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The History of Coleman Playground

The Lower East Side (LES) Skatepark is a legendary park for any tri-state skater, the park is well-known and has been skated by some of the greatest. The skatepark is located in the Coleman Playground, which was named after U.S. Army Corporal Joseph Francis Coleman, whose family lived near Madison Street before World War I. Coleman fought in World War I in france and died later in 1919, in a hospital in Hoboken, due to complications from tuberculosis. Prior to the building of the park, the graveyard of St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church laid on the same land. The church was founded in 1801 and sat on the corner of Chrystie Street and Broome Street, but it closed after sixty-two years, and the bodies in the cemetery were moved to the Cypress Hill Cemetery.

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Coleman Skatepark sits right beneath the Manhattan Bridge, which was opened in 1909. The bridge was designed by by Leon Moisseiff, the architectural firm of Carrere and Hastings designed the entrance to the bridge from Canal Street. It stands 135 feet above the East River. The bridge connects Canal Street on the Manhattan side and Flatbush Avenue on the Brooklyn side. The Coleman park assumed jurisdiction of its land by 1969, and by 1970 reached the size it is now. It has gone through many renovations. The park has also been an opportunity for an installation of test-based imagery by Barbara Kruger, who would “broadcast messages that engage issues of and ideas about power, desire, adoration, contempt, and capital” (Performa 17 2017). When Steve Rodriguez was interviewed about the exhibition, he spoke about how he feels that skateboarding and the arts are similar, and was see them joined.

Steve Rodriguez, a legend and staple of New York City Skateboarding, walks through what the park use to be like, “The skatepark used to just be basketball courts, but I don’t even think there were hoops, it was just total sketchy. Super shitty ground, the only thing you could do was ollie the stairs.”("NYC SKATE HISTORY WITH STEVE RODRIGUEZ" 2011). Throughout the years, local skateboarders had created a DIY (do it yourself) skatepark under the bridge within the playground. In later years it had came to the attention of the city that the people wanted to skate, so with the help of Nike SB, and design by Rodriguez himself, the city opened a real skatepark with cement obstacles, including the rainbow ledge, the big apple, a double set of stairs, ledges, rails and mini ramps.

Events are held at the LES Skatepark, such as the Boardr Am series, which allows for amateur skaters to compete and be noticed by teams, professionals and companies in hopes of going pro or becoming a flowrider, making the park a realm of hopes and dreams. All in all, the skatepark is an amazing work of design and artistry in itself, and is a great place in the neighborhood for skaters to chase dreams and have a hub of competition and networking. The park is also situated within a beautiful park with amazing history, and should be appreciated as a dime of New York.

Works Cited

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