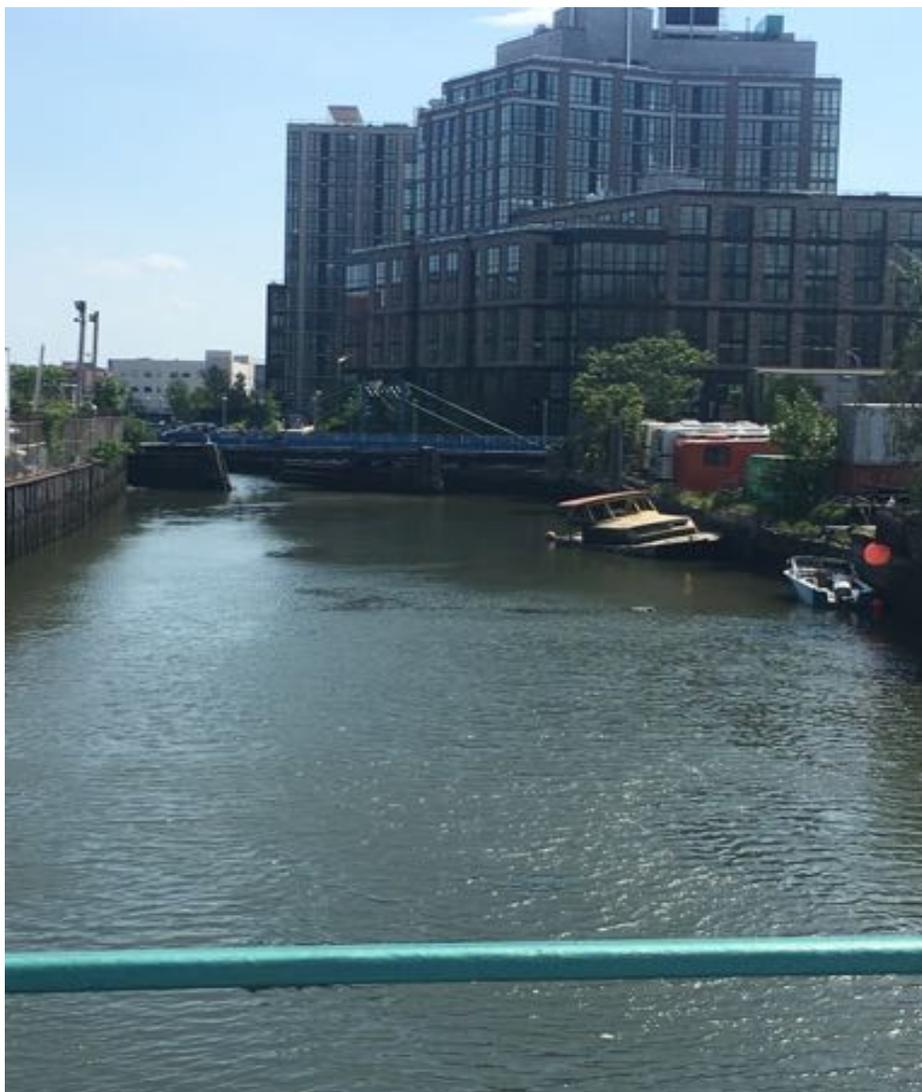


Learning Places Fall 2017

SITE REPORT #1

Gowanus Canal and it's Gentrification



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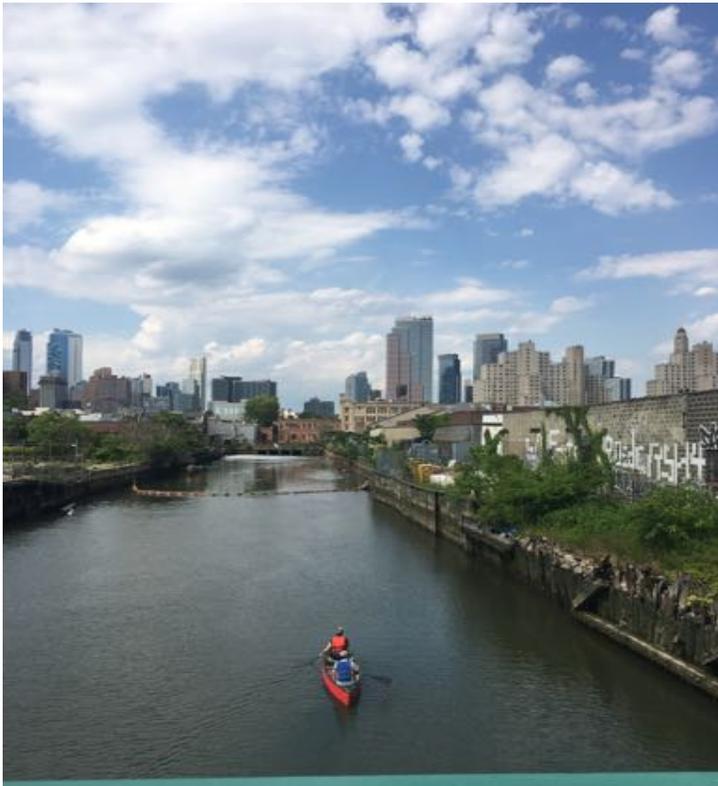
INTRODUCTION

As a class, we visited the Gowanus Canal on June 5, 2017 and observed the Canal and it's surrounding. We took pictures and made sketches of our findings. An education coordinator at Gowanus named Shelby spoke about the history of the canal. She took us around the neighborhood and showed us how the canal is being gentrified. We also saw what measures were being taken to control the pollution in the canal.

SITE DOCUMENTATION (photos*)



This is a picture of a Bioswale. Bioswales are like eco-sponge and they observe water. This bioswale has an inlet and outlet to let water in and out. This particular bioswale has indigenous plants planted inside of it.



On 06/10/17 I visited the Gowanus Canal again and very unexpectedly saw a canoe going through the canal with two people in it. As you can see from the picture two people are canoeing inside the canal. There are a lot of health hazards in regards to their decision as I watched them pass by I heard people say how dirty and unsanitary the canal's water is.

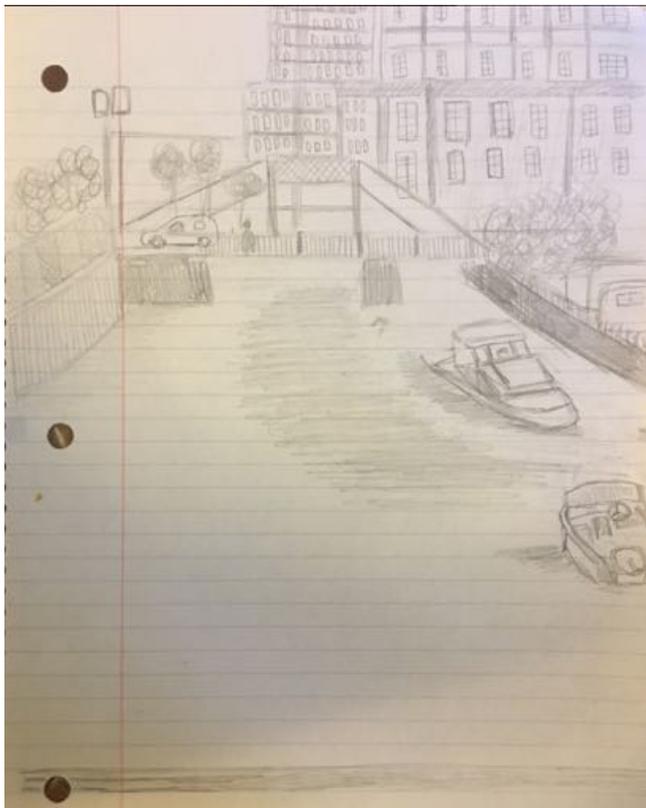


This picture is of an advertisement on top of a brand new building near the canal. As you can see they try to lure people into renting these apartments by showing luxurious spaces and buildings including a gymnasium. It also shows 3 people sitting on the edge with their feet hanging down in the canal, it is a very unrealistic picture since the water in the canal looks nowhere like that.



The above 3 pictures represents gentrification. As you can see there is Whole foods market and a new building which has an esplanade in front of it. The last picture shows the stark difference between the neighborhood. On the left side you see a worn out building with graffiti on top and on the right side you see a lush building.

SITE DOCUMENTATION (sketches*)



This sketch depicts how I saw the canal by standing on the Union Street Bridge. There were 2 abandoned unkempt boats. On the opposite end was a small blue bridge on which cars were passing by and behind the bridge was a brand new apartment building. The water was murky green and if you look down into the river you see toxic waste including excrement's. This image shows the contamination of the canal and why it is listed as a Superfund site.



The juxtaposition of the new building across from the graffiti filled dilapidated building caught my eye. This demonstrates gentrification present at Gowanus.

GENERAL NOTES:

- Gowanus Canal is 1.8 miles long, 100 feet wide and 5-6 feet deep
- It has brackish water, which is mix of 2 types of water, salt water and fresh water.
- 2 main types of pollution: coal tar and combine sewage overflow
- It has 400 million gallons of raw sewage
- Oxygen levels are low in the canal due to pollution
- Bioswales were built to address this issue
- 27 billion gallons of raw sewage in New York City body of water
- Gentrification led to 700 new units, new toilets, sinks which led to 700 times more water in sewage system
- A public esplanade was right outside a new luxury building

- There was a Whole foods market
- Gowanus became a superfund site in 2010
- Gowanus Canal Pilot Sponge Park can hold 1 million gallons of water

INSIGHTS/DISCOVERIES

As one may know Gowanus Canal was once a creek that people turned into a canal in 1869 for the purpose of trade and industrialization. The construction of the Canal had initially begun in 1849. It was known as a busy cargo transportation hub that unfortunately today is known as one of the most polluted bodies of water and is listed as a superfund site. The two main types of pollution in the canal are coal tar and CSO. What I fail to understand is why the canal was treated so poorly and why did people create a system which resulted in CSO. There should have been a better way to deal with the nuisances the canal faces today. Now the Department of city planning is trying to rezone the canal however the Municipal Art Society believes that rezoning “would favor residential development instead of industrial retention and expansion” as per the MAS report published in 2009. A 2002 study from the MAS report states that Gowanus industry was already resurging before its plans for rezoning. The MAS believes that Gowanus already has budding job growth opportunities. Another plus point is that it has access to multi-modal transportation network. This leads us to a very important topic that we have been discussing since the first day of class known as gentrification. What is gentrification? Basic definition is that it is a process to make something more refined or to improve it. If one is trying to improve the aesthetics of something there is no problem in that. The problem only arises when that change leads to higher prices or chooses only a select group of people and divides the other. Who benefits from gentrification and how does it affect certain groups of people. If we go back to the movie *Citizen Jane*, we will see that gentrification only had negative aspects because it segregates or excludes certain groups of people. Just like now Gowanus has new expensive buildings and a whole foods market, well who will live in that building and who will buy food from that whole foods market. Obviously people with low income or lower middle class families cannot afford such luxuries. One prime example that really shows the effect of gentrification is the movie called *My Brooklyn* by Kelly Anderson. Anderson moved to Brooklyn because of low rent and its diverse culture. Soon after the election of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Brooklyn’s neighborhood started to change. Bloomberg reminded me of a present day Robert Moses. Both only looked for financial gains and business growth. The rezoning of the Fulton mall led to a lot of small businesses closing down and big tall residential buildings and upscale stores taking its place. If the Gowanus canal is rezoned then it will have the same fate as downtown Brooklyn.

KEYWORDS/VOCABULARY & DEFINITIONS

1. **Sheet Piling:** Steel sheets used to build walls that keep water or soil in.

2. **Shoring:** The process of using props to support something that is unstable.
3. **Combine Sewage Overflow (CSO):** The discharge from a combined sewer system triggered by water runoff such as snowmelt or storms.
4. **Flushing tunnel:** Also called bubbling up, flushes dirty water connected from head of canal. The water is pulled from New York harbor.
5. **Bioswales:** It is like an eco-sponge that absorbs water and is filled with vegetation, plants and grass. Bioswales has an inlet and an outlet.
6. **Pervious:** A passage that allows water to pass through.
7. **Impervious:** Not permitting fluids to pass through.
8. **Percolate:** Allowing to pass through a porous body.
9. **Esplanade:** A long, open, level area next to a body of water where people walk.
10. **Permeable surface:** A surface that allows water to penetrate.
11. **Superfund:** A site of environmentally polluted area that the government funds to clean up the toxic wastes.
12. **Brownfield Site:** A site usually in abandoned or deteriorated areas that have toxic or waste contaminants that prevent redevelopment.
13. **Gentrification:** The process of improving a place and making it more refined at the cost of benefitting certain population and excluding others.

14. **Rezoning:** The process of assigning new uses for a particular area.

QUESTIONS for Further RESEARCH

1. Why was the Gowanus Canal managed so poorly?
2. What could have been done differently to deal with the pollution of the Gowanus Canal?
3. Can gentrification improve the Gowanus Canal so that it is no longer a superfund site?
4. Is gentrification in Gowanus a reflection of Robert Moses vision?