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**Welcome to the East Village: The Theft and
Reinvention of the Lower East Side**

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Introduction

The Lower East Side has passed through many hands. For most of New York City history, the Lower East Side had been a designated depository for undesirable populations as part of a larger initiative to implement relationships of empire within the urban socio-political landscape. Characterized as destitute, rejected by both the state and urban elites, the Lower East Side was a neighborhood into which ethnic minorities (i.e. immigrants, people of color, impoverished people) had been forcibly settled to fortify a power structure. To transgress the borders presented by zip codes is to redefine one's membership, inclusion, and protection under the state. As such, ethnic succession had long been observed as a repeating pattern in the Lower East Side. Ethnic succession refers to the phenomenon in which the pre-existing populations are displaced by incoming lower-income groups, indicating that the previous populations have moved up the socioeconomic ladder.¹ However, gentrification reverses this pattern, replacing pre-existing lower-income populations with the wealthier and more sociopolitically powerful. The process of gentrification is marked by cycles of divestment and reinvestment, consisting of not a singular instance but a series of events when money would be poured into the neighborhood or taken away. It's a reciprocal relationship between a willing market of investors and voyeuristic tourists who seek the aesthetics of poverty without the frailty that comes with financial instability.

As such, it is vital that the impact in which post-war white settlement within the Lower East Side served as willing agents of displacement which includes; hippies, then yuppies/squatters, then punks, whose efforts culminated in the gentrification of the Lower East Side for white-collared populations. There was never a moment in which there was a singular

¹ White, Michael J. "Racial and Ethnic Succession in Four Cities." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (December 1984): 165-166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004208168402000203>.

monolithic culture that occupied the Lower East Side. In order to fully understand gentrification within the context of the Lower East Side, it is necessary to understand white middle-class suburbanites that migrated to the neighborhood as socio-economically sovereign allies of capital, even when they wore an oppositional veneer of counter-culture.

Within gentrifying groups, there is a distinction to be made between various white actors who were present in the Lower East Side. First wave gentrifiers, such as artists and hippies, took part in peaking the real estate interest in the area but still engaged with aspects of impoverished life albeit in a fetishizing manner. However, it is the second wave gentrifiers, young white-collared workers, that allowed for bigger investments and the clearing of slums as luxury living. Throughout the process of gentrification in the neighborhood we see white actors not only in conflict with the pre-existing populations but, particularly in the case of first wave gentrifiers, with the real estate developers and the city government. It is only when an optimal level of capital interest is generated within the real estate market that pioneers are transformed into the vagrant. Both parties, with various degrees of impact, took on active roles in the gentrification of the Lower East Side.

Moral panic in the face of an increasing white population established just whose neighborhood it was. Throughout the gentrification process, government and real estate companies worked side-by-side to alienate who they deemed to be an opponent to urban development. However, just as it was difficult for its residents to migrate into spaces with concentrated wealth, it had been a challenge for urban developers and realtors alike to gentrify the Lower East Side without willing buyers. It was only until the late 60s that there was an opportunity to transform the slums into an attraction site for the middle-class. Efforts made by

Puerto Rican locals in the 70s to improve the area were actively erased by the state to promote Puerto Ricans as the background of the neighborhood and the white middle-class as pioneers. When looking at the 90s, the real estate developers were able to successfully claim the Lower East Side for the affluent. Thus, the displacement of older populations is legitimized under the guise of improving quality of life on the Lower East Side which ultimately made said populations vulnerable in the context of financial and housing instability.

Building off the work of Christopher Mele's Selling The Lower East Side and Amy Starecheski's Ours to Lose, this paper will detail interdependency between real estate developers, city planners, and white middle-class youth to successfully gentrify the Lower East Side. Capitalistic desire alone has proven incapable of uprooting and displacing vulnerable communities and relies on not only romanticization but also moral panic and moral authority embedded in classist and racist tones.

Chapter 1: Urban Neglect and Displacement Efforts

Efforts to transform the Lower East Side from a series of slums into a nationally recognized tourist center depended on alienating the extant impoverished population. Thus, the arrival of a more desirable population (i.e. middle-class whites) was welcomed into the neighborhood as a colonizing force and an invitation for gentrification under the guise of urban rehabilitation. The actions of urban elites, such as real estate developers and politicians in service of the private sector, to present the desires of wealthier populations as synonymous with modernization of the city was embedded in racism and classism. By 1966, Puerto Ricans were the largest ethnic population in not only the Lower East Side but also the South Bronx, East Harlem, and Williamsburg.² In 1968, only a small portion of Lower East Siders were middle-class, making up 6.3 percent of the total population. This was in stark contrast to the 78.4 percent of residents who resided in low-income private housing and the 15.3 percent living in low-income public housing.³ The continued accommodation of older impoverished populations was perceived to be a threat to the city's capacity for private sector revenue. This perspective made way for the upheaval of local populations who did not hold much bargaining power in conflicts with foreign white middle-class newcomers.

Many efforts have been made by city planners to eradicate low-income housing in favor of increasing more revenue from "mixed-housing" that would promote displacement and other projects that would cater to a suburban middle-class population. The matters in which urban planners had emphasized the necessity for their projects placed an emphasis on making the Lower East appetizing for wealthy investors. Such projects included the Lower Manhattan

² Fitzpatrick, Joseph P., Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 55-57.

³ Mele, Christopher, Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 158

Expressway (LOMEX) which planned on reducing the time spent transporting freight to the suburbs and had ultimately been canceled after various protests from the Lower East Side.⁴ Another project, the Cooper Square Renewal Project, sought to transform Cooper Square into a mixed class housing area. Tenants proved adamantly against the project, angered that changes that would derive from this project would force older impoverished tenants out of the neighborhood. In a submitted report from the tenants, they voiced their resentment against the urban planners for implying that due to their poverty they must uproot themselves for middle-class tenants like “expendable pawns in the housing experiments of the intelligentsia.”⁵ The lack of faith from the pre-existing tenants to urban developers is reverberated through their letter and are socially aware that they were seen as obstacles rather than constituents in their own neighborhood.

With the objection of projects aimed to attract the middle-class to the Lower East Side or cater towards middle-class interest, real estate developers and urban planners opted to neglect the housing needs of low-income residents in the Lower East Side in hopes to drive tenants out of the neighborhood. Buildings that were neglected by landlords were open to be reclaimed by the city under the receivership law of 1961. However, the number of buildings that were reclaimed were in limited numbers. By 1965, 115 buildings were taken over by the city while also passing stricter fines for landlords for building neglect.⁶ This left many buildings unattended and ignored even when in the possession of the New York City government. In the context of rising property

⁴ Georgoulas, Andreas and Khawaja, Ali, “Lower Manhattan Expressway,” Harvard Graduate School of Design, 2010, <https://research.gsd.harvard.edu/zofnass/files/2013/05/Lower-Manhattan-Expressway.pdf>

⁵ Reaven, Marci, “Neighborhood Activism in Planning for New York City, 1945-1975,” *Journal of Urban History*, 2017.

https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/doi/full/10.1177/0096144217705446?utm_source=summon&utm_medium=discovery-provider

⁶ Carroll, Tamar W, *Mobilizing New York: AIDS, Antipoverty, and Feminist Activism*. Vol. First edition. Gender and American Culture. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015, p. 58-59, <https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=e025xna&AN=978163&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

values and an emerging consumer audience that revitalized interest in the Lower East Side, the return of landlords and the squatting population were seen as opponents of the city.

At a time in which wealthy New York landlords sought a new source of revenue, a counterculture of peace, love, and art emerged from the suburbs and began pouring into the inner city. Hippies were more often than not white adolescents who moved from the middle-class suburbs to the Lower East Side Manhattan in pursuit of a lifestyle of artistic whimsy and psychedelics. The Lower East Side soon became a place of pilgrimage for hippies across the country, transforming locals into accessories for their romanticization of poverty and urban neglect. This was part of their larger philosophy to role play the antithesis of middle-class values in which they had been socialized. With the presence of a hippie consumer audience, the Lower East Side's development into the East Village as a hippie haven made way for massive profit. There was a real estate boom in the area near St. Marks between 1966 and 1967, resulting in rental prices doubling. This signaled the beginning of a new era of real estate development.⁷

While many hippies were wanderers, it is important to recognize and distinguish the various bodies present within the hippie community of the Lower East Side. Of the hippies who have chosen to move to the Lower East Side, some had familiarity with an established protocol of squatting and organizing, with some knowledge of land and residency rights. Many of these hippies were the children of back-to-landers.⁸ Additionally, there were also politically active spaces whose members organized larger hippie movements that were inherently anti-capitalist.⁹ One of which were the Yippies, who had their very own squatted headquarters on Bleecker Street. It is also important to note that many white middle-class youth were drawn to urban

⁷ Mele, p. 167

⁸ Starecheski, Amy, Ours to Lose: When Squatters Became Homeowners in New York City, University of Chicago Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, p. 56, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/columbia/detail.action?docID=4526388>.

⁹ Starecheski, p. 57

centers like New York City to seek an escape from homophobia in the predominantly nuclear-household suburbia. About 30 to 40 percent of homeless youth in New York City identified as gay and many have cited the Stonewall Riot of 1969 as a calling for new and reimagined communities.¹⁰ Yet queer identity did not override “colonial white attitudes” toward ethnic minorities, leading to racial tension and displacement.¹¹

Hippies were juxtaposed to the black and Latino youth, who did not live in the Lower East Side out of a desire for adventure but due to intergenerational poverty and exploitation. Hippies were celebrated across various national news outlets as a means of taming the Lower East Side. A New York Times article documented the hippie migration as the solution for racial strife and taming the poor, “At a time when racial antagonisms erupt on the street, these boys and girls appear relaxedly integrated. The problems of poverty and the ghetto - together with those of leisure - are no problems to the hippies who embrace all three.”¹² Others claimed that within the gentrified pockets in which hippies settled had little to no crime.¹³ Hippies, however, did not seek to bridge the racial gap and in many ways they intensified it. Additionally, the willingness of hippies to live in decrepit slums despite having the means to live elsewhere made impoverished blacks and Puerto Ricans suspicious of their intentions. In comparison to their own ties to the neighborhood out of generational poverty found themselves aggravated with their presence.

¹⁰ Gibson, Kristina E., Street Kids: Homeless Youth, Outreach, and Policing New York’s Streets, New York: NYU Press, 2011, p. 1
<https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=e025xna&AN=379191&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹¹ Schulman, Sarah, The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012, p. 40
<https://search-ebshost-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=e025xna&AN=413315&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹² Piess, Kathy, 1986. Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York. Philadelphia: Temple University

¹³ Teaford, Jon C. 1990. The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Puerto Ricans and blacks often attacked hippies and criticized them for their lack of class consciousness.¹⁴

In the wake of civil unrest and neglect in the neighborhood, there was increased agitation against the police presence in the Lower East Side among locals, police, and hippies. Recognized as the “Summer of Love,” the summer of 1967 has been also a year of violent eruptions. A group of anti-hippies swarmed a concert held in Tompkins Square Park. Complaints about the music being too loud and a disturbance to residents in the area. This suggests that the anger of locals over membership and entitlement over land use had transferred from impoverished locals to affluent foreigners. Following the arrival of police and arrests, Mayor Lindsay, then mayor of New York City, had cited the lack of efficient space as the cause for strife. It is in this news coverage that the term “East Village” was used in one of its earliest instances. Prior to hippie arrival, it was simply called the Lower East Side.¹⁵ Concurrent with Mayor Lindsey’s statement, space, space usage, and the designation of usage rights to space became the center of struggle between established Puerto Rican residents and the incoming hippie migrants. The renaming of the hippie section of the neighborhood as the East Village signaled a turning point in real estate development and the introduction of the “bohemian charm” of decaying slums.

Strides in “colonizing” the Lower East Side were met with setbacks. Protecting whites from the “corrupting influence” and “treacherous hands” of black and Latino tenants was at the forefront of these conversations. By creating a juxtaposition between the “peace-loving” white kids and the “violent” colored folk made way for even more reason to make the Lower East Side inhospitable for their old time tenants of color. In an effort of making the local populations

¹⁴ Mele, p. 172

¹⁵ Liebowtiz, Meyer, “Anti-Hippies Disrupt Concert in Tompkins Sq. Park,” New York Times, June 2nd, 1967, <https://www.nytimes.com/1967/06/02/archives/antihippies-disrupt-concert-in-tompkins-sqpark.html>.

appear foreign in the face of gentrification, there were increasingly more and more efforts on the behalf of the city government to isolate communities of color.

As such, white victimhood in particular at the hands of Puerto Ricans and black people on the Lower East Side gave means to the justification to the expansion of policing. The case that made way for the expansion of policing in 1967 following the death of two hippies in the Lower East Side, 21 year-old James “Groovy” Hutchinson from Rhode Island and 18 year-old Linda Fitzpatrick from Connecticut. In the aftermath of a basement party on Avenue B, they were found naked with their heads bashed in with bricks. Groovy was one of the many hippies who had engaged who had transformed ignored tenement buildings into enticing crash pads for the touring youth. During the hippie pilgrimage, about 2,000 hippies had moved near Tompkins Square Park.¹⁶ Establishing a crash pad on East 11th Street, Groovy was able to make a free shelter for the price of \$35 a month, occasionally turning in runaway youth who had a bounty on their heads. Many police investigations were done at the crash pad at the request of parents who were told their children were living there. Groovy had fit the image of the hippie to a T, focusing on love and energy, selling drugs below market cost, and giving away possessions to passerbyers.¹⁷ Moreover, their characters had appealed to what landlords and real estate developers had always wanted. To put this population under threat was to threaten the potential for profit from otherwise unwanted buildings.

Fitzpatrick had been raped by the assailants and had been given particular interest in public press, comparing her life in the East Village to that of her 30-room home and lofty private school education in Greenwich, Connecticut.¹⁸ The assailants, Donald Ramsey, Thomas Dennis,

¹⁶ Mele, p. 167

¹⁷ Lukas, Theodore, 1968, “The Life and Death of A Hippie,” Esquire, <https://classic.esquire.com/article/share/65b4c46b-d6d1-496d-b2b4-49335cb015bf>

¹⁸ Unknown Author, "Linda's Last Trip." 1967. Newsweek, Oct 23, p. 33-34. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/lindas-last-trip/docview/1894161718/se-2?accountid=10226>.

and Fred Wright, were known for their connections to black nationalism and being open with their usage of drugs such as LSD. To be vocal about racial inequality and drug usage while also having been caught committing a heinous crime against whites had proved to some that Moynihan had been right. A family member of Ramsey bemoaned his fate and had pointed her fingers at the hypocritical behavior of the press towards hippies, “If I did all that communal living that they do, they’d throw me out on the street and call me an undesirable.”¹⁹ It was evident among residents that the crimes of people of color and their connection to countercultures are more scrutinized than the neighboring white people. This is not to say that the crimes committed were ambiguous under a legal standpoint but that the implications of these crimes gave way to renegotiating the land under the guise of public safety.

In July 1968, on East 5th Street between Avenues B and C, violence erupted when Puerto Rican youths firebombed businesses, set cars on fire, and smashed window storefronts in response to increased patrol forces in the Lower East Side. Notably, though much of this frustration was geared towards increased policing, the businesses that bore the greatest brunt in the destruction of businesses were Puerto Rican entrepreneurs who cited the police being at fault for not protecting them.²⁰

Across various instances of criminality emerging with impoverished people of color as aggressors, there emerged the need to clean the Lower East Side to make it more palatable for middle-class suburbanite investment. Parents of hippies working alongside the NYPD after leaving the suburbs were also key actors in the entitlement of access to the Lower East Side. The creation of the “Hippie Squad” worked in tandem with parents of runaways and made it their

¹⁹ Unknown Author, "Linda's Last Trip." 1967. Newsweek, Oct 23, p. 33-34.

²⁰ Centro: Center for Puerto Rican Studies, “Puerto Ricans Riots: Lower East Side also in 1968,” Hunter College, <https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/digital-humanities/puerto-rican-labor/puerto-ricans-riots-lower-east-side-also-1968#:~:text=During%20July%201968%2C%20fires%20were.a%20paisano%20at%20this%20bar.>

mission to bust down any squats where their children may be exposed to drugs or prostitution.²¹ The construction of the white middle-class runaway was also aided in news coverage with about 65% of the reports centered on female bodies.²² There was especially a lot of fear towards young white girls falling prey to pimps despite boys constituting the majority of the runaways.²³ The weaponization of white femininity against the predominantly colored neighborhood gave rise to the naturalization of increased policing. As such, the passage of The Runaway Youth Act of 1977 stood as a testament of the desire to “rescue” hippie youth from the squalor of the urban center. It is this initiative for public safety that had led to an increased effort to set firm socioeconomic boundaries for the sake of urban redevelopment that was largely absent when people of color of the neighborhood were denied access to safe living conditions.

As we have seen, hippies were willing agents of gentrification because of the ways in which they romanticized poverty and established a code of living that realtors could package and commodify. Likewise, the city government had made it evident that the Puerto Rican populations stood in the way of the lifestyle hippies had hoped to achieve in the Lower East Side; living in poverty without facing instability. Officials justified expanding police control and initiatives in the neighborhood as a means of making the area desirable for hippies to continue settling in the Lower East Side. It is in this context that the city and hippies had worked in conjunction to displace impoverished communities.

²¹ McGowan, William, 2005, “Dad Ran the Hippie Squad,” *The Wall Street Journal*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB111896675141862132>

²² Staller, Karen M, 2006, “Constructing the Runaway Youth Problem: Boy Adventurers to Girl Prostitutes, 1960–1978,” *Journal of Communication*, Volume 53, Issue 2, 1 June 2003, p. 4. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2003.tb02594.x>

²³ Gibson, p. 47-48

Chapter 2: Rehabilitation Efforts in Loisaida (70s)

The Puerto Rican community of the Lower East Side was by and large one of the biggest opponents to the gentrification process. Yet, they were vital in preserving the neighborhood and relieving the city from the costs that came along with maintaining the abandoned buildings. In contrast to the white hippies of the 60s, the Puerto Ricans were the primary recipients of the homesteading projects because of their ties to the neighborhood. Unlike the white hippies who were drawn towards the poverty of the city, Puerto Ricans did not have the agency to move as they'd like. As such, the appeal of the homesteading program made for the neighborhood to be saved.

While the city largely opted to neglect the needs of Puerto Ricans living in the Lower East Side, the fiscal crisis of the 1970s gave all more reason to accelerate the deterioration of the neighborhood. Cutting off social programs and not recognizing racial inequality within the city, politicians painted the demise of the neighborhood as the responsibility of locals. Yet, within the same vein of thinking, Puerto Ricans have proved to be capable of rehabilitating city-owned buildings in ways that were impossible for the city to handle. In opposition to the dubbing of the white middle-class section of the Lower East Side as the "East Village," Puerto Rican locals also had their own name to which they addressed the neighborhood, "Loisaida." The name had been popularized by the poem under the same name written by Bimbo Rivas, a Puerto Rican playwright.²⁴ Loisaida stood as a threat to the development of the affluent East Village, however, it proved to offer the means to which the city can offset the impacts of neglectful landlords.

News coverage riding the waves of moral panic that had emerged from the Groovy Murders, tales of young gangsters plaguing the East Village continued to dominate local

²⁴ Rivas, Bittman John, "Loisaida," 1974, <http://www.sofritoforyoursoul.com/the-poetry-of-bimbo-rivas-loisaida/>

headlines.²⁵ By the start of the 70s, municipal disinvestment had been promoted as the ideal solution to counter the continuous loss in real estate revenue in the Lower East Side. To invest in major repairs in low-income housing meant the retention of impoverished people. Distaste for the impoverished Lower East Sider was hidden behind a mythical narrative constructed by conservatives that by neglecting urban spaces, inhabitants will learn to grow self-sufficient. As such, this proved to be a powerful idea in political arenas which ultimately had an impact in the neighborhood.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, professor of political science, New York state senator, and counselor of President Nixon, advocated for benign neglect in urban centers as a solution to racial conflict and urban decay. Moynihan had accredited the woes of racial inequity as to the “ghetto” culture in neighborhoods of color that emerged from historical racial injustice. In his memorandum to the president he points at black Americans’ “revenge against whites” as a contributing cause for urban crime, including arson, in cities across America.²⁶ Moynihan viewed black youth residing in the Lower East Side as desperately in need of employment without seeking employment, opting to partake in substance abuse.²⁷ As such, Moynihan denounced the social programs of the 60s, characterizing earlier federal investments in social programs as “overpraised” and the cause for economic decline, preferring more investment in private ventures.²⁸ Moynihan’s arguments echoed local conversations within New York City that promoted disinvestment and shifted the blame from structural racism to the failure of individuals.

²⁵ Daily News, December 11b, 1971

²⁶ Moynihan, Daniel P., The Moynihan Memorandum, New York Times, p. 69, <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/03/01/archives/benign-neglect-on-race-is-proposed-by-moynihan-moynihan-urges.html>

²⁷ Moynihan, Daniel P., “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” United States. Department of Labor. Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965

²⁸ Moynihan, Daniel P., “Patterns of Ethnic Succession: Blacks and Hispanics in New York City,” The Academy of Political Science, Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 94, No. 1 (Spring, 1979), p. 13, https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/stable/pdf/2150152.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A411ed96195354724448e2e04abef518a&ab_segments=&origin=

Moynihan proposed that recognizing racial inequity for blacks in the US would be perceived as “favoritism” by other minorities (i.e. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Indians). He also cited a worsening of the “race war” by affirming “paranoid extremists” that minorities were receiving “favoritism.”²⁹ Yet, Moynihan doesn’t suggest alternatives that are more “inclusive” and instead directs his audience to reject recognition on a federal level. The dismissal of the lasting impact of racial inequity made way for the naturalization of displacement and neglect as a means of neighborhood improvement. As such, there was increasing sympathy towards neglectful landlords through the depiction of locals as an unmanageable population.

This provided a moral argument that the poverty that low-income tenants suffered was the result of a lack of initiative within local New York City politics. Landlords in particular were adamant on neglecting their tenants not only as a way to drive out impoverished populations but also as a form of financial investment. To invest in repairs was to keep the very market that landlords wanted to repel. Such actions included not repairing buildings, threatening tenants, or even burning their buildings in hopes of cashing in the insurance money.³⁰ Arson had become so commonplace that it had been recognized by the House of Representatives as a major issue in New York City. Though landlords were recognized as culprits, it was agreed that being able to incriminate them of such crimes was difficult due to the lack of sufficient evidence available. As such, discussions of neighborhood preservation programs took center of political conversations.³¹

In response to the unresolved issues following the defunding of social programs and the lack of assistance from the state, many locals had come together to form support networks. Real

²⁹ Kihss, Peter, “‘Benign Neglect’ on Race Is Proposed by Moynihan”, New York Times, March 1, 1970, p. 1 <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/03/01/archives/benign-neglect-on-race-is-proposed-by-moynihan-moynihan-urges.html>

³⁰ Mele, p. 192

³¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the Treasury, Postal Service, And General Government, and General Government Appropriations, Arson Problems in New York City: Hearing before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 1970, 30-31, <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/67044NCJRS.pdf>

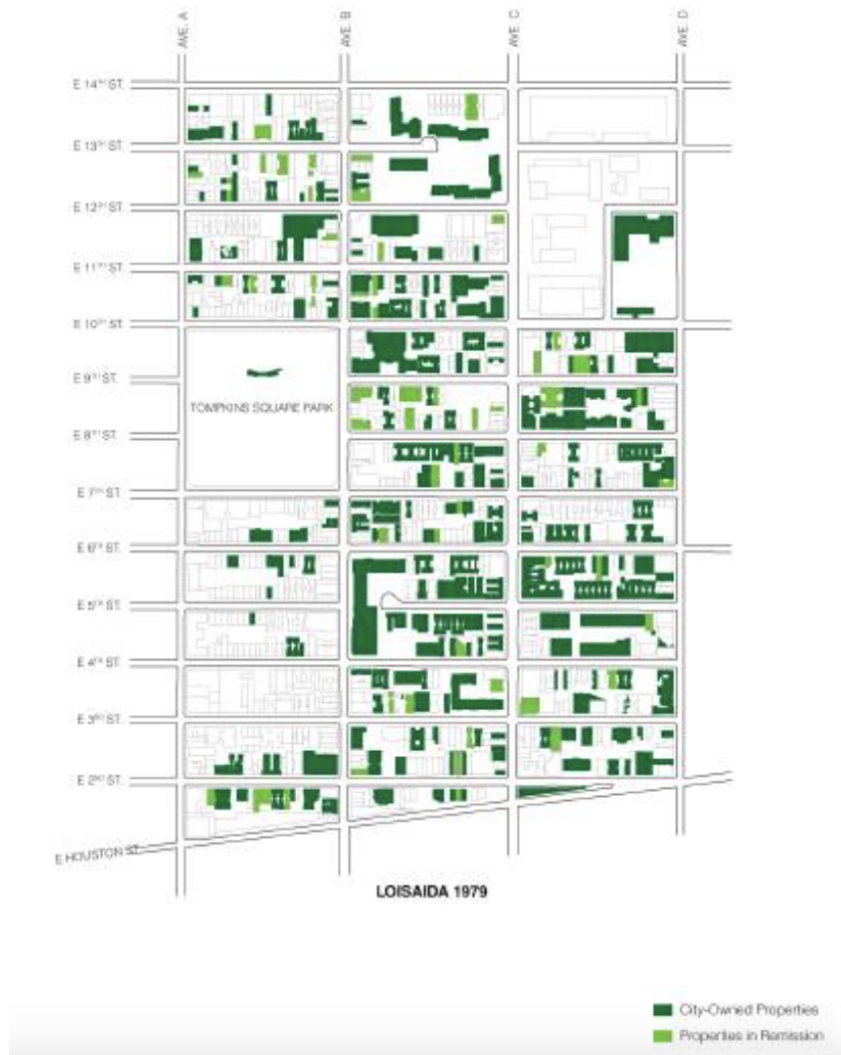
Great Society was an initiative that emerged from the Lower East Side and was organized by former Puerto Rican gangsters.³² Throughout their active years, one of Real Great Society's biggest missions was to address the housing crisis. Though Real Great Society would later disband, Charas (also known as El Bohio) would emerge as a grassroots organization consisting of Puerto Rican locals who followed the same theoretical framework left behind by their predecessors.³³ Spearheaded by Fred Good and guest architect Richard Buckminster "Bucky" Fuller, the Real Great Society created an initiative that would teach locals how to construct shelters in the shape of geometric domes designed to occupy abandoned lots and sidewalks.³⁴ These domes would serve to provide affordable housing with an initial construction cost of \$300 or a reduced price of \$15 with factory manufacturing in spaces designated for urban renewal projects but were not being used by anyone. Chino Garcia explained, "Our main idea is that minority groups do not have to stay locked in the urban areas... Charas thinks we should spread out into the lands and try to use the resources available."³⁵ Thus, the emergence of squats and reclamation of public spaces was a direct response to the abandonment.

³² Schrader, Timo, Loisaida as Urban Laboratory: Puerto Rican Community Activism in New York, Vol. 51. University of Georgia Press, 2020, p. 23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvxkn522>.

³³ Schrader, p. 24-25

³⁴ Schrader, p. 45

³⁵ Mason, Bryant, "Squat Dome Holds Hope For Housing," Sundial News, December 12, 1972.



Map of city-owned property in Loisaida in 1979. Illustration by Nadini Bagchee using Census Data as well as maps drawn by the Interfaith Adopt-A-Building Program in the HUD Report, “Loisaida: Strategies for Neighborhood Revitalization and Self-Determination,” 1979³⁶

Seeing the potential that arose from lingering tenants who sought to rehabilitate their homes, NYC’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development established the Sweat Equity Program in 1976. Under the Sweat Equity Program, interested tenants would be eligible for 30-year loans with an accompanying 1 percent interest rate in exchange for their labor into rehabilitating city-owned buildings. President Jimmy Carter had been particularly impressed by

³⁶ Bagchee, Nandini, Counter Institution: Activist Estates of the Lower East Side. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018, p. 121. ProQuest Ebook Central.

the work done through the homesteading program.³⁷ One particular program, Interfaith Adopt-A-Building, had prominence within the Lower East Side and oversaw the first homesteading project on East 11th Street in partnership with Real Great Society. One of the founding leaders of Real Great Society, Robert Nazario, not only oversaw the program as a director before serving as a housing advisor to President Carter.³⁸ Published pamphlets echoed the sentimentality of earlier struggles against negligent landlords and the unlivable conditions of their tenement buildings. It had been an act that recognized the work and services of people who had been using their labor to create livable spaces despite the municipal neglect. Using the same slogan from earlier rent strikes in the neighborhood, the city published the “No Heat, No Rent: Urban Solar & Energy Conservation Manual” as an educational resource for those who ventured the homesteading project.³⁹ The manual covered a wide variety of topics for self-sufficiency including installing solar power, collecting sunshine, plumbing, hot water maintenance and repair, and methods for accruing their savings.⁴⁰

In 1978, Interfaith Adopt-A-Building established their own headquarters in the abandoned school building of P.S. 64 which had closed in 1977 when the city began to cut down funding on social programs and resources for the neighborhood. This space would then be shared by Charas.⁴¹ Interfaith Adopt-A-Building offered agency to the neighborhood and encouraged Lower East Siders to be compensated for their labor. For city developers, Interfaith Adopt-A-Building was able to prevent the devaluation of real estate. Auctioning buildings for resale as a means of generating revenue had proved futile as it had diminishing returns vis-a-vis

³⁷ NYU Furman Center, “Sweat Equity (City),” <https://furmancenter.org/coredata/directory/entry/sweat-equity-hpd>

³⁸ Good, Fred “The Origins of Loisaida,” in Resistance: A Radical Political and Social History of the Lower East Side, Patterson, et al.

³⁹ Bagchee, p. 125

⁴⁰ The Energy Task Force, “No Heat, No Rent: An Urban Solar & Energy Conservation Manual,” 1977, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=msu.31293012827527&view=1up&seq=7&skin=2021>, p. 7

⁴¹ Bagchee, p. 102-103

low profit and tax evasion from property owners. Allowing Puerto Ricans in the Lower East Side, who had a commitment to improving the neighborhood for a higher quality of life, made way for city developers to have a foundation to work on for future projects.

As can be seen, the efforts made by Puerto Ricans to challenge the deterioration of the neighborhood was supported as a result of aligning the community agenda with that of the state. While a threat to large-scale urban re-development, it can also be understood that the community efforts that arose from Loisaida had also benefited the real estate developers by shifting the responsibility from landlords to tenants.

Chapter 3: Re-Investment and Conflict Between Two Cities (80s)

Emerging from the initial hippie fascination with the slums was the desire to live a life of abridged poverty that was to be produced by the urban elite and sold to white wealthy transplants in New York City. Even while occupying the same geographic space, there was a distinction between the newer white population and the older Puerto Rican population. Policies from the urban elite exacerbated these differences through policies while white transplants continued to feed off the aesthetics of poverty. This was vital in the transformation of the Lower East Side into the East Village.

From 1970 to 1980, the Lower East Side's impoverished population decreased by 30 percent while rents had increased by 128 to 172 percent, which is dramatically higher than any rent increase in other neighborhoods within the same time period. Between 1976 and 1977, the Lower East Side has observed the highest levels of tax arrears and vacancy rates.⁴² By 1981, Reagan had ceased federal investment in homesteading projects. As a result of ending the federal program, the most vulnerable populations who had managed to make a home out of abandoned spaces were most impacted. This had proved especially catastrophic in the loss of jobs for low-income New Yorkers. Between the years 1977 and 1984, 215,000 office jobs were created and 100,000 blue-collared jobs were lost in the city.⁴³ More and more vulnerable populations found themselves homeless in the face of landlord harassment, tenement building neglect, and illegal buyouts.⁴⁴

Squatting thus emerged as a means of countering the loss of housing and an attempt from residents to overcome the municipal divestment they faced in the city. Frank Morales, a squatting

⁴² Smith, Neil, The New Urban Frontier, "Mapping the Gentrification Frontier," P. 196

⁴³ Deutsche, Rosalyn, and Ryan, Cara Gendel, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," p. 94.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/778358.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ac42c308af51cd25614c5903b7160fe59&ab_segments=&origin=

⁴⁴ Ferguson, Sarah, "The Struggle for Space: 10 Years of Turf Battling on the Lower East Side" in Resistance: A Radical Political and Social History of the Lower East Side, Patterson, et al.

activist since 1985, presented squatting as a form of direct action that challenges gentrification. He commented, “Squatting is the antidote to forced removal, a means of community self-defense as well as a means, through use of abandoned spaces, to meet the necessity of a home, and build solidarity and power on the grass roots.”⁴⁵ Outside the realm of homesteading, squats emerged as a solitary space for those who have lost their home or whose landlords ceased to care for their buildings and had a support network for taking care of each other and the building.

Squatters’ unwillingness to deal with the city and their violation of property rights was not an issue until real estate industries began to repopulate the area in the 80s. Private redevelopment and competing claims by housing organizations as well as homesteaders for control over property made the issue of squatting and legitimacy enter mainstream politics.⁴⁶ The Lower East, one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in New York City, was now at an increased risk of facing evictions and homelessness. Such narratives were familiar. By 1982, there had been an increase in population as noted by Con Edison, which is accredited to gentrification. Additionally, in contrast to 1977, it was in 1986 when the rate of tax evasion and vacancy fell by 50 percent and continued to fall until 1988.⁴⁷

Increased policing reframed conversations centered on the reclamation of the landscape as a war against crime and degeneracy. Operation Pressure Point was an initiative in 1984 to disrupt the drug trade in the Lower East Side, emphasizing park and playground reclamation particularly in the Tompkins Square Park area.⁴⁸ Operation Pressure Point had ultimately been about the policing of black and brown bodies in preparation for the white middle-class audience.

The flea markets that lined along St. Mark’s had supported locals as a source of income were

⁴⁵ Luna, Carla, “Squatters of the Lower East Side,” *Jacobin*, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/04/squatters-of-the-lower-east-side/>

⁴⁶ Mele, p. 207

⁴⁷ Smith, p. 196

⁴⁸ FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin. April 1989, Volume 58, Number 4, p. 5. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/117371NCJRS.pdf>

now subject to random searches by the NYPD that interfered with their business conduct.⁴⁹ Operation Pressure Point was a means of removing the unattractive aspects of the neighborhood such as crime, unsanitary conditions, and drugs, which led to purposeful crackdowns of outdoor flea markets which generated revenue for the community.⁵⁰ The deployment of plain clothes policemen and investigating areas as a result of anonymous tips in the neighborhood that would lead them to squats. Police officers were also increasingly more involved in the tenants association and strongly encouraged landlords to fix locks and secure entranceways.⁵¹ Within the first month of the drug operation, there have been over 2,000 drug-related arrests. Within five months the total rose to 7,000 arrests and by 17 months the number of arrests had accumulated to 14,000.⁵² The criminalization of local populations made for a clearing force in the Lower East Side, allowing for the preparation of more whites in the area. Additionally, by disrupting their self-sufficiency, they were exacerbating the lack of resources available to them. This made a clear distinction of who's welcomed in the neighborhood and who wasn't.

A counterculture in the art world that opposed bourgeoisie art movements had gained traction from the Lower East Side. Punks arrived and flourished in the 70s LES from their middle-class suburban homes but differed from the hippies who sought to make change in the world and instead survive in a world riddled with problems. Rather, they embraced the faults of the inner city. By the 80s, they had a visible presence in the Lower East Side.⁵³ These artists, attracted to the Lower East Side for the cheap rent and accessibility to blossoming art galleries, invited for en masse gentrification. In many ways, it exacerbated the real estate value of the slum area for its decrepit conditions and the aestheticization of urban neglect. By 1984, the city had

⁴⁹ Mele, p. 329

⁵⁰ Mele, p. 239

⁵¹ FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, p. 8

⁵² Zimmer, Lynn, "Proactive Policing Against Street Level Drug Trafficking," American Journal of Police, 1990, p. 43-74

⁵³ Mele, p. 218.

expanded the 421 a-tax abatement program which gave tax exemptions to luxury apartment landlords to include landlords with property between 14th streets and 96th streets.⁵⁴ There was an increase in investment in art galleries and creating dedicated permanent spaces for artists in the Lower East Side.

What had once been a burden to uplift had now become a prime opportunity for investment and advertisement for future buyers. The Village Eye's Walter Robinson and Carlo McCormick had commented, "As for ambience, the East Village has it: a unique blend of poverty, punk rock, drugs, arson, Hell's Angels, winos, prostitutes, and dilapidated housing that adds up to an adventurous avant - garde setting of considerable cachet."⁵⁵ Such a statement captures the appeal of the Lower East Side as a settlement in the gentrification frontier and the romanticization of poverty in the eyes of foreign white transplants.

Even prior to the opening of the first art gallery on the Lower East Side, there was a rise in real estate interest in the area. The Christodora building had once housed the Young Lord's office while vacant under city ownership in 1969.⁵⁶ In 1973, the city had sold the building to a real estate speculator for \$63,000 who had hired thugs within the neighborhood to stand guard and threaten squatters who occupied the building.⁵⁷ East village broker, Rose Edwards, explained that she had shown the Christodora to at least three to four parties in 1980. She pointed out, "Even going inside was a sign of fairly serious interest. With the doors of the building soldered shut, that meant bringing a welder."⁵⁸ By closing the building with such force, the city was intent on ensuring impoverished populations wouldn't take advantage of its unoccupied status. For the

⁵⁴ Deutsche and Ryan, p. 97.

⁵⁵ Gottsfield, Jeff and Spencer, Ramsey, 1984, "St. Mark's Place 1984: Eat and Run" East Village Eye, p. 7, <https://www.east-village-eye.com/eyepdfs/jul84.pdf>

⁵⁶ Bagchee, p. 114

⁵⁷ Good, p. 34-35

⁵⁸ Unger, Craig, "The Lower East Side: There Goes The Neighborhood," New York Magazine, May 28, 1984, p. 36, https://books.google.com/books?id=XOUCAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Christodora to have accumulated so much financial interest while having a connection with the neighborhood made for a clear distinction of what the end goal was for real estate developers; profit over housing.

Mayor Koch expanded the Artist Homeownership Program (AHOP) with an allocated budget of twenty-five million dollars in federal funds. Koch had stated that the initiative would “fight abandonment and decay in the Lower East Side” as well as “renew the strength and vitality of this community.”⁵⁹ Through the program, 16 buildings between 8th street, Avenue B and C, all the way to Rivington and Stanton street were to be rehabilitated. Nine of the buildings were designated to serve as housing for median-income artists, which received three million from the city’s public funds.⁶⁰ Such initiatives offered artists the means of permanent living in the Lower East Side without resorting to squatting.

Locals criticized not only the use of space in the area but also the aloof attitudes of the artists themselves towards racial divisions in the neighborhood. One artist, Richard Armijo, critiqued white artists’ use of Puerto Rican and black bodies in their art which was showcased at Artists’ Space and reviewed in Village Eye’s January 1982 issue. The installation, Portrait Show (1981), by Tom Warren, was an attempt to uplift Puerto Rican locals through an art exhibit of their portraits which were taken for the cost of a dollar. ABC No Rio, one of the counterculture art exhibit that hosted the show described the installation as displaying the “enduring of a Hispanic neighborhood often overlooked by those focusing on slum realities.”⁶¹ Armijo commented, “When artists decide to set up residence in a Puerto Rican neighborhood, obviously

⁵⁹ Bennetts, Leslie, 1982, “16 Tenements to Become Artist Units In City Plan,” The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/04/nyregion/16-tenements-to-become-artist-units-in-city-plan.html>

⁶⁰ Deutsche and Ryan, p. 101

⁶¹ Bagchee, p. 166

the usual hands-off policy towards the underclass has been breached. But who benefits?”⁶²

Armijo continues:

Why do anonymous images of the so-called underclass elicit our interest and appreciation, even monetary patronage, while the people themselves are confined to ghettos, encouraged to concentrate in projects, restricted to mostly blue-collar jobs, their intelligentsia too late acknowledged, and their daily movement monitored by cops, sociologists, liberals, and now artists?⁶³

Increasingly frustrated by the objectification of poverty, Armijo had voiced a similar disconnect to the artists as that a decade earlier. Artists, while capable of living out their lives separated from the poverty of the Lower East Side, had only interacted with locals when trying to produce mediums to sell. It's interactions such as these that illustrate how white middle-class artists serve as a gentrifying force in the neighborhood.

In many instances, art galleries that aimed for relatability within a predominantly impoverished Latino community and being a counterculture to bourgeois values failed to resonate with the very community they were trying to invite. Rather, than they also incited aspects of fetishization in their art pieces that claimed drugs, suicide, and decrepit living conditions as representative of the neighborhood. The problems listed in the exhibition were the very problems that the Loisaída aimed to eradicate, not celebrate. The audience was aimed towards the spectators who were touring the neighborhood and ultimately buying property in the supposedly trendy area.

⁶² Strombeck, Andrew, 2020, DIY on the Lower East Side: Books, Buildings, and Art After the 1975 Fiscal Crisis. Albany: SUNY Press, p. 119-120, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=nlebk&AN=2499845&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁶³ Armijo, R. R., “Afterward” in ABC No Rio Dinero: The Story of the Lower East Side Art Gallery, Moore, Alan, and Miller, Marc, (New York City: ABC No Rio and Colab Projects, 1985), p. 99



Installation by John Morton, *Murder, Junk, and Suicide Show*, 1980. Photograph by Tom Warren

Notably, the Village Eye's awareness of the housing crisis and the crisis of membership did extend to the struggles of locals. Village Eye had a dedicated monthly section which allowed readers to anonymously nominate notorious landlords for the "The Gimme Award For Landlord Greed and Community Disregard." In its July 1984 issue, they nominated Paul Stallings and took note of his past in neglecting buildings by not providing heat or water as well as rent increases.⁶⁴ This attempt to speak out against the issues of gentrification also failed to resonate with the racial inequality and historical underfunding of local populations. As such, the article and many of those with similar narratives fall flat in truly understanding the housing crisis.

It is evident that while the middle-class white youth, similar to their 60s predecessors, were fascinated by aspects of poverty, they did very little to connect with the neighboring population. Moreso, they were able to transgress these borders and make claims on their land all

⁶⁴ Gottsfield and Ramsey, p. 7

while using black and brown bodies for their art. Even with attempts to speak about the ills of the Lower East Side, their art and their descriptions of the neighborhood caused tension as well as invitation for gentrification.

Chapter 4: Sensationalism As Gentrifying Force

After the artistic counterculture that enticed early gentrifiers who were mostly white artists, popular discussions in the political arena soon decided to weaponize it as a means of clearing the area. What was once alluring soon became a threat to real estate development as the out-of-state artists moved from aestheticizing poverty to challenging further real estate development in their art installations and music. The city then made a clear distinction between gentrifiers, those who outgrew their stay and those who needed to be protected. As such, the upper class who attempted to move-in did not share the same rejection of white middle-class values and allowed for further displacement to take place following the breakthrough made by the early gentrifiers. This was evident in the turf battles between state and squatters over not only reclaimed tenement buildings but also public spaces such as Tompkins Square Park. As such, the eruption of the Tompkins Square Riot of 1988 was the accumulation of past conflicts between police and squatters. As a result of evictions from the surrounding area and the diminishing numbers of affordable housing units, Tompkins Square Park became the home to a tent city. While there were squats willing to house the homeless, there was not enough space and as such most of the homeless have called the tent city in Tompkins their home.

Such spaces include Bullet Space, an art center within the Umbrella House squat. Bullet Space was founded in 1986 after the owners, Andrew and Paul Castrucci, were unable to pay the rent for their art gallery on Avenue B.⁶⁵ Collective action and communal spaces in squat settlements were public declarations of space reclamation from wealthy neglectful landlords through land occupation. Within these spaces emerged graffiti art containing motifs that were to “intimidate” potential buyers from trying to buy their buildings. Tags included “mug a yuppie,”

⁶⁵ Ferguson, p. 152

“gentrification is class war,” and “your house is mine.”⁶⁶ Similarly, the Rivington School had also emerged as a public art space that occupied an abandoned lot as to exclaim an unwillingness to let go of their claim to the Lower East Side. The art sculptures made of scrap metal and follow no particular format to standard art stood in sharp contrast to the image of a clean-cut Lower East Side that real estate developers wanted to portray. In the face of gentrification, this stood as a threat to potential buyers that their presence was not welcomed in the Lower East Side.



Rivington Sculpture Garden with Ed Herman’s “flying figures,” circa 1986.
(Toyo Tsuchiya/Gallery 98)

⁶⁶ Mele, Christopher. “Globalization, Culture, and Neighborhood Change: Reinventing the Lower East Side of New York.” *Urban Affairs Review* 32, no. 1 (September 1996): 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107808749603200101>

The city first made its intentions clear to transform the Lower East Side from an artistic hub to an affluent commercial area when expressing concerns over the park with claims to public safety. In Mayor Koch's declaration to create a children's park in Tompkins Square Park, where adults can only enter in the accompaniment of a child. Koch described the current state of the park as a "cesspool" and hoped the increase in traffic would push out the homeless. He explained, "[Without attendants], then all you would have is... a new homeless motel, 'cause they would move in. I mean, it's just a fact of life, and you've got to understand it. Or if they didn't move in, they would tear the fixtures out and sell them"⁶⁷ Koch makes it explicit that the only recognized activity in the Lower East Side is commercial activity and is otherwise desolate without the presence of luxury real estate development. It also neglected the efforts made by squatters to address the withering conditions within these abandoned tenement buildings. This depiction of the anti-gentrification protests as against modernization and family values despite making its aims to make the spaces viable for low-income families to stay illustrates which families were important to city officials.

It was evident to locals in the area that it was not only about ensuring the homeless are off the street but embarking on a larger initiative to displace unwanted populations which is to say anyone who isn't a part of the upper middle-class. A university student explained, "It was not the homeless who fought the police. They were too busy trying to protect their stuff. It was the rest of us. It was the whole neighborhood. Why do you think they needed horses? Not to chase a bunch of homeless people with shopping bags." A SoHo waiter at an upscale restaurant commented, "As long as we let the homeless stay in the park nobody is going to invest big

⁶⁷ Purdum, Todd. "A Playground Where 'Derelicts' Can't Enter." August 20, 1998. Page 31. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/20/nyregion/a-playground-derelicts-can-t-enter.html?searchResultPosition=1>

money in the neighborhood.”⁶⁸ The inclination to have sympathy with the homeless was a reflection of their own housing instability. Like SoHo, the Lower East Side was becoming a tourist attraction and a neighborhood for the wealthy. However, the difference lies within how well the city could clear their streets.

Morality soon dominated the conflict over space in the Lower East Side, so much as to create a wave of satanic panic. As loosely connected incidents and surface-level analyses of scattered symbols and statements began circulating, a larger conspiracy arose. Stories of criminals bound by satanism and nazism ran about, further enforcing a narrative of degeneracy looming over the Lower East Side. By association with these tabloid hits, partially through inescapable proximity and the small social circle that existed in Tompkins Square Park, the squatting movement was defamed cast as illegitimate. The very counterculture at the Lower East Side that had once been hailed as an attraction had become weaponized against the residents and promoted even more upscale businesses. There were more calls for crackdowns and evictions to make way for the more desirable yuppie population.

Missing Foundation, an industrial punk band known for their left-wing politics and rambunctious crowds, were the designated scapegoats of a CBS News documentary featuring the Lower East Side titled “Cult of Rage” which followed the events of the Tompkins Protest of 1988. In this documentary, Missing Foundation were painted as instigators of unrest in the Lower East Side through satanism and unprompted immorality, claiming that “more than political sloganing” has been going on. The landlord, Yuri Balarovich, of the venue that they frequented noted there were gorish cult images, satanic ceremonial objects, drugs, bones, and supposedly a

⁶⁸ Marcus, Anthony, Where Have All the Homeless Gone?: The Making and Unmaking of a Crisis, Berghan Books, 2005, p. 128

jar of unknown bodily fluids speculated to be a mix of blood and innards.⁶⁹ Balarovich then went on to tell the filmmakers that Missing Foundation wrecked his basement and owed him three months worth of rent. He also claimed to have seen them performing on the day of the Tompkins Square Park riot, throwing bottles and starting a garbage fire.⁷⁰ However, it is important to note that contrary to Balarovich's claim, Missing Foundation did not perform on the day of the riot.⁷¹ Yet, the pinning of Missing Foundation as a group of deviants ruining the neighborhood and unwilling to pay rent was a part of the larger mischaracterization of the counterculture that rejected middle-class values and the expansion of luxury housing. Targeting said groups was a response to their own anti-gentrification agenda and such images were weaponized against them by the state as a means of undermining anti-capitalist messages that were emerging from the Lower East Side.

The "Cult of Rage" documentary also includes a brief interview with the future murderer and supposed cannibal, Daniel Rakowitz, who told the reporters that he had planned to "distract the cops" so rioters can assault the police. The year after the riot, the formerly homeless Rakowitz was arrested for the death of his partner, Monica Beerle, a Swiss dance student, after she attempted to kick him out of their apartment. In retaliation, Rakowitz strangled her, mutilated her body, supposedly made soup out of her flesh, and abandoned her skeletal remains in a locker. Rakowitz, formerly homeless, drug-addicted, infatuated with Nazi propaganda, fit the image of an untamed Lower East Side. Experiencing symptoms of mania during the investigation, Rakowitz himself also provided different recollections of the crime, some of them included supposed cult members. This not only alerted the media but also the city itself. To present the

⁶⁹ H Feldman, "Cult of Rage - 1988 Missing Foundation news report - Part 2," 02:49, November 21, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xm-frig3ldY>

⁷⁰ H Feldman, 04:41

⁷¹ Ward, J. James. " 'This is Germany! It's 1933!' Appropriations and Constructions of 'Facism' in New York Punk/Hardcore in the 1980s." *Journal of Popular Culture*; Oxford Vol. 30, Iss. 3, (Winter 1996): 155-184. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/195362253/fulltext/6186429D61E24401PO/1?accountid=10226>

Lower East Side as being consumed by vandalism and satanic rituals gave city officials even more moral authority to step in. They were applauded not as a gentrifying force but as peace-makers who would quell the immorality that emerged from the squatting movement.

One of the suspects was Randy Easterday, a member of the “Church of Realized Fantasy” which Rakowitz used to frequent.⁷² This supposed “church” was no more than a drug operation led by Michael Ellis Cezar, known by locals as “Mickey the Pope” or the “Pope of Pot,”⁷³ Mickey the Pope also participated in the early days of squatting and drug pushing on East Eleventh Street.⁷⁴ Yet this did not stop tabloids from letting their imaginations run wild with reports of the Church being “involved in devil worship, human sacrifice and the use of psychedelic drugs.” This led people to connect the grisly crime with anarchism for they were an active part in the tent city propped in Tompkins Square Park, contributing to the chaotic monolithic image.⁷⁵ In the madness, the D.A. also had their eyes on Patrick Geoffrois as a suspected accomplice and “fellow black magician” of Rakowitz. However, Geoffrois adamantly denied ever interacting with Rakowitz.⁷⁶ It had been evident that the sensationalization of the case managed to incriminate many prominent figures in the Lower East Side, so much so as to taint their image and the very goals they had in ensuring an everlasting squat.

The use of the politically weak as a means of asserting the city’s political agenda through the Rakowitz case was evident in the ways that they recruited supposed witnesses that would

⁷² Vscorpiozine, “Daniel Rakowitz - The Butcher of Tompkins Square Park,” 20th Century Murder: A True Crime Blog and Podcast, May 1, 2020,

<https://20thcenturymurder.home.blog/2020/05/01/daniel-rakowitz-the-butcher-of-tompkins-square-park/>

⁷³ Sager, Mike, “The High Life and the Strange Times of the Pope of Pot,” Rolling Stone, June 13th, 1991, <https://www.maryellenmark.com/bibliography/magazines/article/rolling-stone/the-high-life-and-the-strange-times-of-the-pope-of-pot-637526316671729809/R>.

⁷⁴ Starecheski, 58

⁷⁵ Elwell, Gay, “Fantasies Church Called Cult, With Marijuana Its Sacrament,” The Morning Call, February 12, 1992, <https://www.mcall.com/news/mc-xpm-1992-02-19-2841185-story.html>

⁷⁶ Patterson, Clayton, “Cops Were Spellbound By Idea of Magician as Killer,” amNY, March 1, 2012, <https://www.amny.com/news/cops-were-spellbound-by-idea-of-magician-as-killer/>

allow for the legitimacy of doubt across squatting centers in the Lower East Side. There has been a report made by a homeless man living in Tompkins Square Park's tent city claiming that Rakowitz had fed them soup made out of Beerle's flesh, finding a human thumb in his bowl. This rumor had never been verified with physical evidence. Patterson probes the earnestness in this response, claiming that the source in question was a "habitual criminal witness" who was known for providing statements to prosecutors for a reduction in prison sentences.⁷⁷ Yet, this witness statement had invited the police investigation to go even deeper within the squats and Tompkins Square. What had once been a conflict about housing became a hunt for the mentally unstable and cruel criminals. Sensationalization in the Lower East Side acted as another gentrifying force that would doom the Lower East Side.

The news pushed squatters to make a statement as it was interfering with their calls to establish the legitimacy of their squats. Squatters were adamant in shutting down the image that was being depicted by the media that mixed stretched out truths with fantastical fiction. In a statement released by the Lower East Side Squatter Community, they stated:

We believe the city must be stopped from selling off our vacant land for luxury development that only a few can possibly afford. The vast majority of local people are, in fact, low-income people. Therefore we demand an overall plan be developed for the Lower East Side by the people of the Lower East Side.⁷⁸

The need to clarify the purpose behind the squats to the general public who possibly not from the Lower East Side or have come in contact with the squats made it clear that the lack of the had come from increased pressure to vacate these properties. This was only exacerbated by the sensationalization that came out of the Rakowitz murder.

⁷⁷ Patterson, Clayton, "The Case of 'The Butcher of Tompkins Square Park'," amNY, February 12, 2012, <https://www.amny.com/news/the-case-of-the-butcher-of-tompkins-square-park/>

⁷⁸ Van Kleunen, Andrew, "The Squatters: A Chorus of Voices...But is Anyone Listening?" *From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side*, Ed. Abu-Lughod, Janet L. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1994, Print.

As we have seen in this chapter, criminality and moral panic gave legitimacy to the urban elite in gentrifying the Lower East Side. Weaponizing a once fascinating counterculture as it turned against gentrifiers themselves had indicated that the earlier gentrifiers were no longer needed in the gentrification efforts. The Rakowitz case in many ways echoed the same concerns and resentment that arose from the Groovy Murders. Akin to Linda Fitzpatrick, Beerle's presence as a white woman who had willingly settled into the city as an international student only to be killed by an "undesirable" made way for city initiatives that seek to criminalize the entire neighborhood. In these policies and media depictions, there is a clear preference for the wealthy who are capable of maintaining these rents which is also spurred by the image of soiled white femininity. As such, the media, the urban elite, and the police worked in tangent to gentrify the Lower East Side.

Chapter 5: Legitimacy Through Selective Screening

By the start of the 90s, there was increased pressure by the city to remove squats and other aspects of white counterculture from the sociopolitical landscape altogether. At this time the racial breakdown of LES squats was 50% white, 20% Latino, 23% African-American, 2% Asian, and 5% other or mixed. In many instances, the public discourse shifting from primarily political actors of color to white squatters had indicated a change in the way both government and private investors began framing what is appropriate use of public spaces and tenement buildings. Rather than the previous emphasis on art as an attraction that was present in the 70s and 80s, there was now a change in target demographic for real estate development, young white-collared professionals. This was reflected in the city's desire for order and safety for the white middle-class family unit. The mention of Puerto Ricans in popular discussion continued to accessorize them but for the legitimization of squats led by whites who were first wave gentrifiers.

Antonio Pagan, former housing developer and conservative Democratic politician, one of the most notorious opponents against the existence of squats, had implored the irony of middle-class whites living in squats. In a statement released to the press, Pagan implored, “Antonio Pagan, housing developer turned politician, conservative Democrat, gay and Latino, said that “No one should have a God-given right to public property. The infamous minority creating havoc around Tompkins Square Park are living out their revolutionary fantasies. They are white, middle-class young people from the suburbs hiding behind the banner of helping the homeless”⁷⁹ The concept of the undeserving poor had allowed for the targeting of first wave

⁷⁹ Nieves, Evelyn. 1991. “Squatters and Friends March, but Tompkins Sq. Is Weary.” New York Times , October 13, sec. N.Y./Region.

gentrifiers and immediately called for a means of legitimizing their efforts by associating themselves with low-income groups in the neighborhood.

One of the largest issues people identified against legitimizing squats was how disconnected they were with the native New York population who had increasing conflicts with the pre-existing Puerto Rican population. In comparison to the overwhelmingly white and middle-class participants who were “willingly homeless,” the native Nuyorican population found themselves at odds with their lack of mobility and fixed location. In informally organized community gardens managed by Puerto Ricans known as Casita gardens, there was an unwillingness to communicate with the increasingly white, middle-class population who sought to direct the way they organized. Doña Remedios, an eighty-year old woman and Loisaida resident, explained why she carried a bat with her to repel the waves of white outsiders:

Juanito let in a blanquito at the [garden] one on [Avenue] C. Well that blanquito took the whole garden away from Juanito. One came in, a blanco, that brought another, that one brought another, they went on like that and Juanito was left without a garden after so many years of sacrifice. Like fleas, one of them comes in and we Hispanics don't know much English so Pah! Pah! Pah! We get thrown to one side. You see how it is? When they come in, oh boy!... If one of them tries to push in here, los blancos, I'm here with my bat. I know how to get rid of them.⁸⁰

By the 90s, the city passed a moratorium that limited the leasing of lots as gardens to urban farmers.⁸¹ Additionally, there were efforts to build community gardens in abandoned spaces.

While most of the community gardens in New York City are situated in low-income neighborhoods with a predominantly Latino population, 90% of the managing groups (such as Green Guerillas or non-profits) are white.⁸² The hostile response from Doña Remedios was that

⁸⁰ Martinez, Miranda J., Power at the Roots : Gentrification, Community Gardens, and the Puerto Ricans of the Lower East Side, p. 56, 2010.

⁸¹ Schmelzkopf, Karen. “Urban Community Gardens as Contested Space.” *Geographical Review* 85, no. 3 (1995): p. 377. <https://doi.org/10.2307/215279>.

⁸² Schmelzkopf, p. 376

out of knowing the truth of inviting white insiders in spaces that are led by groups with less bargaining power. Local Puerto Ricans' rejection of white squatters in their spaces had echoed the disconnect between the two groups.

Amid the debate between homesteaders and the city, people of color continued to be largely accessorized and absent from mainstream conversations despite their important role in the squatting. Puerto Rican doubt of the overwhelmingly white homesteaders had seemed well-founded as many homesteaders sought the recruitment of people of color based on (X) rather than equal partnership. Homesteaders disregarded their connection with the neighborhood as valuable information, if there was one at all. As such, latino recruitment came across as virtue signaling and hid the intentions of bolstering their legitimacy in the public sphere. David Boyle, founder of the Thirteenth Street Homesteaders Coalition, said:

The little old lady [whom Marisa helped out] was Puerto Rican, but the problem was we took her from an Upper Manhattan neighborhood. We couldn't find anybody who fit the bill to rent locally. That's the thing, it's that a lot of the people that we were looking to recruit were Latino, they already had a pretty good deal. They had an apartment. You talk to them and there's nothing in their interest to get involved with us and work hard. We had to go farther afield, and then those people, even though they reflected the element we were looking for in our community, they weren't from our community. So even though they get the space, they didn't add anything to the social milieu that would promote more people - you know, if you got somebody in who had a family up the block, their family would be in all the time and you would meet their friends and they would be the doorkeeper that would identify which friends were really good. We were operating with little information.⁸³

Rather than emphasize their connection to the neighborhood, Boyle had hoped to have them used as a part of a vetting process. Carla Cubit, a former resident of the Thirteenth Street Homesteaders Coalition, recalled never feeling animosity yet feeling as though she were the token black person to combat claims that the homesteaders were "willingly homeless white people."⁸⁴ People wanted to recruit more people from the area and barred people who were white

⁸³ Starecheski, p. 85-86.

⁸⁴ Starecheski, 76

and outside of New York when they themselves were white and outside of New York was an ironic attempt to solidify their legitimacy within the scene.⁸⁵

There was a tendency to emphasize the impact of “squatting experts” from Western Europe, such as Berlin and Madrid, to guide these squats in their battle for ownership.⁸⁶ Yet, the narratives of calling for foreign experts rather than locals also contributed to the alienation of local Puerto Ricans and blacks. As movement spokesperson, Rolando Politi, explained, there needed to be a front presented to the politicians that they were unable to utilize from their own neighborhood. He stated, “... I remember it was Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, very raw people, very hard culturewise - cutting chicken heads, that sort of stuff. So there’s really no connection to what we a few years earlier have started to do, like a housing movement to rebuild for families under threat of gentrification.”⁸⁷ The approach that seasoned squatters had towards minorities was that of indifference and even speculation. There was little done to approach and collaborate with them. Rather, they focused on managing their own squats and their own projects independently from Loisaida. This indicates the presence of two competing groups within the same area.

Thus the strained relationship between locals and Puerto Ricans as well as other minority groups were intensified as they were only approached as means of legitimizing their own initiatives. Additionally, minority groups felt as if their own work was under threat by the approach of whites. By rejecting whites from entering their spaces, Puerto Ricans were working on fighting against gentrification altogether. This illustrates the historical dispute between the two groups and highlights the role of white artists in the Lower East Side.

⁸⁵ Starecheski, 78

⁸⁶ Starecheski, 58.

⁸⁷ Starecheski, 85

Chapter 6: Whose Land: Tompkins Square Park as the Final Frontier (90s)

The eviction of squatters, which consisted of mostly people who sought affordable housing in the neighborhood, were depicted as being in the way for the neighborhood's common good. Politicians and news outlets alike have worked in tangent to ensure that squats were unable to claim authority. Similarly to the artists, their claim to the building was illegitimate in the face of real estate developers and urban planners who were capable of providing to the needs of the neighborhood. However, it undermined the work done in the squats to serve the neighborhood. Additionally, with the bargaining power of the second-wave middle class, there served no purpose to hold on these abandoned tenements. The reclamation of squats by the city had indicated the complete takeover of gentrifiers and the limited ability of housing activists to ensure that their work is withstanding. As such, the decline of squatter legitimacy had signaled the takeover of real estate developers in community displacement.

The threat of losing the squats that lined the streets of East 13th street had ushered in an era that would call for squats to take to the front lines. The unwillingness to negotiate with the city council had them labeled as “out-of-touch” and “selfish” in the eyes of the media, even butting heads with homesteaders who were aiming for legal recognition as low-income housing rather than an independent commune. One particular instance was documented for the disruption of committee meetings for affordable housing. One newspaper, written by an opponent against squatter’s rights and as someone who has worked in a homesteading project, observed the actions of squatters against the state. The author had criticized squatters for raiding a community board meeting in the East Village with stink bombs and trashcan drums while standing in the way of legal housing for “low and moderate-income families.”⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Leelike, Susan, “The Bullies of the East Village,” New York Times, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/11/13/nyregion/soapbox-the-bullies-of-the-east-village.html?searchResultPosition=6>

Likewise, city officials in the neighborhood due to an unwillingness to even speak with government officials. Following the opposition to the construction of single room occupancy housing for single homeless elderly people, many found themselves to be doubtful of the earnestness of squatters. Elaine Chen, Budget Coordinator of the Lower East Side Joint Planning Council, wrote in her public letter that a squatter supposedly told her “that a tree that needed to be cleared should not be cut as it will last forever, but the senior citizens will die.” In response, she proposes council control over the area, “Given the increase in homelessness and limited resources of land and money, we need to work together as a community for the best possible plan. Those who are not part of the solution are part of the problem.”⁸⁹ Yet, it is apparent that what the city had opted as the ideal solution for upraising the remaining low-income populations in the Lower East Side sought to deprive them of the agency that was once observed in the 70s. Political actors such as Elaine Chen failed to realize that the arguments raised by the squatters came from the lack of ownership the state had given them.

By 1994, the squats of East 13th Street were on the verge of eviction. Antonio Pagan intended to eradicate the squats and replace them with low-income housing that would require an individual to make a minimum income of \$13,800 for a studio apartment. This would be overseen by a nonprofit under Pagan’s rule, the Lower East Side Coalition Housing Development. However, that set income had exceeded the average income of the Lower East Side and would increase housing instability.⁹⁰ It was evident that Pagan had no intention to allow squatters to reside in the Lower East Side and, like many other politicians who lined themselves with real estate developers, hoped to displace the community with a more affluent population.

⁸⁹ Chen, Elaine, “Lower East Side Squatters Block Community Housing Projects,” New York Times, November 29, 1989, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/427417457?accountid=10226&pq-origsite=summon>

⁹⁰ Luna

While squatters of the building had wanted to preserve what they had built in the past few years, by looking to find legal means of legitimization, it had illustrated the limitations of squatting as resistance to gentrification. Under the claim of lack of available housing to be designated as low-income housing and the structural instability of the squats, the city had won total control over the squats. However, as architect Jim Morgan had noted, the foundations of the squats were not under threat of collapse. Rather the large investment in getting the squatters out of the building, a hefty three-million dollars, spoke of long-term investment in being able to get profit out of clearing the neighborhood.⁹¹ Thus when considering the motives behind the claims of real estate developers and the city, it is evident that the primary motive was financial.

Additionally, the city had also claimed that the squats had to be reclaimed for nonprofit use as well as other programs that would serve the community. However, this would undermine the grassroots organizations that were developed by people in the neighborhood. Peter Spagnuolo, squatter activist, had observed the city's efforts to remove squats and replace them with non-profits as a part of a larger initiative to invite private funds through non-profits as a means of accelerating gentrification efforts. Spagnuolo explained,

When the first hints of re-development started, they were public-private joint ventures, leveraging newly available financial power from private and federal sources through these putatively non-profit groups like Enterprise Foundation and LISC. The property to be used invariably came from the city's deep store of seized tenements and lots, which it had amassed during the dis-investment years, by means of the in-rem forfeiture program.⁹²

When taking into consideration the aspects in which Pagan had set aside unattainable "affordable housing" for the neighborhood, it is evident that the city had opted to use moral authority as a

⁹¹ Morgan, Jim, "World Housing Crisis Gives Rise to Squatters; No Danger of Collapse," New York Times, 1995, <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/06/03/opinion/1-world-housing-crisis-gives-rise-to-squatters-no-danger-of-collapse-005800.html>

⁹² Luna

front for community displacement. As such, the invocation of a refusal to set aside for the arrival of city non-profits was to diminish the power of the squats through privatization. Notably, when the city did succeed in the removal of a squat, the city had failed to meet their end of the bargain. In the case of the Glasshouse Squat in 1996, the housing for people with AIDs never was established.⁹³

The fall of squats was defined when the UHAB had given squats the ultimatum of either getting kicked out now becoming tenants in low-income housing. Only 11 squats were able to make this deal.⁹⁴ With mixed feelings, the squatters who were able to secure this deal were proud of being able to secure some affordable housing. However, the larger vision of challenging the encroaching gentrification allowed for a small victory.

As we have seen, the lack of agency given to squatters and the erasure of the community building that they have had allowed for the privatization and unequal compromises. Yet, it is also with their ability to band together that they have been able to secure at least a small portion of low-income housing in the neighborhood.

⁹³ Thayer, Ash, Kill City: Lower East Side Squatters 1992-2000, powerHouse Books, 2015, p. 113

⁹⁴ Ross, Leila, "Squatting in The City," *Deserted NYC*, 2014, <https://desertednyc.nycitynewsservice.com/2014/05/02/squatting-in-the-city/>

Conclusion

The strive to maintain places of affordable housing in the Lower East Side continue to linger to this day. Across the Lower East are traces of what the squatting movement left behind, co-ops who now must pay rent but are allowed to stay in the neighborhood for an affordable price. However, there are also many condos that have been built or are being built that cost millions, threatening the accessibility of the Lower East Side.

The othering of locals and the temporary inclusion of said locals as a means of promoting a capitalistic agenda had worked to create racial tensions and distrust between older tenants and newcomers. The gentrification of the Lower East Side resulted from the efforts of white gentrifiers from the suburbs as well as the real estate developers and urban planners who continued to shape the Lower East Side as an affluent neighborhood. Pre-existing populations, such as impoverished Puerto Ricans, were cast as non-citizens by both real estate developers who only sought their labor when landlords neglected their buildings. Puerto Ricans were also accessorized by white transplants in the neighborhood who were adamant on creating a counterculture that goes against middle-class values.

In the hands of real estate developers, white gentrifiers, and politicians, the Lower East Side had been transformed into the East Village. With local objection to the expansion of gentrification, it must be recognized to which extent that the pre-existing cries for affordable housing has also been usurped by white transplants. While squatting in buildings has always been an option when faced with housing shortages on par with an abundance of abandoned buildings for locals who had no means of leaving the neighborhood, first wave gentrifiers also worked to establish the legitimacy of squats. Whether it is out of a desire to establish affordable

housing for artists or to work in tandem against large-scale gentrification, it is evident among locals that their claim to the neighborhood is dubious.

When addressing why they feel so attached to their neighborhood, first-wave gentrifiers cite their arrival in an undeveloped neighborhood as a sign of commitment. In an interview, a white artist elaborated that it was to their “pioneering work” that they were able to salvage the neighborhood from Wall Street.⁹⁵ As Ocejo points out, the augmentation of nightlife and other commercial venues reveals the neighborhood as a place of entertainment rather than accessible housing. Looking at the demographic information regarding nightclubs, nightclubs have doubled from 35 in 1985 to 76 in 1995 before doubling once again to 144 in 2000 and increasing to 177 in 2005.⁹⁶

Gentrifiers neither acknowledge nor are aware of their complicity with the neighborhood gentrification for it is their arrival that allowed real estate prices to skyrocket as well as attract second-wave gentrifiers. Some artists refused to recognize their role in gentrifying the neighborhood and shifted the blame to the second wave. Artist Penny Arcade made a defensive statement regarding the shifting populations in the Lower East Side, “But the truth is that we moved into these slums without ever having the need to or desire to open a cute café or boutique. We lived among the neighbors as they did.”⁹⁷ Like other first-wave gentrifiers, claim to the neighborhood came from their attraction to the Lower East Side in its slum state. As can be seen in the art exhibits and the way artists took hold of squats when they were eventually kicked out for luxury housing, these artists have never intended to invite en masse gentrification. Yet, their

⁹⁵ Ocejo, Richard E, “The Early Gentrifier: Weaving a Nostalgia Narrative on the Lower East Side,” *City & Community* 10, no. 3 (September 2011): 285–310. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6040.2011.01372.x>, p. 289

⁹⁶ Ocejo, p. 292.

⁹⁷ Schulman, p. 30

role in allowing for even more real estate interest is vital in the gentrification of the Lower East Side.

Ryan and Deutsche explored artists' claim to the land as aligned with that of real estate developers and urban planners. Overlooking their "bohemian posturing," they have created the East Village and the critics and curators have legitimized them. They finish the thought by raising a point, "To deny this complicity is to perpetuate one of the most enduring, self-serving myths in bourgeois thought..."⁹⁸ It is undoubtedly true that they took part in the gentrification by becoming the "willing homeless" but they have also banded together to fight for affordable housing. In order to contemplate what allows for the call for affordable housing to be genuine, it is the desire to work together as a neighborhood against forces that desire to displace the community for profit.

⁹⁸ Deutsche and Ryan, p. 102

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