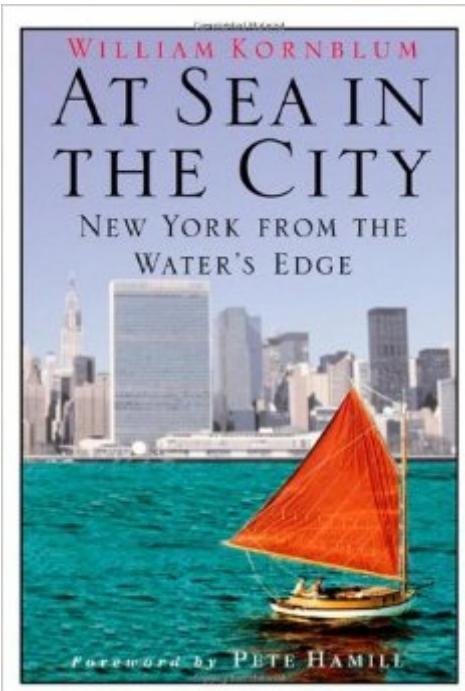


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At Sea In The City: New York From The Water's Edge



Synopsis

New York is a city of few boundaries, a city of well-known streets and blocks that ramble on and on, into our literature, dreams, and nightmares. We know the city by the byways that split it, streets like Broadway and Madison and Flatbush and Delancey. From those streets, peering down the blocks and up at the top floors, the city seems immense and endless. And though the land itself may end at the water, the city does not. Long before Broadway was a muddy cart track, the water was the city's most distinguishing feature, the rivers the only byways of importance. Some people, like William Kornblum, still see the city as an urban archipelago, shaped by the water and the people who have sailed it for goods, money, pirate's loot, and freedom. For them, the City will always be an island. William Kornblum--New York City native, longtime sailor, urban sociologist, and first-time author--has spent decades plying the waterways of the city in his ancient catboat, *Tradition*. In *At Sea in the City*, he takes the reader along as he sails through his hometown, lovingly retelling the history of the city's waterfront and maritime culture and the stories of the men and women who made the water their own. In *At Sea in the City* and in Kornblum's own humility, humor, and sense of wonder, one detects echoes of E. B. White, John McPhee, and Joseph Mitchell.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The author, a sociology professor at City University of New York, was raised in the Big Apple and has lived most of his life in the area. In 1979 he bought a 24-foot New England catboat, built on Cape Cod in 1910, and proceeded to fix it and sail it around the New York area. With this book he

presents a portrait -- and sketchy history -- of the city from an angle few people know it. Structuring the story as a fairly continuous though interrupted sail from his home in Long Beach, around the southern tip of Rockaway and into Jamaica Bay, then into Upper New York Bay and the East River, and ultimately to Long Island Sound, Kornblum offers both close-up looks at the water and shoreline, and their past history. The approach is light and pleasant: Few stories -- whether of the freezing disaster of the privateer "Castel Del Rey" in New York harbor in 1704, knowledgeable black sailors impressed by the British Navy in the War of 1812 and jailed in England for refusing to serve against the US, various ferry disasters, or the vagaries of Robert Moses -- last more than a page or three. The only sections where Kornblum lingers are in Jamaica Bay (its environmental degradation and return), and the dockside concrete industry that built New York's towers and for which the author worked as a kid. Manhattan itself is quickly bypassed though given a loving nod, and there is no venturing into the Hudson side. In the typo sweepstakes, the book does all right, although it says "mechanical break" on p. 156 when "brake" was meant, and I believe I saw an unintended sentence fragment on p. 143. Most egregious, the great A.J. Liebling is identified on p. 103 as "Libeling" (though the name is correct in the bibliography)!

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