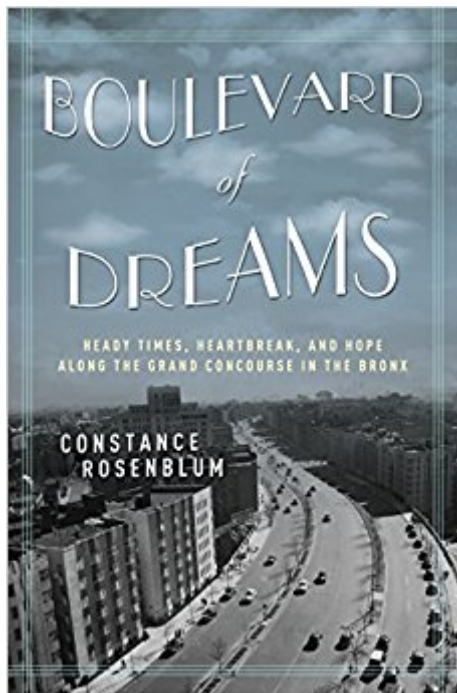




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# Boulevard Of Dreams: Heady Times, Heartbreak, And Hope Along The Grand Concourse In The Bronx



## Synopsis

Stretching over four miles through the center of the West Bronx, the Grand Boulevard and Concourse, known simply as the Grand Concourse, has gracefully served as silent witness to the changing face of the Bronx, and New York City, for a century. Now, a New York Times editor brings to life the street in all its raucous glory. Designed by a French engineer in the late nineteenth century to echo the elegance and grandeur of the Champs Élysées in Paris, the Concourse was nearly twenty years in the making and celebrates its centennial in November 2009. Over that century it has truly been a boulevard of dreams for various upwardly mobile immigrant and ethnic groups, yet it has also seen the darker side of the American dream. Constance Rosenblum unearths the colorful history of this grand street and its interlinked neighborhoods. With a seasoned journalist's eye for detail, she paints an evocative portrait of the Concourse through compelling life stories and historical vignettes. The story of the creation and transformation of the Grand Concourse is the story of New York and America writ large, and Rosenblum examines the Grand Concourse from its earliest days to the blighted 1960s and 1970s right up to the current period of renewal. Beautifully illustrated with a treasure trove of historical photographs, the vivid world of the Grand Concourse comes alive from Yankee Stadium to the unparalleled collection of Art Deco apartments to the palatial Loew's Paradise movie theater. An enthralling story of the creation of an iconic street, an examination of the forces that transformed it, and a moving portrait of those who called it home, Boulevard of Dreams is a must read for anyone interested in the rich history of New York and the twentieth-century American city.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Bronx's Grand Concourse, with its Art Deco structures, is one of New York City's architectural delights, and its political and social history is the worthy subject of this new book by New York Times staffer Rosenblum, who edited the paper's now-defunct City section and now writes a column for its Sunday real estate section. Stretching over four-and-a-half miles, the thoroughfare designed by Louis Aloys Risse, an Alsatian immigrant, and modeled after Paris's Champs Elysées was completed in 1909 and saw the arrival of upwardly mobile Jews in the first five decades of the 20th century, followed by waves of Irish and Italian immigrants seeking to pursue their culture and careers in a safe environment. While Rosenblum explores various aspects of Jewish communal life near the boulevard, she also dissects the rivalry between West Bronx affluence and the working-class East Bronx, and the racial tensions that led to white suburban flight and the decline and neglect of the area. The author also draws attention to the many noteworthy characters who lived on or near the Concourse such as Edgar Allan Poe and fallen NBA star Jacob Louis Molinas. A seminal recounting of the rise, fall and current revival of a major landmark, this book, with many archival photos and drawings, is a must for those interested in the cultural history of the Bronx and New York City. 43 illus., 1 map. (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

“For those of us to whom the neighborhood in the city was not just an idea, but a reality, its sweetness and sadness precious, Boulevard of Dreams is a book one must long reflect upon.” —Haaertz “Boulevard of Dreams traces the evolution of the area surrounding the Concourse from orchard and farmland to inner-cityscape.” —The New Yorker “Rosenbaum has told a harrowing story of construction and destruction, ending with the realistic requirement for changes in attitudes to restore the happy days that once made the Bronx a desirable place to live.” —National Jewish Post & Opinion “A must read for anyone who cares about the history of the city. Rosenblum writes with deep feeling and an acute eye and the result is a rare, unsentimental look at a much maligned borough.” —Laura Shaine Cunningham, author of *Sleeping Arrangements* “Like the Grand Concourse itself, Rosenblum’s Boulevard of Dreams is stately and elegant, proud and poignant. Building by building, block by block, character by character, she leads us on what is not just a tour of an epic thoroughfare, but of a city, a culture, and an era. People who love New York will devour this bittersweet and beautifully written book. Then they will make a bee-line to the Bronx for a shpatzir along the Concourse to ponder how spectacular it once was, and to savor every bit of what

remains. —David Margolick, author of *Beyond Glory: Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling*, and a *World on the Brink* —“Rosenblum has written with real thunder about the Grand Concourse and the wild dreamers who once lived there. *Boulevard of Dreams* is a passionate and deeply elegiac book. —The Wall Street Journal —“The book is a beautiful act of re-creation, untainted by nostalgia, and too varied, too accurate to be only despairing . . . Rosenblum has a fine feel for the everyday people who walked the Grand Concourse. —Columbia Magazine —“Rosenblum peels back the layers of time, grime and glory that have made this majestic boulevard all that it is and was to generations of immigrants . . . Each chapter unearths new thoughts and shares the fascinating history of the Grand Concourse and its passage through time. —Bronx Times-Reporter —“Rosenblum’s book looks at the history of the Grand Concourse over its entire life, from a vibrant area dominated by upper middle-class Jewish families during the early and middle 20th century to the largely black and Latino communities who live there today. —The Berkshire Eagle “Rosenblum, a writer at The New York Times, traces the earliest days of the Concourse and its surrounding neighborhood, its decay during the 1960s and ’70s, and its current renewal.” —Ihsan Taylor, The New York Times Book Review —“Thanks to Rosenblum’s work, the Bronx’s glorious past will not be forgotten while a new, positive chapter for the neighborhood’s future is being written. —BeyondChron —“For anyone who has ever loved a great street or neighborhood as change after change swept over it and dreams and challenges converged. So in fact this is a book for anyone who has ever lived anywhere. It’s a rich, sometimes wild ride through a century of history, beautifully written by a gifted observer. —Tony Hiss, author of *The Experience of Place* —“A seminal recounting of the rise, fall and current revival of a major landmark, this book, with many archival photos and drawings, is a must for those interested in the cultural history of the Bronx and New York City. —Publishers Weekly —“*Boulevard of Dreams* is a carefully researched and beautifully written work that reads with all the drive of a well-crafted novel. At once broad and detailed, Rosenblum’s descriptions will resonate with the diverse array of New Yorkers who have called the Grand Concourse home, and fascinate anyone with an interest in the evolution of American cities. —Thomas Mellins, architectural historian and author —“Pride in the Grand Concourse and West Bronx remains alive. This affectionate volume will help keep it that way by serving as a tangible reminder of what is very much saving and restoring in the Bronx. There was and still is something special about that boulevard of dreams. —History News Network —“She takes us through the different generations of immigrants who made Concourse neighborhoods their home,

looking at the big picture and the changing details of people's lives. —The New York Post— "A writer and editor at the New York Times, Rosenblum is an infectiously enthusiastic tour guide. You can almost feel her pulling you up and down the Grand Concourse—which was completed one hundred years ago—giddily pointing out the sights. —The New York Times Book Review— "Constance Rosenblum's account of the history of the street is evocative and informative. —Jewish Book World— "Like all great documents and painstaking works of love, Boulevard of Dreams is a portal. It opens up the Grand Concourse and, even if we've never lived there, gives us an imaginary address and lets us think what the world was like growing up with Stanley Kubrick and E.L. Doctorow. —André Aciman, author of Out of Egypt: A Memoir

As someone born and raised in the Bronx I'm always interested in reading books about my borough. Rosenbaum's book is an interesting history of the Grand Concourse, from its inception and construction, the people who lived there and left, and it's decent into pretty much a ruin. Though it is bouncing back it will never be as glorious as it was, and it was an amazing place to be. Unless you're from the Bronx I don't see how it would hold much interest for a reader. Those people interested in urban studies might find it worthwhile, but for most it would be a nostalgic look back. I took off one star because it does get somewhat repetitious in spots.

This book was a pleasure to read! I saw a reference to it on Facebook and decided to buy it - mostly for its nostalgia factor. I grew up near the Grand Concourse during the 50s-early 70s. This book is way more than nostalgia. It is a comprehensive and well researched chronicle of the West Bronx; from its earliest days around the turn of the 20th century to its dismal decline in the 1970s. There are many explanations for why the Bronx's deterioration was so significant; Ms. Rosenblum provides a thoughtful analysis for each one. I have recommended this book to my friends who also grew up in the Bronx during the mid-century. It would also be a good read for students of urban planning.

Although I'm not Irish, I often listen to and totally get Irish music, which reveals the hopes and dreams of immigrants, speaks of the pain of parting, and mourns for the Emerald Isle that they'll probably never see again. Humans develop an attachment to their environment and it sometimes doesn't seem to matter how harsh it might have been. Most of my childhood was spent growing up in the intergraded Patterson housing project on 145th and Morris Avenue in the South Bronx hub,

within walking distance of the shopping area, government and legal offices, and the Grand Concourse, which Constance Rosenblum has titled "Boulevard of Dreams" in this wonderful book. We bought stamps at the majestic post office at 149th and Grand Concourse, zone 51 because zip codes didn't yet exist; we visited Franz Siegel Park, which is south of the Court House, and knew of the nightclubs and the Alex and Henry's catering hall that most people rented for their weddings and other special events. I bought strawberry egg creams at one of the local candy stores. As a teenager, one of my friends worked as a doorman at the Concourse Plaza, which is on 161st Street, facing the Court House. And, there was always that luxurious and elegant estate with its wrought iron fence and carefully landscaped grounds that I often wondered about: "What is this place?" I asked myself whenever I passed by. Naturally, when I heard that a hard cover book about the Grand Concourse would soon be out, I ordered it for less than fifteen dollars at Strand's via the website. The original hard cover edition is a beautiful book includes a few color photos that this smaller paperback version does not have. Unfortunately, I had a mishap in my apartment and had people accommodate my books in boxes and toss out the bookcases in order to make preparations to repair the floor. In the chaos, my prized hardcover "Boulevard of Dreams" and several other books disappeared and I didn't notice anything missing until weeks later. It broke my heart, especially since I had only skimmed through that beautiful book. When I went back on line, the price of that treasure had increased to \$175, so I opted for this paperback version. Though informative, it's a disappointment by comparison; it's all black and white and the photos and text are smaller. That's why I didn't give this edition five stars; I loved the hard cover book. I'll treasure this version nonetheless because memories are precious. UPDATE: Minutes after writing this review, I found a hardcover book from two different tertiary dealers; with shipping and tax, the books were less than \$40 each. That's more than twice what I paid for it the first time, but considerably less than \$175, but I've learned the hard way that the edition I previously owned, which was about twelve inches high, is apparently no longer available. One copy is the same small disappointing softcover that I presently have and the other is its twin, in hardcover. If you're also looking for that original edition and you buy from or another dealer, ask about the photos inside and check the book's size, for the hardcover that I recently received and the paperbacks are about 9.5 inches high, with smaller, non-color photos.

Boulevard of Dreams is a breezy read about the Grand Concourse and the people who lived there, mostly in its heyday. You can tell the author tries to profile other residents from other times, but her heart (and book) is mostly about the Jewish families who inhabited the marvelous Grand Concourse

from the 1930s to the 1960s. At times it seems as if those decades were normative and desirable, while more recent times were just dangerous and horrifying. I don't disagree with her about the GC prime years, and it's a wonderful read, but she should have just stopped writing there. Once the Sixties come along, she loses interest and her human stories falter along with her narrative, which becomes more about scared and astounded seniors and much less about new residents. Overall, when the book comes to a somewhat abrupt end, you feel Constance Rosenblum wanted to end her story when the Grand Concourse started going south; after all, who can blame her. But the last few pages are very unsatisfying and almost feel like filler, especially the part about Noonan Plaza, a building ten blocks away from the Grand Concourse.

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