

What's next for St. Marks Place?

We talk to "St. Marks is Dead" author Ada Calhoun about the many reincarnations of St. Marks Place — and where it's headed next.



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When people talk about the three-block strip that is St. Marks Place, there's often a "there goes the neighborhood" sigh. Nostalgia exists for the beatnik days of the 1960s and the rock 'n' roll era of the '70s. But Ada Calhoun's new book, "St. Marks Is Dead," shows that people have long had the feeling that it was "better before."
"There's a narrative people are pushing that it was all good before and it is all bad now," Calhoun, who was born on St. Marks in 1976, tells us. "What was interesting to me is how the different

groups ran up against each other. Basically, everyone who came in ruined someone else's experience of the street."

An epicenter for counter-culture

Calhoun spent four years interviewing more than 200 people for her book. She studied how the street has changed century by century and decade by decade. "I don't think there is any other place in New York that has seen as many changes as St. Marks," she says.

Since the 1950s, St. Marks has been a magnet for young adults wanting to experience counter-culture. "I think each generation will bring its own youth culture there," she says about the area's next phase.

"Right now, I see a lot of Korean and Japanese teenagers. I'm not sure what they will contribute to the history books, but



Ada Calhoun's new book "St. Marks is Dead" chronicles the history of the street from the 1600s to now. PROVIDED

I think it will be something ... I don't like to bet against young people."

The spirit animal of St. Marks Place

She says the St. Marks of

today has its own icons. She calls Trash and Vaudeville manager Jimmy Webb the "spirit animal of St. Marks Place," having seen the street through many incarnations. "He's pals with Iggy Pop and

was also homeless and living in Tomkins Square Park [before getting sober]," she says.

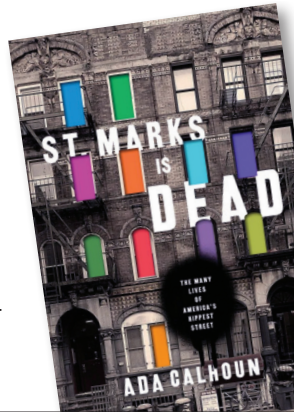
She also mentions Arnie Weinberg, who is often seen standing on St. Marks with his dog. "He started out living in a boys juvenile home and then he started working for this guy next door who he ended up inheriting a multi-million-dollar building from."

Chipotle, 7-Eleven and soaring rent

As more mom-and-pop stores close in the East Village — and New York in general — giving way to chain stores, soaring rents have played into the change of St. Marks. But Calhoun says that change has not been as dramatic as you might expect, even though the street now hosts a Chipotle and a 7-11.

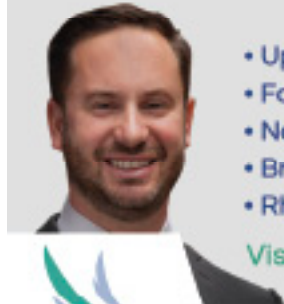
"The rent prices have made it much harder for

younger people and people not working real jobs to live there, and there is a loss of mom-and-pop stores. But one thing about St. Marks Place is that the people who hang out there almost never live there," she says. "It's always been a place for people to stand around and then leave and they will continue to do that because you don't have to pay rent to stand on the sidewalks."



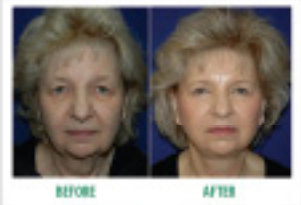
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