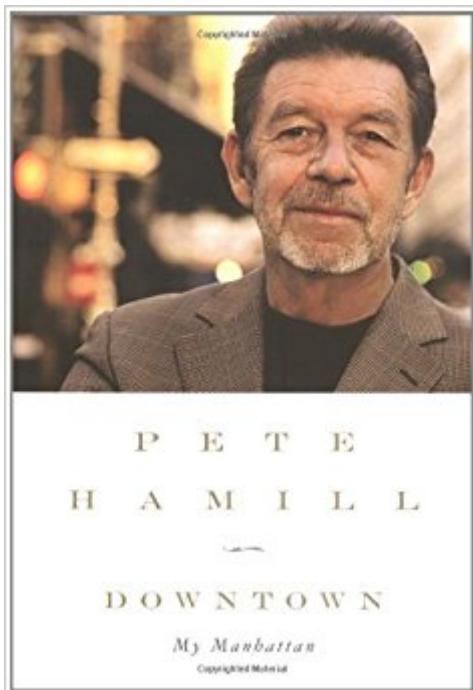


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# Downtown: My Manhattan



## **Synopsis**

A rich historical and personal portrait of Manhattan from the bestselling writer who is for many the living embodiment of the city. Manhattan, the keystone of New York City, is a place of ghosts and buried memory. One can still see remnants of the British colony, the mansions of the robber barons, and the speakeasies of the 1920s. These are the places that have captivated the imaginations of writers for centuries. Now Pete Hamill brings his unique knowledge and deep love of the city to a New York chronicle like no other. During his 40 years as a newspaperman, Pete Hamill has been getting to know Manhattans neighborhoods and inhabitants intimately, bearing witness to their greatest triumphs and tragedies. From the winding, bohemian streets of Greenwich Village to the seedy alleyways of the meatpacking district and to the weathered cobblestones of South Street Seaport, Hamill peels back the layers of history to reveal the citys past, present, and future. More than just history or reporting, this is an elegy by a native son who has lived through some of New Yorks most historic moments, and who continues to call this magnificent, haunted city his home.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Starred Review. New Yorkers love calamity," writes Hamill in this marvelous guide to the most expensive piece of real estate in the world. This is a look at the calamities— and the successes—that have struck downtown Manhattan since the time of the first explorers from the Old World. Hamill's Manhattan is filled with history, architecture and giant personalities. Readers will be thrust into the Civil War riots in Greenwich Village in 1863 and will rejoice in a Times Square filled with delirious New Yorkers on VJ Day in 1945. They will watch the city grow as the subway

crawls northward and the big skyscrapers begin to pop up, from the Woolworth Building in 1913 to the World Trade Center in the 1970s. The city's rogues and heroes are portrayed in action--from Aaron Burr and John Jacob Astor to Stanford White, Walter Winchell and a visiting Oscar Wilde. This is a companion piece to *Forever*, Hamill's novel of New York, and *The Drinking Life*, which explored the city through the alcohol-fueled eyes of the young Hamill. It is written with insight, humor and, most of all, a deep love of the Big Apple. Perhaps Hamill's mother, Anne Devlin, best put it into perspective: "You've seen it before," she told young Peter the first time he was transfixed by the spires of Gotham. "It's Oz." Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Hamill is an excellent novelist (see in particular *Snow in August*, 1997), but in his latest book, he wears his hat as one of the last of the old-time newspapermen whose life and work simply define New York City. He calls this book an "essay . . . based on memory, reporting, and reading." What that amounts to is a delightfully personal, robustly informative portrait of New York, Manhattan in particular (and Lower Manhattan more specifically). Having been in the newspaper biz for four decades, he knows how to keep his eyes and ears open for the good story, the telling detail, and the quirky but exemplary character. As he escorts readers around the island of Manhattan, he takes heavy glances back into history--insisting that New Yorkers constantly experience "aching nostalgia"--as he not so much classifies but revels in the distinctions of NYC both as a "concrete place and as an idea." A marvelous read for anyone who has a hometown. Brad HooperCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

We recently took a wonderful tour of the Hard Hat section of Ellis Island, and our tour guide through this abandoned hospital, once on a par with Columbia Presbyterian and Memorial Sloan Kettering, was wonderfully knowledgeable about lower Manhattan. He said that he found Hamill book essential for anyone wanting a very readable, fact filled, and exciting history of that part of Manhattan Island. I bought a copy as soon as I got home, it arrived in 24 hours, and I devoured it in about three hours. Wonderful stuff -- excellent writing and very reliable -- I checked it against the superb The Encyclopedia of New York City: Second Edition about 20 times. Incidentally, that encyclopedia comes in an iBook and I often check for more information when hiking around NYC or when reading a hard copy book like Hamill's -- an essential companion while exploring this fantastic city. I've taken off one star, a bit reluctantly, but I found Hamill's personal stories distracting. I think a more careful editor might have move those personal sections into either a Forward or

preferably an Afterword, and referenced Hamill's experience with footnotes in the main text. Nevertheless, this is superb history, very well told, and highly reliable. Robert C. Ross September 2015

I'm not entirely sure how much I liked this book. There were parts in where Pete Hamill really raised my brow on some insightful tidbits on the history of Manhattan, but there were a lot of lulls where it was hard to keep reading. In the end I figured this read jumped between a five star book and a three that it was good enough. Hamill has a great writing style and can play up nostalgia very well. He made me feel like some of the things that no one alive today could be old enough to remember seem like something that happened yesterday. In a sense it almost did in terms of relative time, when the Dutch carved out the first settlement on the island, to when the British captured the city in the war, to when the bums got the boot on the lower east side. Walking around knowing what I know now from this book really is fascinating that way. I also did a bit of fact checking myself on some of the specific details he mentioned, and it would seem didn't skimp on the research. This is no wikipedia research paper, his dates and facts check out. Another thing that I like is that he kind put my mind to ease a bit. This change quickly here in New York, especially the things you love. Veselka is mentioned, a wonderful Polish diner, one that I do care about, and I want it to be around forever like it seemingly has been. But nothing lasts forever, as Hamill points out. The trick is to not anguish over the loss and accept it. Veselka will be gone one day, but hopefully by then I will have found something else to move my love to. I always felt especially angry at what happened to my home in Manhattan, Tribeca, because of how real estate fiends came in and essentially forced everyone out to make way for Bed Bath and Beyond as well as over paid yuppies. After reading Downtown, and seeing how change like this is part of my home town history, and to appreciate being there when it was beautiful made me a little less upset. The reason this book want a life changing five star knock out is that sometimes I managed to get bored. The sentimental parts do kind of drone on and on. I think when Hamill wrote about the parts where he wasn't around to witness the events were more interesting simply because more of the facts but still delivered in a clever way. Then you get to the point where he is born. From there it gets mushy. I liked it better when he was able to remove himself a little more and focus on the shared history rather than his personal one. Sometimes it was interesting, but often it wasn't.

Excellent telling of a brief history of downtown Manhattan. Hamill has spent most of his life here and is so convincing in this telling that you would think he was actually here in previous centuries. For

those who do not know, downtown Manhattan is usually not the Manhattan you see in movies and TV. That would be midtown Manhattan. An exception was the "Law and Order" shows which were usually filmed in downtown Manhattan. I worked there for over 30 years and it was especially enjoyable for me.

A great book! PH knows NY and its' history and how it has evolved over the years. PH loves NY, and especially Manhattan - warts and all, and all its' stories of the people who have lived there from the earliest days until now. Even so, it is not a love song to NY at all. No sweet sentiments or longing for what used to be. It's much more than that. This book is a story that takes place over time: good times, bad times, ups and downs.

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