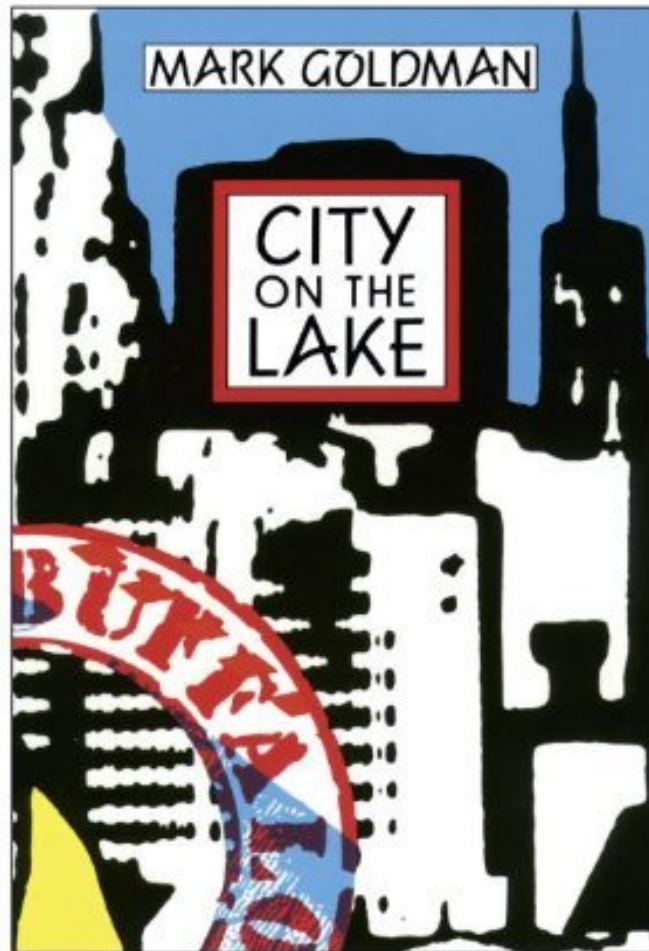


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## City on the Lake

Mark Goldman

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The Challenge of Change in Buffalo, New York

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**Mark Goldman : City on the Lake** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised City on the Lake:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Sad tale about a shrinking city  
By Peter Lorenzi  
Having been born and raised in South Buffalo and Lackawanna, I have a penchant for "Buffalo books". The recent "Power Failure" is a good read and Goldman's upcoming (January 2007) sequel is already in my shopping basket for quick delivery. "City" focuses most of its tale on race relations in Buffalo, kicking off with an "incident" on the Crystal Lake cruise ship in 1956 and following the progression -- or, perhaps, the regression -- of racial relations in Buffalo for the twenty-five

following years. Buffalo was built on a rich ethnic mix -- back when diversity meant multiple nationalities, not skin color -- with a huge Catholic population, and natural physical resources that made it a trade and industrial center. Lake Erie, the Erie Canal, Canada, and Niagara Falls, with immigrant labor doing the heavy lifting, powered a booming city through the first half of the twentieth century. World War II brought another boom and, with it, the migration of African-Americans from rural, Southern areas, filling important, well-paying jobs in the mills and factories. But racial assimilation was not easy. Ethnic neighborhoods thrived with their culture, their history, their food, and their churches. Racial differences ran deep. By the late 1950's, Buffalo had changed dramatically. That was at a time when there were only three national television networks and only three significant (and all domestic) auto manufacturers. Over half of Buffalo's school children attended local Catholic schools. Canisius College was the intellectual center for the production of the new white-collar class. The opening of the St Lawrence Seaway in 1958 and the failure to re-locate the University of Buffalo into the city center in the early 1960's probably had as much to do with Buffalo's economic demise as did foreign competition and the general decline of blue-collar, union jobs in heavy industry. By 1984, what had once been an industrial megaplex was now just rust and dust. Goldman's focus on race relations and the integration of the schools is the theme he uses to tie all these tragedies together. There are a lot of interviews, summaries of Buffalo News stories, brief bios of key players, and strings of anecdotal data about the city's decline. A few, systematic tables on population loss, white flight, and industrial and economic decline would have helped the narrative, as would have maps and photos. Buffalo is a city of neighborhoods, many of the colorful and vibrant, if not now at least they were in the past. Perhaps most important, Goldman follows the heavy hand of the well-intentioned Judge Curtin, trying to right the wrongs of segregation, although he could not compensate for the lack of leadership, innovation and flexibility that the city needed. Instead of needed attention to wealth creation, the city was burdened with political cronyism, corruption, and patronage, back room politics, WASP cliques, stubborn, endangered unions, and a phalanx of lawyers, bankers, activists and judges who missed the real problem -- Buffalo's decline had to not just lamented, it had to be stopped and reversed. Simply righting past injustices comes across as too little, too late, a band aid on a gaping wound. There was no growth, just a lot of squabbling over pieces of a shrinking pie, and a reactive, petty political climate that catered to the worst fears of the working class. Can Buffalo turn it around and thrive once again? Goldman seemed optimistic in his conclusions in 1990. There are current, interesting signs of private, cultural renewal in Buffalo today, with a new, African-American mayor, a new leader for the public schools, and economic development downtown. Home prices are quite affordable, even of property taxes are onerous. There's talk of tearing down the unsightly Skyway. They're moving the toll booths on the Thruway. The Sabres have come back. It will be interesting to see Goldman's take in 2007. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A must-read for anyone who is associated with Buffalo, NY. By John K. An excellent history of Buffalo with a special emphasis on the desegregation and integration of the Buffalo Public School system. The author gives an insider look into how the city has changed and where it could be headed. It is important to keep in mind, though, that this book is already over 20 years old. I look forward to reading Goldman's 2007 release, City On the Edge... 3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Interesting Read, but misses too many factors in explaining Buffalo's change. By Ronald E. Robinson. I grew up and lived my first 21 years in the Allentown section of Buffalo. I attended a series of schools on Main Street: Our Lady of Lourdes, Bishop Fallon High School, and Canisius College. I have always been fascinated by Buffalo's history, government, and economy. Buffalo has been totally dominated by Democratic politicians who never paid any attention to their critics. Goldman makes the same mistake. He has his favorite Leftist figures and is an unabashed cheerleader for them. An example, within three sentences he proclaims Norman Goldfarb as "fighting a lonely struggle for racial justice" "committed to social justice" and "A passionate and persuasive crusader for racial justice." (p. 132) Okay, we get your opinion. Judge Curtin is the book's hero. It is always a stretch to take the side of an unelected judge, who acts like a dictator, over elected officials. Alfreda Slominski and Jimmy Griffin are the villain and almost-always-a-villain, respectively. Slominski was elected to the school board by an 85,000 vote margin by championing neighborhood schools and an elected school board. But, that, of course, was "demagoguery" and "her rhetoric barely clothed in racist euphemisms." I don't remember it that way, but this is how history is seen by Leftist commentators. Unelected judges are heroes, democratically elected citizens are demagogues. Goldman recognizes, barely, that massive government programs and planners' schemes wasted huge resources, eventually drove all department stores from Buffalo, and failed in almost every declared purpose. Yet, because he purports the big government crowd had good intentions, they are to be excused. So, even though Buffalo became associated with "unions, taxshellip;age, and dispirit." (p.176), Goldman seems to associate the city's schools' issues as the primary driver of change. Goldman apparently is familiar with the analysis of Jane Jacobs and Martin Anderson, at least he alludes to both writers early in his book. He should read them, not just referenced their scholarship, and he probably would have benefited by studying Edward Banfield's Unheavenly City and William F. Buckley's Unmaking of a Mayor. Goldman's analysis leaves no room for an in-depth look at the ideas and followers of these writers or even Western New Yorkers including Alfreda Slominski, Ned Regan, Jack Kemp, or any conservatives. His lack of balance leads to poor conclusions on what caused Buffalo's decline and how it might have been different. Goldman never seems to ask the question whether Curtin's commandeering Buffalo's government schools, ordering the closing of neighborhood schools, and initiating

forced busing contributed to Buffalo's decline. He knows Buffalo was a neighborhood, and ethnic-oriented community. Attacking those historic and cultural pillars drove Buffaloians to head to the suburbs where they had more control over their schools and families and no longer had to worry about the next whim of a Federal judge. Goldman understood the ripping apart of the Humboldt Parkway neighborhood (for a highway) was harmful in many unforeseen ways. How did he miss similar impact of Curtin's unelected edicts? Let me offer one more point on Buffalo's schools. Goldman obviously liked the idea that Bishop Head would not allow anyone dissatisfied with Curtin's schemes from shifting their children to parochial schools. This was another serious mistake for the Church and for Buffalo. First, Head should have had more confidence that his schools were teaching his brand of "Social Justice." I certainly got my fill of that in 13 years of k-12 education in Buffalo's Catholic Schools. Whatever harm might have been done by shifting students from government schools to Catholic schools should have been offset by what is taught in Catholic schools. Second, a parochial option might have encouraged more neighborhoods to stay intact. Third, it could have saved more parishes. Fourth, it would keep feeding students into Canisius College, another venerable Buffalo institution. Head's blunder was just fine to those who worshipped at Judge Curtin's altar, but it was a shortsighted decision. Goldman deals with Buffalo's economic collapse like a loyal liberal: he misses alternative analysis. There is a connection between America's high (now highest) corporate tax rates and our loss of jobs to low tax jurisdictions and countries. Schemes like the \$800 million+ subway, whose construction was the final nail in the coffin of Buffalo's downtown department stores, was all right, "as long as someone else was paying (the federal government and the state), there was no reason, it seemed, not to build the subway." (p, 239) He concedes the construction, "all but destroyed [Main Street's core businesses] by the long, forced hibernation." Yet, it is that particular government scheme, not government's consistent failure to deliver success, that seems to be the issue. Goldman seems perplexed that the economy improved in the late 1980s. He never considered it was because the Reagan Administration dramatically lowered tax rates. He would have been well served to spend an afternoon with a conservative or even Jane Jacobs (she was living in Toronto when this book was written). Goodman never even considers rising crime rates as a factor in people moving from Buffalo. I know I personally witnessed crime steadily increasing, and impact my life and relatives' lives, throughout this period. Buffalo prospered when it had a less government-driven economy. It had neighborhood schools. Its leaders didn't preach class and racial warfare and class envy as the Saul Alinsky operatives would do in recent years. It was a model city and a wonderful place to grow up in. Yes, there was some racism and injustices, but Buffaloians, including all racial groups, prospered and willingly made it home. As politicians and judges became more important, Buffalo has lost more than half its population. Judge Curtin should be ashamed how he contributed to its demise.

For more than a hundred years, Buffalo was one of the world's great industrial cities. Its grand office buildings and stately mansions overlooked a metropolis that was the eleventh largest industrial center in the United States, the third largest producer of steel, and the largest inland port. Its diverse ethnic heritage, represented by sizable enclaves of Irish, Italians, Poles, Jews, Germans, and African-Americans, gave the city a vibrant sense of community. But by the early 1970's, all of that had changed. Unrest in the inner city had led to riots; student protests had shut down the city's largest university; and the economy in Buffalo, as in all the "Rust Belt" cities, was crumbling as the nation entered the postindustrial age. The population was dropping, too, dramatically altering the streets and neighborhoods where the people of this aging metropolis had lived for generations. Like the Jerusalem of Jeremiah's Lamentations, Buffalo was a dying city whose gates were desolate and whose people were embittered. It is here that Mark Goldman's *City on the Lake* takes up its story. Goldman analyzes the factors that contributed to the city's decline and describes the efforts of its leaders and citizens to restore Buffalo to its former vitality. Goldman presents the facts - like the immigration patterns in Old Buffalo and the intricate details of the city's 1976 desegregation case - but he also introduces us to the people of Buffalo and puts the city's history into context by interweaving it with the colorful ethnic patchwork of its day-to-day life. By the end of this careful analysis, Goldman's narrative is one of hope. The 1980s witnessed the slow but sure calming of ethnic strife, a new mandate for quality education, and the revitalization of downtown. Goldman believes that the grandeur of Buffalo's past will be recaptured and that Buffalonians are dedicated to building "new gates for the old city."

From *Library Journal* Goldman, author of *High Hopes: The Rise and Decline of Buffalo, New York* (State Univ. of New York Pr., 1984), aims to analyze the process by which Buffalo in the 1970s and 1980s sought to turn around a city plagued with declining "rust belt" industries and massive unemployment; poor housing and decaying neighborhoods; a weakened central business district and inadequate mass transit; as well as an inferior segregated school system and strained race relations. His discussion, however, is loosely structured and discursive so that the main thrust is often lost. The account of the long battle to desegregate the schools is unnecessarily detailed, while industrial recovery, downtown revival, urban renewal, and mass transit are treated skimpily. Suitable only for regional and urban collections. -Harry Frummerman, formerly with Hunter Coll., CUNY Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. About the Author Mark Goldman (Buffalo, NY), a successful entrepreneur who has played a major

role in revitalizing the cultural life of downtown Buffalo, is the author of *City on the Edge: Buffalo, New York*. More on Mark Goldman, *City on the Edge*, and *City on the Lake* can be found at: [www.markgoldman-buffalony.com](http://www.markgoldman-buffalony.com)