

**NEW YORK CITY  
ANTI-GENTRIFICATION NETWORK:  
SUMMATION OF CONVENINGS**



**CAAAY | FIERCE | FUREE  
URBAN JUSTICE CENTER**

**JANUARY 2007**

## Introduction

New York City, like many major cities in the United States, used to have factories and endless pools of workers for various industries. With major manufacturing moving to the Global South to cut production costs, big and small cities alike are changing shape and shifting roles. As some cities struggle to survive in this era of neoliberal globalization, a new type of city has emerged: the Global City. New York City is a prime example of the Global City, also known as a “command post” for the global economy controlling major aspects of finance and production. Consequently, New York City is home to transnational corporations, banks, and media outlets that are run by a class of predominately white, elite professionals who require access to a Global City lifestyle. They demand luxury housing, top-end restaurants, boutiques, cultural centers, domestic workers to care for their children and homes, and other workers to service their full gamut of needs. New York City has also become a destination for migrants who are forced to migrate to the U.S. in search of jobs as a result of U.S. neoliberal policies implemented in their home countries. These migrants along with people of color are the working class who serve the class of elites and professionals, working some of the longest hours for the lowest wages. These workers also require housing and adequate transportation. However, with the attacks on public and rent regulated housing to make room for luxury developments, many workers are pushed further out of the central city and into the outer boroughs, enduring long commutes while breaking up the social fabric of many longstanding communities.

Similar to other urban cities in the US, the process of gentrification in New York City has been complex. It has subjected working class tenants to displacement and landlord harassment, small businesses to skyrocketed commercial rents making it difficult to sustain their stores, and young people of color to increased policing in their community and public spaces, to name a few. Simultaneously, the City has aggressively promoted wide-scale plans for development, which provide optimum opportunity for large commercial and luxury residential development, while failing to protect working class communities from being displaced from their neighborhoods. Therefore, the gentrification process is a key component for the development and livelihood of the Global City.

As a result, several New York City-based community groups organizing among low-income and working class communities of color and their partner groups realized the need to engage the local and city-wide development processes in order to ensure that they have a voice in their future and are not developed out of their communities, neighborhoods and other spaces. In order to build knowledge, proposals and, ultimately, sufficient power to influence development, these organizations identified the need to come together among diverse groups and communities to develop an analysis of the root causes and impacts of gentrification, share experiences and perspectives across communities, identify collective needs and possibilities, and develop strategies and frameworks to promote equitable and sustainable local and regional development.

Therefore, a working group of representatives from several organizations initiated a series of local gatherings among membership-based organizations explicitly working to address gentrification in their communities and a few resource and ally organizations or individuals (see below for more details). This document is a summary of the first two meetings that took place in July and November 2006. Through this means, we seek to share the discussions that have taken place with other local and national organizations, which have focused primarily on descriptive narratives of how diverse communities are experiencing gentrification locally<sup>1</sup>, pull out a few common threads that have emerged, and identify initial

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<sup>1</sup> “Community” is defined both as a place-based collective of individuals, such as a neighborhood, and as a collective of individuals with a common identity, such as LGBT youth.

areas of common need among organizations that could serve as points of convergence and strategic collaboration as we look towards supporting and promoting local and regional equitable development.

### **How this came about and who we are**

The impetus for an initiative that allowed for a space for discussion and the potential for collective action arose from the discussion among local organizations as they each experienced and addressed the effects of gentrification in their communities. Several of these organizations were partnering with the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center (UJC) for research, legal and policy assistance in support of their local efforts. Therefore, both common experiences and needs became obvious, and discussion of how UJC and other local resource/ally organizations/individuals could be most helpful and strategic seemed relevant. Moreover, the need and idea for this space was additionally identified and called for as part of several forums convened by the NYC Research and Organizing Initiative (NYCROI), a city-wide initiative coordinated by the UJC that seeks to support the strategic use of research in social justice organizing and advocacy. Therefore, the UJC convened an initial meeting in July 2006 of their community partners with which they were working around issues of gentrification. Staff and members of CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities, Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment (FIERCE), and Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE) attended this initial meeting in which we exchanged information about the organizations, what is happening in their communities, strategies or campaigns that have been implemented, and identified potential areas for collaboration in the future. Out of this initial meeting, it was decided that a larger group of organizations dealing with gentrification would be convened. This second meeting was convened by these four organizations, and included participation of staff and members from Community Voices Heard, Make the Road by Walking, Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES), and Professor Rene Poitevin of New York University's Gallatin School. Additional organizations working around gentrification in their communities have been consulted and/or interviewed in order to inform this process and this document, including: Movimiento por Justicia del Barrio, Center for Immigrant Families, and Mothers on the Move (MOM).

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## **SECTION 2: Commonalities and Emerging Themes**

From our initial discussions, we have identified several common themes that connect our experiences organizing across different areas of the city, including:

- **Efforts to preserve public housing and affordable housing;**
- **An increasing trend towards the creation of public-private partnerships that are attempting to redefine and control the use of public space; and**
- **The ways in which gentrification denigrates the social and cultural fabric and identity of communities, and the need to preserve our cultural heritages and community-identified historic places.**

Against all this is the backdrop of whose communities, specifically, are experiencing gentrification pressures and the difficulty community organizations working in these communities have navigating the maze of policies, decision-making bodies and public review processes that enable neighborhood change.

### **Race/Class/Gender/Sexuality Implications of Gentrification**

Communities being targeted for the type of development and public policies that are spurring gentrification are predominantly low-income, immigrant and people of color communities. Our organizations have seen that these attacks are not just specific to residential communities of these populations but also to commercial and social/cultural spaces with which they identify. In the case of FIERCE, it is the specific combination of race, sexuality, gender identity, and age that is being used to try to de-legitimize this population's claim as a stakeholder. Many of the residential communities being displaced have a large population of female heads of households and may also have had pre-existing high rates of unemployment. While often we assume that there is an understanding of the role that race, class, gender, gender identity and sexuality play in promoting and fostering social, economic and political marginalization as a result of gentrification, it is important to make it explicit in this context and use available data to illustrate these impacts.

### **Exclusion of Community Voice from Public Decision-making Processes**

In all almost all of the communities throughout New York City where we are exploring the impacts and effects of gentrification, there have been pseudo public democratic processes of planning coordinated by the City or a private entity, or frequently a collaboration between public and private players, that claim to have included the perspectives and represent the interests of diverse community stakeholders. These processes and their resulting plans, however, largely have not provided any real leadership or power in decision-making for low-income stakeholders and others who have traditionally been marginalized and, not surprisingly, do not reflect the interests, needs and perspectives of those individuals and groups of individuals. They do, however, effectively serve to further marginalize those stakeholders, placing them, once again, in a reactive position and force them to fight to merely salvage what they can for their communities.

New York is particular in that it has an extensive political infrastructure of community planning boards (an outgrowth of mid-century grassroots organizing efforts) that must be consulted on various types of projects. However these boards technically are city agencies whose board members are appointed by elected officials and often do not represent the diversity of the larger community district. As agencies, these boards are too under-funded to do effective outreach in traditionally marginalized communities, or formulate their own district community development plans allowable under their mandate. In the case of recent public approval battles surrounding development/rezoning plans Community Boards have been asked to vote to recommend approval or disapproval of complex plans in single yes/no votes on strict timelines that do not allow for adequate research or review. When faced with such situations local boards tend to vote to approve what they are presented with or abstain despite reservations. As the legitimate "community body" their decisions are then used as justification for the claim of real community involvement and further compromise the Boards ability to act independently.

### **Preservation of Affordable Housing**

All the groups involved in our discussions that organize in residential communities, stressed both the pressures that their communities are under regarding loss of existing affordable housing and the creation of new, unaffordable developments and/or loft conversions.

Several groups expressed that their interest in organizing around gentrification has grown out of their direct experience fighting against displacement to preserve affordable housing. Many see the preservation of this housing as one of the primary ways to hold onto the community to be able to fight around other issues such as use of public space. The need to force local government to hold landlords accountable to local laws was listed as a top priority along with holding the public housing authority itself, accountable as a landlord. For example, CAAAV, UJC and Make the Road by Walking are engaged in a city-wide language access initiative to ensure that immigrant and limited English proficient residents are able to access the code enforcement services as one of the only mechanisms available to combat the widespread harassment of low-income tenants by their landlords and as a critical strategy to slow down the forced displacement taking place in their communities as a result of gentrification. Two groups, CVH and FUREE, indicated that the public housing in their neighborhoods represents the largest last stand of affordable units in the area and, therefore, is key to the preservation of the low-income community they are organizing.

Organizing around subsidized housing and code enforcement, along with organizing around tax-credits given to new housing developments, has necessarily lent itself to joining city-wide fights.

### **Public-Private Partnerships**

Many organizations explicitly cited the role that quasi public-private entities have played in making decisions regarding redevelopment/ neighborhood improvement plans that are spurring gentrification. In all instances the city has either encouraged the development of private corporations (local development corporations [LDC's]) to implement its stated vision for the "improvement" of the area, or has worked with pre-existing non-profits (business improvement districts [BIDs], chambers of commerce, etc.) that are publicly funded but with little to no public oversight, to create redevelopment plans. These institutions often represent large business and real estate interests and work with the city to further those interests. The City's own Economic Development Corporation, technically not a city agency but entirely financed with city money and run by Mayoral appointees, has played a large role promoting redevelopment plans, encouraging necessary rezoning actions to enable plans, and soliciting developers for projects.

One striking and disturbing realization connected to this phenomenon is how this has muddied understandings of what is a public space, who is in control of a space, what sort of uses of public space are permissible and who ultimately must be held accountable. In several cases, public agencies such as the Police, Parks, Health and Sanitation Departments have worked to protect the interests of these quasi-public-private enterprises at the expense of community stakeholders or have allowed their work to be assumed directly by them. For example, in Chinatown CAAAV has witnessed street vendors being pushed from lucrative shopping areas to sell in unsafe conditions under the Brooklyn Bridge, in order to escape excessive and often groundless ticketing by the Health and Sanitation Departments. In Downtown Brooklyn the MetroTech BID utilizes a mix of extra, publicly-funded police officers and a large force of private security guards with arrest powers to enforce special rules of conduct specific to the BID's boundaries around the clock.

It is important to note that many of the communities being targeted for gentrification have deep roots in areas on or near the City's vast waterfronts. In order to develop luxury waterfront housing profitably, developers need to be able to offer buyers a complete package that includes green space and adequate infrastructure, such as convenient transportation. This type of development necessarily requires the creation of quasi public-private institutions described above. For its part, the City, seeking to secure funding for improvements to parks and public spaces, or to encourage reinvestment in post-industrial spaces it deems underutilized, will solicit developers to invest in public projects in these spaces. In exchange, developers receive the right to develop and/or maintain these spaces as they see fit. FIERCE

spoke of how important the creation of a local development corporation to “revitalize” and maintain the dilapidated piers from Battery Park to 59<sup>th</sup> Street was to create a climate that enabled the creation of more luxury housing nearby. In Downtown Brooklyn luxury condos are actually being developed on State Park Property as a part of a plan that transfers responsibility for park maintenance and programming over to a LDC. The blurring of these lines of ownership and responsibility often lead to the City risking an over-commitment of limited financial resources to projects that are not fully within the public interest, through the need to invest further in upgrading services to meet the demand of new housing development.

Ironically, it is the same communities that are threatened with displacement by this type of development that were originally either encouraged to locate in these waterfront neighborhoods so as to provide a steady labor force for industry, as was the case with Downtown Brooklyn and Williamsburg and the nearby factories and Navy Yard, or segregated into substandard living conditions in this neighborhood because they were not welcome elsewhere, such as was the case for recent Chinese immigrants in Chinatown.

### **Social and Cultural Preservation**

The adverse affects of gentrification on the social fabric and cultural heritage of low-income, immigrant and communities of color was a common thread that emerged in our discussion. The ways in which this played out in different communities varied and warrant further discussion and analysis of its relationship to the development process taking hold in each community and the connections across communities. For example, FUREE discussed how Downtown Brooklyn has been an important historical, cultural, social and economic center for African American, African and Caribbean communities. This history extends back to the ante-bellum period when the area was a hotbed of Black Abolitionist activity until relatively recently with the organic creation of an Afro-centric shopping district which emerged over time in response to post-war white flight of businesses and residents. Current development plans for the area threaten to both destroy the social fabric through the displacement of local businesses that help maintain it as well as the historical legacy of the neighborhood through the demolition of physical structures connected to the history of black freedom struggles.

UNO discussed how gentrification has denigrated the social and political capital of the long-term Latino community that has lived in the Williamsburg/Greenpoint communities in Brooklyn. As long-term leaders have been displaced or have moved elsewhere, the community is left with disenfranchised residents and newcomers who are apathetic to the collective concerns and wellbeing of the community. Moreover, the increased policing and control over the use of public spaces, plus the targeting of the use of those spaces to a different audience, has affected the traditional celebration of community, and use of public spaces for community building and cultural expression.

Chinatown has long been the gateway for new immigrants to come to when they arrive, find a job and a place to live, and establish their support network among family and friends. Moreover, it serves as the cultural, economic and social center for Chinese immigrants who have moved out of the community to other boroughs or parts of the country, who continue to return to do their shopping, to go to see the doctor, or to participate in social and cultural organizations and activities. Current development strategies focus on the creation of a tourist friendly and centered neighborhood, rather than the vibrant working and living community for Chinese immigrants that has been for decades.

FIERCE’s approach to social and cultural preservation is different than others because, while their constituency is deeply connected to the targeted neighborhood, they are not bound by residency. Since the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969 and particularly since the 1980s, the West Village has been a well-known social and cultural hub for the LGBT community, especially people of color and homeless youth.

For many young people kicked out of their homes, harassed in homeless shelters, and targeted on the streets for being queer and/or transgender, the West Village served as a safe haven and site where new family and support systems were developed. While the area is still a gay-friendly neighborhood in theory, the practice of police enforcement of quality of life policies and racist resident vigilante street patrols have made it quite clear that the gay neighborhood was ok “when it was white gay men, not black youth.” Residents and business owners have gone as far as to say the presence of LGBT youth of color are threat to property values and business prosperity.

### **SECTION 3: Initial Points of Convergence for Further Discussion and Action**

Based on the initial exchange of information among organizations, there has been a basic identification of common needs and interests among organizations that will help to deepen our discussion related to analysis, strategies and frameworks, and potentially develop collective initiatives that support equitable and sustainable development in the region.

While we would expect these areas to evolve over time and with further consultation with groups locally and nationally, we have identified the following as issues around which we would seek to build knowledge and capacity among local organizations in order to support local and regional equitable development strategies and to combat gentrification in low-income communities of color:

- **Exchange of strategies & tactics that organizations locally and nationally have utilized in order to address and prevent gentrification in their community.** We would seek to develop an analysis of the gentrification process in New York City. Through the discussion of successes and failures, we also seek to develop a strategy to both slow down gentrification and promote equitable development that preserves communities, potentially resulting in city-wide policy proposals and city-wide and campaigns. As part of this, we would seek to create a sort of “toolkit” of models, practices, strategies and tactics that have been utilized that could serve as a resource for local and regional organizations and initiatives.
- **Shared and strategic use of data and research** to document development and understand the impact of gentrification on communities, and which serve to support proposals, policies and campaigns put forth by communities.
- **Media training and strategic, collective PR campaigns** across communities to frame the public debate on gentrification and displacement and push forward organizing and policy initiatives to influence and inform equitable development.
- **Base-building and leadership development.** Identify the scale and depth needed from membership-based organizations in affected communities to mount successful campaigns to shape public policy. Build long-term community leaders equipped with the skills and political education necessary to build strong and lasting organizations.

## **APPENDIX: How gentrification is playing out in different NYC communities**

The following section includes case examples of how gentrification is playing out in different communities throughout New York City. As illustrated, gentrification has spread from beyond the central neighborhoods of Manhattan. Today, it is encroaching on neighborhoods that have been a stronghold of certain immigrant communities, such as Chinatown and East Harlem. It is reaching those that have previously had some protection due to their location in an outer borough, such as several communities in Brooklyn. And it is displacing groups of individuals that have long held certain neighborhoods as safe havens and places of building community, such as the case of LGBT youth in the West Village.

The profiles that follow include a description of each group organizing among community members affected by gentrification, and responds to the following questions that were posed to staff and members of each organization:

- What are your experiences of gentrification?
- How does it play out in your community?
- Who is to blame?
- What is the pressures gentrification puts on your community?
- What is the connection between the local and the broader levels?
- What is pushing it and what roles do different stakeholders play?
- Are there different stages of the gentrification process? Where is your community at in the process?

Case summaries are taken directly from meeting notes or from interviews conducted by UJC staff in the case the organization was unable to attend the November gathering. While the same questions were posed to each organization, responses vary across organization as to whether a specific question is answered and/or the level of depth of the answer. We chose only to undertake minor edits for the purposes of this document.

### **CAA AV: Organizing Asian Communities Chinatown Justice Project | Chinatown Tenant Union**

**Community/Neighborhood:** Chinatown, Manhattan

**Organizational Description:** CAAAV focuses on institutional violence that affects immigrant, poor and working-class communities such as worker exploitation, concentrated urban poverty, police brutality, Immigration Naturalization Service detention and deportation, and criminalization of youth and workers. The Chinatown Justice Project is working to unite low-income residents of Manhattan's Chinatown for decent and affordable housing, and fighting displacement caused by gentrification. Chinatown Tenant Union (CTU) is working in buildings where tenants are facing bad housing conditions and organizing for legislation to create access to housing authority services for limited English proficient individuals.

#### **Perspectives and experiences related to gentrification in Chinatown:**

- Because NYC is the global financial capital of the world, and because of Chinatown's location next to the financial district in Lower Manhattan, there is a lot of pressure to develop it in order to provide housing for the new young professionals in the area.



- Developers and real estate agents view Chinatown as an ideal location for new developments and profits. For example, there are lofts going for 1.5 million right across the street from tenement buildings.
- In order to appeal to the real estate market the area is referred to as LoHo and one developer is calling it south-SoHo.
- Meanwhile residents are facing high rents with poor housing conditions, landlord harassment, intimidation, overcrowdings, constant stress and health hazards are leading to displacement.
- There is a lack of code enforcement by the local housing authority and language access barriers for tenants seeking help and accountability.
- Local government supports gentrification and encourages tourism through the creation of public/private partnerships. For example, there is now the Chinatown Development Cooperation that uses 9-11 money to clean up streets and provide 'cultural' programming. There is also a similar partnership to develop the waterfront of the East Side.
- The work of these organizations and public agencies is having a major affect on street vendors, as periodically the Department of Health and Sanitation sweep the neighborhoods and write vendor tickets with little reason. The vendors have been pushed just below the bridge where all the buses are, creating huge health hazards
- Through conducting a small business survey we also discovered that small businesses are also feeling affects of gentrification. Issues business cited were problems with parking, change in customer base and rising rents (both directly and through the displacement of their customer base).

## Center for Immigrant Families (CIF)

**Community/Neighborhood:** Manhattan Valley in Uptown Manhattan

**Organizational Description:** The Center for Immigrant Families (CIF) is a popular education-based community organizing, education, and training center for low-income adult immigrant women of color in Manhattan Valley. CIF's mission is to address, in a holistic way, the inter-connected challenges facing immigrant women by linking our personal/psychological well-being, health, and development to concrete and sustained organizing that is focused on the root causes of the challenges we face.

CIF functions as a collective, working to build a non-hierarchical and consensus-driven process that includes learning and growing together in ways that build upon our life experiences. We understand that challenging inequality and systems of oppression in our daily practice as an organization is integral to our vision of change.

### **Perspectives and experiences related to gentrification in the Upper Manhattan:**

Manhattan Valley is a low-income neighborhood in uptown Manhattan with long-time and sizeable Latino and Black communities. According to the 2000 census, Latino and Black residents represent well over 75% of this community. Additionally, at least 55% of community members are "very-low income" and over 50% are below the neighborhood's median family income, which is \$13,854. Specifically, community members of Manhattan Valley face numerous challenges that include unemployment, lack of available jobs and access to affordable and basic services like health care, childcare, housing, and even many public schools, as well as displacement from our homes, particularly as gentrification intensifies at an alarming rate.

- Social services and affordable services for low-income families facing severe budget cuts and relocating or closing altogether
- Public schools catering to wealthy families moving into the neighborhood

- Home-based day care and other low-income day care centers shutting down
- Rents increasing and landlords buying out long-time residents
- Long-time residents moving to rural areas in the South and other Northeastern states
- Landlords requiring minimum and maximum income levels to determine resident population in certain buildings (catering to young, high-income individuals)
- Construction of luxury buildings
- Transient renters who are not committed to community sustainability or solidarity with long-time residents
- Role of institutions in the neighborhood: Columbia University-owned buildings and Barnard dormitory
- Small businesses that have been in the community for generations are no longer able to afford the rents
- Landlords prioritizing cafés and high-end retail stores in commercial spaces
- Some community gardens losing their community feel as newer residents become members
- The overall feeling among other New Yorkers that this area has “cleaned up” in the last few years denies the history of injustice towards the low-income immigrant, Latino and Black families that have been living here

The rise of gentrification has resulted in the further marginalization of the long-time residents of Manhattan Valley, including the most vulnerable – our children. The survival of the community is at stake, as opportunities for continued personal and community growth and development are being closed off from all angles. Thus, CIF members have recognized public education as an issue to prioritize, recognizing the primary significance of education in the lives of low-income families as well as its central role in the realization of social change. To cite a specific example, there is a clear pattern of wealthy families using their money to exercise choice in the public school system – choices that have denied low-income families, the vast majority of whom are immigrant, Latino, and Black. Schools regularly receive phone calls from parents and real estate agents asking for the schools’ exact catchment lines so that they can move into the catchment area. Realtors have also confirmed that they regularly receive clients who are asking to move into a specific school’s catchment area.

In its organizing around these issues, CIF seeks to understand the pressures and impacts in a holistic way – economically, socially, emotionally, and politically. It is framing its work in terms of a collective reclaiming process of our community. The organization is inspired by and learning from autonomous movements in places like Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa that are responding to similar patterns urban centers.

## **Community Voices Heard (CVH)**

**Community/Neighborhood:** East and Central Harlem, Manhattan

**Organizational Description:** Community Voices Heard is an organization of low-income people of color, mostly women on welfare, based in Harlem. While CVH focuses on welfare reform, its broadly defines "welfare activism" to be multi issue, and thus must include issues such as education, training, jobs, housing, economic development and other community issues.

### **Perspectives and experiences related to gentrification in Harlem:**

- For the past year, CVH membership has been working on a Public Housing Campaign, with the goal of saving and improving public housing in NYC. The campaign grew out of the organization’s Voter Engagement Project, which aims to increase voter turnout in low-income

areas. In 2005, it focused increasing voter turnout in East Harlem. Through surveys, house meetings, one-on-one meetings, and several larger-scale community meetings, they found that many of the concerns that were raised revolved around issues relating to the gentrification of the neighborhood, such as:

- **Lack of/Loss of Affordable Housing:** Many middle-to-high income “luxury” apartment and condominium buildings continue to be built in East and Central Harlem. In private housing in the area, many landlords are conducting high-scale renovations in their apartment buildings, allowing them to drastically increase rents. As rents become more unaffordable in the area, many families are doubling up in apartments to be able to continue living in the area. Rents are being raised in public housing, as well, and many residents feel that public housing won’t be around much longer.
- **New Development:** Harlem is undergoing a construction boom, with new business and industry coming into the area. Some of this new development is large-scale. Along the East Side River, for example, a construction project is underway that will soon house a large Target and Home Depot. Smaller scale development is also occurring, especially along major streets such as 116<sup>th</sup> and 125<sup>th</sup> streets.
- **Lack of Good Jobs in Neighborhood:** Many CVH members who live in Harlem complain that there are no good jobs in their neighborhoods. Many residents are forced to look for employment far away from their homes and families. While much of the new development that is occurring in the area brings new employment opportunities, many of their members are concerned that these jobs are not going to community residents.
- **Arrival of Higher Income, White Residents:** As rents are being raised downtown and in other moderate- to high-income areas, more and more people are looking in traditionally lower-income neighborhoods for affordable housing. The effect this is having on East and Central Harlem is an influx of moderate- to higher-income people, often white young college students or young professionals. Harlem has traditionally been an area populated primarily by lower-income people of color. Many of our members are weary of the arrival of higher-income people that are not a part of the community that has existed in Harlem for generations.

## **Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment (FIERCE)**

**Community/Neighborhood:** LGBT youth of color in the West Village, Manhattan

**Organizational Description:** FIERCE is a community organization for Transgender, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Queer, and Questioning (TLGBTSQQ) youth of color in New York City. We take on the institutions that perpetuate transphobia, homophobia, racism, ethnic conflict, gender bias, economic injustice, ageism, and the spread of HIV, STIs, STDs, and other mental and physical health crises — that make daily survival a terrifying challenge for many TLGBTSQQ youth. FIERCE organizes against the injustices of the criminal “justice” system, housing, employment, education, and healthcare systems.

### **Perspectives and experiences related to gentrification among TLGBTSQQ youth of color in the West Village:**

- TLGBTSQQ youth of color community has a history of involvement in the West Village and is an important part of the community. However, this community challenges the traditional notion of gentrification because they are not residents. Many of these community members are poor and have little income, thus they do not have the money to patronize the new shops in the area.

There are also high rates of homelessness among this community. Public spaces, such as the piers on the west side, not only provide a needed social space but a safe haven.

- The City has been encouraging gentrification through the creations of public/private partnerships, such as business improvement districts and non-profit development corporations that receive public funding. For example, to entice people to buy the land in the area, the state felt they must develop other incentives such as green space; however, the city could no longer afford to maintain these parks and thus gave over the ownership to private interests who impose their own rules and displace the TLGBTSQQ community.
- St. Christopher's pier has been developed in a private/public partnership that used public money to make the space a private area and imposed a 1am curfew on what used to be an open public park. In doing so, the developers took away a safe space for the community.
- The removal of TLGBTSQQ youth community is seen by some as necessary to facilitate new development and improve the quality of life in the West Village. This population is being blamed for the closing of small businesses with the argument that the presence of TLGBTSQQ youth of color scares customers away. Some long-term, working-class residents are working against their class interest and encouraging gentrification as a way of getting rid of TLGBTSQQ youth of color. The new residents coming to the West Village are professional, young, straight, white individuals and heterosexual families.
- The local community planning board tries to act as a mediator between government, residents, and business. They can either halt or push for gentrification through the recommendations they give to public agencies. FIERCE's membership has had to struggle to be considered a legitimate stakeholder within this body.

## Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE)

**Community/Neighborhood:** Downtown Brooklyn

**Organizational Description:** FUREE is a women of color-led organization working to build power among low-income families in Brooklyn. Our previous campaigns include fighting for access to education and training for people on public assistance and the preservation of affordable childcare for low-income families and fair compensation of childcare providers. For the past year we have been organizing in to stop displacement of low-income people of color and the businesses and services that cater to them in Downtown Brooklyn.

### **Perspectives and experiences related to gentrification in Downtown Brooklyn:**

- Since the 1960's Downtown Brooklyn has been eyed by city officials and real estate interests for massive redevelopment.
- The commercial corridor along Fulton Street caters to predominantly African-American, Caribbean and Latino shoppers, and many businesses are owned by immigrants and people of color.
- Surrounding the commercial core are several large public housing developments, which stand like islands amid rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods like Fort Greene where the average purchase price for an apartment has gone up 82% in one year.
- In the same year, 2004, city council approved a massive, mixed-use (residential and commercial) plan to up-zone Downtown Brooklyn and the Public Housing Authority adopted a "modernization plan" calling for the relocation of 1/3 of the residents in Fort Green Houses (about 860 households).
- Since the relocation of public housing residents began two years ago, no renovation work has been started in vacant units. Instead a major elevator renovation project has been taken on

leading to the shut down of elevators in several buildings for 5 months at a time with no adequate provisions made for elderly and disabled residents.

- The Downtown Brooklyn Rezoning has worsened out-of-control market forces, creating a free-for-all environment for developers and property owners by sending property values skyrocketing over-night and by allowing luxury condo towers to be built “as of right”. That is, without needing to seek further approval on large projects eligible for tax credits given for constructing housing. This is counter to the city’s stated purpose of developing office space and creating jobs (that were never intended for low-income workers anyway).
- As a result, several small businesses have closed Downtown or are currently threatened with displacement. In addition, across the street from Fort Greene houses, two city blocks of commercial buildings housing vital services, such as a supermarket and a laundromat, have been torn down to make way for Condo development.
- To make way for this type of development, local government needed to extend the Urban Renewal Plan for the area, which allows property to be taken by eminent domain from non-consenting owners and re-maps several public streets. Some of the sights targeted for eminent domain are thought to make up part of the Underground Railroad and hold special historical/cultural significance for the African-American community.
- Public Agencies such as the police and parks department and the public housing authority have created a hostile environment for area residents and are attempting to redefine how public space may be used and by whom.
- Existing Community stakeholders, including residents, shoppers, and small business owners were not consulted in the crafting of the redevelopment plan. The plan was authored in partnership by quasi public-private agencies like the Economic Development Corporation, publicly funded and run by Mayoral appointees, and the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce with help from the local Business Improvement District controlled by major development and corporate interests.

## **Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES)**

**Community/Neighborhood:** Lower East Side, Manhattan

**Organizational Description:** As a neighborhood housing and preservation organization, GOLES is dedicated to tenants' rights, homelessness prevention and community revitalization. We see ourselves as the leading force on the Lower East Side in preserving not only buildings but community, its institutions, culture and diversity.

### **Perspectives and experiences related to gentrification in the Lower East Side:**

- Manhattan is a global financial center bringing in a lot of people from outside New York and rent stabilized units are slowly becoming hotels and places to house this new population.
- There is an increase in transient renters, many of whom are students from NYU, which allows landlords to raise rents, affects rent stabilization, and drastically affects the community cohesion. Students and other transient renters tend not to hold landlords accountable for poor housing conditions and rent violations.
- These increased rents mean that for low-income people there is less money for basic care and services, and children cannot stay in the neighborhood when they grow up. It also means fewer businesses selling goods for the low-income community and a loss of community spaces.
- Connected to increased rents and an increased transient population, the Lower East Side has become a destination location, which means that businesses cater to tourism and night life markets, further affecting long-time residents.

- Under the current zoning there are loopholes that allow for bigger and denser development. For example, a building that has doctor's offices on the first floor can be residential for 20 floors. Powerful institutions like NYU can take advantage of this, in their case to develop dormitories further increasing the transient population.
- Local government is not enforcing housing codes or protecting tenants' rights.
- When residents can no longer manage to hold on in the neighborhood they tend to look outside of NYC for housing opportunities.

### **Make the Road by Walking (MTRBW)**

**Community/Neighborhood:** Bushwick, Brooklyn

**Organizational Description:** MTRBW is a member-driven organization based in Bushwick, Brooklyn. Members are primarily low-income Latino and immigrant community residents of all ages. MTRBW's organizing and advocacy work deals primarily with housing and environmental justice, educational and workplace equality.

#### **Perspectives and experiences related to gentrification in Bushwick:**

- The Latino population in Bushwick is being driven out through increasing rents and real estate prices, along with increasing costs of living and general overcrowding in available affordable housing.
- This is being caused by capitalist forces that are also responsible for the oppression of immigrant populations in other areas.
- Over the recent years 70% of factories in Bushwick were converted into lofts for higher income people.
- Realtors have renamed the part of Bushwick where this is happening to "East Williamsburg"
- Community members are growing increasingly aware that they are beginning to lose their neighborhood. Organizing around this issue is at the beginning stage. This awareness has been helped by the lack of government concern about discrimination towards low-income residents and workers.
- MTRBW is focused on preserving existing affordable units in the neighborhood to fight gentrification.

### **United Neighbors Organization (UNO) / St. Nicholas CDC**

**Community/Neighborhood:** Williamsburg and Greenpoint, Brooklyn

**Organizational Description:** UNO is a coalition, started by St. Nicholas Community Development Corporation, of residents of central and east Williamsburg and Greenpoint fighting against displacement and for affordable housing. Coalition members are predominantly low-income Latino community members.

#### **Perspectives and experiences related to gentrification in the Williamsburg/Greenpoint:**

- Many long-time businesses have disappeared along with community spaces, small churches, and neighborhood associations. These have been replaced with bars, boutiques, galleries and coffee shops.

- See the gentrification happening in waves. At first the “Hipsters” moved into the neighborhood before the luxury condo development hit. Many lived in sub-standard housing but pay much higher prices for it. Now high income residents moving in from Manhattan and Landlords are increasing harassment of tenants to move them out, including evictions, depriving tenants of services, offering buy outs, charging illegal rents, or just making the conditions so bad people choose to leave.
- See a change in services and to whom those services are catering. “Bodegas” now serve organic food. This is seen as mixed by long-term residents. While more services and healthier options for food are seen as positive, they know that they are intended for a different target population and it is part of the gentrification of their neighborhood.
- The City has furthered gentrification pressures through public policy. For example, the recent rezoning of the waterfront does not include affordable housing. Therefore, the condos being developed are not to meet community needs. Rather, landlords have incentives to try to get the highest income renters.
- Big battles are being waged over public spaces. For example, McCarren Pool has been closed for 10 years. The existing community has been organizing during this time to have it reopened. Now that the neighborhood has changed, the Parks Department has contracted with a large corporation (ClearChannel) to run a summer concert series that inconveniences residents, does not cater to existing community’s tastes, is expensive and does not funnel money back into the community. In addition, over time, there has also been a turnover in who is being chosen to join the public community gardens favoring newer residents.
- Social services, including some school programs, are starting to be cut as new developments are built.
- Police presence has increased and target Latino and Caribbean community members who use public spaces in ways that used to be accepted, such as playing in the streets, sitting outside on sidewalks, listening to music and playing dominos.
- UNO’s biggest concern is tenant displacement and is involved in organizing to preserve rent stabilized apartments, fight tenant harassment and end tax-credits for developers who do not build affordable housing. They see this is a way into addressing the broader issues of gentrification.
- Newcomers are not interested in making a community. They are not concerned about community struggles or what is going on next to their apartment, which is really dangerous politically for the community. It used to be a really strong community. Little by little, leaders who were formally active are gone, and now it is left with residents who are alienated or apathetic.
- Several efforts have been made to reach out to the mostly white, young population of “Hipsters” to organize together but attempts have been unsuccessful.