BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT

NEW YORKERS: A CITY AND ITS PEOPLE IN OUR TIME

CRAIG TAYLOR

2021 BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY BOOK PRIZE FINALIST
BOOK SYNOPSIS

A symphony of contemporary New York through the magnificent words of its people—from the best-selling author of Londoners.

In the first twenty years of the twenty-first century, New York City has been convulsed by a terrorist attack, blackout, hurricane, recession, pandemic and numerous social injustices. New Yorkers weaves the voices of some of the city’s best talkers into an indelible, vital portrait of New York in our time.

Bestselling author Craig Taylor has been hailed as “a peerless journalist and a beautiful craftsman” (David Rakoff), acclaimed for the way he “fuses the mundane truth of conversation with the higher truth of art” (Michel Faber). In the wake of his celebrated book Londoners, Taylor moved to New York and spent years meeting regularly with hundreds of New Yorkers as diverse as the city itself. New Yorkers features 75 of the most remarkable of them, their fascinating true tales arranged in thematic sections that follow Taylor’s growing engagement with the city.

continued on next page
Here are the uncelebrated people who propel New York each day—a bodega cashier, hospital nurse, elevator repairman and emergency dispatcher. Here are those who wire the lights at the top of the Empire State Building, clean the windows of Rockefeller Center and keep the subway running. Here are people whose experiences reflect the city’s fractured realities: the mother of a Latinx teenager incarcerated at Rikers, a BLM activist in the wake of police shootings. And here are those who capture the ineffable feeling of New York, such as a balloon handler in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade or a security guard at the Statue of Liberty.

Vibrant and bursting with life, New Yorkers explores the nonstop hustle to make it; the pressures on new immigrants, people of color and the poor; the constant battle between loving the city and wanting to leave it; and the question of who gets to be considered a "New Yorker." This is a rare book that captures the strength of an irrepressible city that—no matter what it goes through—dares call itself the greatest in the world.
Craig Taylor is the author, most recently, of *New Yorkers: A City and Its People in Our Time*.

Taylor’s other books include *Londoners: The Days and Nights of London Now—As Told by Those Who Love It, Hate It, Live It, Left It, and Long for It, Return to Akenfield* and *One Million Tiny Plays About Britain*, which began life as a column in the *Guardian*.


**LEARN MORE ABOUT CRAIG AT CRAIGDTAYLOR.COM & IN SELECT MEDIA COVERAGE:**

- **TIME**: "I Interviewed Hundreds of New Yorkers. Here’s What They Taught Me."
- **WAMC/THE ROUNDTABLE**: "New Yorkers by Craig Taylor"
- **WGRT/LIMELIGHT**: "Interview with Craig Taylor"
- **VANCOUVER ISLAND FREE DAILY**: "Island Author Writes About New York from the Perspective of Its Residents"
Is there someone in the book who specifically fits your image of a New Yorker? Is there someone who really doesn’t seem like a New Yorker to you? Do you think you are representative of the place you are from?

The photographer Gus Powell says, “New York is an incredibly generous place” (p. 15). Is he right? Are there times when this is contradicted in New Yorkers?

Do the Sunday on the Street interludes change the way you read the rest of the book? How is your understanding of the book affected by reading about Craig Taylor’s personal experiences in New York? Do you feel Taylor’s presence in certain monologues?

Fate is a particularly resonant idea for the people in this book. Joe lies awake mornings thinking about “My situation…what else do you think I’d think about? My position. My fate, or lack of. Lack of fate.” (p. 291). What does he mean by a lack of fate? How do the other New Yorkers we meet think of fate?
In your view, is there a perspective that *New Yorkers* leaves out? If yes, which one(s)?

Most people disappear a few pages or even paragraphs after they are introduced to us in this book. What was your emotional response to this structure? How did you respond when someone returned for a second or even third time, like Antwon Shavers, Pete Meehan or Joe? Was there someone you wanted to hear more from?

Consider this quote: “‘We solve problems.’ My dad just always said that phrase to me.” (p. 202). Were you surprised that Nora Bauso began her interview saying this? Why or why not? How did your opinion of Dan Bauso change after hearing from Nora and Amy?

Ralph Martin, the doorkeeper at Welcome Table says, “Part of the job is to enter into, as some have put it, the chaos of another person’s life” (p. 363). How does Martin do that, and why is it part of his job? How does this quote apply to Taylor’s work as an interviewer and writer? How does it apply to you as a reader?
What do you think keeps Joe from leaving New York? If Craig Taylor had rented a car to drive him to Pittsburgh, do you think Joe would have gone?

Therapist Deborah Karlsson describes a patient who feels a sense of failure for leaving New York (p. 49). Is there a kind of failure specific to New York?

“My parents have never owned anything. They never bought a house, they don’t own anything, but they own many plots of cemetery land, so we’re good there” (p. 239). Why would Craig Geraghty’s family buy cemetery plots rather than property? How does Geraghty feel about this?

Recognition comes up in many different forms in New Yorkers. Jason Nunes writes his name on top of the Empire State Building; Sal Leone is given a citation by the MTA after working for 30 years; Amy Hughes hears the seven o’clock cheering during the pandemic. How do each of these people seek recognition and how do they respond to it?
BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

13 Maggie Parker, the nanny from Houston, has “gratitude that comes with living in Brooklyn.” She worries that she will lose it if her life becomes easier, either through leaving the city or earning more money (p. 346). How would you describe her gratitude? Do you agree that it is linked to hardship?

14 Do you think Antwon Shavers will stay in New York? How does he change between the first and second interview? What do you think New York has taught him?

15 Returning to visit New York at the end of the book, Taylor writes, “I’d failed to stay objective, but I’d also failed to get involved enough” (p. 385). What does he mean by these two failures? Do you agree with his self-assessment?
BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

16. If you wanted to write a book like *New Yorkers* about your hometown, who is the first person you would interview? Why?

17. “I feel like I have something in common with everybody, but I feel like because of that I’m not like anybody” (p. 145). Do you relate to this feeling? Do you think this is a feeling that large diverse cities cultivate?

18. What was your impression of New York before reading this book? How has reading this book changed or altered that impression?
NYC BINGO: Wildlife

Originally published on gothamist.com; created by Brooklyn-based artist and illustrator Sarah Butler.
NYC BINGO: Food

Originally published on gothamist.com; created by Brooklyn-based artist and illustrator Sarah Butler.

See more of artist Sarah Butler's work at instagram.com/sarahcbutler_art

BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT: NEW YORKERS
BKLYN BOOKMATCH READALIKES

Did you enjoy *New Yorkers: A City and Its People in Our Time*? Want to read something similar? Check out these readalike titles below:

- *Humans of New York: Stories* by Brandon Stanton
- *Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul* by Jeremiah Moss
- *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith
- *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok
- *Time and Again* by Jack Finney
- *New York, My Village* by Uwem Akpan
- *New York, New York, New York: Four Decades of Success, Excess, and Transformation* by Thomas Dyja

YOU CAN ACCESS THE LIST AND PLACE HOLDS ON THESE TITLES IN MULTIPLE FORMATS THROUGH THE BPL CATALOG: BORROW.BKLYNLIBRARY.ORG

IN THE MOOD FOR SOMETHING ELSE? GET CUSTOMIZED READING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY’S FREE BKLYN BOOKMATCH SERVICE: BKLYNLIBRARY.ORG/BOOKMATCH

BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT: NEW YORKERS