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## Racist or Radical? The Strange Case of Robert Moses and the Building of New York City's Aquatics Infrastructure

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### **Abstract**

Who was Robert Moses? In this article, we want to cast a bright light on Robert Moses as a visionary urban planner, which included the comprehensive planning of the outdoor and indoor aquatic infrastructure for New York City. Second, we want to highlight some of his administration's significant accomplishments and challenges in providing aquatics opportunities for diverse populations, including people of color. Finally, we aspire to illustrate what happens when officials with power and authority in local government are permitted to operate without scrutiny and are un beholden to a meaningful series of checks and balances. Robert Moses' tenure as a 40-year-plus appointed public official highlighted the need for accountability in public service. During his expansive career, Moses held more than 12 bureaucratic appointments, sometimes concurrently, allowing him to drive his infrastructure development agenda funded by the WPA mercurially. His herculean list of accomplishments included parks, highways, 11 large swimming pools, civic centers, sports stadiums, 13 bridges, 658 playgrounds, 416 miles of parkway, 150,000 units of public housing, and the 1964-65 World's Fair, which cost in today's economy approximately \$150 billion (Adiv, 2015). One of the central jewels in the crown of his accomplishments was the planning, design, and construction of the outdoor and indoor swimming infrastructure of New York City. Unfortunately, many of Moses' achievements were overshadowed by allegations of racial politics, a lack of accountability for his decisions and policy actions, and reports of his disdain for blacks, Puerto Ricans, and low-income people. He was also called *dictatorial*, *power-hungry*, and *vindictive* during his long tenure in public service. Moses was rebuked for his lack of inclusion in planning processes and making resource allocation decisions based on the racial composition of a community.

*Key Words:* equity, New York City, Robert Moses, race, swimming pools, aquatics

### **Introduction**

In 1986, in the second year of my doctoral program at Michigan State University, I took an excellent but challenging public policy course from Jack H. Knott, a political science professor. Knott had come into the professorate after serving as an undersecretary in one of the many departments in the federal government. He had an exciting passion for policy matters at the federal, state, and local levels of government. However, more importantly, through his keen expert insights, he frequently offered a very focused conversation about the necessity of governmental accountability at levels of government, often citing the example of New York City and Robert Moses.

One of the several books students enrolled in the course was required to read was Robert A. Caro's masterpiece, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (1974). This Pulitzer Prize non-fiction novel chronicles the story of Robert Moses, whom some argue was the single most powerful man in New York for nearly a century and the penultimate architect of one of America's legendary municipalities, New York City. One of the cruelest ironies unveiled in Caro's *magnum opus* is the fact that Moses was never elected to public office but amassed for himself a position of exaggerated and untouchable authority, allowing him to utterly reshape the city of New York, leaving an indelible "footprint" in the city we know today. The paradox is that in the documentable public actions that Moses allegedly took for the "greater good" of the citizens of New York, concurrently, he used power and policy to dismantle communities of color and generally damage the lives of millions of people while remaining accountable to no one.

The purpose of this administrative-historical essay is three-fold. First, we want to cast a bright light on Robert Moses as a visionary urban planner, which included the comprehensive planning of the outdoor and indoor aquatic infrastructure for New York City. Second, we want to highlight some of his administration's significant accomplishments and challenges in providing aquatics opportunities for diverse populations, including people of color. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we aspire to illustrate what happens when officials with power and authority in local government are permitted to operate without scrutiny and are un beholden to a meaningful series of checks and balances. This inaugural essay is one in a series of articles about Robert Moses and local aquatics policy that will be submitted for publication in the *International Journal of Aquatics Research and Education* soon.

### **Profile of Robert Moses**

Robert Moses was born in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1888 and grew up on the east side of New York City. He graduated from Yale in 1909 before going to Oxford and then Columbia, earning a Doctor of Philosophy in 1914. Moses was a journeyman administrator, aggressive master planner, builder, and sometimes politician known for the indelible and controversial mark he left on New York City as its Parks Commissioner for 26 years. Unfortunately, Moses was also portrayed by his adversaries in the media and community as a "villain—an unelected dictator who bent New York City to his will with his works of stone, steel, and concrete" (Murdocco, 2019, para.1).

**Photo 1**

*Robert Moses, Master Builder, New York Daily News, July 28, 2019*



Source: <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/ny-rikers-island-history-environment-methane-gas-20191223-aalt4qjqcvc5gvwag6sjhmorm-story.html>

Photo Credit: New York Daily News

Moses began his marathon career under Governor Al Smith in the nineteen-twenties and was forced from power by Governor Nelson Rockefeller in 1968 (Goldberger, 2007). Even more significant than Moses's productivity is that he was one of the first people to look at New York City not as an isolated urban zone but as an essential element in the sprawling metropolitan region. As a result, Moses is often credited as one of the first contemporary urban planners.

During his over 40-year career and occupation of many of the highest bureaucratic appointments in the city government (once holding twelve positions simultaneously), he built at an unprecedented scale and pace, inspired in part by Le Corbusier's 1920s plans to reconstruct central Paris. Planning with the automobile in mind and using New Deal-era funding, Moses constructed parks, highways, zoos, swimming pools, civic centers, sports stadiums, exhibition halls, 13 bridges, 658 playgrounds, 416 miles of parkway, 150,000 units of public housing, and the 1964-

65 World's Fair, all at an estimated cost of what would have an economic valuation of more than \$150 billion today (Adiv, 2015). Moses was also noted for his disdain for the slums of New York, and some argued that he made ridding New York City of its slums a high priority in his concurrent roles as Housing and Transport Commissioners. These policy actions made space for many of his high-visibility swimming pool projects (Walker, 2012).

Among his most noteworthy projects were Jacob Riis Beach in Brooklyn, Jones Beach State Park in Long Island, the Belt, Grand Central, Cross Island, Henry Hudson Parkways, and several outdoor pool complexes. Moses' "bulldozer approach"—act first, worry about the consequences later—to urban renewal catalyzed the preservation movement. His public image has become increasingly debated since the 1974 Pulitzer Prize-winning biographical book, *The Power Broker*, by Robert Caro. Moses succumbed to heart disease at the age of 92.

### **Robert Moses: Visionary Planner**

When the name Robert Moses is invoked, a cloud of controversy comes with it. The name Robert Moses inspires rage among New Yorkers, who claim the master builder of New York was a racist and segregationist. The mania for purifying history to reflect the present day has led to revisionist demands that current New York City officials "cancel him," by removing his name from parks and public works around the state. In an unpublished review penned by urban activist Charles Abrams entitled "Robert Moses v. 'Robert Moses,'" he concurrently praises and damns Moses for doing "great things for this city, and terrible things" (Abrams, 1953). Abrams gives Moses credit for his ability to accomplish giant and worthwhile projects while at the same time taking him to task for his lack of vision:

Thanks to Moses, New York City now has more parks and playgrounds. Thanks to him, too, children must occasionally cross his broad highways to reach them. Moses never believed in master planning—he was the master, and his planning ruled the city (Moses v. 'Moses,' Abrams, 1953)

### **Robert Moses and the WPA**

President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) with an executive order on May 6, 1935. It was part of his New Deal plan to lift the country from the Great Depression by reforming the financial system and restoring the economy to pre-Depression levels. This innovative work opportunity program targeted those who were both chronically unemployed and under-employed. The unemployment rate in 1935 exceeded 20 percent, necessitating a response to the fledgling economy. Over its eight years of lifespan, the WPA put roughly 8.5 million Americans (predominately men) to work building schools, hospitals, roads, and other public infrastructure projects, including public swimming pools. The

WPA was created to relieve the unemployed by providing consistent employment to millions of chronically under-employed or unemployed Americans. At its peak in late 1938, it was estimated that more than 3.3 million Americans were employed by WPA work projects that included building public swimming facilities. (History.com, 2022). Perhaps best known for its public works projects, the WPA also sponsored projects in the arts. The agency employed tens of thousands of actors, musicians, writers, and other artists.

### **The WPA and New York City Parks Commission**

Thanks to the WPA, eleven enormous pool complexes were operating in New York City before Labor Day in 1936. Two were additions to recreation centers opened in the Progressive Era; the others were new, and their monumental brick bathhouses were quickly lauded as stellar works of modern architecture. Each complex also included three big, inground outdoor pools—the largest for swimming, the smaller for diving and wading—built to exacting, up-to-date technical standards so that water would be sanitary and swimming safely. Guttman (2008) in assessing the impact of Moses' strategic initiative to building more swimming pools wrote,

Excitement grew during record-breaking heat, as the new pools opened once each week and New Yorkers thronged the dedication ceremonies, brilliantly staged, and promoted in local newspapers. More than 1.79 million people swam in the new public pools in the summer of 1936; over 600,000 were children under fourteen, admitted at no charge on weekday mornings. (p. 544)

Adiv (2015), speculating on why Moses prioritized the planning and constructing swimming pools, surmised that Moses had a longstanding affinity toward swimming. She noted,

The priority placed on building pools at all, as opposed to other projects with WPA dollars, certainly had to do with the preferences of Robert Moses—he had been a competitive swimmer. He wanted to see New Yorkers in an organized setting in the water, even for recreation. (p. 437)

Many WPA pools were constructed to adapt to off-season uses such as paddle tennis, shuffleboard, volleyball, basketball, and handball. The wading pools were dually used as roller skating and hockey rinks during the cold weather season. Moreover, the indoor locker rooms and changing areas were "flipped" for boxing instruction and evening dance venues for teenagers. The adaptability and flexibility toward the planning and design of multi-use facilities was one point of innovation that Moses is often credited with. In 1966, a pilot program created "portable pools" with two pre-engineered, prefabricated 20' x 40' aluminum or steel above-ground pools with six-foot-wide attached wooden decks. The average depth of these pools was between 3 and 3.5 feet, and the structures cost approximately \$25,000 each.

The portable pool program was meant to provide pool facilities to underserved neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs, much like a mobile classroom provides provisional classroom space. These pools were designed to be easily moved as neighborhood needs shifted.

**Photo 2**

*'Swimmobile' circa 1960*



Source: <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/new-york-swimming-pools-historical-photographs/>

Photo Credit: Rare Historical Photos

**Allegations of Racial Bias in Aquatics Planning**

The allegations of racial bias in the allocation of aquatic recreation against Robert Moses abounded during his tenure as New York City's parks commissioner. The most incredible accusations of bias were anchored in the way Moses selectively chose locations for recreational facilities based on the racial compositions of a neighborhood, such as when he selected sites for eleven pools that opened in 1936. According to one author, Moses purposely placed swimming pools in communities with mainly white populations to deter African Americans from using them. Other pools intended for African Americans, such as the one in Colonial Park, later renamed Jackie Robinson Park, were placed in inconvenient locations. Another author wrote that of 255 playgrounds built in the 1930s under Moses's tenure, two were in primarily black neighborhoods. Caro wrote that close associates of Moses had claimed they could keep African Americans from using the Thomas Jefferson

Pool, in then-predominantly white East Harlem, by making the water too cold (Caro, 1974; Waller & Bemiller, 2018; Wiltse, 2007).

Robert Moses, the parks commissioner, envisioned and worked with the mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia, to win federal funds for the pool building project—the largest and the finest of its kind in the United States during the New Deal. Moses' intent to actively pursue assistance from the WPA was to create greater access to recreation for the citizens of New York City. The critical issue became greater access for which factions of New York City residents?

The federal government spent over 750 million dollars on community recreation facilities in the 1930s, including thousands of new and renovated swimming and wading pools. In addition, many public employment programs, including the WPA, funded design and construction, with the government convinced that investing in public works would help bring the nation out of economic depression. Thanks to generous WPA funding in New York City, eleven enormous pool complexes were up and running before Labor Day in 1936. Two were additions to recreation centers opened in the Progressive Era; the others were new, and their monumental brick bathhouses were quickly lauded as stellar works of modern architecture. Each complex also included three big, inground outdoor pools—the largest for swimming, the smaller for diving and wading—built to exacting, up-to-date technical standards so that water would be sanitary and swimming safely (Guttman, 2008).

With Moses' aggressive WPA swimming pool infrastructure program, WPA-funded artist John Wagner developed a *Learn to Swim Campaign* complete with a poster series that drew attention to Moses' biases and the racial schism in New York City during the late 1930s.

The less-than-subtle comparison of black and white children is widely perceived as *prima facie* evidence that racial segregation prevailed in New York's new pools during the New Deal era. Social historian Jeff Wiltse in his book *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (2007), called the figures “cartoonlike and took the intended message to be that the color line divided swimmers in New York as it did elsewhere during the 1930s” (p. 121).



**Photo 3**

*Colonial Park Pool (Jackie Robinson Park), circa 1936*



Source: <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/new-york-swimming-pools-historical-photographs/>

Photo Credit: <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/new-york-swimming-pools-historical-photographs/>

The color line did run through pools in racially segregated neighborhoods, but the singular reading of the poster misses an essential point about the New York context. The Department of Parks, with Moses as commissioner, welcomed both black and white children to the instructional program and city pools with the caveat that they participate in their geographically segregated communities. In addition, and defiance of racist stereotypes, the poster shows black and white youngsters as clean and healthy and benefiting equally from government programs intended to promote public health and citizenship. In other cities, whites succeeded in segregating public pools during the New Deal, preying on racist fears of body contact, dirt, disease, and adolescent sexuality.

**Figure 1**  
*Learn to Swim Program Poster*



Courtesy US Library of Congress

**Figure 2**  
*Learn to Swim Program Poster*



Courtesy US Library of Congress

### **Was Robert Moses a Racist?**

One of Caro’s most damaging accusations is that Moses was motivated by racism in his designs for particular projects and in his decisions about what neighborhoods would be prioritized for new parks and swimming pools. Much of what author Robert Caro offered as fact about Robert Moses being an innate racist continues to be contested. For example, in an interview with Paul Windels, a colleague of Moses, Caro (1974) turns up the awkward narrative that Moses believed that black people preferred warm water and decided to use this supposed fact to deter them from using a particular pool in East Harlem: “While heating plants at the other swimming pools kept the water at a comfortable seventy degrees, at the Thomas Jefferson Pool, the water was left unheated” (p. 541). Ultimately, Caro, reflectively speaking of Moses, recanted the following brazen statement, He did not want them 'mixing' with White people in other pools, in part because he was afraid, probably with cause, that 'trouble'— fights and riots would result; in part because, as one of his aides puts it, 'Well, you know how RM felt about colored people' (Caro, 1974, p. 513). Additionally, Caro (1974) reported that Moses was overly committed to keeping blacks and Puerto Ricans from intermingling with Whites while using public facilities. He posited that both groups of people were considered “dirty.”

### **Residential Segregation and Aquatics Planning**

Residential segregation in major urban centers such as New York officially separated black swimmers from white through segregationist policies and local ordinances. The spatial outlay of communities made it exceptionally convenient and potentially threatening for black residents to swim at any, but the two pools designated for their use (Caro, 1974; Waller & Bemiller, 2018; Wiltsie, 2007). In New York, parks commissioner Robert Moses similarly encouraged racially segregated use by locating most of the city's WPA pools within thoroughly white neighborhoods such as the Lower Eastside, Greenpoint, and Red Hook. This separation ensured that if black New Yorkers attempted to swim in a pool intended for whites, they would have to trek through the white neighborhood to get to the swimming pool. As a result, they would be far outnumbered and more easily intimidated in the water (Wiltsie, 2007).

Building swimming pools in Harlem became complex for Moses because blacks, Puerto Ricans, and whites lived near one another. African Americans and Puerto Ricans, whom Moses also considered "colored people," predominated, but many whites lived along Harlem's southernmost edge (Caro, 1974). What complicated matters more was that Moses advanced segregation of the pools in this area of New York City through strategic location and cunning administrative policies. For example, he located one pool within the nexus of the predominately black sector of Harlem at Colonial Park (146<sup>th</sup> Street). Moses then positioned the other further south in Thomas Jefferson Park (between 111<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Streets). He earmarked the first pool for blacks and Puerto Ricans and the second for whites to deter the African Americans and Puerto Ricans who resided in lower Harlem from utilizing the well-designed Thomas Jefferson pool.

Gutman (2008) elucidates further about Moses as a perceived racist in her article *Race, Place, and Play, Robert Moses and the WPA Swimming Pools in New York City* gives a frank exposition of Moses and his motives when she stated,

But the question remains: did Moses build two pools in Harlem because he wanted to imprint a racist vision of public space on its neighborhoods? He explained the decision otherwise—as a pragmatic solution of a political conservative to what he called "racial problems." His one direct discussion of race and the swimming pools occurred at a lecture at Harvard in 1939, later published as *Theory and Practice of Politics*:

In New York City, as part of the recreation program of the present administration, the Park Department planned and, with the assistance of relief labor, built a number of great neighborhood recreation centers, each with a huge swimming pool, which could be converted into an outdoor gymnasium in winter. One of these pools was located in a predominantly Italian district. On the boundary

of this district is a group of Puerto Ricans and north of them lies the black belt of Harlem. Immediately on the opening of the new pool it became evident that the local Italian population would not tolerate the so-called Spanish element in the pool. Obviously, this was against the spirit and the letter of the State Constitution and the Civil Rights Law, yet what could be done about it? Policing could not solve the problem because all the police that could be made regularly available could do nothing about it, since the most flagrant acts were committed outside of the park area. Shortly after this pool opened another one in the negro section was completed. The Puerto Ricans finally decided to go there. The Harlem negroes were resentful of any white intrusion. Our problem was ended in a practical way and the theory of the Bill of Rights remained intact. (p. 545)

Furthermore, Caro (1974) inferred that Moses opted to strategically employ only white pool attendants and lifeguards to restrict the admission of blacks and Puerto Ricans into pools. Furthermore, according to Moses' biographer Robert Caro kept the water at Thomas Jefferson pool unheated, assuming the cold water bothered quote, "colored" [black] swimmers more than whites. As Caro (1974) and Wiltsie (2007) suggested, regardless, pool use was segregated along racial lines. Additionally, the danger imposed by traversing predominantly white neighborhoods to access a swimming pool further exacerbated the race problem.

### **Counter-Narratives on Moses as a Racist**

While the mounting evidence points toward Moses as a bigot, counter-narratives have emerged over the last two decades that paint Moses differently. Moreover, there appears to be a willingness to give Moses the benefit of the doubt where doubt exists. For example, the architectural historian Marta Gutman points out that the placement of swimming pools was, in almost all cases, determined by the location of existing city parks. She also confirms that the pool in East Harlem contained the same heating equipment as the others (although there is no proof that it was turned on).

Kenneth Jackson, a Columbia University history professor and the author of *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York City* (2008), vehemently argues that "the evidence does not support Caro's claims that racism was a defining aspect of Moses's character, or that his actions had a disproportionately negative effect upon African Americans" (p. 70). Jackson further offered that,

When he first came to a position of great responsibility in the 1920s, prejudice based on skin color was a fact in the metropolitan region. In the middle of Harlem, for example, the most famous black neighborhood in all the world, restaurants, theaters, and stores routinely treated African Americans as second-class citizens. But Moses *did* try to place swimming

pools and park facilities within reach of black families and accessible by convenient public transportation. Moreover, he *did not* build bridges too low to accommodate buses so that black families would stay away from Jones Beach, nor did he control the water temperature to discourage black patronage.” (pp. 70-71)

Moreover, Jackson framing the commentary on Moses as a racist made a more general point: “The important questions, however, are not whether Moses was prejudiced—no doubt he was—but whether that prejudice was something upon which he acted frequently” (p. 70). Jackson argues that Moses’s strong commitment to creating expansive public works projects more than compensated for his tendency to skimp on facilities for black neighborhoods. It is also worth pointing out that, no matter what planners think or do, architecture is ultimately defined by patterns of use that emerge over generations; today, Moses’s pools, situated in multiethnic neighborhoods, serve entirely different communities from the ones he envisaged (Goldberger, 2007, para. 13).

Whatever Moses’s racial views, the swimming pools he built were monuments that conferred grandeur, even nobility, on their neighborhoods. This suggested that Moses believed the public realm deserved only the best designs (Wiltsie, 2007). In the summer of 1936, he opened one swimming pool per week. Each was architecturally notable; each was different, and the biggest ones could hold thousands of people at a time. A few, like the Crotona Pool in East Tremont and the McCarren Pool in Greenpoint, were masterworks of what Gutman (2008) called *modernist* public architecture. Gutman writes that Moses managed “to integrate monumental modern buildings into the fabric of everyday urban life,” and she persuasively asserts that the buildings were “unique in the United States during the New Deal.” (Goldberger, 2007, para. 17)

### **Recasting the Public Image of Moses**

The challenge that faces social historians and critics of Moses is to discern and accurately portray in Mosesian narratives what are fact and fiction relative to his attitudes about race and aquatics services. For example, one of the controversial narratives related to Robert Moses was the confluence of transportation and recreation planning efforts in his dual role as Parks and Transportation Commissioner. Arguably, a part of the urban legend regarding Moses is that he intentionally constructed bridges over the approaches to Jones Beach that were too low to accommodate buses toward the end of restricting the use of Jones Beach by people of color (Barron, 2019). The evidence is contradictory.

In major urban centers in the United States, like New York City during the 1920s and 1930s, transportation policy was anchored in the escalating use of the

automobile to help move people into thriving cities. Nevertheless, the seminal question is whether Moses' disdain for blacks and Puerto Ricans would result in what may be construed as an incredible dereliction of duty to sustain the "all-white" status of Jones Beach. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, New York City was overwhelmingly white. For example, Jones Beach State Park was built in the 1920s when African Americans represented approximately three percent of the city's population. Furthermore, circa 1945, there were only 13,000 Puerto Ricans in New York City (Korrol, n.d.). When Jones Beach was opened in 1929, New York City was more than 95% white — that is, whiter than Maine is today (Bonner, 2019). In that era, most public accommodations around New York were almost exclusively white by default. Unfortunately, his critics are split on this issue. As Barron (2019) ardently noted, "the passionate hatred for Moses is rooted in an urban legend, a shallow understanding of New York City history and a misreading of *The Power Broker*, Caro's biography of Moses" (para. 13).

#### **Accountability of Public Officials**

As we examine the backdrop to Robert Moses' tenure as a 40-year-plus public official, an essential thread to meaningful governance appears to be missing—accountability. Concomitantly, citizen demands increased accountability and even community control of city services, including recreation (e.g., aquatics services) increased. Krase and Krase (2018), in their article *Undermining Governmental Legitimacy: Failed Expectations of Community Accountability*, posited that "a key task of governance is to establish and nurture the connection with citizens' values, needs, and expectations, the strength of which depends upon the observable quality of the link between administrative responsibility, trust, and authority in the exercise of power" (p. 42). What framed this statement was an analysis of the Moses actions, particularly during the highpoint of his tenure during the 1960's. Roulier (2017) in a similar vein noted that Moses "provided hardworking city dwellers with the recreational opportunities and mobility they craved; however, Moses co-opted ostensibly democratic institutions." (p. 141)

#### **Citizen Engagement as a "Safeguard" to Abuse of Power by Public Officials**

Without question, Robert Moses got things done. His list of completed municipal infrastructure projects that include multiple swimming facilities is nothing less than herculean. The relevant concern for many is different from what he accomplished but how he accumulated power and operated in the age of citizen participation; this has become harder and harder. In an era when almost any project can be held up for years by public hearings and reviews by community boards, community groups, civic groups, and planning commissions, not to mention the courts, it is hard not to feel a particular nostalgic tug for Moses's method of 'building by decree.' Goldberg (2007), to moderate Moses' disdain for citizen engagement, stated,

It may not have been democratic or even right. Still, somebody has to look at the big picture and make decisions for the greater good. Moses's problem was that he could not take his eye off the big picture. He was so in tune with New York's vastness that he had no patience for anything small. (para. 12)

Before the advent of the administration of New York City Mayor John V. Lindsay in 1965, community engagement was sporadic at best, especially for groups deemed as *ethnic* or poor. Before Lindsay's election, Robert Moses was a significant force in the city; after 1973, Moses was ousted, along with many other urban power brokers. Relatedly, Krase and Krase (2018) stated, "Mayor Lindsay was very interested in having a community participation component as part of the development process. Following the Robert Moses era that mostly ignored public opinion, Lindsay wanted local communities to have an impact on government decisions" (p. 42). However, Reed (2016) surmised that "Moses's efforts had frequently glided forward thanks to assertions of expert knowledge unavailable to the general public and the skillful manipulation of civic processes" (para. 23). In other words, in many instances, Moses averted the process of seeking public input based on his political strength and his reputation as an expert in the planning affairs of New York City.

In summary, as Robert Moses progressively obtained and used power, he had contempt for the people forced to yield to him. His great ambition to benefit the public was hurt by his insistent ambition to have his way, often regardless of what other people deserved, and he went out of his way to punish anyone who opposed him (Stern, n.d.).

### **Conclusion**

Robert Moses was a highly skilled public administrator with an affinity toward "thinking big" and chasing a big vision on behalf of the residents of New York City. Some argue that his methods were peculiar yet effective. On the other hand, Moses was also called dictatorial, power-hungry, and vindictive during his long tenure in public service. His life comments vividly on the two kinds of ambition. On the one hand, he was a creative, shaping force in the United States's local government for over 40 years, with a tremendous and visionary ambition to improve the public's quality of life.

In contrast, his desire to be helpful, mainly as he came to have more power, was accompanied increasingly by contempt, showing unbridled arrogance and spitefulness (Stern, n.d.). Moses was a complex person, a rich study of the desire to be and to have and wield more and more power for its own sake. And Robert Moses' fierce insistence on having his way led in time to his total loss of control.

Although his reputation was tarnished by increasing public criticism of his callousness, his power remained intact.

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