

Coronet

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New Yorkers Are People

by CURT RIESS

A well-known writer consults many different sources about that rare species, the New Yorker—and gets these many different replies

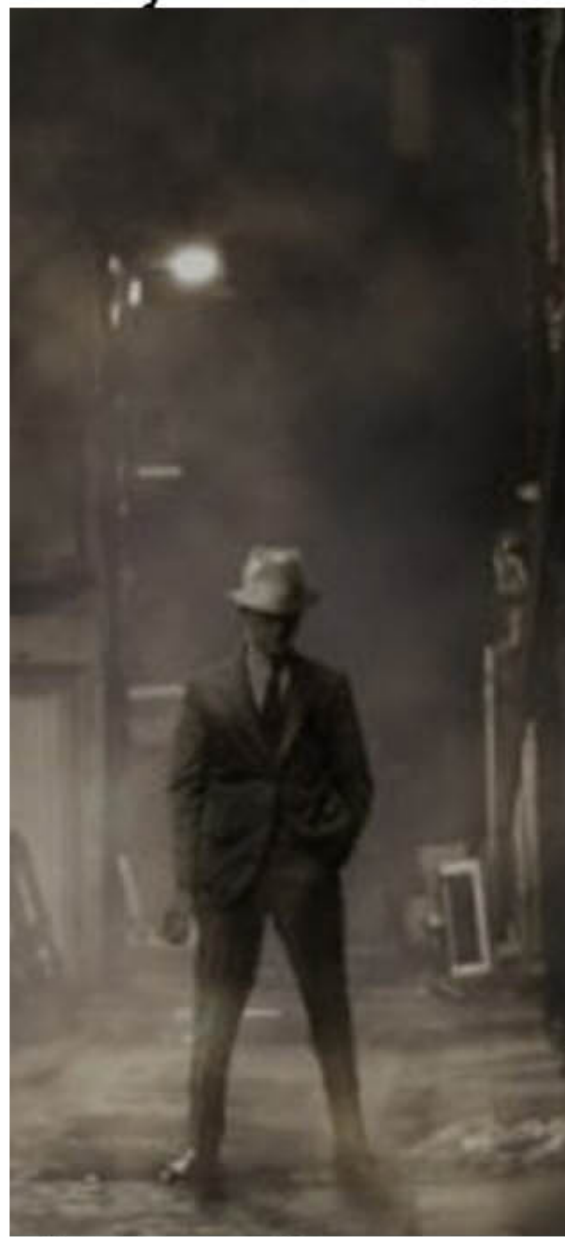
IF YOU want to find out what's wrong with the New Yorker, the natural person to ask is a cop.

That is what I did. It isn't difficult. I think the New York police force is the nicest in the world, because it's the only police force that doesn't treat everybody who happens to own a car as a criminal. There are more than 19,000 cops in New York, but didn't talk to all of them—just to McGilligan.



He cleared his throat and said that he didn't think the New Yorker on the whole was so bad. "Of course, I mean when it comes to crime and vice," he explained, and then he plunged right into crime and vice.

When cops speak of crime and vice, you almost get the idea that they didn't become cops because



they wanted to exterminate those evils, but because they are so fond of talking about them. They can talk about them for hours.

McGilligan started telling about gambling. He talked about the policy game—a racket that has infested the city from Harlem down to the Battery. He spoke of horses, too. Of course, betting on them has been legalized lately. But bookies are still illegal, and most betting is still done via the

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corner cigar store. He thinks a million bets a day would be a conservative average.

And then, surprisingly enough, McGilligan said, "Yeah. New Yorkers are suckers, all right. They think they are so much smarter than anybody else, but they're the biggest suckers of all. You just tell them how they can make money the easy way, and they lose their shirt. Some smart guys!"

He didn't linger long on the subject of prostitution and just mentioned in passing that the dope situation still was pretty bad. Marihuana. And about 50,000 heroin and opium addicts.

"But statistics show that the rest of the country is no better than New York—I mean when it comes to crime," he added, not without genuine pride. "The New York crime rate is about 1,028 per 100,000; the crime rate for the nation as a whole is 1,168 per 100,000. Not bad," McGilligan said. "Not bad at all. Just about 5,000 cases of assault and 275 cases of murder and manslaughter. Not bad at all."

No, it isn't bad. And yet what about all those people who dislike New Yorkers from the very bottoms of their boots? According to statistics, there are forty million non-New Yorkers coming into New York every year. They know very well that New York is the world's capital. They know that you have to come to New York if you want to reach the top in any line or profession. They know that New York is the beginning and the end of the great career.



I HAVE interviewed a businessman from Philadelphia, a professor from Cambridge, and about a dozen others from Texas, Idaho, Michigan, Maine and Nevada. And here is the verdict: all of them feel that New Yorkers are arrogant and snobbish, smug and self-satisfied. The New Yorker, they vow, may have a vague idea that there is a world beyond the city limits. He has heard of a

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place called Texas, where people wear big hats and do a lot of fancy riding. He knows that if you go far enough south you'll meet people who for some mysterious reason are all colonels, drink mint juleps and never do a day's work. Of course they know all about Hollywood: it takes you three days to get there, and then you go to a party every day in the year. On the way back you might even stop off at Reno, where everybody gets a divorce.

Maybe that sounds funny. But it isn't so funny. After all ignorance is only a product of something which is much more serious. What the non-New Yorker reproaches the New Yorker for is that he doesn't care; that he doesn't give a damn; that he's self-satisfied and smug.

And 120,000,000 Americans can't be wrong. Or can they?

To answer this question, it would be necessary to find the average New Yorker.



DURING my search for the typical New Yorker, I pounced upon a lot of innocent bystanders. The Italian waiter in the little neighborhood restaurant. A German chambermaid in a big hotel. A Hungarian playwright stranded in the Stork Club. A Negro boxer in Stillman's Gym. A Jewish delicatessen owner on the lower East Side. And twenty-nine Chinese laundrymen.



Asked whether they should be qualified as average New Yorkers they all said they had only come to New York a comparatively short time ago. So I looked

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elsewhere. I looked among the real New Yorkers, whose grandfathers lived in New York. Who start every sentence with: "Before they put those horrible buses on Fifth Avenue."

You can't interview many of them. In the first place, their butlers won't let you. In the second place, they—not their butlers—are dying out fast. A few of their Fifth Avenue palaces still stand, but very few. According to a Fortune survey, there are only thirty-nine of those houses left, with only eighty people living in them. The reason: it's too expensive—even for millionaires. It costs, with taxes what they are, between \$30,000 and \$50,000 just to open one of those houses.

It was by a sheer miracle that I finally got hold of one. The particular gentleman had just arrived from Florida and was on his way to his Long Island estate. Or maybe it was the other way around. No, he didn't think much of the New Yorker at all. New Yorkers weren't what they used to be, he reflected. Not even the Met openings were what they used to be. Too bad, too bad, he murmured.

Well, his grandfather might have been an average New Yorker. He isn't. Walking down Fifth Avenue, you are hardly aware that this was once the street where the cream of New Yorkers lived. Fifth Avenue has become the world's finest shopping center. And if you go farther downtown it becomes a wholesale district, and then it merges into Greenwich Village, the artistic center.

And if you go uptown, you come to Harlem. And if you go West you come to Broadway, or eventually to the notorious Hell's Kitchen. Then, if you ride cross-



town, eastward, you see Park Avenue and Sutton Place, the new Fifth Avenues. Or farther downtown, you won't get around unless you speak Italian, Chinese or Yiddish. Or still farther downtown to Wall Street (if you don't wear a Roosevelt button).

It seems that those Italians and Poles and Germans and—well, Americans who have come lately to New York, are just as much entitled to call themselves average New Yorkers as those whose great grandfathers lived in the then not-so-big city. In fact, statistics show that immigrants and their children make up more than seventy per cent of New York's population. There are more Irish and Jews and Negroes in New York than in any other city in the world. And more Italians, except for the three biggest Italian cities. More than a million Italians, that is. And 950,000 Russians, 600,000 Germans, 400,000 Poles, 300,000 Austrians. And so on with every nationality.



THE AVERAGE

New Yorker? He has 300,000 dogs and 500,000 cats. He lives in 300,000 one-family houses and in 6,000 elevator apartments. He works in 10,000 factories and his cars fill 12,000 garages. He swarms into 800 movie houses and theatres.

"The average New Yorker?" one elevator boy reflected. "Dis joint is lousy wid dem."

By this joint he meant sixty floors of steel and concrete.

And 7,000 job-holders.

This particular skyscraper is one of many, just as the 7,000 job-holders are a cross-section of

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the enormous army of gainfully employed New Yorkers. They spend their days in skyscrapers and factories. They emerge from the subway at the rate of two million a year.

They work. New York has 800,000 factory workers and 500,000 employed in trade; 500,000 clerical workers and approximately 450,000 domestics. Transportation and communication employ another 300,000, and there are 250,000 professionals.

They work. But what is this? Five hundred or six hundred people at least. Here they are standing—barely fifty yards from a big skyscraper, symbol of feverish rush and work.

That's the average New Yorker.

The average New Yorker. They say he's hardboiled. They say he doesn't care what happens to the next guy. Well, I talked to one, a taxi driver named Joe. Joe's a little hardboiled; nobody can deny that. Otherwise he wouldn't get along. His colleagues would squeeze him—that is, park so closely that he'd never get out to pick up a fare.

He said, yeah, New Yorkers was okay by him. But come to think of it, he hadn't ever thought about it. Not much, anyway. And then very slowly, an expression of disgust spread over his face. "I getcha," he murmured. "Those guys that go around blabbing about Broadway and Ruckerfeller Center. Just like as if they built it. As if they owned it. They're a pain in the neck. Those . . ."

Let's quote only what's fit to print. But even if we censor Joe, his answer still is revealing. He really feels that those hundred per cent New Yorkers who go around being New Yorkers and nothing

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else, as if they'd built it themselves—are just like the small-town people who never stop talking about how wonderful Podunk is; just small-town stuff. It sounds paradoxical, but maybe there's something in it.



AND THEN maybe there is something more to New York. And something more to those New Yorkers who go around almost drunk with the feeling, with the happiness of being in New York: looking up at the skyscrapers and counting the stories, feeling excited when they walk on Broadway and Fifth Avenue. Yes, I'm thinking of those young people who arrive on trains stopping at Grand Central or the Pennsylvania station every fifty seconds. Or maybe they arrive on buses, or hitchhike. They come to New York to make good, to become rich, to win fame. For them the very bigness and greatness of New York is something tremendously important. Because it's a symbol of their own ambition. It gives their ambition a goal.

Never mind that only one of a thousand or a million is destined to arrive and that the others will fall by the wayside. Never mind that McGilligan, our cop, or the elevator boy in the big skyscraper, each hopes to save enough money so he won't have to live in New York all his life. Each hopes to save enough money to get out into the country, to some little town, and open a newsstand or a cigar store, or maybe have a little chicken farm . . .



You see, these are the real New Yorkers who know all about the big city. They take New York casually. They are smart, and yet they are suckers. They are real hustlers, and they stand for hours watching an excavation. They are good, and they are bad. Some come into New York every fifty seconds, and some of them stay and some of them go.

There is something symbolic about those trains entering and leaving New York every minute of the day and night.

—*Suggestions for further reading:*

PORTRAIT OF NEW YORK

by Felix Riesenberg
and Alexander Alland \$5.00
The Macmillan Company, New York

1001 AFTERNOONS IN NEW YORK

by Ben Hecht \$3.00
The Viking Press, Inc., New York

SODOM BY THE SEA

by Oliver Pilat and Jo Ranson \$3.00
Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., New York

METROPOLIS

by M. F. Parton \$2.00
Longmans, Green & Co., Inc., New York



Curt Riess feels he has a particularly good perspective on New York, being not quite on the inside looking out nor yet on the outside looking in. The second time he saw Manhattan (in 1930, as correspondent for the famed *Paris Soir*) he put the metropolis down as third choice, after Paris and Berlin, of all places in which he'd like to live. After the occupation of France, he returned to New York which, by elimination, had become his "choicest spot on earth." Hollywood is the one-hundred thirty-fourth on his list, between Paris, Arkansas, and Paris, Illinois.