

The highline: a new destination essay sample

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The way things can evolve with just the snap of a finger is truly amazing. Less than a decade ago, the highline was an abandoned wasteland but in 2009, it was transformed into a meaningful elevated park. The highline has a very long history being that it also used to be railroad track in the late 1930s. It has gone through many transformations throughout the decades, but now it has become one of the most famous parks in New York City. Before the high line was created, train cars would go down the streets of tenth avenue to bring supplies to the growing 19th century New York. Cowboys on horses used to ride ahead of the trains to warn people of its arrival, but yet, in the very crowded turn of the century New York City, it became extremely dangerous.

Tenth avenue became known as “ death avenue” because so many people would get hit by trains bringing steel, cattle, or coal into the city’s factories. In the 1930s, the New York State legislature approved the construction of the highline: train cars would be elevated to avoid conflict with pedestrians and car traffic on tenth avenue. According to the “ friends of the high line”, in 1934, “ the high line opened to trains. It ran from 34th Street to St. John’s Park Terminal, at Spring Street. It was designed to go through the center of blocks, rather than over the avenue, to avoid creating the negative conditions associated with elevated subways.

It connected directly to factories and warehouses, allowing trains to roll right inside buildings. Milk, meat, produce, and raw and manufactured goods come and go without causing street-level traffic.” At that time, the high line became a symbol of the booming industrial New York City. It was soon going to end however. After World War II, the highway system overtook rail as the

main way to transport goods in the Northeast United States. The highline became underused and in 1980, the last train pulled three carloads of frozen turkey into the meatpacking district and the elevated train line was abandoned.

What is most interesting about the high line is that it is truly a symbol of New York City. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the high line was completely abandoned as was a symbol of urban decay. In the early 2000s, however, it was turned into a park and has been completely reborn into successful park for all. In a way, it mirrors the history of New York City. New York went through a very tough time when factories closed down and people left town. The high line was a symbol of that decay, being a complete wasteland. Recently, however, New York City has been back, and so has the high line.

In 1980, the high line was completely abandoned. It was not destroyed, but instead was left to rot on the west side of Manhattan. Like many buildings and other places in the city, it became covered in rust and graffiti pretty quickly. It was an unsafe place to be around, it was representative of urban decay, homelessness, and drugs. Very soon, according to Kenneth Jackson, New York City historian, “ Sadly, the entire structure was off limits to ordinary citizens, which was necessary because the path was uneven and tricky, the old stairways had rusted and broken glass was a threat. And even if you were willing to ignore “ No Trespassing” signs and the possibility of arrest, you must had been skinny, young and adventurous to slither under, over, or through the barricades.”

This shows that the high line was a shame for New York. It was hidden in the darkness, to be completely ignored and representative of a very difficult New York City. “ Then the line just sat. Passers-by ignored the forsaken mass overhead as it slowly went native. The only ones who saw possibilities there were advertisers and graffiti artists.” writes Meera Subramanian. The high line became the home of homeless people, crack junkies, and graffiti artists. Residents of Chelsea pretended like it never existed and it was left to rust for decades. In a way, it was very representative of New York City back then. New York used to be rough: subway cars were full of grafittis, crime was rampant, and drugs were found as easily as McDonald’s.

Coming out of the A train in Chelsea, the sight of the abandoned high line was no different from the train ride: junkies were living under the tracks and grafittis covered it. It was just normal life in New York City. It seemed like the high line, just like New York City, had reached rock bottom and would never recover. It was an abandoned place that would always be an urban wasteland. Nobody believed it could change. The high line, however, just like New York City, recovered. If we asked anybody today who slept under the high line during these hot summer nights of the 1980s, they would have not believed it, but it is now one of the most popular tourist attractions in the city. The high line, which people used to be ashamed of, and scared of, is now the pride of the city, and it barely took any effort.

In 2003, “ The Bloomberg administration moved ahead with its plans to transform an abandoned elevated rail line into a 1.6-mile-long park and make it the centerpiece for new commercial and residential developments along the western edge of Chelsea.” It was a bold idea, but why not? It

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barely cost anything and this disgusting eye sore in Chelsea would become a park. No more graffiti, no more junkies, no more urban decay. For a few million dollars, this abandoned piece of steel would become a park and even if nobody ever went there, it would have been money well spent because it is better than a disgusting abandoned elevated railroad track. At the beginning, expectations were low: how would a piece of elevated tracks a few feet wide compete with awesome parks like Central Park? For some people, at best it would have just been a cleanup effort. But then a miracle happened: it became popular.

It also started with the graffiti: in 2009, “ As the first section of the High Line park was poised to open last April, the mayor’s office began painting over the graffiti next to the elevated tracks.” Soon, the graffiti were gone, then quickly after, so were the weeds and before people even realized, the high line was open for business again. Then, everything became better: “ Michael R. Bloomberg, proclaimed that preserving the High Line as a public park revitalized a swath of the city and generated \$2 billion in private investment surrounding the park.” This little piece of steel and concrete had become an economic powerhouse. “ On top of the 8, 000 construction jobs those projects required, the redevelopment has added about 12, 000 jobs in the area, the mayor said.” Just like New York City was recovering from the crack epidemic and the economic crisis of twenty years ago, the high line became a symbol for that change.

People had left it for dead, impossible to improve, and now it was beating all expectations. It became so successful that other cities wanted to create their own high line. “ Developers from Rotterdam and Hong Kong have come

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looking for ideas. Officials from Jerusalem are hoping to visit. Recently a team from Singapore spent time on the landscaped walkways that stretch from Gansevoort Street to West 20th Street.” New York used to be a shame, the high line used to be an eye sore, and yet now it is a model for the rest of the world. Crime on the high line is almost nonexistent: “ According to the Times, there has not been a single report of a serious crime on the High Line since its opening.” Even the most optimistic Chelsea residents could not have seen that coming.

As a matter of fact, some people are upset at the high line today, especially some longtime residents of the neighborhood. Some people miss the old rough New York. “ Seth Carnes, an artist whose 2008 white, red and black painting of the words ‘ i heart’ was covered over with what he calls ‘ a battleship gray layer of paint,’ tells City Room, ‘ Certainly when I saw the drab gray paint over it, it was a tragic moment. Part of the act of the street art-form is what goes onto a wall is covered or changes. But I think a solid gray coat of paint over what used to be a nice textured brick wall with some good graffiti over it is not an improvement.’” Residents who remember what Chelsea used to be are upset at the popularity of the high line. “ It seems that somebody in Chelsea is not loving the insane popularity of the High Line.

So much so, in fact, that they’ve gone and put up signs reminding “ High Line Tourists” that ‘ West Chelsea is not Times Square. It is not a tourist attraction.” Some people living near the high line feel like their old neighborhood is not the same and they have no privacy anymore. “ It’s tough living right next to the crime-free, world-renowned slice of green space
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known as the High Line.” So says a few grumpy Chelsea residents whose apartments abut the walkway, and thus the thousands of gawkers every day that traipse along, snapping photos every 10 feet. ‘It’s absolutely horrible!’ one woman tells the Post, presumably without a trace of irony given that she lives within walking distance of a brand-new \$115 million park. ‘People take pictures and wave at you when you’re alone in your home. We have to keep shades up all the time. It’s voyeuristic, and there’s zero privacy.’”

But at the end of the day, the high line has been a huge success. It has received gifts from Google and other big companies who are now in the neighborhood, that they would have avoided like the plague before. Property value near the high line has been going up and it is now one of the most visited tourist attraction in the city. The high line used to be just like New York City: rough, dangerous, and full of character. Now, maybe it has lost some of its character, but it has been reborn and is extremely successful. In a way, the high line mirrors New York City, and who knows what the future will bring to that odd unique park?