



# Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City

*Edward L. Widmer*

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## **Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City** Edward L. Widmer

This fascinating study examines the meteoric career of a vigorous intellectual movement rising out of the Age of Jackson. As Americans argued over their destiny in the decades preceding the Civil War, an outspoken new generation of "ultra-democratic" writers entered the fray, staking out positions on politics, literature, art, and any other territory they could annex. They called themselves Young America--and they proclaimed a "Manifest Destiny" to push back frontiers in every category of achievement. Their swagger found a natural home in New York City, already bursting at the seams and ready to take on the world.

Young America's mouthpiece was the *Democratic Review*, a highly influential magazine funded by the Democratic Party and edited by the brash and charismatic John O'Sullivan. The *Review* offered a fresh voice in political journalism, and sponsored young writers like Hawthorne and Whitman early in their careers. Melville, too, was influenced by Young America, and provided a running commentary on its many excesses. Despite brilliant promise, the movement fell apart in the 1850s, leaving its original leaders troubled over the darker destiny they had ushered in. Their ambitious generation had failed to rewrite history as promised. Instead, their perpetual agitation helped set the stage for the Civil War.

*Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City* is without question the most complete examination of this captivating and original movement. It also provides the first published biography of its leader, John O'Sullivan, one of America's great rhetoricians. Edward L. Widmer enriches his unique volume by offering a new theory of Manifest Destiny as part of a broader movement of intellectual expansion in nineteenth-century America.

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