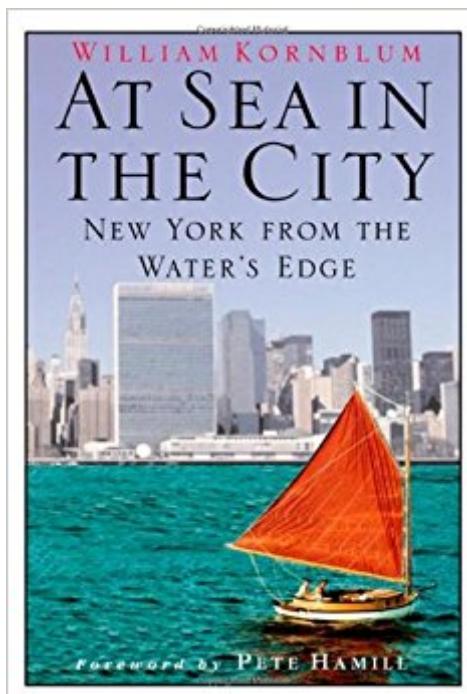


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At Sea In The City: New York From The Water's Edge



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.

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Customer Reviews

The glorious anachronisms of sailing stand out in high relief against the backdrop of New York City in these vignettes of sailing around Manhattan. Kornblum's *Tradition* is a 24-foot-long shallow-draft workboat based on an American catboat design, which he found and adapted from a classified ad. But Kornblum, a professor at the City University of New York, minimizes the nostalgic restoration

story and takes readers right on board for refreshing views of an island city that was built on the economic foundations of great natural harbors and fertile inland waterways. Kornblum knows the remaining "urban archipelago" and cruises Jamaica Bay, the tidal Hudson, the Rockaways and the inshore Atlantic coast. He sails under the city's modern bridges, through disused canals, into still wild wetlands, and pauses for nautical history lessons at sites like the wreck of the General Slocum in 1904, a catastrophe in the narrows of Hell Gate. The eight essays glide along nicely, even as Kornblum approaches the unromantic waters around the East Coast's largest airport and the churning oil-sheen tides of the Arthur Kills. Kornblum and his wife, Susan, are wonderful guides to the city, with its often uninviting waterline. Illus. and charts. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Kornblum (sociology, CUNY), a native New Yorker, has spent much of his life touring New York's waters. Part urban sociology, part erudite Circle Line tour, Kornblum's charming book recounts the history of New York's waterfront and maritime culture even as he sails along beside it in his old sailboat, *Tradition*. Kornblum sees the city as an urban archipelago with only one-eighth lying on the mainland; the rest is comprised of larger and smaller islands, many virtually unknown to most New Yorkers. Kornblum hopes that more people will take to the waters of the city to see it from sea level, where it remains a place within nature's domain. Although forever changed by September 11, 2001, for Kornblum the city's waters still exert a magical pull; and for much of the rest of the world, he believes New York remains a place of infinite human possibility. With a fine introduction by onetime waterfront reporter Pete Hamill, this appealing work is suitable for New York City collections. Harry Frumerman, formerly with Hunter Coll., New YorkCopyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

A look at New York from a unique angle....the water surrounding it. And while you are at it you will learn a lot of details of the history of the area which does not appear in the resources which are generally used for such information. Sailors will be able to experience this unusual journey with a smile while others will get a feeling for the wonder and the challenges of sailing. This book was such a treat for me I sent it to a landlubber resident of Manhattan Island.to enjoy, also.

I bought this book because I have been contemplating trailering my sailboat to NYC for a 5 day trip of it's waterways. I found the book very informative, and well written. It is not meant as a sailing guide, even though it does discuss the authors travels one summer along the waterways around

NYC. He did this in several stages, leaving the boat for days or weeks at a time as work and life allowed him to continue his journey. There is a fair amount of discussion of the pluses and minuses of a catboat as well.

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)! A pity there apparently are youthful editors (I don't suppose there is such a thing as a proofreader in publishing anymore) who do not know this great journalist's work backward and forward. Another ominous development -- to this reader, anyway -- is that the lovely cover photograph is an unreal composite. Different photographers are credited for different portions of it. I find this vaguely disturbing. The writing is definitely four-star quality or better. Here's my favorite passage: "Up another shadowy bend stood two snowy egrets, with their outrageous yellow boots and platinum punk haircuts. How chic, these mudbank sushi bars. The egrets were spearing for sand bugs, moving along the edge of the marsh with the herky giant steps of students at a party stepping over empty beer cans." I give the book only three stars because it is slight. Probably an excellent gift for the average non-reader who happens to love sailing or New York City, or the casual reader who knows little about either, but I would have liked to know more.

City University of New York Professor Kornblum pays homage to what he describes as the New York archipelago. The full city consists mostly of three large islands, a bunch of small islands, and a peninsular. Professor Kornblum takes readers on a tour of the various waterways that tie the city together. Readers visit City Island off the Bronx Peninsular, Ellis and Liberty islands off lower Manhattan Island, and the Rikers Island Prison as well as several much smaller and less known rocks within the waterways. The author provides historical references and a crystal ball look into the future where nature in the present is fighting to regain a foothold from the vast urbanization. *AT SEA IN THE CITY* is an engaging look at the Big Apple from a different lens as the highways cross waters connecting the city such as the "byway" from Fulton St. in lower Manhattan to Fulton St. Brooklyn. Not just for natives, this is a wonderfully different perspective on New York that makes for a leisurely yet educational and enjoyable reading. Harriet Klausner

This is the account of a sailboat cruise, but rather than crossing an ocean the author travels maybe 40 miles from home, into the maelstrom that is NY harbor. It's an interesting book, sort of, but I expected more history of the harbor, more about what the place is, and less of the author's personal experience. I expected the former thanks to a review in the NY Times, I think -- some newspaper, anyway -- that suggested it was less an ecological than an historical journey. Without this preconception, I probably would have liked the book more. If you're from NYC, it's worth a read, but there are many better sailing accounts if you want hairy-chested adventure, or to learn something about sailing in general. There are also better books about ecology of the shoreline. But the style is pleasant and the author seems like a man who would be an enjoyable sailing companion. That's worth three stars.

This is a delightful view of some of the Big Apple's waterfront. William Kornblum writes well, and I am pleased to meet the family, friends, and acquaintances of his journey. Having explored much of our city, and having studied many of the coasts from opposite shorelines, I nevertheless learned much from Kornblum's views from his catboat. I also enjoyed his flash-backs, particularly his days as a youth working at the Transit Mix dock. As another reader noted, the book has a few errors that should have been caught. The A train travels neither through The Bronx nor over Williamsburg Bridge (p. 91). In Red Hook, the parish school is within the Brooklyn diocese, not archdiocese (p. 122). When I find errors on topics I know well, I begin to worry that the publishing industry has a problem with fact-checking in non-fiction. Yet, I must say that this book is a thoroughly enjoyable meeting of humans, views, and story. I recommend this book as a gift.

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