

the forces of suburbanization sapped both of their vitality. The apartheid that characterized urban America surely characterized Harlem as well and appeared to be the fate of Clinton Hill, too. Both neighborhoods came to take on black identities and with that all of the history of struggle and maltreatment that has been the fate of black neighborhoods in modern America. Attempts at urban renewal while improving the housing conditions of some failed to stem the decline of these neighborhoods after World War II. Yet in their grand beginnings the seeds of revival lay dormant, bursting through when conditions were ripe. Clinton Hill began its renaissance before declining as far as Harlem did. But Harlem followed, so that by the turn of the century gentrification was in full sway in both neighborhoods. And for both of these neighborhoods, gentrification did not mean the end of their black identity, rather, it was their black identity that in some ways contributed to their revival.

This is the historical context of Clinton Hill and Harlem that served to color residents' reactions to the gentrification swirling about them.

### 3 There Goes the 'Hood

THE ABHORRENCE WITH WHICH gentrification is viewed in many circles is illustrated clearly by the results of an online search of the term *gentrification*, which turned up the following:

The term is often used negatively, suggesting the displacement of poor communities by rich outsiders. (Grant 2003)

"They're pushing poor people out of the city and in the process breaking up the power bases of their struggle," he says. "It's gentrification, but you could also almost call it apartheid by both race and class." (Lydersen 1999)

As such, gentrification is almost always a displacement of poor residents to remote and less economically favored areas with similar substandard housing, and a theft of public and private resources from other poorer neighborhoods which deserve to be improved for the people who already live there, and should be understood and resisted as such. (Dixon 1998)

These snippets are illustrative of the popular wisdom of gentrification as anathema. It is a process that benefits the haves to the detriment of the have-nots. It is a continuation of the history of marginalized groups being oppressed by the more powerful. And always, gentrification leads to the displacement of poor marginalized groups.

Outside of the Ivory tower, *gentrification* has become a dirty word, at least outside of real estate interests and city boosters. Although initial reports of gentrification in the 1970s tended to be favorable, this view was quickly erased by ongoing concerns about displacement and class conflict thought to be inherent in the gentrification process. Community-based organizations often sprung up to combat gentrification (McGee 1991). For example, in my neighborhood a community-based organization sponsors an annual antigentrification block party. As early as 1985, the Real Estate Board of New York felt it necessary to take out a full-page ad in a paper defending the positive benefits of gentrification. A nonprofit research, communications, capacity building, and advocacy organization at one time had an antigentrification Web site.

The political economy approach portrays gentrification much the same way. This school of thought typically portrays moneyed real estate interests, yuppies, and government elites as the beneficiaries of gentrification. Through gentrification, the political economy critique has it, yuppies gain access to space that is conveniently located to downtown employment

and cultural amenities. Real estate interests profit by speculating on previously marginal properties. Government elites see a rise in their tax base and perhaps a decline in social services needs associated with the poor. Smith and LeFavre (1984, p. 17) write:

Thus the benefits of gentrification appear to accrue to the capitalist class, defined as those who own and control capital for the purpose of investing it for profit or interest, as well as to the middle class in general, who are the beneficiaries not only of new living space but also of profitable, if comparatively small investments.

My conversations with residents of Clinton Hill and Harlem, however, reveal a more nuanced reaction toward gentrification. If gentrification were a movie character, he would be both villain and knight in shining armor, welcome by some and feared and loathed by others, and even dreaded and welcomed at the same time by the same people.

A positive reaction to gentrification was a clear theme that emerged during my conversations with residents of Clinton Hill and Harlem. Some of the positive reactions were based on narrow economic self-interests. Especially in Clinton Hill, where many of the respondents were homeowners or cooperative owners, the escalating housing prices increased the return on their housing investment substantially. Renee grew up in a nearby public housing project moved into a Clinton Hill coop in the mid-1990s. (The names and some identifying characteristics of the people quoted in this book have been changed to protect their anonymity.) Since then she has been considering purchasing her apartment, lamenting the opportunities lost:

1999, 2000 things turned around, the co-op stabilized a lot, and we began to attract, uh, what we call a different market. In 1999 apartments here sold, one-bedroom apartments, sold for maybe \$35, \$40, \$45,000. That's when I should have made my move. Today that same apartment will sell for \$160,000. Little sleep for an apartment.

Or, consider the experience of James, a man in his forties who grew up in nearby Bedford-Stuyvesant and attended college for a few years before settling in East New York as an adult. He moved into Clinton Hill at the age of twenty-eight: "I paid \$18,000 in cash for my apartment in 1988. Now this unit would go for a couple of hundred thousand dollars. That's because people are coming from areas that are even more expensive." For these homeowners, gentrification has been a boon. Whatever their discomfort about whites moving in, increased police protection, or other facets of neighborhood change, it would be impossible for them to ignore the economic benefits associated with gentrification.

That homeowners would stand to benefit from gentrification is an obvious if sometimes overlooked result of gentrification. Moreover, because

of disinvestment in these neighborhoods, housing prices in the past were extremely depressed. Those who purchased in earlier years were not necessarily affluent but now stand to reap a considerable windfall should they decide to sell their property. To some degree this is happening for people who were fortunate to become homeowners in Clinton Hill and Harlem. Naturally some people are enthusiastic about this facet of gentrification. Barbara is a graduate student who moved to Harlem seven years ago. She was initially a renter, but her building turned into a cooperative several years ago. She summed up how the recent changes in Harlem were affecting her personally: "To sum it up I am experiencing the changes, I'm rolling with the punches. I'm excited about the possibility of making money. And I look at this as an investment—I'll be making money from my apartment."

The increase in housing values for homeowners of Clinton Hill and Harlem is clearly a good thing for these homeowners. Given the paltry homeownership rate in Harlem as shown in table 1.1, however, the economic benefits of gentrification are unlikely to accrue to many Harlem residents. In contrast, in Clinton Hill, where there is a substantial presence of black homeowners, these economic benefits are meaningful. Indeed, in recent years much has been made of the vast inequalities in wealth between blacks and whites. It has been pointed out that the disparity in wealth is much larger than the income disparity, and much of this difference has been laid at foot of unequal housing values (Oliver and Shapiro 1995). Oliver and Shapiro (1995, p. 147) write:

In general, homes of similar design, size, and appearance cost more in white communities than in black or integrated communities. Their value also rises more quickly and steeply in white communities. . . . Whether or not discrimination is intended, the racial housing-appreciation gap represents part of the price of being black in America.

Conley (1999) has also pointed out the costs of differences in wealth accumulation due in part to lower housing appreciation among blacks. These increases in home equity, particularly in Clinton Hill where much of the property is owned by blacks, are perhaps a long time coming.

That homeowners who moved into gentrifying neighborhoods would benefit from gentrification is perhaps not surprising even if this fact is relatively overlooked among commentators. But the economic benefits stemming from increased property values for homeowners was hardly the most prevalent source of goodwill expressed toward gentrification. More prevalent and perhaps more surprising was the reaction of some long-term residents to other aspects of gentrification. Many residents appreciated the improvements in amenities and services. Gentrification often brings to mind yuppies and the upscale specialty shops that serve them,

leaving the impression that these services would do little for long-term residents. To some extent this characterization is accurate, but it is not always complete. The changes taking place in Clinton Hill and Harlem in some ways might be perceived as the normalization of commercial activity in these neighborhoods after decades of disinvestment. A supermarket with decent produce, a drugstore, and a moderately priced restaurant are amenities taken for granted in many neighborhoods but were in short supply in inner-city areas like Clinton Hill and Harlem.

Associating increased retail activity with gentrification does beg a chicken-or-egg type of question. Is the arrival of a Duane Reade drugstore really a sign of gentrification? In recent years there has been a revival of many depressed inner-city neighborhoods (Von Hoffman 2003). When this revival occurs either in a hot market, a neighborhood with an attractive housing stock, or a neighborhood with a good location, gentrification will often accompany the revival. Certainly higher-income residents make the opening of a store like Duane Reade more attractive. Likewise, the presence of basic stores and amenities like a Duane Reade certainly make inner-city neighborhoods more attractive to those we might classify as the gentry. Although a Duane Reade certainly could

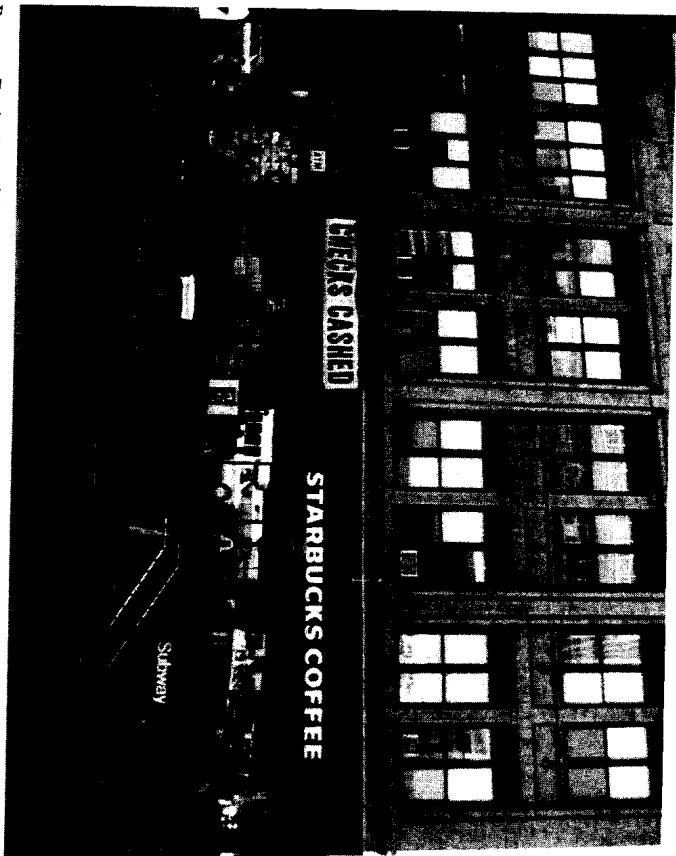


PHOTO 7. A sign of the old and new. A check cashing place, common sight in low-income neighborhoods, abutting a Starbucks, a ubiquitous symbol of gentrification.

open without gentrification, the arrival of higher-income residents and other kinds of investment make the arrival of these types of investment more likely to occur. Certainly residents of these neighborhoods considered all of the improvements as part of the package of gentrification—as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The lack of retail amenities is not only an inconvenience but may have significant effects on quality of life. Indeed, scholars in the United Kingdom have coined the phrase *food deserts* to describe neighborhoods where affordable and nutritious food is not readily available (Wrigley 2002). Instead of markets where fresh fruits and vegetables and other nutritious options are available, residents of many poor neighborhoods have to make do with corner stores with higher prices and fewer nutritious options. Some have linked residence in these food deserts to unhealthy lifestyles that contribute to morbidity and illness (Acheson 1998). Although evidence of food deserts in the United States is anecdotal, if their existence is an empirical reality, gentrification might make more nutritious food readily available and affect the health of poor residents in these neighborhoods. As will be shown shortly, several residents pointed to the improved availability of fresh produce and other grocery items as one of the more salient changes they associated with the changes in their neighborhood.

Aside from possible health implications, residents relished the options that gentrification afforded them. Juan is a mid-forties resident of west Harlem, where he has lived all of his life. He witnessed the waxing and waning of the neighborhood. The urban renewal programs, the heroin plagues, the crack epidemic, and the disinvestment that beset the neighborhood from the 1960s on. This disinvestment left the neighborhood with few satisfactory retail options. He is very cognizant of the changes in this area: "But, uh, as I was mentioning the things, there's a Fairway [a new supermarket]. You know. Uh, and that's terrific. Because the, you know they have a nice price range on things. If you want to buy something that is upscale it's there. If you wanted something reasonable it's good. But the quality is good." Tina is a single mother in her thirties native to Clinton Hill. As such she was born when the first stirrings of gentrification were beginning in parts of Clinton Hill, and when Myrtle Avenue, the main thoroughfare up the street, was called Murder Avenue. Her overall reaction to the changes was as follows:

I just like the change . . . and all the people. I really like the changes. You know, you get to see, different people, different stores being opened, even though those people's kind of snotty. Some of them are, some of them is kind of friendly, so . . . me and my kids go up on DeKalb Avenue to the different restaurants. Then, we went to the sushi restaurant. My son was like, what is this? I was like, let's just try it, 'cause I've never had it before.



PHOTO 8. New coffee/bakery shop on the once notorious "Murder" Avenue.

What is particularly surprising about Tina's response was her positive reaction to amenities like a sushi restaurant. This is the type of neighborhood change that many would assume would benefit only the newly arrived gentry. Tina's response suggests that this is not always the case. Her response should not be interpreted as indicating that all long-term residents are appreciative of the more boutique type of amenities that often accompany gentrification. Most residents did not mention such amenities, instead focusing on those that impacted their daily lives, such as supermarkets. A few were even openly hostile to restaurants that they viewed as being targeted for them. Terry, native of Harlem in his fifties, said, "We don't eat there. I went in there for a piece of cake and it was like four bucks! I can get a whole cake for four bucks. Obviously they don't want too many of us in there. We don't get down like that spending four dollars for a piece of cake, know what I'm saying?" Terry lives in the same public housing project where he was born and raised and provided the comments in response to a query about some of the new restaurants that had opened in the neighborhood. The prices, though standard for restaurants in New York, seemed outlandish to him and his peer group—"we don't get down like that." But for the most part, residents were appreciative of at least some of the changes taking

place in their neighborhood. Ms. James migrated to New York City from the South as a child and has been living in Clinton Hill for some forty years, since she was a teenager. She witnessed the decline of the neighborhood and is now witness to the change and seems amenable to these changes.

Now we have um, see, a lot of things changed in that community after the, the Warts rebellion. And then you had several of the many rebellions, okay, and each time that something like that would happen, things would change. It used to be all Italian merchants on Myrtle. But after the rebellions things was real tense. Then Italian merchants left um, when it became, when Clinton Hill became all black. You know the dairy, the drugstore, and the other things changed when it became um, a black community. One of the drug stores on Myrtle put in a Plexiglas all over, so, you could no longer go behind, um, you could no longer walk through and just pick up whatever you want. Stores was leaving or hiding behind Plexiglas. But it was bad. It was bad, but, when the man is being robbed every day. And they, they had a pharmacy underneath. It was this, this was robbed twice in one day. So could you blame them? So, now I like the stores. I think um, most of us the tenants who have been here for a long time are really delighted to see all of these things come back, because at one time when, we only had like the um, an Italian restaurant that was a, you know, and then they, when it got black they left, so, we didn't even have anything.

Carmen is a single mother of three who is native to Harlem. She expressed her appreciation of the improvements in shopping options this way: "More stores are coming, like downtown stores are in our neighborhood. Before I used to go downtown, 34th Street, 14th Street. I take the bus to 125th Street, you can find every store that you find downtown there. It's wonderful."

The convenience afforded by improved amenities and services was a constant theme in my conversations with residents of Clinton Hill and Harlem. To some degree, this speaks to the dearth of commercial activity that plagues many black communities like these. The exodus of people from many inner-city neighborhoods in the 1960s and 1970s was also accompanied by receding commercial activity. The civil unrest of the 1960s, red lining by financial institutions and insurers, and seeing their customer base steadily shrink caused commercial enterprises to flee neighborhoods like Clinton Hill and Harlem in the 1960s and 1970s. It was not uncommon for a supermarket or a video store to simply not exist in some neighborhoods. Being able to go to grocery shopping or eating out in one's neighborhood are things that are available in many middle-class and mostly white neighborhoods and are often taken for granted. This was not always the case in recent years in many black inner-city communities. Juanita is mid-thirties native of Harlem who

moved out to one of the outer boroughs after attending one of the CUNY schools. She has since returned to Harlem, where she now lives in her mother's rented apartment. Juanita's narrative illustrates how living in a commercial desert might predispose one to be somewhat receptive of gentrification.

Like the new stores, the shops and things of that nature, I appreciate that. Like I know there's a Pathmark that's opening up on 145th and 8th Avenue. That's like unheard of. I was really surprised at that, and then up the block, it's, uh, Duane Reed opening up. 'Cause we used to have the travel so far just to get prescriptions filled. 'Cause you're leaving from 8th Avenue and going, not, only ten blocks, but then you have to travel avenues further west to get to a pharmacy. So that'll be a lot more convenient.

Given this backdrop, it should come as no surprise that the respondents I spoke with often appreciated the improvements in amenities, even when they were suspicious of why additional amenities were being provided. Ms. Johnson is a native of South Carolina who migrated to Harlem in the 1940s. After living in several sections of Harlem, she now lives in an apartment building in central Harlem. Her perspective on the improving services and amenities was as follows:

MS. JOHNSON: But to me I think it's, it's helpful, because you see more policemen. They respond faster. So here to me, I enjoy the change in the neighborhood. Okay. As I, as I said, the supermarkets are different, and I don't see where it could hurt. I don't have no reaction, except that I think the improvement is for all the best. Well it's actually much better and since they've built it up it's much cleaner. Because with the empty lots, the people used to bring their garbage from all over, and there was all these rats would be around. Now they've built it up with new homes, so that I think the neighborhood looks better, and it's much cleaner. I don't see how it affects you know because as I've said we now have supermarkets, we always have transportation so that was one of the good thing about living in Harlem and now that we have better supermarkets and have much more umm—drugstores because I remember we went down to about one drugstore you had to walk about ten blocks to get to that one. And now we have drugstore all around the corners. So, I think it is more convenient, expensive but it is convenient.

LANCER: Okay. All right, is there anything else you think we should know about this neighborhood or how it is changing and how these changes might effect neighborhood residents?

MS. JOHNSON: Well I—I imagine everyone don't like it because we have other people living here. But to me it helps so because you have a better source of living. For example if they weren't here we would

have still had those old supermarkets with their dried out vegetable and spoiled meat—Where in now we don't have that. And they didn't do it because of us, because if they did it would have happened years ago. So to me they staying here it makes, doesn't make any difference. For us and it is better to me but then I can't speak for nobody but myself. Because I have some neighbors that despise it [laughs] but when I said to them—I said look at the supermarkets, look how nice and fresh the food, I think you go there and you can buy fresh vegetable like you can downtown. Well, we would go—and load them on the buses downtown in a better neighborhood to get fresh meat, fresh food, fresh vegetables, you don't have to do that now. But you know you can't please everybody. And so I only go and say what's best for me.

Ms. Johnson is an African American who clearly subscribes to the notion that the improvements taking place in Harlem were not for “us,” meaning blacks, but for “them,” meaning whites. As an African American myself, I feel confident that she was using our shared race to designate “us” in contrast to whites or “them.” Certainly other racial/ethnic groups have also been moving into Harlem, notably Latinos. But given the shared history of discrimination and disinvestment, especially in New York, it is probably safe to assume that she is referring to whites. Her view is ultimately pragmatic. Although the improvement in services in her mind reflects the discriminatory treatment black neighborhoods receives, she is more than happy to take advantage of these improvements. That residents would appreciate improved amenities, in hindsight, seems like common sense. Who wouldn't appreciate better stores in which to shop?

Increased commercial activity, however, has been derisively coined “Disneyfication.” Powell and Spencer write:

Gentrification transforms public spaces into privatized consumption spaces. Urban leaders, developers and economic elites provide a package of shopping, dining, and entertainment within a themed and controlled environment which some scholars call “Disneyfication” . . . This commodification of culture is perhaps most jarring in Harlem, where recent redevelopers have packaged race as culture and art, using frontier motifs to “tame” the neighborhood while keeping it exotic enough to attract consumers. (2003, pp. 443–44)

These critiques make valid points. Certainly the capitalist class continues to benefit from gentrification. A Disney Store has indeed opened on 125th Street (although it has since closed), the main thoroughfare in Harlem. Nonetheless, this does not mean that long-term residents will not witness any benefits. To be sure, some of the positive feelings toward gentrification were often ambivalent. This ambivalence often stemmed

from the disrespect residents felt their communities had experienced in the past, as discussed. But the fear that the neighborhood would lose some of its character because of rising prices also figured into the ambivalence that many people felt. Nate is a mid-forties native of Bedford-Stuyvesant who moved to Clinton Hill fifteen years ago. As such, he moved in when his section of the neighborhood was somewhat dicey. He was nevertheless attracted to the neighborhood because of its black identity and the fact that compared to other predominantly black areas in Brooklyn it was a “good” neighborhood. As a civil service worker he is solidly middle class but squeezed out of some New York’s pricier neighborhoods. He is thus ambivalent about the improvements to what he sees as an up and coming black neighborhood: “I am concerned about people leaving the area because it is too expensive. But I’m also happy. They will bring a stabilizing element in reference to police protection and many access to many resources. To me it’s like half and half. I see good and I see bad.” Other Harlem residents, though appreciative of the new stores, recognize some of the benefits of the older mom and pop stores.

CAROL: One of the not so good things is that I see a lot of mom and pop shops being moved out, forced out, you know, because of all the new, um, construction and high, high cost, you know, places, I guess all the real estate around, around those places are going out so people can’t afford their leases. You know, the laundry mat I used to go to on the corner that was there for so long, they put a super kind of laundry mat that stays open twenty-four hours right across the street and drove him out of business, and that’s one of the things that I think is kind of negative.

LANCE: So most of these stores are leaving because of the increases in the, in the costs?

CAROL: I think they can’t afford to pay. When you, when it’s time to renew the leases they can’t afford, and another thing is that they, you know, he’s in business in the case of the laundry mat, he’s losing business, it was a smaller place. So everybody’s going over to the larger place with the bigger machines and, you know, things of that nature. And to a certain degree I thought that although you can always use a lot of laundry mats in the neighborhood, to have them right across the street from the other, it seemed like the target was to force the little man out of business.

LANCE: All right. Could you talk a little bit more about why you think that’s a, a negative, um, because the, yeah—

CAROL: Well, because that’s a laundry mat that has been in the neighborhood for years owed by someone who lives in the neighborhood, and has always been supported by the neighborhood, and

then you have people that do not live in the neighborhood, the money’s not going back into the neighborhood, that’ll weaken benefits off the people in the neighborhood, so that’s why it’s kind of negative. And not being funneled in the community because the, the gentleman was very involved in different kind of things, uh, positive things, um, and you know, it wasn’t just about the money, I mean, it was about the neighborhood opposed to being just about the money.

As a native of Harlem in her late thirties, Carol is all too familiar with the lack of retail options in the neighborhood. She is well aware of the fact that the stores that did persist in Harlem through disinvestment were often small, lacked variety, and charged higher prices. Yet she is also aware that as mom and pop stores they often provided other services for the community. Terry, who was introduced before, elaborated on another potential drawback to the decline of the local mom and pop store:

If you look at the stores they used to be little mom and pop shops. You know? And these stores whenever we had a party or an event they would pitch in, soft drinks, a little money whatever. But now you’re seeing all these little boutiques and chains open, but they don’t give anything to the community. You know? If you go in there and ask them to contribute, it’s a problem. And the other thing is, we don’t see these new stores opening up hiring anyone from the community. Either they hire college students or someone from outside the community. You know?

This type of sentiment was most often expressed in Harlem, which has seen an influx of national chain stores that clearly are not indigenous to the community. Clinton Hill, in contrast, has not experienced such an influx, although nearby downtown Brooklyn has. This is a complaint hardly confined to gentrifying neighborhoods, as communities across the country have bemoaned the loss of the mom and pop stores while voting with their feet and patronizing the nearest Wal-Mart.

Despite these fears about the changing character of the neighborhood, my interviews clearly revealed a positive sentiment toward the gentrification taking place in their areas. Below are three examples from individuals that typify these positive feelings.

LANCE: Well, just to conclude how would you say the changes that are taking place are affecting your life there?

CAROL: The one thing that it has, it, the way I, you see, I’ve never really thought about, you know, like the idea of just paying rent. And having ownership or part whatever, you know, the co-op thing, ‘cause that’s another confusing thing for me, I’m but, part



PHOTO 9. Multifamily housing development in Clinton Hill that was converted to cooperatives in the 1980s.

shareholdership in something. And, that's a good thing, wanting to strive, it's making you want to strive to, to do those things. I'm feeling the changes and it's also made me appreciate my community a little more, and understand the strong history... within the community and the importance of maintaining that history and rebuilding. You understand?

MS. JONES: It makes me feel good. It makes me feel good. I feel, I feel safe, you know, I, you know, I kind of feel a little bit like back when we, when I first moved in now it's getting better.

MS. JOHNSON: But then you should, you can question yourself, you've been living someplace that nobody wanna live. So if other people wanna live there then there is something good about Harlem. And we have some nice places in Harlem

The narratives point to an appreciation for the improvement in the quality of life that was taking place. After years of seeing their community decline, improvements were welcome. Not surprisingly, this inspired

pride in some. This, after all, is their home. Why shouldn't residents of gentrifying neighborhoods want their home to be viewed as desirable and a place that others want to live?

The discourse on gentrification, however, has tended to overlook the possibility that some of the neighborhood changes associated with gentrification might be appreciated by the prior residents. Even apologists or boosters for gentrification often ignored the potential for the process to benefit existing residents. Early proponents of gentrification focused on the need to bring the middle class back to the city, the improved appearance of rehabilitated neighborhoods, and the strengthening of the tax base associated with gentrification. Detractors focused on displacement almost to the exclusion of any other impact that gentrification might have. Clearly the narratives expressed here are inconsistent with this depiction of gentrification as villain and suggest benefits extend beyond improving the tax base and attracting the middle class back to the city.

The context of inner-city decline in the latter part of the twentieth century is instructive in making sense of positive sentiments toward gentrification. This is especially true in Harlem, but to some extent in Clinton Hill as well. Many inner-city neighborhoods truly reached their nadir in the last decades of the twentieth century. Poor neighborhoods are nothing new. Since the advent of industrialization, slums, ghettos, or whatever we choose to call them have always been with us. But the ghettos of the late twentieth century were truly unique in some ways. They were unique in the extent to which so many people, institutions, and capital totally abandoned these neighborhoods. The Lower East Side of the late nineteenth century and even Harlem of the early twentieth century were famous for their density. They were places that no matter how deplorable their physical condition, which was worse in absolute terms than anything in recent decades, were still places of opportunity to the thousands of migrants who continued to pour into them. Although conditions were bad and there was a criminal underworld that flourished, poor neighborhoods were historically viewed as stepping stones to a better life. Moreover, these teeming masses, no matter how poor, were able to support bustling commercial districts.

In contrast, the slums of the late twentieth century are notorious for their depopulation. In the decade of the 1970s alone, Harlem lost nearly a third of its population. Like other depressed communities, commercial enterprises followed this out migration. Wilson (1987) has characterized the outmigration of residents from neighborhoods like Harlem as one that depleted these neighborhoods of middle-class residents who would form a social buffer in the event of economic decline. Although there is some debate about the characteristics of this type of decline, it undoubtedly included some of the most able members of the community.



This further weakened an already vulnerable community. When the crack epidemic hit in the 1980s, communities like Harlem were ill-prepared to cope. Thus, Harlem was a neighborhood that had experienced the flight of many of its residents, disinvestment, and widespread abandonment. Against this backdrop, positive reactions toward the improvements associated with gentrification in Harlem are perhaps not so surprising.

Clinton Hill, although suffering from some of the same maladies affecting neighborhoods like Harlem, never declined to the extent that Harlem did. Nevertheless, its proximity to poorer neighborhoods like Bedford-Stuyvesant and Bushwick may have tainted expectations about the neighborhood's ultimate trajectory before gentrification began. As a result, Clinton Hill also experienced decline and disinvestment during the 1970s.

The positive reactions toward gentrification described here suggest a rethinking of the impacts of gentrification may be in order. Clearly there are benefits that may accrue to residents of gentrifying neighborhoods who themselves would not normally be classified as gentrifiers. The lack of even basic services in many inner-city neighborhoods means that many will welcome at least some aspects of gentrification. This does not mean, however, that gentrification did not have its downsides or detractors. As one respondent aptly stated: "What good is a nice neighborhood if you can't live there?"

### FEARS OF DISPLACEMENT

More than any other aspect displacement is pointed to when the villainous nature of gentrification is discussed. For example, in her summary of the literature on gentrification, Writberg (1992) focuses on displacement when describing the potential negative impacts of the process. Moreover, some observers go so far as to define gentrification as the displacement of low-income households. A report by the Brookings Institution states that "gentrification requires the displacement of lower income residents from their neighborhoods" (Kennedy and Leonard 2001, p. 5). Defined as a household having to move for reasons beyond its control, displacement can indeed be traumatic. Moreover, in cities like New York where housing is scarce, displacement can threaten households with homelessness. Given the potential havoc that displacement can wreak and the emphasis placed on it in the popular and scholarly literature, one would expect fears of displacement to be paramount among residents' reactions.

Carol, like many other residents I spoke with, expressed such a sentiment:

LANCÉ: Well given your, uh, experience living in the community, maybe, could you tell me, um, what significant changes you've seen in the neighborhood?

CAROL: Well, first I'm gonna start with my building. Tenants in my building as, like myself and whatever, they're really trying to push him, the management and, um, they want certain people out.

JUAN: Well yeah, I do worry about the rent going up.

These narratives correspond to the well-known criticisms of gentrification as a force of displacement. The threat of increasing housing costs could lead to some having to move. The theme of fear of displacement, however, was not always personal. Much to my surprise, most respondents did not report personal experiences with a fear of displacement. Despite the lack of a personal fear, there was a general concern about displacement that permeated the air. This concern meant that people were worried about being "pushed out." The neighborhoods were indeed changing, and what the end result would be no one was sure, much like a thunderstorm that inspires fear of lightning. Someone may have never witnessed a lightning strike, and the odds of being struck personally might be low, yet a thunderstorm still has the power to inspire fear and concern.

This general concern about displacement, although not always personal, did manifest itself in the stories people told me about others in their community. Below are snippets of some of the stories that were related to me.

JUANITA: A lot of people feel like they, they're being pushed out.

There's people that, you know, trying to carry more than one job and, and, and actually, you know, this, this whole thought of, or this feeling of, really, because there's a lot of single-parent households, right? But this, this real feeling of the need for more than one person to make, to make it, you know?

JAMES: Well, if you go to personal comfort, probably for me doesn't make a difference. Uh, my experience has been that gentrification has, because of the increased prices, forced some people to have to move African Americans for the most part. Many residents that have been in Clinton Hill for a long time if they happen to not have the benefit of rent-stabilized apartment having rents almost double in the space of four years has caused some residents to have to move out. That's very unfortunate.

LANCÉ: How widespread do you think that is, where or—

JAMES: Uh, in terms of those long-term residents that did not have the benefit of rent stabilization, I think it's been pretty widespread.

Anthony is in his early thirties and has been residing in Clinton Hill for four years. Although he is African American, his college degree and



suburban Maryland upbringing might classify him as a gentrifier. Moreover, as someone who recently purchased a co-op in Clinton recently he might be viewed part of the reason housing prices were rising. He was nevertheless attuned to the fears of long-time residents, as he states here.

People think there is a shift, especially to kick people out, you know. But I mean, people have serious concerns, and these are people, these are people who usually have been in the neighborhood a long time. It was not a nice neighborhood. I heard of a lot of people wouldn't walk on Myrtle Avenue. I think it was nicknamed "Murder Avenue" [laughter]. And there is DeKalb Avenue, which they now call "Restaurant Row" which up to about eight years, it was kinda scary as well. So now it's finally good and they are afraid they are losing their neighborhood. It's, I finally get something. And and, now the rent is so high that they have to leave. Like "they are taking over, we are getting pushed out," I think that's their only fear. A lot of people I talked to have rent control, it's a weird for them, because they have rent-controlled, excuse me, rent-stabilized apartments, so they rent, I mean, they get the best in the world, by all the new services coming in, the neighborhood looks nice, the crime goes down, the rent only goes up 2 percent.... So, I don't really think they have a legitimate beef. But I think, think that maybe it's maybe a historical thing, or like, you know, for something their parents thought taught them, or something from back, who are really angry about just seeing....

These examples show that concern about displacement permeated conversations about gentrification. Some people spoke of people who they knew who were displaced. Mason, a late thirties native of Harlem who is living in the same public project he grew up in, related to me an example of someone he knew that had been displaced:

What I'm hearing is that people who have been living in a building for years are being given thirty days notice to leave. I don't begrudge a developer for making money, but thirty days notice, that's not right. I know this ninety-two-year-old guy been living on 123rd and for years. They were renovated and he had to move. Now he has to scramble around and figure out what resources are out there. At ninety-two he's paid his dues. That's not right.

More common was the refrain that people felt they were being "pushed out." The struggles that residents of the community were undertaking, such as working two jobs, to avoid being pushed out also feature in these narratives of displacement. Anthony, however, proves to be an armchair sociologist with an especially insightful view of the displacement narrative that permeated discussions about gentrification. He alludes to the fact that many of those expressing fears of displacement indeed had rent-regulated apartments and so in his mind did not have "a legitimate beef." But history

or something lends credence to fearing the displacement powers of gentrification. This comment hints at the way people interpret gentrification, and this is elaborated on in depth in the next chapter. For now it suffices to say that this is further evidence of the extent to which fear of displacement was part of the perception of gentrification.

Given the widespread concern about displacement expressed by respondents and in literature on gentrification, it is somewhat surprising that more experiences with displacement were not more personal. This appears to be due mostly to the housing situation of the persons I spoke with and not just plain luck. A few individuals were lucky to have landlords who did not charge as much as they could for a unit. Despite the depiction of landlords as greedy or rational profit maximizers, there a few instances in which landlords defied both these stereotypes. Jake, who grew up in the nearby Fort Greene housing projects, went to the Pratt Institute and now resides in Clinton Hill, related this dynamic to me in the following conversation:

LANCE: Do you know many people who have had to move because of rising prices?

JAKE: I really don't have the pulse on that. But not really. Because you have these pockets of affordability.

LANCE: How are they able to maintain affordability?

JAKE: Some landlords aren't greedy. They may have bought their property way back when before prices went sky high. So they can afford to charge a reasonable rate. Others that just bought have to pay their mortgage. So they charge what the market will bear.

Sometimes the landlords' own self-interest might make them hesitant to raise rents drastically, particularly if they are small owners of a few units. For small landlords, the transaction costs of finding new tenants who pay the rent on time, don't abuse the property, or make a lot of noise might make some hesitant to raise rents to a degree that would force one of their good and reliable tenants to leave. Alicia, a college student with limited means, lives in Clinton Hill and thought that her being a reliable tenant discouraged her landlord from raising her rent excessively: "This year he hasn't, he didn't increase the rent. I figured because he may have overheard a conversation that I was having with Susan downstairs. I was like he better not like raise our rent, because doesn't he realize that we're good tenants. So, it's like, okay."

Aside from the few who were lucky enough to have landlords who did not simply charge what the market would bear, other types of housing situations served to protect people from displacement due to gentrification and thus also limited any personal experience with the threat of displacement. As was pointed out earlier, some were homeowners in the form of shareholders in cooperatives. Others were fortunate to live in a

rent-regulated apartment or a government subsidized unit. As table 1.1 indicated, a substantial portion of the sample were either homeowners or residing in rent-regulated or subsidized units. Homeowners face little threat of displacement because the bulk of their housing costs are tied to maintenance and servicing the debt used to purchase their home, neither of which will be affected by gentrification. Property taxes for homeowners, however, may increase as the assessed value of their home increases. But in New York City, where property taxes are skewed to favor homeowners against commercial and large multifamily unit owners, this is unlikely. Not surprisingly, none of the homeowners I spoke with expressed a fear of being displaced due to rising property taxes. Those in subsidized units are for the most part not at risk of displacement due to gentrification. Likewise, those fortunate enough to have secured rent-regulated apartments also had a modicum of protection from rapid increases in their housing costs.

What rent regulation also did, however, was provide an incentive to landlords to encourage current tenants to move. Under New York City's rent regulations, when a tenant moves the unit is deregulated and the landlord can charge the market rent. Given the wide disparity between the market rent and regulated rent in many instances, it is not surprising that landlords might actively seek to empty their occupied rent-regulated units. Sometimes landlords offered cash as incentive for the tenant to leave. Other times, they resorted to more nefarious methods to encourage occupants of these apartments to leave. Tales of landlords withholding services, harassing tenants, and hiring detectives to make sure tenants adhered to rent regulation guidelines (i.e., their regulated unit is their primary residence) abound. These stories are perhaps more common in changing neighborhoods because gentrification increases market rents and therefore widens the gap between regulated rents and market rents.

In response to this landlord harassment, a number of tenants' rights organizations have sprung up to protect tenants from landlord harassment. Harlem Operation Take Back and the West Harlem Tenants Organization are examples of such groups. These groups apprise tenants of their rights, provide free legal clinics, and generally serve as advocates for the interests of tenants and low-income households.

Viewed from the lens of these organizations or those making use of their services, gentrification poses a threat in two ways. One, by increasing market rents it gives a landlord more of an incentive to encourage them to leave as the following narrative by Juan suggests:

JUAN: They are always trying find ways to get people out.

LANCÉ: How, like what is some of the types of things they do trying to get people out?

JUAN: Well they'll contest the lease. I had to fight for my lease. I was living a few years with great-grandmother, so I had succession rights or whatever you wanna call it. And so with some other people they've done that also. For whatever the reason is, whether it's, it's a son that was there for a few years or whatever. And they thought they had a legal angle in not giving that apartment. They, they would do it. Um, someone went on a vacation and I think this is a, a certain guideline on when how long you can be away from your apartment. And because she made a mistake on something they were able to bring that in. She lost her apartment. Although she fought it for a long time. And, um, they'll, they'll play dumb on something and make, uh, you prove that you're right about whatever the issue or point might be in, in terms to uh, uh, um, lawfully um, being the tenant. And they'll take you to court. Because a, how many people can afford to miss, uh, work? How many people can afford the lawyer sometimes? Sometimes it's not a person who's uh, uh, articulate in English or whatever. Sometimes it's elderly so there's the intimidation factor. So you know, whenever they can. Um, hey, but in our building it's been a handful of little tricks that they try and they haven't succeeded. Except for that one person that was evicted and, uh, you know it's a shame because, uh, she, she didn't protect herself better.

Under New York rent regulations, there are various guidelines governing not only how much the landlord can raise the rent but whether the unit can be deregulated when the original tenant moves out. If a family member remains living in the unit, the unit maintains its regulatory status even after the original tenant moves or dies. These are known as succession rights. The rent regulations also stipulate that a regulated unit must be the tenant's primary residence. Consequently, landlords will challenge tenants on the grounds that the unit is not the tenant's primary address or that they are not related to the original tenant in a way to have succession rights.

During one legal clinic that I attended, a tenant described his predicament. He had shared an apartment with the mother of his child. The apartment was in her name, and she paid all the bills out of her account, although he gave her money. She eventually moved to Georgia, leaving him with the apartment. The landlord had apparently hired a detective who uncovered the fact that the original tenant was now in Georgia. Because they were not married and did not have joint accounts, he had no legal claim to succession, at least in the opinion of the legal clinic attorney. The landlord's efforts to evict him were thus likely to succeed.

These narratives are perhaps as suggestive of the way that rent regulation can distort landlord-tenant relations as they are in speaking to the

way gentrification is viewed by residents. Moreover, it is not clear that harassment of this type was increasing concomitantly with gentrification in Clinton Hill and Harlem as the following dialogue with Juan suggests:

LANCE: Is the harassment something that you notice that's happening more frequently now? Or is that something that's always been going on?

JUAN: You know it's always being going on. That's when one of the reasons why the tenant's association for our area came up, because they were trying to get people out.

One might expect, however, that increasing prices associated with gentrification would give landlords an incentive to harass occupants of regulated units and through their actions contribute to a fear of displacement permeating the air.

A second way gentrification contributed to the aura of concern about displacement was that by increasing housing prices in the neighborhood the option of staying in the neighborhood was all but eliminated for those who did want to move. Tammi is in her mid-twenties and native to Harlem. For college she left New York and went away to school. Despite the upward mobility that is associated with obtaining a college degree, rising housing prices prevented her from moving out of her mother's apartment and setting up her own household:

I went away to school, for five years, with the intention of not coming back home and getting my own place and you know, establishing my independence and coming back home. During that five-year period, the rents have increased, the neighborhoods have changed drastically and that's like kind of disheartening that, you know, I come back and want to return back home to stay in my community and I, I really can't.

Thus, the fear or concern of displacement or being pushed out was a common refrain during my conversations with residents of Clinton Hill and Harlem. As already noted, this concern was not always personal. Rather, people pointed to displacement they had witnessed or fears that others had expressed. The narrative of displacement has become part of the community lore regarding gentrification—a point I will return to in the next chapter. The housing status of many individuals, in the form of regulated or subsidized units, undoubtedly contributed to some not having personal experiences with displacement. That many residents have some form of rental protection—be it in the form of a subsidy or regulated unit—is not surprising in New York. Data from the 2002 New York City and Housing Vacancy Survey show that citywide, 68 percent of all rental units have some form of subsidy or regulation; in Clinton Hill the figure is 62

percent and Harlem this figure reaches 89 percent (author's calculations)! With relatively few units unregulated or not subsidized, widespread displacement is perhaps unlikely. It may also be that those most vulnerable to displacement have already been displaced and hence unlikely to be reached through my sampling methods. Nevertheless, as the narratives make clear, concern about displacement continues to be a common theme.

It should also be kept in mind that due to speculation, housing inflation in gentrifying neighborhoods is likely to be worse in the ownership sector than the rental sector. Whereas rising prices are often an inducement for owners to purchase in anticipation of the capital gains they will realize, rising rents seldom encourage people to rent. Consider figure 3.1, which illustrates trends in housing prices and fair market rents (Fair Market rents are set at the 45th percentile of all rents), in the New York metropolitan area. The trends show a much steeper appreciation in the ownership sector than in the rental sector. Although rents have been steadily increasing, the increase in the past few years has been nowhere as sharp as in the ownership sector. Were rents increasing as rapidly as prices, displacement pressures would be more severe.

The feelings toward gentrification discussed so far have focused on the process or end results of the process, better services, increasing housing prices, displacement, and so on. But gentrification also implies a gentry and a change in the type of people residing in these neighborhoods. In the next sections I explore the reactions to the coming of the gentry.

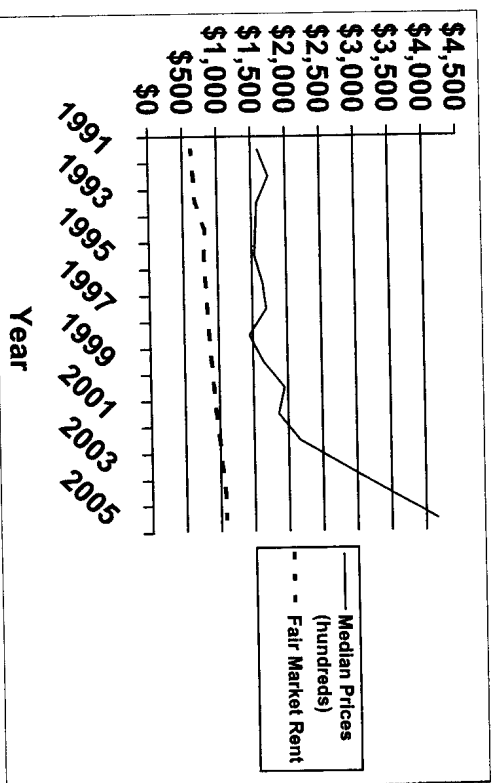


Figure 3.1. NYC Metro Area Housing Prices and Fair Market Rents  
 Source: National Association of Home Builders and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

## DIVERSITY IN THE 'HOOD

The gentrification of both Clinton Hill and Harlem, predominantly black neighborhoods, had significant racial overtones. Here I will touch briefly on some of residents' reaction to the influx of nonblacks into these neighborhoods. It is important to remember the context of the study neighborhoods when interpreting these responses. Harlem and to a lesser extent Clinton Hill are overwhelmingly black neighborhoods, despite noticeable gentrification in recent years. As noted in the preceding chapter, a stroll through either of these areas will be reveal more brown faces than not. Thus, both neighborhoods still have a black character, complete with services such as barbershops, churches, hair salons, and so on that target a black clientele.

In both neighborhoods an increasingly visible presence of whites was perhaps the most noticeable change associated with gentrification. To some, the increased presence of whites was the very definition of gentrification. Nate expresses this sentiment: "Once you see white people hanging out in a neighborhood where they generally wouldn't come through, it's gentrification."

When asked about the neighborhood changing, many residents pointed to the time when they first noticed whites walking around as evidence that gentrification was occurring. When whites came that meant the neighborhood would improve and that significant changes were under way. Moreover, whites were assumed to be gentrifiers—either artists, students, or some other demographic—that fit neatly into preconceived notions of who gentrifiers are.

Although social scientists have shone a spotlight on the process of white-to-black succession, the integration of whites into black neighborhoods is relatively unexamined. This may be because until recently the change from predominantly black to white has been a relatively rare occurrence (Lee 1985). This rarity is reflected in the shock that many residents expressed at seeing whites moving into these predominantly black neighborhoods. Black neighborhoods perhaps differ from other types of minority areas in that not only do they have a black majority but they have historically been relatively homogenous with few whites. Although ethnic enclaves of various nationalities are a common occurrence, they are seldom dominated by one group to the extent that some neighborhoods have been dominated by blacks (Massey and Denton 1993).

Consequently, in the racialized landscape of urban America, black neighborhoods not only have black identities but have been devoid of a white presence as well. Thus, a black identity for a neighborhood came to mean not only a substantial black presence but an absence of whites as well. This identity means the neighborhood "belongs" to blacks. Those not

of this background are viewed as outsiders and perhaps interlopers. Outsiders, whites in this case, are not expected to be seen walking down the streets of these neighborhoods. If they are passing through, they are not expected to linger. Consider the following reactions of Kenneth and Takesha, both of whom are in their late twenties and moved into Harlem after attending predominantly white colleges. Although they spent considerable time in the white world, Harlem was seen as a black world, a place where whites did not venture. Thus they were still taken aback at the presence of whites in Harlem:

LANCE: When did you notice significant changes taking place in your neighborhood?

KENNETH: And then I would walk along 125th Street and notice [white] people just strolling, and there used to be a time where it was a threat! You would be scared to be in Harlem and be white it was like know! But now I see them strolling like at midnight you know passing me by.

LANCE: Since you moved into the neighborhood [Harlem], have you, um, noticed any changes?

TAKEESHA: Well, obviously, um, in addition to, I guess the, um, rehabilitation to a lot of the buildings I've noticed that, uh, different types of people moving in, um, obviously a lot of white people, . . . so you, and I've seen the, the thing that, that, uh, I guess shocked me the most was the day that I, um, got up, I was out about six o'clock in the morning, this was during the wintertime when it was cold, and I saw a young white girl jogging down the street, which to me was shocking.

LANCE: Why did that, why did that shock you?

TAKEESHA: Because, I mean, first of all a lot of people think of Harlem as being very dangerous, um, and I wouldn't, although I don't feel threatened, I wouldn't be jogging like at that time of day, you know, um—

LANCE: It was still dark or—

TAKEESHA: Yeah, it was just, the sun was just coming up and, you know, so to see, you know, a young white girl jogging through Harlem is just to me just crazy, you know.

Surprise at the visibility of whites was even evident in Clinton Hill even though the white population has always been at least 20 percent. Nevertheless, in the past whites ceded certain spaces in the neighborhood to blacks, particularly at night. This is no longer the case. James, a resident of Clinton Hill for over fifteen years described the increasing visibility of whites in Clinton Hill this way:

I moved here in '88. I can tell you that I would not have been comfortable walking around the neighborhood at night. Today it's a very different story. The streets are vibrant. You see people at all hours of the day. And oddly enough when you walk Myrtle Avenue at night, which still has a reputation although not to the extent it did years ago, now I see many Caucasians and Asians walking around Myrtle Avenue at, to the extent that, almost to the exclusion of African Americans.

According to this view, whites are expected to fear and avoid black spaces. The black neighborhood as a place of crime, danger, and unpredictability has been etched into the national psyche. Writers have described them as “deadly neighborhoods” (Jencks 1988), and activists as “third world countries” (Chinellyu 1999). Social scientists have posited that the equating of black neighborhoods with crime, poverty and general undesirability is the reason whites are reluctant to share residential space with blacks (Gould Ellen 2000; Harris 2001). Whites with the privilege and wherewithal to do so are expected to avoid black neighborhoods. When whites move into predominantly black neighborhoods, they upset the prevailing notions of who belongs in particular areas. This surprise at seeing white people was certainly more apparent in Harlem than in Clinton Hill. Although Clinton Hill is also predominantly black, it has a shorter history as a black neighborhood, dating back to the late 1960s and 1970s, and has always had a substantial white population due to the presence of Pratt Institute.

A visitor from overseas who walked down a major thoroughfare in Harlem or Clinton Hill for that matter might wonder what all the fuss and concern about whites in the neighborhood is about. The faces are still overwhelmingly black and brown. Moreover, as illustrated in the previous chapter, in absolute numbers the increase in the white population has not been that dramatic. Indeed, in Harlem the biggest change in terms of racial/ethnic groups has been the increase in the Hispanic population. But the long history of blacks sharing residential space and socioeconomic status with Hispanics in New York renders the Hispanic influx a non-event (Massey and Bitterman 1985)—at least thus far. In contrast, the modest increase of whites signifies a sharp break from past patterns and hence engenders much surprise. What this surprise signifies is just how racially isolated many of America's inner-city communities had become. A white face was truly a rare occurrence.

What the surprise may also indicate are changes in whites' use of public space in these two predominantly black neighborhoods. As one respondent astutely noted, whites appeared to be more comfortable using public spaces in these neighborhoods. Given the dramatic and well-publicized drop in crime in New York City, a plausible speculation might be that despite all

the negative stereotypes still associated with black neighborhoods, whites feel safer in these areas now (Beveridge 2004). Harlem in particular has received much publicity about the second renaissance, with magazine articles and TV shows highlighting the attractions of the neighborhood. This publicity, combined with the drop in crime may have made whites more willing to invade black space, even at times when it would have previously been unthinkable—like six in the morning.

Much of the literature on gentrification points to the influx of whites as something loathed by long-term residents. Powell and Spencer (2003, p. 437) write: “Then at some point in the future, and in part because the neighborhood values are depressed, whites move back in and force residents to leave, often to strange neighborhoods that are in distress. Even if minority residents remain, they fear their way of life will not be the same.” Figure 3.2 is also illustrative of the hostility directed at the influx of whites. The flyer depicts gentrification, in part, as whites taking over black neighborhoods. More revealingly, the flyer issues a call to stop the takeover. Whites moving into the neighborhood is not viewed here as an innocuous trend toward more integration. Likewise, the black popular media has also reflected the anxiety surrounding white movement into black neighborhoods as the following headlines attest: “Invasion of the Hood Snatchers: How Black Neighborhoods are Being Gentrified” (Montgomery 2002) and “The Whiteming of Black Neighborhoods” (Watson 2003). Thus, the scholarly literature, popular media, and the actions of community activists paint a picture of black resistance to white infiltration.

My conversations with residents of Clinton Hill and Harlem did reveal an undercurrent of hostility toward whites moving into these neighborhoods among at least some of the interviewees. The hostility was seldom directed to whites per se, or even what the coming of whites foretold for the future of the neighborhood. Rather, the hostility emanated from how people made sense of the causes of gentrification, or more specifically the neighborhood improvements associated with gentrification. This is a point I discuss in considerable detail in the next chapter.

To be sure, there were some who expressed antagonistic feelings toward whites moving into these neighborhoods just on general principle. Henry is a mid-sixties native of North Carolina who moved to New York as a teenager. He has spent almost all of his life living in the black ghettos of New York—Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville—and has been living in Harlem for the past twenty years or so. As such he is not used to living around whites: “Well it make me feel less comfortable. Because for one I'm not used to being next to whites, and I prefer not to. Prefer to stick with my own.” Takeesha also expressed a degree of antipathy toward whites moving into Harlem, despite interacting with them on a regular basis:

**Saturday February 28<sup>th</sup> 2004**  
**THE STATE OF BLACK NEW YORK**  
**CITY WIDE CONFERENCE ON**  
**GENTRIFICATION**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Gentrification Summit**  
**Major Community Town Hall Meeting**  
**3:00pm**

**Subject: What is Gentrification? : How And Why Whites Are Taking Over The Black Community and What We Can We Do To Stop It"**  
 Conference Begins At 10:00 AM

- Workshop #1 **Tenants Rights-** "How To Avoid Being Victimized By Your Landlord"  
 -11:00 am
  - Workshop #2 **Buy Black!** "How To Keep Black Businesses Alive In New York"  
 -11:00 am
  - Workshop #3 **Money, Land And Property** "How To Move From Renter To Owner and Independence" (Credit Issues, Finance, Programs That Can Help)  
 -1:00 pm
  - Workshop#4 **The Politics Of Gentrification:** "From City Hall To The Streets. How To Hold Politicians Accountable"  
 -1:00 pm
  - Workshop #5 **Commercial Real Estate** "Buying Apartments, Landlord, Renovations"  
 -6:00 pm
  - Workshop #6 **Self Improvement:** "How We Stop Deterioration In Our Neighborhoods"  
 -6:00 pm
- Featuring:** Harlem Fight Back...Nellie Bailey...Harlem Tenants Council... Real Estate Agents & Brokers...Mayoral Candidate/ Councilman Charles Barron... Other Elected Officials...Dr James McIntosh (CEMOTAP)... Morris Powell (Harlem Activist)...Nation Of Islam...Lawyers...Committee To Honor Black Heroes and Others...Kevin Williams from Key's Copy Center...Delois Blakely (Mayor Of Harlem)...National Action Network... Other Activists and Leaders.... Business persons, Pastor Dennis Dillon...Written Information on Laws, Rights, Research and Programs and Money that Can Aid You
- Consistent Questions And Answers..... Participation From The People The Forming Of The Anti Gentrification Movement ..... The 1<sup>st</sup> Conference Was Great!
- Sponsored By:** The Black Power Movement; New Black Panther Party; Black Lawyers For Justice; African Nationalist Pioneer Movement
- Hosted By:** Attorney Malik Z. Shabazz (NBPP Chairman/ Black Lawyers For Justice)

Figure 3.2. Flyer Announcing Anti-Gentrification Meeting

Yeah, you want better services, you want a safe neighborhood, you want a clean neighborhood, but, at the expense of, you know, of whom, uh, and so, and that, that's why I feel conflicted because, you know, you want the neighborhood to, to improve but not in terms of, its resources, not in terms of, improve doesn't always mean, you know, white people... in general I just felt like it seems like whenever, you know, black people have something, it's really hard for them to, to retain it, white people have always operated, as, you know, sort of, you know, conquistadors, just, you know, basically taking over... and it affects me because I've never known such hatred inside of me until this started happening, and I can't explain it, because it's not that I haven't worked with white people, I haven't been around white people, but for some reason this just, it just means something more to me and so when I see them in the stores and, you know, I just, I'm just filled with such anger I got on even, uh, I mean I've been dealing with it, I'm like, okay, to me obviously there's really nothing I can do.

Such antiwhite sentiments, however, were relatively rare during my conversations with residents. Most residents did not express negative reactions toward whites or other groups typically not found in black neighborhoods moving into Clinton Hill or Harlem. Sandy, a native of Harlem in her mid-thirties, remembers when nonblack faces in Harlem were relatively rare. He nevertheless appears to be somewhat open to the notion of others moving into Harlem. "You see not only whites, you see all nationalities such as Asians, up in Harlem now. Which I don't think is a bad thing." Nate, the civil service worker, was also amenable toward whites moving into the predominantly black Clinton Hill:

Well I'm a realist. I think gentrification is good in certain respects in that it brings things to a neighborhood what it really never had. Like an all black neighborhood never had as much police protection as their white counterpart. So it brings that. Plus it brings investment. Plus I have no problem being in a neighborhood that's um, you know, mixed.

Ms. Johnson was reflective about the importance of integration and questioned why Harlem should be all black:

I think it is good. And why should we want a neighborhood that nobody lives but African American. Just like some neighborhood are only Asian, Jewish and you think people it shouldn't be that way. How can we learn each other if we gonna to be living separate. So—I think, in every neighborhood it should be you know different people. I don't think it should just be one nationality living there. I don't think so. So then the improvement I would welcome it. Because I don't want to say well, okay I live in Harlem but nobody live here but African American. So what's wrong with Harlem so that nobody else wanna live there in Harlem? But then you should, you can question yourself, you've been living someplace that nobody wanna live. So if other people wanna live there then there is something good about Harlem.

Gary was twenty-nine at the time of our discussion, grew up in East Orange, New Jersey, and moved to Clinton Hill six years before. He values the juxtaposition of the 'hood with gentrification, which creates a neighborhood dynamic found in few neighborhoods.

GARY: I like the variety we have in the neighborhood. I like the French restaurants. I like Modeba which is South African. I like that we have Sol, a little spot owned by an African American doing his own thing. I like that it's accepting to gays and lesbians. I like the fact that you have the old black grandmas who go to church every Sunday and will give you a lecture on what's good and what's bad you know. I like that it's a cross between, what my girlfriend calls, what does she call it, the 'etto. Because it's on the verge of being ghetto on Myrtle.

LANCE: What does she call it?  
GARY: The 'etto without the *gh*. Cuz it's not exactly ghetto cuz you have this nice side going this way from Myrtle Avenue and then on Myrtle Ave you have sort of ghettoish things. You have people selling drugs and that sort of thing. And its that mix. That's what I like about it.

The implications of the unique mix created by gentrification and the 'hood, or the 'etto as Gary and his girlfriend call it, is a dynamic I alluded to in chapter 2 and will discuss in more detail in the concluding chapter. Here, it serves to support the notion that there was a general acceptance to a more integrated neighborhood. Residents certainly noticed the increase in diversity. But few spoke in overall negative or positive tones.

This pattern of responses is consistent with the notion that blacks are amenable to residential integration as some writers have posited (Massey and Denton 1993). But remembering the context is again important. Both Clinton Hill and Harlem remain predominantly black communities. Residents may not be adverse toward some diversity in the form of a few whites moving into their neighborhood. Were these neighborhoods to become predominantly white, overall reactions might be more be negative. Indeed, several respondents indicated that although they did not have a problem with whites moving into the neighborhood, they would be disappointed if the neighborhood became predominantly white. This is also consistent with what has been written about blacks' preferences for residential integration. Although blacks have been found to be amenable to and actually prefer integrated neighborhoods, integration does not mean an overwhelmingly white neighborhood (Farley et al. 1994). Tina expresses this sentiment. Although she claims to be comfortable with integration, her view of the area is still a predominantly black neighborhood:

LANCE: Well, does the fact that the neighborhood was, uh, predominantly black and is becoming more white over time, do you, do you have any feelings about that one way or the other?

TINA: No.

LANCE: No?

TINA: It's all right for me.

LANCE: So if the neighborhood became, say 90 percent white, that wouldn't bother you or it would?

TINA: Maybe not 90 percent. [laughs.] Maybe 30, you know. I wouldn't be bothered, but 90, come on. Where they coming from?

In sum, the increase of whites in Clinton Hill and Harlem was probably the most notable aspect of gentrification. Although this proved troubling to a few, the themes that more commonly emerged from my conversations were a guarded indifference and to a lesser extent, appreciation. Outright hostility was relatively rare. In this way, interviewees' reactions to residential integration with whites appear to mirror those found by other social scientists who generally find blacks to be amenable to residential integration with whites. Though my conversations with residents of Clinton Hill and Harlem revealed a somewhat blasé attitude toward the notion of sharing residential space with whites, these same conversations indicated that a great deal of significance was attached to the coming of whites. This is a point I discuss in detail in the following chapter.

#### WHAT OF THE BLACK GENTRY?

Although the residents I spoke with most quickly associated gentrification with racial change, the scholarly literature elevates class over race as the defining feature of gentrification. Although definitions of gentrification explicitly mention class, race is often ignored. With the correlations between class and race being what they are in urban America, however, it is difficult to discuss class without alluding to race. In this case, the reactions described suggest a notable awareness to what is a modest increase in the white population. Nevertheless, to the extent gentrification is occurring, it also suggests there is a class change as well. Moreover, if one subscribes to the scholarly definitions of gentrification it becomes clear that in both Clinton Hill and Harlem, the "black gentry" or college-educated blacks have been increasingly represented.

In contrast to the agitation that surrounded the arrival of whites, reactions toward the black gentry were much more muted. When asked how they perceived their neighborhood to be changing, an increase in the black gentry or middle class was seldom volunteered by any of the



interviewees I spoke with. Barbara is a black graduate student who attended an Ivy League university, pledged an elite black sorority, grew up in a New York City suburb, and moved to Harlem within the past five years. She perhaps fits the profile of a black gentrifier. Maybe because of her own class background, she was also cognizant of class differences among black Harlemites:

LANCE: Maybe you could tell me how you think the neighborhood has changed, or if maybe it hasn't changed since you've been there.

BARBARA: I see more businesses developing. I see St. Nicholas Avenue has gotten just cleaner, renovated brownstones. Of course, I see the construction coops, condos going up every other week. I also think it's become diverse, Now I see a little of everything. I see Asian, I see white and different blacks too.

LANCE: What do you mean by that?

BARBARA: You see people coming off the train dressed in work attire, so you assume that they're professionals.

But this was an atypical response. More typically interviewees volunteered noticing new stores opening, buildings being renovated, and as noted an increased presence of whites. An increased presence of blacks of higher socioeconomic status was rarely volunteered. This is not to say that interviewees never noticed the changing class composition in their neighborhoods. As will be discussed, this was also an important theme. But it was one that typically had to be drawn out of respondents through direct questioning or additional prompting. This is instructive. It speaks volumes about the extent to which race can trump class as a marker of social status in America.

In the context of gentrification in these predominantly black neighborhoods the relatively muted reaction toward the influx of the black gentry is due to the lack of obvious class distinctions among blacks in these communities and the long-term presence of the black middle class in these same communities.

Unlike white skin, which automatically signifies membership in the gentry class in the context of a predominantly black gentrifying neighborhood, there is no such obvious mark of the black gentry or middle class. Income is a criterion one might use to identify the black gentry, but one's income is not always obvious from outward appearances. To be sure, there are outward trappings of class in urban America—one's address, one's clothes, the car one drives, one's diction, and occupation, to name a few. But for a number of reasons none of these make the same type of mental imprint as a white face in a predominantly black community.

Address is no clear marker of class in gentrifying neighborhoods, because by definition gentrification takes place in formerly less than prestigious neighborhoods. In addition, various housing subsidy programs, such as public housing, rent regulation, Mitchell-Lama, and particularly in Harlem various housing developments sponsored by HPD, allow those with limited means to reside and continue moving into these neighborhoods. Thus, although Clinton Hill and Harlem are gentrifying, one cannot easily assume that someone living or recently relocating to these neighborhoods must be of a particular class.

One might assume that the black gentry would stand out based on their style of dress or comportment. The American ethos, however, is to downplay class distinctions. Class is undoubtedly an important determinant of life outcomes in the United States. But this does not necessarily translate into the advertisement of one's class in all situations. In everyday anonymous interactions, it is often difficult to determine one's class unless he or she is at one of the extremes of the socioeconomic spectrum. This is reflective of the overwhelming ethos that posits ordinary middle-class status as normative. Thus, many of the elite, like the son of a blue-blood family who is now president, claims to be "just folks," while the poor strive to be accepted into the middle class. Putting on airs is frowned on in America. Likewise in the black community, "keeping it real" is a popular phrase meant to convey one's desire to relate in an everyday manner with the common folk. Characteristic of this everyday, plain folks ethos is the ubiquity of casual dress as well as casual language.

Another important factor contributing to the relative inconspicuousness of the black gentry is the fact that income differences between the black gentry (and the white gentry for that matter) and other residents of Clinton Hill and Harlem are not always that great. Indeed, during the early stages of gentrification, many of the gentry seek out these neighborhoods because it is some place they can afford. Many of those that might be classified as the gentry may be starting their careers or be in relatively low-paying occupations, like the arts. Therefore, not only are differences in income likely to be inconspicuous, but the differences may be small or nonexistent to begin with.

The inconspicuousness of class contributed to the muted reaction toward the arrival of the black middle class that was associated with gentrification. A further contribution, however, is that both Clinton Hill and Harlem have always had some socioeconomic diversity, and hence an increase in the black middle class is not perceived the same way as if theirs were a sudden appearance. To some extent they have always been there. Wilson (1987) talks about the flight of the black middle class from black neighborhoods like Harlem in the wake of the civil rights legislation that outlawed discrimination and putatively opened up previously

all white neighborhoods to the black middle class. Though the veracity of Wilson's thesis has been debated extensively, it is clear that even if true, it does not mean that all of the black middle class has left these neighborhoods.

Clinton Hill, for example, even when it was experiencing white flight and the major thoroughfare was known as Murder Avenue, seems to have had a stable middle-class presence. Indeed, many of my respondents had solid middle-class credentials. Consider the following examples. Yolanda is a black resident of Clinton Hill in her mid-fifties who grew up in a public housing project in Fort Greene. She now has a master's degree and has been a resident of Clinton Hill for seventeen years, before the gentrification. Louis is a black resident of Clinton Hill in his late sixties who went to college after being in the military and has been residing in Clinton Hill for thirty-five years. Jake is an African American resident of Clinton Hill in his early forties who grew up in public housing just blocks away from where he now lives (and has always lived). Jake attended Pratt Institute and now works as a teacher. None of these individuals have backgrounds that one would normally associate with the gentry, and they were living in Clinton Hill long before it began to gentrify. Yet all have college degrees and have worked in white-collar or professional occupations. Given the long-term presence of individuals like these, it is not surprising that blacks who might fit the profile of gentry might not attract much notice.

Likewise Harlem has always had a black middle-class presence. Harlem's heyday as a mecca for the black elite is well known and touched on in chapter 2 of this book. Sections of Harlem like Strivers' Row and Hamilton Terrace have long been and continue to be enclaves of the middle and upper middle class in Harlem. In addition, Harlem is home to several middle-income housing developments like the Lenox Terrace Mitchell-Lama development that houses middle-class households. Thus, even when Harlem reached its nadir in the 1970s and 1980s, there was still a significant middle-class presence. Carol is a black woman in her mid-thirties who has spent her entire life in Harlem. She now has a master's degree. Tammy is a black woman in her mid-twenties who also has spent her entire life in Harlem. She went away to a state college in upstate New York and returned to Harlem after graduation. Both Carol and Tammy are examples of long-term Harlem residents who because of their educational backgrounds might be classified as part of the gentry. But they have been there all their lives and would hardly be seen as gentrifiers.

Barbara reinforces two of the points I have been making about the inconspicuousness of the black gentry in the narrative below:

LANCÉ: Well, maybe you could tell me a little bit about why you chose to move into Harlem.

BARBARA: I was attending grad school, and the commute was too difficult, so I was looking for a place in New York City. Plus my family was moving, their house was being sold, so I had to become a little more independent. And a soror of mine from college said she had lots of room. Her mother moved out of state, and she was the only one living in this brownstone on 148th. So she rented a floor out to me. And it was very affordable. And I thought, great, I'll stay there.

[laughs]  
LANCÉ: So you chose it primarily because you knew someone that was there, and the affordability.

BARBARA: Right. And my friend, soror, Tonya, she grew up in the area, since her mother was always there, she knew a lot of the history. And she reassured me that there were decent people living in the neighborhood despite the reputation that Harlem had.

LANCÉ: In your mind what kind of reputation did Harlem have?  
BARBARA: You know, a has-been reputation. It's almost like the negative is always highlighted. Actually, while I was living up in Westchester, we would drive through Harlem, and people would say—comments like, "This was once a beautiful place to live. What has happened?" So just a situation that has gone progressively worse, it has gotten worse. That was pretty much what people would say, almost like it's a shame, almost that feeling some sort of regret when they speak of Harlem, what has happened to Harlem. So that's the only reputation that I knew of.

LANCÉ: So then you had these perceptions of what the neighborhood was like. And then you moved in. Your friend reassured you that, as you said, there were some good people in your neighborhood. Is that—that was—what do you mean when you say that?

BARBARA: Well, "good," meaning upwardly mobile folks, and "good" meaning educated people. It's sad that—I shouldn't even use the label "good," but what she meant was that growing up on the block she knew that there were people who had similar values as her family. They believed in just, you know, family and education and similar type things. And since her mother was of that background, I guess that was her way of reassuring me that you're not going to be surrounded by people who don't care about the area, or who just don't care about life, you know. I know that Tonya's mother would come back and forth from Florida, and she would say things like, "I wish Tonya wouldn't look as if she was a part of this community," which sounded like a snobbish statement to me. But she said, "Because our daughter was an attorney?"—but Tonya's so cool and down-to-earth that—you know, baseball cap wearing, jeans, sneakers all the time. So she felt like unlike her presence, which

was the sophisticated lady, well-dressed, that strands out, who would often be noticed, Tanya didn't have that same presence and was never going to have it. So she kept saying, "You guys look like you belong." [laughter] So Tanya would say, "Well, if we was, you know, uppity like you, we probably wouldn't have gotten along so well."

The narrative illustrates how Harlem always had a middle-class presence despite its unsavory reputation. Families sent their children to Ivy League schools and on to become attorneys. Barbara's friend fits the profile of a black gentrifier as an attorney, sorority member, and graduate of prestigious school. Yet she always lived in Harlem and was familiar with an area that had middle-class folks and values. In this way there is little to distinguish Barbara as a black gentrifier from her friend who has always lived in the community.

Barbara and her friend are nevertheless aware of the differences in class between them and many others in the community. By dressing down and keeping it real however, they are easily able to blend in, get along, not draw much attention to themselves, and are probably not perceived as outsiders.

Although the black middle class or gentry was perhaps a more potent force than whites behind gentrification in demographic, economic, and political terms, their presence did not attract the attention that the statistically smaller white populace did. Nonetheless it was whites who figured prominently in narratives about gentrification. The prominence of race will emerge again in the following chapter when I discuss how residents of Clinton Hill and Harlem make sense of the gentrification occurring in their neighborhoods. This prominence, though, signifies the central role race played in reactions to gentrification.

### THE DILEMMA OF GENTRIFICATION

The narratives reported herein attempt to portray the general attitudes I found toward gentrification. They tell a conflicting story, as well they should. Conflicting feelings most aptly describe the residents' feelings toward gentrification. Juan said, "Yeah, that I was thinking about what, how I would be coming out in case you have asked, um, that you think gentrification is good or bad. That's a hard one. You know." Betsy commented,

We've been getting, we are getting sort of a face-lift, so and that's a good thing, um, that's the major thing in the neighborhood. One of the not so good things is that I see a lot of mom and pop shops being moved out, forced out, you know, because of all the new, um, construction and high, high cost, you know, places, I guess all the real estate around, around those places are going out so people can't afford their leases.

Yolanda said, "And the neighborhood is probably gonna change for the better, maybe, meaning that it's gonna become more upscale. But is upscale always good?"

These examples further illustrate the dilemma gentrification poses for these neighborhoods. Residents were surely appreciative of the improvements associated with the process. But at the same time, the threat of displacement hangs in the air, making many wonder if the improvements are even worth it. Thus the narratives suggest that an ambivalent view is perhaps the only way to capture complex and conflicting feelings that gentrification can inspire. Rather than cheering for gentrification or accusing it of "knocking out" the disadvantaged, a more even-handed perspective would recognize that gentrification brings both cheer and grief.

The context of this inquiry are also worth remembering when considering how the narratives presented here were interpreted. It could be argued that given the disinvestment these neighborhoods had experienced, especially Harlem, some gentrification was sorely needed. These neighborhoods had experienced particularly stark days in the 1970s and 1980s, and few would be nostalgic about returning to those times. In some ways these areas did not provide their residents with an acceptable quality of life when the landscape was dotted with abandoned buildings, the crack epidemic was in full force, and basic amenities like a supermarket were scarce.

This context is important because not all "gentrifying" neighborhoods reached the depths of disinvestment that Harlem or even Clinton Hill did in the 1970s and 1980s. *Gentrifying* is put in quotes to signify how the process can take on different forms and mean different things in differing times and places. Gentrification in a working-class ethnic neighborhood is different than it would be in a neighborhood devastated by arson and abandonment like Harlem. There are similarities, but key differences as well. A working-class neighborhood might not have a gourmet supermarket but would still have a well-stocked grocery store. Likewise, gentrification in Harlem at the turn of the century is likely different than the gentrification that took place in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn, in the 1970s. Even at its nadir, Boerum Hill would never have been confused with an underclass neighborhood or a place where mortality rates rivaled those found in some developing countries.

The importance of context could even be seen between Clinton Hill and Harlem. Clinton Hill, for example, had a much higher homeownership rate, and therefore its residents had a much greater economic stake in gentrification. Consequently, although residents of both Clinton Hill and Harlem were appreciative of the improvements in amenities and services, Clinton Hill was where people were more likely to see an improvement in their financial well-being. The range of feelings toward

gentrification expressed here may differ from those found in other neighborhoods, depending on their context.

Context may also help explain some of the discrepancy between some descriptions of gentrification and the sentiment of some respondents presented here. Gentrification's reputation as a "yuppie boutique" phenomenon may have been cemented by the experience of the first wave of gentrification during the 1970s. At that time, gentrification seldom occurred in the poorest inner-city neighborhoods like Harlem or predominantly black neighborhoods like Clinton Hill, Clinton Hill perhaps being the exception.

Consequently, the dearth of amenities and services that have afflicted inner-city black communities in recent decades was perhaps not a problem in the first gentrifying neighborhoods, and hence the notion that gentrification could introduce amenities and services appreciated by long-term residents has perhaps not taken hold in our imagination.

The context of Clinton Hill, Harlem, and perhaps other neighborhoods suggest a more ambivalent view of gentrification. In this way the findings of this research echo the thinking of Kennedy and Leonard (2001) who concluded that gentrification was neither "good or bad" but posed a set of challenges and opportunities for communities.

In Clinton Hill and Harlem, gentrification thus poses a dilemma. It was acknowledged to bring good, but it also created a foreboding of things to come. A fear of displacement hung in the air. This fear of displacement played a significant role in the negative sentiment that was sometimes expressed toward gentrification. This fear, however, was hardly the only source of malcontent. As one of the interviewees expressed it, there was a "historical thing, or like, you know, for something their parents taught them" that inspired the negative reactions toward gentrification. In the next chapter I argue that indeed history does play a role in how people interpret and make sense of gentrification.

## 4 Making Sense of Gentrification

THE DRAMATIC CHANGES associated with gentrification inspired Clinton Hill and Harlem residents to think about why their neighborhoods were changing as such. Many had witnessed firsthand the decline of the black inner city in urban America. Beyond their personal experience, the image of decaying black neighborhoods is one that has been etched in the popular imagination and reinforced by the popular media. Movies like *Boyz n the Hood*, *New Jack City*, and *Straight Out of Brooklyn* all attest to the dismal reality that the urban ghetto had become. A reversal of fortunes in such neighborhoods necessarily calls out for explanation.

Although there are well-developed theories on the causes of gentrification in the scholarly literature, a common wisdom has also evolved on the streets of urban America. Henry, a Harlem resident who was introduced in chapter 3, has only a high school education. As such he might not be expected to have been exposed to scholarly debates on the causes of gentrification. Nonetheless, he articulated some of the common demand-side explanations for gentrification:

LANGE: What do you think made the whites want to move in?

HENRY: Well, the economy. Most of them are staying out on the island [Long Island, a suburb of New York City]. And now since the jobs are a little tighter, money is a little tighter. So they're getting in places that they can easily get to work. They're tired of that long commute.

Zanetta, a native of Spanish Harlem who moved to central Harlem as an adult, related a common refrain when describing the onset of gentrification in Harlem—the relatively cheap housing cost.

LANGE: Do you have any ideas about what's attracting people to the neighborhood?

ZANETTA: The, the price of living is cheaper. Um, I moved into my apartment, well, I moved in, I had a studio apartment, and my rent initially was \$525 a month, a nice spacious studio, you know, and then I moved to a one bedroom, it was \$660. I would say that probably just in general Manhattan is just getting expensive and people need to find a place to live, so this just makes sense.