

Within the legacy of Robert Moses lies both the vicious destruction of communities and the emphasis on inclusive public spaces. While these two ideas are seemingly contradictory, Robert Moses viewed them as the cause and effect of urban planning. Thus, in order to create accessible public spaces, Moses believed that he must establish an anti-institutional sentiment by tearing apart neighborhoods through governmental approval of slum clearance. Moses epitomized his paradoxical view of progress through his revitalization and renovation of Orchard Beach.

Orchard Beach, prior to Robert Moses' intervention in 1934, was a vacation spot for middle and upper class citizens. Residents who frequented Orchard Beach in the summers lived in tents and created a "well-established colony, complete with a city-like infrastructure. Campers enjoyed conveniences such as street cleaning, mail and fire service, ice delivery, and garbage hauling."¹ Even though the tents had the feel of rustic, American life in the Wild West, members of the colony truly lived in luxury. When Robert Moses visited Orchard Beach, he was appalled by this colony. Perhaps, his fury stemmed from the residents' illusion of nostalgia for the American West. Moses, a man who prided himself on hard work and self-sufficiency, could not stand to watch as "officials, policemen and, yes, judges," appeared to be individualistic while simultaneously affirming that power is derived from ties to large institutions and the government.² Ironically, on November 6th, 1934, Robert Moses, a Republican, was defeated in the election for New York State governor by 800,000 votes, which *The New York Times* describes as "the largest margin in New York State history."³ While Robert Moses fought for the removal of the Orchard Beach colony in February, 1934, his only attempt at governor failed, and thus his hostility towards organization, higher institutions, and government, might be rooted in the lack of support that he received during his political campaign. Nevertheless, Moses strived to wipe out the colony of democrats on Orchard Beach.

In June 1934, after a lengthy lawsuit, Robert Moses gained the right to demand that the residents of the colony leave Orchard Beach. During the lawsuit, a resident of the colony argued that according to the Local Law 10, Moses must "continue to issue permits until the beach was 'actually laid out for park purposes.'"⁴ However, Justice McGeehan "ruled that the contention that permits must be issued until the beach actually is developed under an appropriation for that purpose put a 'strained construction on Local Law 10.'"⁵ Thus, Moses won the case, but *The*

¹ "Pelham Bay Park," *New York City Department of Parks and Recreation*, <https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/pelham-bay-park/highlights/12110>

² Ibid

³ Paul Goldberger, "Robert Moses, Master Builder, is Dead at 92," *New York Times*, July 30th, 1981, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1218.html>

⁴ "Moses Wins again in Row Over Camps; Clearing of Orchard Beach Sites is Begun." 1934. *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 12, 25.

<https://search.proquest.com.libproxy.riverdale.edu/docview/100942846?accountid=39333>

⁵ Ibid

New York Times remarked that Moses was ridiculed and “was greeted with angry shouts and gesticulations by about twenty disgruntled campers.”⁶ While Moses’ triumph displaced members of the Orchard Beach colony, it allowed Moses to begin transforming Orchard Beach into a beautiful, public park. Here again lies Moses’ paradox: isolation yields inclusion.

Today, Orchard Beach is described as a “slice of riviera, with a familiar twist,” which illuminates Robert Moses’ powerful impact on the lives of local New Yorkers.⁷ He created a sense of escape and relaxation for many people who could not afford to travel far away from their homes. In a *New York Times* article, Edward Karen describes that “we had freedom there.”⁸ Those who frequent Orchard Beach have “freedom” to escape from racial and class tensions, and unite with the common goal of enjoying life. While Moses might have driven the colony apart, a utilitarian would argue that Moses maximized happiness because he created a space for everyone even though it was at the expense of the elite.

While Moses does not epitomize empathy and compassion, his work at Orchard Beach must be understood by his own personal struggles with democracy and his desire to create a park that was inclusive. In his article entitled “Rethinking Robert Moses,” Phillip Lopate illuminates that “Moses was a pragmatic political animal who practiced ‘the art of the possible.’ He knew how the levers of society operated, and his dislike of planning critics and do-gooders rose from his sense that they did not.”⁹ Robert Moses worked to maximize efficiency and within this goal lies his true spirit; Moses was a man driven by a desire to create change (although we may ask whom this change is for). His individualistic mindset ran contrary to governmental officials and law abiding citizens. Thus, Moses fought to remove the colony on Orchard Beach as a rejection of collective order and as a reminder that individual effort must be praised and restored in American democracy.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Juan Forero, “ORCHARD BEACH JOURNAL; Slice of the Riviera, With a Familiar Bronx Twist,” *New York Times*, July 9th, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/09/nyregion/orchard-beach-journal-slice-of-the-riviera-with-a-familiar-bronx-twist.html>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Phillip Lopate, “Rethinking Robert Moses,” *Metropolis*, August/September 2002, <http://www.metropolismag.com/December-1969/Rethinking-Robert-Moses/>