



# **Hot Time in the Old Town: The Great Heat Wave of 1896 and the Making of Theodore Roosevelt**

*Edward P. Kohn*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

# Hot Time in the Old Town: The Great Heat Wave of 1896 and the Making of Theodore Roosevelt

*Edward P. Kohn*

## **Hot Time in the Old Town: The Great Heat Wave of 1896 and the Making of Theodore Roosevelt**

Edward P. Kohn

One of the worst natural disasters in American history, the 1896 New York heat wave killed almost 1,500 people in ten oppressively hot days. The heat coincided with a pitched presidential contest between William McKinley and the upstart Democrat William Jennings Bryan, who arrived in New York City at the height of the catastrophe. As historian Edward P. Kohn shows, Bryan's hopes for the presidency began to flag amidst the abhorrent heat just as a bright young police commissioner named Theodore Roosevelt was scrambling to mitigate the dangerously high temperatures by hosing down streets and handing out ice to the poor. A vivid narrative that captures the birth of the progressive era, *Hot Time in the Old Town* revives the forgotten disaster that almost destroyed a great American city.

## **Hot Time in the Old Town: The Great Heat Wave of 1896 and the Making of Theodore Roosevelt Details**

Date : Published July 27th 2010 by Basic Books (AZ) (first published July 16th 2010)

ISBN : 9780465013364

Author : Edward P. Kohn

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History, New York, Politics, Presidents, Us Presidents

 [Download Hot Time in the Old Town: The Great Heat Wave of 1896 a ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Hot Time in the Old Town: The Great Heat Wave of 1896 ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Hot Time in the Old Town: The Great Heat Wave of 1896 and the Making of Theodore Roosevelt Edward P. Kohn**

---

# From Reader Review *Hot Time in the Old Town: The Great Heat Wave of 1896 and the Making of Theodore Roosevelt* for online ebook

## Amy says

This book seemed timely, given the current meteorological and political climate. Unfortunately it was less about the heat wave and its impact on Roosevelt than it was about the downfall of the political ambitions of William Jennings Bryan. The author should have chosen a different title.

It was an interesting read, but definitely not the one I was looking for when I purchased this book. A book about the 1896 heat wave and how it impacted Theodore Roosevelt... now that's a book I'd like to read.

---

## Christian says

I wanted to love this book. I think my expectations were too high. One of the reasons I picked this book was because of Roosevelt, sadly there was less of Roosevelt and more of William Jennings Bryan. While Bryan is an interesting historical figure, the book clearly states in the title "the Making of Theodore Roosevelt" while it should have been "the Unmaking of William Jennings Bryan." Honestly, I don't care that much about the bi-metalism debate. What I do care about is the suffering that occurred in the tenements as well as Roosevelt's response. Unfortunately neither of those were dealt with satisfactorily.

There are certainly interesting comparisons that can be drawn between 1896 and the current summer. Beyond that....meh.

---

## Patrick Sprunger says

Edward P. Kohn has a strange little book here.

Though the talk on the book tour is tantalizing, the author's interviews are basically summaries of *Hot Time*. If you heard Mr. Kohn on *Fresh Air*, like I did, you've essentially already experienced everything the reader will find within *Hot Time's* 250 or so pages. Reading the book is little more than formal consummation of an (admittedly) good interview.

But that doesn't speak to what is strange about *Hot Time in the Old Town*. The subtitle reads: "The Great Heat Wave of 1896 and the Making of Theodore Roosevelt." Neither the heat wave nor its impact on Roosevelt are the focus of the book. Not quite. Instead, *Hot Time* is an oscillating sweep of three subjects, which I'll enumerate briefly.

1. *Hot Time in the Old Town* is, at its best, a reminder of how closely the 19th century American lived with death. Politically, the heat wave of 1896 is a reminder - in the form of a vignette - of why the Progressive era was critical to the country's 20th century narrative. The 1,300 deaths attributed to the week long heat wave may be blamed in greater degree to the squalid conditions of tenement housing, structured to prey on poor

immigrant and laboring families than to the heat itself (which, to an Alabamian induces little awe).

2. After a grisly account of hellish tenements and horse carcasses, *Hot Time* freezes the moment when William Jennings Bryan's 1896 presidential bid lost momentum. After creating an audacious zeitgeist of hope (that would be familiar in the era of Obama) following the "Cross of Gold" speech, candidate Bryan chased gaffe with a dead on arrival, much-hyped speech at Madison Square Garden - where spectators initially crushed one another for seating, only to leave en masse when Bryan came across like Nixon in the televised 1960 debate.

3. Finally, there's the part about (then New York City police commissioner) Theodore Roosevelt's role in both the emergency response to the heat wave and the national presidential election. While it is interesting that the scion Roosevelt had a part in both stories, the two stories are not necessarily related. Circumstantial coincidences suggest a link that is actually more literary than historical/sociological.

None of this is meant to say any of the three subjects are in any way unworthy of scholarship. In fact, each are immensely worthy. Point one is worth including in a book about either the Progressive era or the evolution of American cities between 1820 and 1919. Point two is clearly an important chapter in any ambitious biography of William Jennings Bryan. The same goes with point three, with regard to Theodore Roosevelt. The 1896 election is itself worthy of study; the events in *Hot Time* would necessarily form a key pivot in any such study.

The problem is that Mr. Kohn's book lacks any of the ambition needed to contextualize any of its three subjects. While *Hot Time* is promoted as - and probably intended to be - a beach/airport read, it lacks the cadence of the mass market non-fiction epitomized by Simon Winchester or Jon Krakauer. At 250 pages and rife with sensational detail, *Hot Time* should go down smoothly and easily. Instead, reading the book is a bit of a chore.

All this considered, I still might be inclined to rate *Hot Time in the Old Town* at a solid - if average - three stars, if the bizarre postscript were not tacked on at the very end of the book (after two successive chapters titled "Conclusion" and "Epilogue"). Kohn's final words suggest his improbable thesis was actually to inspire readers to think more about quality of life issues and emergency planning in a world that is still following a trend of urbanization. If so, that is not what I got from it.

Kohn may also be implying that climate change is the new tenement housing in the continuum of pestilence the urban poor are forced to contend with. Fine. But the sum of all of these parts is not a tidy narrative that details a "heat wave" and "the making of Theodore Roosevelt." And that is the principal problem with *Hot Time*.

There was a short circuit somewhere in the chain connecting author and publisher. The manuscript should have been sent back. If *Hot Time* was a plate of food, it never would have left a respectable kitchen.

---

**Eric says**

Informative.

---

## Camrose says

The editor was AWOL; the book is layered with repetition. The title is annoyingly misleading: it is really about (a) the heat wave and (b) the undoing of the Democratic nominee William Bryan. Kohn tries to argue that the latter resulted from the former but from the facts he presents it is clear that the heat wave was at most a contributing factor. Likewise, he tries to suggest that the heat wave contributed to the political rise of Roosevelt, who was chief police commissioner in New York City at the time. Again, the facts presented do not support the argument. The last chapter finally gets to Roosevelt's subsequent success, but in a cursory manner.

Although disappointing in its scope, and tiresome in its presentation, it is valuable in portraying clearly how depressing and dangerous it was to live in the airless tenements, particularly during a heat wave. People sought breezes by sleeping in the filthy gutter or on the roof -- sometimes rolling off the roof to their death. Piles of dead horses blocked streets; high numbers of overworked funeral staff, coroners, doctors, police officers, and death registry clerks died due to the heat as they tried -- unsuccessfully -- to keep up with the number of dead bodies to process. The city government made no concerted attempt to address the situation until much too late.

Kohn does succeed in making his main point: cities are more vulnerable than small towns to dangerous heat waves because of their built environment; cities need to plan to reduce the risks of heat waves and to apply emergency measures to alleviate the impacts. It's too bad some readers may give up reading the book before they get the point.

---

## Jennie says

I originally picked up *Hot Time in the Old Town* after hearing an interview with the author on Terry Gross's *Fresh Air*. As someone who is interested in accounts of our past, particularly those that resonate with our present times, I found the book to be uneven (hence the three star rating).

Far and away, the best parts of this book are those that take the reader into the dark and dank tenements and illustrate in rich detail the cramp and stifling conditions. Kohn draws upon contemporary reports from the time period such as those written by Jacob Riis to bring into vivid detail how the rising temperatures left poor immigrants vulnerable to the ravages of extreme heat. His description of the conditions in the city and the impact of the heat wave on its residents are fascinating.

When he ventures from the streets and tenements into the terrain of city and national politics, the book begins to lose its sharp edge. The reader is certainly provided with rich background on Theodore Roosevelt and his political career. However, when Kohn attempts to link the events surrounding the heat wave to "the making of Theodore Roosevelt" he is on shaky ground. Certainly, the reader sees in Roosevelt's response to the heat wave his distaste of concentrations of power and a compassion for those less fortunate, but his claim that this event was instrumental in establishing his political standing is not well supported.

Readers who enjoyed the historical novels of Caleb Carr (*The Alienist* and *The Angel of Darkness*) will find account of city life and the struggles of the working poor interesting context. If however, readers entering the

text looking for explanations for Theodore Roosevelt's rise to national prominence will find themselves on a lost search.

---

## Travis says

I read "Hot Time in the Old Town" in four days, and for most of that time it was hard to put down (the ending dragged a bit). The book purports to be about the critical period of Theodore Roosevelt's life when he was a NYC police commissioner (during which time the heat wave of August 1896 killed thousands), but it ended up being less about Roosevelt than about the horrors of tenement life, the William Jennings Bryan / William McKinley race for president--and of course, the events leading up to and including the heat wave that helped turn Bryan's Madison Square Garden speech into a political disaster, effectively ending his run for president.

The book reminded me somewhat of "The Devil in the White City," which was also a great mix of history and biography (with a healthy dose of murder mystery tossed in for good measure). Although "Hot Time" doesn't track a Chicago serial killer, it proceeds at the same breathtaking pace, recounting biographical facts and historical events so effortlessly and compellingly that it reads like a novel.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is the picture it paints of the Republican and Democratic parties, which by the end of the nineteenth century had apparently already evolved from their Civil War era predecessors into the respective forms they have today: the Democratic Party, even then concerned primarily with lost causes, union interests, moral issues, and the social problems plaguing poor and middle-class Americans, but too disorganized, poorly funded and ideologically fractured to solve many of those problems or to unify a winning percentage of voters; the Republican Party, already driven by huge amounts of corporate money, focused primarily on protecting the interests of the wealthy, and even a century ago, devilishly efficient at 'staying on message' (Sound familiar? This tactic was already being advised in the Republicans' 400 page 1896 campaign handbook) and insulating their candidate behind layers of protective propaganda and well-trained handlers.

Also interesting in "Hot Time" were its sporadic references to "bi-metallism," an important plank in Bryan's political platform, the primary concern of the "Silver Republicans" who jumped party lines to support Bryan, and a hotly debated topic in 1896. Unfortunately, aside from a bit in the preface, the author doesn't explain nearly enough about the bimetallist debate and says virtually nothing concerning its history, about which I knew nothing. This--and the annoying lack of footnotes--would be my only major criticisms of the book (a minor criticism is that it is repetitive in parts). These are puzzling defects, since so much of the book absolutely requires at least a cursory understanding of bimetallism, and since so many of the author's claims invite further research or spark a desire to hunt down sources. So, if you're only interested in the review, you can stop reading here; above-mentioned caveats aside, I thought "Hot Time in the Old Town" was a pretty good book. If you're planning on reading it, however, you might want to read the next two paragraphs, which constitute my poor attempt to summarize the six hours or so of research I did to make sense of the book's numerous "bimetallist" and "Silverite" references.

A bimetal monetary standard is one in which currency is backed by reserves of both gold and silver, instead of by gold alone, or by neither gold nor silver. During the "free banking" era prior to the Civil War, when chartered banks were allowed to print their own currency, the U.S. used both gold and silver coins (whose face value roughly equaled their precious-metal worth) and over 7,000 (!) different sizes and designs of currency notes (whose face value was supposed to be backed by precious-metal reserves or government

securities) printed by over 1,600 different state and private banks. This wild proliferation of paper notes predictably led to considerable confusion and widespread counterfeiting. A U.S. Treasury Department webpage currently estimates that roughly a third of all paper money in circulation by the end of the Civil War was counterfeit—though the U.S. government itself apparently contributed to this problem by secretly counterfeiting Confederate currency in order to undermine Confederate war efforts (a fact mysteriously omitted from the Treasury Department webpage). In 1861, to supplement dwindling coin reserves, and further finance the Civil War, the U.S. Treasury began printing for the first time since the Revolutionary War its own non-interest bearing “Demand” Notes, which could be exchanged “on demand” for an equal value of precious-metal coin (though this practice was halted before the end of the war in order to preserve gold and silver). Over the next several years, paper Demand notes were successively replaced by U.S. Promissory Notes (commonly called Greenbacks due to their green color), by United States Notes (legal tender), and in 1866, by National Bank Notes—all of which were standardized and detailed in various ways to reduce counterfeiting.

It had been common practice during these years to exchange (for a negligible minting fee) mined or prospected gold bullion for an equal value of minted gold coinage. “Silverites,” or “Free Silver” advocates, favored a monetary policy that would allow a similar “free” coinage of silver. In 1863, the government began issuing gold certificates for gold in an effort to replenish precious metal supplies, and ten years later, in 1873, the Fourth Coinage Act placed the U.S. on a mono-metallic gold standard by demonetizing silver. While the government also began issuing silver certificates in 1878, the Coinage Act had significantly devalued the silver then being mined in great quantities throughout the West (which is why it was derisively called “The Crime of ‘73” by its opponents). The Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 required the government to buy silver, and this bolstered somewhat the demand for it, and thereby bolstered its value as well. But that legislation reduced the profits of North-eastern bankers and investors by increasing inflation and thus decreasing the high value of the interest that borrowers (including many farmers from the West and Midwest) were paying on bank loans. Bank and farm failures, railroad collapses, and a run on gold initiated the Panic of 1893. In response, Grover Cleveland repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, which again drove down the price of silver and decreased inflation (which pleased eastern capitalists, but hurt struggling Westerners and Midwesterners indebted to Eastern banks). This repeal, coupled with the long-standing feud between wealthy Eastern lenders and needy Western borrowers over the monetary role of silver, is what triggered W. J. Bryan’s famous “Cross of Gold” speech at the Chicago convention, engendered the “Silverite” Democratic platform of 1896, split the Republican Party into Eastern “McKinley men” and Western “Silver Republicans,” and primed the 1896 presidential election for a “bi-metal” showdown. So, there you have it—as well as I can tell it.

---

## **Kater Cheek says**

This was the worst sort of book--not good enough that I really enjoyed reading it, but not bad enough to take it to the library. I am not the right audience for this book; I'm not nerdy enough. It deals with the heat wave of 1986, and with the political campaign heating up (ha ha) that year in New York.

One of the issues with this book is that it is not really a book about Theodore Roosevelt as much as it is about William Jennings Bryan. If I already knew a lot about both politicians, and wanted to get a deeper knowledge, this book might fill some gaps. As it was, I didn't go into this knowing much about William Jennings Bryan, and nothing in these pages made me fascinated by him. I especially don't care about his speeches and how his bid for the presidency fared, except as a way of informing me about the time period.

The other subject of this book is the heat wave itself. I'll include a quote, because I think it illustrates why this is not a captivating subject.

"Heat waves are not like other disasters. Heat kills slowly, over days. It does not leave marks on the victim's body. Nor does it destroy buildings or leave any physical evidence of its destructive force. There is no single moment when a heat wave strikes, no specific time allowing survivors to recall the moment when it began."

The problem is that a heat wave is not a gripping disaster, whether natural or man-made. It's not a perfect storm or a plane crash or a maritime disaster, where heroes arise and victims perish. Nor is it an epidemic, which can also be an exciting murder mystery (as in *THE GHOST MAP*). Poor people died, those in control shrugged, meanwhile, let's read about Bryan's opinions on bimetallism.

What I did like about this book was the way it touched on the horrid conditions in New York in the poorer areas in the nineteenth century. I'm as ghoulishly fascinated by the tragic deaths of other as most nineteenth century Americans were. I was also aghast at the incompetence and corruption of the officials. You can talk about poor modern response to natural disasters, but it seems the prevailing attitude of the time was so poisonously macho that the city officials wouldn't even institute a siesta or let people sleep in the parks (the latter for fear that homeless people would do it). They didn't even try to do anything to alleviate suffering until after the heat wave had already broken, and killed over a thousand people. Probably unintentionally, this book is a good argument for social welfare. Unbridled capitalism looks like shrugging and leaving for Long Island while your constituents die in the gutter.

This book is best for people who already know a lot about America in the latter 19th century and want to fill in some gaps. The research feels thorough, but the prose isn't deft enough to entice lay readers.

---

### **S.L. Berry says**

Interesting read, half history about the 1896 heat wave in New York and half political history about the early stages of the 1896 presidential campaign though keep a chronology of Theodore Roosevelt handy if you are not familiar with his history as the author jumps around a lot.

---

### **Anna says**

This book is an unfortunate example of overambition. *Hot Time in the Old Town*, in addition to being an earworm for anyone who ever went to Girl Scout camp, attempts to tell three interlocking story: the rise of Theodore Roosevelt's political career, the collapse of William Jennings Bryan's 1896 presidential campaign, and the forgotten tale of a ten-day stretch in August of that year when the heat index in New York City remained well over 100 degrees, due to a disastrous combination of high temperatures and humidity--a heat wave that killed about 1,300 people. All three stories are interesting and deserving of attention--the book was never boring--but the connections between them are often tenuous, and the chapters jump from one to the other with little transition, giving the narrative a jerky quality.

Roosevelt was police commissioner at the time, and made some laudable decisions that helped the sweltering populace, especially the denizens of the oven-like Lower East Side tenements: police wagons were deputized as extra ambulances, and towards the end of the heat wave, officers handed out free ice to the poor. When Roosevelt learned of the rampant fraud going on (some families sent multiple children to pick up ice &

resold it; wealthy people who could afford ice lined up with the indigent), he re-organized the distribution by giving individual beat cops vouchers to distribute to the families they knew from experience were the neediest. But other than these two initiatives, Roosevelt had little involvement in the events of the heat wave, and he spent most of the time at his house on Long Island, well out of the city.

Bryan, for his part, arrived in NYC at the height of the disaster to give a speech at Madison Square Garden--accepting his nomination to the Democratic ticket and bringing his Western populism to the hostile--but crucial--East Coast. I am not going to go into the debate then raging regarding "bimetallism"--tying the dollar to both silver AND gold--since although it was the cornerstone of Bryan's campaign, it is eye-glazingly dull at the best of times, and *especially* when one has been reading harrowing tales of tenement dwellers driven to sleep on their roofs falling off in the middle of the night and the epidemic of horse carcasses rotting in the streets. True, Bryan's speech went over like a lead balloon, badly enough that his campaign strategists cancelled the rest of his East Coast tour--but I just don't buy that it was all due to the heat.

So *Hot Time in the Old Town* was ultimately disappointing, in structure if not in content--I think that the heat wave itself would have made more a fascinating book without trying to tie it into the politics of the time. I also feel like no book should ever have both a prologue *and* an introduction--or, even worse, a "conclusion," an "epilogue," *and* a postscript. Seriously? Three endings? Come on.

However, the author did quote Roosevelt's 1891 book on the history of New York, which I am taking as my motto in tough times from now on: "[New York's] life is so intense and varied, and so full of manifold possibilities, that it has a special fascination for ambitious and high-spirited men of every kind, whether they wish to enjoy the fruits of past toil, or whether they have yet their fortunes to make, and feel confident that they can swim in troubled waters--for weaklings have small chance of forging to the front against the turbulent tide of our city life. The truth is that every man worth his salt has open to him in New York a career of boundless usefulness and interest." A-men, Teddy!

---

## Alicia says

Unlike the book "Devil in the White City", This book really talked about what the title states. For a while I was getting annoyed because there was lots of talk of this "Bryan" guy, but it ended up being relevant and very interesting.

In 1896 there was about 10 days in NYC when the temperatures didn't come down out of the high 80's. In the middle of the day, the temps would reach the high 90's. While that doesn't seem so bad to those living in AZ, the author goes on to describe what 80% or 90% humidity will do to temperatures like that. A 90 degree day with 90% humidity will make it feel like 120. And so that phrase "it's not the heat, it's the humidity that kills" really makes sense.

Also factoring into the tragedy were the tenements on the lower east side, the lack of wind or any kind of breeze, and the officials not stepping in sooner to try to help people. They could've done many things to make sure that these people were able to cool off at night, but they only did those things AFTER the 10 day stretch of high temperatures was over.

This is also a story about Bryan and his horrible horrible luck when it came to his presidential campaign. Up until this time, he was a great speaker, a winning candidate. But he changed his game plan on the night of his speech in Madison Square Garden. That change, along with the horrible heat of 17,000 people in one place had disastrous effects on his campaign.

Finally, I really liked how the author tried to give many of the deaths a name and a face. He told about their families, where they came from, their kids and how they died. At the end of the book, there is an appendix with as many bios of the nearly 1300 dead that he could find. You could tell that he wanted to pay respect to these poor, hard working and often times babies that were unable to escape the oven of a city.

A good non-fiction story with a lot of heart. Just my kind of book!

---

### **Aspen Junge says**

Imagine the heat wave we went through in July 2011. Now imagine it without air conditioning. Or electric fans. Or refrigeration. Or building codes that said you have to be able to open a window for ventilation, and city services that said garbage will be collected in a timely manner. That's what the heat wave of 1896 was like in New York City (and the Midwest and East Coast). While the "official" temperatures never got much above the mid 90s, the city's heat island effect made the heat at ground level brutal and deadly. Those affected worst were laborers who lived in the overcrowded tenements, and their infants and elderly. 1500 people died of heat-related causes.

For those who think that government should leave the care of the poor to private charity; the private charities were overwhelmed, and the pre-Progressive era government of the City felt they had no duty towards the well-being of those suffering in the heat. Individual City departments might help; Teddy Roosevelt convinced the City to buy ice and distribute it to the poor at police stations, and the sanitation department finally started hosing down the streets to wash away the garbage and cool the asphalt-- but the fact that every doctor in town was overwhelmed with heat-related cases was just too bad for those who got sick and died. They should have had the money to leave town for a month, right?

About half the book was about William Jennings Bryan's wrong-footed attempt to launch his presidential campaign in NYC during the heat wave, as well as Teddy Roosevelt's early political career, but I skipped those parts because it wasn't nearly as interesting to me as the accounts of people falling off of fire escapes while they were trying to sleep.

---

### **Peggie says**

This was the most disorganized book I have ever read. I'm not sure why I continued to read it but I did finish.

First, the title is misleading. It is about the heat wave in New York in 1896 during the presidential convention, but there is very little about Teddy Roosevelt. Certainly not enough to have that as a subtitle.

Second, this books skips all over the place. He follows Bryan from Nebraska to NY on the train and metnions how hot it is and how tired he is when he gets there. This is interspersed with accounts of people who died in the tenements daily from heat exhaustion. I don't know that I needed 250 pages to tell me: 1) it was dangerously hot in 1896, 2) the government did little to nothing to help the poor and didn't think they should, 3) Teddy Roosevelt as police commissioner organized an ice giveaway to the poor that probably saved lives, 4) Bryan was a good speaker until the convention then he read his speech and probably lost the election because of it.

That's pretty much the gist of the book. I did learn facts about NY and the times I did not know but I was never sure where the next page would take me.

---

### **Dominic says**

Hot Time in the Old Town tells the story of a forgotten natural disaster. Edward P. Kohn makes the case that a heat wave is one of the most deadly natural disasters, particularly in the tenement districts of New York City in the 19th century. The tales of suffering due to the heat wave are not detailed due to the nature of the medical record keeping and Kohn often describes the same scenes of dead horses in the street. The book is repetitive at times. Kohn also does not exactly talk about how the heat wave made Teddy Roosevelt. He argues that the decisions he made in his position of power in New York city showed his personality, which could be true, but the reaction and feelings for Teddy Roosevelt, which led to him becoming president, are not apparent. The title is a bit of a stretch as Teddy Roosevelt was fairly unpopular in New York City at the time. Kohn does not show that he was "made" in the town. The book also focuses on the presidential campaign of William Jennings Bryan more than Roosevelt. Bryan's famed Madison Square Garden Speech to accept the presidential nomination for the Democratic Party occurs during the heat wave and Kohn argues that the overall failure of the speech was due to the heat but dispels that in almost the same breath as saying his failure was because he read from a manuscript. The failure of Bryan is merely a coincidence with the heat wave and Kohn does not make a great argument directly relating the two events. With all of the issues of the book, it is a solid description of 19th century urban history.

---

### **Alix says**

I REALLY wanted to like this book and was so very disappointed...

I was looking forward to learning all about Teddy Roosevelt and what "made" him become the politician that he was, but I didn't really get much out of the book in this regard. Mr. Kohn spent a lot of time talking about the other politicians and some of the extenuating circumstances surrounding the era. I expected some of the background material to be mentioned (tenement houses, life of the poor at the turn of the century, etc.), but was it necessary to dedicate whole chapters to this topic with no mention of Roosevelt at all? Oh he may have mentioned Roosevelt in the last paragraph of the chapter, but it was always some really obscure connection where Roosevelt did something in his life years before.

The biggest downfall for this book, in my opinion, was that the narrative skipped around A LOT. One chapter sub-section (separated from the others by a double-space and '\*\*\*' in the text) would be about one day, then the very next sub-section would jump back in time or way forward in time to talk about how some individual reacted by passing some law or writing some letter to a politician. And then, of course, this would be followed by yet another sub-section from a different time all-together before (perhaps) jumping back to the date originally discussed. It was incredibly frustrating for me to read because it was such a challenge to stay straight the day/time!

I did, however, appreciate the inclusion of detailed appendices in the back that listed total deaths and a breakdown of who died during the heatwave of 1896. I found these appendices to be informative and not overly muddled by superfluous text.

Yeah. Overall, a highly disappointing read.

