

# A Tale of Two Cities in New York

*'Drive Niagara Falls fast to its tomb.'* This, from Albany

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It was the best of times — for Albany.

It was an age of foolishness, an epoch of incredulity, a season of darkness — for Niagara Falls. Tourists coming here, seeing a ruined city, ask, "What went wrong?"

You would think Niagara Falls had the advantage — the cataracts, the hydropower, a famous name. Its troubles are not the fault of its people; if they are no better than those in other places, they are no worse.

It might be fame echoing from a distance, rumbling like falling waters, menacingly, through all this space of time. Certainly more know the name Niagara Falls than that of its master, Albany. Coupled with the most celebrated natural landscape, synonymous with power, the most-heralded waterfalls in the world, is a small town, failing to live up to its too-big name: 50,000 people, down from twice as many 50 years ago.

"The Power City?" "The Honeymoon Capital?" its residents ask, in deepening shadow. "What went wrong?"

It was the worst of times for Niagara Falls.

In Albany, some think they served this city well, that the fault lies in the people, or the local elected officials, or the developers, or the unions — someone, anyone. You cannot control the mincing vanities and empty-headed giddiness of Albany politicians.

The reason, for good or evil, for the decline of Niagara Falls is that Albany took its waterfalls, the wonder that millions visit every year, and along with it the electrical power generated from the descent of roaring river.

We went from paying among the lowest electrical rates in the USA when we controlled it, until 1956, to the third-highest since Albany took over in 1957. Whoever heard of a place that had a super-abundance of any product — be it power, water or apples — where the people living closest paid more than everyone else?

More recently, to ensure our winter of despair, Albany gave, to gain a soupcon of revenue, a tiny, foreign nation called Seneca the keys to the hunting grounds. The terms of the casino compact with Albany the



**ALBANY'S VIEW:** A thoughtful Albany official, right, contemplates its perception of the intelligence and perspicacity of a resident of Niagara Falls, N.Y.  
*(NOTE: This vicious image deserves our bitterest scorn — please ignore it!)*

Seneca instant wealth, and, surer than death, no taxes to pay despite having the right to open any business — giant hotels, elegant restaurants, retail stores, all tax free — while the long suffering, long-time taxpaying American business people here struggle to pay the "killing three" — among the highest property, state income and sales taxes in the nation.

In doing so, Albany gave Niagara Falls keys direct the other way. Foolishly, some maudlin souls say we stole the Falls from then-poor Seneca, so we owe it to them to make them, like Albany's power brokers, our rich masters; but they know nothing of history. The Seneca actually stole Niagara Falls from the peaceful Neutrals' tribe — by exterminating them.

A mere 50 years later, early Americans threw the Seneca off, like they did the British. We might just as logically give the British tax free advantages over Americans. Come to think of it, maybe we did: through Albany's convoluted, perverted destruction of everything that is ours, we now buy expensive electrical power from National Grid, owned by the British, while, today, the profit from our local, inexpensive Niagara hydro-electricity goes to Albany and New York City. But what of tourism?

This is the mantra: there is a great crowd coming one day into our lives — and Albany alone shall profit. All through the cold and restless interval of 122 years, they whispered to the people of Niagara Falls — taxes are not Albany's remedy for all things.

They can run profit centers — for themselves. Following Olmsted's plan, Albany helped create the Niagara Falls State Park in 1886. A "garden in which

the fruits of life hung ripening, waters of hope that sparkled in everyone's sight," and profit promised for all! A moment and it was gone — except for Albany, which made it an enormous profit center, virtually depriving the city of "spin-off" every other area enjoys from tourist-drawing natural landscapes.

The most visited state park in the nation, adjacent to a ghost town, across the river from a boom town. And Albany chants hypocritically, "this is an Olmsted park," while violating Olmsted's vehement ideal to keep the park 100 percent commercial-free and 100 percent green. Before coming and after leaving the all-green park, Olmsted planned that tourists would spend their money in the city.

What happened? The residents of the Falls sometimes sat alone of an evening, outside the park, listening, until they made the roar of the falls out to be the echoes of all the footsteps that are coming by and by into their lives. Last year, the footsteps were left by the feet of eight million. Albany made sure it possessed them all.

When eight million people convene in a 100 days of summer, on less than 100 acres, naturally they wish to eat and buy souvenirs. Should they leave the park to do that and go into the city? "Why?" asked Albany.

There should be stores and restaurants here — for our profit keeping. The biggest incursion is gigantic parking lots which paved over Olmsted's "green." Their planning is brilliant — the routing of people along the Robert Moses State Parkway so they see not the city; and into the state parking lot, paying \$10 for the privilege, spend \$10 for the Cave of the Winds, \$12 for the Maid of the Mist, buy souvenirs at stores in the park, eat a meal at restaur-

rants in the park, then, after an average four-hour stay, without an advertisement for any activity in the city (except for the Seneca casino), millions of tourists leave believing there is nothing else to do in Niagara Falls on the American side. They leave on state-owned roads out of town or cross the bridge to Canada. Every tourist dollar spent in the park alone!

Sayeth Albany to Niagara Falls, "Tell the Wind and Fire where to stop, but don't tell me; we got your taxes, and control your biggest assets, two local assets that would otherwise make you rich, unbelievably rich. Assets that, in the past, when you controlled them, had made you rich: your hydro-power and your tourism!"

It is the meanest of times in Niagara Falls.

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Paid for by the Committee to Suspend Albany's Stranglehold on Niagara (SA-SON)