great urban civilizations of Western history.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. We think we have culture wars today, but our world is peaceful compared to 19th-century England as portrayed by Hunt in this comprehensive study of the emergence of the modern city. Hunt, a historian at the University of London, examines the many antagonistic political and aesthetic movements vying for dominance as the Victorian city took shape. In the 1830s, rural masses migrating to the industrial cities found rampant disease, extreme want and a life expectancy as low as 30 years. In response, some argued nostalgically for a return to medieval patterns of life or a resurgence of Saxon traditions of local autonomy. Others preached a municipal gospel, stressing a duty of serving the community through public office or participating in the myriad voluntary associations created to promote education, public health and the morality of the working poor. Hunt devotes lively chapters to these and other responses to Victorian urban life. He finds that none provided a lasting solution, as the cities of England and Scotland sank into drab suburbanism in thrall to the "metropolitan imperialism" of London. Demonstrating a remarkable command of literature, political history and architectural criticism, Hunt (who is all of 31) brings a long-departed era vigorously to life. 16 pages of b&w illus. (Jan. 4)

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From [The New Yorker](#)

This fun, if meandering, intellectual history of city-building in Victorian Britain traces the evolution of grim industrialized towns, with their "rat-haunted slums" and "vomiting chimneys," through their heyday as wealthy cultural centers, and beyond. Hunt relates how a newly prosperous middle class, eager to legitimize its economic power and distance itself from accusations of philistinism, began "manufacturing a new cultural identity," in which architecture and government reflected social and moral values. Using various models—from the buccaneering "municipal gospel" of Joseph Chamberlain to the example of Renaissance Florence, with its traditions of self-government and public design—the Victorians created the Age of Great Cities. No model was wholly successful in combatting the miserable living conditions of the poor, and an "anti-civic" solution—the suburbs—signalled the end of "urbs triumphant." Yet, Hunt argues, aspects of the Victorian framework hold valuable lessons for revivifying contemporary cities.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review London, Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, crucibles for the Industrial Revolution, horrified Blake with their "dark Satanic mills" and outraged Dickens with their scenes of Coketown squalor. But as a cultural historian, Hunt finds much more than pollution and poverty in the cities that made Victorian England the world's first truly urban society. He uncovers in these cities a remarkable range of municipal ambitions, as determined reformers fight to alleviate the misery of the crowded masses and as cosmopolitan artists stretch their talents for growing new audiences. Readers thus retrace the events that transform filthy streets into delightful thoroughfares connecting spacious and beautiful libraries, art galleries, churches, and civic halls. Hunt details the spirited debates over competing architectural styles--Greek, Gothic, Venetian--proposed for the new urban centers, locating these debates in a much larger clash of civic visions, progressive and reactionary. Personalities as well as principles collided in this struggle to define municipal life, the moralists Carlyle and Ruskin looming especially large. But it is a healthy ferment that Hunt sees in the conflicts over how best to establish social order in the burgeoning cities, the best and brightest Victorian minds joining to meet the shared challenge of creating a humane urban world. Because much of what the Victorian titans achieved toward that end has since been lost in the twentieth-century flight to suburbia, Hunt

concludes by posing hard questions about how policymakers might now renew neglected ideals of municipal citizenship. An enlightening historical context for urgent current issues. *Bryce Christensen*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lily Sawyers:

Would you one of the book lovers? If yes, do you ever feeling doubt when you are in the book store? Attempt to pick one book that you just dont know the inside because don't assess book by its handle may doesn't work this is difficult job because you are afraid that the inside maybe not since fantastic as in the outside seem likes. Maybe you answer could be Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City why because the amazing cover that make you consider with regards to the content will not disappoint an individual. The inside or content is usually fantastic as the outside or cover. Your reading 6th sense will directly make suggestions to pick up this book.

Robert Doyle:

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