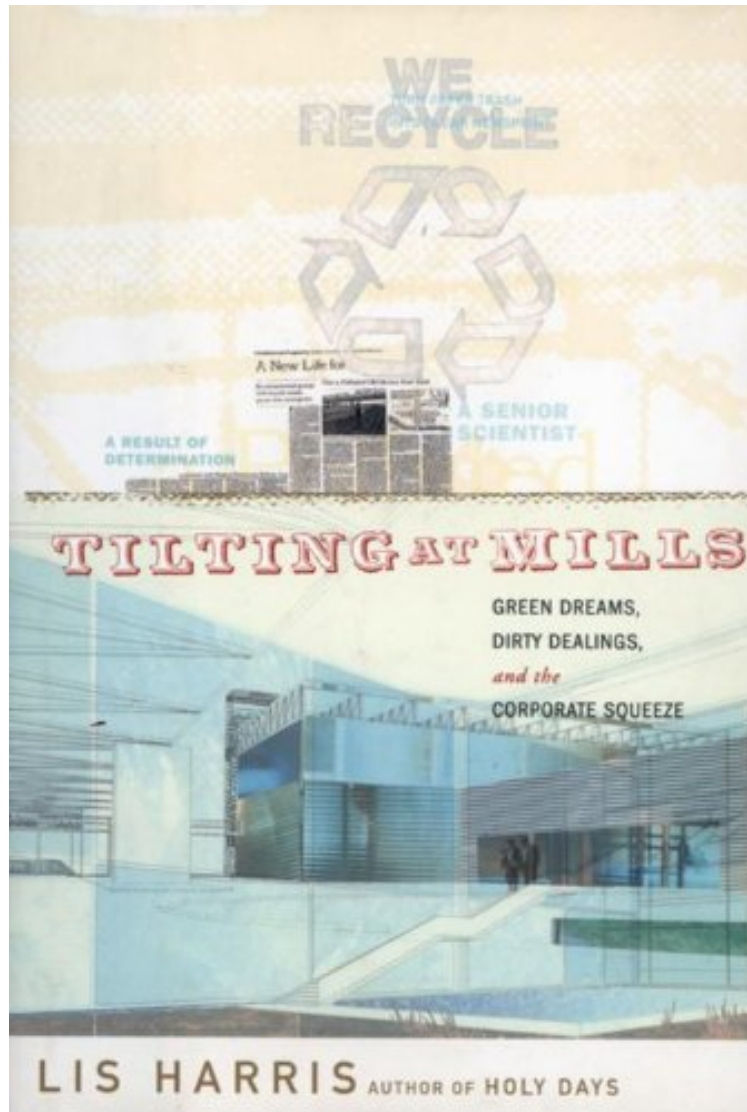


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Tilting at Mills: Green Dreams, Dirty Dealings, and the Corporate Squeeze

Lis Harris

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Lis Harris : Tilting at Mills: Green Dreams, Dirty Dealings, and the Corporate Squeeze before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Tilting at Mills: Green Dreams, Dirty Dealings, and the Corporate Squeeze:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Quixotic ExcusesBy MaandigLove struck pre-teens would be hard pressed to fawn as heavily over the object of their respective affections as Lis Harris dotes over Allen Hershkowitz. Harris' book, "Tilting at Mills" purports to document the tortured history of Hershkowitz's admirable efforts to bring a paper mill to the South Bronx, but in execution the text reads as a slam book on all those who crossed him on his way.

The book is, therefore, a huge disappointment for all those who seek to understand how the environmental movement in the United States can expand its scope and efficacy. The paper mill project forced Hershkowitz and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) to directly confront two groups with which environmentalists have not made significant inroads: ethnic minorities and big business. A serious treatment of the complexity of the failed interaction between these different slices of America could contribute to a better comprehension of how to bridge gaps. What Ms. Harris provides in this book, however, cannot be characterized as serious treatment. The explanations provided for particular failures are inexorably provided from the perspective of Hershkowitz -- blame lies with everyone else and not with the Man of La Chelsea. Why did the mill project fail? Because the "community groups" of the South Bronx were hopelessly corrupt, because city politicians and bureaucrats (and one prominently derided state bureaucrat) lacked vision, and because businessmen were hopelessly greedy. What lessons were learned from the failure of the mill project? According to Ms. Harris' rendering: ethnic minority community groups are hopelessly corrupt, most politicians and bureaucrats lack vision, and the majority of businessmen are hopelessly greedy. There is no complexity in "Tilting at Mills," and that is unfortunate. Take for example Ms. Harris' reporting of the interactions between Hershkowitz and Banana Kelly. Why did Hershkowitz partner with Banana Kelly and Yolanda Rivera? Answer: the recommendation of an individual who worked with community groups in the South Bronx. An objective observer would, perhaps, be puzzled by why the NRDC had little knowledge of community groups operating a few miles to the north of its NYC headquarters, but "Tilting at Mills" is untroubled. Ms. Harris waives away any concern by noting that the NRDC had successfully worked with community groups in the past and was wholly unprepared to deal with the avarice of those that headed Banana Kelly. The greatest failing of the book, however, is that it often reverts into an unabashed hatchet job on all those who Hershkowitz perceived as obstacles to the project. Venice Miller, NRDC's director of environmental justice who opposed the mill project, is one of those singled out and held up for ridicule. Ms. Harris lets readers know that not only was Ms. Miller wrong in each and every facet of her criticism of the project, but that she was fired from a position with the EPA after the federal government determined that she lied on her resume. Similarly, readers are treated to a history of the indictments handed down regarding Charles Gargano, the chairman of the Empire State Development Corp. who also opposed Hershkowitz's vision. Indeed, all those vehemently opposed to the project, we are told, are archetypes of moral failure. This tale of comeuppance may flatter Hershkowitz and provide absolution to the NRDC and its supporters (like myself), but it makes for an uninteresting read. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. why good ideas dont go thru By William D. Tompkins a great idea is composed yet city politics provide a blockade. the author presents a very easy to read synopsis of the plan to build a paper mill in upper harlem yet local politics blaco the way 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It's a drama By A Customer Tilting at Mills is the story of an heroic adventure in the two worlds of ecology and politics. The question of why very good ideas don't make it into practical, concrete existence is one that keeps coming up in life. (In case you hadn't noticed!) Lis Harris has produced an absorbing study of a project that almost made it. The characters in the drama are presented in vivid detail. So add to ecology and politics, psychology. And sociology. But the book reads like a novel. Harris really is a wonderful writer.

It is New York City in 1992. Unaware of the heartbreak he will encounter, the veteran environmentalist Allen Hershkowitz proposes developing a major recycled-paper mill in the city. He's tired of being outgunned too often by industry lobbyists in legislative battles and wants to develop an environmentally friendly and profitable business that will bring jobs to one of the city's poorest neighborhoods. What's more, the project could become a national model. But Hershkowitz quickly finds himself pitted against surprising forces. To the idealist's surprise, neighborhood activists fiercely resist outsiders, and he must confront byzantine politics and powerful industry hostility. The project may be outstanding environmentally and socially, but often that's not what matters. From beginning to end, *Tilting at Mills* reveals what can occur in attempted alliances between big business and environmentalists and is filled with shocking stories of what really happens behind the scenes in major deal-making.

From Publishers Weekly In this insightful though slim volume, Harris (*Holy Days*) documents the rise and fall of a major New York City recycling plant. After suffering a defeat in Washington in 1992, environmental lobbyist Allen Hershkowitz began to think that working to develop green-friendly business might be a more successful means of achieving his idealistic ends. With the support of his nonprofit employer, he embarked on an eight-year odyssey to build a technologically advanced paper mill in the South Bronx that would be responsive to the surrounding community. The reasons for the plant's ultimate demise are too numerous to list—they touch on technology, market forces, politics and personality. Harris, to her credit, doesn't try to scapegoat one culprit. Based on interviews with many but not all of the important players, the book hews to the point of view of Hershkowitz, who takes only a light drubbing for being too smart, naïve and enthusiastic. Harris essentially fleshes out and follows up on the story she first reported in the *New Yorker* in 1995, and the book retains the flow and skilled writing associated with the magazine. However, due to the number of players and the complexity of the issues involved, Harris raises many more questions than she is able to address in a book of this length and style. Still, this deservedly will be popular among

environmentalists and should be required reading for politicians and businesspeople who claim to support innovation. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Harris follows the rise and fall of an idea proposed by a respected environmental scientist to build a recycled-paper mill in a neglected neighborhood in New York City, an idea that promised to bring jobs and promote profitable green business. It was the dream of Allen Hershkowitz of the environmental advocacy group National Resources Defense Council. He identified a local community group, Banana Kelly, and its administrator, Yolanda Rivera, as a potential ally in the venture. From 1992 until the project finally failed in 2000, Harris details the incredible negotiations and machinations that eventually killed this promising project, including groups working at cross purposes and a good deal of intrigue. Community groups were suspicious of outsiders, be they industrialists or environmentalists. Industrialists were similarly suspicious. Between them all stood a very determined Hershkowitz, raising money, securing permits, juggling partners from Europe and the U.S., and masking growing tensions among the partners. Given the technical information, detailed negotiations, and incredible cast of characters, this is a surprisingly fast-paced and dramatic account of a failed environmental project. Vanessa Bush Copyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved "Tilting at Mills is a gripping narrative." - New York Magazine New York Magazine "...fast-paced and dramatic.." -Booklist Booklist, ALA