

Boogaloo on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue – a novel of Pastry, Guilt and Music  
by Mark Kurlansky. Jonathan Cape 2005.

Set against the background of the Dukakis-Bush Senior Presidential campaign this novel by Mark Kurlansky, previous author of best-selling factual 'biographies' (Cod: a Biography of the Fish that Changed the World, and Salt: A World History) is an exuberant, hilarious, touching saga set against the background of the Lower East Side of New York.

The characters range across the spectrum and include Puerto Rican and Dominican drug dealers, black prostitutes, émigré patissiers and Hispanic musicians. But the chief protagonists are a Jewish family – property owning, Boogaloo impresario Harry Seltzer and his wife Ruth, his survivor brother Nusan, his sons Nathan, owner of the Meshugaloo Copy Center, and Mordy who is a waster, and his Mexican-Jewish daughter in law Sonia and granddaughter Sarah.

The people are important to the story – naturally – but so is the district, still largely vacated by Jews and in transition from a slightly seedy present to a foreseeably fashionable and up-market future. In this transition from Jewish Lower East Side to Hispanic Loisaida the lives of the residents are lived out, and they range from the tragic to the bathetic to the highly amusing.

In some ways the story-line overall, with its multifarious strands (which Kurlansky ties together beautifully) may strike some readers as bizarre, if not impossible, but anyone with experience of New York will know that it is all too credible.

Mark Kurlansky is to be congratulated on a wonderful novel, as well as writing without doubt one of the most erotic couplings of sex and pastry that one could wish to read!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh