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In the popular imagination, 1960s radicalism often appears as a national phenomenon that varied little from region to region. The case of downtown Manhattan during these years, however, challenges this assumption. Student radicals at New York University in Greenwich Village were just as concerned with issues of urban equity and the politics of urban space as they were with more national concerns, such as ending the Vietnam War. NYU students advocated that the university offer open admissions and free tuition to any New Yorker who wished to attend and fought against what they perceived to be the university's imperialistic management of Bellevue Hospital.

In this paper, I consider the ways in which late 1960s radicals in downtown Manhattan negotiated how a city should be constituted, and I argue that, in challenging the concrete city conditions that they deemed to be indicative of larger systemic problems, these radicals' activism represents not only a piece of 1960s radical history but also a chapter of local urban history. Manhattan radicalism in the 1960s was predicated on the urban environment that it was a part of, and a consideration of the radical efforts to reconstruct the postwar city is essential to understanding period radicalism and the development of cities.

The rapid and transformative changes in American metropolitan areas after the Second World War and the leftist radicalism that is the hallmark of the decade are narratives that commentators often tell as two different, unrelated stories, even though, in the case of New York City, student activism had everything to do with the postwar city. My examination of radicals' work to enact local change takes steps toward furthering the efforts of a generation of scholars who have tried to complicate our view of "the sixties."

Dans l'imaginaire populaire, le radicalisme des années soixante semble souvent un phénomène peu variable d'une région à une autre. Cependant, en considérant la situation des quartiers du sud de Manhattan, cette supposition est remise en question. Les étudiants radicaux de New York University (NYU) à Greenwich Village étaient autant concernés par des enjeux d'équité urbaine et la politique de développement urbain que par des sujets nationaux, comme mettre un terme à la guerre du Vietnam. Les étudiants de NYU ont lutté pour des admissions plus ouvertes et l'annulation des droits de scolarité pour tous les New Yorkais qui souhaitaient aller à l'université. Ils combattaient ce qu'ils percevaient comme de l'impérialisme de la part de l'Université dans la gestion de l'hôpital Bellevue.

Dans cet article, j'aborde les manières par lesquelles les radicaux de Manhattan des années soixante ont déterminé comment une ville devait être constituée. Je soutiens qu'en contestant les conditions urbaines, ils ont mis en lumière des problèmes systémiques plus larges. L'activisme de ces radicaux ne constitue pas seulement une partie de l'histoire radicale des années soixante, mais aussi un chapitre de l'histoire locale et urbaine. Le radicalisme de Manhattan dans les années soixante est enchâssé dans le milieu urbain dans lequel il se trouve et une analyse des efforts radicaux de redévelopper la ville dans l'après-guerre est essentielle pour comprendre le radicalisme de cette période et le développement des villes.

Les changements rapides qu'ont connu les régions métropolitaines des Etats-Unis après la Seconde Guerre mondiale et le radicalisme gauchiste qui est caractéristique des années soixante sont des récits que souvent les chercheurs considèrent comme distincts, sans rapports entre eux, même si, dans le cas de New York City, l'activisme des étudiants était partie intégrante de la ville de l'après-guerre. Mon analyse des radicaux et de leur action afin de provoquer des changements locaux accentue les efforts d'une génération de chercheurs qui ont essayé de complexifier notre façon d'examiner et de comprendre « les années soixante ».

In May 1970, students at New York University "liberated" three buildings around Washington Square Park in Manhattan's Greenwich Village. The student takeover came on the heels of similar student strikes, most famously at Columbia University several dozen blocks uptown, where students had stormed the campus and occupied buildings to demand cessation of construction of a university gym in Harlem, adoption of forms of due process in the disciplining of students, and termination of the university's affiliation with the Institute of Defense Analyses. NYU students called for changes that were at once similar and

divergent.[1] Like the Columbia strikers, NYU radicals ordered an end to the Vietnam War and to police brutality on campuses, but they also called for their university to pay the bail for the Panther 21, to improve treatment of poor minority patients at Bellevue Hospital, and to open admissions to all New York City high school students, regardless of ability to pay or even academic standing.[2]

The story of NYU's strike is both anticipated and remarkable. A campus uprising in the 1960s, in which student radicals held buildings hostage and made ambitious demands, is a classic tale. Upon closer examination, however, this account is hard to reconcile with our standard images of the decade. The idea that student radicals were just as connected to local issues of community development and urban equity as they were to national or international issues like the Vietnam War or creating a cultural revolution seems foreign to a popular understanding of "the sixties." Just as Columbia strikers organized against the construction of an exclusive university gymnasium in Harlem, NYU students held local concerns at the forefront of their minds as they planned and executed a protest that lasted two months.[3] Activism at NYU demonstrates that 1960s radicalism was not simply a singular movement that swept the nation for a period of a few years; rather, NYU students, like community organizers before them, noticed their immediate surroundings and came together to create change.

When a speaker mentions the sixties, one knows immediately the narrative that she refers to: the social and political upheaval that, in the popular imagination, began in the Southern United States in the early 1960s with African-American agitation for civil rights and progressed to the North and the West Coast, where students began striking, hippies began "dropping out," and African-American urban residents began rioting. In this telling, the sixties appear in an ahistorical limbo between the Cold War hysteria of the 1950s and the malaise, recession, and conservative drift of the 1970s. To many observers, those events that symbolize the sixties seem to have emerged spontaneously and to have disappeared just as suddenly. Certainly, the Free Speech Movement began at Berkeley, the mid-decade urban riots began in Watts, and the most famous of all student strikes overtook Columbia; but still these moments exist ungrounded like snapshots for most of us, as though they could have happened anywhere.

The earliest narrative about the decade, a story told by lay commentators and scholars alike just after the end of the 1960s, is partially responsible for our contention that the national character of 1960s radicalism mattered most. Authors such as Terry H. Anderson, Mark Kurlansky, Jim Miller, and Todd Gitlin are quick to emphasize the continuities in the actions of the New Left across space and the distinctiveness of the 1960s from all eras before and since.[4] Over the past ten to fifteen years, however, a new strain of scholarship has emerged, challenging key points of the typical consensus about the sixties. In *Rethinking the New Left,* Van Gosse underscores the origins and the legacies of the hallmark actions of the 1960s with descriptions of the

1950s Daughters of Bilitis, several late-1960s Third World movements, and the Gay Liberation Front.[5] Mary Ann Wynkoop's *Dissent in the Heartland* chronicles 1960s activism at Indiana University, focusing on the differences between Midwestern radicals and their East and West Coast counterparts.[6] And in *American Babylon,* Robert O. Self details the Black Panthers' emergence from a history of African-American resistance, struggle, and activism in Oakland stretching back to promises of postwar racial equality and prosperity, emphasizing the centrality of local conditions and local history in determining the character of 1960s local urban politics.[7]

My work is an addition to this larger project of recasting the 1960s. The story I tell—about the radical activity of NYU students and other community members in downtown Manhattan during the late 1960s and early 1970s—is an attempt to draw our conception of the 1960s away from visions of the decade's radicalism as primarily national and locally undifferentiated; and by examining the specifics of postwar New York City, I furthermore hope to situate the leftist activity in downtown Manhattan within the context of the national and local conditions, changes, and challenges coexisting with—and, in fact, informing—the social and political upheaval of the decade. The rapid and transformative changes in American metropolitan areas after the Second World War and the leftist radicalism that is the hallmark of the decade are narratives that commentators often tell as two different stories, even though, in the case of New York City, student activism had everything to do with the postwar city. This article looks to flyers, pamphlets, and administration policy papers from 1960s NYU to begin to construct a coherent narrative that weaves together the work of student radicals and that of the downtown Manhattan residents who came before them. Although the creators of these documents have often been left anonymous, looking to the words they left behind and the administration's documentation of their activity can allow us to examine the ways in which their advocacy was, first and foremost, local.

Looking at the 1960s in downtown Manhattan through the lens of urban radicalism allows us to begin answering some questions unaddressed in our popular conception of what the sixties meant. By grounding the radical activity of the period in the conditions of the postwar city, we can see that the protests of the decade emerged out of a particular historical circumstance that had everything to do with the way that cities had developed in the previous decades. Furthermore, focusing on New York City takes emphasis away from the usual focal points of youth radicalism during the period: college campuses, hippie communes, and Southern towns and cities. This is the story of a large Northern metropolis, in which radicals were interested in solving the problems of their city and of their communities, and in which non-white and white activists worked together. The revolutionary politics of downtown Manhattan constitute a segment of the history of the 1960s and 1970s, but this story is also a chapter of New York's urban history and fits as neatly into a chronicle of grassroots urban activism, urban planning struggles, and racial

conflicts as into an account of the period's nationwide "movement." The sixties, as we tell it, were about a global revolution that, if successful, would have an impact on every aspect of life, from economic systems to sexual mores to the arts. But the sixties were, more fundamentally, also about efforts to transform communities and, at a very basic level, to forge a revolution at home. My narrative is the story of late 1960s and early 1970s efforts to build a revolutionary city from the ground up. For the radicals involved, the revolution would surely transform the world—but it would transform their urban homes first.

Early Organizing at NYU

When the sixties came to NYU, student radicals continued the legacy of Village residents who had been resisting the neighbourhood's development for decades. Radical student activities at NYU in the 1960s had much in common with the action taken by students elsewhere in the United States.[8] In 1965, a number of NYU campus groups joined forces to form the New Student Union (NSU), a conglomeration of the leftist student organizations on campus. One of NSU's key contributions was the creation of the Students' University at NYU (SUNYU), an alternative educational institution similar to those begun at other universities that instructed students in subjects neglected by the official curriculum such as black history, Southeast Asian history, and Marxist economics.[9] NSU's most dramatic action, however, was a strike in December 1966 protesting a proposed tuition increase, the second in a single year. The student strike was overwhelmingly effective and encouraged students to advocate for the formation of an administrative commission to determine university policy, composed of 30 per cent faculty, 30 per cent students, and 30 per cent administration officials.[10] In the following months, students organized against the Vietnam War, and, in the wake of Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 assassination, black and white students united to pressure the university administration to consider NYU's role in maintaining a racist system that effectively excluded Third World youth from higher education.[11] In the first days of the Columbia University takeover, NYU students worked with their uptown counterparts, joining the striking students in liberated buildings and contributing funds to the Columbia cause.[12] Student organizing later in the decade centred on the firing of the director of the new Martin Luther King Black Studies Center, John Hachett, on account of Hachett's alleged anti-Semitic remarks, and the suspension of two students after disruptions at a talk given by South Vietnamese Ambassador Nguyen Huu Chi.[13]

Although student organizing at NYU often resembled that in other parts of the nation, from the earliest part of the 1960s NYU students were interested in engaging the city that they were a part of, even as they connected with the university community itself. Early in the decade, as Greenwich Village gradually gentrified and as traditional Village residents moved east, NYU students focused their energies on drawing attention to the Lower East Side, a historically impoverished neighbourhood adjacent to the Village that was home to recent Eastern European immigrants, African Americans, and Puerto Ricans.[14] In 1963,

the NYU chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) removed uncollected garbage from the Lower East Side and deposited it outside City Hall to protest the ways in which the poor and primarily minority neighbourhood was neglected by the city government. Also during that year the same organization coordinated a rent strike in the area and opened a community centre on East Fourth Street to tutor local youth and organize residents to advocate for local control of the neighbourhood. NYU CORE continued to operate the centre until mid-decade.[15]

Student activists in the late 1960s drew upon local history both in their decision to focus their energies on the people of the Lower East Side and in their continuing engagement with the neighbourhood in which they lived. Whether they were aware of the continuities or not, their late 1960s activism in Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side did not emerge spontaneously but rather built upon a long tradition of locally based community organizing in the neighbourhoods. By focusing a portion of their work on uplifting the Lower East Side, NYU students responded to a recent series of social, political, and economic developments that had drawn their area closer to their eastern neighbour. But NYU activism was not limited to place-based activities on the east side of Manhattan; just as Village residents fought the zoning policies that earmarked their streets for demolition and renewal, students later in the decade demanded city and university accountability to the blocks they walked. To better understand these locally based activities and those that followed later in the decade, a look to postwar developments in New York City and neighbourhood resistance in both Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side is instructive.

Postwar New York City

New York City resurfaced from the Second World War on top of the world, the shining urban symbol of the United States' emergence as the Western political, economic, and cultural superpower. The authors of *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* note, "New York was not only physically intact" after the war, in comparison to major European cities at mid-century; the city was also "prosperous and optimistic, symbolizing the best American values to Europeans and to the returning GI's."[16] With business exploding in the city during and after the war, bars and clubs glowing at night as they had not been in decades, and the United Nations settling into Manhattan, New York City was a graphic illustration of the changing fortunes of a nation emerging from years of depression and war.[17]

In many ways, New York City's changes mirrored those that other American cities experienced after the war. African Americans migrated from Southern farming centres en masse to Northern and Western cities, including New York; thousands of returning GIs helped to create a massive housing shortage within the metropolitan centre, as happened in other urban areas; and large industry was in decline, a situation that threatened the sort of economy that had characterized Northern American cities for decades.[18]

The details of the postwar circumstance in New York, however, differed from those of other Northern urban centres. The rapid deindustrialization that plagued other cities did not devastate New York in the same ways because of the city's postwar status as a centre of culture, capital, and politics.[19] While industry moved out of the inner city, many businesses expanding their customer base to national (and international) markets chose to locate their headquarters in Manhattan, inspired by the city's newfound reputation as "the capital of the world," as E. B. White put it.[20] Just ten years after the end of the war, the *Reporter* confronted the "madness" of the Manhattan business district, which, according to the editors, comprised the full "lower half of Manhattan from Fifty-Ninth Street to the Battery."[21] Furthermore, like other northeastern cities, New York was experiencing rapid immigration, especially from African Americans, but the scale of that immigration was unparalleled in the rest of the nation. "New York was the densest of American cities" in the postwar years, and "with the density came even more diversity than before: it was a city more representative of the world than the United Nations itself . . . [and] the world's largest black metropolis."[22] And unlike other industrial cities in the eastern half of the country, New York was not simply a black-and-white city. One of the largest groups of immigrants came to New York from Puerto Rico: Puerto Ricans first began moving to the city in large numbers just after the war, and in the 1950s, over 300,000 Puerto Ricans lived in the five boroughs; by the 1970s, 1.3 million had immigrated.[23]

Not only was New York's economy changing in ways that were different from the economies of other American cities, but the city's labour force was exceptional as well. As Joshua Freeman explains in *Working Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II,* the labour movement in New York was incredibly strong, even through the 1970s and 1980s, when the American labour force elsewhere was in serious decline.[24] Earlier in the decade, the labour movement had been remarkably successful at winning a broad menu of victories: as Roy Rosenzweig sums it up, "Everything from low transit fares and rent control to an unparalleled range of health, educational, and cultural institutions—from the free city university to a quasi-public arts centre and opera company."[25] Throughout the city, then, expectations were high: the city was booming and workers were acquiring not only higher wages and job security but also social services and leisure activities that were available to all residents of the city

From Bohemia to Bourgeois: Postwar Greenwich Village

The winding, narrow, disorderly streets of Greenwich Village, from Fourteenth Street in the north to Houston Street in the south, from the Hudson River in the west to Broadway in the east, were the capital of American social nonconformity in the early twentieth century when Emma Goldman, John Reed, and Margaret Sanger all called the Village home. The 1940s and 1950s brought Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac to the neighbourhood, while Bob Dylan launched his career there in the early 1960s.[26] But changes to the neighbourhood after the Second World War dramatically shifted the real composition of

the area, even if the area's reputation as an artistic and revolutionary centre continued to shape the ways in which these changes were negotiated. The local shifts begun just after the war would provide a backdrop and perhaps even an inspiration for the activism of NYU students in the 1960s.

After 1945, even as poets and painters continued to flock to the area's coffee shops and bars, the Village was quickly becoming an attractive locale to a different type of resident. Villager William Barrett wrote in 1954 that, in recent years, "the Village ha[d] become a popular haven for young marrieds who prefer its informal—they still call it 'Bohemian'—atmosphere to the featureless neighborhoods uptown."[27] As Robert Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fisherman put it in their exhaustive text on postwar New York, *New York 1960,* modernist building in New York City was characterized by a "streamlined, horizontally banded, strip-windowed aesthetic"; modernist builders hoped to provide purely modern, rational, and affordable housing to New Yorkers by razing existing buildings to construct massive, prefabricated towers, often surrounding a central courtyard.[28] According to Barrett, then, the grand new modernist architecture heralded by urban theorists in the postwar years was a key factor in driving residents *out* of more upscale neighbourhoods and into the quaint, dirty, antiquated "slums" downtown. But ironically, to meet the demands of the expanding real estate market in the area, developers began attempting to build modernist apartment towers in the Village, which had been characterized by idiosyncratic small buildings.[29]

Plans for tall apartment complexes in the Village continued to emerge throughout the 1950s, but the new 1961 zoning regulations—which allowed for tall buildings but encouraged all new construction to supply courtyards or other open spaces—further hampered developers' plans.[30] A 1962 *New York Times* article anticipated that the zoning regulations might make building new apartment complexes in the area financially unfeasible; at any rate, apartments in buildings that would be built after the new zoning was implemented would be even more expensive than other modern buildings springing up in the area, since builders would have to recoup the cost of building open spaces that they could not rent out.[31] By the early 1960s, then, the sort of residents who had populated Greenwich Village since the beginning of the century—poor immigrants and bohemians—were finding it increasingly difficult to afford to live in an area that, for decades, had represented nonconformity and affordability.

Villagers did not tacitly accept postwar changes to their neighbourhood; on the contrary, area residents were quick to make their concerns with new development known. Community activists, for instance, halted developer Joseph Siegel's planned tremendous apartment building, leading him to complain in the *New Yorker,* "I try to do a great thing for Greenwich Village, and all that happens is letters to the editor. It's going to be the beginning of a new era for those poor people with hardly any closets at all. In my building they're going to have closets they can walk into and stomp around in."[32] But Villagers, it seemed, were more concerned with retaining the character of their idiosyncratic

community than with closet space. The authors of *New York 1960* hypothesize that the history—and the mythology—of the Village made many residents believe that it was worth preserving.[33] The "revitalization" efforts of New York City's most powerful public official at the time, Robert Moses, took on a more symbolic significance for those who cherished the fact that their community had once been home to a number of interesting, brilliant, famous, and bizarre individuals. The White Horse Tavern would become a hard bar to shut down, for instance, once one knew that Dylan Thomas enjoyed his last drink there.

Accordingly, some Villagers united to ensure that the qualities that they felt made their neighbourhood great would be able to survive in spite of rising rents and towering apartment complexes. In 1963, a *New York Times* reporter wrote about Villagers who independently "leased two loft buildings as artists' sanctuaries" and, in one subheading, posed this action as a means toward "conserving a species."[34] Village residents resisted the expansion of NYU into their neighbourhood, challenging the classification of the southeastern part of the square as a slum and organizing a powerful resistance to NYU's proposals to build a Law Center, Student Center, and library around Washington Square.[35] The characterization of the Village as a historic centre of progressive thought, experimentation, and artistic expression inspired pride in urban residents who fashioned themselves as citizens of a community first and of a greater metropolitan area second, and their dedication to hemming in postwar development helped the Village to retain a good deal of its character. But despite neighbourhood activists' efforts, an increasing number of artists and activists from Greenwich Village, and those from elsewhere in the country who would have settled in the Village had they come to New York just a few years before, began heading toward the nearby Lower East Side in the early 1960s, chasing cheap rents in what they hoped would become the new artistic neighbourhood of downtown Manhattan.

The Lower East Side as a Cultural Icon

Planning for the Lower East Side, Harry Schwartz's book "based on a report submitted in 1970 to New York City's housing and planning agency," described a Lower East Side that was plagued by poverty, drug abuse, racial violence, and unemployment, with residents unable to escape their conditions in the face of overwhelming systemic problems. But the Lower East Side, according to Schwartz, was different from other poor urban areas; and, as he outlined suggestions for transforming the ghetto neighbourhood into a flourishing, healthy one, the author repeatedly highlighted the neighbourhood's distinctiveness—which was largely a product of its well-known history. "The Lower East Side has played a crucial role in America's history and its emergence as a democracy," Schwartz asserted, because "the Lower East Side has served New York City and America as a starting place for its immigrants, who have done much to create the flourishing metropolis New York is today." Furthermore, the Lower East Side's reputation as an immigrant resting place was not simply a historical phenomenon:

Puerto Rican immigrants entered New York City at a steady rate throughout the postwar years—in 1950, 250,000 Puerto Ricans lived in the city; by 1960, the number was 600,000; and by 1970, it was 800,000—and African Americans migrating from the Southern United States settled in the neighbourhood as well.[36] It was this story that made saving the area essential in 1970: Schwartz ended his segment on the history of the area by arguing, "It would be unconscionable to sacrifice the Lower East Side to the giant system to which it has given such life and strength."[37]

According to Schwartz, the Lower East Side's geography had historically segregated it from the rest of the city. Although the area occupied what seemed to be a prime location in postwar Manhattan—close to the city's growing financial centre at the tip of the island—the area's position made constructing subway lines within the neighbourhood difficult. "Important roads and mass transit lines run parallel to each other along north-south axes" in Manhattan, Schwartz explains, but "since the Lower East Side substantially departs from the regular pattern of the rest of Manhattan, jutting out sharply into the East River for most of its length . . . it has remained largely unconnected with the north-south transportation system."[38] This situation changed modestly with the demolition of the Third Avenue Elevated line in 1956, and although this change further reduced the ability of neighbourhood residents to travel to the rest of Manhattan, it opened up the area for visitors from outside its traditional borders. With this above-ground barrier between east and west removed, by 1960, the *New York Times* reported, the area began to be "recognized as an extension of Greenwich Village . . . [a]lthough there is no real concentration of Village atmosphere."[39]

This new relationship between Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side, coupled with postwar ideologies about slum clearance, inspired some developers to try to remake the historic Lower East Side into a new kind of neighbourhood. Modernist planners sought to eradicate the poverty and vice that the neighbourhood represented; for them, the only way to improve the area was to demolish old tenements to build large housing projects of numerous tall buildings situated around open space on enormous super-blocks. For Robert Moses, this transformation was not enough. Moses' 1956 plan proposed the demolition of the entirety of a thirty-acre area in the northwestern part of the neighbourhood, pushing almost seven thousand residents and five hundred businesses out of the area. The fact that the destroyed buildings would be replaced not by low-income residences but instead by three thousand middle-income apartments was telling.[40] Catching wind of Moses' plans, "absentee landlords withheld maintenance and vital services as a method to maximize profits before condemned buildings were scheduled to be torn down," sociologist Christopher Mele writes, and planners' methods of identifying particular sub-areas within neighbourhoods for "renewal" efforts "invented and reinforced the isolated residential enclaves defined by ethnicity/race and class."[41] Meanwhile, slumlords were able to appeal to the traditional rhetoric about the perpetually poverty-stricken Lower East

Side, "portraying themselves often as hapless victims of demographic shifts, rent control limitations, white flight, and a soured economy," even as they "earned profits through disinvestment" in the neighbourhood.[42] Planners' struggles to change the reputation of the neighbourhood coexisted with slumlords' attempts to retain its reputation for their own material gain, even while the *New York Times* pointed out that attempts at gentrifying the neighbourhood had left a shortage of low-income residences in the Lower East Side.[43]

As in Greenwich Village, community residents in the Lower East Side critically considered developers' plans and resisted attempts to recast the neighbourhood as a middle-income area at current residents' expense. Community activists managed to halt Moses' 1956 gentrification plan; the early 1960s witnessed a number of rent strikes in the area; and the residents of a cluster of tenements on Suffolk Street combined their tiny backyards into a single park-like space that they renovated with the help of private funds, demonstrating that the physical structures of urban neighbourhoods did not have to be destroyed to improve the quality of life.[44] One of the best examples of Puerto Rican resistance was represented by the Young Lords Party, a radical late-1960s and early-1970s organization that led a number of community activism projects, including the Garbage Offensive, a project to clean up garbage in Puerto Rican neighbourhoods. The Young Lords framed their "offensive" as a form of resistance, as a means of expressing their belief that the neighbourhoods' large amount of uncollected waste was indicative of the municipal government's neglect of poor areas of the city.[45] The work of community activists in the early 1960s would inform and inspire the actions of NYU students later in the decade, while the Young Lords' response to city neglect emerged alongside student efforts on the west side of the island.

The symbolism of the Lower East Side as a famed immigrant ghetto, coupled with the new connection between the two neighbourhoods as Villagers began to move east and the elevated rail barrier between the two areas was dismantled, brought the Lower East Side to the forefront of NYU students' minds, even as they advocated for change on their own campus. As the two neighbourhoods seemed to grow closer together, students, as we shall see, discovered that their university was a significant landholder in the nearby neighbourhood, in the form of a hospital and apartment buildings, only furthering their perceived connection to the Lower East Side. Students at NYU called for their university to be accountable to "the community"; and in the late 1960s, that "community" was often assumed to include the Lower East Side.

The New University Conference

This was the context in which student activists at NYU found themselves in the late 1960s: in a city where labour had historically been a strong defender not only of bread and butter issues but also of making the city more broadly responsible to all of its residents, NYU students rallied around locally based issues in their Greenwich Village neighbourhood and in the nearby Lower

East Side. In both neighbourhoods, locally based resistance was tradition.

Perhaps the strongest ongoing example of student radicals' commitment to these local politics lies with the New University Conference (NUC), a student organization interested in ensuring that all New York City residents would be able to benefit from the university. NUC was a national organization committed to advocating, as one organization document explains, "for increased or 'open' enrollment for black and third world youth" in American colleges and universities. The organization saw their mission as a specifically urban one, as educational institutions, "particularly in cities," had a responsibility to "serve the community—*all* of the community." NUC based its work on the fact that urban universities, whether public or private, drew "on a definable population" and should be required to serve that population. This meant that even elite schools such as NYU, with high tuition rates and admission standards, needed to address their exclusion of minority and poor youth. Many in NUC believed that the inequalities of higher education could be solved only by dramatically changing the ways in which students were admitted to the university—and the amount of tuition that students were required to pay upon admission.[46]

Significantly, NUC—and especially the organization's regional New York City chapter—saw universities primarily as community organizations whose main responsibility lay in the communities they were a part of. Universities were not national institutions that should try to attract the best students from across the country or should increase their acceptance of low-income or minority students living anywhere in the United States; rather, universities (and especially urban universities) should be mindful of their metropolitan surroundings and seek to include those potential students who had grown up near their campuses. As the notes on NYCNUC's first meeting put it,

> The issue of open admissions seems to us unusually valuable because it focusses attention immediately upon the relationship of the university to its surrounding community, not in the relatively (for most people) abstracct [*sic*] way in which the war embodies this relationship but in the tangible, personal matter of who is inside and who out and why. This is an issue of class (white lower class communities should be entered as well as black) and race which opens naturally into a radical social critique.[47]

In March 1969, NYU students organized a campus rally on the subject of open admissions for all New York City high school students.[48] Later, NUC at NYU began "a campaign to open classrooms to all who want[ed] to attend," inviting "members of the community, meaning lower-class high school students, dropouts and workers . . . to attend classes and discuss issues of concern to them and to university students," according to the notes of the chapter.[49] The organization envisioned a future in which faculty, students, and community members would "begin to convene at sites arranged by community organizations . . . This means that classes would now meet in factories, in community storefronts, in housing projects or in churches, wherever

people were interested." Community-oriented education would culminate in the university "effectively overcom[ing] its traditional separateness" from the city.[50] Another NUC campaign called for an end to tracking in high schools, linking the public schools' system of earmarking students for either college preparatory or vocational training—a process more often than not determined by the income of the students' parents—with the lack of "black, Puerto Rican, and white working class youth" at NYU.[51] For many NYU activists, organizing focused on local issues and local communities—such as open admissions and corresponding programs supporting local workers' strikes and opening community daycare centres—that were fundamentally more important than, for instance, ending the Vietnam War. "People who face rising taxes, slum housing, shrinking job market, and whose children face the draft want real answers," a 1969 SDS flyer proclaimed, "Can the anti-war forces provide those answers? . . . We must build the open admissions movement into a fight to improve general conditions of life. That's how we can end the war."[52]

The actions of NUC were predicated on the hardly revolutionary idea that education is central to success in the United States. Students' radicalism became evident, however, in their declaration that education had been forcefully withheld from certain segments of the population. Accordingly, they began a movement to help those individuals attain the tools they needed to emerge from poverty—and, in the radicals' ultimate vision, to subvert the social and economic system entirely. Their arguments were also informed by the concurrent debate about community-controlled education in elementary and secondary public schools. Most famously, in the Ocean Hill–Brownsville neighbourhood of Brooklyn, the Ford Foundation funded an effort to give the community control over local schools. This experiment would end in crisis, but the debate about community control would not be over; and in 1969, the discussion about giving residents more of a stake in education on a local level was just beginning.[53] The activities of NUC challenge assumptions that student radicals were concerned primarily with securing a place for themselves in crafting university policy or with getting excused from final examinations, and the group's work in New York City also brings into question the belief that white students, black and Third World students, and non-students (often community members of colour) failed to work together in the late 1960s.

The arguments that NUC members were able to make and the rhetoric they employed were determined by not only the prominence of the New Left but also by local developments in recent years, and the way that these local developments were articulated. As residential Greenwich Village changed in the 1950s and 1960s, as the neighbourhood shifted from a bohemian haven to a trendy bourgeois area, another mainstay of the Village, NYU itself was undergoing rapid and dramatic changes as well. NYU, established in 1831 as a democratic university that would educate "the men of the city," differed from its inception from elite Ivy League institutions such as Columbia; in fact,

in 1870, the university began to offer free tuition to all students.[54] By the 1880s, university officials felt that Washington Square in Greenwich Village was growing too commercial to house a university, and NYU purchased land in the Bronx, maintaining two separate campuses—one uptown and one in the Village—for almost one hundred years.[55] Still, the Washington Square campus remained the centre of the university, and throughout the early twentieth century NYU struggled to determine its place within the city, remaining interested in admitting students from various socio-economic backgrounds and in serving city residents according to emerging progressive social theories.[56]

At the end of the Second World War, NYU was thriving: with over 47,000 students in 1946, the university had the highest enrolment of any university in the United States at the time.[57] The G.I. Bill had significantly boosted enrolment, offering opportunities for higher education to individuals who could not have afforded it before the war. The increase in students, however, put a strain on the university's resources, and the school responded by planning to construct new academic and dormitory buildings and by raising admissions standards, which had previously been relatively relaxed.[58] Conveniently for NYU, Robert Moses declared the southeastern part of Washington Square a slum in 1953 and proposed to clear it and institute "urban renewal," opening up the area for development by the school.[59] In 1959, the Loeb Student Center opened on the square, and in the mid-1960s the school began construction on a nine-story glass-encased library also bordering Washington Square Park, a project that required NYU to secure permission from the City Housing and Redevelopment Board to break an agreement between the board and the university not to construct any buildings over sixty feet high.[60]

By the 1960s, then, NYU had faced significant challenges to its self-proclaimed status as an urban university. The school no longer accepted as diverse an applicant pool, and tuition was steadily on the rise.[61] Still, according to Thomas J. Frusciano and Marilyn H. Pettit's *New York University and the City*, NYU continued to "emphasize its service to New York City in research of urban problems, its preparation of specialists in science, education, public administration, and social science for careers in which they would help solve problems particular to an urban setting."[62] The university's long-standing pose as integrated with instead of in opposition to the surrounding urban area would significantly affect the challenges to the university's policies that arose later in the decade. NUC's calls for open admissions and local accountability drew upon the language that NYU itself had used—and continued to use—to describe itself. Into the 1960s, even as the university grew to be more elite academically and financially, NYU continued to position itself as the city's university. NUC activists demanded that the university live up to its own claims, in spite of the local historical developments that had made doing so all the more difficult. Students' demands for reduced tuition and greater university accountability were not simply selfishly motivated; rather, students saw them as part of a larger effort to make New York

City a true city of opportunity to the low-income people who comprised most of it.

The Student Strike

Indeed, working for and with the low-income communities surrounding their campus was central to the activities of NUC—and to the work of other NYU student radicals who organized a massive strike in the spring of 1970. After President Nixon's April announcement of another escalation of the war in Vietnam and the National Guard's shooting of four Kent State University students in early May, NYU students decided to organize a large-scale anti-war rally, despite the fact that NYU President Hester had, according to a university report on the strike, already opted "to suspend class attendance and devote the last few days of the school year to peace activities."[63] Immediately following the rally, however, students entered Loeb Student Center and, in the style of the Columbia strike two years earlier, "liberated" the building; students spread to two other campus buildings the following day. What seemed at first glance to be simply a mimic of earlier student anti-war action, however, proved quickly to be much more significant. Students were not simply outraged at the continued war and the student deaths—had these been the only reasons for discontent, President Hester's fairly liberal handling of the situation (e.g., cancelling classes and organizing anti-war campus activities) would have taken steps toward calming student anger. Instead, student radicals linked these two watershed events to the community ills they continued to see around them in the vicinity of their campus, and anti-war or anti-military posturing would not satisfy their discontent.

Campus flyers from the time of the strike make clear the students' primary concerns. Just as Columbia students had been disgusted at their university's encroachment into Harlem, NYU students found their school's treatment of Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side inexcusable. Central to the students' outrage was NYU's affiliation with Bellevue Hospital, the famed public institution that had been founded to serve "the needs and demands of the surrounding city"—a mission quite similar to NYU's self-proclaimed purpose.[64] Bellevue was simultaneously a symbol of urban democracy and equality and of the failure of utopian urbanism. Unlike most of the country, New York City boasted a public hospital system that had for many years treated even the most destitute segments of the population, but by the 1960s Bellevue had become "New York's hospital of last resort," according to historian Sandra Opdycke.[65] Serving primarily African-American, Puerto Rican, and Chinese-American patients, Bellevue, located near the Lower East Side, was constantly plagued by insufficient funding.[66] In the postwar years, NYU stepped in to partner with Bellevue as its teaching hospital, and by midway through the 1960s, the university had direct control over 75 per cent of patient beds at the hospital.[67] NYU selected those patients that would be admitted to the wards controlled by the university—often choosing only patients with ailments useful for teaching purposes—and those wards controlled by the city were left to treat all patients that NYU refused. By the end of the decade, "NYU faculty replaced

almost all community practitioners," and the university, in league with Robert Moses' Slum Clearance Committee, ensured the destruction of the "slums" surrounding the hospital, dramatically reshaping the nearby community.[68]

Student radicals learned of NYU's connection with Bellevue and made it a part of their protests during the strike. One strike pamphlet outlined the issue with Bellevue: "When NYU Medical School uses Bellevue Hospital as a training groung [*sic*] for student doctors—mostly white men—to learn their trade by cutting up poor people—mostly black and Puerto Rican women—under filthy conditions, then we [radical students] get cut up and butchered too." The writer continued by urging the university to "begin to serve the community with the Med Center, instead of oppressing it."[69] Another pamphlet addressed the problem cynically:

> But why should NYU care about Bellevue Hospital when only a few blocks away NYU Hospital stands to serve a small wealthy white community. At first glance NYU Hospital is a pearly white modern complex with fancy service and fantastic prices. Both hospitals are managed by the same people yet the care and conditions of the hospitals themselves are so different.[70]

Strikers were also outraged at the university's newly constructed apartment complexes, out of the price range of most university employees.[71] In addition, radicals pointed out that NYU was not simply a university but also an urban landholder, seeing the clearance of the low-income neighbourhoods around Bellevue, and "the problem of housing in NYC" itself, as "simply another symptom of the whole lopsided power distribution characteristic of the system."[72]

Perhaps the most famous demand of the strikers, however, involved the "Panther 21," the Black Panther Party members who had been arrested in New York City and were being held for $100,000 bail. Strikers took hold of the Courant School of Mathematics during the take-over and held a computer, worth $6 million, "hostage," demanding that the university pay the bail to release just one BPP member to ensure that the strikers did not destroy the expensive equipment. This demand, too, was linked to the specific conditions of New York City neighbourhoods. "New York University has been oppressing the black and brown people in New York through its racist admissions policies, through a health complex that gives totally inadequate care to the people on the lower east side [*sic*], and through their real estate holdings in lower New York City," one flyer alleged; "NYU must begin reparations to the Black community by paying the bail of Black Panther leaders now being held in New York."[73] To be sure, many of the strikers' priorities and strategies had been borrowed from BPP organizing: community uplift and concern with the state of low-income communities had been central tenets of the party since its inception. That the students would demand retribution for imprisoned party members seemed only fitting.

Furthermore, strikers, no doubt inspired by the NUC, linked calls for open admissions to the strike. A NUC bulletin after the

"THE SPIRIT OF THE PEOPLE IS GREATER THAN THE MAN'S TECHNOLOGY."

Huey P. Newton

THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR AEC COMPUTER AT NYU'S COURANT INSTITUTE OF MATHEMATICS HAS BEEN HELD BY STRIKING STUDENTS SINCE TUESDAY MORNING. IT IS BEING HELD FOR RANSOM. WE DEMAND THAT EITHER THE UNIVERSITY MUST PAY $100,000 FOR BAIL FOR ONE MEMBER OF THE NEW YORK PANTHER 21 BY 11 AM THURSDAY MORNING OR THE COMPUTER WILL SUFFER POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES!

New York University has been oppressing the black and brown people in New York through its racist admissions policies, through a health complex that gives totally inadequate care to the people on the lower east side, and through their real estate holdings in lower New York City. It also serves to oppress people of the third world by supporting the war in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia by contin-uing ROTC and military research. The Atomic Energy Commission computer is a tool of that oppression.

NYU must begin reparations to the Black community by paying the bail of Black Panther leaders now being held in New York, but they will not pay if we just ask. NYU does not want the Panthers on the streets fighting for the Black community. They will only pay if they feel a real threat. OUR HOLD ON THE COMPUTER IS THAT THREAT.

MASS CITY WIDE RALLY AT COURANT INSTITUTE

9:30 A.M. THURSDAY

New York University
Mercer St. and LaGuardia Place

FIGURE 1: Flyer from May 1970 NYU protests.

strike's end mentioned that "during the strike, worker-student brigades were formed by the [NUC] chapter to talk to workers and high school students about the goals of the strike and the war."[74] Furthermore, a strike pamphlet argued that, for NYU "to begin to relate to the community . . . a community oriented school would have to open its doors to the people of the community, particularly black, brown and white working class people" as well as to provide "child care centers . . . staffed by both men and women."[75]

Strikers continued to occupy campus buildings until 15 May. A summary of the strike written by a participant noted, "Realistically, the strikers had to give it up. Without the support of larger groups on the outside, demanding the ownership of *their* places of work, *their* apartments, *their* subway lines, the students and faculty could not stand alone" to hold campus buildings.[76] Although the student radicals had attempted to engage the surrounding communities—indeed, even though constructing an equitable city lay at the heart of their aims for the strike—those communities had not been convinced to help the strikers, and, even after the take-over's failure, students continued to perceive the local community as central to radical success. For NYU students involved in the take-over, their forms of radicalism were not primarily about ending a war or restructuring a university. Rather, larger goals of community development and empowerment lay at the heart of their efforts, and New York City itself was central to their world view.

Results of Radicalism at NYU

NYU responded better to the activities of its radical students than most colleges and universities during the period, establishing a Martin Luther King, Jr. scholarship, beginning to accept affirmative action policies, and renewing its commitment to the urban communities it was a part of.[77] Needless to say, however, the university did not go as far as the student radicals had hoped it would.

In many ways, radical student activity at NYU resembled that at other American institutions of higher education, but the students' focus on local issues of community development suggests that student activism during the 1960s also fit into an earlier series of debates over the politics of urban space. Just as Greenwich Village residents had protested the construction of luxury apartment buildings in their neighbourhood, students challenged the university's "revitalization" efforts around Bellevue and demanded that the university—and the city as a whole—work to create a more equitable metropolitan area. And the history of radicalism, resistance, and community cooperation inherent to Greenwich Village and to New York University coloured student and university responses to the questions raised during the sixties. Columbia students had demanded that the university be accountable to Harlem residents, but NYU students were able to co-opt a pre-existing language about the "urban university" to make a case for the school's responsibility to its community.

Crisis, Collapse, and Rejuvenation

By the mid-1970s, New York City had suffered a financial collapse that crippled the city and broke its spirit. The United States as a whole found itself entrenched in economic problems in 1975, but in few places was the situation as severe as in New York. The city's elaborate social programs had been partially funded by the federal government in the early 1960s, but after federal funds were withdrawn, the city attempted to retain the same ambitious services. The municipal government was, unsurprisingly, incapable of picking up the slack, and the mid-1970s and early 1980s were very dark days in Gotham.[78]

Those who had returned to the city in the early and mid-1960s under the optimistic mayoral administration of John Lindsay fled again after the city's financial collapse, and with their exit the mood of the entire city changed. Nationally, Americans found themselves less willing to be optimistic in the years following the Vietnam War and Watergate, and the local trend in Manhattan leaned toward despair. For a brief moment in the 1960s, urban elites had dreamed of inhabiting an exciting and vibrant inner city neighbourhood such as Greenwich Village, but by the 1970s, most New Yorkers with options for mobility wanted only to be as far from the city as possible.[79]

As I write in 2009, however, both Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side are remarkably gentrified areas with unfathomable rents. Luxury buildings dot the neighbourhood and landlords often charge more than $2,500 per month for tiny studio spaces in the area. For Christopher Mele, the recent transformation of the Lower East Side had everything to do with the countercultural groups who have resided there, and his analysis might be extended to Greenwich Village as well. In a postmodern urban environment, developers have been able to market radicalism, "grittiness," and marginality—and to translate those values into high rents. The ultimate luxury in present-day New York living is to stake out a tiny space in a building on the same block that earlier residents dreamed only of escaping.

In light of this odd reality, the study of radical urban history is all the more vital. A look at radicalism in late 1960s and early 1970s downtown Manhattan has demonstrated that the events that transpired here were ultimately tied to place: the radicals of New York City saw themselves as members of an urban community who had a direct responsibility to the other members of that community. Recovering their interest in urban space—and the way in which their interests were determined by the particular moment in which they worked—is central to understanding the character of the radicalism of the period. But beyond this imperative, popular understandings of the history of urban radicalism are linked fundamentally to the way that cities have developed and continue to develop: residents' conceptions of what took place on their streets before they arrived shape which areas find themselves in high demand at which times. The ways that we remember urban history can never be separated from the way that we experience urban spaces in our contemporary lives. Thus, the activities of NYU students in Greenwich

Village are more than just idiosyncratic moments in a short-lived national "movement." They are, instead, pieces in a puzzle of a city's heritage, and, despite their impermanence, they have affected—and continue to affect—the very real space of down-town New York City.

Notes

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4. See Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2004); Jim Miller, *"Democracy Is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); and Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

5. Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

6. Mary Ann Wynkoop, *Dissent in the Heartland: The Sixties at Indiana University* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

7. Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

8. For an overview of 1960s radicalism at NYU, see Amy Surak, *1968 Revisited*, an online exhibition available at http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/collections/exhibits/arch/Homepg/Index.html.

9. "The Student Movement at NYU," 1970, NYU Archives, 3.

10. Ibid., 3–4.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 12.

13. Ibid., 13, 18–19.

14. Harry Schwartz, *Planning for the Lower East Side* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 13.

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20. Qtd. in Joanne R. Reitano, *The Restless City: A Short History of New York from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 155.

21. Stern, Mellins, and Fisherman, *New York 1960*, 21.

22. Ibid., 14.

23. Gabriel Haslip-Viera, Angelo Falcón, and Félix Matos Rodríguez, eds., "Introduction," in *Boricuas in Gotham: Puerto Ricans in the Making of New York City* (Princeton: Wiener, 2005), 1.

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27. Stern, Mellins, and Fisherman, *New York 1960*, 221.

28. Ibid., 47, 50, 53.

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32. Stern, Mellins, and Fisherman, *New York 1960*, 222.

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34. Martin Tolchin, "'Village' Refuge Offered Artists," *New York Times*, 5 October 1963.

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41. Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 131, 133.

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59. Ibid., 208.

60. Ibid., 211, 213–214.

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70. "Free the Panther 21," NYU Archives.

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72. An SDS flyer, NYU Archives.

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