



Triumph of Order: Democracy and Public Space in New York and London (Columbia History of Urban Life)

Lisa Keller

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In an effort to create a secure urban environment in which residents can work, live, and prosper with minimal disruption, New York and London established a network of laws, policing, and municipal government in the nineteenth century aimed at building the confidence of the citizenry and creating stability for economic growth. At the same time, these two world cities attempted to maintain an expansive level of free speech and assembly, concepts deeply ingrained in both national cultures. As democracy expanded in tandem with the size of the cities themselves, the two goals clashed, resulting in tensions over their compatibility.

The results of this clash continue to resonate in our society today. Treating nineteenth-century London and New York as case studies, Lisa Keller examines the critical development of sanctioned free speech, controlled public assembly, new urban regulations, and the quelling of riots, all in the name of a proper regard for order. Drawing on rich archival sources that include the unpublished correspondence of government officials and ordinary citizens, Keller paints an intimate portrait of daily life in these two cities and the intricacies of their emerging bureaucracies. She finds that New York eventually settled on a policy of preempting disruption before it occurred, while London chose a path of greater tolerance toward street activities.

Dividing her history into five categories—cities, police and militia, the public, free speech and assembly, and the law—Keller concludes with an assessment of freedom in these cities today and asks whether the scales have been tipped too strongly on the side of order and control. Public officials increasingly use permits, fees, and bureaucratic hassles to frustrate the ability of reformers and protesters to make their voices heard, and by doing so, she argues, they strike at the very foundations of democracy.

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