



Cities in Civilization

By Peter Hall

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Ranging over 2,500 years, **Cities in Civilization** is a tribute to the city as the birthplace of Western civilization. Drawing on the contributions of economists and geographers, of cultural, technological, and social historians, Sir Peter Hall examines twenty-one cities at their greatest moments. Hall describes the achievements of these golden ages and outlines the precise combinations of forces -- both universal and local -- that led to each city's belle epoque.

Hall identifies four distinct expressions of civic innovation: artistic growth, technological progress, the marriage of culture and technology, and solutions to evolving problems. Descriptions of Periclean Athens, Renaissance Florence, Elizabethan London, and nineteenth-century Vienna bring to life those seedbeds of artistic and intellectual creativity. Explorations of Manchester during the Industrial Revolution, of Henry Ford's Detroit, and of Palo Alto at the dawn of the computer age highlight centers of technological advances. Tales of the creation of Los Angeles' movie industry and the birth of the blues and rock 'n' roll in Memphis depict the marriage of culture and technology.

Finally, Hall celebrates cities that have been forced to solve problems created by their very size. With Imperial Rome came the apartment block and aqueduct; nineteenth-century London introduced policing, prisons, and sewers; twentieth-century New York developed the skyscraper; and Los Angeles became the first city without a center, a city ruled instead by the car. And in a fascinating conclusion, Hall speculates on urban creativity in the twenty-first century.

This penetrating study reveals not only the lives of cities but also the lives of the people who built them and created the civilizations within them. A decade in the making, **Cities in Civilization** is the definitive account of the culture of cities.

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Cities in Civilization By Peter Hall Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1048558 in Books
- Published on: 1998-11-17
- Released on: 1998-11-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.50" h x 7.00" w x 2.25" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 1184 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Every golden age has been an urban age; throughout history, cities have provided a crucible for creativity. How do such *belles époques* come about? Why should the creative flame burn so uniquely in cities and not in the countryside, and why does the creative and innovative spirit of one city inevitably yield to another? *Cities in Civilization* explores these issues and others related to the central role of cities, past and present, in the fostering of artistic, philosophical, scientific, and technological genius.

Peter Hall devoted 15 years of his life conceptualizing, researching, and writing *Cities in Civilization*. His extraordinary efforts are apparent in the analytical scope, historical depth, and sheer length of the book, which, including photographs and a bibliography, is well over 1,000 pages. Supporting his argument with ample reference to dates, historical figures, and citations of leading urban scholars, the book does not lend itself to casual, cover-to-cover reading. Despite the book's length, though, it remains easy to navigate through the case studies of individual cities. Hall systematically divides the text into five thematic chapters, further subdividing each chapter chronologically by city. The chapters explore themes of cultural creativity, technological and economic innovation, the urban fusion of art and technology, urban innovation, and the partnership of the private and public sector to promote urban development and regeneration.

Breaking from other leading scholars in the field, Hall does not consider the great city doomed. Instead, *Cities in Civilization* testifies to his confidence that cities of the 21st century, like the great cities of the past, will successfully work to solve their own problems and ameliorate their own ills. --Bertina Loeffler

From Publishers Weekly

What brings a city to its golden age? Hall (*Cities of Tomorrow*), a distinguished professor of urban planning, applies this question to cities ranging from Rome and Athens to Glasgow, Memphis and Palo Alto in his new survey. His conclusions, like the book itself, are diffuse. Examining cultural belle époques, Hall contends that it was, ironically, the restrictiveness of the official artistic culture in turn-of-the-century Paris and Vienna that fueled startling innovations, as new artists were forced outside the mainstream. Looking at technology, Hall argues that an unfettered market is a great stimulant to invention, as in the heydays of Glasgow's shipbuilding trade and Manchester's cotton textile manufacturing, but, as both cases show, it also leaves cities vulnerable to the losses that result from other cities improving on their initial innovations. Turning to the fusion of cultural and industrial innovation, using L.A.'s film industry and Memphis's pop music scene as examples, Hall asserts that the success of both rests on recognizing a "society in flux" and catering to "the deepest emotional needs" of an important, untapped market. Hall next examines the great successes and boondoggles of urban planning over the last two centuries (as well as in imperial Rome) before ending with a coda in which he applies his accumulated insights to the future cities. Hall's broadmindedness allows him to draw useful insights from thinkers as diverse as Joseph Schumpeter and Michel Foucault. While it may not come as a great surprise that neither entirely unregulated markets nor rigid central planning, but a little of each, with a pinch of kismet, will bring a metropolis to its peak, Hall must be commended for making this case with unusual thoroughness.

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From Library Journal

Like Braudel's and Holmes's, Hall's thesis here is that "the biggest and most cosmopolitan cities...have throughout history been the places that ignited the sacred flame of the human intelligence and the human imagination." Case studies illustrate themes such as the city as cultural crucible, the milieu for innovation,

etc. Other recent larger studies of historically important cities include Robert Hughes's *Barcelona* (LJ 10/1/91) and Roy Porter's *London: A Social History* (Harvard Univ., 1995). (LJ 12/98).
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Users Review

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