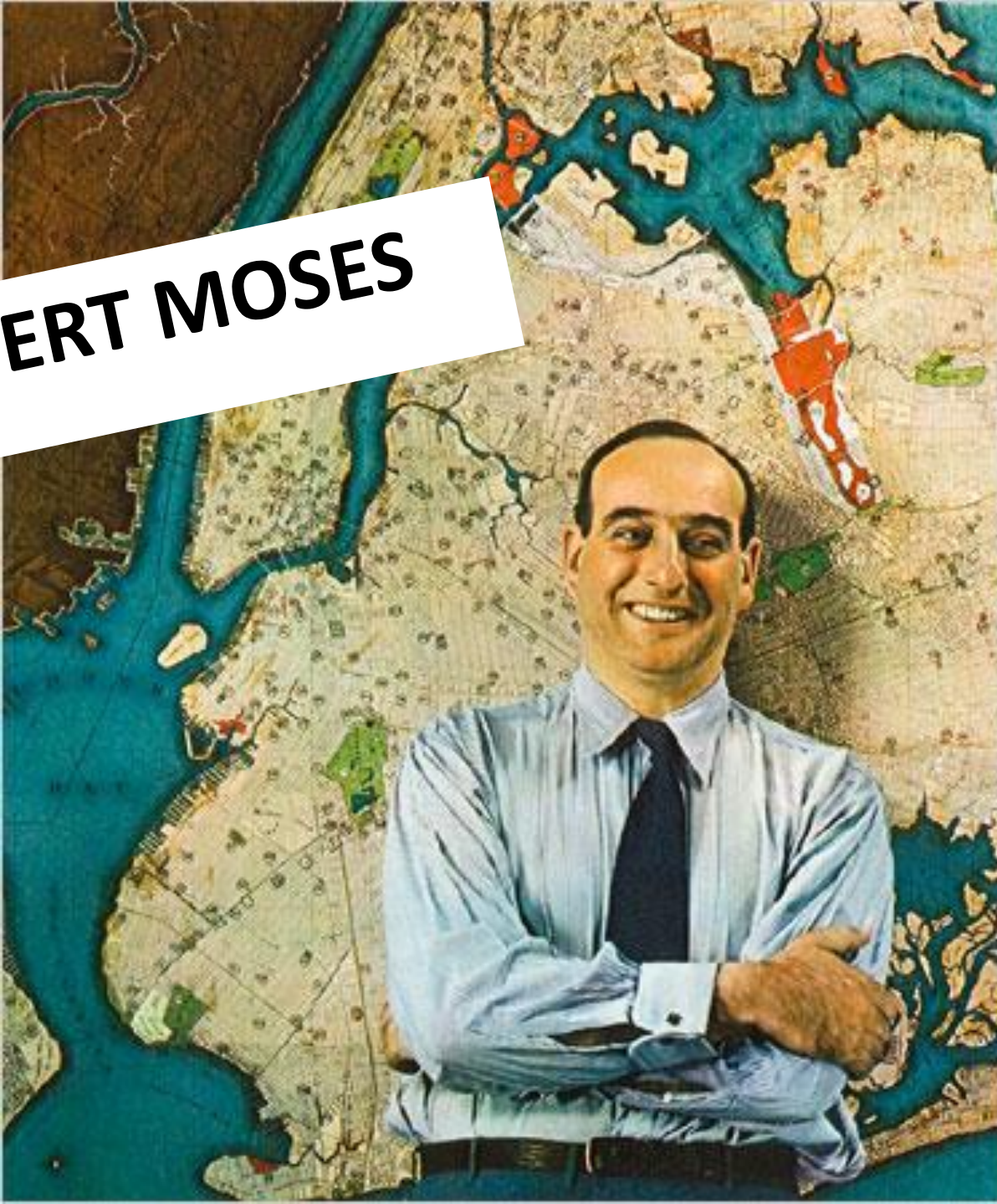


# ROBERT MOSES



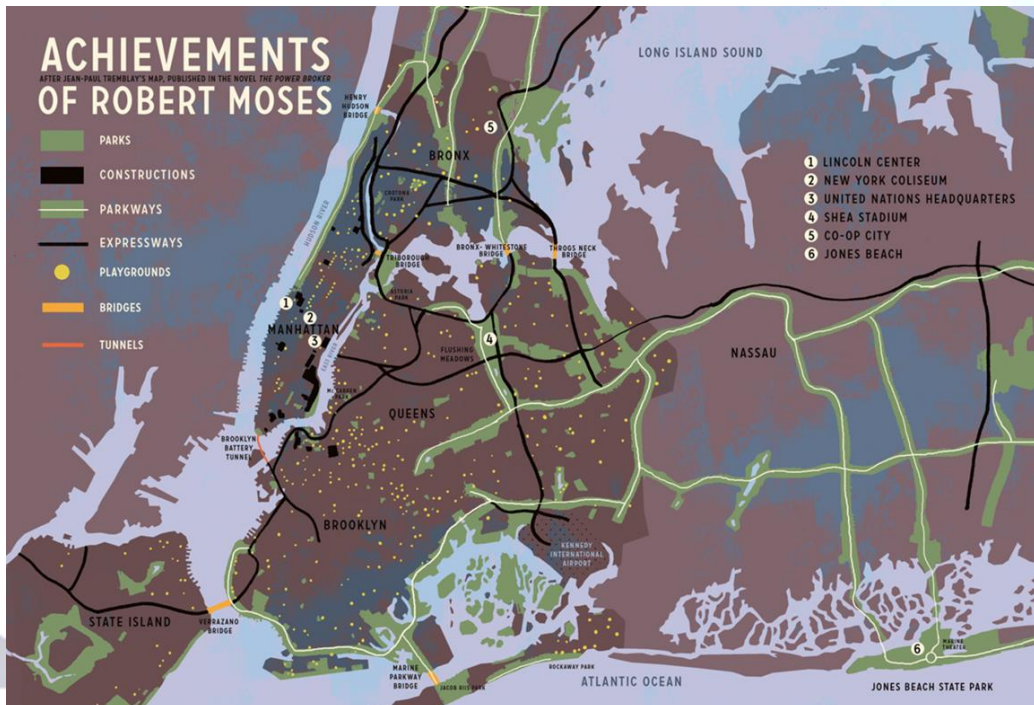
**MASTER  
BUILDER**

**POLITICAL  
MASTER**

# HOW WOULD NEW YORK CITY AND LONG ISLAND LOOK WITHOUT ROBERT MOSES?

During his almost half-century in power Moses constructed:

- 658 playgrounds in NYC alone
- 2,600,000 acres of parkland
- 627 miles of parkways and expressways
- Every modern bridge in New York (13)
- Dozens of housing developments



Other projects include:

- The Brooklyn Battery tunnel
- The United Nations
- Shea Stadium
- Lincoln Center
- 1939 and '64 World's Fairs
- The NY Coliseum
- Jones Beach
- The NY Aquarium
- Central and Prospect Park zoos
- Stuyvesant Town & Co-op City
- The Thousand Islands Bridge
- Niagara Power Station
- Many more all over NY State



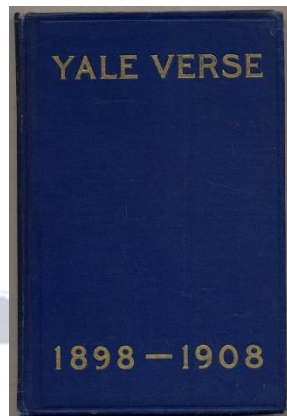
## EARLY BACKGROUND

**1909: BA Yale.** Wins Math, Latin, and Public Speaking prizes. Phi Beta Kappa

Editor, Yale Courant; active in other Yale news publications.

Articles criticize barriers to entry for student government office. Promotes merit-based, open elections / reforms.

**Member, Yale Swim team.**



Editors: Robert Moses  
and Carl Hammond  
Philander Thurston, Yale  
University Press, 1909.

**1910 – 13: Oxford Univ.**

Honors BA and MA  
Jurisprudence. Also:

- Capt Swim/Rowing teams
- First ever American  
President of the Oxford  
Union Debating Society

**1914: PhD Columbia,**  
based on research  
done at Oxford on the  
British Civil Service.

His Book, *The Civil Service of Great Britain*, is published to good reviews in the US & UK.



Proposes US Civil Service reform based on English model - competitive exams, educational level. Known expert in the area, crusader against Tammany Patronage/ Graft system.

# FROM IDEALS OF THE ACADEMIE, TO THE REAL WORLD

## THE MUNICIPAL RESEARCH BUREAU, 1915 – 17

Founder Henry Moskowitz. MRB is “reform” hub.

Moses volunteers. Develops mathematical models for grading civil service employees, qualifications and pay grades (16); civil service by merit, not patronage.

But could this create a new kind of caste system?

**John Purroy Mitchel, Head of MRB, becomes Mayor, 1914:** invites Moses to lead his *Reform Commission*.

Withdraws offer when Tammany screams Moses is “elitist” and use passages from his book to vilify him.

## MITCHEL & MOSES OUTMANOEUVRED BY TAMMANY

### “The Boy Mayor”



*Sorry Bob, not this time.  
But please stick around, we  
can still use your findings.*

**Versus** the  
Old Guard -  
No to Moses:  
Elitist!

Don't worry  
Men, “Boy”  
is a 1-termer!



Getty Images

# 1919: AL SMITH, BELLE MOSKOWITZ AND BOB MOSES – ALMOST THERE

## Belle Moskowitz “The Most Powerful Woman in American Politics” Recommends Moses to Al Smith

- Progressive reformer, Al Smith’s Right Hand Woman - helped win the just enfranchised NYS women’s vote.



My husband Henry says you’re brilliant Dr. Moses. We need you in Albany with Governor Al!

- Moses, out of work – jumps at the chance. Belle takes him under her wing, teaches him you must hold real power to enact change. EUREKA!!! He never forgets the lesson.

## Al Smith – 1<sup>st</sup> Term Governor, 1919 -20

Smith names Moses Chief of Staff of his “*Commission on Retrenchment and Reorganization*”, with Belle M.

The Moses Final Report recommends:

- 4 year gubernatorial term (instead of 2)
- Consolidate hundreds of departments and agencies into a more manageable number
- Reporting directly to the Governor, instead of independent fiefdoms.
- Financial transparency and accountability.
- Removal/reduction of patronage.

**Foiled Again:** Smith a **One Termer too?** Suffers reelection defeat before he can enact these reforms.

## SECOND CHANCE FOR SMITH – FIRST TOUCH OF GLORY FOR MOSES AL RETURNS AS GOVERNOR, 1923 - 29

### ***That Other Moses had nothing on Bob***



He had to get *God*  
to write his law.

### ***But Bob got to write his own!***

- Authors legislation creating a unified NY State parks Authority. Smith gets it passed into law.
- Consolidates over 40 local state park commissions that could not issue bonds, into one, that could.
- Moses is the first Chairman.
- The law stipulates a \$15 million bond issue, which Moses can use to acquire/build roads & parks.

*“Bob Moses . . . Was the best bill drafter we ever had at Albany and wrote all the reorganization bills”*

- Governor Al Smith

Moses puts just the “right” words in his legislation. E.g. “Parkways”, instead of Highways – as existing legislation regulated highways, not parkways.

“Appropriation” of public lands by a newly created “Authority” is also written into the law – adds extra clout when negotiating with landowners.

Plus new financial resources.

RM has real power for the first time, and uses it.



# EARLY SUCCESSES: JONES BEACH AND THE LONG ISLAND PARKWAY SYSTEM

*“An ‘Authority’ as evolved in New York, is an ingenious corporate device calculated to get things done while a confused people hesitates between private and public ownership of natural monopolies. The authorities set up by Moses, are self-sustaining . . . empowered to issue bonds based on revenue to be collected from tolls or services rendered.”*

*Robert Moses, An Atlantic Portrait, The Atlantic Magazine, Feb. 1939*

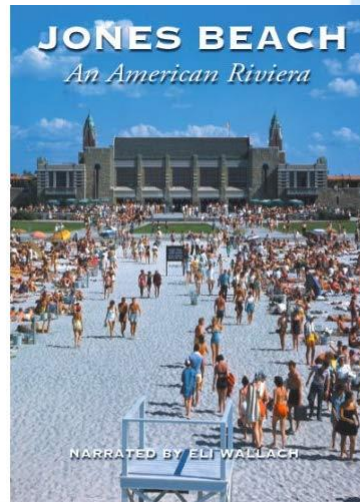
Under these “Authorities” Moses was able to obtain funding and initiate multiple projects, such as:

- Jones Beach
- Southern State Parkway
- Northern State Parkway
- Wantagh State Parkway
- Ribbon Parks +++

Don't worry Gov – we'll build big beautiful bath houses and gorgeous parkways with “ribbon parks” around them. The people will love it.

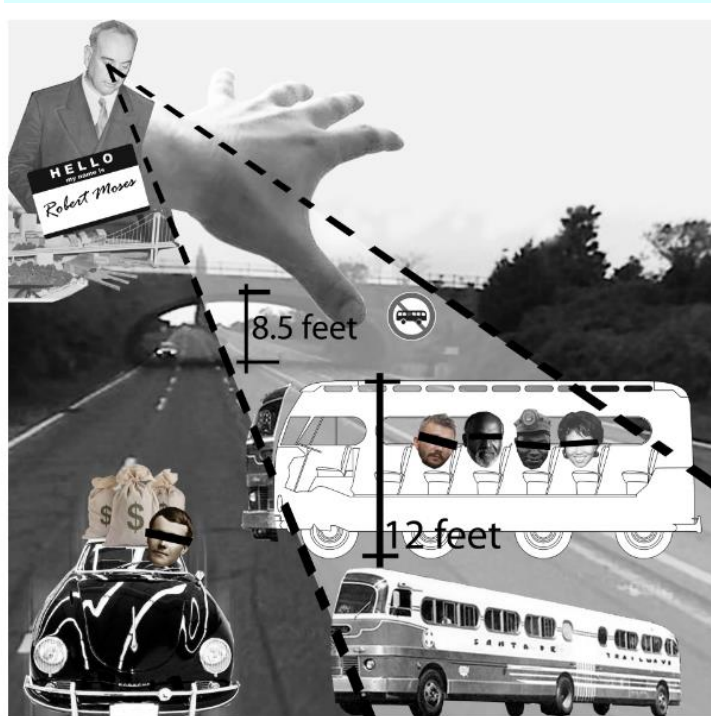


Jones Beach is just a swamp and a desolate strip of sand . . . You sure about this Bob? There's no roads here either. People can't come anyway! They'll say we waste \$\$\$.



First a bit skeptical as a cautious politician; but Smith soon realized that Moses was right – they did come, and they loved his parks, parkways and beaches. They helped Smith get reelected & prepare for a Presidential bid in '28.

# PARKWAY TO THE BEACH BRIDGES CONTROVERSY



## Red Herring or Fact?

- Southern State Parkway, built as the first road to Jones Beach has low bridge clearances.
- Caro's book accuses Moses of racism and classism by doing this explicitly to keep less affluent/minority bus riders from the beach.
- Moses fans counter: all parkways - before then and after (e.g. Merritt) have low clearance, as their stated purpose is use only by cars, not commercial trucks and buses.
- Moses also built bus stops at train terminus stations and at Jones Beach offering train riders from the City seamless transfer onto direct buses to Jones Beach from the train.
- To build his first LI Parkway Moses ingeniously followed a water supply line already under government control, avoiding eminent domain fights. He was not so subtle later.



## FULL SPEED AHEAD: MOSES, THE LITTLE FLOWER, THE FEATHERDUSTER AND A LEHMAN BROTHER TOO



- Mayor Fiorello La Guardia names Moses NYC Parks Commissioner early 30's.
- Moses agrees only if allowed to keep his NY State jobs and titles (OK!).
- Herbert Lehman succeeds FDR (now President) as Governor of NY, 1933.
- RM Heads Mooreland Commission – much of his reco's used in FDR legislation
- Foolishly runs for Governor against a popular Lehman in 1934, but appears aloof, arrogant, defensive. Ineffective as a retail politician.
- Suffers worst electoral defeat in NY State history.
- Gov. Lehman keeps Moses on anyway at his many *Commissions & Authorities*.
- Lehman needs him for PWA "shovel ready" jobs - and he's not disappointed.

# THROUGH THE ROARING TWENTIES, THE DEPRESSION, THE WWII YEARS AND EVEN AFTER, MOSES GRADUALLY EXTENDS HIS POWER DEEP INTO NY STATE, NYC AND LONG ISLAND

Robert Moses Titles with 4 year overlapping terms from 1924 to 1975

1. Long Island State Park Commission (President, 1924–1963);
2. New York State Council of Parks (Chairman, 1924–1963);
3. New York Secretary of State (1927–1928);
4. Bethpage State Park Authority (President, 1933–1963);
5. Emergency Public Works Commission (Chairman, 1933–1934);
6. Jones Beach Parkway Authority (President, 1933–1963);
7. New York City Department of Parks (Commissioner, 1934–1960);
8. Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (Chairman, 1934–1981);
9. New York City Planning Commission (Commissioner, 1942–1960);
10. New York State Power Authority (Chairman, 1954–1962);
11. New York's World Fair (President, 1960–1966);
12. Office of the Governor of New York (Special Advisor on Housing, 1974–1975).

Also– Chairman NYC “Slum  
Clearance Committee” 1949  
- 60. Very useful when  
you’re removing tenements  
& building housing projects.

Moses mastered the use of the “Public Benefit Corporation”, a quasi-private entity that can issue debt like a Govt agency but without legislative action; provides huge funds for him to expand, little oversight.

[Same as the Port Authority now?]

His empire was built initially on creating truly transformative open spaces and arterial roadways, that enabled mobility and recreation, and were extremely popular with the general public.

That is, until they weren't. By the late 1950's - '60's investigations unearthed what some called sweetheart deals to assuage large LI landholders, and various strong-arm tactics with the less fortunate.

## THE INCIPIENT AUTOMOBILE ERA MEETS NEW DEAL

Greater NYC (when Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island merged into NYC) was created in 1898, the year after Moses moved as a boy with his parents to Manhattan from New Haven. This “greater” NYC, and the growth of the automobile culture early century made much of his work possible.

Mass Production of the Automobile cranked up in the 1920’s to huge effect.

Plus

1930’s, Depression = Opportunity (Never let a Crisis Go To Waste!)

Moses employs tens of thousands of workers directly at the depression’s peak, building scores of projects – including many of NYC’s bridges/tunnels - with PWA / CCC and other New Deal funding.

These projects also create indirect jobs at suppliers in NY and nationwide. They love him, of course.

These works became so vast that over 10% of “Shovel Ready Project” dollars from D.C. ended up in NY.



## FIX THE PROBLEM!

*“After a fourteen-year period in which the number of automobiles in New York City grew by over 650,000 while the government failed to build a single mile of arterial highway, the city was strangling on its traffic by 1932.”* – Jack Fascitelli, Robert Moses and The Real Estate City, Trinity College, Hartford CT, 2019

### Moses to the rescue!

- Establishes the Triborough Bridge Authority to build and operate the Triborough (RFK) Bridge, with revenues controlled entirely by him. Opened 1936. Cash Cow ever after!
- With the Triborough and eventually other toll roads, Moses gains independent financing – politicians realize it’s a danger but they love the popularity of his projects with the electorate.
- The revenues gave him enormous power and clout with elected leaders – he carried a “resignation” letter with him: if an elected leader threatened a “No” he would pull it out.  
No one dared accept it!
- With a growing pot of money, federal highway grants and his own Authorities’ bonding capacity the politicians largely stand aside as he works his magic: West Side Renewal, Henry Hudson Pkwy and Bridge, Whitestone Bridge, Cross-Bronx Expressway, Verrazano, on and on!

## NO SMALL FEATS, PLEASE: THE TRIBOROUGH BRIDGE

Three bridges make up the Triborough; one is the **largest vertical lift bridge in the world**.

Each **girder . . . was as big as a ten-room ranch house**; would **have to be carried on 4 or 5 barges and pushed by an entire team of tugboats** into position.

So much **concrete** was used in the bridge that **entire factories had to be reopened from Maine to Mississippi**.

**An entire forest** was leveled in Oregon to produce the wood used to hold the concrete in place. **5,000 men** would be working on this bridge at any one time **putting into place the materials created by many times 5,000 men in 134 cities in 20 states** all over the USA.

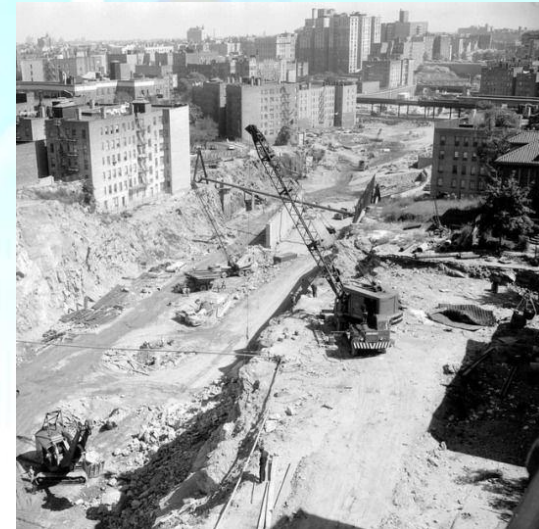
*The bridge was so impressive that in the opening ceremony, the keynote speaker was President Roosevelt himself. **The bridge was an indication of the great number of public works that would arise under Robert Moses's time** and of civic rebirth and renewal, holding out the promise of a glorious future just over the horizon, not just for the privileged few but for the general populace. – Ali Hussain, 2017, Baruch College CUNY*



# THE CROSS-BRONX EXPRESSWAY 1950'S – '60'S – 70'S: ONE OF THE MOST COMPLEX US ROADWAY PROJECTS. GENERATES CONTROVERSY EVEN NOW.

“You can draw any kind of picture you want on a clean slate . . . but when you operate in an overbuilt metropolis, you have to hack your way with a meat ax.”

“I raise my stein to the builder who can remove ghettos without removing people as I hail the chef who can make omelets without breaking eggs.” -Robert Moses





# THE CROSS-BRONX RATIONALE AND RAMIFICATIONS

## **Objective: connect I95 NJ to LI & N. England**

Once over the GWB (the main freight artery for NYC, Long Island, & east of Hudson) trucks used surface roads. The CBE was to remedy this, connecting I95 from NJ to the Bruckner and on to I95 CT / New England; and via Throgs Neck Bridge to Long Island.

## **Social Challenges:**

Forced removal of around 5,000 families into (mostly) public housing. Permanent damage to neighborhood. (Although some saw property values increase most did not).

## **Construction Challenges (among many):**

Raising IRT subway station, and tunneling under the tracks while the trains still ran.

Excavation and blasting in high density areas.

Navigating around existing utilities/pipes.

How to build Bruckner Interchange and Expressway once CBE completed.

## **The Cross-Bronx in The 2000's**

- 200,000 vehicles per day (259,200 capacity)
- Routinely backed up at all hours
- Still 6 lanes (no room to widen)
- Only one good alternate route (Bruckner Expressway to I-87) –still ends up at I-95

“Verdict: Although built at great social and financial cost, the Expressway was sorely needed locally, regionally, and nationally. Still a traffic bottleneck, but much better alternative than surface arteries.

Suggestions in retrospect: –Use the Crotona Park routing (fewer people displaced)”

Steve M. Alpert & Lexcie Lu: MIT Ctr for Transportation Studies  
Project Evaluation, Spring 2003 Big Dig Seminar at Boston Univ

# OTHER AREAS OF INFLUENCE: PUBLIC UTILITIES AND HOUSING

## Public Utilities



Robert Moses Niagara Power Station.

Opened 1961, it was at the time the largest hydroelectric plant in the western world.

Moses headed the NYPA for nine years . . .

## Housing



After WWII Moses became the key facilitator of housing construction in NYC. Involved in over 28,000 units such as Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper Village. Leveraged “Slum Clearance” role to destroy old tenements and move people to new housing that was often underwritten by private investors and Title 1 Financing. At the time it was considered innovative.



-Higher End Project-  
Gracie Mansion &  
Carl Shurtz Park,  
1940 prior to Moses  
(with La Guardia OK)  
converting it to NYC  
Mayoral residence.



**IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY THAT NEW YORK WOULD HAVE BEEN A BETTER CITY IF ROBERT MOSES HAD NEVER LIVED. IT IS POSSIBLE TO SAY ONLY THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A DIFFERENT CITY. – Robert Caro**



Hamilton  
Fish Pool



Crotona Pool  
Bathhouse

“For every Moses project that ruined a neighborhood, as the Cross-Bronx Expressway did East Tremont, there are others, like the vast pool and play center in Astoria Park, Queens, or the Hamilton Fish Pool, on the Lower East Side, that became anchors of their neighborhoods and now are designated landmarks. Lincoln Center, whatever you may think of it, jump-started the revival of the Upper West Side. “

- Paul Goldberger, Jan 29, 2007  
New Yorker article

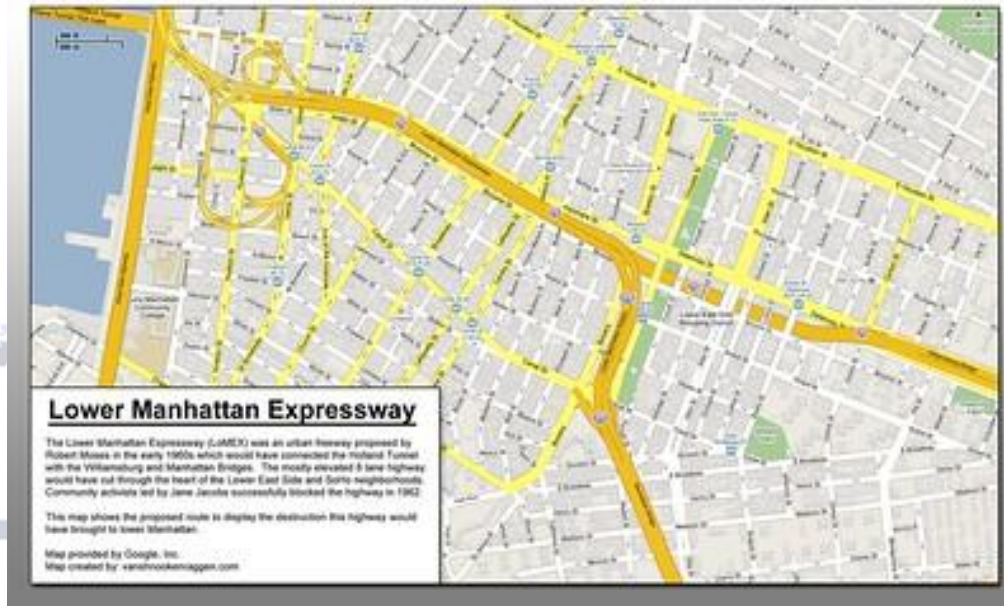


# HE DID NOT GET EVERYTHING BUILT THAT HE WANTED. SOME NOTABLE “UNBUILT” MOSES VISIONS.

MME – 1930's : to connect Lincoln Tunnel with Queens Midtown Tunnel. Even in the 30's Midtown Real Estate was too costly for him to pull this off. Powerful businesses strongly objected too.



LOMEX – 1960's: to connect Holland Tunnel with two East Side Brooklyn-bound bridges. Jane Jacobs' preservationists famously battled this, and won, showing it would destroy Little Italy, SOHO and parts of Greenwich Village.



## OTHER “UNBUILT” MOSES VISIONS – LOSING YOUR MOJO, BOB?



Jane Jacobs



### OVERREACHING

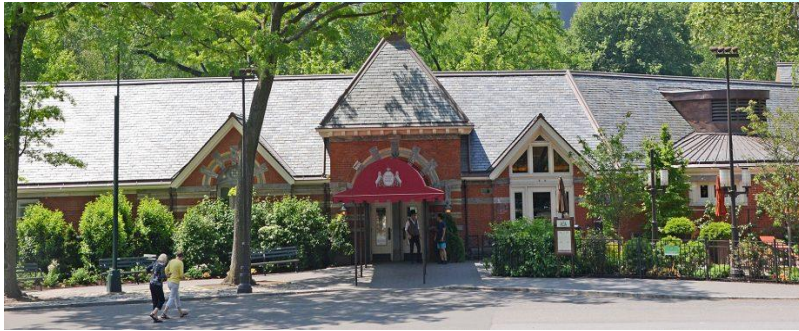
Late '50's: Moses's plan to extend lower Fifth Avenue, bisecting Washington Square Park, created major backlash among neighbors, notable architects, and some press. This key loss for Moses brought Jane Jacobs to the fore. She becomes Moses's nemesis. Publishes "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" 1961.

Late '60's: Long Island Sound Bridge: "*Robert Moses, the mid-20th century bridge czar . . . had for years tried to build a bridge from Oyster Bay to Rye . . . but plans ran aground in 1973.*" - Hartford Courant, Jan 15, 2018

He even had a major rebuff as early as the late '30's when he attempted to push through a Brooklyn-Battery bridge. The Brooklyn Battery Tunnel was more feasible. FDR's War Department settled the matter ruling against Moses. Said his bridge could impede Navy ships. Or maybe FDR was just getting back at him! Moses got the last laugh – taking over the Tunnel Project.



# LAST STRAWS: TAVERN ON THE GREEN, SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK, WORLD'S FAIR FIASCOS – ET TU, PAPP?



## The press starts getting snarky!

*Tavern On The Green Restaurant, Central Park*

1956: Parking lot plan blueprints found by wife of a reporter. “The Mothers of Central Park” formed and stopped the plan to excavate a play area for restaurant parking. A chink in the armor – Moses looked mean, fighting women & children.



*The Second Battle of Central Park – Joe Papp*

“Shakespeare in The Park”, was free since founded 1954. By 1959 Moses’s deputy asks Papp to charge admission, and give the Parks Dept 10% of revenue. But he really wanted him out - for political reasons.

1964 - 65: Moses Chairs NY World’s Fair. He infuriates BIE (Bureau of Int’l Expositions), so they don’t bless it as official. Many European countries don’t attend. It loses money. Books are examined, evidencing generosity to friendly contractors, other irregularities. A final blow?



Papp fights back with theatrical PR skills, continues to operate by getting corporate sponsors. Moses backed his deputy but got egg on his face. Another blow to his reputation.



## 1968 – END OF AN ERA: THE YEAR THE CASH COWS WERE TAKEN AWAY

That's my resignation letter you've got there Nelson! No one ever accepted it.

There's a first time for everything Bob!



First Mayor Lindsay removed Moses from some NYC roles.

Gov Nelson Rockefeller (1959 – '73) wanted him completely out, but RM had strong allies.

Finally Rockefeller tried to “merge” him out of his biggest job, and its revenues, by combining the MTA and the TBTA, after Moses refused to turn over TBTA revenues to help with NYC’s poor finances.

Moses said TBTA bond holders would sue, pulled out his resignation letter. Nelson calls his bluff. Brother David’s bank is the largest bond holder and agent, won’t sue. (Oops!)

**Consolation: RM stays on as consultant with a title in name only. But has no real power.**

# POLARIZATION AND REVISION

## His Critics Say

“Robert Moses wasn’t elected to anything. We’re taught that in a Democracy power comes from being elected. He had more power than anyone, and he held it for 48 years.”

- Robert Caro, *The Power Broker*, 1974

“Moses would never alter his plans for working men, although there are many examples of him doing so under pressure from wealthier landowners. “

“Cross-Bronx Expressway - a staggeringly difficult engineering challenge involved crossing 120 streets opened for traffic; nine surface, subterranean and elevated rail tracks; and hundreds of active water, sewer, and utility lines . . . [with an] astonishing sticker price. It wasn’t just hundreds of millions of 1950s dollars spent over more than a decade, but the destruction of hundreds of buildings, homes to tens of thousands of people—poor people forcibly displaced into soulless housing projects . . .”

“He designed his cities *for cars*, not for people. The landscaped riverfront highways and miles of asphalt cutting through parks were meant for the drivers, rather than pedestrians, to enjoy.”

– Marcin Wichary (Google Engineer & Designer, ) 2012

## An Opposing View

“Had the city not undertaken a massive program of public works between 1924 and 1970, had it not built an arterial highway system, and had it not relocated 200,000 people from old-law tenements to new public housing projects, New York would not have been able to claim in the 1990s that it was the capital of the twentieth century....”

- Kenneth T. Jackson, Professor, Columbia U

“His aim was to strengthen the center city in an age of decentralization, suburban drift, and urban decay ... The beneficiaries were middle- and upper-class residents; universities, college students, and an economy propelled by brainpower; and cultural institutions, suburbanites, and tourists who saw New York as a cultural magnet.”

- Hilary Ballon, NYU Professor/Curator of 2007 Moses Exhibit

“Caro stimulated a great discussion, and there’s a human truth there: Powerful people become undone by their power. But the book is far from definitive and misjudges history. It’s absolutely evident to me that ‘The Power Broker’ is symptomatic of a time and a zeitgeist. In the community of historians, there’s been brewing a sense of discontent.”

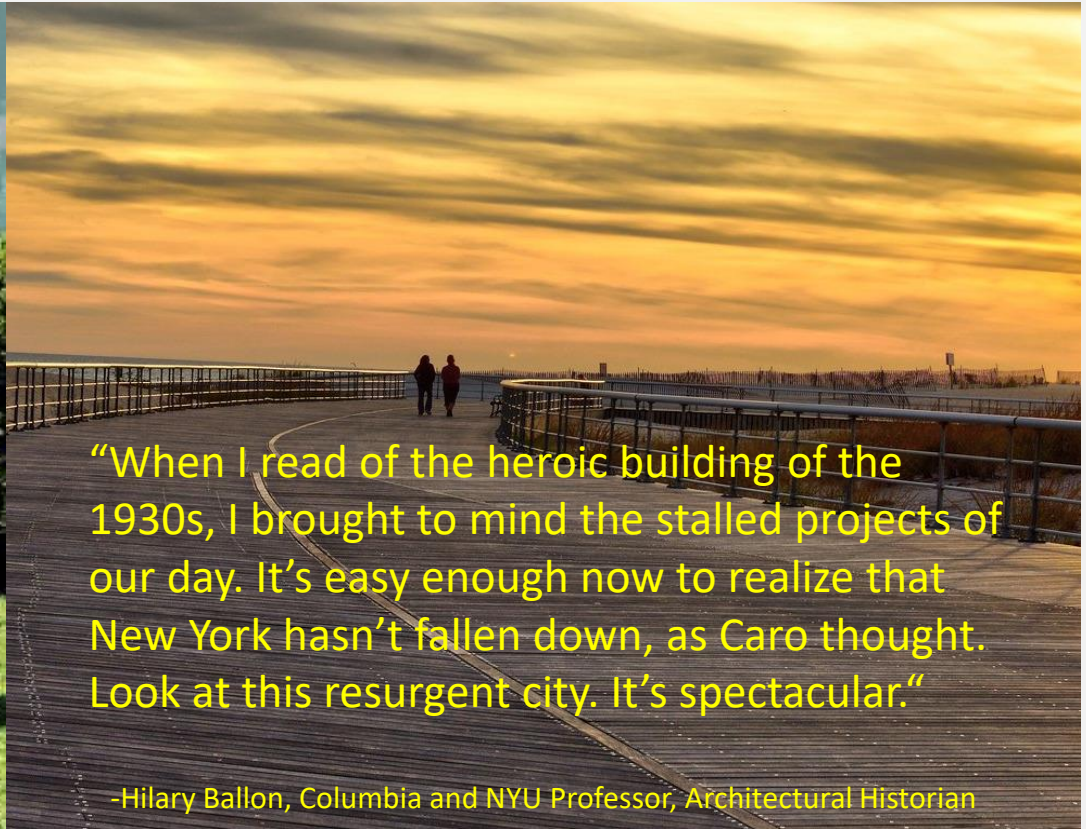
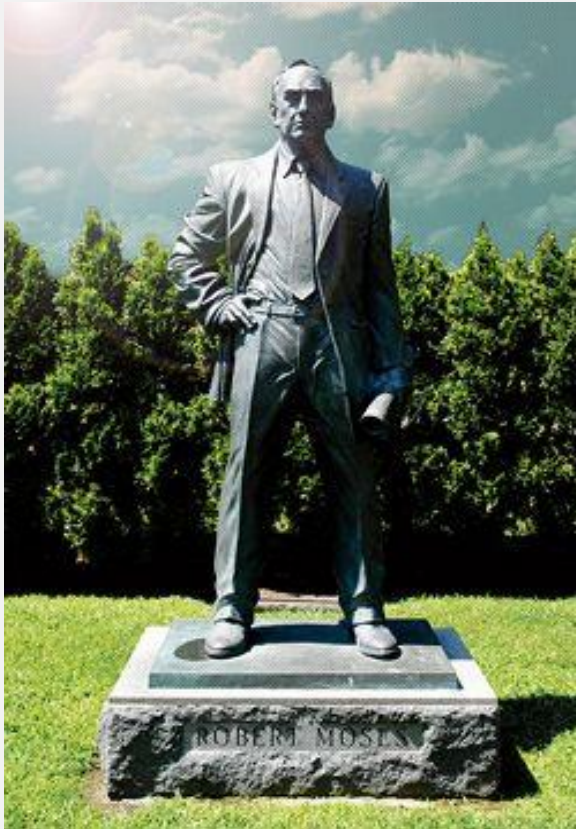
– Hilary Ballon

## MOSES IS OFTEN COMPARED TO BARON HAUSSMANN, WHO RECONFIGURED PARIS UNDER NAPOLEON III

Haussmann himself estimated 350,000 Parisians were displaced by his grand Boulevards and Parks constructed between 1853 and 1870, even greater than Caro's figure of up to 250,000 removals due to Moses.

*"It was Monsieur Haussmann who impressed me the most. It was a strange thing, but it was less his **talents and his remarkable intelligence** that appealed to me, but the **defects in his character**. I had in front of me **one of the most extraordinary** men of our time; **big, strong, vigorous, energetic, and at the same time clever and devious**, with a spirit full of resources. This **audacious** man wasn't afraid to show who he was ... It seemed to me that he was exactly the man I needed to **fight against** the ideas and prejudices of a whole school of economics, against devious people and skeptics ... Whereas a gentleman of the most elevated spirit, cleverness, with the most straight and noble character, would inevitably fail, this **vigorous athlete** ... full of audacity and skill, capable of opposing expedients with better expedients, traps with more clever traps, would certainly succeed. I told him about the Paris works and offered to put him in charge." – Victor de Persigny, Minister of the Interior to Emperor Louis Napoleon*





“When I read of the heroic building of the 1930s, I brought to mind the stalled projects of our day. It’s easy enough now to realize that New York hasn’t fallen down, as Caro thought. Look at this resurgent city. It’s spectacular.”

-Hilary Ballon, Columbia and NYU Professor, Architectural Historian

**LECTOR, SI MONUMENTUM REQUIRIS, CIRCUMSPICE**

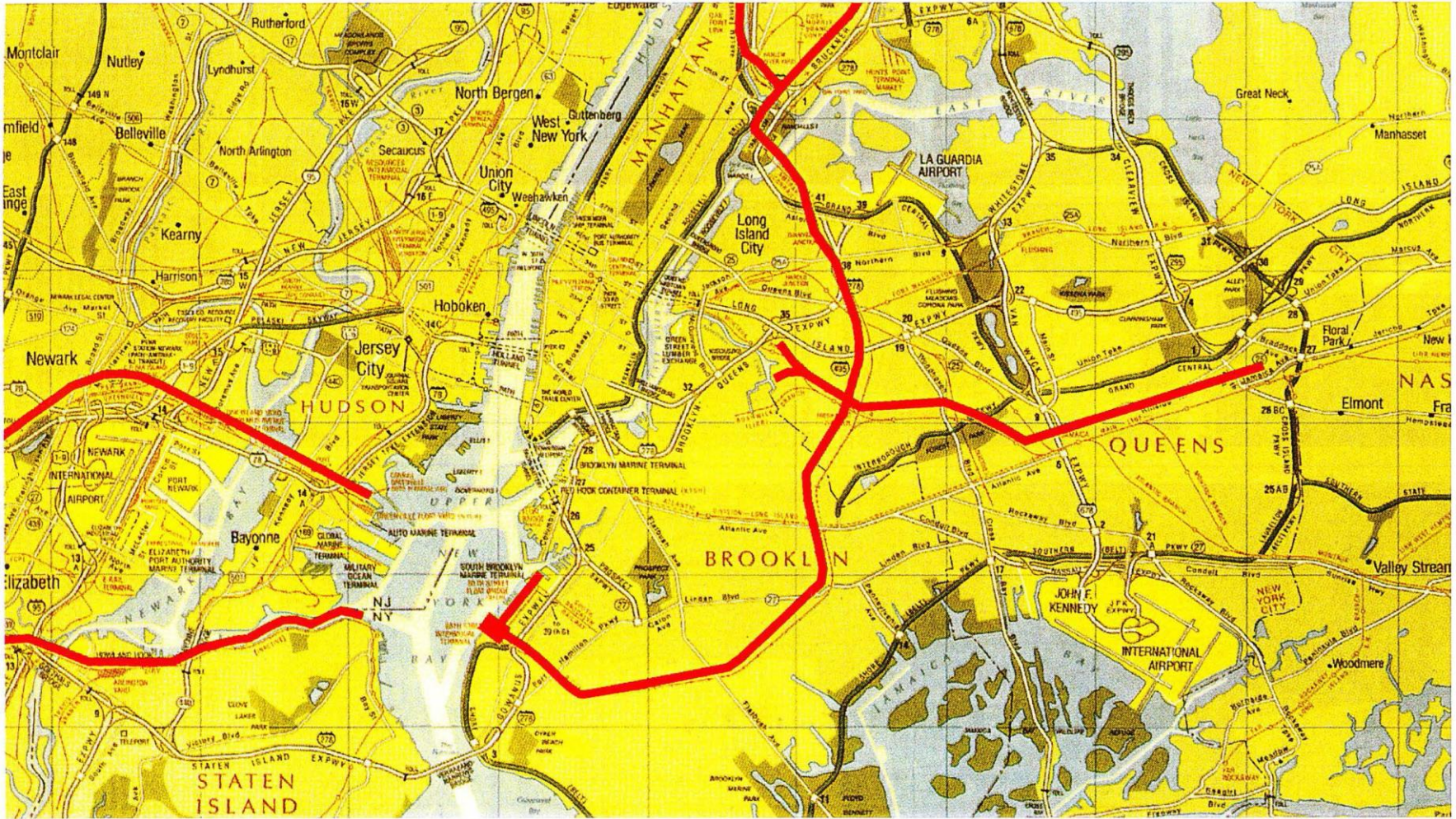
(Reader, if you seek his monument look about you)

**Inscription to Sir Christopher Wren, St. Paul’s Cathedral, London**

(Wren had the advantage of rebuilding a city that had burned down!)



# Final Thought: A Not So Modest Proposal to Relieve Truck Freight Traffic in NY, NJ, Long Island, Connecticut



*New York Cross Harbor Rail Freight Tunnels, Port and Terminals – Private Investment Project – Introduction; Initial Requirements; Time Lines* **COS Inc.**

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