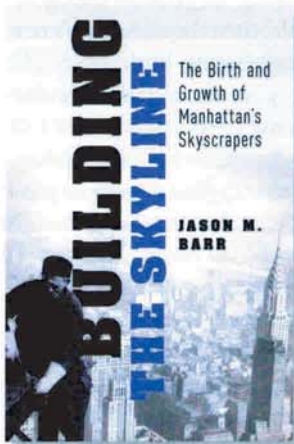


Building the Skyline: The Birth and Growth of Manhattan's Skyscrapers

By Jason M. Barr. New York City: Oxford University Press, 2016; 456 pages; \$49.95

WHETHER FROM a highway, a train, or your airplane window, that first sight of the iconic skyline as you approach New York City never fails to impress. It can be no surprise to anyone who has seen it how much ink has been spilled about the architecture and engineering that brought it about and how the skyline has affected the city's history. Less fully explored have been the economic forces that drove those modern wonders ever skyward.

But *Building the Skyline's*



author, Jason Barr, Ph.D., is an associate professor of economics at Rutgers University and is considered an expert on skyscraper economics. Thus, it is not surprising that this is his perspective. His book has two major themes: the skyline as the product of the "battle for place" as people and organizations try to figure

out where to live and work and the "skyline as system," which Barr explains is a way of understanding how decisions about where and how to build are interrelated.

Even the book's selection of illustrations is reflective of a different focus. Rather than a plethora of photographs and sketches of these massive, often beautiful structures, Barr includes maps of population densities, charts of land value indexes, and tables with statistical regression results on a variety of relevant data.

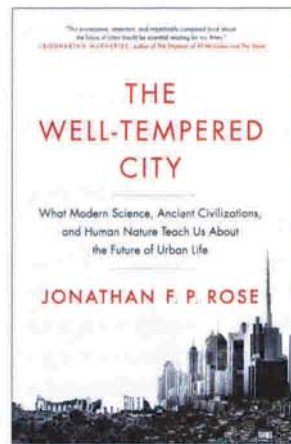
Barr takes a fresh look at many old ideas. Why did skyscrapers sprout downtown and in midtown but not between those two clusters? The answer has to do with neither the presence of Grand Central Station nor the depth of the bedrock (both common explanations) but rather with post-Civil War economic and demographic forces. In another example, he concludes that, for the past 125 years, the skyline "is a response to the growth in land values; while . . . land value growth is not directly affected by the skyline itself." This seeming contradiction reveals that, from an economic perspective, the skyscraper "is a solution to a problem, rather than a cause of other ones, such as congestion or excessive density."

Barr takes into account theory, data, and historical analysis, and as a result *Building the Skyline* is a deeply learned, exhaustively researched, and completely fresh look at the development of one of the world's most important metropolises.

The Well-Tempered City: What Modern Science, Ancient Civilizations, and Human Nature Teach Us about the Future of Urban Life

By Jonathan F.P. Rose. New York City: Harper Wave, 2016; 320 pages; \$29.99

WITH EACH PASSING year, it becomes clearer that as the world's population inexorably rises, an increasing percentage of those people will live in urban centers. In books this manifests itself as a growing wave of thoughtful and scholarly works examining what cities will or should look like and how



those forms and structures can best serve us.

In *The Well-Tempered City*, "urban innovator" Jonathan Rose looks backward to ancient cities, as well as at the evolving cities of today, and defines the key challenges that cities will increasingly face. These will include climate change, crumbling infrastructure, and soaring costs, and the author uses this survey in prescrib-

ing how to make the cities of tomorrow resilient to these megatrends.

The book highlights five characteristics that cities should cultivate in order to thrive in the future. One of these is coherence, which Rose defines as engaging everyone, ensuring that agencies work seamlessly with one another, and using integrated planning and evidence-based solutions. Another is circularity; here Rose is referring to the sustainable practices of reusing and recycling resources to the fullest extent possible. The third is resilience, by which is meant the capacity of such natural features as trees and soil both to provide citizens with an important respite from their stressful day-to-day lives and to perform such practical functions as absorbing excess stormwater.

The last two features are community, which manifests itself in safe, strong, accessible neighborhoods that improve residents' well-being, and compassion, which is a nebulous but very real sense of interdependence and altruism, the sense that "we are all in this together."

Drawing on his own experience in urban planning, Rose weaves a compelling and often idealistic message about how to build or mold our cities so that they become the most pragmatic and effective way of living together harmoniously on our increasingly crowded planet. **CE**



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