

## CHAPTER 6

A NEW NEIGHBORHOOD  
IN A NEW CITY

IN THE MID-1990S, when the violence of the crack years was a fresh memory, researchers asked people in Washington Heights two deceptively simple questions: What is violence? And what can be done about it?<sup>1</sup>

Interview subjects responded that there were many kinds of violence in the world, from human rights violations to street shootings. Yet they saw two ways to deal with it: “hide or flee.” In the terror of the crack years, activism was not an obvious option. It was much safer to lay low. “Neighbors,” the researchers concluded in a report, “are afraid of one another.”<sup>2</sup>

People in the Heights saw the police as part of the problem and part of the solution. Some mistrusted police officers and were reluctant to give them information for fear they might come under suspicion. At the same time, people credited police officers with bringing down crime and wanted to see more of them in the neighborhood. Police, in turn, were aware of danger in the neighborhood and the locals’ distrust, but were most likely to blame this on residents’ apathy and their failure to communicate with officers. People blamed Dominicans for the drug trade. Dominicans responded, correctly, that their entire community was unfairly stigmatized for the wrongs of a few.<sup>3</sup>

The researchers were a team from Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health led by Mindy Thompson Fullilove, a doctor with a deep interest in the health of cities and political roots in the left. Fullilove was closely attuned to the relationships among individual health, community

action, and the urban environment. She was also part of a new generation at Columbia-Presbyterian that sought productive ties between the hospital and its surrounding neighborhood. “Injury and Anomie,” an article in the *American Journal of Public Health* reporting the Fullilove team’s findings, showed how the fear and mistrust led to isolation and a sense of helplessness. In a report that was the foundation of the article, the team described Washington Heights as a place of deep fear and great potential.

Adults fear youth. Immigrants fear authorities and community service institutions. People of different cultural origins misunderstand and fear one another. All of this fear is encapsulated in silence and isolation, and every single one of these conflicts points to the critical need to bring people out from behind closed doors, bring them together in environments where they can speak and listen to one another, share in a public forum what they shared individually with us: we are afraid, and we feel alone; we understand precisely why we are being choked by violence and we want it to stop.

All of these perceptions, when locked tightly within the midst of thousands of individuals, do nothing but alienate, dehumanize, and generate helplessness. Unleashed—shared—they have the power to generate massive community reformation.<sup>4</sup>

The Fullilove team’s report concluded with five steps to restore the health of northern Manhattan: foster a sense of community; provide for people who have been hurt by violence; link police and the community in a collaborative relationship that overcomes distrust; create jobs and economic opportunity; and put the public health system in charge of preventing and containing drug epidemics. In substance, each suggestion fit comfortably within the range of policies advocated by liberal Democratic politicians and community activists in northern Manhattan. Yet putting such proposals into practice was well beyond the reach of the people of Washington Heights.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, residents managed, over time, to forge ties within their neighborhood and between Washington Heights and the larger world. They founded a community newspaper, created a dynamic arts scene, made films, wrote books, opened restaurants, and restored public parks. As they strengthened their neighborhood, a greater sense of ease and optimism came to once-edgy streets. As the twenty-first century dawned, the image of northern Manhattan began to change in the metropolitan media. Inside and outside Washington Heights, people began to see the neighborhood as something more than one big crime scene. Residents began to see one another as more than just fearful strangers.

Ironically, two tragedies in the fall of 2001 brought people together and changed perceptions of northern Manhattan for the better: the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, and the crash of American Flight 587 from New York to Santo Domingo two months later.

Across New York and the metropolitan area, memorial making was one of the common responses to the deaths of 9/11. Northern Manhattan was no different. The first acts of commemoration were undertaken in haste. In the ghostly messages scrawled on the dusty walls and windows of lower Manhattan, one observer noticed these words on Albany Street for a firefighter: "God Bless John Burnside, Ladder 20-Inwood Boy." Gradually, more organized efforts emerged. Vigils took place at Inwood Hill, in Mitchell Square at 166th Street, in J. Hood Wright Park on Fort Washington Avenue just south of the George Washington Bridge, and in Fort Tryon Park.<sup>6</sup>

In the memorials and mourning in northern Manhattan, and their coverage in the media, signs emerged of a meeting and mixing between old and new groups that belied the old days of apartness. Many of those who died on September 11 were Irish Americans with roots in Washington Heights and Inwood, but Dominicans died as well. On September 14, a vigil at Good Shepherd for the missing concluded with a march to a firehouse on Vermilyea Avenue. Marchers from other vigils joined in; together, they formed a river of candlelight that stretched for four blocks. At the firehouse of Engine 95 and Ladder 36 at 31 Vermilyea, the marchers sang "God Bless America" and chanted in English and Spanish to honor the firefighters and police, "Los Bomberos" and "La Policia."<sup>7</sup>

More enduring signs of mixing appeared in memorials. In Inwood, the friends and family of Brian Patrick Monaghan Jr., who had gone to the World Trade Center on a new job in construction, waited four days and nights for his return. A poster seeking Monaghan among the missing described how he had a large shamrock tattooed on his arm. Outside a bodega, Monaghan's sister Danielle and his friends Mick Fitzgerald and Rey Martinez lit three candles on a cardboard box for him.<sup>8</sup>

Monaghan never came home. As the days went by, the makeshift memorial was moved to 207th Street and Seaman Avenue. Police officers, firefighters, and neighborhood people visited to pay their respects and to pray. So many left behind memorabilia—poetry, flowers, and photographs—that a bookcase was brought to the site to hold the accumulating items. Monaghan's friends Martinez and Fitzgerald took on the tasks of maintenance. At a shrine with cultural roots in Latin America, crucifixes came to rest alongside Jewish *yartzheit* candles, a bottle of Heineken, letters, wind-up toys, Yankee caps, and a Christmas tree. The kind of sidewalk memorial that once marked the



Figure 12: Inwood memorial to Brian Patrick Monaghan Jr., who died on 9/11. Photograph by Martha Cooper/City Lore.

casualties of the drug wars became a shrine to the dead of 9/11. A practice with roots in Latin America took on meaning for many who traced their ancestry to other regions. The shrine was featured on broadcasts in the Dominican Republic and the United States. Brian's body was discovered and buried before the attacks were a month gone, but the shrine remained up through New Year's Day 2002. The day after, with permission, the New-York Historical Society and City Lore, an organization dedicated to urban folk culture, took down the shrine to present it a new venue—in their exhibit "Missing: A Streetscape of a City in Mourning."<sup>9</sup>

Another memorial paid tribute to a former Inwood resident, Bruce Reynolds, a Port Authority police officer and an African American. After the attacks, Reynolds raced from his patrol on the George Washington Bridge to the World Trade Center, where he was last seen helping a woman who had been burned by jet fuel. Reynolds and his parents were probably the only African American family on their street when they moved to Inwood in 1965. Bruce's father, to get him out and playing with other children, organized neighborhood kids to clean up Isham Park, which was scarred by burned benches and foul-mouthed teenagers who hung out there to smoke and drink. When Reynolds grew up, he joined the Port Authority police and married Marian McBride, an immigrant from County Donegal in Ireland. They moved to western New Jersey, and had two children. Reynolds joined the Ancient

Order of Hibernians and traveled often to Ireland. In May of 2002, the Parks Department dedicated a corner of Isham Park as Bruce's Garden.<sup>10</sup>

In mourning Brian Patrick Monaghan Jr. and Bruce Reynolds, it was possible to see that some of the boundaries between people and communities in northern Manhattan were more permeable than some people had assumed. Interracial and interfaith friendships, romances, and marriages had always been present in Washington Heights and Inwood, of course, but now they were public stories in the lives of honored dead, stories that people could learn from.

Barely two months after the September 11 attacks, northern Manhattan was scarred by another tragedy—the crash of American Airlines Flight 587. One of some fifty flights that coursed weekly between the United States and the Dominican Republic, Flight 587 was one of the mainstays of Dominicans' transnational way of life. The general pattern of flying home to the Dominican Republic was familiar to many residents of Washington Heights, as the journalist Seth Kugel noted: First, buy tickets from a travel agent in northern Manhattan. Then, buy an enormous suitcase to be filled with gifts for relatives. Shop the stores on 181st Street or Broadway for everything from cheap jeans and T-shirts to gifts with brand-name labels for special relatives, then jam as much as possible into the suitcase without going over weight limits.<sup>11</sup>

The aura around Flight 587 was so strong that it became the subject of a merengue lyric sung by Kinito Mendez and Johnny Ventura, which begins “*Llegó el avión / Es el vuelo 587 con destino a Santo Domingo*” and continues (in translation)

The plane comes packed with luggage  
 The plane comes packed with luggage  
 It comes full of hope  
 And also with joy  
 It comes full of hope  
 And also with joy  
 To spend Christmas with my family.<sup>12</sup>

When Flight 587 crashed in the seaside neighborhood of Belle Harbor in southwest Queens barely two minutes after takeoff on November 12, 2001, 260 people on the plane died. The crash killed five people in Belle Harbor and left a burning black crater in a neighborhood of Irish, Italians, and Jews that was already devastated by losses in the World Trade Center attacks. Belle Harbor was the final stop at the eastern end of the A train. At the other end of the A train, in northern Manhattan, in an eerie replay of September 11, Dominicans rushed to call friends and relatives. Rumors spread that the plane had been taken down by a terrorist attack.<sup>13</sup>

Grief-stricken friends and relatives descended on Alianza Dominicana. An agency founded to help Dominicans struggling with new lives in Washington Heights now turned to serving grief-stricken friends and relatives of those who died on Flight 587. Moisés Pérez, executive director, estimated that his agency was serving 120 families stricken in the crash. Within Alianza itself, ten staffers lost family members.<sup>14</sup>

In media coverage of the crash, New Yorkers glimpsed fuller pictures of the Dominican diaspora and Washington Heights. Before Flight 587 plunged to earth, the human connection between the Dominican Republic and the United States was often represented in the persons of baseball players or criminals. Afterward, in newspaper stories about relatives who came to New York to claim their dead but instead found red tape, and in accounts of funerals that channeled mourning between the Dominican Republic and northern Manhattan, Dominicans became real people with real grief. In New York, a city where the story of immigration is endlessly repeated as a kind of civic religion that spans groups and generations, Dominicans were finally acknowledged in defining ways as immigrants—just like so many other New Yorkers.

Ray Sanchez of *Newsday* chronicled a sad yet illuminating funeral in the small city of Baní, in the Dominican Republic. Forty or more passengers with ties to Baní were on Flight 587. Many of them worked as grocers or gardeners, and supported relatives in the Dominican Republic. They took the flight south to join in the feasts and processions in honor of La Virgen de Regla that brighten Baní every November. When the plane crashed, the annual celebration was replaced by days of prayers for the dead. Sanchez covered the funeral for Jose Hilton Sanchez and his brother Elvis. Born in Baní, they had left eleven years earlier to run their uncle's store, Rafael Grocery, on West 134th Street. They returned in coffins. At their wake in Baní, the funeral home was packed. Chairs were set out on the sidewalk for the mourners, who dressed somberly in gray and black under a sweltering sun.<sup>15</sup>

Back in the Heights, grieving was both intimate and public: a gasp of recognition at a neighbor's face in a photograph enshrined in a sidewalk memorial; the sudden absence of a regular customer at a food market; wreaths of black ribbon in a hair salon. These stories of grief were shared with the rest of the city through news media that rediscovered northern Manhattan. As the *Daily News* put it immediately after the crash, appropriately mixing English and Spanish, “If a street could cry, upper Broadway wept yesterday for the victims of Vuelo 587.”

After the attacks on the World Trade Center, the *New York Times* columns “Portraits of Grief” remembered the secretaries, police officers, firefighters, and restaurant workers who died—the kind of working people whose lives

were typically ignored in *Times* obituaries. After the crash, *Newsday* did something similar for the dead of Flight 587. In *Newsday*, readers encountered stories of labor, sacrifice, and devotion in a frame that embraced both New York and the Dominican Republic: Tito Bautista of the South Bronx, who worked at both a meat market and bodega and changed flights three times to cover his double shift before flying south to bring his four-year-old son back to New York; Ramona Pimentel, who retired comfortably with her husband to Santo Domingo after years of running a bodega in Brooklyn; and Domingo Matias of Corona, Queens, married and the mother of five, who worked twelve hours a day in a factory and then went home to cook and clean house. Individually and collectively, such portraits gave new meanings to the Dominicans of New York City.<sup>16</sup>

There were some concerns that disproportionate attention was devoted to the residents of Belle Harbor. In *Newsday*, Sanchez and the novelist Angie Cruz, who was born and raised in Washington Heights, argued that the dead of Flight 587 were slighted in comparison. Sanchez blamed the problem on bigotry and a habitual lack of interest in the lives of the kind of Dominican working people who were on the flight. ("If it would have been [Dominican-born baseball star] Sammy Sosa on that plane we would have gotten more coverage," an Alianza Dominicana staffer told Sanchez.) Cruz asked: "Does the amount of compassion we feel for the families affected with any tragedy have to do with how much the media machine cares to cover?"<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, the stories of Dominican lives lost were a great departure from the ignorance and demonization of the past. Equally important were mourning rites that helped bridge the gaps between Belle Harbor and Washington Heights. At Saint Elizabeth's in Washington Heights, which held eleven funeral masses for people who died on the flight, Cardinal Edward Egan entered an overflowing mass to the hymn "Sí, Me Levantaré" (Yes, I Will Rise). Among those in attendance was Melvin Lafontaine, son of the impresario who had helped make famous the song about Flight 587. Cardinal Egan welcomed the worshippers in Spanish. "The entire community of the Archdiocese of New York is with you," he said. "We love you very much." In grief, the Dominicans of New York could be seen for what they had been all along: hard-working people who deeply loved their families. As Councilman Guillermo Linares observed, "We have been exposed as a people, that we are part of the fabric of what America is, in the tradition of fulfilling the American dream."<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, despite all the grit, energy, ambition, and determination that Dominicans shared with other immigrants, past and present, their grasp of the American dream was less than complete. By 2001 New York City was not the engine of immigrant economic mobility that it once had been because

it no longer had the manufacturing and shipping jobs that once provided solid incomes for immigrant families.

The income gap between recent and older immigrant groups in northern Manhattan was visible in the casualties in the fall of 2001. The Irish dead of Inwood were members of the securely employed working class (firefighters and police officers) and children of immigrant, working-class parents who had moved up into the comforts of the middle class. Their mobility was a testament to hard work, good connections (often forged growing up in Inwood), and a lack of ethnically based discrimination against Irish Americans in the second half of the twentieth century. Their lives ended early and tragically, but in most cases their survivors could credit them with achievements that their grandparents only imagined.

For the most part the Dominican dead of Washington Heights were in the modest and insecure end of the working class—people who drove livery cabs, worked in the region's remaining factories, washed dishes, styled hair, emptied bedpans, and kept bodegas open until the late hours of the night. Their deaths were a tragic endpoint to lives that were often lived in a persistent state of longing for prosperity and reunion with loved ones. While they knew days of joy, their highest hopes were frequently pegged to the future. The crash of Flight 587 ended the dreams of both the passengers and their survivors on the ground.

Owing in part to the two tragic events in 2001, Dominicans visibly took their full place alongside the immigrant groups that had preceded them in northern Manhattan. This was itself a great achievement. But in the background a nagging question remained: Would Dominicans find the prosperity that had enriched the lives of their predecessors?

A report issued in 2003 by the Dominican Studies Institute at the City University of New York found that Dominican New Yorkers had the highest poverty rate of all the city's major racial and ethnic groups—32 percent—when the overall poverty rate in the city was 19 percent. Women headed some 38 percent of Dominican families; citywide the figure was 22 percent. Almost half of the families headed by Dominican women were poor, more than twice the rate for other families. Unemployment among Dominicans was high. There was a bright spot, however. From 1990 to 2000, per capita income for all New Yorkers increased by 9.2 percent. Among Dominicans, the increase was close to 16 percent.<sup>19</sup>

Reports from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene issued in 2003 and 2006 found the Heights and Inwood were far more Hispanic than the city as a whole (71 percent compared to 27 percent) and

had far more immigrants (51 percent compared to 36 percent). In Washington Heights and Inwood, 31 percent of residents lived in poverty, compared to 21 percent in the city as a whole.<sup>20</sup> The 2003 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene report also included the results of a survey on people's feelings of vulnerability in their own community. Overall, 32 percent of New Yorkers felt their neighborhood was unsafe. In Washington Heights and Inwood, the figure was 51 percent.<sup>21</sup>

Despite these statistics, there were grounds for cautious optimism.<sup>22</sup> In both Inwood and Washington Heights west of Broadway, Dominicans could now be found in greater numbers in census tracts marked by economic security, even prosperity. In the 1970s, the Inwood streets north of Dyckman and west of Broadway, census tract 295, were the more Irish section of the neighborhood. Yet between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic population there, strongly Dominican, grew from 38 percent of the population to 60 percent. Economic mobility, and a Latino presence in Good Shepherd Parish, helped open the area to Dominicans. In the west Heights along Fort Washington Avenue, in census tract 273, a middle class and strongly Jewish area that gentrified under the new name of Hudson Heights, the Latino percentage of the population, again strongly Dominican, grew from 26 percent to 33 percent. In the two parts of northern Manhattan most associated with economically secure Irish and Jews, Dominicans had arrived as residents in their own right.<sup>23</sup> The growing Dominican population west of Broadway was a sign that the Dominicans of northern Manhattan included not only the poor, but also striving first-generation immigrants and members of a second or even third generation who were making impressive strides into the middle class through politics, business, the arts, science, and medicine.<sup>24</sup>

Ironically, some of the unease in the neighborhood was the consequence of visible improvements. In 1979, Betty Clarke, an aide to State Senator Leichter, said she dreamed that one day the Heights and Inwood would have to worry about gentrification. It was a funny line at the time, but in less than two decades it was a reality.<sup>25</sup>

The historian Deborah Dash Moore, who moved into an apartment on upper Fort Washington Avenue in 1986, at first found her neighborhood "rough." Around 1990, though, she noticed harbingers of change. Musicians, priced out of the neighborhood around Lincoln Center, began to appear in her section of the Heights. Gay and lesbian residents also moved in. With musicians riding the uptown train home from downtown gigs late at night, the A train began to feel safer. Over time, the efforts at neighborhood stabilization and public officials' efforts to strengthen municipal services bore

fruit. When Moore first settled in the Heights, her friends would not visit a neighborhood with a dodgy reputation so far uptown. By the early 1990s, her friends started asking for tips about finding apartments in the western Heights. By the late 1990s, the arrival of middle class families with baby carriages signaled that gentrification was a fact.<sup>26</sup>

An article in the October 2001 issue of *Cooperator: The Co-op & Condo Monthly*, caught the prevailing mood: "The cat's out of the bag," says Gus Perry, owner of Stein-Perry Real Estate, who deals mainly with Washington Heights properties. "We've been discovered. People come to the neighborhood and realize it's a diamond in the rough."<sup>27</sup> In fact, such enthusiasm applied mostly to the western Heights, an area once known as Fort Washington, which was reborn in the 1990s as Hudson Heights. The term Hudson Heights was disparaged as a realtors' invention on the order of renaming Hell's Kitchen as Clinton. Residents, however, made a convincing claim that the term was coined in 1993 by the founders of the Hudson Heights Owners Coalition, who banded together "to maintain and enhance the quality of life and the property values in the neighborhood." While membership in the coalition was no impediment to a life of inclusive public activism, once the realtors grasped the new name its predictable impact was to conceptually separate the area from the rest of Washington Heights.<sup>28</sup>

This was an old phenomenon in the Heights. Earlier generations of residents had mentally drawn and redrawn the southern boundaries of their neighborhood to exclude Harlem to the south. In a time of gentrification, the use of the new name could diminish a sense of shared interests on both sides of Broadway.

Into this promising but precarious situation appeared the bilingual *Manhattan Times*, launched in 2000 by Luis A. Miranda Jr., Robert Ramirez, and David Keisman—all veterans of politics and government. Keisman was the former publisher of a newspaper in Queens. The *Manhattan Times* succeeded where other community newspapers failed because it generated readers and advertisers in both English and Spanish. In its news stories, the paper gave readers an unprecedented possibility of shared knowledge. In fighting for the neighborhood, it was a voice grounded in both sides of Broadway. Its coverage of the arts in northern Manhattan enabled residents to see themselves as inhabiting something other than a crime scene, while its attention to the growing number of local restaurants chronicled a growth industry with a significant number of Dominican entrepreneurs. The paper's real estate stories encouraged people to see the neighborhood as a place to buy or rent a home (and probably advanced gentrification as well). Its coverage of landlord-tenant issues—always a sore point in northern Manhattan—gave residents a voice in housing disputes.<sup>29</sup>

For the *Manhattan Times*, community building was as much a part of the paper's role as reporting the news. Indeed, one of the paper's founders, Luis Miranda, grew up in a politically active family in Puerto Rico reading the socialist newspaper *Claridad*. After a stint in the Koch administration led him to see the value of working inside mainstream institutions, Miranda and Ramirez became partners in the MirRam Group LLC, a political consulting firm. They eventually counted among their clients Hillary Rodham Clinton, the New York Yankees, and Transport Workers Union Local 100. Equally significant, Miranda's years reading *Claridad* gave him a belief in the value of a newspaper that organizes a community and solves its problems.

The newspaper's owners clashed with Republican mayor Michael Bloomberg on the editorial page and on Election Day. When Bloomberg ran for a second term in 2005, Ramirez and Miranda advised his Democratic opponent, Fernando Ferrer. The Democrat lost, but one of their editorials illuminated recent changes in northern Manhattan.<sup>30</sup> "Beneath the phoenix-rising-from-the-ashes story that the Bloomberg campaign has tried to sell," the *Manhattan Times* argued,

there is a dark and ultimately unattractive truth: New York City is fast becoming defined by nothing else but the stark divisions between the very rich and the rest of us. And our neighborhood, for better and for worse, is about as clear an example of this new reality as any in New York.

While we are as happy as any local resident to see that new blood is moving into places like northwestern Washington Heights (er, Hudson Heights) and western Inwood, we have watched as many local residents and businesses—including many who braved the dark days of the late eighties and nineties—have fled looking for relief from ever-increasing costs of living. How sad and ironic that many of the same people who fought to save our neighborhoods in the face of thugs and drugs have ultimately been forced to surrender their communities to the almighty dollar.<sup>31</sup>

The newspaper's editorial stances and its owners' political tendencies usually align, but the *Manhattan Times* maintained a broad commitment to community building that transcended the concerns of any one political party. In May 2006, the paper conducted the Bridge/Puente project to connect both sides of its community. Under rainy skies, a long line of residents and elected officials stood shoulder to shoulder across upper Manhattan along Dyckman Street—the boundary between Washington Heights and Inwood—from the Harlem River across Broadway to the Hudson. At either end of the line,

participants filled large jugs with water from the respective rivers. Cheerfully, they passed the jugs hand to hand along the line. When water from the Harlem was poured into the Hudson and water from the Hudson was poured into the Harlem, the event symbolically linked the two sides of Broadway. The future of northern Manhattan, the project suggested, was about making connections and not about enforcing boundaries.<sup>32</sup>

Publications on the Web complemented the *Manhattan Times* and dramatically increased the opportunities for residents to learn about each other. From 2003 to 2012, Washington Heights and Inwood Online offered listings of events, discussion forums, local history, a photo gallery, and classified ads. Equally important was DNAinfo.com, a Web-based news organization founded in 2009, which covered Washington Heights and Inwood as well as other neighborhoods across the city. In 2010, Led Black and friends launched the *Uptown Collective* at [uptowncollective.com](http://uptowncollective.com) to "document" the "verve, energy and dynamism" of "the Uptown Renaissance" and "shape its trajectory."<sup>33</sup>

The new media system of northern Manhattan reduced the ignorance and uncertainty that had scarred the area in its bleakest years. Also valuable, in complicated ways, was a new sense of New York emanating from city hall. Mayor Michael Bloomberg had little patience for ethnic politics, unlike his predecessors Koch and Giuliani who exploited white fears and resentments. Bloomberg, a cosmopolitan businessman with technocratic tendencies, was more interested in expanding the city's economy. In government, he valued competence and recruited a generally well-regarded administration. He thought of himself as a straight-talking businessman and took pride in not being a politician. That became a vulnerability because he lacked a common touch. He made himself an easy mark for tabloid wisecracks when he flew to Bermuda in his private jet, but the nagging question during his mayoralty was whether his economic vision enriched the city as a whole. He nurtured a prosperity that helped the city endure the Great Recession and promoted amenities like riverside parks, all of which made New York a more pleasant place to live and attracted tourists and residents from around the world. Such measures did not, however, raise stagnant wages or close the growing gap between rich and poor. Bloomberg's New York was safer and more dynamic economically, but it was also a place where people of low and moderate income felt less and less at home. While crime dropped, his stubborn adherence to aggressive stop-and-frisk policing angered and alienated thousands of young men of color and diminished the good feelings that might have otherwise arisen from living in a safer city.<sup>34</sup>

With safer streets, New York became more comfortable with its own urbanity. In Washington Heights, as elsewhere, residents stepped out of their homes, reclaimed parks and sidewalks, and overcame the fear that had driven so many people indoors during the years of high crime. In this context, one of the strongest sources of optimism about northern Manhattan's future has been a growing, multiethnic arts scene. Of particular note is the annual monthlong Uptown Arts Stroll with gallery shows, open studios, performances, and a street fair that showcases both the work of local artists and the neighborhoods of northern Manhattan. A central figure in founding the Uptown Arts Stroll was Mike Fitelson, a journalist and photographer who moved to northern Manhattan in 1999, and began looking for a place close to home to show his photographs. One meeting led to another and eventually a one-day event emerged in the fall of 2003. With the support of the *Manhattan Times*, where Fitelson worked, the Uptown Arts Stroll, or El Paseo de las Artes del Alto Manhattan, was born in 2003.<sup>35</sup> The event would have been unthinkable in the early 1990s, when many people associated the sidewalks of Washington Heights with drug shootings.

There had been arts organizations before in the Heights and Inwood, but in 2007 the energy that produced the Uptown Arts Stroll was also manifested in the founding of the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance (NoMAA), a nonprofit dedicated to supporting artists and the arts funded by money from the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, a Clinton administration antipoverty initiative, and the Hispanic Federation.<sup>36</sup> With NoMAA, artists in northern Manhattan have a strong, cosmopolitan advocate and northern Manhattan had the possible germ of a new relationship between artists and the city. By 2007, arts-oriented strategies for urban revival were nothing new. What was new about NoMAA and Washington Heights, however, was what they offered in a divided neighborhood with an uneven economy.

By the late 1980s, northern Manhattan had already attracted musicians lured north by affordable rents and sturdy, prewar apartment buildings that could contain the sounds of a practicing cellist. There were also local artists, often immigrants or the children of immigrants, whose works ranged from traditional to strongly topical. Natasha Beshenkovsky, educated in the Soviet Union, painted classical miniatures. In the same neighborhood, M. Tony Peralta, an artist and graphic designer born in New York to immigrant Dominican parents and raised in Washington Heights, grew up with the influences of hip-hop, graffiti, Marvel comics, and Keith Haring. He designed a T-shirt emblazoned "DOMINICANYORK"; its black-and-white type underlined in red recalled the *New York Post*, a paper whose coverage of Dominicans in the Heights' bleak years was not always enlightened or subtle. He also took

on Dominican attitudes about race in two posters of identical Afro picks (combs) labeled *Pelo Bueno* (Good Hair) and *Pelo Malo* (Bad Hair).<sup>37</sup>

The People's Theatre Project, founded in 2008 by the Dominican theater artist Mino Lora and Bob Braswell, an actor with a BFA from Boston University, embraced northern Manhattan as both a theatrical subject and a source of actors and playwrights. The Project blends performance and activism to address community concerns such as deportations, housing, and obesity in programs that reach everyone from school children to senior citizens. Its plays, writing projects, and theatrical games foster an awareness of current concerns on both sides of Broadway, even as its collaborators include older institutions in the neighborhood such as New York-Presbyterian Hospital (born in the merger of Columbia-Presbyterian and New York Hospital in 1998), the YM-YWHA, and the Morris-Jumel Mansion.

Like NoMAA, the People's Theatre Project helped create an artistic crossroads. Such efforts have raised the prospect of urban revitalization through the arts that does not involve the displacement of working class and immigrant residents, but grows from their presence. Northern Manhattan could incubate, in Richard Florida's phrase, its own "creative class."

To be sure, artists in northern Manhattan faced problems, foremost among them rising rents, the lack of arts supply stores, a relative shortage of gallery space, and a relative shortage of patrons who would buy artwork in sufficient quantities at sufficient prices that an artist could make a living. Their unique individual and collective strengths, however, more than compensated for these limitations.

The arts scene was not the only crossroads in northern Manhattan. Residents also took back the streets and parks in Washington Heights and restored them to public use. As far back as the 1970s, a medieval festival in Fort Tryon Park—an outgrowth of a workshop program run by the Cloisters for young people in Washington Heights and Inwood—brought crowds to the park and demonstrated better possibilities of sharing public space. In the summer of 1977, with the looting during the blackout in recent memory, my mother wrote me in Alaska about her visit to the festival; she praised the "non-littering crowd" and said the people of New York did themselves proud that day. In 1985, Tim Page of the *New York Times* took in the exuberant crowds, the sunshine, the exhibits on black, Hispanic, Islamic, and Jewish life in the Middle Ages, and pronounced the afternoon "one to be cherished rather than merely enjoyed." When the festival faltered, Councilman Stan Michels helped revive it under the auspices of the Washington Heights–Inwood Development Corporation, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1978 to encourage local economic development. Eventually, a grand painting of the

festival—with northern Manhattan notables, including Michels, dressed in medieval garb—graced a wall in Coogan's. The artist who did the painting was Sam Garcia, formerly the baritone to Jim Clarke's first tenor on the street-corner singing scene of Washington Heights in the fifties.<sup>38</sup>

The owners of Coogan's got into the business of reclaiming the streets for the people in 1999 by sponsoring a five-kilometer footrace—Salsa, Blues and Shamrocks. From a starting line in the lower Heights the runners plowed uphill on Fort Washington Avenue, wound through Fort Tryon Park past the Cloisters, doubled back to the finish line, and retired to a generous brunch at Coogan's. In the array of runners and the cheering onlookers, people gained an opportunity to recognize what Washington Heights looked like and to celebrate it.<sup>39</sup>

Yet the task of restoring the streets and public parks of Washington Heights required more than energy, imagination, and goodwill. It would also cost an enormous amount of money, as a 1990 report by the Dinkins administration noted. Fort Tryon Park, with perhaps the most glorious view in all of New York, was marred by neglect, vandalism, and graffiti. Despite the efforts of the Friends of Fort Tryon Park, it needed extensive work, including "erosion control and planting." Highbridge Park was in worse shape. There, despite "spectacular natural resources" and an extensive recreation complex that dated to the La Guardia years, the most pressing task was to remove dumped automobiles. In 1985 alone, more than three hundred abandoned cars and one hundred junked refrigerators were pulled from the park. In the same year, the pool was restored at a cost of \$7.4 million in capital funds. One year later, the park's recreation center had been restored but the playgrounds, paths, basketball courts, and ball fields still were in disrepair and the Dinkins report estimated it would cost \$7 million to restore them. But where would the money come from? During the crack years in Highbridge Park, Mothers Against Violence had won back a playground from drug addicts. Their action took great courage, but the heroism they brought to the park could not by itself bring in the dollars needed to rebuild what was once one of the grand facilities of New Deal New York.<sup>40</sup>

The dilemma of Highbridge Park was complicated by the fact that it had never enjoyed the prominence of a Central Park or even nearby Fort Tryon Park—both of which fell on hard times of their own in the bleak period from the 1970s to the 1990s. When activists and elected officials lobby government offices or foundations for help with a park, they enjoy an advantage when a park is well known and located near affluent neighbors with political power (and a desire to maintain real estate values). Fort Tryon Park benefited from

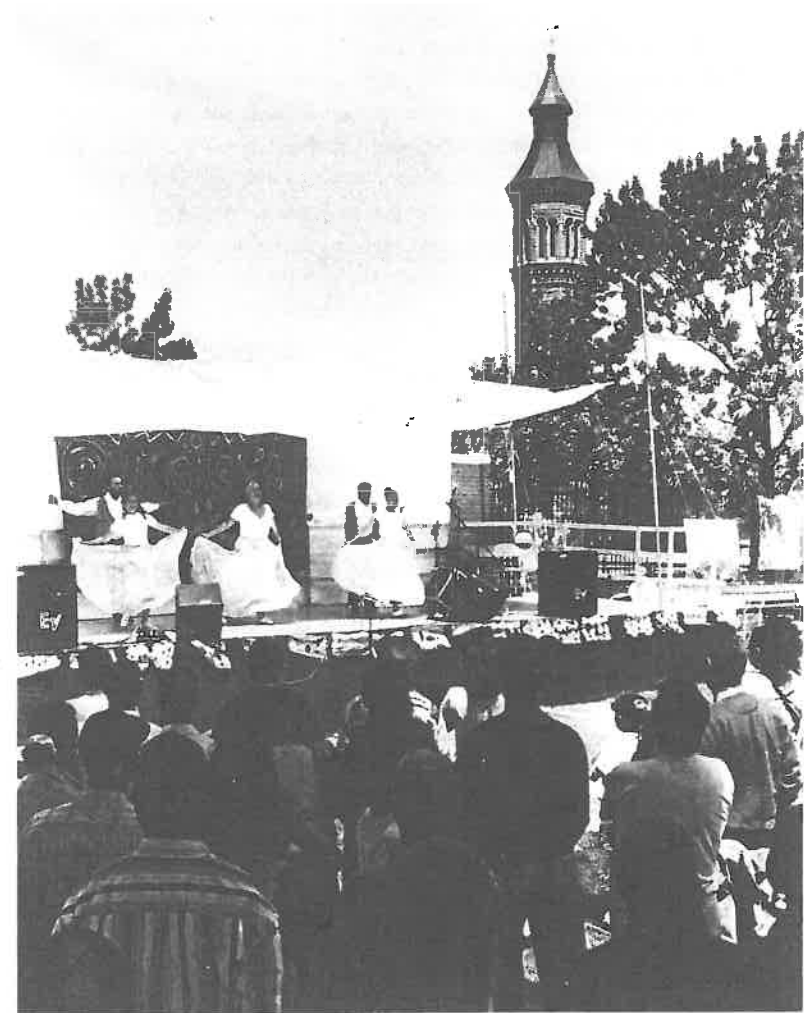


Figure 13: Reclaiming Highbridge Park: Quisqueya en el Hudson Festival, 1996. Photograph by Tom van Buren. Courtesy of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance archive ([www.ctmd.org](http://www.ctmd.org)).

the work of the Friends of Fort Tryon Park and later the Fort Tryon Park Trust. Separately and after they merged, they coordinated volunteers who cleaned up garbage, cultivated gardens, and worked with city government and foundations to restore the park to its full beauty. David Rockefeller, son of John D. Rockefeller Jr., whose philanthropy first made the park possible, donated \$1 million to the Fort Tryon Park Trust. In 1995, the entertainer



Bette Midler founded the New York Restoration Project to help New York's less known parks—including Fort Tryon Park, Fort Washington Park, and Highbridge Park. In 2001, the project turned a very ordinary snack bar in a stone building in Fort Tryon Park into the New Leaf Restaurant and Bar—an elegant establishment whose earnings support the Restoration Project.<sup>41</sup>

Grants and volunteers alone could never replace the need for substantial government expenditures to keep the parks open as healthy public spaces. Still, in fits and starts, and not without setbacks, the people of Washington Heights recovered their open spaces. As early as 1996, the ACDP and the Center for Traditional Music and Dance went to Highbridge Park to mount *Quisqueya en el Hudson*, a festival that featured dynamic but less familiar forms of Dominican music and brought people into the park. Jon Pareles of the *New York Times* called the event in its second year “a mixture of neighborhood party and aficionados’ folk festival.” In his 2004 book, *Waterfront: A Journey around Manhattan*, Phillip Lopate examined the thickets, highway ramps, cliffs, architecture, and ruins found in Highbridge Park and pronounced it a complex mixture of “problem and potential.” Sara M., who grew up in Washington Heights in the late 1980s and early 1990s, wrote in 2009 about the “chaos” of her young days at Highbridge Pool: “hooligans” breaking into lockers, “floating diapers in the children’s pool,” fights on the line for the diving board, and blasting music. In 2009, however, she found the park “all cleaned up.”

It is still very popular with the local teenagers but the bathrooms are clean, the lockers are secure, everyone has to wear bathing suits (they check to make sure there is a lining in all suits). People picnic, play and smoke blunts in the park. A good time is had by all.

It’s come a long way but that’s a testament to the neighborhood, it’s come a looooooong way from what it once was and while some people like to talk smack about it being ghetto . . . in comparison to what it used to be . . . it’s almost suburb like!

Smoking blunts was not what Mayor La Guardia had in mind when he opened Highbridge Pool, but in 2009 the park that Sara M. enjoyed was a grand public recreation area in recovery. After gang wars, decades of decay, and crack wars, the people of Washington Heights could reenter their parks, enjoy them, and get used to each other’s company.<sup>42</sup>

As Sara M. recognized, the changes in Highbridge Park were one more sign that Washington Heights had passed through a great transformation—one of many that marked the neighborhood’s passage from the era of La Guardia to the era of Bloomberg. In such moments, some older ethnic groups

strove to preserve their history by writing about the neighborhood as it had been. For example, Jim Carroll in his 1978 memoir, *Basketball Diaries*, and John McMullen in his 2010 book, *The Inwood Book: Poems, Short Stories and a Novel*, wrote about the Irish experience in northern Manhattan.<sup>43</sup> Manfred Kirchheimer, whose Jewish family fled Germany in 1936 and arrived in the Heights in 1942, examined his community in the documentary film *We Were So Beloved*, released in 1986. Kirchheimer looked closely at German Jews’ capacity for questioning the country they lived in—whether it was Germany or the United States. Kirchheimer’s former neighbors criticized him for airing the prejudices that some of them held against Eastern European Jews and for relating one woman’s enduring good feelings for Germans. Overall, Kirchheimer thought his film was not popular with the German Jews of Washington Heights.<sup>44</sup>

For African Americans, the desire to preserve an important part of their history in a changing neighborhood fueled a bitter dispute with Columbia University over the fate of the Audubon Ballroom in the southern Heights, where Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965. After the slaying, the Audubon declined and the city seized it for back taxes. In the 1980s, Columbia proposed to demolish the building to build a research center. After long and complex negotiations, a compromise preserved the Audubon’s facade, let Columbia have its research center, and established a home in 2005 for the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center.<sup>45</sup>

Sharing histories did not mean a consensus, but it did help people learn to live with the complexities of their own history. Equally important, an interest in local history could also draw people to public events, enriching the sense of ease in northern Manhattan that was so important for overcoming the sense of fear that once plagued the area. In Inwood, the writer and realtor Cole Thompson joined with Don Rice, a musician and Inwood resident, to produce monthly evenings devoted to Inwood history at the Indian Road Café. The filmmaker and realtor Vivian Ducat, living at 790 Riverside Drive, organized a series of oral history meetings where residents of her neighborhood shared memories of the past. Her efforts contributed to the designation of the area between 155th and 158th streets west of Broadway as the Audubon Park Historic District. Historian James Renner ran walking tours of northern Manhattan devoted to everything from its role in the American Revolution to its great estates to the African American enclave of Sugar Hill.

Nowhere did the past and present of northern Manhattan meet with greater humanity and artistry than in the parlor concerts of Marjorie Eliot, a pianist who moved from the Upper West Side to 555 Edgecombe Avenue at West 160th Street in 1982. Raised in Philadelphia in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in a community saturated with music, she grew up

to play jazz in clubs and work in the theater. Officially, her address north of 155th Street put her in Washington Heights. As an African American who was proud of her predecessors at 555 Edgecombe—a building that was by the 1940s the home of the singer, actor, and activist Paul Robeson, the jazz musician Count Basie, the psychologist Kenneth Clark, and the actor Canada Lee—she thought of herself as a resident of Harlem. (Edgecombe Avenue is the spine of the section of Harlem known as Sugar Hill.)<sup>46</sup>

After Eliot's son Philip died on a Sunday in 1992, she began to put on Sunday afternoon concerts in her apartment as a way of getting her through a painful weekly anniversary. Her playing met similar needs after her son Michael died in 2006. ("It's a great joy to me, and it chases the shadows," she said.)

Eliot's parlor concerts attract jazz fans from around New York and around the world; they have been chronicled in a French documentary. They bring in comparatively few African Americans, however. African Americans are a declining presence in northern Manhattan, and even when they were more numerous they were not a large part of her audience. Still, Eliot became a beloved presence in northern Manhattan. She developed a warm relationship with Councilman Stan Michels, and in 2000, City Lore, an organization dedicated to urban folk culture, inducted her into its People's Hall of Fame.

"History will not leave you alone," Eliot says. In 2009, Ducat and the Riverside Oval Lecture Series featured Eliot and friends in a concert at the apartment of Mo Strom and Craig Ulmer in the Grinnell. The concert was conceived as an opportunity to savor the music of "jazz legends," many of them from nearby Sugar Hill, and "meet your neighbors." As at Eliot's concerts at 555 Edgecombe, most in attendance were white. Talking with the audience, Eliot said she could not shake the feeling that in crossing over to the west side of Broadway, she was going to "the other side of the tracks." With that thought in mind, her gracious, elegant, and sensitive performance created a sonic bridge across Broadway for an evening.<sup>47</sup>

By the twenty-first century, Dominicans had taken their place in the history of Washington Heights. In 2001, the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute at City College (founded in 1992) and the City College library mounted an exhibit chronicling "one of the largest Latino immigrant groups and the fastest growing ethnic minority in New York City." The show, *The Evolution of an Ethnic Community: Dominican-Americans in Upper Manhattan*, recognized that the formative years of the Dominican community in northern Manhattan were over. A great and tumultuous historical passage had ended. "As the 21st century begins," a label in the final panel of the exhibit said,

"Dominicans are hopeful. In the past 40 years, Dominicans have grown and matured as a community. . . . Dominicans now count on the strength of its youth and the wisdom of its elders in the land they have chosen to settle and now call home." For a neighborhood that had been painted in the media with lurid colors, the exhibit was refreshingly restrained.<sup>48</sup>

Sharing the Dominican experience with non-Dominicans—something the Dominican Studies Institute did generously—still meant overcoming obstacles. Ironically, the Dominican presence in upper Manhattan was so large that Dominicans in Washington Heights lived with less "diversity" than they would have found in other neighborhoods, where Dominicans were not as large a percentage of the population. If the goal was to overcome the "apartness" that defined relations within and between ethnic communities in northern Manhattan, the number of potential partners in dialogue shrank as the number of Height residents of European ancestry declined. A change from this pattern appeared, however, in a musical play.

The YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood had a long record of serving Jews and non-Jews. Still, by the 2000s it was a challenge to create programs that embraced both the large Dominican community in the area and its much smaller Jewish population. A possibility emerged in 2008 when the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in lower Manhattan mounted an exhibit on the little-known story of Jewish refugees who found a refuge from Hitler in the Dominican Republic, in the town of Sosúa, when most countries were closed to them. The motives of Trujillo, the Dominican dictator who accepted them, were far from pure—he hoped to whiten his population and improve his international standing. Moreover, the eight hundred Jews who made it to his country were far fewer than the anticipated number. Still, the Jews who settled in Sosúa survived the war and wrote a unique chapter in the history of Jews and Dominicans.<sup>49</sup>

Victoria Neznansky, a social worker and chief program officer at the Y, visited the exhibit on Sosúa and saw how its story might appeal to Jews and Dominicans in northern Manhattan. A colleague directed her to a meeting with Liz Swados, a composer and director. Eventually an idea was in motion: a play about Sosúa, performed by Jewish and Dominican young people under the auspices of the Y, *Sosúa: Dare to Dance Together*.<sup>50</sup>

Aside from the obvious Jewish-Dominican dimension, and the two groups' histories as immigrants, the concept had other strengths. It began with one thing that the two populations shared: an experience with dictators, Hitler and Trujillo. Unlike the situation in northern Manhattan, where an older Jewish community encountered Dominican newcomers, in Sosúa the Dominicans were the local majority meeting newly arrived Jews. Trujillo's racism against Haitians, and his slaughter of some fifteen thousand ethnic Haitians

in the Dominican Republic in 1937, was set against Hitler's anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.<sup>51</sup>

Students researched the history behind the play, wrote and performed scenes, and wove their own experiences into the continuously evolving script. Moreover, they swapped identities: Jews played Dominicans and Dominicans played Jews. In a performance of *Dare to Dance Together* that I saw, Dominican students played elite members of the U.S. government explaining why they would not admit Jewish refugees to the United States. The actors' cutting portrayals of U.S. officials, which must have drawn on the rejection Dominicans faced in their own time, were unforgettable.<sup>52</sup>

*Dare to Dance Together*, along with the talkback sessions that followed it whenever I saw it, was a great exercise in bridge building. (Not all of the chasms bridged were the obvious ones. At one performance, I heard one cast member explain that being in the play taught him an important lesson: the students he encountered in the cast from La Guardia High School of Music and Art and Performing Arts, one of the city's elite public schools, were not all snobs.) In *Dare to Dance Together*, performed in northern Manhattan, at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, at the United Nations, and many more venues, Jewish and Dominican kids learned to explore not just their own identities but how there was also a bit of the other in each of them. One play wove together not just Nazi Germany and the Dominican Republic but both sides of Broadway.

As the historian Thomas Bender has observed, a democratic city rests on political representation and visual representation. As for political representation, Washington Heights entered the twenty-first century with elected representatives and civic institutions that could credibly deliberate the issues facing the neighborhood and present its views to the larger public. Decades of community board meetings, efforts to elect Dominicans to political office, and painstaking efforts to build alliances around common interests had all born fruit.<sup>53</sup>

Visual representation, the project of seeing and being seen in ways that promote respect, inclusion, and a recognition of differences within a larger collective identity, was another matter. Local media, like the *Manhattan Times*, had done important work to introduce the different peoples of northern Manhattan to each other. Introducing northern Manhattan to the rest of the city, the state, the nation, and the world was a much more difficult matter. Yet just as the Jewish Lower East Side inspired a wide range of cultural productions that defined and redefined the neighborhood over many decades, so did Dominican Washington Heights in the early years of the twenty-first century generate films, novels, and a Broadway musical that would give upper Manhattan a new face.

To be sure, the association between Washington Heights and the drug trade died hard. *El Circulo Vicioso*, a low-budget feature film released in 1999, made by a Dominican director and Dominican actors and shot in Washington Heights, sparked anger among Heights residents with its recycling of old and ugly themes. But as time passed, more nuanced depictions of the neighborhood's difficult and notorious years appeared. Crime and the drug trade are elements in *Washington Heights* and *Manito*, both released in 2002, but in complicated ways. *Washington Heights* is less a drug movie pure and simple than a story about ambition, generations in an immigrant family, and making peace with life's limitations. *Manito*, a feature film produced with a documentary feel, treats the drug trade years as the source of a toxic residue of violence, exploitation, and distrust. Contrary to the image of drug dealers as uptown Robin Hoods or eager entrepreneurs who would have become legitimate businessmen in better circumstances, the dealer in *Manito* is a selfish man who wrecks his family.<sup>54</sup>

Infinitely less bleak in its perspective on Washington Heights was *Mad Hot Ballroom*, a 2005 documentary about New York City public school children in Tribeca, the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn, and Washington Heights who compete in a ballroom dancing competition. The filmmakers knew that the Heights had a reputation for poverty and crime, so they concentrated on what people didn't know about the neighborhood: the dreams and ambitions of its children. There is a sense in the film, as the *Times* critic A. O. Scott noticed, that the students from Tribeca "expect to win" the competition but the students from the Heights (or at least their extraordinary teacher) "need to win." The film's camera crew captured the eventual victory of the Washington Heights team, but left them as they took the subway uptown with their trophy. There, the camera crew missed the real ending of the competition: the crowds of Washington Heights residents who cheered the children as they emerged from the subway.<sup>55</sup>

Underdogs who become winners is an old theme in immigrant New York. So is getting out of your old neighborhood to seek a better life. All of these themes appeared in two feature films made about Washington Heights, *Take the Bridge* (2006) by the Chilean filmmaker Sergio Castilla, and *GWB* (2010) by Jonathan Ullman. Both are set in the years after the crime drop. In both films, drug dealers are a presence in the neighborhood that the protagonists overcome. Both films were shot with loving attention to the buzz of the street and the natural beauty of the Hudson River, and the title of each film played off the defining landmark of Washington Heights—the George Washington Bridge.<sup>56</sup>

For Castilla, a Chilean who made his film after many years in New York, *Take the Bridge* was an ode to New York's "last neighborhood," a place where

an older city of corner stores, grandmothers watching over sidewalks, and kids playing on the street still survives. His protagonists—four young people who have all tried to commit suicide, an issue in Castilla's own family history—wrestle with whether to stay in Washington Heights or break free from it and “everything that holds us back.” In the end they leave, triumphant and exultant, speeding west across the George Washington Bridge.

*Take the Bridge* was Castilla's farewell to New York City before he moved to Europe. For Ullman, *GWB* was film about a neighborhood he grew to love. Living at 158th and Riverside, he noticed that the neighborhood was often used as a setting for films and television series about general urban themes. Rarely, however, was it the subject of work that told Washington Heights' own stories. In a neighborhood where, as one character says, you've got to “make it to take it,” two young boys run off with drug dealers' money. The drug dealers come in pursuit. Official sources of authority are not much help, so the boys rely on their friends and family to help them through the ordeal that follows.

As in *Take the Bridge*, the protagonists of *GWB* (which went into commercial distribution in 2012 under the name of *Trouble in the Heights*) eventually leave Washington Heights. In both films, the protagonists have surmounted the challenges of their neighborhood. Neither film sees the lingering shadow of the crack years as anything but a bleak remnant. Both look forward to a better future. In such stories, after many difficult years, Dominican residents of Washington Heights could claim something like a victory. For all the romance around immigrant neighborhoods in New York City, for their residents a large part of life is dedicated to making it—and for young people, as Marshall Berman observed of his beloved postwar Bronx, that usually means getting out. In the twenty-first century Dominican Washington Heights took its place in the history of New York's immigrant enclaves, alongside the Irish Five Points and the Jewish Lower East Side, in its scale, its struggles, and ultimately in its residents' willingness to leave it for better places when they had the chance.<sup>57</sup>

More recognition of the struggles and victories of Dominican Washington Heights emerged from Cayena Publications. Founded by Mary Ely Peña-Gratereaux—who immigrated to New York in 1965 and has worked as a mediator in northern Manhattan—Cayena in 2000 published the first of a series of books on Dominicans, the Dominican immigrant experience in the United States, mediation, and social justice. Among its productions are a book and documentary on workers at Madame Alexander's Dolls Factory, a plant in Manhattan that employed generations of immigrant workers, most recently Dominicans. It closed in 2012 after more than a decade of shipping jobs overseas ended in a change in ownership. In its emphasis on labor and

commitment, albeit with a sad ending, *The Faces behind the Dolls: Los Rostros Detrás de las Muñecas* is a welcome corrective to discussions of Dominican New Yorkers that emphasize cultural explanations for poverty. The problem of New York City's economy, the film suggests, is not a lack of a work ethic among immigrants but the lack of secure, economically sustaining jobs for immigrant workers.<sup>58</sup>

Literary works also revised the image of the neighborhood. In the novels of Angie Cruz, born in Washington Heights in 1972 and raised at Broadway and 165th Street, northern Manhattan becomes part of a flow of stories, people, and memories that swirl between the United States and the Dominican Republic. *Soledad* (2001) and *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005) explore a Washington Heights that is a crossroads of past and present, alive with pain, resilience, and possibilities. (*Soledad* begins with a young Dominican woman living downtown summoned home to the Heights because her mother is in ill health. Soledad gripes, “It's *always* like that: just when I think I don't give a shit about what my family thinks, they find a way to drag me back home.”) In both books, readers far from northern Manhattan could discover the complexity of Dominican experiences. *Soledad*, like the writings of Junot Diaz set in northern New Jersey, suggested that as important as Washington Heights was for Dominicans, it was no longer the only plausible setting for their lives in the United States.<sup>59</sup>

A red carpet was rolled out to Broadway outside Coogan's. Inside nervousness mixed with joy and pride as the crowd watched a live broadcast of the 2008 Tony Awards for excellence in Broadway theater. Earlier in the evening *In the Heights*—a musical about the Latinos of northern Manhattan and the meaning of home—won prizes for its score, choreography, and orchestration. Yet the biggest prize of the night remained. “One more award—one big one,” said Peter Walsh, the co-owner of Coogan's. Finally, around 11 p.m., Whoopi Goldberg announced the winner of the 2008 Tony Award for Best Musical: *In the Heights*. Coogan's erupted in cheers. Guillermo Linares, now commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, was euphoric.

“A motorcade,” he exulted, “we gotta do a motorcade. We got to bring it in the community.” Onstage, producer Jill Furman accepted the award surrounded by members of the show's cast and creative team, among them Lin-Manuel Miranda—the Puerto Rican New Yorker from Inwood who conceived the musical, wrote its music and lyrics, played one of its lead roles, and had already taken the stage to wave a small Puerto Rican flag and rap out his acceptance speech for best score. At Coogan's, celebrants went home to the sound of firecrackers popping in the streets of Washington Heights.<sup>60</sup>

The neighborhood portrayed in the musical was a far cry from the one portrayed in the news media in the early 1990s. Gone were the stories of drug dealers and murderers. Instead, the musical fused rap, hip-hop, salsa, and merengue to paint an optimistic portrait of hard-working immigrants striving for the American dream. *In the Heights*, so far the most acclaimed work of art to emerge from northern Manhattan, was the product of a dynamic neighborhood, old and new currents in popular culture, and the genius of Lin-Manuel Miranda. Miranda, the son of one of the publishers of the *Manhattan Times*, was at once an insider and an outsider in the new New York that emerged in northern Manhattan in the late twentieth century. Miranda lived in a neighborhood with plenty of bodega owners, taxi drivers, and guys hanging out on the corner, but he went to the Upper East Side every day to study at Hunter College High School, one of the city's most academically demanding public schools. He wrote a little for the *Manhattan Times* and attended Wesleyan University, where he first wrote a play about his old neighborhood that eventually became *In the Heights*, produced off Broadway in 2007 and then on Broadway in 2008.

In the play, people could see more clearly something that had long been true about Washington Heights: it was a neighborhood of Latino immigrants, most of them Dominicans, struggling to make homes in northern Manhattan. Dominicans could finally claim a place of their own in New York City's rainbow of immigrant groups. For all the differences among them, Dominicans were as much a part of the Heights as the Irish, Jews, and Greeks. Yet, there was no guarantee that Dominicans as a group would achieve the kind of security and prosperity that their predecessors found, either in Washington Heights or in the suburbs beyond. Affirmation and anxiety both ran through *In the Heights*.

In structure, the play was a classic Broadway musical inspired by many works that came before it. (Miranda once joked that when disputes arose in rehearsals, he settled them by saying: No, that's not how they do it in *Fiddler on the Roof*.) In its book, music, and dance, however, the show was completely a part of contemporary New York. Miranda used Spanglish, hip-hop, Latin music, and hybrids of all three to create sights and sounds that emerged from Nueva York. In an age when so many musicals were revivals or British imports or corporate productions, *In the Heights* was grounded in its city of origin. It recalled the best works of Edward Harrigan and Tony Hart, whose songs and stories chronicled the immigrant communities of the Lower East Side at the end of the nineteenth century, and the best mid-twentieth-century Broadway musicals, like *On the Town*, which turned popular music and dance into memorable theater. With *In the Heights*, the sounds and soul of New York reclaimed the Broadway stage.

Miranda cast the Latino experience in northern Manhattan in universal terms. *In the Heights* was not just a musical representation of days and nights in an ethnic enclave; it was a dynamic meditation on the meaning of home. While the older Jewish and Irish communities of northern Manhattan had barely any presence in the play, Miranda said he was gratified by how many viewers told him after seeing the show that he had grasped themes common to all immigrant groups.

Like the generations before them, the people of *In the Heights* wrestle with the choice between staying in the neighborhood and leaving to make it in the wider world. There is one modestly successful businessman among them—the owner of a livery cab company—but otherwise the people of *In the Heights* are too poor to think about making money off real estate in their neighborhood. Instead, they worry about rent increases. (One subplot has gossip hair salon owners moving to the Bronx in pursuit of cheaper rents.)

Almost all of the characters in the play are Latinos who trace their roots to the Caribbean. There are no obvious ethnic antagonists in the play, but one love affair is sharpened by the implicit point that it unites a Dominican woman and an African American man. As in *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof*, with their interethnic and interreligious love affairs, the freedom to love remains a strong theme in Broadway musicals—an inheritance from New Deal New York's opposition to bigotry and the gay men who worked the theme into many musicals. Neither does the play valorize the thug life that claimed too many lives in the Heights during the crack years. Indeed, it opens with a bodega owner who begins his day's work by chasing away a graffiti tagger.<sup>61</sup>

Miranda's musical closed a narrative that began in 1957, when *West Side Story* first appeared on Broadway. *West Side Story* had attempted to tell its own story of turf, ethnic conflict, and forbidden love. Its choreography was mesmerizing, its music superb, and its effort to make a musical engage social issues laudable. Its great flaw was that the Puerto Ricans depicted in the play were someone's idea of Puerto Ricans, not Puerto Ricans representing themselves. *In the Heights* was a musical by and about Latino New Yorkers. It drew deeply on Broadway traditions, but exuberantly mixed them with Latin music and hip-hop. In *West Side Story*, the Puerto Ricans are rejected newcomers who barely get to speak for themselves. The people of *In the Heights* are on their home ground, singing in their own voices. Their song is New York City's song.

*In the Heights* acclaims the hard work and communal feel that define the neighborhood, with all of these framed by the contrary tugs of the Caribbean and New York City, past and present, the community and the individual. Indeed, some of the sharpest conflicts in the play embroil individuals

who wrestle with the weight of their family's and neighbors' expectations in work, education, and love. Like Maria in *West Side Story*, or Tevye's daughters in *Fiddler on the Roof*, it is women who aspire to live boldly in this play—overturning traditions, going away to college, or heading downtown to start a new career. Men are the ones who stay in the neighborhood—partly out of loyalty to their community, partly because their talents for running a bodega or a car service don't translate well in the wider world.

All of these conflicts and worries are resolved in the last act by a miraculous intervention. In this respect, *In the Heights* is very much part of the Broadway tradition. The ending is not entirely happy—departures from the neighborhood in the face of rent increases echo the Jewish departure from Anatevka in *Fiddler on the Roof*, but without the violence of a pogrom. You can't help but wonder whether the neighborhood scholarship girl will be satisfied with her taxi dispatcher boyfriend once she earns a degree from Stanford. Nevertheless, the final scenes of *In the Heights* are sustaining, affirming, and even cautiously optimistic about what the future will bring. In all these respects, the play is very much in tune with the real world of Washington Heights.

## EPILOGUE

AT A DISCUSSION OF THE HISTORY OF NORTHERN MANHATTAN, a longtime resident asked me a sharp question: Wasn't my research focusing too much on the negative aspects of the past in Washington Heights?<sup>1</sup>

It was true that I identified problems in the neighborhood, I said, but I did that to illuminate the challenges that its residents faced. Every New York City neighborhood, I said, has its flaws. The strength of Washington Heights, I insisted, lay in its residents' ability to confront and—sometimes to overcome—problems that wracked cities in the late twentieth century.

Our exchange was one of many conversations I had with senior citizens from northern Manhattan under the auspices of the YM-YWHA. We met at the Y and in common rooms of local apartment buildings after lunch or dinner. My job was to deliver a short talk on the history of northern Manhattan and then run a discussion about what we might learn from its recent past. The talks were attended by an ethnically and racially mixed group of elderly people who were typically Jewish, Irish, African American, and Latino.

I discovered quickly that the past provided both islands of consensus and grounds for disagreement. Everyone shook their heads at the racist and anti-Semitic efforts to keep African Americans and Jews out of Washington Heights. People cringed when I mentioned that Kenneth Clark was directed to attend a vocational school. The Farmer case was universally seen as a tragedy. Crime was widely recognized as a blight on everyone's life. At the same time, the record of the Lindsay administration in upper Manhattan, and