

INVENTING TIMES SQUARE: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World

Edited by William R. Taylor

Name: Daley Holder

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1. Between 1900 and 1929, Times Square was the center of American commercial culture. The area flourished as a national showcase for music, vaudeville acts, fashions, and consumer goods through the 1920s and for many years afterwards.
2. The market economy and fragmented polity that characterized both New York City and America at large provided the institutional infrastructure that allowed Times Square to handle its classic role.
3. The physical infrastructure that located and defined Times Square was provided by the decisions that shaped the city's transportation system and the built environment of both the city and the nation.
4. The economic infrastructure of both America and New York City helped establish the conditions that brought the market for commercial culture to Midtown Manhattan.
5. The development of the "first" true rapid transit system, starting with the opening of the original IRT line in 1904, was a key factor in the rapid development of Times Square. By 1918, local and national transportation networks brought the largest and most diverse audience possible to test and validate vaudeville acts, plays, films, songs, singers, and performers of all kinds together in just one place: Midtown Manhattan.
6. The local economic and government decisions that defined the city's land-use districts that centered the American market for commercial culture in Times Square. And retail, manufacturing, corporate office, and mass communication activities sought to take advantage of this central location in Midtown Manhattan.

7. In the early days as the central theatrical district, Times Square became known for the spectacular quality of its productions and for the great size of its theaters.
8. By 1909, movies were beginning to change the national market for theatrical entertainment, as well as the shape of New York's theater district, as it brought in new groups of managers and producers, as well as new, even larger theaters. Most of them came to see all kinds of talent that were on constant display in front of the live audiences of Times Square and "of "Broadway" in general.
9. In the 1920s, the growth of radio helped establish yet another communications industry to Times Square; like movie producers, radio executives mostly came to evaluate theatrical talent—and to make it easy to bring performers and newsmakers to their studios.
10. The New York Zoning Resolution of 1916 did not establish a district for exclusive use of the entertainment industry. Instead it created only three different kinds of land-use districts: residential, business, and unrestricted. And while the theater district developed around Times Square, property owners still had the freedom to use their land and buildings for commercial uses that offered the best income.