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# Altering the Urban Frontier: Gentrification and Public Parks in New York City

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**Altering the Urban Frontier:  
Gentrification and Public Parks in New York City**

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In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis,  
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Readers:  
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## I. Introduction

Access to quality public services is essential to the well-being of urban residents. Public parks in urban areas contribute to a citizen's mental, physical, and social health. They serve as recreational fields, community meeting locations, spaces of relaxation, performance stages, community gardens, and an escape from the dominant concrete urban biome. Within the five boroughs of New York City, there are over 1,700 parks owned and operated by the Department of Parks and Recreation. After decades of neglect and lack of funding, the municipal government has finally made parks a priority. In fact, Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC city plan strives to have every resident be within a 10 minute walk of a park.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, massive waves of gentrification, signifying the process by which lower-income neighborhoods experience an influx of wealthier residents, are changing the face of the city. As wealthier residents move into and invest in traditionally low-income neighborhoods, gentrification leads to the direct or indirect displacement of low-income residents, as well as the reinvestment of capital, changing community demographics, and landscape alterations. The process profoundly restructures the social, economic, and spatial dynamics within a neighborhood.<sup>2</sup> One can easily observe the effects of gentrification within the private sector, as displayed by expensive, high-rise waterfront developments and trendy, expensive coffee shops. These types of patterns within the housing and private sectors have been well-documented in New York City. However, the effects of gentrification on public entities, such as parks, are less documented.

Private spaces, such as apartments and restaurants, are inherently exclusive and directed towards those who can afford to participate. Public spaces, like neighborhood parks, however, are meant to be inclusive and open to all members of the public, regardless of their socioeconomic

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1 City of New York. *PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater New York*. New York: 2007.

<<http://www.nyc.gov/html/planyc2030/html/home/home.shtml>>

2 Neil Smith and Peter Williams. "Alternatives to Orthodoxy: Invitation to a Debate." *Gentrification of the City*. 1986.

standing. Unfortunately, public parks, as a public service, are not immune to being altered by the politics or social dynamics of an urban area, which can lead to the uneven distribution of resources and socio-spatial exclusivity. In my research, I observed the effects of gentrification on public parks in three New York City neighborhoods. My research was centered on three questions: How does gentrification change park usage? How does gentrification change the physical appearance or landscape of a park? And finally, how is the government involved in this process; is the distribution of public resources toward a park affected by gentrification? Before I began my study, I expected to find that parks in neighborhoods experiencing gentrification would receive more public and private resources, would be more aesthetically appealing spaces, and would have different social uses than parks in less gentrified neighborhoods.

To answer these questions, I conducted ethnographic research, such as interviews, and demographic analysis using GIS, Geographic Information System software in three New York City neighborhoods at different stages of gentrification. My study sites were Soundview Park in the Soundview neighborhood of the Southeast Bronx, Red Hook Recreation Area in the Red Hook neighborhood of South Brooklyn, and McCarren Park in the Williamsburg neighborhood of North Brooklyn, as displayed in the below map. I defined the stages of gentrification these neighborhoods fall under as 'non-gentrifying,' 'gentrifying,' and 'post-gentrification,' respectively.

## New York City Gentrification Case Study Sites



Data Source: US Census 2010 & 'Bytes of the Big Apple'

Figure 1.) Case Study Sites within New York City (Evers, 2012)

My research was conducted during the summer of 2012 while I was an intern at Partnerships for Parks, a joint organization of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the City Parks Foundation. Partnerships for Parks acts as a liaison between these departments and neighborhood community and volunteer organizations, helping residents take advantage of the resources the Parks Department has to offer. This includes helping groups collect supplies for community events, like sports equipment, portable stages, etc, as well as providing workshops for teaching skills like grant writing. As an employee of this nonprofit, I was exposed to the inner-workings of the Parks Department, the importance of parks to New Yorkers, and how resources were not always evenly distributed between neighborhoods. While living on the outskirts of Williamsburg, the post-gentrification neighborhood, I was confronted, on a daily basis, with the ways gentrification was

changing the face of the city and the lives of residents. Through this paper, I will contextualize the relevance of my research through a literature review of previous research in the field, explain my methodology for collecting data through participant observation and demographic analysis, and finally, present, analyze, and make conclusions based on my findings for how gentrification is altering public parks in New York City.



## II. Literature Review

### *Third Wave Gentrification:*

Gentrification, when wealthier residents move into a traditionally low-income neighborhood restructuring the social, economic, and spatial dynamics within a neighborhood<sup>3</sup>, has occurred in three 'waves,' since the 1960s. During the market crash and consequential urban decline of the early 1970s, gentrification ceases until the 1980s, labeled as the '2<sup>nd</sup> wave.' The gentrification of today, which started in the mid-1990s, is known as 3<sup>rd</sup> wave gentrification.<sup>4</sup> This contemporary gentrification differs from prior waves in a number of ways, notably: gentrification has moved from inner city neighborhoods adjacent to the central business district of Manhattan into more remote neighborhoods; because of the global real estate industry, developers are often instigators in gentrifying neighborhoods, rather than coming in after a neighborhood has been established by individual citizens; resistance to gentrification has become less common, today most anti-gentrification groups have become housing service providers; and finally, the government is far more involved in the process than previous waves<sup>5</sup>.

Hackworth, in his work "The Changing State of Gentrification," explains:

"After years of laissez-faire politics regarding gentrification—i.e to encourage it only if the private market has proven it viable and in some cases, even help its resistance - local governments, state level agencies, and federal administrations are assisting gentrification more assertively than during the 1980s. In the USA, some of this shift has been formalized into urban policy, but much of this change has been played out less formally, in the form of increased local government assistance to gentrifiers, relaxed zoning, and reduced protection of affordable housing" (pp. 65)

In addition to the government playing a more active role in making gentrification easier,

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3 Smith, 1986

4 Jason Hackworth and Neil Smith. "The Changing State of Gentrification." *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 2001.

5 Hackworth, 2001

resisting gentrification and finding affordable housing has become more difficult. With the decline of industry in cities across the U.S., New York City has found success as a global city focusing on consumerism, tourism, and elite knowledge-based industries where “Quality of urban life has become a commodity for those with money” (Harvey, pp. 8). Unfortunately, many of the local and federal housing policies of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have been more focused the commodification of the city for tourists and the wealthy than making the city accessible for working class people. The NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development used to be an ally for those resisting gentrification; for example, through selling anti-gentrification organizations abandoned buildings at cheap prices.<sup>6</sup> This department has now taken a more neoliberal stance on housing, with programs such as Section 8. Under Section 8, known as the Housing Choice Voucher Program, in lieu of expanding public housing or rent controlled housing, eligible low-income individuals and families are given rent subsidies in the form of vouchers. With these vouchers, qualified recipients are then pushed into the private market to find affordable housing. For reference, the average subsidy is \$952.21 per month<sup>7</sup>, whereas the average rent in Manhattan is \$3,418 per month.<sup>8</sup>

Like many public services, city governments have become strained for resources due to the gutting of federal programs, such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which was scaled-down during the Reagan Administration. Their HOPE VI program, meant to improve and replace the decaying high-rise public housing of the 1990s, “now allows municipal governments to remove public housing units for the purpose of redevelopment without one-for-one replacement”

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6 Kathe Newman and Elvin K. Wyly. “The Right to Stay Put, Revisited: Gentrification and Resistance to Displacement in New York City.” *Urban Studies*, 2006.

7 City of New York. Department of Housing Preservation and Development. *DTR Section 8 General Program Indicators*. September 2012. <<http://www.nyc.gov/html/hpd/downloads/pdf/Section8-Program-Statistics.pdf>>

8 Marc Santora. “The City of Sky-High Rent.” *New York Times*. 2012 April 20.

(Hackworth, pp. 69). During gentrification's 3<sup>rd</sup> wave, public housing has become one of the only ways low-income residents are able to stay put in gentrifying neighborhoods. Yet even public housing programs are not an answer to the housing crisis, as “A typical family now spends eight years on the waiting list for an apartment in one of the city's public housing developments” (Newman, 2006).

Rent control is often seen as a solution to both affordable housing and preventing displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods; however, the system of rent control has transitioned to rent stabilization. Rent control applies to residential buildings constructed before February 1947; the tenant must have been occupying the apartment continuously since before July 1, 1971, or if the apartment is part of a one or two family house, a *l*á a brownstone, the tenant must have been continually occupying the apartment since April 1, 1953.<sup>9</sup> In both of these cases, once the apartment is vacated, it is no longer rent controlled. Rent stabilization applies to buildings with six or more units built between February 1, 1947 and January 1, 1974, as well as tenants who moved into apartments during this time are covered by rent stabilization. Certain buildings built after 1974 adhering to certain tax requirements are also rent stabilized.<sup>10</sup> In New York City, rent controlled apartments are 3 per cent of the housing stock and rent stabilized apartments are 42 per cent.<sup>11</sup>

Although there are tax initiatives which can turn apartments into rent stabilized apartments, rent controlled and stabilized apartments, as they now function, are not a realistic solution for the future of the skyrocketing rents in New York City. The Rent Regulation Act of 1997 allows landlords to increase the rent of regulated units 18 to 20 per cent when they are vacated. Furthermore, once the rent reaches over \$2,000, landlords can remove the unit from the regulated housing stock.<sup>12</sup> The restructuring of

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9 New York City Rent Guidelines Board. *Housing NYC*. 2012

10 New York City Rent Guidelines Board. 2012

11 Lance Freeman and Frank Braconi. “Gentrification and Displacement: New York City in the 1990s.” *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 2004

12 New York City Rent Guidelines Board. 2012

these types of affordable housing programs has made it increasingly difficult for low-income residents to stay in their homes. In fact, poor residents in New York City “Pay an average of 61 percent of their incomes on rent to stay in neighborhoods where they developed connections with people and places. This suggests that gentrification needs to be understood as a comprehensive process of neighborhood change which cannot only be understood in terms of real estate values” (Cahill, pp. 306). While a hot, gentrifying real estate market can be extremely profitable for developers, reading neighborhoods by their potential capital does not account for the historical, cultural, and psychological importance of communities which is broken down through the process of gentrification.

Displacement is often cited as the main negative component of gentrification, an unfortunate, but necessary, occurrence. However, when Lance Freeman published his 2004 study, “Gentrification and Displacement in New York City,” many saw his “at most modest link between gentrification and displacement” (pp. 480) as definitive evidence that gentrification truly was the best solution for urban decay.<sup>13</sup> However, Freeman's quantitative findings contrast the many personal accounts from residents and community activists around New York City. Despite his findings, “When we consider the negative impacts of gentrification, we can think not only of residents who are immediately displaced by gentrification processes but also of the impact of the restructuring of urban space on the ability of low-income residents to move into neighborhoods that once provided ample supplies of affordable living arrangements” (Newman, pp. 544). In addition to displacement being incredibly difficult to measure, it is also not the only negative affect gentrification has on residents. The effects of displacement may only be obviously displayed when looking at the change in neighborhood make up over longer time scales. Reconsidering factors not considered by Freeman, including those who leave New York all

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13 Adam Sternbergh. “What's Wrong With Gentrification? The Displacement Myth.” *New York Magazine*, 2009.

together, fall into homelessness, or share apartments with friends and family, Kathe Newman and Elvin K. Wyly, in their study, “The Right to Stay Put, Revisited: Gentrification and Resistance to Displacement in New York City,” recalculated Freeman's displacement model and found that the rate of displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods was 6.2 to 9.9 per cent, rather than Freeman's original 5.1 to 7.1 per cent. The newer number represents 10,000 displacees a year, which “should not be ignored, even in a city of 8 million” (Newman, pp. 548).

As one might expect, those displaced are often foreign-born, female-headed households, people in poverty, and senior citizens.<sup>14</sup> But because their neighborhoods represent community ties, access to employment, and quality of services, vulnerable residents will do a lot to stay in their gentrifying neighborhoods, despite rapidly rising rents. The previously described housing policies in New York provide little relief, as it was found that 3.7% of poor renters in gentrifying areas have rent controlled housing, 6.6% have rent stabilized housing, and 28.9% live in public housing.<sup>15</sup> Poor renters in gentrifying neighborhoods will often experience pressure from both developers and landlords to move out of their apartments, through “...slips under the door offering to buy out in public housing, family members relocating temporarily never to return home, personal experiences of being harassed by landlords, doubling up of families in tiny apartments, and seeing friends displaced” (Cahill, pp. 305). Whether residents are displaced or struggling to stay in their neighborhoods, gentrification hurts. The economic inability to comfortably stay in a neighborhood, or leave by their own choice, reflects uneven mobility between gentrifiers and original residents.

Economic differences are not the only divide between new and old residents of gentrifying neighborhoods. Race, as it is intrinsically connected to economic status, is a necessary component in a

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14 Newman, 2006

15 Newman, 2006

conversation about gentrification. As for new residents moving into lower-income neighborhoods, “Whiteness is the face of gentrification” (Cahill, 302), these residents are often characterized as young and well-educated as well. Historically, communities of color have been marginalized and disinvested in, therefore,

“Residents of the 'hood are sometimes more receptive because gentrification brings their neighborhood into the mainstream of American commercial life with concomitant amenities and services that others might take for granted. It also represents the possibility of achieving upward mobility without having to escape to the suburbs or predominantly white neighborhoods” (Freeman, pp. 1)

Yet these amenities being improved on or put into place can prove that neighborhoods of color are only worth investing in once white people live there as well (Cahill, 2007). For a brief time period, gentrification can make neighborhoods diversely populated, as seen in the demographics of 2000 Williamsburg, where the population was 8.4% black, 46.4% white, and 39.1% Latino,<sup>16</sup> however, “In no way but proximity does gentrification counteract the economic and racial polarization of most urban populations... What appears as ethnic, racial, and economic integration at the neighborhood level may be enclaves within the census tract, the block, and individual buildings” (Zukin, pp. 221).

Additionally, New York City neighborhoods are furthered compartmentalized into smaller ethnic enclaves. In neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, Williamsburg, and Red Hook, there have always been white residents; yet contemporary gentrification waves are colonizing even areas of the neighborhood which have traditionally been black or Latino enclaves.<sup>17</sup> While the well-educated, creatively-oriented, white gentrifiers may not be ideologically racist, their presence in a gentrifying neighborhood can increase police presence and subsequent racial profiling. In gentrifying neighborhoods, “Social and spatial boundaries are patrolled by stepped up police forces who discipline

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16 United States Census Bureau. *DPI-General Population and Housing Characteristics, 2000*

17 Caitlin Cahill. “Negotiating Grit and Glamour: Young Women of Color and the Gentrification of the Lower East Side.” *City & Society*. 2007

young men of color constructed as dangerous and criminal” (Cahill, pp. 304). This changes the dynamic of street and stoop life, as “There's a heightened level of intolerance...All of a sudden people can't sit on their stoops. They can't listen to their music” (Gibberd, pp. CY8). Police harassment is part of life as a young man of color in New York City, where the police stop random citizens deemed 'suspicious' and search them for weapons. 90 per cent of those stopped during these 'Stop and Frisk' procedures between 2002 to 2011 were black or Latino.<sup>18</sup>

Even for the black gentry, access to what neighborhoods they can move into is far more limited than those of white gentrifiers; “In interviews with Harlem's black gentry it was not uncommon to hear stories about negative experiences on the job and with white neighbors before making the move to Harlem. Some have endured slights as subtle as whispered comments. Others have weathered more severe attacks- racial slurs and, for one family, the fire-bombing of its new home” (Taylor, pp. 286). Regardless of your class, white gentrifiers have a taken for granted privilege to move freely throughout space, in neighborhoods of color and white areas.

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18 New York Civil Liberties Union. “Stop and Frisk Data.” 2012

## *Public Parks in New York City*

Because of their significance to the quality of life for urban dwellers, there have been numerous studies on the dynamics, benefits, and distribution of public parks both in New York City, and around the world. In the past, parks have been seen as stages for urban behavior, where residents from all walks of life and forced to interact and socialize. Famed landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted viewed these interactions in parks as crucial to the health of cities and residents, stating, “Is it doubtful that it does men good to come together in this way in pure air and under the light of heaven, or that it must have an influence directly counteractive to that of the ordinary hard, hustling working hours of town life? You will agree with me, I am sure, that it is not, and that opportunity, convenient, attractive opportunity, for such congregation, and is a very good thing to provide for, in planning the extension of a town” (Olmsted, pp. 311). During the 1930s, the government found that parks could not only serve as areas of leisure and relaxation, but also serve to meet health and active recreation needs through specific facilities such as pools, ball fields, and courts. This era of parks development, where in New York City many large public works projects, such as the McCarren Park pool, were constructed, is considered the golden era for parks.<sup>19</sup> As federal funding bled from cities, individual municipal governments became responsible for providing social services to their constituents, including parks, which as a result, fell into disarray towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, under the Bloomberg Administration, the Parks Department proudly boasts, “Not since those days of Depression-era federal funds has the budget for park construction been so large,”<sup>20</sup> with a budget of up to \$384 million in the

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19 Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris. “Urban Form and Social Context: Cultural Differentiation in the Uses of Urban Parks.” *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. 1995

20 City of New York. Department of Parks and Recreation. “City of New York Parks and Recreation Biannual Report 2006-2007.” 2007



Fiscal Year of 2008.<sup>21</sup> The Bloomberg Administration has made parks a priority by striving to create a city where every New Yorker is a ten minute walk from at least one park.<sup>22</sup> It has been found that distance or walking time from one's home is the most important precondition for use of parks. Bloomberg's goal is a step in the right direction, as the walk for optimum accessibility is five minutes.<sup>23</sup>

Despite how large the NYC Parks Department budget sounds, it takes quite a bit of funding to maintain and improve the thousands of public parks within New York City. Research has shown that while parks may be evenly distributed throughout neighborhoods, regardless of racial and socioeconomic make up, quality of facilities was less in poorer neighborhoods, particularly those inhabited by people of color.<sup>24</sup> Although neighborhoods can be classified as high, middle, or low-income, the socioeconomic makeup of a neighborhood often varies greatly from block to block, especially in gentrifying neighborhoods. As Olmsted intended, parks often are sites of integration for many different types of people, yet the uses of parks varies between different groups of people. Research has shown race to be the most important indicator in park usage preference, even more significant than class. Black residents were found to prioritize group oriented activities, such as visiting relatives and playing team sports, where Caucasians were found to be more individual in their actions, preferring activities such as walking and jogging. Latinos were the most enthusiastic users of parks, using them primarily as a social space for activities such as birthday parties.<sup>25</sup> More specifically, race was also found to have the strongest influence on the preference of recreation activity, for example,

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21 City of New York. Committee on Parks and Recreation. "Hearing on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2012 Preliminary Budget & the Fiscal Year 2011 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report." 2012

22 City of New York. *PlaNYC*. 2007

23 Ann Van Herzele and Torsten Wiedemann. "A Monitoring Tool for the Provision of Accessible and Attractive Urban Green Spaces." *Landscape and Urban Planning*. 2003

24 Ana V. Moore, et. al. "Availability of Recreational Resources in Minority and Low Socioeconomic Status Areas." *Am J Prev Med*. 2008

25 Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995

African Americans were found in one study to “prefer natural environments that are open, well-groomed, and have more structured amenities such as ball fields and paved trails” (Payne, pp. 184).

Ideally a park would have amenities to suit every residents preferences, but one can imagine with differing users, these preferential differences can lead to conflicts over space usage, as well as differing visions for future improvements in the park.

*The Privatization of Public Space and Socio-spatial Exclusion:*

Neighborhood residents are not the only voices who hold sway in the future for public parks. Private corporations are increasingly involved in the operation and development of public spaces in New York City, in response to lack of federal funding. During the 1990s, the concept of the privatization of public space was displayed through quasi-public spaces, such indoor shopping malls, replacing more democratic spaces, like public parks.<sup>26</sup> These privatized quasi-public spaces were often highly surveilled, where “‘Security’- has less to do with personal safety than with the degree of personal insulation, in residential, work, consumption, and travel environments, from “unsavory” groups and individuals, even crowds in general” (Davis, pp. 180). Compared to the diverse, varied, and unpredictable city landscape that urban theorists such as Frederick Law Olmsted and Jane Jacobs idealized, the privatization of public space is in stark contrast; where order, predictability, and 'safety' are prioritized over truly open, accessible, and inclusive public spaces. An example of a privatized space in New York City manifests itself in Bryant Park, located in Midtown Manhattan adjacent to the main branch of the New York Public Library, where I did the majority of my non-ethnographic research over the summer.

Bryant Park is a public park, but it accepts no public funds and instead is operated by the Bryant Park Corporation, founded in 1980 after the park fell into disarray during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>27</sup> The money to operate the park is collected from business improvement district members, fees from concessionaires, and revenues generated by public events. As their website boasts, Bryant Park now

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26 Mike Davis. “Fortress L.A.” *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. 1990

27 Bryant Park Corporation. “About Us.” [Bryantpark.org](http://Bryantpark.org). 2012

operates with a budget of more than six times of that when it was publicly funded.<sup>28</sup> Bryant Park's private operation is illustrated in both subtle and obvious ways; for example, this summer, if you looked closely at the green chairs which are scattered across the lawn for public use, you would have seen the words 'Enjoy Coca Cola' emblazoned across the backs of the chairs. The park is also host to a variety of events, most of which are open to the public, with the exception of exclusive events such as runway shows during fashion week. Urbanist Mike Davis explains that with privatization of space comes the marginalization and exclusion of 'unsavory' populations, stating, "The universal and ineluctable consequence of this crusade to secure the city is the destruction of accessible public space. The contemporary opprobrium attached to the term "street person" is in itself a harrowing index of the devaluation of public spaces" (pp. 180). While Bryant Park is open to the public, it's official rules make it clear that said 'unsavory' or 'street' people are not welcome in the park:

"You are welcome... to spread blankets on the lawn, *but not plastic material or tarpaulins*, to use a park chair or *one seat* on a bench designed for sharing... Park guidelines prohibit... alcohol use outside the Grill, Café, and Southwest Porch, organized ballgames, rummaging in trash receptacles, amplified music that disturbs others, performances, except by permit, commercial activity, except by permit.." <sup>29</sup>

These rules prevent homeless people from spending time in the space, spreading tarps, or sleeping on park benches. Violation of these rules will result in removal by one of the parks many security guards. None of my study sites, McCarren Park in Williamsburg, Red Hook Recreation Area in Red Hook, or Soundview Park in Soundview, are managed by private corporations; however, this type of public-private partnerships reflects what some people view as the future of maintaining public

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28 Bryantpark.org, 2012

29 Bryantpark.org, 2012

spaces.<sup>30</sup> In connection to my research question, private companies are likely only to invest in post-gentrification neighborhoods.

Blurring the lines between public and private space is an example of how cities, such as New York, are increasingly polarized between different groups of people. In his research, “Social Exclusion and Space,” Ali Madanipour explains the ways in which our world is divided by physical, economic, and social barriers. One's ability to move freely through spaces gives one a sense of pride, while “The fragmentation of the social world, where some members of society are excluded in the 'mainstream' and where this exclusion is painful for the excluded and harmful for society as a whole” (Madanipour, pp.159). Like the rules and regulations that indicate homeless people should not spend time in Bryant Park, socio-spatial exclusionary forces characterize all built landscapes:

“ A combination of formalized rules and regulations, informal codes and signs, and fears and desires control our spatial behavior and alert us to the limitations on our access. Through these, we have come to know whether we can enter a place, are welcomed in another and excluded from others. More restrictions on our access to our surroundings would bring about the feeling of being trapped, alienated and excluded from our social space” (Madanipour, pp. 162)

These types of exclusionary forces can be heightened in gentrifying neighborhoods, where expensive coffee shops replace cheap pizza joints along the city landscape. In the private sector, these exclusionary forces are manifested through rising rent costs, where one is excluded from a neighborhood if they cannot afford the rent, or through new establishments. A low-income, long term resident may not enter a new, swanky coffee shop if they cannot afford to purchase a four dollar latte. While the private sector does not necessarily owe anything to the public, public spaces should be inclusive and open to all citizens, particularly those who may be metaphorically barred from private spaces. Because of the increasing exclusivity that characterizes the housing and private sectors of gentrifying or post-gentrification neighborhoods, public parks are crucial spaces for participating in the

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30 Laura Vanderkam. “Parks and Re-Creation: How Private Citizens Saved New York's Public Spaces.” *City Journal*. 2011

social life of a neighborhood, as places of resistance, and for feeling at home in one's own community. While third wave gentrification, disparities in quality of public services, the privatization of public space, and socio-spatial exclusion have been thoroughly researched, my research investigates where these theories intersect, how socio-spatial exclusion and privatization caused by third wave gentrification affect neighborhood parks.

### III: Methodology

#### *Justifying My Case Study Sites: Why Soundview, Red Hook, and Williamsburg?*

Given the time limit of a summer to conduct my research, I chose to compare three parks located in neighborhoods at different stages of gentrification. My case study sites were McCarren Park in post-gentrification Williamsburg, Red Hook Recreation Area in gentrifying Red Hook, and Soundview Park in non-gentrifying Soundview. In Soundview, the non-gentrifying stage is characterized by gentrification mainly occurring within the housing market. The only signs of gentrification are the presence of new, park adjacent high-rise coops and rental units. But these developments are not brand new; they are actually middle-income housing converted from what used to be public housing. Despite these new residents with higher income levels, evidence of gentrification has yet to become visible in the commercial section of the neighborhood, as displayed by the available bodegas, restaurants and grocery stores, or lack thereof. The area is historically known as low-income and high-crime, experiencing a lack of both public and private services. Up until 2006, “In the hundred blocks of Soundview that lie west of White Plains Road, an isolated area dotted with huge public housing projects and middle-income towers, there [were] no bank branches at all” (Neighborhood Report, *New York Times*, 2006). The population of Soundview is 31 per cent black, 2 per cent white, and 60 per cent Latino.<sup>31</sup>

The gentrifying neighborhood, Red Hook, has been a destination for artists since the mid-1990s.<sup>32</sup> However, the neighborhood is fairly isolated from public transportation and dominated by a massive complex of public housing buildings; almost three fourths of the population lives in public housing.<sup>33</sup> So while the neighborhood has changed quite a bit in the past five to ten years, it is still a

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31 United States Census Bureau. *DPI: General Population and Housing Characteristics*, 2010

32 John Marchese. “Call it RedHo? An Artist's Colony Grows in (Red Hook) Brooklyn.” *New York Times*. 1994

33 Joseph Berger and Charles Bagli. “For Whom Will the Foghorn Blow?: Industry v. Gentrification on Brooklyn Waterfront.” *New York Times*. 2006.

low-income, industrial neighborhood. Evidence of gentrification within the commercial sector is mainly concentrated on one street, where a gourmet bakery and other new high-end eateries can be found. The demographics of the neighborhood in 2010 were 36% black, 17% white, and 43% Latino.<sup>34</sup>

Williamsburg, the post-gentrification neighborhood, has been considered one of the most hip and trendy neighborhoods in New York since the 1990's, then dubbed “the New Bohemia” by *New York Magazine*.<sup>35</sup> An artist destination since the late 1980's, the Williamsburg of today is an expensive neighborhood, with luxury lofts, four dollar lattes on every block, and 'Bring Your Own Booze' painting classes that cost \$50-70 to recreate a famous piece of art work. Williamsburg is the epicenter of the cultural class; the development of “bars, galleries, restaurants, and clubs transformed the area from immigrant enclave to night life destination in recent years” (Buckley, pp. A25). An example of evidence of Williamsburg's transition from bohemian to bourgeoisie is found in the opening of a high-end baby store in the central business corridor, replacing a discount art supply store. A resident laments, “It's deplorable... It's one more sign of the deterioration of the neighborhood. You always figure there are places for people who want to have kids. Like over in Park Slope” (Bahrapour, pp. CY2). Williamsburg is still home to a diverse body of older residents: Italians, Eastern Europeans, Latinos, African-Americans, and Hasidic Jews, but the neighborhood is rapidly becoming whiter. The neighborhood's demographics in 2010 were 4% black, 63% white, and 27% Latino.<sup>36</sup>

In order to minimize variables in my study, I chose neighborhoods with similar amenities. Each neighborhood is relatively close to Manhattan, which makes these neighborhoods appealing for gentrifiers who may not find employment in their respective neighborhoods. It is possible to commute from each, although Williamsburg is more convenient than Red Hook and Soundview. All of the neighborhoods are located on the waterfront, however Soundview is the only neighborhood whose park runs along the water. Because of their waterfront locations, each neighborhood historically has

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34 United States Census Bureau. *DPI: General Population and Housing Characteristics*, 2010

35 Marchese, 1994

36 United States Census Bureau. *DPI: General Population and Housing Characteristics*. 2010



possessed an industrial working waterfront, but most of the functioning industry has left each neighborhood but Red Hook. Due to their large size, all the sites are over 30 acres, each park is considered to be a regional park, which means that there are people from surrounding neighborhoods using the park on a regular basis.

## *Participant Observation During the Summer of 2012*

To explore the effects of gentrification on public parks in New York City, I conducted research through participant observation and completed demographic analysis using GIS. With the help of a research grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Claremont Colleges Environmental Analysis program, I conducted field research in New York City for 10 weeks from June until the end of August 2012. As I previously mentioned, during this time I was also interning, for a second summer, with Partnerships for Parks, a division of the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. My work at Partnerships for Parks often overlapped with my research as I was working on an oral history project in Soundview as well as making interactive community maps for parks on the Lower East Side, Coney Island, and Soundview.

During the summer I connected with several neighborhood residents and community organizers to collect personal accounts about gentrification and public parks through interviews. As a white outsider to these communities and a non-native New Yorker no less, communities and organizations working to resist gentrification were sometimes not interested in talking to me; many an email to different groups across the city, such as the Greenpoint Waterfront Association for Parks and Planning (GWAPP) and the Open Space Alliance for North Brooklyn (OSA) went unanswered. On the other hand, when I tried to contact individuals involved in waterfront development or public-private park organizations, they tended to be unresponsive as well. Luckily, the connections and relationships I developed through my internship with Partnerships for Parks were invaluable to my research, as it allowed me to make contact with community members and organizations that may have been skeptical to talk with me otherwise. Because I became interested in park funding, I decided to focus my interviews on residents who also were involved in park advocacy, as community organizers or volunteers. Because of their advocacy, these residents have a unique and thorough understanding of the

public and private attention their respective parks were receiving. The first two interviews listed were conducted as a part of the oral history project in Soundview about the park. The interviews are listed below:

Name of Interviewee:	Neighborhood Associated with:	Description/Occupation:
1.) Lucy Aponte	Soundview	Soundview resident, Founder of Friends of Soundview Park
2.) Elbin Mena	Soundview	Soundview resident, Founder of the Harding Park Homeowners Association
3.) Anna Ortega-Williams	Red Hook	Director of Health Programs at the Red Hook Initiative
4.) Tony Schloss	Red Hook	Red Hook resident, Media Programming Director at the Red Hook Initiative
5.) Victoria Hagman	Red Hook	Red Hook resident, Real Estate Broker
6.) Wylie Goodman	Red Hook	Red Hook resident, Catalyst Coordinator in Red Hook for Partnerships for Parks
6.)Lacey Tauber	Williamsburg	Williamsburg resident, Board member of Neighbors Allied for Good Growth
7.) Jason Shwartz	Williamsburg	Director of Partnerships for Parks
8.) Elena Conte	Soundview, Red Hook, Williamsburg	Former organizer at Sustainable South Bronx & current organizer for Public Policy campaigns at the Pratt Center for Community Development
9.) Joan Byron	Soundview, Red Hook, Williamsburg	Director of Policy at the Pratt Center for Community Development

Table 1.) Interviews conducted over Summer 2012.

While conducting these interviews, I formatted my questions to specifically relate to each participant's relationship to the neighborhood and park. For example, questions for Victoria Hagman, a real estate broker in Red Hook, mainly related to outside consumer perceptions of the neighborhood as well as rezoning of the waterfront. Questions that I asked each resident include: What is your relationship with the park? How has the park and neighborhood changed in the past few years? Have you noticed gentrification affecting funding, event programming, activity preference, or social dynamics in the park? Although I did have specific questions for each participant I interviewed, many of the interviews ended up being more like informal conversations than formal interviews. It is important to note that because many of the people I interviewed are paid employees of NGOs or the Parks Department, like Anna Ortega-Williams, Tony Schloss, Wylie Goodman, Lacey Tauber, Jason Shwartz, Elena Conte, and Joan Byron, their answers may differ from someone who is involved in the

park on solely a volunteer basis, like Lucy Aponte, Elbin Mena, and Victoria Hagman. However, all the people I interviewed lived in one of the neighborhoods I was studying, with the exceptions of Anna Ortega-Williams, Jason Shwartz, Elena Conte, and Joan Byron, whose history of working and organizing in the neighborhoods gives them unique insights about each park. The other component of my summer participant observation research was spending a lot of time in each neighborhood park. I would visit the parks weekly, observing the types of activities, types of people, and general happenings of each park. I visited the parks on both weekdays and weekends, in the mornings, afternoons, and evenings. I attended events and concerts in each park, organized by community groups, as well as larger scale events put on by the City Parks Foundation.

## *Contextualizing My Findings through GIS*

Upon returning to Claremont in the fall, geography prevented me from further completing ethnographic research in my study sites. I used the time through this semester to collect more quantitative data, focusing on funding, park amenities, and demographic data using GIS, Geographic Information Systems. Using information on the Department of Parks and Recreation's website, I was able to locate data on capital projects in each park, as well as find data to assemble a 'Park Quality Index' about the available resources found in each park, which I will discuss in further along in the paper.

To contextualize my own and community members' observations in each park within the neighborhoods, I used GIS, which allows readers and researchers to visualize demographic data layered over geographical information in the form of maps, to create a total of 24 maps displaying racial, financial, and housing information. Because New York City consists of neighborhoods that can differ drastically from block to block, I created my maps on a census tract level, using shape files made accessible by the New York City Department of City Planning's product, 'Bytes of the Big Apple.'<sup>37</sup> By comparing a census tract layer with neighborhood boundaries as determined by Google Maps, I created my own layer files by census tract for each neighborhood. New York City neighborhood boundaries are slightly vague and can be different based on who you are asking, so the boundaries I created are not absolute. However, the main purpose of the maps is to illustrate major trends and observe the tracts closest to the parks, so this discrepancy, although important to note, is not a huge flaw in my data.

Once I had collected the geographic information on each neighborhood, I used demographic data from the 2000 and 2010 US Census of General Population and Housing Characteristics (DP1) and Profiles of Selected Economic Characteristics (SF3). This allowed me to retrieve demographic and

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<sup>37</sup> City of New York. Department of City Planning. "Bytes of the Big Apple™ ." 2012

economic data for each census tract in each neighborhood. Because gentrification is often characterized through increased presence of white populations,<sup>38</sup> I chose to map the racial makeup of each neighborhood based on the three largest racial groups in each neighborhood: Black, White, and Latino. As gentrification first occurs mainly within the housing market, I mapped housing vacancies, renter-occupied housing, and owner-occupied housing. Third wave gentrification is characterized by large amounts of capital investment, which can often be displayed in the form of new housing developments,<sup>39</sup> so the percentage of vacancies in these contemporary census tracts can be a reflection of the presence of new housing developments. I made a map for the percent Latino, percent Black, percent White, percent vacant housing, percent owner-occupied, percent renter-occupied, and finally, median household income, from 2000 and 2010 Census Data for each neighborhood, however, not every map was relevant enough to my analysis to include. By comparing data from 2000 to 2010, we can see different time scales of each neighborhood's changes, as well as how gentrification has recently changed each neighborhood. I will go into further detail analyzing these findings in the following chapter.

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38 Cahill, 2007

39 Hackworth, 2001

## IV: Results

### *Park Quality Index*

Each study site, Williamsburg, Red Hook, and Soundview, contains a large regional park. But size is not the only factor in creating a successful, useful, and accessible public park. In his research about park access and quality in New York City, Keith K. Miyake asserts that access to public parks is an environmental justice issue. Because access to parks is not equitable across racial and ethnic categories, certain demographics have unequal opportunities for physical exercise, leading to health disparities.<sup>40</sup> Park access is “also a social and environmental justice issue since uneven access to these environmental amenities have historically been shaped by structurally and institutionally racist processes of housing discrimination, redlining, gentrification, and uneven development” (Miyake, pp. 2). Based on his methods, I created a park quality index to analyze the differences in opportunities for recreation that each park offers. While Miyake's research focuses on physical activity sites and their potential for exercising, my research is about the broader potential of each park to both passively and actively recreate.

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40 Miyake, 2010

<b>Park Name:</b>	<b>McCarren Park</b>	<b>Red Hook Recreation Area</b>	<b>Soundview Park</b>
Park Type:	Regional	Regional	Regional
Zip Code:	11211	11231	10472
Neighborhood:	Williamsburg	Red Hook	Soundview
Park Size:	Large	Large	Large
Acreage:	35.71	58.5	205.31
Proximity to Public Transit: (Miles)	.3/.1	.9	.8
Baseball fields:	yes	yes	yes
Basketball courts:	yes	yes	yes
Bathrooms:	yes	yes	yes
Bocce courts:	yes	no	no
Dog runs:	yes	no	no
Fitness equipment:	yes	yes	no
Eateries:	yes	yes	no
Football fields:	yes	no	yes
Handball courts:	yes	yes	yes
Pool:	yes	yes	no
Playgrounds:	yes	yes	yes
Running tracks:	yes	yes	(under construction)
Spray showers:	yes	yes	yes
Water fountains:	yes	yes	yes
Recreation center:	yes	yes	no
Soccer fields:	yes	yes	yes
Tennis courts:	yes	no	no
BBQ areas:	no	yes	no
Bicycling/greenways:	no	no	yes
Cricket fields:	no	yes	yes
Kayak/canoe launch:	no	no	yes
<b>Total amenities:</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>

Table 5.) Park Quality Index.

The parks are not equal in terms of their accessibility or amenities provided to neighborhood residents. Although Williamsburg's McCarren Park is geographically the smallest of the three parks, at 36 acres, it contains the most amenities, with a total of 17. Amenities that are unique to McCarren Park are tennis courts, bocce courts, and a dog run. Tennis courts actually require permits to use; \$15 for a single use or \$200 for a season pass; although there are substantial discounts for seniors and minors. Bocce, a game which originates in Italy, may have been installed at the request of the Italian communities that have historically lived in North Brooklyn. McCarren Park is the most accessible to both the wider community of the city and the wider community of Williamsburg, as it is only .1 miles from the L train which runs west into Manhattan and east into the Brooklyn neighborhood of



Bushwick, a lower socioeconomic area of North Brooklyn. The park is .3 miles from the G train, which runs north to south from Greenpoint into Downtown Brooklyn. Because of its accessibility to other neighborhoods, McCarren Park provides amenities and resources for a wide variety of New Yorkers.

Red Hook Recreation Area is slightly larger than McCarren Park, at 58.5 acres, and contains 15 park amenities. Like the other sites, these consist of basic amenities such as bathrooms and water fountains, but the park also possesses a recreation center, a pool, cricket fields, and uniquely, designated areas for barbecuing. Like in McCarren Park, the presence of a pool and recreation center are invaluable resources, particularly during the summer months where relief from the heat can be difficult, or expensive as with blasting air conditioning, to find. The presence of cricket fields could be an indication of the large immigrant population within Red Hook. Red Hook Recreation Area is the only of the three sites to contain BBQ pits, which are often requested by residents of public housing units, as I will later discuss further. Despite the fairly high number of amenities, the park is not very accessible to those who live outside the community or far from the park. The closest subway lines, the G/F trains, are .9 miles away. This trek includes walking over a pedestrian bridge suspended above the massive highway, the Brooklyn Queens Expressway. Although it is a large regional park, Red Hook Recreation Area may not see a great deal of public funding because it is not particularly usable for people outside of the immediate Red Hook and South Brooklyn areas.

Despite being significantly larger than the other two parks, at 207 acres, Soundview Park contains the least amenities and could be considered the poorest in quality. Soundview Park currently contains 12 amenities, although there are two more currently being constructed, a performance space and a track and field. Like in Red Hook, the presence of cricket fields could be a reflection of a large immigrant population in the neighborhood, particularly those from the Caribbean and Africa. Amenities such as a recreation center, pool, fitness equipment, and eateries, which both Red Hook and McCarren contain, are absent from Soundview Park. However, Soundview Park has some amenities

that both the gentrifying and post-gentrification neighborhoods do not: bicycle paths and a boat launch for kayaking or canoeing. Unfortunately, the boat launch is not yet widely used by the majority of the neighborhood, since it requires a boat, and a \$15 permit, to use. There are, however, community groups in the area which periodically take neighbors and local youth out on the Bronx River using the launch. Given Soundview Park's short history with receiving funding for projects from the Parks Department, it is impressive that Soundview already contains so many amenities. Unfortunately, Soundview Park is not particularly accessible to people outside of and further north in the neighborhood. The park is .8 miles from the 6 train, which travels into Manhattan from the Bronx, and, as in Red Hook, park visitors must cross a massive highway to access the park, here the Bruckner Expressway.

### *Who Benefits? Municipal Funding and Neighborhood Characteristics*

If not maintained or invested in, public parks will fall into disrepair. Research has shown that, as a result of federal devolution and privatization, local municipal governments are responsible for allocating the vast majority of funding for public services such as parks.<sup>41</sup> However, these resources are often not distributed in an equitable manner to different parks. In his study, "Leveling the Playing Field? Urban Disparities in Funding for Local Parks and Recreation in the Los Angeles Region," Pascale Joassart-Marcelli observed and assessed the allocation of federal, state, special district, municipal, and nonprofit resources to parks facilities throughout the Los Angeles region. Joassart-Marcelli found that funding for parks was highly uneven, "from less than \$1 to \$500 per capita annually" (pp. 3) in various parks. Because of its denser, more concentrated nature, New York City may be considered an overall fiscally healthier city, as the Los Angeles region is broken into smaller cities, rather than neighborhoods, that vary from Santa Monica to Compton. The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, which serves all neighborhoods in the city, possessed an annual budget of \$290.2 million.<sup>42</sup> Considering that there are thousands of parks in New York, the majority of this budget goes to maintenance in these parks rather than capital development and investment. If this money was distributed evenly between New York's 8,244,910 million people<sup>43</sup>, the park's yearly budget would have \$35.20 per New Yorker. If evenly divided between all 1,700 parks and playgrounds under the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation's jurisdiction,<sup>44</sup> the budget would allot \$170,705.90 per park. However, since the budget is allotted for large scale projects, like \$50 million dollars to the McCarren Park pool renovation, each park is not seeing an even amount of funding. In

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41 Pascale Joassart-Marcelli. "Leveling the Playing Field? Urban Disparities in Funding for Local Parks and Recreation in the Los Angeles Region." *Environment and Planning*. 2010

42 Department of Parks and Recreation, 2012

43 United States Census Bureau, July 2011

44 City of New York. Department of Parks and Recreation. 2012

order to see if gentrification changes municipal spending in public parks, I compared the capital projects in each park within the context of demographic information of the neighborhood. While each park is a regional park that is used by residents all over the city and their neighborhoods, research has shown that park users are most likely to use a park regularly if there are within a .2 mile walk of the park.<sup>45</sup> Because of this, the demographic changes in the park adjacent tracks are most significant when looking at who is benefiting most from publicly funded improvements.

**McCarren Park, Williamsburg; Post-Gentrification:**

<b>Capital Project:</b>	<b>Date Started:</b>	<b>Date Completed:</b>
(electrical) Pool & bathhouse	01/11/10	not yet complete
(h&v) Pool & bathhouse	01/11/10	not yet complete
(plumbing) Pool & bathhouse	01/11/10	not yet complete
Pool & bathhouse	01/11/10	not yet complete
Portion of bathhouse	09/08/08	05/29/09
Skate park	09/08/10	05/29/09
McCarren Park (b058)	05/15/08	05/05/09
Construction of lighting for soccer field	03/26/07	03/19/08
Soccer field + track	10/01/04	09/28/05
Boilers & heating systems	07/16/01	07/30/02
Ballfield	09/25/00	10/10/01
Handball & bocce courts	09/25/00	07/11/01
Site work (b058)	09/25/00	10/12/00
Wading pool & landscape	09/11/00	08/02/01
Site work at Basketball court (b058)	10/08/99	08/31/00
Father Popielusko Square	08/16/99	04/13/00
Sidewalks & pavements (b058)	02/16/98	04/24/98
Terne-coated stainless steel roof (b058)	11/15/97	12/18/97
Paths & ballfields 1 & 2	09/22/97	12/30/97
Sidewalks, paths, pavements, & Sitework (b058)	04/28/97	07/15/97
McCarren Park bathhouse roof	06/01/95	12/04/95
<b>Total Projects:21</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2012</b>

*Table 2.) Capital projects in McCarren Park*

45 Keith Miyake et al. “Not Just a Walk in the Park: Methodological Improvements for Determining Environmental Justice Implications of Park Access in New York City for the Promotion of Physical Activity.” *Cities Environ.* 2010

Between 1995 and 2012, there were 21 municipal projects in McCarren Park (Table 2). Many of these projects would be considered capital improvements, including large scale projects like the creation of handball and bocce courts in 2001, a soccer field and track in 2005, a skate park in 2009, and the most recent project, the reopening of the McCarren Park pool, finished in the summer of 2012. This last project was a renovation costing \$50 million dollars alone, or 17% of the Parks Department's 2012 budget. So who has benefited from these improvements?

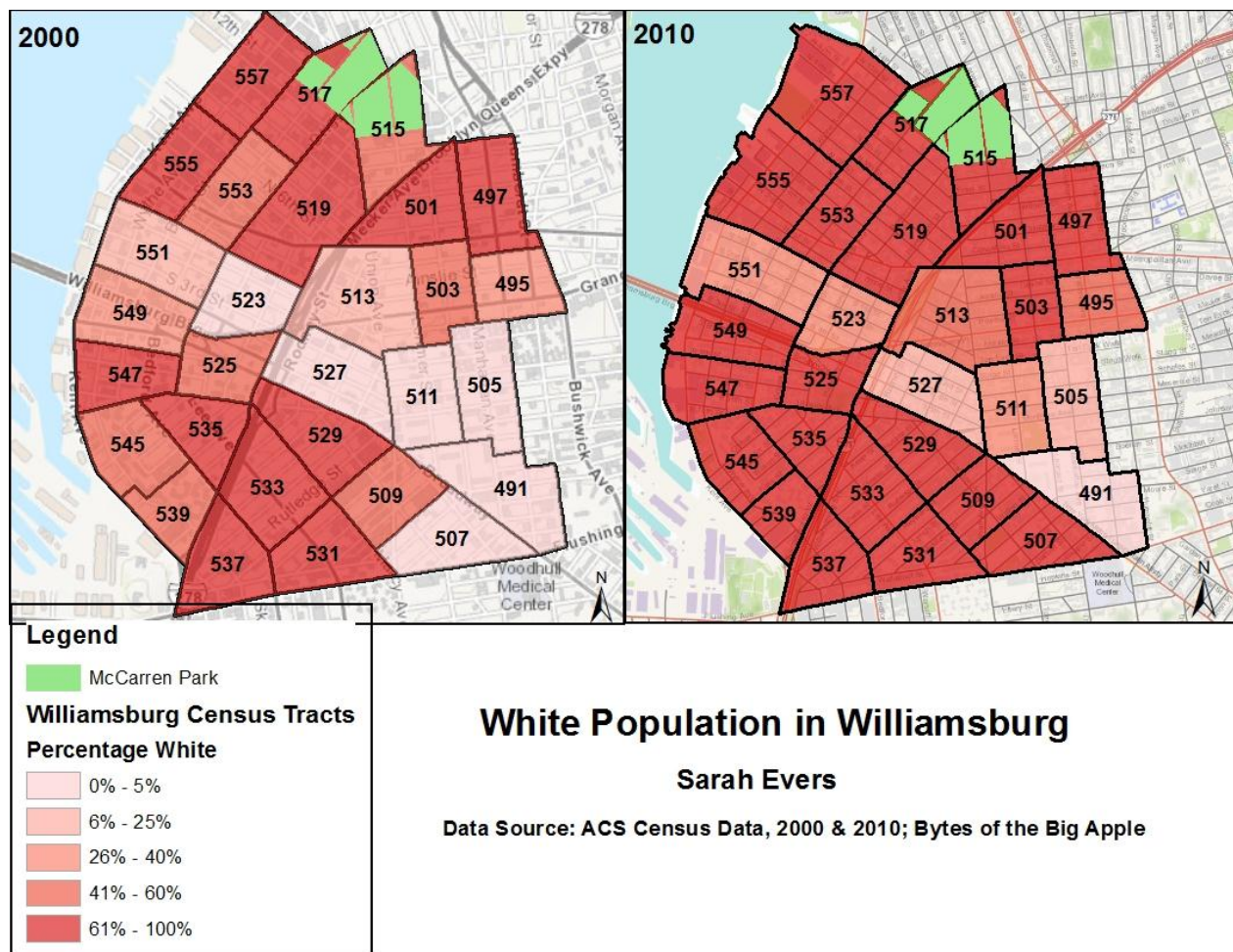


Figure 2.) White population in Williamsburg, 2000 & 2010.

In 1996, “It [was] still possible to find affordable rent and actual space in Williamsburg. But change [was] fast afoot here, especially in the North side neighborhood” (Cohen, pp. R6), where

McCarren Park is located. Change in the form of gentrification was indeed fast afoot; as displayed by the change in white population between the years 2000 and 2010 (Figure 2). Between the years of 1995 and 2000, the majority of projects in McCarren Park were small and maintenance related (Table 2). These included repairing sidewalks and developing baseball fields. But unlike the other neighborhoods, who were either in very early stages of gentrification or not gentrifying at all, by 2000, Williamsburg had already become a destination. Before 2000, McCarren Park did not have significant amenities or federal attention, but this quickly changes, along with the neighborhood. A Williamsburg artist who left the neighborhood in 1999 cites this year as “Everything began to boom. When I got back, the place for which I was paying \$600 a month was going for more than \$2,000” (Brozan, pp. K1). After the year 2000, Williamsburg started to transition to a post-gentrification neighborhood. Simultaneously, McCarren Park saw an increase in municipal projects, with the park receiving 15 projects, from handball courts to a lighted all-weather track, between then and 2012. The neighborhood's white population went from 46% in 2000 to 61% in 2010. This increase in white residents is particularly notable in the tracts adjacent to the improving McCarren Park, each of which was over 70% white by 2010. While there still were significant Latino populations in park adjacent tracts in 2000, tract 515 was 32% Latino, the Latino population shrank in all park adjacent tracks by 2010; tract 515 fell to 17% Latino.

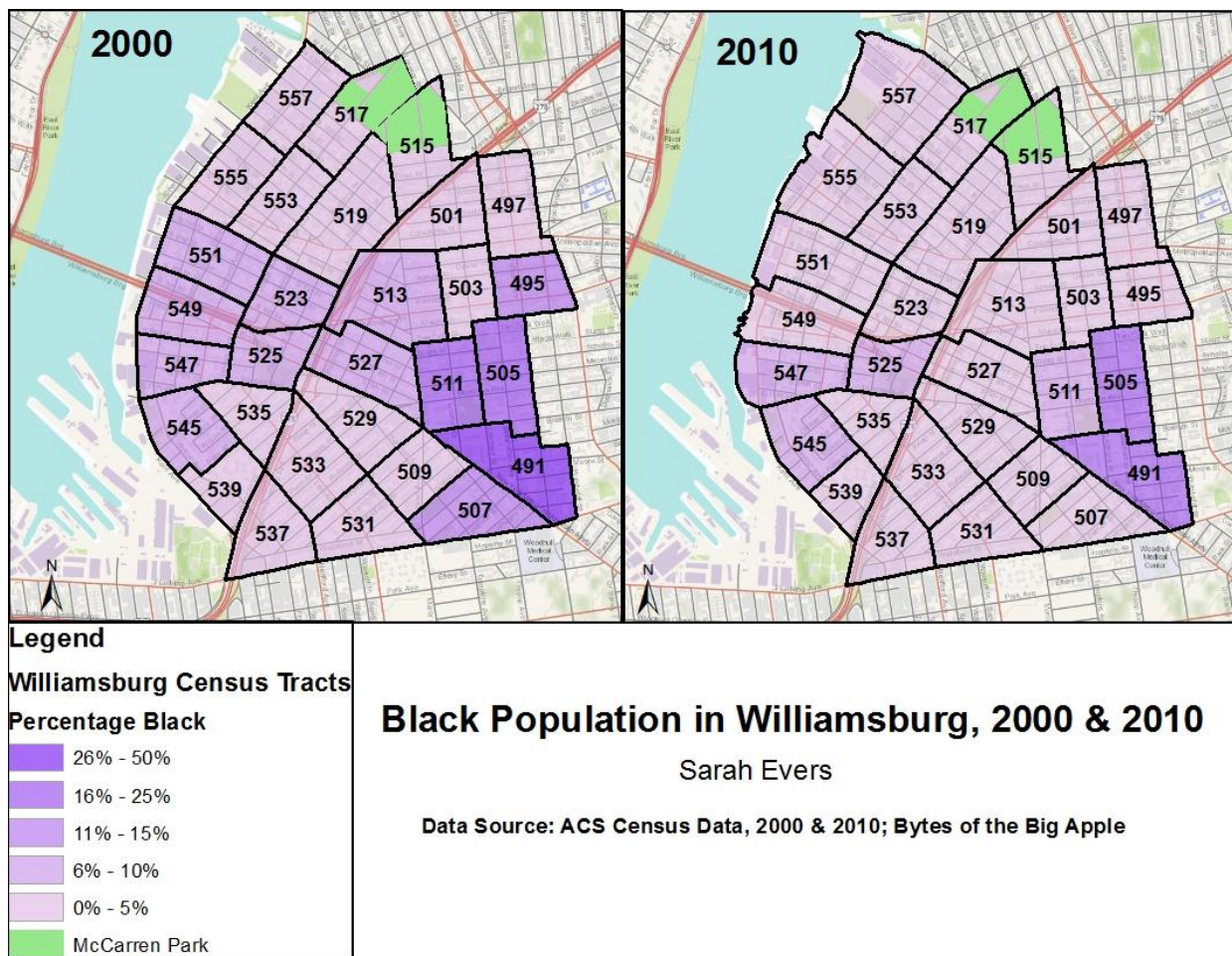


Figure 3.) Black Population in Williamsburg, 2000 and 2010

Although there have always been white ethnic enclaves near McCarren Park, mainly Polish and Italian communities, these census tracts have recently been the sites of extensive public and private capital. But this funding is mainly benefitting wealthier, whiter residents of Williamsburg. As Williamsburg transitions from gentrifying to post-gentrification, the already small black population in the neighborhood is being pushed further and further from McCarren Park, and the waterfront. In the neighborhood as a whole, the black population was cut in half, from 8% in 2000 to 4% in 2010. By 2010, the percentage of black residents in park adjacent tracts fell from a high of 4% to a high of 2%. Although there are many new housing developments in these park adjacent areas attracting many new residents, very few new residents are black. This is symptomatic of the entire neighborhood. In 2000

the census tract with the highest percentage of black residents was 49% and the census tract with the lowest was .4%. By 2010, the census tract with the highest percentage of black residents had fallen to 17%, with a low of .1%. In contrast, the white population of Williamsburg, which used to have a high of 92% and a low of 5%, had by 2010 increased to a high of 98% with a low of 17%. The census tracts with the highest percentage of black residents are now *less* than the lowest percentage of white residents found in any census tract in Williamsburg. As Williamsburg improves, with the help of both private and public investment, the black community is disappearing from the neighborhood.

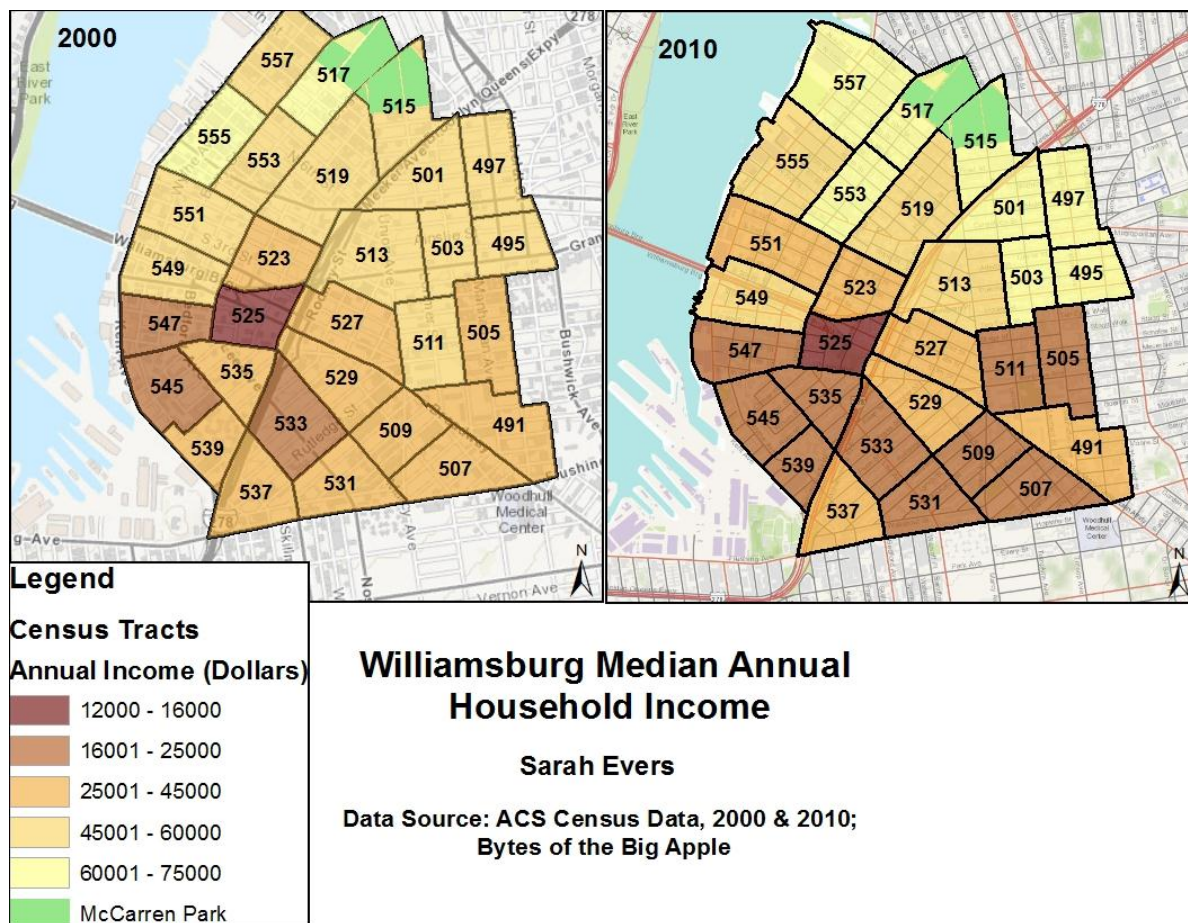


Figure 4.) Median Annual Household Income, 2000 and 2010

As shown by the previous maps, as McCarren Park and Williamsburg improve, those living closest to the park have become whiter, while the Latino and black populations have shrank significantly. The median household incomes have increased throughout the neighborhood. The high of



\$50,132 and low of \$12,069 in 2000 increased to a high of \$73,021 and a low of \$15,948. However, the gap between the rich and the poor was raised to \$57,073, making 2010 post gentrification Williamsburg the most economically unequal neighborhood of my study. This is interesting considering that advocates of gentrification often claim that the process improves neighborhoods, when we can observe, through census tract analysis, that gentrification only brings wealth to certain demographics, while other groups stay in poverty.

I would argue that the demographic changes in the northern, park proximate area of the neighborhood are not caused by the park improving, but rather, the park is improving because this area is becoming wealthier. In 2005, parts of the North side and waterfront areas of Williamsburg were rezoned from industrial use to residential and mixed-use. McCarren Park, which still only saw more capital projects like a baseball field, handball courts, and bocce courts (Table 2), became “the heart of the rezoned area... [where] luxury towers climb skyward” (Cave, pp. B1). The population living in these park adjacent, newly rezoned and developed tracts has a significantly higher median household income than other tracts in the neighborhood. Before the rezoning, these tracts were some of the wealthiest in the neighborhood, at \$36,000 to \$50,000 a year, but were a reflection of the neighborhood's middle class status in the year 2000. By 2010, the median household income in the tracts closed to McCarren Park rose to \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year. In contrast to the demographic we see in these tracts, residents of the community were advocating for middle and low income housing in this rezoned area. Unfortunately, by 2006, government middle and low income projects were not being built as quickly as new luxury housing created by developers.<sup>46</sup> The City Department of Building had received 337 complaints about construction in the rezoned region in only a year; a local resident had to leave her home when “The construction of condominiums next door had cracked walls in her home and made it unsafe” (Cave, pp. B8). After building had already begun, the Department of City Planning

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46 Damien Cave. “City Sees Growth, Residents Call it Out of Control.” *New York Times*. 2006

added height restrictions for new developments, but glass towers went up quickly on the edge of McCarren Park; one complex bragged through advertising, “It is now illegal to get this high.”<sup>47</sup> Despite the government's commitment to affordable housing, some residents fear:

“The gap between the spirit of the market and the amble of government may also have doomed the expected growth of affordable housing inland, where most people live. The city promised in its plan that 640 new apartments for low- and middle-income families would be created in these areas over roughly a decade. While developers on the waterfront have taken advantage of a provision that let them construct taller buildings if they set aside at least 20 percent of the apartments for such families, most developers inland have not bothered with a similar program.” (Cave, pp. B8)

While zealous developers transition Williamsburg to a luxury neighborhood, the new focal point, McCarren Park, continues to see publicly funded improvements. All large scale projects were completed after the rezoning of 2005, including a soccer field and track, lighting for said soccer field and track, a skate park, and finally, the \$50 million dollar renovation of the McCarren Park pool in 2012 (Table 2). In addition to private and public attention, McCarren Park also saw the formation of its own nonprofit public and private partnership, with the 2008 formation of the Open Space Alliance for North Brooklyn.<sup>48</sup> Often times, nonprofit organizations step in to supplement municipal funds towards a park once a neighborhood has already been established. Parks that are already well-maintained “influence the willingness of nonprofits to provide recreation opportunities, further exacerbating disparities” (Joassart-Marcelli, pp. 9). Fortunately, this nonprofit fundraises for not only McCarren Park, but all parks within North Brooklyn. Parks in Williamsburg, Greenpoint, and Bushwick receive funding and attention from the organization. It will be interesting to see how park improvements funded by OSA change the demographics of housing surrounding parks in Bushwick, a recently gentrifying neighborhood that borders Williamsburg to the east.

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47 Damien Cave. “City Sees Growth, Residents Call it Out of Control.” *New York Times*. 2006

48 Open Space Alliance for North Brooklyn. “About OSA.” [osanb.org](http://osanb.org), 2012

## Red Hook Recreation Area, Red Hook; Gentrifying:

Capital Project:	Dated Started:	Date Completed:
Rec. Center- boilers and heating system	02/16/09	not yet complete
Park: Ballfield (b126)	07/20/06	12/13/06
Bush-Clinton Playground (b126)	08/01/04	12/09/04
Bush-Clinton Playground Phase 1 (b126)	07/12/04	10/29/04
Bush-Clinton Playground Phase 1 (b126)	03/01/04	02/09/04
Fence work at Bush-Clinton Playground	09/09/03	10/06/03
Fence work at ballfield	05/05/03	09/15/03
Red Hook Recreation Center (b126)	02/19/03	09/15/03
Red Hook Recreation Area- Soccer Field	11/03/01	12/19/02
Red Hook Pool Electrical Systems	05/11/98	08/15/98
<b>Total Projects: 10</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2009</b>

Table 3.) Capital projects in Red Hook Recreation Area.

Red Hook Recreation Area has seen considerably less public investment and attention than McCarren Park and its 21 projects. Between the years of 1998-2009, the park has seen 10 projects, the majority of which consist of maintenance, represented by the phrase 'b126' (Table 3). The only large scale project completed recently in Red Hook Recreation Area is a soccer field, constructed in 2002. Interestingly, 6 out of the 10 projects that have been funded in Red Hook were completed in the years of 2003-2004.

Compared to Soundview and Williamsburg, Red Hook is easy to analyze by census tract, as it only contains four. However, it is important to note that the census tracts changed between 2000 and 2010; census tracts 55 and 57 merge into one census tract, 53, in 2010. In 2000, three out of the four census tracts are within a .2 mile walk<sup>49</sup> of Red Hook Recreation Area, 55, 57, and 85. Unlike the other

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49 Miyake, 2010

neighborhoods, which are larger, Red Hook Recreation Area is an amenity that is very accessible to almost all residents of the neighborhood:

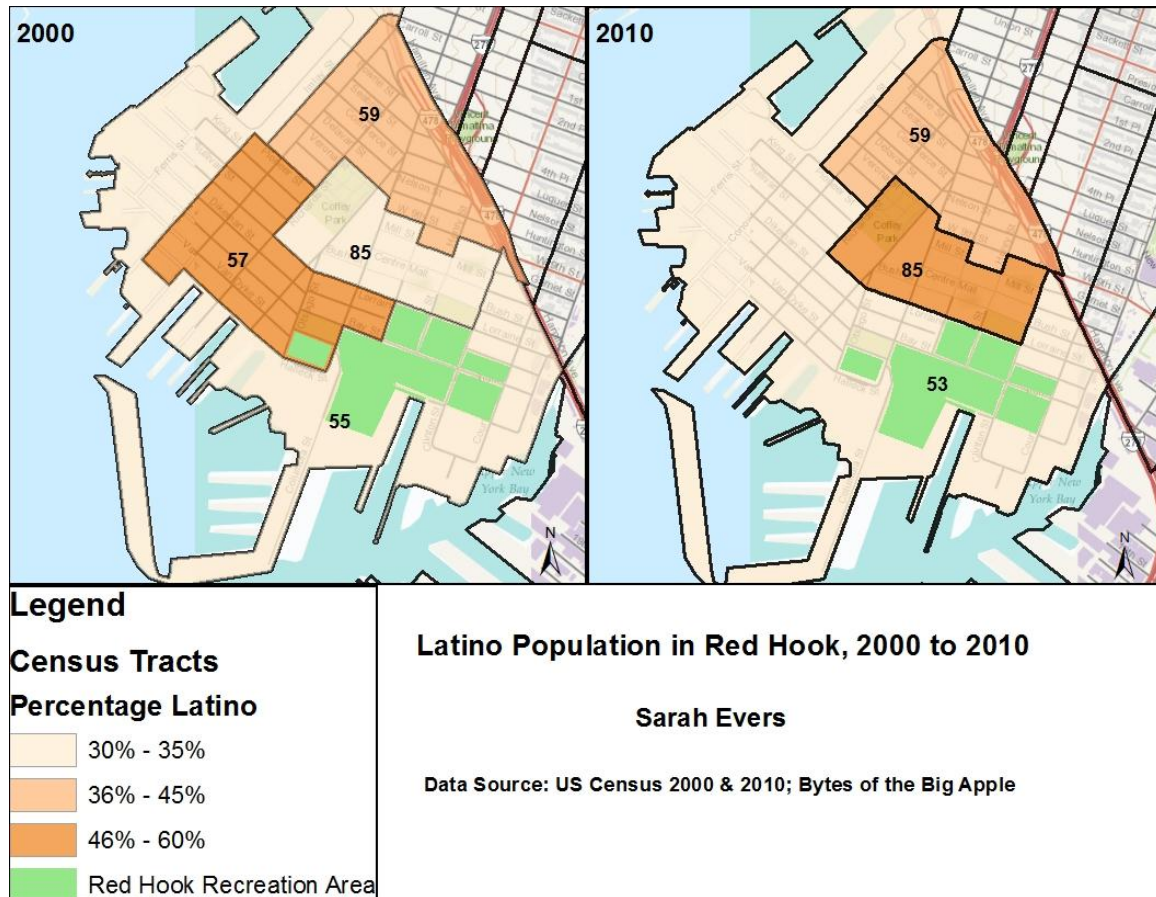


Figure 5.) Latino Population in Red Hook, 2000 to 2010

Tract 85 is mainly public housing, which results in high levels of black-white segregation in the neighborhood both in 2000 and 2010. In the year 2000, the public housing tract was 56% black, 42% Latino, and 1% white. By 2010, this tract gained a higher percentage of Latinos, now at 48% Latino, 48% black, and 1% white. Despite engulfing the former majority Latino tract 57, the new to 2010 waterfront-encompassing census tract 53, has increased to 53% white and 31% Latino. Although Red Hook has been a destination for artists since the early 1990s, gentrification was slow to appear in the private sector; in 1994, “There [was] no chic restaurant in Red Hook, not an espresso bar to be

found...”(Marchese, pp. V1). Today, Red Hook is considered to be a foodie destination,<sup>50</sup> with lobster joints, a high end bakery, and arguably the best key lime pie in New York.<sup>51</sup> The majority of restaurants, cafes, and bars are concentrated on Van Brunt Street, which runs from the northeast corner of track 59 diagonally through track 53. The location of this new, central commercial district could explain the decrease in Latino population in track 59. In 2000, track 59 was 43% Latino; the population fell to 32%. In fact, the percentage of Latino population fell in each census tract except the one which contains the public housing complex.

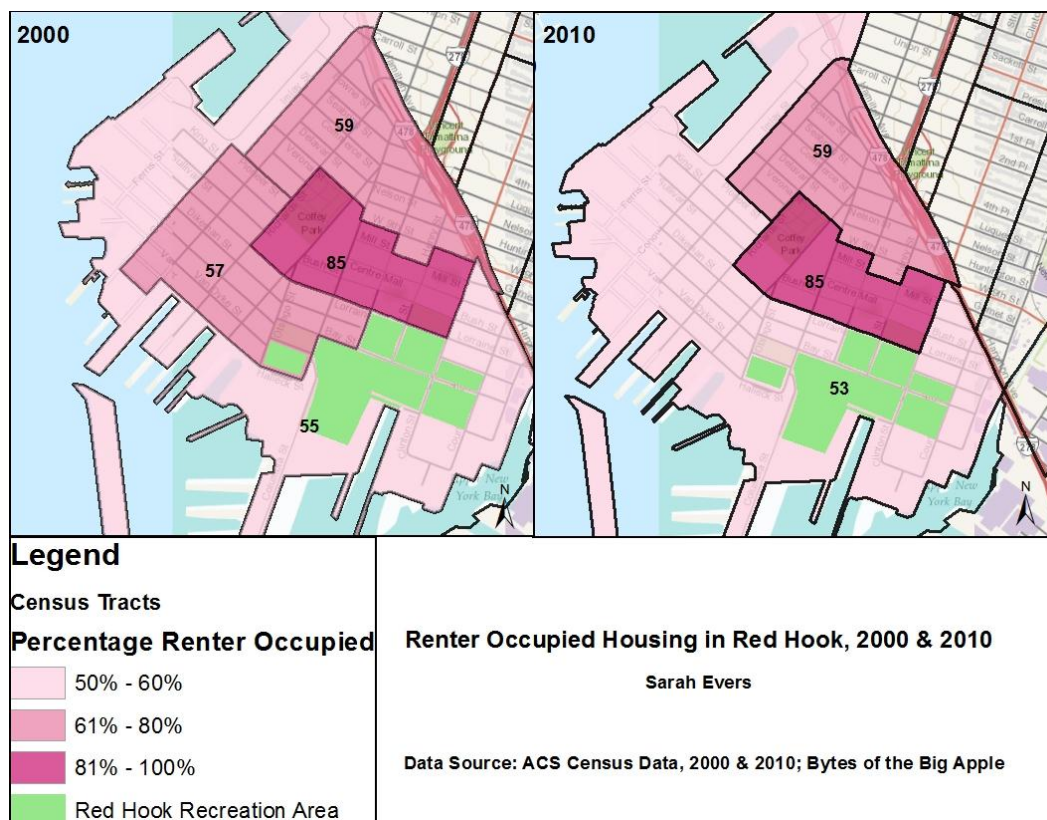


Figure 6.) Renter Occupied Housing in Red Hook, 2000 and 2010

Although there has always been segregation between white residents and residents of color in Red Hook,<sup>52</sup> it seems that as gentrification in the neighborhood progresses, the black and Latino residents are more likely to be found living within the tract that contains the public housing complex.

50 Wylie Goodman. Personal Communication, 2012

51 Steve's Authentic Key Lime Pies. Stevesauthentic.com, 2012

52 Tony Schloss. Personal Communication, 2012

The majority of all residents of Red Hook are renters; between 2000 and 2010 each census tract saw an increase in the renting population (Figure 6). However, in 2010 the waterfront tract contained far more homeowners than the public housing tract. This contrast between 21% owner-occupied on the waterfront and 0% owner-occupied in the public housing illustrates how, in terms of financial resources, waterfront residents have a stronger economic claim to Red Hook. With the exception of foreclosure, you stand a better chance of not being displaced if you own your home. As long as the public housing complexes remain in Red Hook, these residents will not easily be displaced either. However, compared to the waterfront residents, the public housing residents have less economic mobility and agency in the neighborhood. Homeownership, or lack thereof, can be a reflection of civic participation. In a neighborhood or in this case, census tract, “low homeownership rates and high levels of residential turnover are often associated with lower pressure on local governments to provide specific services, fueled in part by the likelihood that their voices will be overlooked in favor of more affluent, powerful communities” (Joassart-Marcelli, pp. 11).

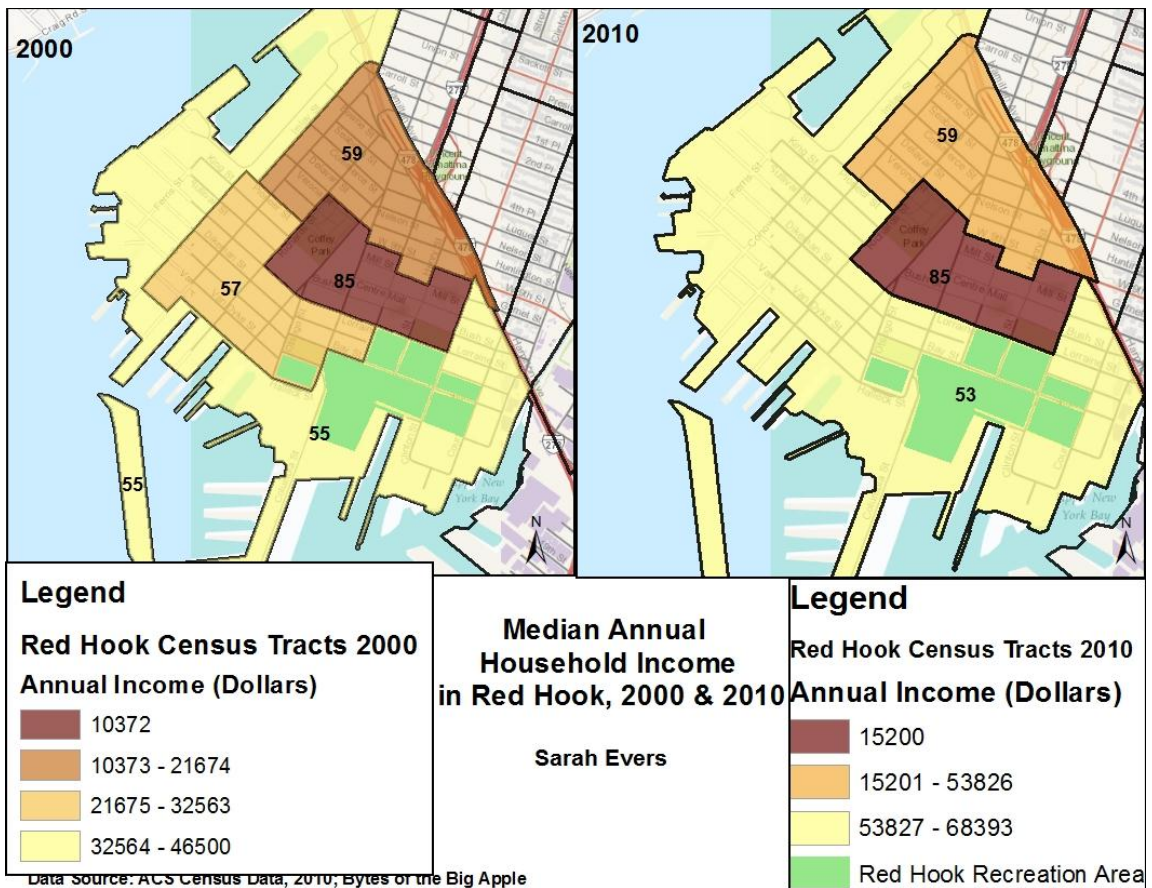


Figure 7.) Median Annual Household Income in Red Hook, 2000 and 2010

Between 2000 and 2010 in Red Hook, the waterfront populations have continued to be more affluent than their inland neighbors. In 2000, the median annual household income was a modest \$46,500, but this was still far more than that of tract 85, \$10,372 per year. Red Hook started to become a more appealing neighborhood when its first grocery store opened, a Fairway in 2003. By 2008, an Ikea had also moved into the neighborhood. Both of these establishments are located on the waterfront in tract 53. With the addition of private investment, the median annual household income increased to a wealthier \$68,393 along the waterfront. The northern tract along Van Brunt Street, 59, also became wealthier, with an average median household income of \$53,826 per year, up from \$21,674 in 2000. In contrast to the economic growth of these two tracts, tract 85 remained at an alarmingly low median household income of \$15,200 per year. As reflected by the median household income, some areas of Red Hook have become wealthier, but the income gap between the rich and the poor has become more

drastic. This \$53,193 gap between the richest and poorest tracts makes Red Hook the neighborhood with the second highest levels of inequality; we can see that income disparity is increasing as gentrification progresses. Although Williamsburg has higher levels of income disparity, most of these tracts are geographically far from each other. The high levels of inequality in Red Hook are interesting given the small area and population of the neighborhood, especially considering the close proximity of all census tracts. For reference, Red Hook is just over one square mile, compared to Soundview's one and a half square miles and Williamsburg's almost three square miles.<sup>53</sup> Red Hook's small size and amount of housing also becomes an obstacle for the neighborhood to continue gentrifying. Other than the tract with the public housing, the majority of potential real estate can only be seized by rezoning the working waterfront from industry to mixed-use, a concept which raises concern among many long-term community members, as I will later discuss.

So if census tracts bordering Red Hook Recreation Area have seen increased wealth in their residents, why has there not been a capital project commenced in Red Hook Recreation Area since 2009? Since the majority of wealthier residents have moved towards the waterfront, as well as north towards Van Brunt Street, I would infer that wealthier residents have directed their park advocacy and attention towards the waterfront, in spaces such as Valentino Pier, a small, waterfront park in census tract 53.

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<sup>53</sup> Urban Mapping. City-Data.com, 2011



**Soundview Park, Soundview; Not Gentrifying:**

<b>Capital Project:</b>	<b>Date Started:</b>	<b>Date Completed:</b>
Track and Field	03/19/12	not yet complete
Performance Lawn	01/16/12	not yet complete
Soundview Park (x118-Zn03)	11/02/11	01/04/12
Bike/Walk Path	12/01/10	06/30/11
Sidewalks (x118)	08/20/09	09/14/09
Access to Bronx River	08/11/08	11/09/09
Electrical-construction of field house	09/03/07	11/23/10
(h8v) Construction of field house	09/03/07	11/23/10
(plumbing) Construction of field house	09/03/07	11/23/10
(plumbing) Construction of field house	09/03/07	11/23/10
<b>Total Projects: 10</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2012</b>

*Table 4. Capital projects in Soundview Park.*

As I will discuss later on in my results, Soundview Park was not a functioning park until very recently. The first recorded municipal project was not until 2007. By this year in the other neighborhoods, Red Hook had nine projects and McCarren had seen thirteen, which could indicate that gentrification leads to expedited attention from the public sector. The youth of Soundview Park is displayed by the fact that sidewalks and a walking path through the park were only installed in 2009 and 2010, respectively. When looking at demographic and economic data from the year 2000, 10 years before a path was in the park, one can note that this was a population which did not yet have a functioning park, but rather, 207 acres of derelict woods.

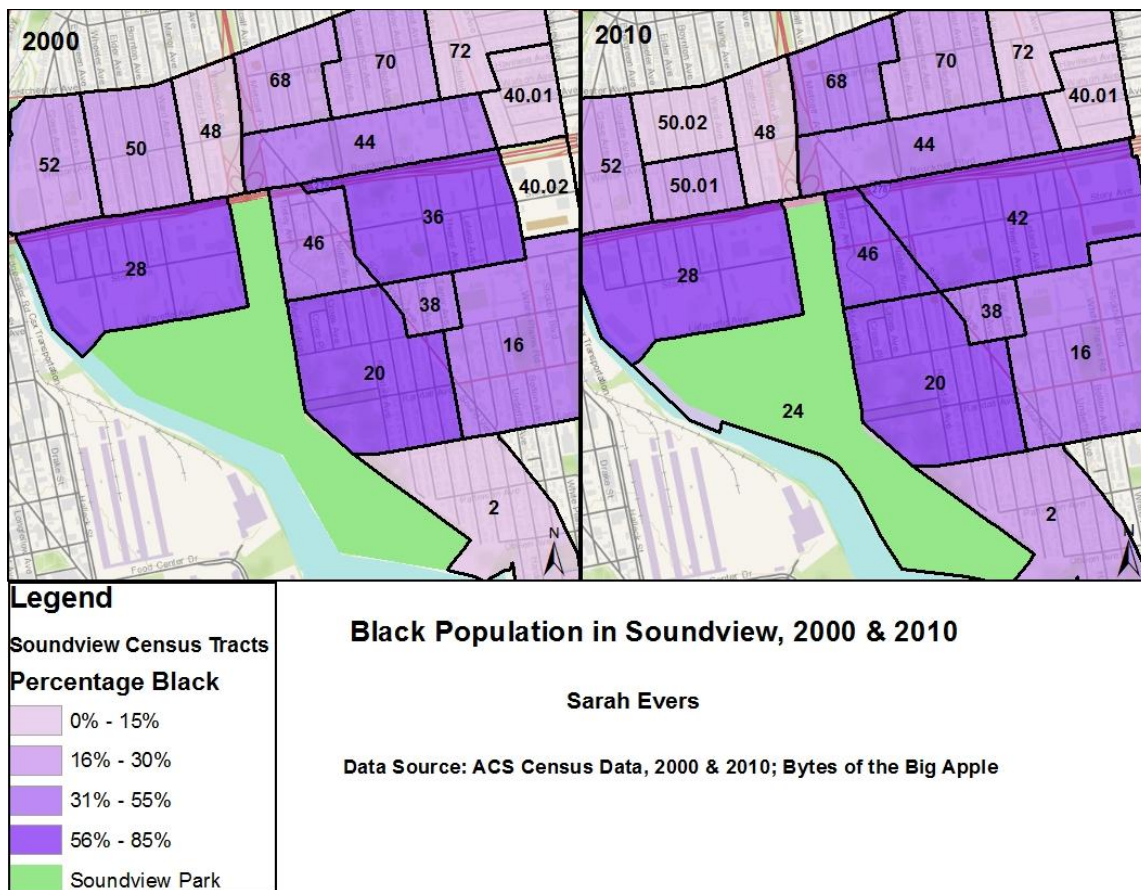


Figure 8.) Black Population in Soundview, 2000 and 2010

In the year 2000, the vast majority of Soundview residents who lived in census tracts bordering Soundview Park were black, from 52% to 82%. Latino residents also made up a large percentage of park proximate residents, at 48% to 62%. These numbers are characteristic of the neighborhood, as the majority of residents were, and are, black and Latino. By 2010, after many park improvements had been made, including paths, sidewalks, a field house, and access to the waterfront (Table 4), the tracts that border the park are still dominated by people of color, from 22% to 69% Latino and 22% to 75% black. In contrast to waterfront and park adjacent census tracts in gentrifying Red Hook and post-gentrification Williamsburg, no Soundview census tract that borders the park has a White population higher than 3%.

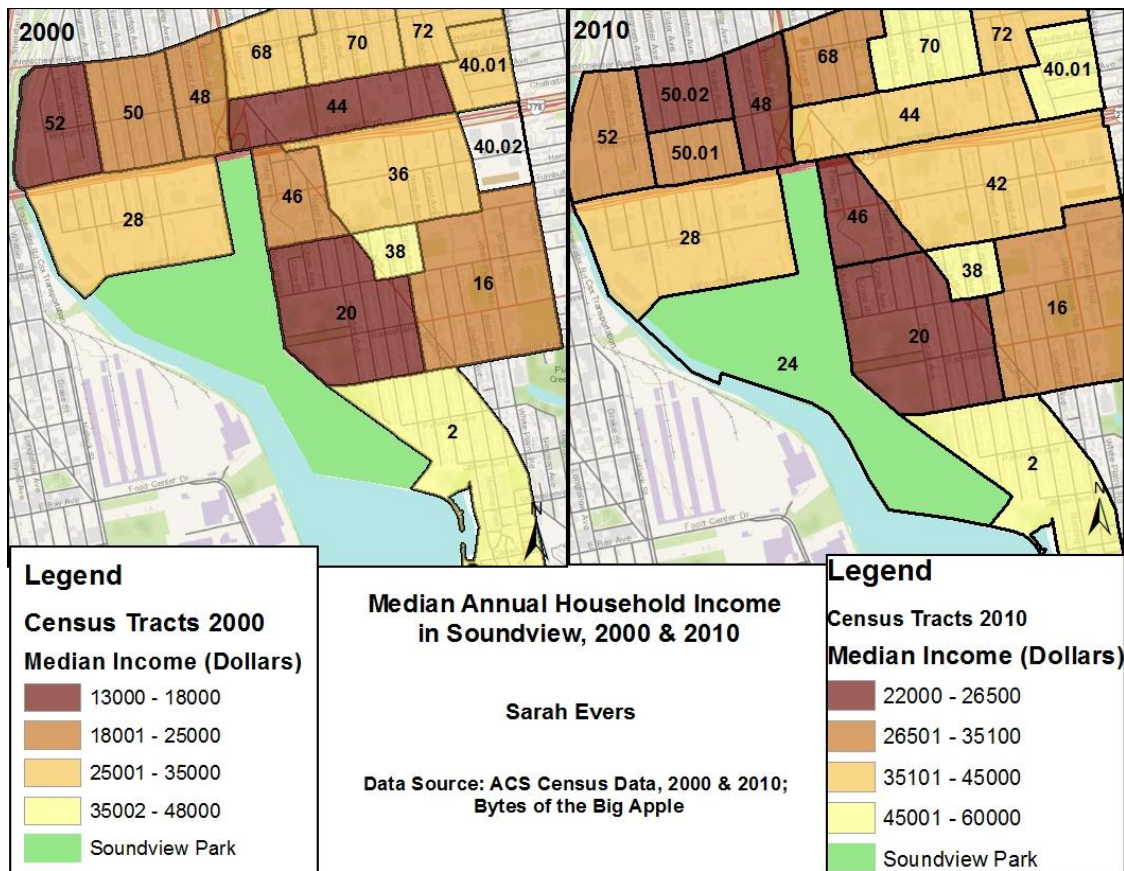


Figure 9.) Median Annual Household Income in Soundview, 2000 and 2010

In the year 2000, median annual household incomes do not show that higher income residents lived around Soundview Park. Although the entirety of the neighborhood was low to middle income, only one park adjacent tract fell into the highest median annual household income bracket, \$34,235 to \$47,647. The other tracts bordering the park were lower income, which, in addition to reflecting the presence of a large complex of public housing in tract 20, may reflect that in 2000, the park was not considered desirable to live near. Before a renewed interest in developing housing in the Southeast Bronx around the year 2006, capital investment in the neighborhood was scarce in 2000.<sup>54</sup> New housing developments are still few and far between in Soundview, but there are a series of new,

<sup>54</sup> "Neighborhood Report: Soundview; In the Southeast Bronx, a Bank for the Bankless." *New York Times*. 2006

middle-income coop buildings that border the park, found in census tract 28. The complex's presence has raised this tract's median household income to \$44,036 annually, while remaining 75% black (Figure 8). This illustrates that gentrification in Soundview and around the park is mainly characterized by the incoming of young, black professionals. Out of the three study sites, Soundview has the smallest gap between the wealthiest and poorest residents' median household incomes, at \$37,680. It is also interesting to note that the lowest median household income in Soundview is \$22,146, higher than Red Hook's \$15,200 and Williamsburg's \$15,948, despite Soundview's reputation as being the 'worst' neighborhood of the three study sites.

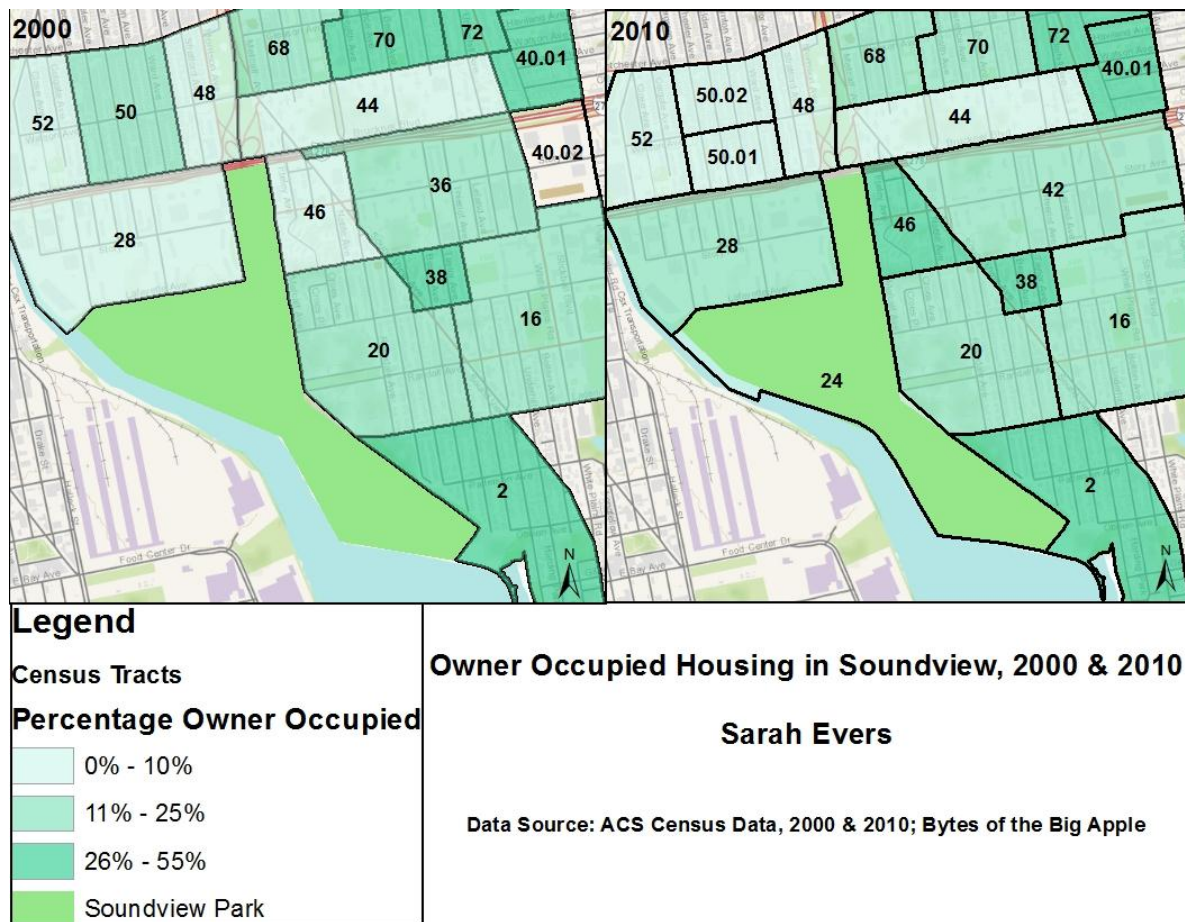


Figure 10.) Owner Occupied Housing in Soundview, 2000 and 2010

Like my other study sites, as well as most neighborhoods in New York City, Soundview is a neighborhood of renters. And like other communities whose neighborhoods have been gentrified, renting, rather than owning, makes people more vulnerable to displacement. It is interesting to note,

however, that Soundview has relatively high percentages of owner-occupied housing in park adjacent census tracts, with 50% owner-occupied in tract 2 and 21% owner-occupied in tract 46. These percentages of owner-occupied housing are higher than any park adjacent tracts in Red Hook or Williamsburg. As of 2010, it appears that Soundview Park has not caught the eye of many outsiders, gentrifiers, or developers. The park has been drastically improved since 2000, there is even a track and field and performance lawn currently under construction, but despite these large improvements, the neighborhood demographic and economic make up has not been greatly altered in the past ten years. This data further reinforces Soundview's title as not gentrifying, as well as showing that Soundview Park's recent improvements were accomplished by private capital investment and are mainly benefiting the same community which has resided in the neighborhood for the past ten years. Soundview's capital projects in the past couple of years, \$15 million for the new track and field, \$5.7 million in 2011 for the field house/information center, and \$6.3 million in 2010 for a shoreline restoration project, brings investment for capital improvements in Soundview Park to an impressive \$27 million.<sup>55</sup>

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55 City of New York. Department of Parks and Recreation. "Soundview Park." 2012.  
<[www.nycgovparks.org/parks/soundviewpark/](http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/soundviewpark/)>

### *Whose Park? Qualitative Findings*

Ten years ago, Soundview Park was “littered, it smelled, it didn't look safe, it didn't seem used as a park at all. The children’s playground was not good, the condition that it was in was not good for children to be using it. It just seemed like it was absolutely neglected,” reflects a lifelong Bronx resident and park advocate Lucy Aponte. Another neighbor of the park, Elbin Mena, who has resided in the Puerto Rican ethnic enclave of Harding Park for 25 years, echoes this memory of the park being an unusable space in the recent past. Because the Bronx is the car capital of New York, Soundview Park was a dumping ground for cars in the 1980s and 1990s; Elbin reflects that, “There were fires every night, every night cars were set on fire, brand new cars. I would be calling the fire department every night. And one time the whole park caught fire by my house, and I was there with a hose literally hosing down my house because of the embers coming from the park.” Despite these types of obstacles, community members, like Elbin and Lucy, saw potential in the space. Because she is an artist, Lucy was interested in bringing performances to the park; in 2006 she helped organize Soundview's first 'Make Music New York,' an event where local musicians conduct free concerts in neighborhood parks. Because of permit issues, the event had to be held on the sidewalk outside of Soundview Park.<sup>56</sup> Elbin is most interested in the ecological quality of the park; before the Parks Department started cleaning up Soundview, Elbin took matters into his own hands:

“...The water’s edge was infested with abandoned cars, motorcycles, boilers. So myself and a couple of my neighbors, we removed 90% of those and dragged them onto the park at that time. And the parks department removed them when they started the program of removing all the abandoned cars there. So now it is a beautiful park.”

Through the vision and commitment of community members like Elbin and Lucy, as well as other

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<sup>56</sup> City of New York. Department of Parks and Recreation. “Soundview Park: Make Music New York.” 2010

community organizing groups and nonprofits in the area, the Parks Department began to take notice of Soundview Park and direct resources to the space. Today, Lucy sees the park as a place where everyone in the neighborhood can be engaged and welcome, “It is the one place that everybody can use, where everyone is the same...regardless of where they are [from], whether it is Lafayette Estates [the new coop building by the park], or the projects, or the houses, where people come together and enjoy the same space.”

Soundview Park now possesses soccer fields, basketball courts, playgrounds, fountains, handball courts, waterfront seating, and an extensive greenway for biking and walking. Despite the lack of gentrification occurring in the neighborhood, community members have turned Soundview Park from an abandoned and derelict piece of land to the beautiful park it is today. Parks Department employees and local volunteers maintain and clean up the space. The park is well-taken care of, but one can observe that the main entrance of the park by the new coop buildings is visibly better maintained than entrances on the sides of the park that are bordered by public housing complexes.



Figure 11.) Entrance by Soundview Houses<sup>57</sup>



Figure 12.) Entrance by Coops.

In these images, you can see that the image on the left, which is the entrance by the public housing,

57 Google Maps, 2010. [Soundview Park, Bronx][Street View]Retrieved from [https://maps.google.com/maps?q=soundview+park&ie=UTF-8&ei=oAXCUKi8K6PgiAKu\\_YF4&ved=0CagQ\\_AUoAA](https://maps.google.com/maps?q=soundview+park&ie=UTF-8&ei=oAXCUKi8K6PgiAKu_YF4&ved=0CagQ_AUoAA) and [http://maps.google.com/maps?q=soundview+park&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=X&ei=OUTCUNC-LoLiwL\\_jYFA&ved=0CagQ\\_AUoAA](http://maps.google.com/maps?q=soundview+park&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=X&ei=OUTCUNC-LoLiwL_jYFA&ved=0CagQ_AUoAA)

there is trash that has yet to be picked up, as well as square blocks of concrete to designate the entrance. The entrance by the coops is far more inviting, with more open space and a well-maintained entryway.

The South Bronx has recently received some attention documenting their community-organized efforts for green space and waterfront access. This summer, the New York Times published an article entitled, “River of Hope in the Bronx,” about the new parks along the Bronx River:

“...Compared with headline-making projects in Manhattan and Brooklyn, the unexpected renaissance under way along the south end of the Bronx River flies largely below the radar. Park by park a patchwork of green spaces has been taking shape, the consequence of decades of grinding, grass-roots, community-driven efforts. For the environmentalists, educators, politicians, architects and landscape designers involved, the idea has not just been to revitalize a befouled waterway and create new public spaces. It has been to invest Bronx residents, for generations alienated from the water, in the beauty and upkeep of their local river”  
(Kimmelman, pp. 1)

Soundview Park is part of that 'patchwork of green spaces;' and community organizers in the area remember the struggles they faced in making these parks a reality. Elena Conte used to be an organizer with Sustainable South Bronx, an organization that works to solve environmental and economic issues within the neighborhood. Born and raised in New York, she currently works as the Organizer for Public Policy campaigns at the Pratt Center for Community Development, which works to fight inequality in New York City. Elena echoes the sentiment expressed in the New York Times article, calling the development of these parks a result of a “sustained grinding effort over decades by lots and lots of local people.” She elaborates:

“This area of the Bronx historically was, and continues to be full of industry and environmental ills, such as waste transfer stations and heavy truck traffic due to wholesale food warehouses in nearby Hunts Point. As a result of this legacy and environment, when community groups and residents proposed the idea of creating and improving green space along the river in the South Bronx at a community board meeting years ago, they were laughed at. It wasn't like 'Oh, wow this is visionary and this is going to raise property values,' it was a serious joke.”

Despite skepticism from surrounding community board members, the parks became a reality thanks to “an alphabet soup of public entities and local organizations like Rocking the Boat, Sustainable South Bronx, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, Partnership for Parks and the Bronx



River Alliance” (Kimmelman, pp. 1). In relation to gentrification, Elena states that community groups and residents have, “done this with a real understanding that gentrification is a constant threat, but they wanted these resources of parks more than they fear gentrification.” According to the demographic data analyzed previously, it does not appear that the community of Soundview has yet to fear gentrification as a result of the revitalization of Soundview Park.

Because of the obstacles residents and park advocates had to overcome to make waterfront parks like Soundview Park a reality, the parks along the Bronx River feel very much for and by the community, agrees Elena. This spirit is emphasized by the groups and programming that occurs in Soundview, most of which is organized by the park advocacy volunteer group, Friends of Soundview Park. This collective of community members advocates for the park to local elected officials, tries to get other residents involved with the space, and throws localized events such as the Hunts-Point Soundview Community Olympics and the annual Arts and Music Festival, which showcases local talent. As a founding member, Lucy Aponte explains:

“Friends of Soundview Park is a group of people from the community who are very passionate about Soundview Park and about the possibilities that they envision for the park and this community. What it is this group of people, I’m one of them included, who have skills in certain areas and interests in certain areas... I am an artist so I do arts and crafts and my interest is bringing arts and culture to the park...So Friends of Soundview Park, I know it will grow, because there are a lot of people here in this community who have a tremendous interest in seeing the possibilities come to fruition...”

To make positive changes and events happen in Soundview, Friends of Soundview Park continues to work with nonprofits like Partnerships for Parks and other local community groups, such as Rocking the Boat, a group which teaches boat building and usage to local youths, and Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, another youth-oriented community organization. By working together, local groups have been successfully at leveraging public resources for and engaging the community in Soundview Park.

On the other side of the gentrification spectrum, McCarren Park, in post-gentrification

Williamsburg, receives its funding and support from public-private partnerships. The Open Space Alliance for North Brooklyn, a private non-profit organization which works to maintain, support, and supply programming in North Brooklyn parks, formally partnered with the Department of Parks and Recreation in 2008. Judging by the year this organization was created, one can assume that this public-private partnership is partly a manifestation of the money and attention that gentrification has brought this neighborhood in the past decade. Although she was researching in the Lower East Side, Cahill states that “the experience of privation contributes to a sense of not being worthy of public investment” (pp. 305). Although OSA does a lot of positive things for the North Brooklyn community, the above sentiment may be felt by residents who have been in the community long before this partnership existed, especially because this new private investment has bled into public spaces.

Today, McCarren Park is a very well used and active park; it has excellent facilities, and is constantly full of a diverse array of people. While public-private partnerships allow private money to keep a park better maintained than just public money alone, one also sees symptoms of the privatization of the park. As Davis explains, when private interests are at stake, there are heightened concerns about security. This concern is illustrated through the presence of police cars, which periodically drive through the park, and security guards at the McCarren Park pool in addition to life guards. Public-private partnerships, like the Central Park Conservancy and the Prospect Park Alliance, come into existence when a neighborhood is wealthy, signaling Williamsburg's place as a post-gentrified neighborhood.

While one can see that gentrification can change the people who are advocating for a public space, in this case from community activists to a public-private partnership, there are park usage preferences which vary between parks. Every weekend in Soundview Park during the summer, there are countless barbeques and birthday parties. These groups vary from a couple of family members barbequing, to a congregation of upwards of 40 Ghanaian immigrants with a speaker system more

powerful than the one the Parks Department had provided for the Friends of Soundview Park Arts and Music Festival. Birthday parties and barbecuing are also very common practice in Red Hook Park. Tony Schloss has lived in Red Hook for five years and is now the Media Programming Director at the Red Hook Initiative, a nonprofit which provides programming and support to local youth. Although he does not barbeque in the parks, Tony notices that “Red Hook Park feels almost like a no-man's land because it's so out there... but Latino families use Red Hook Park for barbeques, they usually gather at the end of the park which faces the waterfront...but you don't see them barbecuing in Coffey Park. So somehow these norms get established in different parks.” Like in the smaller Red Hook Park, Coffey Park, barbeques and barbeque pits are noticeably missing from McCarren Park, signaling a difference in the spatial values of the visitors of the three parks. Because of the heavily regulated nature of McCarren Park, people may refrain from barbecuing because technically, groups over 20 people require a \$15 permit, a practice which seems to be largely ignored in Red Hook and Soundview as there is no one there regularly monitoring permit usage. McCarren Park is more of a destination for people from all over the city; it gets the most crowded on weekends out of the three parks. Perhaps there simply wouldn't be enough room to accommodate barbecuing in the park with so many other activities going on.

In lower-income neighborhoods, particularly those with adjacent public housing, like Soundview Park and Red Hook Park, parks are seen as an extension of one's home.<sup>58</sup> Low-income residents, including those who reside in the Soundview Houses and Red Hook Houses, do not have roof decks or backyards, so they barbeque and socialize in their local park. These practices are sometimes quietly disapproved of; in Soundview I learned that the park manager installed large boulders around open areas of the park, partly so gatherings could not grow to a certain size. For higher-income park users, parks are seen as more of a destination than an extension of one's home. They come to the park

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58 Elena Conte. Personal Communication, 2012

to recreate, either passively or actively. Lacey Tauber, Williamsburg resident and board member of the community group, Neighbors Allied for Good Growth, noticed this difference in spatial values as well. NAGG started off as an organization working to block the development of waste transfer station on the Williamsburg waterfront (in a parcel of land which would become the waterfront park, East River State Park), but has in recent years become more of an advocacy group for affordable housing in Williamsburg. As a resident of Williamsburg, Lacey told me that there had been conflicts over park barbequing in a local park in Bushwick, a rapidly gentrifying area on the Eastern border of Williamsburg. This park is framed by both public housing and new, expensive rental units. After a group of residents of the public housing successfully advocated for a year to get barbeque pits, other neighbors of the park objected. Lacey states,

“People have been upset because there are people playing soccer in the public space, saying that they are ruining the grass and it is for passive recreation, and of course it’s the Latino immigrants who play soccer there. And then they put in barbeque pits, and oh my God, the new residents are like, ‘We’re not racist but we just don’t think there should be barbeque pits and trash, and all these people, and it’s dangerous, and they don’t pick up after themselves.’”

In addition to fear trash and large crowds of people, new residents worry that the coals from barbequing might damage the park's trees. Despite organized protests against the pits, the new barbequing facilities were installed this summer, potentially causing a rift between neighbors who use the barbeque pits, and those view them as “ghetto blaster central, where people park their cars and blast music” (“Park Barbeque Spat Heats up,” 2012).

Arguments over barbecuing in a local park are unpleasant, but the argument is far more heated when it comes to the fight over the city's waterfront zones. As previously mentioned, Soundview Park, McCarren Park, and Red Hook Park are all located in waterfront neighborhoods. The exclusivity caused by gentrification can be particularly painful in waterfront areas, as historically waterfront spaces were undesirable to live near. Waterfronts were the sites of heavy industry and environmental blight,

sometimes then followed by abandonment after industry started to leave cities, but now represent some of the most valuable and exclusive real estate in New York.<sup>59</sup> In the early 1990s, the New York City government rewrote the rules about waterfront development. The regulations made public access to waterfronts a priority, where “Builders of large projects in middle- to high-density residential and commercial districts would have to set aside 15 to 20 percent of their property for the public, including shoreline esplanades 20 to 25 feet wide, with landscaped “buffer” areas between the public and private space” (Dunlap, pp. 394). Critics of the zoning, cite that, “By special permit, new piers can be converted to “waterfront-enhancing” uses like hotels, motels, restaurants, theaters, arenas, boat showrooms, skating rinks, tennis courts and golf courses-provided that the original use had ended at least two years earlier... Critics suspect that this is a loophole through which commercial development can be slipped on to new piers” (Dunlap, pp. 394). Luckily for Soundview Park, the Bronx River border the park, so this area of water access is not in danger of being zoned off from public use for private development. The fates of the Red Hook and Williamsburg waterfronts, however, are a bit more complicated. As previously explained, the Williamsburg waterfront was rezoned in 2005; community members advocated for maintaining a live-work neighborhood with areas of industry, public access to the waterfront, and affordable housing (Gibberd, 2005). Unfortunately, the plan ended up accelerating residential development along the waterfront, hence the presence of many high-rise luxury condos along the Williamsburg waterfront.

Areas rezoned as “mixed-use” along the water can be either industrial or residential, and developers can make far more money off of residential investments. Joan Byron, Director of Policy at the Pratt Center for Community Development and employee of over 10 years, explained that,

“The Bloomberg Administration has been very intentional and very strategic about creating waterfront parks as anchors for gentrified development... The Williamsburg waterfront was rezoned for high-rise residential buildings and parks were wrapped in with the rezoning... it was

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59 Urban Justice Center, CAAAV, FIERCE, & FUREE. “New York City: Anti Gentrification Network: Summation of Convenings.” Urban Justice Center. January 2007.

<[http://www.urbanjustice.org/pdf/publications/NYC\\_anti\\_gentrification.pdf](http://www.urbanjustice.org/pdf/publications/NYC_anti_gentrification.pdf)>

kind of a devil's bargain. We'll give you waterfront parks, but the price you will pay is high-rise, high-end residential buildings.”

Lacey echoes this sentiment stating, “People wanted growth, but they were very concerned about preserving affordable housing and keeping the neighborhood live-work. Now there are issues with what constitutes waterfront businesses, it can be like hotels or ice-skating rinks, but those aren't the jobs people in the neighborhood are looking for.” In the mid-1990s, the Williamsburg waterfront was far from being the site of any redevelopment:

“Plans to develop the waterfront, now zoned for heavy industrial use, have come and gone... [Community groups] favor a mix of housing and light industrial use... Though the Hispanic and Hasidic groups that share the Southside are united on many environmental issues, they disagree on housing, with the Hispanic groups seeking affordable housing along the waterfront, and the Hasidim wanting market-rate housing. Everyone, however, wants housing low enough not to block the sweeping waterfront views.” (Cohen, pp. R7)

When visiting the waterfront esplanade which leads to East River State Park, one can see why community members are both pleased and disappointed. It is a beautiful boardwalk, with ample seating and an incredible view of Manhattan. Yet luxury loft condominiums, many stories high, are literally attached to the Southern entrance to the esplanade and park. One has to walk through their waterfront porch structure to make it to the board walk when approaching from this angle, increasing the presence of socio-spatial exclusionary forces.



Figure 13.) Approaching luxury lofts to get to the esplanade, my own photograph, 2012

Because it is not immediately obvious that the space does not solely belong to these developments, there are many signs stating that the area is open to the public, as well as signs listing rules including 'No performing' and 'No collecting from trash cans;” implying that the space is not particularly welcome to all people, particularly not homeless people. As one continues along the boardwalk, the developments rise higher, some 20-30 stories, but they are further set back from the park, which makes one feel like less of an intruder within the space. They definitely are not what the Hasidic and Latino residents of Southside Williamsburg envisioned for the waterfront in 1996.<sup>60</sup>



Figure 13.) High rise luxury glass towers along the Williamsburg waterfront, my own photograph, 2012

While using the main entrance which runs between these high-rise buildings, one immediately notices the signage indicating that the area is being surveyed by private security cameras at all hours of the day. However, as famed urban theorist Jane Jacobs wrote, “No amount of police can enforce civilization when the normal, casual enforcement has broken down” (pp. 100). To Jacobs, having neighbors watch the streets was the most successful way to keep a neighborhood safe. This requires “a

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60 Cohen, 1996

clear demarcation between what is public space and what is private space. Public and private spaces cannot ooze into each other as they do typically in suburban settings or in project” (pp. 100). It is hard for neighbors to casually survey the street when their back yard is a public esplanade and they are 20 stories from the street life. With the lack of casual, neighborly enforcement, the Williamsburg waterfront must be regulated by private security forces, which can alienate and exclude marginalized populations.<sup>61</sup>

Because Red Hook's waterfront has not yet been rezoned, the effects of gentrification on the waterfront are not yet displayed through high-rise towers, as in Williamsburg. Because it is small and does not have a large housing stock, real estate broker and Red Hook resident Victoria Hagman describes Red Hook as a “seaside village of New York... You feel isolated but it's a comforting isolation. It feels slower and you don't feel on top of everyone else... People are moving here who can afford to overcome the isolation; they have cars, etc... But people that want to live in Red Hook, want to live in Red Hook. It's difficult to convince people to live here.” In contrast, or perhaps in alignment depending on who you ask, to Red Hook's seaside charm, the industrial areas along the water are still very active. In fact, from 1991 to 2006, the number of industrial businesses has grown 60 percent and jobs have increased 19 per cent.<sup>62</sup> Other waterfront activity has been thriving as well, “The Erie Basin Barge port was vacant 15 years ago, but it now provides staging for 500 barges used for repairing bridges or shooting off Macy's Fourth of July fireworks” (Berger, pp. B8). A big concern within the community is that new residents will pressure the city to rezone the waterfront out of industrial use. They reason that if new residents are paying exorbitant amounts of money for new luxury apartments, they are not going to tolerate the noise that industry creates, such as foghorns and truck traffic. Victoria Hagman stated that even her neighbors have begun complaining about the noise from a factory's air conditioner. Victoria is an advocate for the continuation of Red Hook as a live-work neighborhood, and

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61 Madanipour, 1998

62 Joseph Berger and Charles Bagh. “For Whom Will the Foghorn Blow? Industry vs. Gentrification on Brooklyn Waterfront.” *New York Times*. 2006



expressed anxiety over the effects of a new 100 unit luxury rental project set to be completed this year.

Another change along Red Hook's waterfront is the opening of Ikea, which paved over an old ship graving site for its new parking lot. The Director of Health Programs, Anna Ortega-Williams, at the Red Hook Initiative, a community center that works with local youth, expressed more concern about the amount of jobs Ikea would bring to local residents than its effect on waterfront access. Anna explains that, "Red Hook is a commercial area, historically in terms of the waterfront, so commercial activity along the waterfront isn't new, so it wasn't so much of a concern. The private residencies have prevented access more than businesses." She went on to express her feeling that waterfront access projects, such as bike paths, are symptoms of gentrification; she views them as mainly a real estate ploy.

"It's attracting real estate that no one who is already here can truly afford, especially within the public housing. There were some developers offering affordable housing, but it was still way too expensive for people to move out of the public housing into it. Or the income requirement was way too high...There is an illusion of more permeability than actually exists."

In Red Hook, where income disparity is vast, even the low-income and affordable housing was inaccessible to NYCHA residents. Despite her suspicion about the waterfront developments, Anna would love to see waterfront development that involved local youth in the planning process, to make it more accessible to local residents and to increase a sense of ownership and pride over the space. The developed waterfront, like the previously mentioned Valentino Pier, has private security. Anna mentioned that young people have been asked to leave because of assumptions about what type of behavior they might engage in. She elaborates:

"Access to the waterfront is important; everyone loves to be able to access a park. But there is a give and take, now there is more security along the pier; young people will be asked to leave because some kids have been caught having sex or vandalizing it. If young people were allowed to be more involved in the planning process, it also gives them education about what can and can't be done on the pier, times it is open, so they would feel more welcome and involved in the pier."

There are currently local groups working to engage youth in the waterfront, such as the Red Hook

Boaters, which takes people kayaking, and also hires young people from the community to do kayaking tours.

The ways in which gentrification alters public parks can be observed through event programming in each park. Particularly during the summer, parks are perfect venues for sports programming, concerts, and movies, all of which occur in the public spaces of Soundview, Red Hook, and Williamsburg. In Soundview Park, the City Parks Foundation provides programming including family movie nights, senior citizen yoga and walking, youth golf clinics, and three concerts, all of which were Latin music, from salsa to pop. This type of programming seems to fit the majority of Soundview residents, as there are large Puerto Rican and Dominican populations, as well as recent immigrants from Central America. In Red Hook Park, the City Parks Foundation provides youth media programs, track and field programs, and three concerts, one hip hop, one indie rock, and one alternative hip hop. These last two performances featured new, emerging artists, which attracted crowds that were young and hip, many of which were outside of the community.<sup>63</sup> Wylie Goodman was an organizer in Red Hook for Partnerships for Parks from 2009 until 2010 and currently works as the Technical Assistance Coordinator at Partnerships for Parks. As a Red Hook resident and long term Partnerships for Parks employee, she explained how events were curated by the Art Directors at the City Parks Foundation:

“They want to take parks that don't get any attention, or maybe that were getting negative use, and bring positive use to them, so to the degree that positive uses bring [the park] to a wider community that draws attention to that neighborhood is a good thing. They want the bands to appeal to people in that neighborhood; first and foremost is to meet the cultural needs of the community but yes, in a way that could also attract other people.”

While the larger concerts are located in Red Hook Recreation Area, puppet shows and children's concerts, catered to local family audiences, take place in Coffey Park, a smaller park in Red Hook. Wylie theorizes that the family oriented events take place in Coffey Park because it is adjacent to

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63 Tracy Allison. “Deer Tick & Jonny Corndawg played Red Hook Park.” *Brooklyn Vegan*. 2012.

public housing units and spatially serves a smaller crowd. There are also movies shown at the Valentino Pier, the waterfront public space, most of which are catered towards families and organized through a community group called 'Red Hook Flicks.'

As one might expect, McCarren Park and other Williamsburg parks see far more events than the non-gentrifying and gentrifying neighborhoods. Because of the financial support the Open Space Alliance for North Brooklyn provides, the City Parks Foundation no longer facilitates concerts in McCarren Park, although they do provide free tennis clinics and an environmental education camp. 'Summer Screen,' privately sponsored and branded by companies including Vitamin Water, IFC Films, the East River Ferry, and Adult Swim, hosts nighttime screenings of 90's classics, such as 'Cruel Intentions,' in McCarren Park. In addition to being corporately sponsored, these events are definitely catering to the younger, more hip crowd. There are concerts before the movie screenings playing genres described as 'noise rock, experimental, garage rock, and psychedelic.'<sup>64</sup> Although these events are free and open to the public, it seems that they will only appeal to a certain demographic within the Williamsburg population. This may be because McCarren Park is well-known and these events are meant to attract the young and hip from across the city. OSA also puts on concerts, many of which are ticketed. This summer the series took place in Bushwick Inlet Park, a recently created park that is still more of a parking lot than a park. These concerts were supposed to happen in East River State Park, the new, grassy waterfront park, but, as Lacey Tauber explained to me, community members petitioned to OSA to change their location. Because the majority of these events were ticketed, community members did not want the waterfront public park taken over for a private concert series for the summer. They were successful in this campaign, and instead of the ticketed concerts, there were family movie screenings in East River State Park during the summer months. Lacey described a diverse array of community oriented programming in East River State Park, including Polish singers, appealing to the

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64 "Schedule" summerscreen.org, 2012

nearby ethnic enclave of Poles. McCarren Park seems to be chosen for the larger scale, more regionally oriented events, while East River State Park provides more family and locally-oriented events.

McCarren's name recognition for attracting a large crowd from outside the neighborhood is an example of how parks can gain cultural capital within gentrifying or post gentrification neighborhoods. Unlike the other two parks, McCarren is continually very busy, most likely because of how accessible it is via public transportation. No matter the day of the week or time of day, the park is full of a diverse array of people, from mow-hawked guitar players to Hasidic Jews playing baseball. Williamsburg is very a popular destination, and by extension, so is McCarren Park.

Along with new housing developments, there are many bars and restaurants that border McCarren Park, including a large, open-air, German-style beer hall. Red Hook Park has a group of well-known food trucks serving Latin food, which can make the park a destination on weekends. Anna at the Red Hook Initiative mentioned that when these food trucks were going to lose their permits, older community residents and gentrifying populations petitioned successfully for the carts to stay. Both of these parks have components of cultural appeal, while Soundview does not. Residences surround the entirety of Soundview Park and to get food or drink, one must walk across a very busy street and around a strip mall of a convenient store and grocery store to have access to eateries, which consist of a Subway and a McDonalds.

Another resource missing in Soundview which is present in McCarren Park and Red Hook Park is a public pool. Multiple Red Hook residents, Wylie, Anna, Victoria, and Tony described their pool as a valued community resource, where all different types of community members came to cool off and enjoy themselves. Victoria, the real estate broker, did mention that she prefers to go to the pool after 6:00pm, when all of the local kids have gone home. Red Hook's pool does not get much publicity, but as the McCarren Park pool just opened this summer, it has been a hot topic among community members and citywide. After existing since the 1930's, McCarren Park pool was in disarray by the

1980's. In 1984, when the city had the funds and plans to refurbish public pools, community members in Williamsburg blocked the project, citing a fear of illicit activity and outsiders coming into the community as reasons to keep it closed.<sup>65</sup> The pool was drained and vacant until 2005, when new residents of Williamsburg started using it as a performance space. Concerts including bands like The Black Keys and Sonic Youth played the McCarren Park pool from 2005 until 2008. In 2009 when Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC was revealed, it included a capital project to refurbish the pool. As in the 1980's, there were mixed responses from community members. Some older residents still believed that it would bring too much action and outsiders into the area. Hipsters who had been organizing or attending the concerts felt that their performance space was being taken away; Liz Castaldo told the New York Times, "They let it rot for years and years, and now all of a sudden they're like, 'It's viable to turn it into a pool again'" (Sisario, pp. E1) Despite some negativity from people who enjoyed the empty pool as a concert space, many see the renovation of the pool as a way to make McCarren Park more inclusive. Residents confirmed, "The basic need of that pool is as a pool and recreation center for all the peoples of North Brooklyn, which includes a lot of black people and a lot of Latino people... its basic needs are not for the fashionistas of Williamsburg" (Sisario, pp. E1).

This summer, the McCarren Park pool opened with quite a bit of media attention, particularly documenting the fights occurring at the pool between local youth and lifeguards. Jason Shwartz, the Director of Partnerships for Parks who was involved in the reopening of the pool, claims that fighting happens at all public pools, but McCarren's was highlighted because it was brand new and critics were searching for flaws:

"I think there is a real mix of users in McCarren pool, which is causing a lot of tension. So people who have been there for a while are like, 'See what happens when you reopen the pool, now there are people from outside the neighborhood and there is fighting'... All of which needs to be put in the perspective of there is always fighting in public pools."

As I analyzed in the municipal funding table, one can see patterns between distribution of

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65 Jessica Firger. "Awash in History, Pool Opens." *Wall Street Journal*. 2012

public money and gentrification. I asked the Director of Partnerships for Parks, Jason Shwartz about the timing of the project. He believed that the decision to open the pool had little to do with gentrification and was more aligned with park advocacy:

“I think it’s a mix, the Parks Department, like any agency, has their list of projects that they really want to see happen. A lot of that comes from the community groups they are advocating with. When it comes to the way the funding works, most of that money comes from elected officials, so the advocacy part is really important. The elected official who is trying to be responsive to their constituents, they are going to be a lot more effective. But its neither one nor the other, it’s a mixture of both.”

Jason cited the fact that this region of Brooklyn lacked a public pool as a more likely reason, stating, “So maybe the changing demographic had something to do with it, but it’s not that the government was like, ‘Oh, hipsters are the engine of the economy so we better build a pool there.’” In recent years, Soundview has achieved capital investment through community advocacy, where McCarren has continued to attract investment on the part of the Open Space Alliance for North Brooklyn.

Socio-spatial barriers exist within all of the neighborhoods, but because Soundview Park, Red Hook Park, and McCarren Park are all regional parks, the types of conflicts and uses are not necessarily reflective of the localized neighborhood. Jason Shwartz explained that “These parks that [have] people from all over the city using [them], which creates a real tension between people who live right on top of the park and people who are coming from outside.” He explained that it is often difficult to get locals involved with cleaning and maintaining the park when they claim that outsiders as the ones bringing trash to the parks. There may be less of a sense of community within a regional park because there are many people coming from outside of the localized community coming to use the park.

The relatively inclusive nature of regional parks can be starkly contrasted by that of smaller, local parks, explains Tony Schloss of the Red Hook Initiative. Living in Red Hook and working at the Red Hook Initiative for almost a decade, Tony rarely sees the residents of the projects he works with at the Red Hook Initiative on the gentrified commercial corridor of Van Brunt Street or on Valentino Pier.

“I’m not sure if this is due to gentrification or social norms. But there is a mix of people at Red

Hook Park... using the track; there's a mix of people at Coffey Park. Those parks are well-used by the people in the [public housing], where the where the waterfront parks are used more by the newer, wealthier residents. But it's hard to say whether that is because of gentrification or historically in place.”

As I inferred while comparing the rise in median household income to number of public projects in Red Hook Recreation Area, Tony thought that most new residents and homeowners were more concerned about advocating for waterfront spaces than for the inland parks, such as Coffey Park and Red Hook Park. He elaborated, stating that, “There's a Red Hook Civic Association which is homeowners, and they are much more involved in waterfront issues, than say the Tenants Association of the Red Hook Houses.” Wylie Goodman echoed this sentiment, stating:

“My understanding is that folks from NYCHA [New York City Housing Authority] have still not made significant use of the waterfront, like the kayaks and stuff like that... Just not making that trip down there; don't feel comfortable, welcome... I don't want to say welcome.. I think it's that divide, that wall, that those buildings [the projects] serve as an this unspoken wall, like 'Oh ya you don't go past... you don't go to Van Brunt Street to stroll the streets;' its weirdly kind of self-imposed.”

Because the waterfront is associated with the wealthier, whiter new residents, the lack of the ability to participate economically may be one of the reasons why residents of the projects do not stroll down Van Brunt Street. The housing projects have very high rates of unemployment, and “In the economic arena... The main form of exclusion...is a lack of access to employment. Marginalization and long-term exclusion from the labor market lead to an absence of opportunity for production and consumption, which can lead to acute forms of social exclusion” (Madanipour, pp. 160). Because of economic barriers, lower income residents may feel spatially excluded from the waterfront region of the neighborhood. Despite the lack of comfort found by some in the waterfront, Tony Schloss believed that Red Hook Recreation Area was well-used by public housing residents, as well as people from outside of the community; although he did not use this park frequently. Tony found that interactions occurred more frequently between different types of residents at Coffey Park, a small, local park located between the public housing and the low-rise homes towards Van Brunt Street. He described Coffey

Park as “a neutral ground, with a stronger sense of community, where neither demographic felt a particular sense of ownership over the space.



## **V: Conclusion**

In line with my hypothesis, by changing the demographics of a neighborhood, gentrification alters public spaces in terms of capital investment, park usage preferences, and accessibility. Private investment clearly increases as a result of gentrification, however, I was surprised to find that public funding is distributed based mainly on community advocacy. McCarren Park, in post-gentrification Williamsburg, and Soundview Park in non-gentrifying Soundview, have received the most public funding in the past few years. However, ten years ago, McCarren Park and Red Hook Recreation Area received far more public projects than Soundview. While a park can be successful without money being brought in by gentrification through community advocacy, this process appears to take far longer, as displayed by the very young age of Soundview Park and its amenities. Parks in low-income communities are also disproportionately affected by the lack of funding the Parks Department possesses, because they do not have public-private partnerships to pick up the slack, as Williamsburg currently possesses.

Regardless of where funding is coming from, each of my study sites could benefit if a wider array of community members become involved in advocating for their parks. Yet it can be difficult to feel a sense of leverage while your community is being erased by gentrification. As Caitlin Cahill explains, “In short, gentrification is experienced as a loss of self, community, and culture. The threat of erasing of “my grandmother's house,” “my history,” and “my neighborhood” is accompanied by feelings of anxiety and anger. 'I don't belong here': this anger expresses a sense of not feeling welcome in one's own community” (pp. 307). By taking away one's spatial identity through gentrification, the displacee's sense of agency is lessened, leading to political apathy, and making it unlikely that one is going to advocate for their local park. This may be why Red Hook, the gentrifying neighborhood, seemed to have the least amount of organized activity in their regional park, but this theory would have

to be researched more extensively. As for other future research on this topic, it would be interesting to complete this study on a larger scale, looking at a larger number of non-gentrifying, gentrifying, and post-gentrification neighborhoods across the city, to see if there are patterns beyond my specific sites. After learning more about the tension that surrounds waterfront rezoning in New York, I am curious about the social dynamics of the quasi-public waterfront esplanades throughout the city, particularly their role in the tourist industry. For an extension of this research, it would be interesting to interview more casual users and neighbors of each park, rather than focusing on the perspectives of people who are particularly involved in the parks.

Although no one has more of a right to a public space than anyone else, I would suggest more diverse programming amongst private partners, particularly in McCarren Park. People with more money have more options to participate in non-free events, as well as the ability to escape the city to non-public green spaces, such as going upstate, going to the Hamptons, or in the case of many transient gentrifiers, like myself, going home to a more rural environment. Historically, the government has supported gentrification through loose zoning regulations and benefits to gentrifiers through tax benefits, so why shouldn't it now actively support making public spaces inclusive to a diverse array of users? This could be accomplished through making translations of park signage into Spanish, or supporting community initiatives to involve local youths in public parks, like the Red Hook Boaters.

Those involved in the process of gentrification in New York City do not have malicious intent, people need affordable places to live, and new developments can be a sign of progress in a city which is constantly changing like New York. Yet for public entities, it seems unfair to continually prioritize wealthier populations through promoting gentrification, particularly within spaces that should be inclusive like parks. Solutions to gentrification, within public and private spaces, are difficult to remedy, as they are symptomatic of larger issues surrounding economic disparity. Regardless, what makes New York City great is the wide variety of people that call the city home. If third wave

gentrification, as in private developers leading the gentrification charge, continues to be unmonitored and unregulated, the city may cease to be the dynamic and livable city it is today. A recent article in the *New York Times* quantified the incredible income disparities within New York City, stating that the income gap between the rich and the poor is one of the highest in the country, comparable to disparities in sub-Saharan Africa, in countries such as Namibia and Sierra Leone.<sup>66</sup> Despite what advocates for gentrification claim, that it is improving the city, this contemporary process is only widening the gap between the richest and poorest populations. Despite the safer, wealthier face that the city presents, the poverty rate has reached its highest point in more than a decade, at 21% and rising.<sup>67</sup> As David Harvey states in his work, “Right to the City,” “The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be” (Harvey, pp. 2). If we want a more just, dynamic, and vibrant city, the municipal government has an obligation to prioritize keeping public entities, especially parks, open, accessible, and inclusive to all New Yorkers, regardless of their socioeconomic standing.

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66 Sam Roberts. “Income Data Shows Widening Gap Between New York City's Richest and Poorest.” *New York Times*. 2012

67 Sam Roberts. “Income Data Shows Widening Gap Between New York City's Richest and Poorest.” *New York Times*. 2012

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