

***Beach Beneath the Streets: Contesting New York City's Public Spaces* by Benjamin Shepard and Greg Smithsimon. State University of New York Press 2011. Pp. 246. \$29.95 (Paperback). ISBN: 1438436203**

Reviewer: Jessica Rechtschaffer

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I was supposed to review Ben Shepard and Greg Smithsimon's *Beach Beneath the Streets* back in August. I can be thankful for delays as the events of Occupy Wall Street have caused me to completely rewrite this review. The timing for this book could not have been better as it provides a comprehensive history of the struggle for first amendment and economic rights in New York City over the past 50 years.

This book is divided into two parts. The first, by Greg Smithsimon, describes the private takeover of public space through various zoning provisions negotiated between developers and the New York City government, often without the input of the local community. Smithsimon gives a general history of how government and private interests parceled out the use of public and private space. Shepard, in the second part, focuses on the practical uses of that space and the history of the advocate for public space who strove against a hostile government and private sector in the late 20th and early 21st century. This organization allows the reader to become grounded both in the technical aspects of space usage in Part I as well as the human narratives of advocacy in Part

The authors stress that accessible public space is vital for the basic function of society and imperative for a true democracy to function. The use of public space forms the basis for basic social discourse, from family picnics to political gatherings to the creation of safe havens such as community gardens. But the amount of open, truly public space has