



Alumni Book Club: Tri-State Region Selection

Gotham Unbound by Ted Steinberg

8:00-9:00 PM ET on Tuesday, Nov 7th, 2023

Meeting Schedule

Date	Chapters
11/7/23	Part 3: Night Comes to the Marshes 1900-1980 Chapter 9: The Road to Hermitville Chapter 10: The Landscapers of Queens Chapter 11: The Wilds of Staten Island Chapter 12: The Massifs of Fresh Kills Chapter 13: The Great Hackensack Disappearing Act
<i>Note - we are skipping Thanksgiving Week</i>	
11/28/23	Part 4: The Green Colossus (1960-2012) Chapter 14: The Age of Limits Chapter 15: The Big Apple Biome Chapter 16: The Future of New York

Chapter 9

1. The early 20th century saw the decimation of the marshlands from Long Island on the east to the Hackensack Meadowlands on the west. This brought more development close to the sea, eliminated the wetlands that served as storm buffers, and changed the nearshore habitat of the flora and fauna suited to live in close proximity to a large concentration of people. Gone were the old customs of haying, hunting, and foraging.



The View from Jones Beach, New York

The South Shore of Long Island was a place for gunning, cutting salt hay for winter forage, and for collecting berries and mushrooms by the local inhabitants. However, a growing real estate market, recreational development, and a man named Robert Moses put an end to these traditions and changed the concept of “common land.” Robert Moses used the new concept of common land and the Hempstead Planning Commission to obtain several hundred acres of common lands to build a beach and causeway. The Jones Beach Causeway to Jones Beach Park destroyed High Hill and the road to Hermitville.

Has the concept of “common land” impacted you? If so, in what way?

In the end, Jones Beach is no longer a natural environment, however true to Robert Moses' vision, it is enjoyed by vast numbers of people (8.3 million people visited in 2020 alone). Did Moses improve Jones beach? Why or why not?

Chapter 10

2. As the author states on page 210, Robert Moses had little patience for the irregularities of the natural world. Are we better at balancing the natural world and development, today? Can you think of projects that do a better job creating that balance?

Chapter 11

3. The development of Staten Island came at the expense of the last of the “commons” in the city, where land was unregulated and shared for the various uses of all, such as recreation, hunting and gathering, cutting firewood and such the like. Now every parcel of New York is designated for a particular purpose and is highly regulated. Is the loss of the commons a natural part of having a city this size or is it possible to have unregulated shared space in a modern city? Does your part of the world have any commons left?

During the Great Depression, residents were using the commons to meet basic needs, such as hunting for food and cutting firewood. This put the desperately poor at odds with environmentalists and those wanting to preserve the natural world. What's the best way to balance those two legitimate needs?

Chapter 12

4. New York City has tried throwing its trash in the river, burning it, using it as fill to expand the island, and creating gigantic landfills like Fresh Kills on Staten Island. Every single method tried has been an ecological catastrophe that has ended up polluting water, air, or sacrificing vital coastal wetlands. At the present time, every landfill in New York City has been filled. What should a city this size do with its vast amounts of trash? What does your area do?



A closed landfill in Croton on Hudson just up the river from New York City.

Chapter 13

5. The marshes around New York City have been slowly disappearing for centuries. What remains are full of invasive *Phragmites* (common reed) and do little to protect the surrounding land from flooding or clean the waters of the estuary. Do you face any similar problems where you live? If you found yourself in a position of influence in the Big Apple, what would you suggest the city and surrounding areas do about the lack of wetland in the area?



An egret fishing from the stump of a cedar tree still visible in the Meadowlands, today long after the cedar forest was cut down.