

## Riverbank Park

If there is any motto emblazoned on the shields of New York City's planners it is probably "Making the Best of a Bad Thing." The latest attempt to turn an atrocity into an asset is the proposal to use the sewage plant scheduled for construction in the Hudson River from 137th to 145th Street as part of a park plan that would link the plant's 22-acre surface with development of the adjacent riverfront for recreational, cultural and community purposes.

Since the \$100-million interceptor tunnels that will channel West Side waste to the \$125-million plant are already being built, the controversial question of where to locate the facility seems beyond debate. In any event, the bitter racial overtones injected into that debate by some objectors in the Harlem community never had much warrant. The city already has put almost a dozen similar installations in white neighborhoods. Eventually, alternate methods of sewage disposal may become practical, but the new purification plant at this location is a necessary fact of life now.

There is nothing left, then, but to practice that particular brand of planning sleight-of-hand expediency that has become a New York specialty. Earlier studies aimed at "beautification" with surface fountains and pools would only have made an ornamental eyesore of the 22-acre offshore protuberance. The present effort, a state- and city-sponsored proposal paid for by the State Park Commission, cannot really disguise it either. But it offers the possibility of facilities that both the bordering neighborhood and nearby Harlem conspicuously lack.

By developing the misused, deteriorated waterfront from the point where Riverside Park ends and tying it to the huge plant, a thirty-acre "activities park" is proposed, with a sports and recreation deck terraced to the water's edge. Where construction would join the plant to the shore—bridging railroad tracks and roads—room for needed day care, health and cultural centers could be provided.

New York State has made no firm commitment of funds for the project beyond the initial study grant. The program and design are still to be worked out with the community. But officials of the State Park Commission have suggested that any feasible, locally approved scheme will get the help of Governor Rockefeller and the Legislature. That amounts to an open door for constructive community planning. Even backing into badly needed benefits is far better than pointless racist argument now.