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Research Paper-Draft 2

Pollution in the Newtown Creek and the Gowanus Canal

Back when I was in middle school, my cousin and I went to Coney Island amusement park. It was my first time going there and I liked going on all the rides. My cousin decided that we should go to the Coney Island beach and I liked the idea, thinking that it would probably be a nice place to go before heading home. As we were making our way to the beach I began to pick up abandoned sea shells that were left out by the shore. A great amount of people were swimming at the beach and I began to approach the water. As I looked closely at the water, there was a large amount of waste thrown into it like bags, bottles, and other discarded items. It felt sickening being there and seeing all these people not knowing what they were swimming in at the time. Over the years, the water front of Brooklyn has been polluted with waste that is causing a huge problem in the borough. This was pollution that was produced over time and was not looked at as a big deal back when urbanization was at s young stage in New York. We can see the affects that the pollution has caused us today based on the mistakes we made in the past come to haunt us by way of infection in our environment. Along the Brooklyn Waterfront, there has been a heavy load of pollution throughout the Newtown Creek and Gowanus Canal, and there have been solutions towards these problems.

Newtown Creek is located in the city of New York in the borough of Brooklyn and it’s the borderline from Brooklyn and Queens. Back in the 1800’s, the Creek was one of the busiest water ways in New York. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, “Newtown Creek was one of the busiest hubs of industrial activity in New York City. More than 50 refineries were located along its banks, including oil refineries, petrochemical
plants, fertilizer and glue factories, sawmills, and lumber and coal yards” ("Newtown Creek-Brooklyn and Queens, NY."). The factories included oil and petroleum refineries, fertilizers, and lumber productivity. Based this information the Newtown creek was seen as the largest water way transportation route in the eastern part of the United States. The Creek was swarming with boats that brought in raw materials from other parts of the United States and also from other foreign countries. Around the 1850’s, the city began dumping raw materials in the Creek in addition to all of the pollution that was created during the activity of both the boats and the factories. Based on the information from the Environmental Protection Agency, during World War II with its busy boats, “various contaminated sites along the creek have contributed to the contamination at Newtown Creek. Today, as a result of its industrial history, including countless spills, Newtown Creek is one of the nation’s most polluted waterways” ("Newtown Creek-Brooklyn and Queens, NY."). A large amount of oil and gun powder was spilled along the Creek.

Gowanus Canal is also located in Brooklyn and it was an enclosed coastal body of water flowing into the Gowanus Bay in the 1840’s. The canal is about 2 miles by hundreds of feet wide and was built in the nineteenth century. By the 1870’s, “the surrounding area, with its natural marshlands and freshwater streams, had been fully urbanized and industrialized” ("Gowanus Canal."). The Canal was home to many industrial activities such as farms, refines, cement factories, and chemical plants that used most of the water that was coming from the bay as a resource for all the production. Unfortunately, there was little restriction in the ecological regulation and by the twentieth century, a lot of waste was dumped in the Canal because the United States was manufacturing items for the wars that were held at that time. As stated on the New York City Environmental Protection, “the Gowanus Canal became contaminated with a host of industrial pollutants, such as coal tar and heavy metals (e.g. mercury, lead)” ("Gowanus Canal."). This contamination has brought many sicknesses to people who use public fountains and many have suffered major diseases. The Gowanus Canal did not have a treatment plant and the city of New York did not pay attention to all the pollutants that they had discarded into the water of the Canal. Since then, the city of Brooklyn has begun to have an awareness of the contamination in the Canal.

Although both Newtown Creek and Gowanus Canal have been the biggest polluted waterways in the City of New York, there have been established solutions towards the problems that have occurred on the water. The solution has been taking affect towards the safety of the borough of Brooklyn. As referred by the United States Environmental Protection Agency, “In the early 1990s, New York State declared that Newtown Creek was not meeting water
quality standards under the Clean Water Act” ("Newtown Creek-Brooklyn and Queens, NY."). The city started to act upon this response in the immediate cleanup in the Creek. The large spill that has been found along the Creek by ExxonMobil is being subjected to cleanup thanks to the enforcement of the environmental organization of River Keeper. This has brought much public awareness and has helped the government realize what is important in terms of the environment. According to the article in the New York Times in 2012, “the city’s [Department of Environmental Protection](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dep/html/home/home.shtml) has been pumping air into the four-mile-long waterway between Brooklyn and Queens for years in an effort to oxygenate its [fetid waters](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/28/nyregion/28newtown.html)” (Bryce). The process at which water is pumped under water is called aeration. A superfund has been established in this location to ensure that work is being done and cleanup is in effect. The superfund has conducted two phases of Remedial investigation. Phase one began in February of 2012 and was completed in March 2013 which was mostly sampling of the water and ecological surveys. Following this, phase two which will begin in the spring of 2014 is going to deal with sampling of water in and out of the Creek after some major cleanup ("Newtown Creek-Brooklyn and Queens, NY.").

As for Gowanus Canal, actions were being made for the pollution problem that had to be resolved. Beginning in the twentieth century a group of “city planners and engineers decided that something had to be done to improve water quality in the Canal” ("Gowanus Canal."). The cleaning of water was very crucial to many New Yorkers because all that pollutant will be driven to the bay and into the beaches of Brooklyn where many civilians go to beat the summer’s heat. City engineers “decided to build a tunnel to flush the Canal by drawing water from the head of the Canal near Butler Street, conveying it through a 1.15-mile tunnel, and discharging it into Buttermilk Channel. The Flushing Tunnel was completed in 1911” ("Gowanus Canal."). This was one problem that was resolved but not very affective because some of the trash was still lying at the bed of the Canal. Back on 2013, the federal government invested 500 million dollars in cleanup plan, which seems useless because it will still “remain very much a garbage dump for the city” as stated in the article in the New York Times (Gregory). Even though the Gowanus Canal is being cleaned, industries are continuing the process of dumping pollution in the Water. Thanks to the organization, River Keeper, they have brought justice to the environment in the Brooklyn Waterfronts. Companies such as Sixth Street Iron Metal and Greco Brothers Concrete have been sued by River Keeper under the federal Water Pollution Control Act. Many other companies were fined by the government for the act of polluting in the Canal. This has helped keep the water clean in parts of the Canal and made sure that companies that used Gowanus as a dump will be subjected to pay a large amount of funds for their actions that have or might affect the environment.

In conclusion, solutions have been established to keep the pollution away from Newtown Creek and Gowanus Canal. Newtown Creek was one of the biggest and longest polluted water sites in New York City. The Creek waste dump started in the 1800’s because of all the imports and exports of raw materials. It was mostly abundant to industrial production that soon filled up the Creek with severe waste that slowly grew bigger during the United States War in World War II. The Country soon established a super fund to clean the water and keep pollution from spreading, and being released in the ocean where it could travel to other countrys’ territories. The Gowanus Canal was the second biggest super funded site in New York. Many spills of chemicals and oil were being dumped purposely. As a solution, the government has given money to create a way to clean the water in the Canal. Also, companies have been sued or fined to address the stance that killing the environment was unethical. As said by Margaret Mead, “We won’t have a society if we destroy the environment.

Works Cited

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