



Robert O. Binnewies. *Palisades: The People's Park*. New York: Empire State Editions, 2021. 424 pp. \$43.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8232-9369-8.

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Savannah Donnelly on Robert O. Binnewies, "Palisades: The People's Park"

What can a state park in New York and New Jersey teach us about how human beings have formed understandings of the natural world? How can conservationists and everyday citizens protect green spaces despite competing forces of wealth and greed?

In *Palisades: The People's Park*, Robert O. Binnewies traces the development of Palisades Interstate Park and Historic Site System from its native and early colonial to modern days. Primarily, the work serves as a cultural history of how the collective (and sometimes tremendous) efforts of visionaries, activists, lawmakers, private citizens, and philanthropists have transitioned the park from zero protected areas to thousands of acres of green canopy for modern and future visitors to enjoy.

While the Palisades Park system is a protected space now, its tumultuous history to develop as such offers a glimpse into a larger pattern within the fight to save natural areas. The work opens in 1898 and shows that initially, local citizens perceived the Palisades to be valuable only as fill material and thus celebrated its exploitation and quarrying. Despite having powerful and well-known people like President Theodore Roosevelt,

J. P. Morgan, and the Rockefellers advocating for its protection from the onset, the Palisades Interstate Park Commission had many difficulties in protecting the park. Because the park system crosses state lines, securing funding and getting legislation needed for protection from New Jersey and New York proved to be particularly difficult. Not to mention the competing agendas of developers and conservationists whose conflicting wants and needs forced the commission members to become skilled negotiators, as protecting and acquiring park system lands required over a thousand real estate transactions.

Pulling from a diverse array of archival sources, *Palisades* offers a vignette of the ongoing struggle to protect natural areas for public benefit. Within the discourse of state and national park history and cultural/environmental history, this work offers optimism that preserved places can come to fruition despite setbacks. This is especially important given the increasing need for these types of spaces in a growing era of climate catastrophe and overpopulation. While the work is a cultural history, it effectively acknowledges environmental autonomy and adds much-needed nuance to how the social constructs of wealth and

gender have impacted green spaces. Simply put, without an abundance of time, experience, and money from both famous and ordinary individuals of both genders, Palisades would never have come to fruition. The result of these efforts is a much-needed green and historic space within one of the nation's most densely populated metropolitan areas and similar action in other national and state parks across the United States.

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