

INTRODUCTION

New York does things on a grand scale. *The Spirit of New York: Defining Events in the Empire State's History* presents New York history by exploring dramatic events that altered the course of state history and, because of New York's importance, national history as well.

The first fifteen chapters were included in the book's first edition; the last four have been added in this new edition. The nineteen chapters present stories of twenty events, including two fires in Chapter 9. Each chapter describes what led up to the event, the event itself, and what happened as a consequence. The events illustrate the spirit of New York—the elusive traits that make New York State unique, or at least distinct, among the fifty states—and the complexity of its history.

New York State presents a complicated historical mosaic, stretching back nearly two and a half centuries. During most of its history, the state has been a leader in business, commerce, agriculture, transportation, culture, education, and other areas. For many years, it was the nation's most populous and influential state but over the past few decades its leadership and influence have declined.

New York has often been on fast-forward, ambitious, eager to advance its prospects, impatient of delay, and inclined to go it alone if the rest of the nation did not share its vision. When federal authorities turned down New York's request for aid in building a cross-state canal, DeWitt Clinton, canal advocate and future governor, convinced the state to undertake the enterprise and build the Erie Canal. "It remains for

a free state to create a new era in history and to erect a work more stupendous, more magnificent, and more beneficial than has hitherto been achieved by the human race," he declared in 1815.¹

New Yorkers can sometimes be assertive and inclined to boast about their state's superiority. Writing in 1939, New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia confronted critics who asserted that his city is "strictly a money mart . . . a synonym for Wall Street. . . . New Yorkers are impolite." The mayor countered that "New York is a warm-hearted and generous community" but so far superior to other cities that "we could afford to stop for the next twenty years and we would still be slightly ahead of the procession."²

Capturing New York State's history has never been easy. The state's size, ethnic diversity, and cosmopolitan character, as well as the rapid pace of its historical development, all complicate efforts to identify a coherent state history with clear turning points and eras, cause-and-effect patterns, and sharply defined themes. New York City, Long Island, the Hudson Valley, the North Country (roughly the region north of Albany) and Western New York all claim regional historical distinctiveness. Identifying central themes is a challenge. State Museum staff, planning an exhibit on state history for the bicentennial of the American Revolution in 1976, settled on three grand traits: *materialism* ("New Yorkers have fashioned, used, invented, acquired, lusted after, traded for, and aspired to a literally infinite number of material things . . . [which] all bespeak a prodigious productivity and achievement reflecting a people's quest for a material definition of success"); *diversity* (millions of immigrants, an ethnic, religious, and cultural mosaic, and cities reflecting a cosmopolitan flavor, tolerance, and creativity); and *change* (rapid transformation and growth driven by transportation facilities such as the Erie Canal and the New York Central Railroad and the growth of business and finance).³

David M. Ellis, one of the state's most thoughtful historians, asserted that "the New York character" was determined by its geography (distinct regions that complement each other), population diversity (originally set-

1. Ronald E. Shaw, *Erie Water West: A History of the Erie Canal, 1792–1854* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), 58.

2. Fiorello LaGuardia, "Ten Misconceptions of New York [1939]," in *Empire City: New York Through the Centuries*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson and David S. Dunbar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 647–52.

3. David Gould, *Forces: Three Themes in the Lives of New Yorkers* (Albany: New York State Museum, 1977).

bled by the Dutch, immigration of Yankees from New England after the Revolution, but after that people from all over the world), inventiveness, and the spirit of fair play and tolerance. New Yorkers formed “a society of infinite variety, complexity and change” and “learned how to balance rival interests, to accommodate change without jettisoning traditional values, to unearth and reward talent, and to take care of those in need.”⁴

Novelist and historian Carl Carmer wrote that “York State is a nation,” using a diminutive version of the state’s name but asserting its expansive claim to elite, near-autonomous status. Carmer asserted that Yorkers assume that their “country is as separate, as decisively bordered, as any island in the sea.” A Yorker might visit neighboring Pennsylvania but is relieved to be “back in the New York State hills.” Yorkers are sensible, generous, industrious, easy-going, and given to doing things in moderation. The average Yorker is “hale, humorous.” Yorkers are “free and democratic . . . good-naturedly indifferent to the machinery of their state government.” Their state is an easy, satisfying place to live.⁵

Governor Mario Cuomo (1983–1995) saw enlightened, progressive public policies as New York’s defining trait. He defined “the New York Idea” as “government using its resources to help create private sector growth, then requiring those who benefit from that growth to share some part of it so that hope and opportunity are extended to those who have not been as fortunate.”⁶ His son Andrew Cuomo, who became governor in 2011, emphasizes that New Yorkers are exceptionally energetic, innovative, determined, and resilient. “At every difficult moment in our nation’s history, New York has emerged as . . . the progressive leader in the nation,” he explained. “In New York, we may have big problems, but we confront them with big solutions,” he wrote soon after taking office.⁷ A decade later, as the COVID-19 pandemic raged, the governor emphasized the themes of “reimagine, rebuild and renew” in his annual “State of the State” address. “We have a confidence born

4. David M. Ellis, *New York: State and City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 1–24.

5. Carl Carmer, “York State is a Country,” in *Dark Trees to the Wind* (New York: William Sloane, 1949), 7–46.

6. Mario Cuomo, *The New York Idea: An Experiment in Democracy* (New York: Crown, 1994), 10.

7. Andrew Cuomo, *2011 State of the State Address*, <http://www.governor.ny.gov/sl2/stateofthestate2011transcript>, and *2012 State of the State Address*, <http://www.governor.ny.gov/assets/documents/Building-a-New-New-York-Book.pdf>.

from accomplishment. We know what we must do and we will do it. We will win the COVID war and we will learn and grow from the experience. We are smart, united, disciplined and loving. We are as we say, New York Tough.”⁸

New York is rarely complacent or self-satisfied. It is constantly changing, reinventing itself. We have a constitutional and legal commitment to equality and justice before the law. There is a moral commitment beyond that to openness, fairness, and the dignity of individuals. But New Yorkers understand their state has often fallen well short of these goals. The state’s founders in chapter 1 wrote an enlightened constitution, but it sustained slavery (finally abolished in 1827) and denied women the right to vote (not enacted until 1917). As historian Jill Lepore suggests, we need “a clear-eyed reckoning with American history, its sorrows no less than its glories.”⁹

Sometimes, New York seems to have a historical split personality, greatness and enlightenment existing side by side with narrowness and darkness. New York has a paradoxical political culture, one characterized by competition and compassion, says historian Joanne Reitano:

The one emphasizes individualism and entrepreneurship while the other reflects community and social conscience. Materialism and opportunism are balanced by humanitarianism. Thus, New York was simultaneously a symbol of ruthless capitalism and a leader in public education, labor legislation, philanthropy, and social service. The state’s wealth enabled it to bankroll benevolence. But as the state’s fortunes turned, the tension between these two objectives grew, reinforcing the regional conflicts that have often turned the state against itself. In good times and bad, New York State’s priorities have not only mirrored but also influenced the nation’s priorities.¹⁰

Writing about similar inconsistencies or tensions in American history, John Meacham advises that “the only way to make sense of this eternal

8. “Video, Audio, Photos and Rush Transcript: Governor Cuomo Outlines 2021 Agenda: Reimagine, Rebuild, Renew,” January 11, 2021, <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/video-audio-photos-rush-transcript-governor-cuomo-outlines-2021-agenda-reimagine-rebuild-renew>.

9. Jill Lepore, *This America: The Case for the Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2019), 137.

10. Joanne Reitano, *New York State: Peoples, Places and Priorities—A Concise History with Sources* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

struggle is to understand that it is just that: an eternal struggle. And the only way to come to that understanding is by knowing the history that shaped us.” He continued that “we learn the most from those who came before us not by gazing up at them uncritically or down on them condescendingly but by looking them squarely in the eye and taking their true measure as human beings, not gods.”¹¹

Sometimes, change is led from the top. More often, it begins with aspirations and demands of individuals and groups, sometimes borne along by public demonstrations. Groups of New Yorkers, particularly in New York City, always seem to be protesting about something. A history of New York City protests from Dutch colonial days to recent years found “just how remarkably continuous urban uprising are . . . [which translates into] violent revolt (and counterrevolt), slave uprisings, police riots, militant strikes, bombings and arson, ritual overturnings of the social order, spontaneous outbursts, organized assaults, highly localized tumults and citywide boycotts, shady conspiracies and out-in-the-open grabs at power.”¹²

But when times are tough and a common enemy threatens, New Yorkers tend to put aside their differences and pull together. Governor Andrew Cuomo, writing about how the people of the state confronted the deadly COVID-19 virus in 2020, noted that “the results were solely produced by the people of the state of New York. This was an extraordinary example of social action. . . . [I]t was democracy in action. It was a diverse group of people forging community. It was individual responsibility and a collective conscience.”¹³

Some historians assert that New York is a microcosm of the United States, manifesting characteristic American traits such as individualism and courage. It is a place where ideas start and then spread to the rest of the nation, often leading the way or pointing it out through example. New York is “a mirror of the national past. . . . New York was or was always becoming what the rest of the nation turned out to be. As

11. Jon Meacham, *The Soul of America: The Battle for our Better Angels* (New York: Random House, 2018), 259.

12. Don Mitchell, “The Lightning Flash of Revolt,” in *Revolt New York: How 400 Years of Riot, Rebellion, Uprising, and Revolution Shaped a City*, ed. Neil Smith and Don Mitchell (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 3.

13. Andrew Cuomo, *American Crisis: Leadership Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic* (New York: Crown, 2020), 276.

New York changed, so did the country.” New York exemplified natural beauty, urban and rural landscapes, and extremes of wealth and poverty. New Yorkers could be thought of as “cosmopolitan Americans: energetic . . . materialistic and brash but also convivial, humane, tolerant, and idealistic. That one state alone should be able to encompass in itself so many of the virtues and limitations of the American people is a measure of New York’s unique role in the nation’s history.”¹⁴

New York’s energy and impatience to get on with things has sometimes inspired a sort of historical heedlessness. Historian Allan Nevins’ assessment of New York City history contains insights into the state as a whole:

[I]t is too protean, too subject to incessant phantasmagoric change. . . . [I]ts architectural and social record is a palimpsest. Over its skyscrapers hangs some demon forever waving his wand and exclaiming “Presto, Change!” At his command, the change comes—comes through growth, the successive waves of immigration from abroad and migration from within, the passion for rebuilding engendered by high land values, the want of reverence for the past.¹⁵

“New York gives little time to thinking of its past,” another historian observed. “Its concern is with the future.”¹⁶ New York, so confident and assertive in some forms, sometime seems modest about its own history. New York history is not given much attention in the schools. The public is often unaware about the state’s past, which could often provide insights into current issues.

Telling New York’s story is a challenge for historians. “Here is a really interesting story,” observed Dixon Ryan Fox, President of the New York State Historical Association, in 1933. “Where is there a history more dramatic, more richly varied, more instructive? In every stage it illustrates the history of the whole United States.”¹⁷ “[T]hroughout

14. Milton M. Klein, “Shaping the American Tradition: The Microcosm of Colonial New York,” *New York History* 59, no. 2 (April 1978): 174–76.

15. Allan Nevins, “The Golden Thread in the History of New York,” *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (January 1955): 7.

16. Bank of Manhattan, “*Mannahatin*”: *The Story of New York* (New York: 1929), 217, quoted in Milton Klein, “Introduction,” in *New York: The Centennial Years, 1676–1976*, ed. Klein (Port Washington, NY: Kenikat Press, 1976), 3.

17. Dixon Ryan Fox, foreword to *Wigwam and Bowerie*, vol. 1 of *History of the State of New York*, ed. Alexander C. Flick (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), vi–vii.

the past two centuries, New York has been where the action is,” wrote David M. Ellis. “Wherever we look, we encounter . . . people who have formed a society of infinite variety, complexity, and change. As America’s society grows increasingly pluralistic, it may be able to forecast its future from New York’s experiences.”¹⁸

“New York State is [not just] diverse; it is radically heterogeneous,” note the editors of the *Encyclopedia of New York State*. “New York State resists tidy conceptualization. . . . [T]he way to view New York State as a unified whole is by embracing its full complexity, not by trying to trim it to a single narrative,” advise the editors of the *Encyclopedia of New York State*.¹⁹ *The Spirit of New York* proceeds on that assumption. New York in all its vibrant complexity, creative energy, and puzzling contradictions emerges in these twenty events and the stories built around them. The events were selected with several criteria in mind:

*The event took place on a particular day and therefore provides focus for vivid, detailed recounting and also for building a story illuminating key aspects of history by describing what led up to it and what happened afterward or as a consequence.

*It has received limited historical attention in standard historical accounts. These events include the key contributions of New York aviation pioneer Glenn Curtiss; the story of IBM, a company with deep New York roots; or the story of the New York State Thruway, one of the greatest public works projects ever undertaken by a state.

*It is an interesting story with lively, engaging New Yorkers at the center of it. Consider, for instance, innovative novelist James Fenimore Cooper; the incomparable multi-issue reformer Elizabeth Cady Stanton; or the gruff but effective president of the 1964–1965 World’s Fair, New York’s master builder Robert Moses.

*It has features of drama, excitement, adventure, or courage, for instance, involving a group of rebels writing the first state constitution while on the run from British troops, citizens in

18. Ellis, *New York: State and City*, 24.

19. Peter Eisenstadt, Editor in Chief, and Laura-Eve Moss, Managing Editor, “Preface,” in *The Encyclopedia of New York State* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), xi–xii.

Syracuse rescuing a runaway slave, or New Yorkers protesting Wall Street excesses.

*It illustrates something profound and important and is a prelude to other important developments such as the first executive order against stream and lake pollution in 1899 or the Department of Health's announcement about the health perils of Love Canal that helped propel Niagara Falls resident Lois Gibbs to leadership of the environmental movement.

*It is at heart a "New York" story but has national ramifications or demonstrates or foreshadows New York's leadership. To wit, child labor protective legislation in 1903, the regulation of working conditions after the 1911 Triangle Fire, or the "Occupy Wall Street" protest a century later.

*It reveals and typifies the diversity of New York over its history, including stories of farmers rebelling against a tenant land system with roots going back to the Dutch colonial period, Jackie Robinson breaking the "color barrier" to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, and the music and cast of the hit 2015 musical *Hamilton*.

*It illustrates themes of transformation and resilience, for instance, the story of the Fire Department of the City of New York before, during, and after 9/11, or New York's response to the emergency landing of a passenger plane on the Hudson in 2009.

The book is necessarily selective. The events described in it are not evenly distributed across timeframes. Other events might have been selected by other historians, for instance, the opening of the Erie Canal on October 26, 1825, the Civil War draft riots on July 13–16, 1863, or the "crash" of the New York Stock Market, October 24, 1929. They have been covered in detail many times in topical books and textbooks. *The Spirit of New York* tries to elevate less well-known events and stories, to put new interpretations on ones that are more familiar, and to look at them all as examples of New York's historical distinctiveness.

Chapter 1, *April 22, 1777: New York State Begins*, discusses the first state constitution, which boldly proclaimed New York State into existence and gave it a surprisingly durable blueprint for government.

Chapter 2, *February 4, 1826: Fiction Trumps History*, analyzes *The Last of the Mohicans*, a novel by a pioneering New York writer that helped establish a new, distinctly American, literary tradition.

Chapter 3, *July 4, 1839: The Farmers' Rebellion*, examines a sustained, sometimes violent New York tenant farmer uprising and the political processes and compromises that led to its conclusion.

Chapter 4, *July 20, 1848: A Demand for Equal Rights*, describes the Seneca Falls women's rights convention and the career of one of New York's most ardent and steadfast reformers, Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Chapter 5, *October 3, 1851: Striking a Blow for Freedom*, details the rescue of a fugitive slave from a U.S. marshal in Syracuse, revealing the complexity of the abolitionist movement in New York State.

Chapter 6, *March 30, 1899: Pollution and Politics*, traces a half century of New York water pollution policy, revealing the scientific theories, political intrigue, and complexity of public health policy making.

Chapter 7, *April 15, 1903: Intervening for the Children*, looks at the process of developing state policy to protect its youngest citizens.

Chapter 8, *May 29, 1910: First in the Air*, highlights the career and accomplishments of unsung New York industrial leader, aviation pioneer, and inventor Glenn Curtiss.

Chapter 9, *March 25 and March 29, 1911: Fires Change History*, presents the story of two extraordinary and tragic fires, one in New York City and the other in Albany, four days apart, both altering the course of history.

Chapter 10, *February 14, 1924: Leading into the Information Age*, is the story of IBM, a company that exemplifies New York innovation and commercial success.

Chapter 11, *April 15, 1947: Breaking the Color Line*, presents the story of Jackie Robinson, who defied racial prejudice to become the first black major league baseball player, with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Chapter 12, *June 24, 1954: A New Enterprise for Moving around New York*, discusses development of the New York State Thruway and the role of its sponsor, Governor Thomas Dewey.

Chapter 13, *April 22, 1964: The World's Fair Opens in New York*, presents the story behind the World's Fair and its president, extraordinary New York builder Robert Moses.

Chapter 14, *August 2, 1978: Environmental Crisis and Citizen Activism*, describes the campaign of citizen activist Lois Gibbs to secure state

action to help people living near the Love Canal toxic dump site in Niagara Falls.

Chapter 15, *September 11, 2001: New York's Resilience*, recounts the history of the New York City Fire Department before, during, and immediately after the terrorist attacks on 9/11.

Chapter 16, *January 15, 2009: Miracle on the Hudson*, is the dramatic story of the emergency landing of the U.S. Airways Flight 1539 in the Hudson River and the heroic acts by the pilot, crew, and first responders that prevented loss of life and led to the successful rescue of everyone on board.

Chapter 17, *September 17, 2011: Occupy Wall Street*, discusses a campaign to address the issues of income inequality and irresponsible bank practices.

Chapter 18, *October 29, 2012: New York Confronts a Superstorm*, tells the story of Hurricane Sandy's devastating impact on New York City and the city's recovery and resilience following it.

Chapter 19, *February 17, 2015: "Hamilton: An American Musical" Opens in New York City*, recounts the historical background and impact of this smash hit which depicts the career of a Revolutionary New Yorker using a multiethnic cast, smart dialog, and rap and hip-hop musical scores.

Several themes emerge from the stories. These are worth noting in part because they provide insights into issues and challenges being faced by the state today.

Determined individuals organize around public issues and bring change. New York has produced more than its share of average citizens who became motivated to deal with particular issues, organized others, kept at it, and eventually triumphed in their cause. Advocacy by social activists Lillian Wald, Florence Kelly, and others led to child labor reform. Love Canal activist Lois Gibbs exemplifies the New York individual citizen activist, driven by motivation and connected to the welfare of family and community, organizing other like-minded people who face the same threat, negotiating with other interested groups, and using the news media, political parties, and other tools to magnify their influence and ultimately alter public policy. Elizabeth Cady Stanton made voting rights the centerpiece of her reformist work but insisted that the agenda include other issues including marriage, divorce, and religion. She framed the issues as ones of fairness and fulfillment of the nation's, and state's, historic commitment to freedom and equality. She

led by confounding her critics but also by applying a sense of humor. Smith Boughton and the other leaders of the anti-rent movement used a variety of approaches—a rent strike, guerrilla-style tactics, political action, court challenges, and even amending the constitution.

Strategies for addressing problems may develop slowly. The growth and development of such a large enterprise as New York State inevitably produces tensions, inequities, imbalances, and injustices. There are lots of examples of the political process being inclined toward delay and compromise. The Hudson Valley landed tenant system was clearly anachronistic by the mid-nineteenth century, but the state policy of intermittent investigation, legislation, and court action weakened but did not end it. That finally required hundreds of individual tenants compromising with landlords and buying their farms. Pollution of streams and lakes was well documented by the end of the nineteenth century. But scientific experts differed on solutions. Three of the state's most progressive governors—Theodore Roosevelt, Charles Evans Hughes, and Alfred E. Smith—sidestepped the issue, and the first comprehensive anti-pollution act did not come until 1949. In April 1911, it was easy to see in retrospect that allowing workers to labor in hundreds of high-rise factories lacking fire detection and suppression, and escape provisions, was irresponsible from both a business and a public policy perspective.

After the Love Canal crisis hit, reasonable New Yorkers wondered aloud how a well-regarded New York company like Hooker Chemical could have dumped deadly waste inside a city and how local and state government could have allowed it. “Occupy Wall Street,” the 2012 two-month long occupation of a park, plus marches and demonstrations, took up and advanced a longstanding crusade for adequate incomes for everyone and reigning in irresponsible corporate activities. The protest dissipated after a couple of months, but the sentiments it expressed and the issues it raised about equity and income inequality continue to reverberate.

New York's politics are blurred. New York's politics has seldom fit easy patterns such as rural vs. urban, upstate vs. New York City, or liberal vs. conservative. As the state began, there was the beginning of divisions between those who favored strong state government protecting and promoting landowners and business interests, those who wanted government programs for the powerless and disadvantaged, and those who wanted weak government, fearing that strong government would mean an abridgement of individual freedom. But such sentiments did not crystallize into ready distinctions of liberal vs. conservative.

New York's political parties are alliances of factions which shift over time, operating on the basis of compromise and consensus, making it difficult to take and sustain clear-cut policy positions. Whigs and the Democrats both waffled on the anti-rent issue in the pre-Civil War era. Democrats and Republicans avoided taking a clear stand on votes for women and women's rights generally. The Democrats are generally identified with reforms such as legislation protecting individuals' rights, but in New York it was Republicans who enacted child labor reform in 1903. Democrats were mainly responsible for enacting the state's labor and industrial code after the Triangle Fire, but Republicans left it mostly intact when they regained power in 1915. Democrats are often associated with civil rights, environmental reform, and large-scale public works programs. But it was a Republican, Thomas Dewey, who signed the nation's first state civil rights law in 1945, the state's first stream pollution measure, in 1949, and the Thruway act in 1950, the greatest New York public works enterprise of the era.

For some New Yorkers, neither major party has been sufficiently responsive to public needs. They have identified as politically independent and supported or opposed politicians based on their positions on critical issues.

The quest for social justice requires energy and sacrifice. One of the themes in New York's history is the quest for social justice, racial justice, equality for women, and fair treatment of less fortunate New Yorkers or citizens who cannot speak or fend for themselves, especially children. Lillian Wald, Florence Kelly, and Frances Perkins saw social evils such as child labor and firetrap factories first hand, attempted to deal with them through associations and publicity, then moved on to become very successful catalysts for change via the political process. Gerrit Smith, Samuel May, and Jermain Loguen, ardent abolitionists, were tireless in condemning slavery and courageously put themselves at risk for the freedom of fugitive William Henry. It was Henry himself, determined to stay free, who was the foremost hero of the "rescue" story. Branch Rickey courageously hired Jackie Robinson and made him a Brooklyn Dodger. His motives were mixed: hatred of racial discrimination, determination to give free run to athletic talent, and making money by winning ballgames. But it was Robinson himself—extremely talented, cool under pressure, an exemplary athlete and citizen—who is the real hero of the story.

Leadership requires innovation and creativity. John Jay led the writing of the first constitution by being knowledgeable about political theory and popular sentiment, an excellent writer, and a capable politician who brought others around to his views. He knew when to hold firm to principle and when he needed to compromise for the good of progress. Glenn Curtiss—designer, inventor, tinkerer, aviator, organizer of mass production—exemplified the traits of hard work, cooperation, bringing out the best in others, and leading in forming a new industry. Curtiss was the archetypical quiet New Yorker, modest, a deep thinker, always working. Thomas Watson—visionary, organizer, and promoter of both himself and his company, IBM—showed the advantages of building on technology, outdistancing competitors, providing exceptional customer service, and nurturing a positive corporate culture. Joseph Pfeifer, a New York City Fire Department line officer on 9/11, became a leader in the reorganization and transformation of that agency in the following years. Lin-Manuel Miranda, creator of the hit musical *Hamilton*, was a genius at creating a cast reflecting today’s diversity to reflect the Revolutionary generation’s exuberance.

New York produces inconsistent characters. New York State is so large and diverse that sometimes the historian does a double take because things do not seem to fit any pattern. The behavior of some of the people in these stories likewise seems enigmatic and contradictory. For instance, Revolutionary-era statesman and state constitution architect Gouverneur Morris expressed disrespect or even contempt for New York’s common people at the same time he was risking his life and welfare to write a constitution that would keep them safe and free. Elizabeth Cady Stanton for several years struggled with rivals for leadership of the women’s rights movement. She was fiercely anti-slavery but after the Civil War chafed when blacks were given constitutional voting rights but women were not. Tom Dewey, progressive in many ways, had little use for bipartisanship and political compromise. Governor Hugh Carey could not understand why people living near Love Canal never seemed to be satisfied with the state’s remedial action. Robert Moses, New York’s great builder, achieved much but applied power relentlessly to do it, and sometimes let his ego trump the public interest. Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a self-made millionaire and generous philanthropist, resented and did not understand the people who demanded income equity in the Occupy Wall Street initiative.

New York has a special kind of resilience. One of the themes in the stories is resilience—springing back from adversity and continuing forward progress. Members of the Provincial Congress kept working even as advancing British royal forces scattered continental and New York troops. When the British approached the temporary capital at Kingston, the new government simply dispersed, reassembled later at Poughkeepsie, and kept the fledgling state intact. The new governor, George Clinton, calmly took the oath of office and then hurried off to lead a fight against the enemy. The first chief justice, John Jay, took time to lecture his first jury on the real meaning of the revolution and New York's new constitution.

Setbacks inspired Elizabeth Cady Stanton on to more tenacious campaigning. Mishaps in testing prototypes and patent infringement lawsuits motivated Glenn Curtiss to keep innovating. The New York City Fire Department mourned its dead after 9/11 and then creatively revised its mission, policies, and training to meet the new threat of terrorism. New York City sustained substantial damage from Superstorm Sandy in 2012 but bounced back stronger than ever.

New York's history is a great experiential treasure trove of wisdom and folly, success and failure, progress and retreat. The stories in *The Spirit of New York* reflect the state's diversity, tenacity, creativity, leadership, and some of its many successes. Several show a state characteristic of forging ahead, going around or over obstacles, and using state pride and the history of its great accomplishments to help sustain the momentum. They also show the challenges inherent in keeping a large, dynamic state unified and effecting change and improvement. Some of the stories show a pattern of drift, hoping problems will go away or resolve themselves. Others document problems ignored and injustice perpetuated too long before being addressed. The New Yorkers in the stories are vibrant and interesting but activated by complex human motives, blending ego and self-interest with determination to improve the lot of their community, state, and nation.

The stories may have some loose ends and contradictions but, like New York itself, they are never dull.