



**"IMAGINING DE-GENTRIFIED FUTURES"**

**CURATED BY BETTY YU  
AT APEXART  
11/4 - 12/19/20**

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**Radical Housing  
Manifestos  
Reader**

# Radical Housing Manifestos Reader

**“Imagining De-Gentrified Futures”** is an interactive exhibition at Apexart, that attempts to imagine socially-just futures for our cities and aims to rethink the assumed trajectory of urban development. Drawing inspiration from antigentrification resistance across the U.S., decolonization movements, and Afrofuturism, this exhibition gives permission to imagine, to dream, to unleash and explore ways in which socially-just futures can exist for cities and communities.

Check out the exhibition, info here: [www.apexart.org/you.php](http://www.apexart.org/you.php)

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**“Radical Housing Manifestos”** is part of this exhibition. As the exhibition’s curator, I solicited written materials, essays, poems, images, graphics, and audio from a handful community organizers, cultural workers, urban planners, and scholars that offers a creative re-visioning of neighborhood development. The selection of works serves as a resource combining research and vision.

All contributors were asked to answer the following questions or simply use them as a reference:

- Is it possible to disrupt the dominant narratives put forth by real estate speculators, developers, extractive industries and the 1% - that depict gentrification as “inevitable” and a “natural” part of urban evolution?
  - How can we harness our collective resources and trace a new trajectory that allows communities to flourish without being priced out of our neighborhoods?
  - What does a de-gentrified New York City look like that is rooted in anti-capitalist and anti-colonial values that recognizes housing as a human right?
  - What does it look like in your neighborhood, on your block?
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Radical Housing Manifestos contributors:

Thomas Angotti  
Alicia Grullon  
Hate Free Zone  
Lynn Lewis, The Picture the Homeless Oral History Project  
Antoinette Martinez, Protect Sunset Park  
Robert Robinson, Take Back the Land  
Pati Rodriguez, Mi Casa No Es Su Casa  
Samuel Stein  
Sunset Park Popular Assembly

Betty Yu  
Guest Curator, “Imagining De-Gentrified Futures” at Apexart

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# Gentrification is Displacement

Tom Angotti is Professor Emeritus of Urban Policy and Planning at Hunter College and The Graduate Center, City University of New York. He is the author of *New York For Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate* and co-editor with Sylvia Morse of *Zoned Out: Race, Displacement and City Planning in New York City*.

**Gentrification** is more than just a word. It's a warm blanket that covers up the dark secrets kept by white folks. Secrets about war, colonialism, racism, and genocide.

No, gentrification is not some creation of nature. It is not an inevitable part of the evolution of communities. It is not just an invention of people who have problems with the way their neighborhoods are changing.

Gentrification happens when bankers and investors, looking for places to store their vast reservoirs of surplus capital, move into our neighborhoods to buy up our land, houses and apartments so they can safely stash their wealth in plain sight. Or just flip what they bought so they can make instant profits. When these guys move in the price of everything skyrockets: rents, house prices, food, everything. The gentry move in and the people have to move out. This is not some benign process of gradual change.

## **Gentrification is Displacement.**

Gentrification inexorably leads to the displacement of those who can no longer afford to stay in the place where they live, the neighborhood where they and previous generations grew up. It has been produced during every historic period in the evolution of capitalism. With the rise of indus-

trial capitalism, the people who worked the land were displaced from rural areas, leaving a huge low-cost surplus labor force in Europe's cities. Europe's colonial powers displaced indigenous people on every continent and launched the international slave trade. In America, European settlers displaced Native Americans from the lands they had stewarded for centuries. And as the United States urbanized, black and brown people were shuttled into segregated enclaves in central cities, then displaced again by the federal urban renewal program, and segregated again by redlining. They are now being displaced into new suburban enclaves by the so-called invisible hand of the real estate market.

Gentrification is not a natural product of evolving cities but it is a stealthy form of racial and class bias. It is color coded, not color blind. New York City's history is one of **serial displacement of poor, black and brown people**. But New York also has a rich history of community fightback, tenant organizing, and struggles against gentrification and displacement. Community-based resistance created the political foundation for rent regulations, tax policies protecting small homeowners, and the defeat of urban renewal programs (aka "Negro removal").

## What can be done?

There is nothing natural or inevitable about gentrification, and tenants and homeowners have often fought back. Our history is filled with examples of sustained struggles against displacement, like the Harlem Rent Strikes, the fights against the West Side Urban Renewal program, and the occupation and redevelopment of abandoned buildings in the South Bronx and Harlem. These struggles, often linked to the Civil Rights movement, made a difference and won important concessions and policy changes. In addition, for decades the environmental justice movement has sought to defend communities of color against polluting waste transfer stations and exposure to toxic air while at the same time fighting for the right to stay put. Today the climate justice movement, led by communities of color that are most vulnerable to sea level rise and climate change, is on the frontline of efforts to fundamentally alter the way the city adapts to a future without fossil fuels. In sum, our communities have had to struggle for every bit of government support to stabilize and improve the quality of life for residents and workers.

We have to keep fighting for more just local and state policies that help preserve and strengthen our vibrant neighborhoods: zoning and tax policies that promote stable communities and not real estate speculation; community-based and city-wide planning that guarantees that all residents have an equal opportunity to shape the future of the city; and explicit rejection by government of the hidden racial, ethnic and gender biases behind its housing, land use and other policies. Instead of government's usual charades known as "citizen participation" we need intensive and continuing dialogues within and between communities, and between communities and government, about the long-term future of the city and our diverse neighborhoods. It means shedding the myths of a technocratic, color-blind government and the taboos against speaking out loudly against racial injustice at every level.

Instead of an obscure zoning regimen controlled by technocrats, developers and high-paid lawyers, we

need to nurture active citizenship aimed at improving the quality of life for all. Instead of tax and land use policies that force people of color to move, we need a government that actively applies principles of racial justice to end gentrification and displacement. Instead of greenwashing and green gentrification that protects the wealthiest enclaves and promotes displacement of the most vulnerable, we need environmental policies that build on the struggles for racial and economic justice and improve the lives of the ninety-nine percent.

Let's build the city of the future on social justice and not economic greed. New Yorkers can learn from the Lenape people who preceded the European settlers and for whom land was not a commodity but an integral part of nature and human life. If we are to expose and undermine the forces of displacement and gentrification we must listen to the cries of mother earth as she continues to be smothered by more concrete, glass towers and asphalt. Let's set her free!

## Nine Tanka Poems on Home by Alicia Grullon

Home is an archive.  
Rooms with dates and descriptions  
catalogs with guests  
faded colors sometimes matte.  
Gloves, socks, cups, weaves and laundry.

Bracelets that have hung in  
tacked with metal one day in June  
returning from school.  
A plate cracked on one edge dropped  
while we argued and fought again.

Home is where the cat  
waited for us to finish then.  
No surveillance here.  
The rent is too damn high now  
for us to live and dream, love.

Home is space and time.  
Sheets, bourbon, joints, confetti  
or sometimes tissues.  
Crying from losing or pain.  
Familiar protests on streets.

To have all of this.  
Home is a manifesto  
written directly  
on walls, floors, windows, moments  
affirmative acts- a fight.

In New York City  
a 5% rent increase  
has been linked with  
3,000 more residents  
becoming homeless people.

In Amerikkka  
the evisceration of  
public schools for jails  
and social services stretch  
less money to cover real needs.

Think tanks can't solve this,  
nor non-profit programming  
or research centers  
with their top-down approaches.  
*What do you think it will take?*

Possibility.  
Collective power and vision  
to organize for  
homes, not shelters or hand outs,  
but sheets to rest in and hug.

# Hate Free Zone Queens: Envisioning Our Community-Centered Neighborhoods

## What is a Hate-Free Zone?

A Hate-Free Zone enables our humanity, our inherent kindness and compassion for each other, to shine. A Hate-Free Zone is built by our communities, for our communities. In a Hate-Free Zone, we look out for one another. We love and protect each other. We do not let each other be targeted or separated by hateful policies and practices. In particular, we move to protect those of us at the frontline of these attacks: our undocumented folks, workers, immigrants, women, and our Muslim, Black, LGBTQ, gender non-conforming, and young folks. We organize to defend our communities from workplace raids, deportations, mass criminalization, violence, and systemic violation of our rights and dignity.

The times we are living in now call us to lean into love, hold onto hope, and build true solidarity so that each and every one of us has a chance to live and thrive in our communities. We are a strong force rising up in the face of hate. We invite community members, local businesses, faith institutions, and elected officials to join us in making our communities Hate-Free Zones.

## Who We Are


HFZ Queens focused on the four neighborhoods of Woodside, Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, and Corona in the New York City borough of Queens. HFZ Queens is anchored by DRUM - Desis Rising Up and Moving and includes the following core partner organizations: Adhikaar, Centro Corona, Damayan Migrant Workers Association, Global Action Project, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Justice Committee, Queens Neighborhoods United, and Ugnayan Youth for Justice and Social Change. FB: HFZQueens

## Process

On September 17, 2017, Hate Free Zone Queens collectively envisioned what our neighborhoods would look like 20 years after we began intentionally practicing how to love and protect our communities and each other.

## Visions

1. It had been years since ICE or the NYPD had set foot in the neighborhoods. La Roosevelt was just as busy and bustling as always as immigrants, sex workers, & young children felt safe anywhere on the street. There were Community Land Trusts and the rents hadn't gone up in years. Businesses were locally-owned, selling samosas and arepas with a side of political consciousness. All the vecinas were in communication and there was mutual support. People could depend on each other. Pero este fin de semana nos enteramos through the underground mom network that danger might be lurking in our neighborhood. We had heard about waves of violence happening in other communities because our networks were connected to other networks; so we had organized a dabacito natin to discuss the situation. Of course, the interpreters were busily helping us communicate across languages as we brainstormed next steps. Folks were trickling in as they came back to the neighborhood from their jobs--long forgotten were the days of DACA because everybody had the right to work. After all, this was liberated territory where citizenship is irrelevant and we share responsibility for keeping each other safe and happy. It was an understatement to say "We Love and Protect Each Other."

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2. Pilipinx, Black and Muslim communities gather for informal meetings to talk about life and deepen their understanding of each other. The Latinx, LGBTQ, and young people join for potluck, politics and karaoke. They collectively plan their rooftop gardens, childcare collective, and all other collectively-run, community-owned businesses. They plan birthday parties for everyone in the communities for the next year. They decide what community projects to invest their dividends from their collectively owned businesses. These communities include barrios, barangays and townships where there is need for mutual support and cooperation.
  3. In the near future we envision exchanges between Hate Free Zone's art programs. This includes art exhibits that depict multicultural efforts and movements. The Wawakunas have helped spread the values of HFZ, first in different cities throughout the U.S. then worldwide. The HFZ museum began as a single location in Queens but began to open many branches in all boroughs.
  4. In 20 years, ICE really wants to do a raid, but business owners start contacting each other. There is an undocumented family at Kabayan and they feel confident that the people around them want to protect them because they've heard about the rapid response network in their neighborhood, and they know their rights. The owner of Kabayan gets a call with a tip that a raid is happening down the block from the bodega owner. Good thing the owner of Kabayan just went to an ICE watch training at the DRUM office! At the training, he got resources that he could share with customers. He also knows that without a specific warrant for people in the restaurant, he, as a business owner, has the right to turn any customer away and not let ICE in. He tells his customers that his restaurant is a Hate Free Zone, and that he will provide food and water to everyone until ICE leaves. The owner at Kabayan then calls the owner at Ihawan and other spots around the block to make sure ICE isn't somewhere else nearby. After this experience, the undocumented family becomes a member of Ugnayan and Hate Free Zones and they recruit their friends and family to be part of it too.



# Imagining De-Gentrified Futures

## The Picture the Homeless Oral History

Imagine getting on the subway. There are two seats on the train. One is next to someone who is visibly homeless and the other is next to someone else riding the train that you don't know or assume anything about. Who do you choose to sit next to? Who would you invite to be your neighbor? Your comrade?

Resistance begins with asserting our humanity. Collective resistance demands that we identify our collective humanity. The only way to disrupt the dominant narratives put forth by real estate speculators, developers, police and even progressive forces that seek reform but that don't change the root causes of our oppression is by uncovering and amplifying the hidden histories of resistance that are all around us. Those histories of resistance contain lessons that can inspire and help to guide our work. Those histories of resistance do not remain in the past. The rights that we do have now are the result of someone fighting for them. We only know a few of their names and fewer of their stories. Their work flows into our present and if we can uncover those lessons, they can help us to chart a way forward to a future that we collectively agree is worth fighting for.

The Picture the Homeless Oral History project documents the work of PTH through the stories and analysis of long time homeless leaders, former staff and political allies. PTH is the only NYC group whose mission is to organize homeless New Yorkers. It is a place where homeless New Yorkers can collectively imagine what a just NYC should look like and collectively work to create organizing campaigns to change this city for the better. The oral histories being collected for this project breathe life into the archive of the first 17 years of the organization. They tell us what those decisions and events mean to the people who made them happen.

PTH illuminated the multiple systems of oppression that contribute to homelessness: extreme poverty, systemic racism, gender discrimination and the privi-

leging of private property over human rights: reflected in the many ways that policing and gentrification go hand in hand. Homeless New Yorkers embody these intersections. Remember that visibly homeless person on the subway? What systems of oppression did they embody? As we work to build a movement to fight for housing as a human right it is essential to create structures that ensure that the people most harmed by this system are teaching us about how oppression shows up in their lives and that collectively we create opportunities to build the skills we need. This essay will explore some of the central themes emerging from the stories of PTH leaders, staff and allies interviewed through Picture the Homeless Oral History project. The quotes featured are all from long time PTH leaders whose words shine a light and reveal the way forward.

### Being Welcoming

*"They're Not Building Nothing for Me  
But I Can't Be Nowhere" Marcus Moore, PTH leader*

PTH welcomed homeless New Yorkers into a political home. Put yourself in the shoes of a homeless New Yorker and imagine going through the day and night without being welcomed anywhere. Not only did PTH welcome folks into our physical space, we welcomed them to share

"They're Not Building Nothing for Me  
But I Can't Be Nowhere" Marcus Moore, PTH leader their knowledge and to engage in collective analysis about the issues impacting them and together identify solutions. Homeless New Yorkers represented the organization in public events: from speaking engagements to being media spokespeople – transforming the "picture" of homelessness and defeating stigmatizing stereotypes.

*"They call us eyesores.  
They don't want to see us.  
They don't want to look at us.  
They move us over here  
Move us over there.*

*They don't want us on the main strip, with a lot of people, with tourists.  
They're probably getting complaints from the community  
Look at all these people; what are they doing?  
The cops come and they tell us there's too many of us,  
So, we've got to scatter out; we've got to separate.*

*They're just like with cattle, just herding us around. You want to go to jail?  
Go to the hospital?  
I just get up and go.  
It's rough.*

*It's a struggle.  
It makes you angry, because why is society—why am I in this situation? Why?  
There's got to be a better way.  
The only better way there's going to be is by letting somebody know how it is, talk about it.*

*That's how I got into it. I started talking.  
Then I got speaking in places and learning how to communicate  
And let people know what's going on  
How things are out there  
What people are really going through*

*Everything that we planned  
Everything that we organized went through smoothly  
Because it was organized and done professionally  
And it was done with the backing of people  
That really needed and wanted this to happen.*

*That's why I like Picture the Homeless  
I felt that I got so much accomplished because  
People believed in what was happening and what was going on,  
They didn't want to just listen  
They acted. They responded.  
They made things happen."  
Floyd Parks, PTH leader*

### **Leadership**

When we begin to picture homeless New Yorkers as our neighbors, when we choose to sit next to someone deemed an eyesore then we can begin to harness our collective resources and trace a new trajectory that allows communities to flourish without being priced out of their neighborhoods. If we allow ourselves to dream one another's dreams, to plan, and to organize to win what the State tells us we can't have and what our friends tell us is "unwinnable" we can begin to dismantle the systems that divide us.

*"We were counting vacant buildings and properties.  
We were having a meeting one night and  
I got so fired up and mad.*

I said, oh my god.  
Those could be homes for people.  
They don't have to stay in the freaking shelter.  
That was just the beginning of a little seed that has blossomed.

We went out.  
They said we couldn't do it.  
We took some vacant buildings and  
We counted all these vacant buildings in all five boroughs and  
They said we couldn't do it."

DeBoRah Dickerson, PTH leader

When we convert our collective dreaming into collective action, we must acknowledge that there are things we must learn – lessons that the system tries to hide from us. We need to educate one another and the movements that we're connected to through bold, direct action. Collective action and collective reflection creates learning.

### **Education and Direct Action**

"Being at Picture the Homeless it was very important  
That we get involved in order to understand the process of the system.  
If you didn't get involved, you would be just part of the system, accepting what was happening to you. That was the furthest thing from the truth!"  
So, we learned how to fight back.  
How to write chants.  
How to stand up to the government.

We don't believe that you have the right  
To keep us out of these vacant houses  
That I know for a fact are vacant.

We learned how to go around and search for vacant property.  
We learned how to log property and to research property and to find out who's the landlord.  
At the same time, members  
Because this was a member led organization Members were learning how to lead  
How to stand up  
And fight back.  
We learned the importance of speaking to the Senator, or the politician.  
And their role.  
And when they wouldn't listen  
We had leaders that would show us how to grab your attention through the public eye. How to get the media's attention.  
What to say and not be tricked.  
We would learn these interviewing techniques and  
At the same time learn to take that interview to use it

To the advantage of the homeless population.  
We learned so much at Picture the Homeless!”

Arvernetta Henry, PTH leader

### **Resistance Relationships**

A de-gentrified New York City rooted in anti-capitalist values that recognizes housing as a human right will be born from a love that is rooted in collective struggle. There are two primary types of relationships that PTH leaders and staff consistently mention in their interviews. One is the love for others, or for neighborhood or the city itself that motivates folks to join PTH and fight for others.

*“I suffered a lot over the years.*

*When I was younger, I was homeless twice. I hit it twice, being homeless!*

*The first time it was because I couldn’t afford to pay the rent.*

*My rent was so high.*

*I didn’t make enough money to pay any rent or anything.*

*Then when I finally got back on my feet again, I took care of my mother until she passed away and then I went back to another torture.*

*I try my best to help someone*

*By fighting to get them to come back with us, and*

*“Let’s do it together. Let’s work together to fight the system.”*

*We’re entitled to what we need.*

*I mean, we shouldn’t have to go through this.*

*When I was younger, I didn’t know any better.*

*I’m older now and I’m wiser, and I’m going to do something better than that.*

*So, you know, I try my best to stay on top of myself*

*But I’m always looking out for my fellow citizens, to get that as well.”*

Andres Perez, PTH leader

The second type of love are the resistance relationships formed through collective struggle that gave each of us the strength to take risks, to do things we’ve never done before, to sacrifice their emotional and physical comfort because someone else at PTH welcomed us into struggle and would have our backs.

*“When there’s pain and there is love, we gravitate towards love.”* Rogers, PTH leader

In a de-gentrified future, no one is too poor to afford a roof over their head because housing is a human right, not a commodity. Buildings and land aren’t vacant: they’re utilized as housing, or community spaces, schools or gardens, or whatever a community identifies that it needs.

Communities make collective decisions about what they need because we have learned to drop the stigmas that have been brainwashed in us all by this system, and we replace them with histories of resistance and solidarity so that we can learn to live together, and love one another and ourselves.

### **Listen to the oral histories:**

Interview with Nikita Price

<https://soundcloud.com/user-637352935/interview-with-nikita-price-december-2-2018>

Other members:

<https://soundcloud.com/user-637352935/picture-the-homeless-oral-history-project-shorts>

# by Antoinette Martinez (member of Protect Sunset Park)

Submitted October 9th, 2020

New York City's land use policies are racist. We can spend time dissecting this city's long history of redlining and disinvestment to trace how various policies have systematically disenfranchised people of color. But in all honesty, we don't need to look that far back to see the inequity of these policies today.

Right now, in 2020, land rezonings are tools used to kick working class families out of the neighborhoods they've lived in for years. To displace people from the communities they've helped build.

So, working class communities of color have no choice but to fight back against gentrification and displacement.

Have no choice but to demand inclusive community development, where working mothers, undocumented families and so many others who are often an after thought in city policy decisions - work to undo decades and century old policies that perpetuate system racism.

My name is Antoinette Martinez. I've lived in Sunset Park for all 33 years of my life. It's where my family, who migrated from Puerto Rico, has lived since 1979 and if you've ever met my mother - she'd be proud to tell you how much she LOVES the neighborhood. She might share how she's lived in the area since she was 19 and how it's where raised each of her 3 children. She might even happily tell you about the attention she receives on weekend walks along 8th avenue - when children and their families stop in their tracks to warmly greet her with smiles exclaiming "Hi! Ms. Martinez!" My mother has worked as a Daycare assistant with the Brooklyn Chinese Association in Sunset Park for the last 20 years and has played a major role in teaching and caring for neighborhood children. Sunset Park has historically

been one of New York City's largest walk-to-work communities and my mom, someone who has never learned to drive, just LOVES that she can walk over to work. To me Sunset Park is so much more than a neighborhood. It's been a home to my family for decades, a place where our roots have grown, and a community we've helped shape and one that has helped shape us.

In 2016, when I learned from UPROSE (a celebrated local organization fighting for environmental and social justice) that a group of billionaire investors were looking to turn Sunset Park into the next Williamsburg - it shook me to my core. Sunset park had been targeted as the next hot spot destination for tourism, fancy shops and restaurants, and luxury hotels. My family and I were already feeling the economic pressures of increased rent and the thought of not being able to afford living in a community my family had lived in for nearly 4 decades was devastating.

But through years of canvassing, petitioning, rallies, Twitter storms, showing up at politician's houses, researching, postering, yelling, and taking up space works!!! Thousands of Sunset Park residents worked together to push back against the largest private rezoning in NYC history and WON!!

Industry City withdrew their rezoning application. Sunset Park was able to successfully rip through the developer narrative that described a hard working neighborhood as "decrepit". Can't tell you how many times developers postured themselves as "saviors" to Sunset Park - forgetting true neighborhood heroes are people like my mother, people who've devoted so much of their lives to this neighborhood and even in between a full time work schedule, and carrying for an aging mother in law - still found the time to do her part in fighting against billionaire developers who were working hard to uproot her.

3 weeks ago Industry City withdrew their rezoning application!! Industry City's narrative of bringing 20,000 jobs into the community was shattered. Sunset Park pushed and fought back against the facade and won! This rezoning was not for the community and would've turned Sunset Park's waterfront into a luxury mall for the rich.

Now Sunset Park is able to move forward and plan bigger. We deserve a comprehensive waterfront plan that includes the Sunset Park community and a green future to the Sunset Park waterfront as outlined in UPROSE's community alternative plan the Green Resilient Industrial District proposal.

We want and deserve a neighborhood working people can afford. That's why our families have fought back - to ensure the future of our neighborhoods are planned with us and for us!


# Gentrification

## “The Ethnic Cleansing of New York City Neighborhoods” by Robert Robinson

Gentrification was a word I first started to hear in Miami in 2004 as I was homeless and spending nights sleeping alongside a luxury apartment building on Miami Beach. Every day as I took the J-bus over the causeway from Miami Beach to the little Havana area of the city, I would notice the construction of luxury towers going up quickly next to Biscayne Bay. With a new Convention Center being built in the downtown corridor, Biscayne Boulevard was quickly changing its appearance and the commercial corridor was suddenly seeing for rent signs go up as the current tenants did not want to sign on to unforeseen rent increases being demanded by landlords looking to collect their windfall.

In 2006, when I finally found my way back to New York City (NYC), I ended up in a facility designed as a drop-in center but morphed into a shelter due to the number of people looking for a bed every night. A drop-in center was designed for folks who were homeless to find services such as food pantries, soup kitchens, clothing and other life essentials. Rather than spend my days in the drop-in center staring at the walls, I decided to go to the public library and learn as much as I could about the word—gentrification--- which was constantly in the news, in conversation in stores and was seemingly a big contributor to the rising population of homeless people across the city surviving on the streets and living in shelters. Gentrification was taking a toll on traditional communities inhabited by black and brown people. Communities like Harlem, the South Bronx, Bushwick, Crown Heights, East New York, Williamsburg and downtown Brooklyn. Hipsters had started to move into Williamsburg, fancy restaurants came next followed by Starbucks and other fancy coffee shops.

During my ten months in the New York City shelter I was transformed. I grew up in a working class family on Long Island with a father that whole heartedly believed in the American Dream. I grew up with the same set of values drilled into my head by my parents until I ended up homeless in Miami. Homeless in a shelter in New York City and listening to story after story of --rising rents, low wage jobs and no sign of a bright future ahead. In fact, the broad brush that homelessness was being painted with motivated me to better understand housing history in New York and around the United States. My lived experience and the experiences of others who were in shelter sharing their stories led me to conclude a theory. I concluded that **gentrification, leads to displacement, which leads to criminalization**. It seemed to me there was a pre-determined path for some people. Most of the people seemed to be single black males. In fact people being displaced had to face narratives such as “you are homeless because you don’t want to work. You want a handout! You don’t have an education! You have substance use or alcohol abuse. The issue was being painted with a broad brush while more and more data showed rising rents had a direct effect on the homeless population in the city. Where’s the brush that paints the issue as a social issue?



In 2004, the NYC council voted to rezone downtown Brooklyn which should have led to a rental housing boon for the area. Instead the area was flooded with luxury towers much like I had witnessed in Miami and now playing out in Brooklyn. The result was mass displacement from bordering communities like

Fort Greene, Boerum Hill and Clinton Hill. The city council vote was in favor of the downtown rezoning with only two dissenting voices. The dissenting voices were Charles Barron of East New York Brooklyn and Tony Avella from Bayside Queens. It seemed no matter how loud the outcry from affected communities the city council constantly voted against their constituents and on the side of developers. With mayor Bloomberg proposing rezoning(s) of neighborhoods across the city, a huge struggle was about to take hold in NYC. Couple that with the financial crisis of 2008 and it was war. Bloomberg setting himself up for a third term added fuel to the fire and it was a wakeup call for housing activist across the city.


The Occupy Movement in 2011 really exposed gentrification and the economic inequality in NYC and around the country. This gave rise to the 1% and the 99%. The 1% owned 38% of the country's wealth and thereby controlled 99% of our lives. Post economic crisis in NYC saw speculation of land and housing hit all-time highs. Land speculation and the effects of the market translated to a boom in luxury housing construction and the disappearance of one story structures like gas stations and parking lots. A new mayor was elected running on a platform of a "Tale of Two Cities" a catchy phrase which was meant to highlight the economic inequality of the city and a promise of change. Instead mayor DeBlasio bought us more of the same. Rezoning with little or no benefit to long term residents and more forced displacement from higher rents.

### The Fight Back from the Community

Grassroots communities across the city began to organize and come up with plans to upend the recent trends of luxury construction; removal of rent controlled and stabilized apartments from preservation and building owners trying to capitalize from gentrification. Questions arose about land-- and how to control land --- especially city owned or public land. How to demand construction that fits the needs of the communities across the city? How can we demand construction of apartments for fixed income, low-wage workers and senior citizens? All of whom have a human right to a home! And remember a shelter is not a home! How can we transform our fundamental relationship to land? This must happen before we can ever control housing construction. We must control the land-- that housing sits on. There are many ways to make this change. The most popular at the moment is the community land trust (CLT) model. A piece of land is given to a group of people in perpetuity. It is owned and governed collectively by a community. The model of a CLT most often referred to in NYC is the Cooper Square Community Land Trust which dates back to 1984. One could argue and I would take up this argument that Cooper Square was created 35 years ago when conditions were much different. With development in Manhattan almost out of control and air rights going for almost \$500 per square foot, it is almost impossible to get land given away in perpetuity.

The model I would propose is a more militant approach. An approach that gets the attention of developers and elected officials would have people taking vacant buildings and redistributing to people





The model I would propose is a more militant approach. An approach that gets the attention of developers and elected officials would have people taking vacant buildings and redistributing to people in need. There are many successful models to learn from. The Landless Workers Movement in Brazil (MST), the European Squatters Collective and the Abahlali baseMajongolo (Shackdwellers) are all examples of people exercising self-determination.

Another model communities could and should consider is running candidates for city council that bring a new vision of community development. Housing organizers who come from the communities most affected can make good candidates. We must elect candidates that understand international human rights law and are willing to challenge American exceptionalism; that says “the US democracy doesn’t violate human rights”. Well the US doesn’t seem to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) **\*see below.**

My Brooklyn community of Bed-Stuy a traditional stronghold of African American people is quickly changing its hue. The hipsters are moving south from Bushwick and Williamsburg and the Fresh Cold Pressed juice spots are popping up all over the place. I can’t afford \$15.00 for a glass of juice. We must take over the vacant spaces before the city is ethnically cleansed!

### **\*The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

#### Article 25

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

# Pati Rodriguez, Mi Casa No Es Su Casa



@MICASARESISTE

# DON'T LET THESE PIGS TOUCH US EVER AGAIN



COPS OUT OF THE MTA. COPS OUT OF OUR HOODS.  
STRONG COMMUNITIES MAKE POLICE OBSOLETE.

**DEFEND BUSHWICK**

**¡BUSHWICK SE DEFIENDE!**

**NO REZONING**

**¡BUSHWICK NO SE VENDE!**



# Like Gravity on a Tilted Table: Thoughts on Gentrification’s “Inevitability”

By Samuel Stein


Is gentrification inevitable?

In New York City, we hear this question a lot. In plenty of other places, it wouldn’t make much sense; in fact, in most of the country (as measured by surface area, if not by population), gentrification is far less of a concern than that process’s opposite: persistent disinvestment. At other times in New York City’s history, that question would have been similarly puzzling. In 1974, even though “brownstoning” and “loft living” had already become cultural and economic touchstones, no one with their ear to the ground would have claimed that gentrification was imminent, let alone inevitable, for the city as a whole.

And yet, here we are. Neighborhood after neighborhood seems to go through a similar process which, while unique in its particular manifestations, always ends the same: the neighborhood gets too expensive for many of the people who long lived there, and for those like them who might have moved there. The working-class and often Black, Latino, and Asian communities who not only inhabited but built-up the neighborhoods they lived in – whose labor and institutions kept those spaces animated in the face of repeated rounds of capital flight or state violence, and whose cultural production and economic interventions fueled interest in the place among people who could pay more to live there – are dismissed from their service, displaced from their homes, and disconnected from their social bonds.

Those who stand to benefit from this state of affairs tend to tell us that such a condition is inevitable, and even natural. Some celebrate its arrival, claiming that gentrification is actually good for everyone. Others recognize its ill effects but are resigned to the idea that gentrification is simply a symptom of the city’s success.

Most New York City housing activists reject both of these narratives. Of course gentrification isn’t inevitable, we insist – it is instead the result of specific economic and social policies, all of which could have gone differently. If the federal government had fully funded and expanded public housing, and had stopped corporate investors from buying up so much of the country’s housing stock; if city and state governments had strengthened and expanded the rent laws’ long ago, structured their tax codes to punish housing speculation, and used their land-use powers to expand social housing into wealthy neighborhoods while restricting luxury development in poor areas; if the federal reserve had taken action to cool overheated property markets; if we had a real leftist party in power, or if the tenant movement was stronger and more unified, or if the labor movement could have pushed up wages faster than rising rents; if these counterfactuals had come true, gentrification wouldn’t be the force it is today.



Those counterfactuals, however, are just that: an alterative history that did not manifest. We live in a city where, instead, real estate capitalists have joined with their public allies to produce a system that makes gentrification so predictably persistent that it feels inevitable. As many people have noted before me, it has become far easier for most people to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Here in New York City, thanks to the long efforts of real estate boosters in business, government, the media, and academia, it is now easier for most residents to view gentrification as inevitable than to view de-gentrification as possible.

Given all this, it isn't wrong to say that if we remain on our present course, New York City's gentrification will persist and intensify to the point of inevitability. To call this natural, however, would be an absurd mystification of our present condition.

Try this thought exercise: picture our city's land use and housing system as a table built with one leg slightly taller than all the others, but all four legs touching the floor. If you placed a marble on the corner with the taller leg and let go, what would happen? The marble would glide downward toward the opposite corner. Why does it do so? Surely because of the natural force of gravity, but also for a far more relevant reason: because the tabletop has been designed at a slope.

That is how our system operates. It is built to produce the kinds of results with which we are familiar: rising land and property values, gentrification, and displacement in working-class neighborhoods. Those who naturalize gentrification are mistaking – or misrepresenting – the system's slope for the law of gravity. Here in New York, our table has been slanted for so long that to many of us it seems normal.

We on the left must often engage in defensive anti-gentrification fights against plans and policies that clearly benefit real estate capital over working-class tenants and communities. We can conceptualize such campaigns as struggles to keep the city's designers from extending our table's taller leg even further upward. Crucial as such fights are, we must remember that even when we win them, we have only stopped the table's slope from steepening. This doesn't produce an even surface, or a table that slopes in our direction instead of theirs; it just returns us to the status quo ante, which is stacked against us and tends toward gentrification.

The task before us is not to reverse gravity, or ignore it: the system is, in fact, constructed to make gentrification inevitable, or at least highly likely, in more and more places throughout our city. On this point, the liberals and apologists are not wrong. The task for radicals is to change the system such that it is no longer true!

This cannot be accomplished through technocratic tinkering with existing market mechanisms. Unless we take definitive action, the taller table leg will just keep growing higher, even as the other legs struggle to catch up. Instead, we need a program that lops off the surplus and returns it to the people.

Off with their leg!

# Sunset Park, 2040

**Corbin Laedlein, Jess Kulig, Gisselle Jiménez, and Michelle Yun**  
**Sunset Park Popular Assembly**

It has been 15 years since The Uprising. Members of the Sunset Park Popular Assembly reflect on daily life in a liberated East Lenapehoking and how they each contribute to their community.

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*San, age 20:*

My day began early, harvesting pumpkins in the *milpa* that surrounds Sunset Park. In between poking around the prickly leaves and vines for ripe pumpkins, I'd watch my neighbors go about their morning routines. I spotted my *compa* Valerie from the Youth Council passing by on 5th ave and waved. "Buenos días, San!" she called from the street, "See you tonight!"

Working at the *milpa* can be hard work, but I enjoy this rotation of my Urban Agroecology apprenticeship more than the oyster and seaweed cooperative at Jamel Floyd Park-- I'll take scratchy vines over the freezing water any day. Most of what's produced by the farm cooperatives gets distributed to local schools, and it feels good knowing that my work contributes to my community's health and autonomy.

At the *milpa* I work with Auntie Joanne (who can be found with her famous homemade cookies and cosmetics at the Thursday Night Market) and Don Rigoberto (who's never caught without his signature embroidered vest) from the *Sindicato de Campesines Urbanes*. They can talk a lot, but they are also great listeners, and so kind--they always make sure to feed me after a morning of hard work. Today, Don Rigo brought tamales made from our own corn, and Auntie Jo brought scallion pancakes.

We sat in the orchard for lunch after the harvest. Auntie Jo and Don Rigo talked of how it was before the Popular Assemblies instituted land reform. Of how our Mother Earth and homes were called "property" and "real estate"; of how landlords bought and sold them for profit, forcing the dispossessed and racialized peoples to rent tiny crumbling apartments or to live in the streets, public parks, and subways; of how the *malgobierno* and the political parties ruled from above, serving the interests of the landlords and bosses while they manipulated our people with false promises and fear.

Everything we could see – from the *milpa*, to my apartment building, to the salt marshes of Manahatta in the distance, had been collectivized and redistributed according to social and ecological need following The Uprising. The original stewards of this territory, the Lenape, had rematriated back to their homeland after the fall of the colonial government, and now all decisions over land-use here in East Lenapehoking are made with their consultation and consent.

From where we sat, I could see the memorial to those martyred by the *malgobierno's* police, *migra*, and military in the northeast corner of the park. I stared at it as Auntie Jo shared that there were times when she almost lost hope, when fascism seemed inevitable. A truck with a loudspeaker went up 44th street, reminding us that our neighborhood assembly was this evening. I listened as I ate, feeling humbled and grateful to those who sacrificed to free the Earth and her people, allowing us, as Don Rigo says, “to finally be human beings again.”

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*J, age 43:*

Hiba, Sofía, and Celeste all stayed home from school today. Everyone's exhausted from the fun last night, so we decided to sleep in. Hiba's aunt and cousin—Amti Souad and Basma—are leaving to go back to Morocco on Saturday, and Frankie just got back from San Francisco de Macorís, so we celebrated with food and karaoke in Sunset Park. Hiba spent a lot of time learning to cook with her aunt this past month, so she made couscous for everyone. It was delicious—especially with all the vegetables from *la milpa*. Frankie had everyone rolling on the ground laughing with her throwback Disney covers. Sofía, of course, was so happy to see her again. Her connection with Frankie is special.

Frankie and I were the first ones up this morning, so the two of us walked over to see our friends on 54th Street. Shaun and some of the *tíos* from the block made a huge batch of his famous chicken and waffles, so we picked up enough for all of us. Frances gave us some maple syrup that she tapped in the Bronx, and I had a bottle of hot sauce left from my visit to my sister, which were the perfect touches for the meal.

Over breakfast, the kids asked us to tell them stories about when we were children. It's always fascinating to see their reactions. Even though it hasn't been that long, their world is so different. Today, I told them about the time I got my hair cut short for the first time. I loved how my new haircut looked on me, but when I went to school, the kids all laughed at me. One of the teachers even scolded me when I went to the bathroom, saying, “This is the *girls'* restroom.” I tried to explain how stressful it was, but Sofía and Celeste just giggled. They thought it was so silly that my short hair was such a big deal!

Amti Souad chimed in, “You think that's strange? 15 years ago we couldn't even come here without permission from the government! We tried for years and years, but they just wouldn't give us that damn piece of paper! They rarely gave them to people like us...” The kids twisted their faces in perplexion. They've heard about borders and visas and citizenship before, since many of our friends, family, and neighbors have stories—stories about living in the shadows; stories about being separated from loved ones by invisible lines in the sand; stories about crossing those lines, only to suffer exploitation and oppression on the other side; and stories of being placed inside dark, cold cells. But they still don't totally understand. I don't think I would either. People have freedom to move around now, and no longer have to fear being thrown into a cold, dark cell by the government.

The kids finished breakfast and got ready to meet their friends at Jamel Floyd Park, close to the site where the infamous MDC prison once stood. Sometimes I feel jealous of them—jealous that they



never had to go up against the big land developers who wanted to force us all out of the neighborhood, or that they'll never have to worry about their loved ones being locked behind those drab walls at MDC. But I'm also grateful for how we've been able to transform Sunset Park since The Uprising, and I'm excited to see what we can continue to make of this world together. And I can't lie—I do love seeing the elders' faces every time Celeste confuses the word "landlord" for "wizard!"

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*Esperanza, age 84:*


My morning *cafecito* tastes better by the window. My neighbors wave to me as they trickle down our block on their way to work at the waterfront. Saleem, Krystal, Jin Hui, Xiomara, Aj... a knock at the door. I finish my last sip of coffee and grab my cane to answer it. "*¡Ao zǎo, a Señora Esperanza!*" Jenni greets me with a big smile. "I picked an eggplant for you along with some more pigeon pea pods ready for shelling. I'm running late for my apprenticeship at the bike shop so I'll catch you at our meeting later!" She's taken off before I can thank her.

For the last few years, Jenni has tended my plot on our building's shared rooftop *conuco*. It's my piece of the Taíno Nation here in Lenapehoking. I miss the thick, humid air of the greenhouse, but I can't make the climb up to the roof anymore. Here on the ground I still have our native plant garden, the blooming tree my mother left me, and the community that grows in its shade. I lean out the window and ask one of the neighborhood children running up the hill to PS94 to stop and pass me a fistful of bee balm from the garden.

Unmarried and without children, I never imagined I'd have anyone to leave anything to. When the pandemic struck, I was at risk and alone. Soon young folks from the Popular Assembly noticed my solitude and began to bring me groceries and sometimes, from a safe distance, they'd linger to learn more about me. They resurfaced memories of my childhood in the mountains of Kiskeya where all we had was each other, the river, and God. It was humble but we had dignity. I stir my pot of *sancocho* and watch the steam rise to fill the room with the smell of my island.

In the years leading to The Uprising, those young people reminded me our city was made of *islas* too, and that we lived on earth and among rivers that could still sustain us and teach us and heal us, if only we cared for the land in return. They reminded me we still had each other, and that we needed each other. They said they needed even me. I'd been alone for so long I had forgotten what that felt like. How could I have known my stories would be fuel for a revolution? How could my mother have known my name, *Esperanza*, would be prophetic?

Now I serve with the Elders Council of the Popular Assembly, guided by Lenape elders, to revive and preserve the knowledge that took generations to accumulate. This month, we on the Safety Committee prepared a discussion series on peacemaking and restorative justice practices in other communities in order to continue developing our own practices in Sunset Park. Tonight we'll study the *Mamas of Rojava*, a group of women elders in liberated Syria who have kept their community safe by serving as mediators between the families they already know and love.



As the late afternoon sun begins to tinge everything gold, Jenni, Aj, Xiomara, Jin Hui, Krystal, and Saleem drag themselves back up the steep hill of our block and plop down heavily in our garden like overripe fruit. I carefully bring a tall pitcher of iced bee balm tea to the window sill and sweeten it with honey from the milpa's apiary. I give them time to fill their bottles with the pale pink drink and rest in the breeze under my mother's tree before we begin our meeting. I pour myself a glass last. Everything tastes better by the window.