

Davis, John. *Waterloo Sunrise: London from the Sixties to Thatcher*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022, vii+588. Hardcover, \$39.95.

Twenty-first century London is a tourist mecca—drawing visitors from all over the world to experience its culture, shopping, and historical attractions. The city boasted over 21 million visits in 2019 (pre-Covid), with millions of pounds spent by tourists. Nevertheless, modern London was built on the backs of industry—the city boomed during the Industrial Revolution, its population growing sixfold over the course of the century. As the British Empire spread so did the city’s power as an international arbiter of business and manufacturing. Post-1945 the city’s place on the world stage seemed in doubt. Britain lost an empire, and the city seemed to be at a loss as well. John Davis’ *Waterloo Sunrise: London from the Sixties to Thatcher* sketches out a narrative history of how the various sections of London dealt with post-war malaise. Davis argues that the city, “anticipates in various, often unrelated, ways many of the features of ‘Thatcher’s Britain’ in the 1980s” (vii). According to Davis, London was not built by Thatcher, but the city shaped Tory policies in specific ways in the years leading up to her victory.

In many ways this expansive—and lengthy—history functions as sixteen micro-histories of various parts of the city from the mid-60s until 1979. It is a deeply researched and carefully drawn book, one which took Davis through his retirement from The Queen’s College at Oxford. Each essay in this collection can be read individually, and indeed several of them work better as stand-alone chapters than they do when the reader attempts to fit them into the larger schematic of the book. Chapters are largely thematic and/or geographic in scope. Davis covers everything from the trattoria craze in the West End during the 1960s, strip clubs in Soho, motorway planning in the Greater London Council, to the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival riots. The book even includes a graph of Greek and Chinese restaurants in the 1960s and 1970s on two streets in W1. Naturally such an expansive book is hard to neatly summarize, but his general approach is to

pinpoint a moment of change in part of the city and then dissect the cause and consequences of that change. This leads to a narrative that is even-handed, one might say to a fault. Swinging London turns out to be much less swinging than popular culture imagined, but this approach does allow Davis to cover most of the city without getting too bogged trying to connect these multifaceted stories together.

The result of these essays is an interesting picture of a city, beset by new kinds of problems in the 1960s but also finding a way forward to build a new type of identity by the 1980s. For readers searching for an in-depth analysis of Thatcher's impact on the city, they should look elsewhere. Despite the Thatcher in the title, this is a book about London, not a book about the Iron Lady, or even her relationship with the city. Davis is at his best analyzing the new cultures that emerged as the postwar generation came of age, and he brings an important corrective to the popular culture image of the city. *Waterloo Sunrise* is at once expansive in its scope and narrow in its focus—larger world or national events get very little play within these chapters. New people move to the city from the Caribbean, from South Asia, but their connections to the larger empire remain very inchoate. The city itself is largely unmoored from its' national setting because Davis prioritizes the narrative of the locale over national or international concerns. In many ways this works in the book's favor, because the stories themselves are already incredibly complicated thanks to the labyrinth of local councils and committees that all have some part to play in the story of the city's development.

Waterloo Sunrise rewards the careful reader with snapshots of the city, and physical presentation of the book is a delight for those used to tiny font and small black and white pictures sparingly interspersed throughout the text. Each chapter has multiple color photos, graphs, and its overall layout is veritable feast for the eyes. Greater rewards are in store for those who know

the city intimately—there are photographs throughout the text but only two maps, both found deep within the text (p.268-69). Many facets of British life are analyzed in detail, but few are explained for the non-expert, such as estate housing. By the final chapter Davis has built a persuasive argument, that life in London for the middle and upper classes got better through the 1960s and 70s as the city adjusted to its post-industrial economy, while it got worse for those at the very bottom of the social strata. That, at least to this reader, is a more powerful argument than anything related to Prime Minister Thatcher. The city remade itself into a service, tourist-based economy and while that helped prepare the city for the Tory victory in 1979, the party is a side note in the city's story.

Amanda Ford, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of History
Carson-Newman University
Jefferson City, TN