



Waterfront: A Walk Around Manhattan

Phillip Lopate

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Fusing history, lore, politics, culture, and on-site adventures, esteemed essayist and author Phillip Lopate takes us on an exuberant, affectionate, and eye-opening excursion around Manhattan's shoreline.

Waterfront captures the ever-changing character of New York in the best way possible: on a series of exploratory walks conducted by one of the city's most engaging and knowledgeable guides. Starting at the Battery and moving at a leisurely pace along the banks of the Hudson and East Rivers, Lopate describes the infrastructures, public spaces, and landmarks he encounters, along with fascinating insights into how they came to be. Unpeeling layers of myth and history, he reveals the economic, ecological, and political concerns that influenced the city's development, reporting on everything from the building of the Brooklyn Bridge to the latest projects dotting the shorelines.

New York's waterfront has undergone a three-stage revaluation—from the world's largest port to an abandoned, seedy no-man's land to a highly desirable zone of parks and upscale retail and residential properties—each metamorphosis only incompletely shedding earlier associations. Physically, no area of New York City has changed as dramatically as the shoreline, thanks to natural processes and the use of landfill, dredging, and other interventions. Everywhere Phillip Lopate walked on the waterfront, he saw the present as a layered accumulation of older narratives. He set about his task by trying to read the city like a text. One textual layer is the past, going back to the Lenape Indians, Captain Kidd, and Melville's sailors; another is the present—whatever or whoever was popping up in his view at the moment; a third layer contains the constructed environment, the architecture or piers or parks currently along the shore; another layer still is his personal history, the memories recalled by visiting certain spots; yet another consists of the city's incredibly rich cultural record—the literature, films, and artwork that threw a reflecting light on the matter at hand; and finally, there is the invisible or imagined layer—what he thinks should be on the waterfront but is not.

Waterfront is studded with short diversions where Lopate expounds on some of the greater issues, characters, and sites of Manhattan's shoreline. Be it a revisionist examination of Robert Moses, the effect of shipworms on the city's piers and foundations, the battle over Westway, the dream of public housing, the legacy of Joseph Mitchell, a wonderful passage about the longshoremen and Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront*, or the meaning of the World Trade Center, Lopate punctuates this marvelous journey with the sights and sounds and words of a world like no other.

A rich and impressive work by an undisputed master stylist, *Waterfront* takes its rightful place next to other literary classics of New York, such as E. B. White's **Here Is New York** and Joseph Mitchell's **Up in the Old Hotel**. It is an unparalleled look at New York's landscape and history and an irresistible invitation to meander along its outermost edges.

From the Hardcover edition.

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