



## **Ghosts of 42nd Street: A History of America's Most Infamous Block**

*Anthony Bianco*

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Imagine shuffling down Broadway through the hustle and bustle right into the nonstop, neon heart of New York City: 42nd Street.

Once a quiet neighborhood of brownstones and churches, the area was transformed in the early 1900s into an entertainment hub unlike any in the world. No place has ever evoked the glamour and romantic possibility of big city nightlife as vividly as did 42nd Street. It was the dazzle of "naughty, bawdy, gaudy" 42nd Street that put Times Square on the map and turned the Broadway theater district into the Great White Way. *Ghosts of 42nd Street* stirs your imagination as it takes you on a historical journey of this glamorized strip still known today as the Crossroads of the World. From the bold innovations of Oscar Hammerstein and Florenz Ziegfeld through the porn-laden 1960s and 1970s to the present-day "Disneyfication" of New York's bright lights district, *Ghosts of 42nd Street* is as fascinating as a tabloid frozen in time.

## **Ghosts of 42nd Street: A History of America's Most Infamous Block Details**

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### **King says**

It might seem a silly complaint, but the book suffers from being too thorough. Many of the hundreds of little stories it tells would have been worthy of book-length treatments of their own. Consequently, the book suffers from anecdotal whiplash as it tears through a blizzard of names and places over its few hundred pages. While it is a breathtaking work of scholarship (peppered throughout with interesting cocktail-party trivia) and is potentially a useful reference, it's not a particularly engaging piece of writing. Actually, often I was kinda bored. :-/

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### **Elizabeth says**

I enjoyed the first half of this book but once it got to more recent times found it a bit boring. That's nothing against the book so much as I'm just a bigger fan of older New York stories. Informative non the less:)

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### **Lauren Albert says**

While I was doing graduate work at CUNY GSUC, I regularly walked down 42nd Street from the subway to school which was then housed in two buildings on 42nd between 5th and 6th Avenue. How different it was then. I cringed walking by the porn shops and the men lurking in front of them. I didn't feel safe walking through there at night. I've watched so many of the positive changes take place--the re-opening of the New Victory Theater, the closing of the last porn shops, the cleaning of the streets. So it was fascinating to read about the street's history from its first days to the late 80s when I first regularly walked through. If you love NY, you'll love reading about its speakeasy days, the rise of the Lobster palaces, the grind (2nd and 3rd run movie houses) houses, the ascent of the "peeps"--there is so much wonderful (and not so wonderful!) history here. You learn how porn took hold of the street and how the work of a few saved it and re-created theater in NY. Worth reading.

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### **Susan says**

I really was fascinated by this book. From my childhood when Times Square was the exciting place my father took me through the  
sleazy days of pornographic movie houses  
to a hectic Broadway institution to its current  
sterilized feeling - I can mark my life by my  
memories of this NYC area!

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### **Jeff Dawson says**

Thought I'd open up my interests a bit and try something new.

The first third of this story is great. It details how "Broadway and 42nd street" became the mecca of the Old and New World when it came to the entertainment industry. Fascinating. I had no idea how many of the greats started here: Barrymore, Hope, Astaire, Gershwin and others. I enjoyed the description of the famous three sided building we're all familiar with at the crossroads. Finding out it was the main office for the New York Times was cool. This is the best part of the book

The next two thirds became a bit dry and dull. It revolves around how the area descended into the sex shows, trades and smut. Then fell off into the politics of New York City and the failed plans to revitalize the area.

Didn't care for the occasional political references through the story. Added nothing.

I believe, "The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of 42nd Street would be a more appropriate title.

Three stars

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### **lc says**

Ghosts of 42nd Street: A History of America's Most Infamous Block was an interesting book for one lover of New York, theater, and the original Broadway. It gives the good and the scum of the earth in its pages. So glad I read it. Government officials nearly kept the clean up of the area from ever happening because none of them could get together on the plans and each mayor involved wanted full credit.

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