

CHAPTER 7

A New York: A New Deal

NEW YORK "INCUBATES" THE NEW DEAL

A special census of the unemployed taken in January 1931 estimated that there were almost 610,000 persons in New York City's five boroughs "able to work, willing to work, . . . looking for a job . . . [or] laid off"; another large segment was working only part-time at seriously reduced wages. Factory employment had dropped to three-fourths of its level in the prosperous 1920s.¹ Because there were as yet no public institutions to cope with an emergency of this magnitude, two of New York's oldest philanthropies stepped immediately into the breach. The Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor and the Charity Organization Society joined forces to raise more than eight million dollars for the Emergency Work Bureau, which, between December 1930 and April 1931, actually engaged some 37,500 workers in "paving roads, surfacing playgrounds, repairing fences, fixing water fountains, cleaning hospitals, renovating city properties, and clearing vacant lots."² But the needs were far vaster than private charities could ameliorate.

Pressures for government action came, *inter alia*, from the Welfare Council of New York City. Between October 1930 and May 1931, the council surveyed some nine hundred social workers and public health nurses to find out how the Depression was affecting their clients. Among the findings were that a significant "downgrading" of housing standards had occurred, as families moved to smaller, cheaper quarters or doubled up with relatives (especially in Harlem, where housing was already overcrowded); that diet and health were already deteriorating; and that families were suffering from severe psychological distress and strife.³

When the Welfare Council's urgent appeals to Mayor Jimmy Walker⁴ were met

with a feeble appropriation and the excuse that the City Charter did not permit more, Council Director William Hodson appealed directly to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, then New York's governor. "In August of 1931, Roosevelt summoned the state legislature to a special session on relief," proposing the twenty-million-dollar Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA) "to underwrite municipal aid to the distressed."⁵ Roosevelt appointed Harry Hopkins director of TERA, and Hopkins promptly exceeded his mandate—until his program was covering one out of every ten families in the state.⁶ This initiative was hailed enthusiastically by Fiorello La Guardia, then a New York congressman representing East Harlem, who had been proposing similar relief measures at the federal level but with no success. A basic coalition was forming that would lead eventually to a close working relationship between Washington and New York in the New Deal, once FDR assumed the presidency in 1932 (taking Harry Hopkins to Washington with him) and La Guardia was elected mayor of New York in 1933.⁷

When he took office in 1934, however, La Guardia inherited a city in great distress: city aid had lagged behind the state, and its relief programs were riddled with graft and corruption; a fiscal crisis had been imminent by the end of 1933, when the city had to be rescued from receivership.⁸ There was much to be done, and the city turned to Washington. It received help, thanks to the political coalition of FDR, Hopkins, and La Guardia that had already been established, even before FDR put together his New Deal, which built, in part, upon experiments begun in New York State. This close relationship between New York City and Washington greased the wheels for numerous programs that often were begun in New York City, even before they became national policies.⁹

NEW YORK "INVENTS" PUBLIC HOUSING

Subsidized housing was, of course, one of those areas in which New York City led the way, well before the Housing Act of 1937 extended federal assistance to other cities. Because New York was basically a city of renters rather than home owners, the effects of depressions were always felt more quickly there, as evictions for rent arrears take place much faster than banks are able to foreclose on delinquent owners. The city's poor, therefore, had a long history of resisting forced dispossessions, with well-honed neighborhood techniques to block marshals and reinstall furniture that had been dumped at the curb.¹⁰

But this time the scale was beyond the capacity of such local actions. In the eight-month period that ended in June 1932, some 186,000 families had already been served with dispossession notices. "Small neighborhood bands often stopped marshals from putting furniture in the street; other times, crowds of up to 1000 neighbors blocked evictions. One estimate is that such grass-roots resistance succeeded in restoring 77,000 evicted families to their homes in New York City."¹¹ However, this left more than a hundred thousand families unassisted. In addition, a large population of homeless men, after having abandoned the families they could no longer support, were building "Hoovervilles" in interstices throughout the city, even raising one in Central Park on the future site of the "great lawn."

First Houses

The initial response to the "housing crisis" was extremely modest: a tiny rehabilitation project on the Lower East Side, appropriately named First Houses. However, it marked the beginning of a long-term and massive program of public housing construction that by 1990 was providing homes to at least half a million low-income New Yorkers.¹² First Houses, even though it contained only some 122 subsidized units intended for employed working-class tenants, illustrates the informal way the special coalition between Washington and New York worked.¹³

One month after he took office, Mayor La Guardia appointed Langdon Post, former head of the city's Tenement House Department, to direct the newly established New York Public Housing Authority (NYPHA).¹⁴ Taking Vincent Astor up on his offer to unload a row of decrepit (and unprofitable) tenement buildings on the Lower East Side, and having "wangled \$300,000 and free Public Works Administration labor" from Washington,¹⁵ Post gutted, reorganized, and rehabilitated the units around an interior court, an arrangement that had been recommended at the turn of the century by architect reformers. This proved so successful (in terms of livability, if not economics) that not only is the project still occupied, but in 1974 it was designated a New York City "landmark."

By the time the U.S. Housing Act (sponsored by New York Senator Robert Wagner Sr.) passed Congress in 1937, New York already had 2,330 public housing units under construction or completed, and between 1937 and the U.S. entry into World War II in 1941, another 10,648 were begun.¹⁶ Although this is hardly an impressive total, it did constitute a substantial proportion of all new housing built in the city during the Depression. As Peter Marcuse notes:

In nearly eight years . . . the NYPHA built 12,978 units of housing in a city with over two million households. . . . [Thus it built] housing for less than one percent of the city's people. . . . [But between 1934 and the end of 1938] a total of only 6,641 new units were built in the city, of which the public units started before the 1937 act constituted 35 percent; for the whole period 1934-1941, 55,465 units were completed, of which public housing provided 23 percent. Public housing, therefore, was important because of its relative, not absolute, numbers.¹⁷

But from the start the city administration had more ambitious schemes. Two larger-scale projects, to be built on vacant land, were successively planned: the Williamsburg Houses in Brooklyn, intended for white occupancy and designed by a famous Swiss architect, and, somewhat belatedly, Harlem Houses, intended for black occupants.¹⁸

The Harlem Riot of 1935

The building of Harlem Houses was undertaken in rapid response to racial unrest. According to Marcuse, the Harlem riot of March 1935 precipitated Mayor La Guardia's announcement that "the very next housing project to be built would be in Harlem."¹⁹ Although this may appear "manipulative," most scholars credit La Guardia and the

growing political power of Harlem blacks with more positive motives. Dominic J. Capeci Jr. notes that although between 1933 and 1943 race relations in New York City were not ideal, "they were more harmonious than in other urban centers. *This was partly due to the combined efforts of black leaders* [such as Adam Clayton Powell] *and white public officials* [such as La Guardia]."²⁰

La Guardia certainly was quick to recognize the dangers of racial conflict. After "a minor incident involving a young black shoplifter and a white store manager ignited a riot that swept through Harlem, [La Guardia] appointed a biracial Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem . . . [that] conducted twenty-five hearings, and listened to the testimony of 160 witnesses."²¹ Howard University sociologist E. Franklin Frazier was given a staff of thirty to conduct a study of the appalling socioeconomic conditions in Harlem, which was hardest hit by the Depression.²² Not surprisingly, the investigating commission found that the problems of blacks were due chiefly to inadequate incomes.

Discriminatory hiring practices deprived AfroAmericans of adequate employment and . . . [therefore] of nourishing foods, decent lodging, necessary medical care, and a healthy family relationship. Hence many became wards of the state, depending upon others, often the discriminators, for charitable assistance. . . . During the first week of September 1935, 43 percent of Harlem's black families were on relief. Throughout the state that year, two-and-a-half times as many blacks as whites were on relief because of unemployment. . . . blacks registering as unemployed in 1937 constituted 40 percent of all gainful AfroAmerican workers, while the corresponding percentage for all other groups was 15.²³

All the earlier negative findings of the Welfare Council were found in extreme form within the black population: they lived doubled up in overcrowded slum housing; they suffered from high rates of illness (especially tuberculosis and malnutrition) and were inadequately treated in Jim Crow hospitals; their schools were segregated through district gerrymandering and were overcrowded, old, and dilapidated and lacked adequate teaching materials; furthermore, students often had unsympathetic white teachers and read textbooks filled with demeaning images of blacks.²⁴

It was no wonder that crime rates were high, especially given that the police were overzealous in arresting black youth and that blacks tended to view the police as "the boldest examples of northern racism. . . . Critics of the police compared large concentrations of patrolmen in black ghettos to 'an army of occupation' and complained of constant brutality."²⁵ Given these conditions, it was not surprising that the Harlem riot of 1935 "brought to the surface aggressive, resentful feelings. Unlike earlier disorders in which whites attacked blacks, Harlem's was a hostile outburst 'against racial discrimination and poverty in the midst of [comparative] plenty.'"²⁶

Although La Guardia rejected the commission's report and its recommendations,²⁷ several actions to improve Harlem conditions were immediately undertaken. "By 1940, the Harlem River Houses, the Central Harlem Center building, the Women's Pavilion at Harlem Hospital, and two Harlem schools were completed. Also, the number of black nurses and attendants of the Hospital Department doubled and that of black physicians and medical board members tripled."²⁸

Harlem Houses

The 574 units of the Harlem River Houses were constructed on vacant land that John D. Rockefeller owned, between built-up Harlem and the Harlem River and adjacent to the Dunbar Co-ops, which Rockefeller had earlier constructed for middle-class blacks (a project then in foreclosure). The federal Public Works Administration contracted with the New York City Housing Authority to plan and design the project, but the PWA actually built the project before leasing it back to the NYCHA to operate.²⁹ Some fifteen thousand families applied, so admission could be highly selective.

However, because the unemployed and persons in "atypical" households were disqualified from admission (it was not until the late 1950s, for example, that single mothers were admitted), even if much more public housing had been built, it could never have solved the problems of unemployment generated by the Depression, although it could, and did, give work to construction workers. Nor could it solve the endemic competition between the city and its suburbs for resources.

THE NEW DEAL FOSTERS DECENTRALIZATION

La Guardia's arch rival for power over the city's form during the Depression was Robert Moses, whom Robert Caro calls "the power broker" and Jerome Charyn refers to simply as "the pharaoh."³⁰ More than any single other figure in the city's history, Moses, who never held any elective office, shaped the spatial pattern of the New York region—before, during, and after the Depression—by utilizing powers he accumulated in the independent empire he had amassed through his appointed sinecures as state and city parks commissioner and through his freedom to reinvest the lucrative tolls from the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, which he headed. Thus, despite the close relationship between La Guardia and Roosevelt and their mutual distaste for Moses, the latter had an independent edge vis-à-vis Washington.

To understand this, one must refer back to the 1920s. Peter Hall reminds us that Roosevelt was heavily committed in principle to a "mass return to the land," a position Hall attributes to the influence of Roosevelt's uncle, Frederic Delano, who had guided the New York Regional Plan and whom he later appointed to the National Resources Planning Board.³¹ Given this predilection, no conflict was recognized between the New Deal's commitment to cities and its commitment to suburban development. Robert Moses, as parks commissioner, availed himself of subsidized PWA labor to rebuild and expand his park empire in both the city and its suburbs, and the highways and bridges he constructed eventually midwived the predictions of the 1920s New York Regional Plan into the reality of 1950s suburban sprawl.

NEW YORK AS A KEY PLAYER IN LABOR ORGANIZING

While the WPA absorbed a fraction of the unemployed, the cutting of wages and the job insecurities of the employed nurtured long-standing radical labor movements in New York, movements that were strengthened in the early 1930s by federal legislation

protecting workers' rights. In 1932 Congress passed the Norris-La Guardia Act, blocking federal injunctions against strikers and outlawing yellow-dog contracts, and in 1935, stimulated by a rash of strikes the previous year, the Wagner-sponsored National Industrial Recovery Act guaranteed labor's rights to organize and to bargain collectively. (At Wagner's initiative, the Social Security Act was also passed in the same year.)

Indeed, whereas the post-World War I labor movement had been severely weakened in the 1920s, the crisis of the 1930s revitalized it. Despite the poor bargaining position of labor (how do you strike when you don't have a job?), the AFL/CIO, working largely out of New York, took advantage of the new legislation to mobilize greater union strength and to build a national network of unions in the late 1930s that was sufficient to pressure for the Fair Labor Standards Act, passed by Congress in 1938.³² (This act established the long-sought forty-hour week, set a minimum wage, and banned child labor.)

The opportunity for labor to flex its growing muscles, however, was interrupted by World War II, when the emergency led to a temporary moratorium on strikes. Strikes would resume immediately after the war. The most spectacular actions were in the prospering fields of transportation: railroads, mass transit, and the ports. In the late 1950s, municipal workers—of whom New York City had an inordinate number, especially after the quasi-independent subway companies were unified and placed within the public sector, thus absorbing the previously unionized transit workers—also gained the right to bargain collectively. Encouraged by this precedent, New York's police officers, firefighters, social workers, and teachers rapidly transformed their professional organizations into bargaining unions. Thus the principles of the NLRB devised by Robert Wagner Sr. a generation earlier, which originally applied only to private firms, were later extended to public employees by his son, Robert Wagner Jr., when he was mayor of New York City.³³

NEW YORK AS CULTURE INCUBATOR

New York Introduces "Modern" Architecture

I have already noted that two exemplary "skyscrapers" (the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building) were already under construction when the Depression struck. Despite the ensuing hard times, interest continued and, perhaps surprisingly, new developments were added—not only in Manhattan but in the outer boroughs as well. Leonard Wallock credits the Museum of Modern Art's International Exhibition of Modern Architecture in 1932 with introducing European modern architects to the United States. The exhibit displayed the works of Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and other European avant garde architects, thus helping to popularize the international style. It was followed by a 1934 exhibit of "machine art" and, in 1938–39, by an exhibit titled "Bauhaus, 1919–1928."³⁴

Many of these influences would be manifested in the 1939 World's Fair.³⁵ But even before that, one could see similar simplifications in the buildings of Rockefeller Center, such as the Time & Life, Eastern Air Lines, and Associated Press buildings,

and other commercial structures used themes from European modernism and art deco.³⁶ Krinsky suggests that a desire to save money through simplification "may have been the real catalyst to the widespread acceptance of a sparer aesthetic during the Depression years"³⁷—a most interesting hypothesis.

Novels and Noir Films

Cheaper still than simplified buildings were words and images. Although it is difficult to separate individual writers' angst from the somber realities of the 1930s, noir views of New York became even darker when outside circumstances piled on internal tensions. Shaun O'Connell's chapter on literary New York City in the 1930s suggests that negative literary images of New York, previously tempered by fascination and exaltation in the city's freedoms, turned to unrelieved disillusionment once prosperity disappeared.³⁸ The vitality of the iconoclastic and creative Greenwich Village/Harlem Renaissance scenes nurtured by the 1920s Jazz Age gave way to new forms of creativity in the dismal thirties. Nathanael West (né Nathan Weinstein), born in New York, gained early fame for his *Miss Lonelyhearts* (a book begun in 1929 but not published until 1933), which presents a sordid view of New York's callous soul.³⁹ And Clifford Odets's play *Waiting for Lefty* was so inflammatory when first performed in 1935 that the audience greeted its rhetorical ending not with applause but with rhythmic shoutings of "strike, strike."⁴⁰ Perhaps these two exemplars capture the range of responses to the depression.⁴¹

On the other hand, the 1930s were not a time when films could afford to depress; rather, Hollywood catered to the desire to escape from harsh reality, if only momentarily, through voyeurism on the lives of the pampered rich. A profusion of true "noir" films on New York had to await recovery. If *Blade Runner*, set in the "future," is the quintessential noir film about Los Angeles, and "backward-looking" gangster films of the Prohibition 1920s are the chief noir images of Chicago, New York continues to inspire an enormous output of dystopic films set in the "present."

In 1994, a two-month retrospective showing of sixty-four New York noir films made between 1941 and 1976 ran at New York's Film Forum. The deep connection in these films between plot and setting is highlighted in William Grimes's review:

If ever a city was made for black and white, it's New York. The city is a place of harsh light, dark shadows, strong angles and violent extremes. . . . Manhattan, it's all black clothes and pale skin. The skyline itself, the city's most durable, destructive image, achieves full power, Lucifer-like, as darkness descends and a million cold white diamonds begin to glitter. *New York is a noir city.* . . . "The city's uncompromising landscape and the endless surge of its anonymous crowds make an ideal setting for pitiless moral dramas in which doomed characters move inexorably toward a violent end. *In the classic New York noirs, the city's skyscrapers and streets play the role of the gods and the chorus in Greek tragedy.* They are the impassive observers, the iron enforcers, of a bleak moral code."⁴²

A cursory survey of film titles highlights recurring themes: death, terror, stranger, phantom, wrong man, wrong number, lost, no way out, screaming, crying, alone,

dark corner, victim, strangers, killer, double life, silence, shadows, crime, jungle, middle of the night, naked city, force of evil. Such themes were nurtured by the Depression, even though the films that incorporated them would not appear until later (but recall that Fritz Lang's dystopic view of New York dates back to the mid-1920s). In art as well, grim and sordid images of the city replaced the glowing impressionist palette of Childe Hassam.

1939: ON THE CUSP OF THE FUTURE

Although New York's economy in the Depression had neither plunged as deeply as Chicago's nor recovered as rapidly as Los Angeles's, by the late 1930s a dim light had appeared at the end of the tunnel. As elsewhere, full recovery would not be achieved until the involvement of the United States in World War II. We might, therefore, take stock of the city just before 1940, when its population, troubled as it was, was approaching 7.5 million, a total somewhat higher, it should be noted, than in 1990, when it stood at 7.3 million (the population of the five boroughs actually peaked in 1970). This seems an appropriate moment: before the United States entered the war and less than a decade before the region began its total transformation through fissive explosion. The year 1939 offers a Janus-like opportunity to look both backward and forward.

Looking Backward

In 1939, perhaps the best "guide" to the "real" New York City ever written was published. This seven-hundred-page book was one of the finer achievements of the Depression or, rather, of the Federal Writers' Project, which marshaled a crew of talented unemployed scholars and writers as well as skilled photographers, artists, and mapmakers, drawn from the Federal Art Project, to create the *WPA Guide to New York City*.⁴³ Each of the boroughs and its neighborhoods is mapped and described in loving detail, with attention to its historical development, its economy, its landmarks, and its relation to the rest of the city.

The "mental map" of the city projected by the *Guide* is, of course, grossly distorted, an error that persists to this day. Reflective of its economic power and its symbolic centrality, Manhattan, which by then housed less than a quarter of the city's population, consumed almost four hundred pages of text. Brooklyn warranted only seventy-five pages, even though it was home to some 37 percent of the population. The Bronx and Queens, accounting respectively for some 20 and 18 percent of the population, were each covered in about forty pages, and Staten Island, with only 2 percent of the city's residents, was accorded some twenty-five pages.⁴⁴ And yet it would be in these "outer boroughs" and their suburban extensions that the city of the future would be constructed, and where, with time, the most dramatic transformations would take place.

The image of the city projected in the *Guide* was also distorted by nostalgia and affection, which caused a certain blurring of harsh realities. Although New York was

still deep in the Depression when the book was written, the volume repeatedly boasts of New York's financial power, industrial might, and active ports, as well as the creativity of its art, theater, and music. A more dispassionate look would have revealed that deep deindustrialization was already taking place, even though the coming war would temporarily mask this decline in manufacture.

Looking Forward

The year 1939, however, was one of enormous optimism and hope, which perhaps accounts for the upbeat tone of the *Guide*. Chicago had the misfortune to open its "Century of Progress" Exhibition (commemorating one hundred years of the city's existence) in 1933, during the darkest days of the Depression, an eerie parallel to its 1893 fair, which had coincided with an earlier crash. In contrast, the United States seemed finally to be emerging from its ten-year slump when New York's greatest world's fair opened on April 30, 1939, amid great fanfare heralding the "dawning" of a new utopia.⁴⁵ Its theme was "Building the World of Tomorrow." That world was to be "urban," but in a different mold.

Today, cities, even "good" ones, have a bad reputation. It is therefore amazing to recognize how central "the city" was to the 1939 vision of tomorrow. Although many of the exhibits of the fair focused on science's contribution to new technologies and blatantly "pushed" new consumer products (both television and fax machines vied with pure foods and domestic equipment for attention), three of the most noteworthy and best-attended exhibits were Democracy, Futurama, and the panorama of Manhattan produced by Consolidated Edison.

Democracy, sponsored by the fair theme committee under architect Robert Kohn and designed by Henry Dreyfuss with the advice of Lewis Mumford and Clarence Stejn, was a vast model built inside the Perisphere itself, depicting an ideal metropolitan region of a million people.⁴⁶ For twenty-five cents, visitors were treated to a six-minute show in which they circulated through Utopia, as light changed from day to night and as music swelled from a "thousand-voiced chorus." The transition between cycles was marked by the dawning of a great day.⁴⁷ The *Guide* describes the show as follows:

Two enclosed escalators carry visitors . . . to Perisphere entrances. . . . Around the interior—twice as large as Radio City Music Hall—two "magic carpets" or revolving platforms bear passengers "two miles" above [ground for a bird's-eye view of the model]. . . .

Democracy, with a working population of 250,000, is represented as the business, administrative, and cultural core of a community of more than a million people. It lies on the banks of a river and has no residents. The population is housed in a rim of garden apartments, suburban areas, and in neighboring, semi-industrial towns. Green-belt areas circle the city and the towns, with intervening tracts of land devoted to intensive farming.⁴⁸

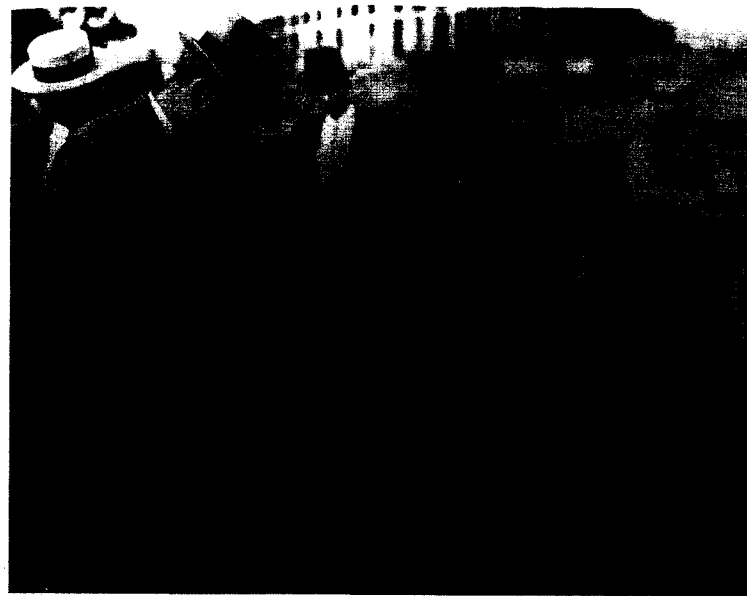


Figure 7.1. Uneasy bedfellows: (left to right) Robert Moses, Grover Whelan, and Fiorello La Guardia at the opening of the 1939 New York World's Fair. Courtesy of the La Guardia and Wagner Archives, La Guardia Community College/The City University of New York; used with permission.

It is a fantasy Ebenezer Howard and Patrick Geddes might have instantly recognized, but its neat arrangement failed to predict the form of suburbanization that would splinter metropolitan areas in the postwar period.

Democracy was second only to the most popular exhibit of the fair, Futurama, designed by Norman Bel Geddes and sponsored, not surprisingly, by General Motors.⁴⁹ This model offered the "technofix" for achieving Democracy's utopian goal (albeit not as extreme) of an ultimate disengagement between places of residence and work. Futurama, which promised to "transport you into 1960," was an automobile manufacturer's wish-dream. Wide highways equipped with overpasses and cloverleafs crisscrossed the continent, linking the cities and towns of America into a vast network capable of absorbing an infinite number of cars, preferably made by GM.

After visitors to the Futurama exhibit had completed their conveyor-belt moving-chair passage over an enormous model of the United States, alternating between wide angles and zoomed close-ups, each was given a blue-and-white button that read "I Have Seen the Future." Indeed, they had. If Democracy was the reincarnation of Ebenezer Howard, Futurama was the model behind Robert Moses's plans for New

York, which may be why it was a better predictor: highways and bridges were his "thing."⁵⁰ More wide-scale (outside the New York region) construction of elevated "superhighways" that would slice through the centers of existing cities or bypass them entirely would, however, have to await federal involvement in heavily subsidized highway construction in the 1950s.

Both Democracy and Futurama depicted "dead" landscapes bearing little resemblance to existing "living" cities. Devoid of slums, of older historic structures, and even of churches (which were added belatedly, when their absence was noticed), they lacked humanity, movement, and excitement. To my mind, the really exciting exhibit was the one mounted by Consolidated Edison, even though it was designed to "push" electricity:

The fairgoer who ever dreamed of seeing the whole New York panorama, from Coney Island to Westchester, could see it in the Con Ed Building. "The City of Light," a diorama long as a city block and high as a three-story building . . . was complete with Manhattan's towers and subways in action, and it was dramatized with sound effects . . . to simulate a twenty-four hour cycle in the city's life.⁵¹

Frankly, I still find that "real" city more interesting. And on the grounds that the best "predictor" is often the present, it was as accurate (and as inaccurate) as the more imaginative ones in the Perisphere and the General Motors exhibit.

THE FUTURE "ON HOLD FOR THE DURATION"

But what appeared to be a light at the end of the tunnel actually turned out to be a brief clear moment poised between one crisis and the next. Five months after the fair opened, Germany invaded Poland, and in June 1940 Paris fell. The fairgrounds closed briefly in early October to allow (male) workers to register for the draft, and on October 27 its doors closed in bankruptcy. If the future was not dead, it was at least postponed "for the duration." The brave new world of plenty and technology in the service of the consumer envisaged at the fair was put on a cold back burner; technology in the service of death took its place. At first, the United States only provided war matériel to Europe under Roosevelt's "lend-lease" program (not unrelated to recovery), but finally entered World War II at the end of 1941 as an active belligerent.

Although the economy of the New York metropolitan region never benefited from war-related demand as much as that of Chicago, which specialized in heavy armaments and ordnance, or that of Los Angeles, whose Pacific ports and burgeoning air industry were stimulated by hostilities in the Pacific, it, too, experienced an infusion—albeit only temporarily and more in transport than in heavy manufacturing.

The Port

Especially during the brief interim period of lend-lease, the combined ports of New York/New Jersey regained some of their former dominance over American shipping. Throughout the 1920s, an average of about twenty-five million long tons of bulk

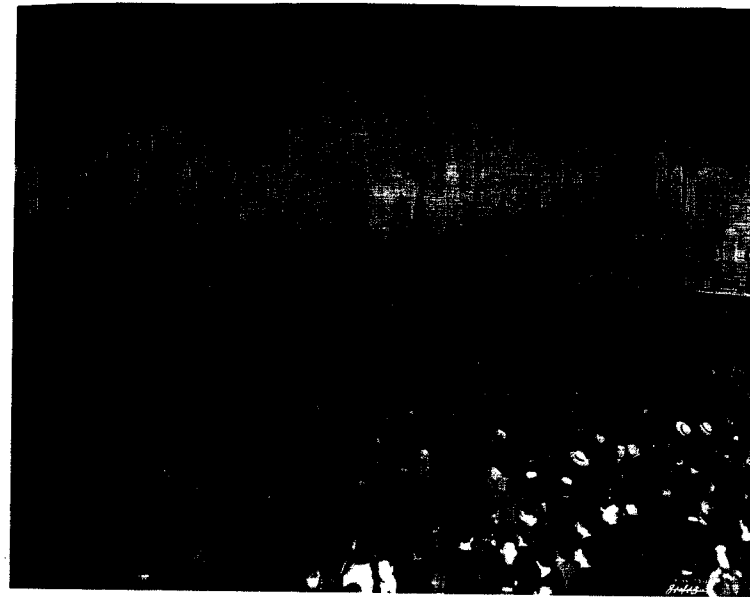


Figure 7.2. Consolidated Edison's City of Light. Courtesy of the Photo Archive Collection of Consolidated Edison; used with permission.

and general foreign trade goods per year had passed through those ports, which accounted for more than a quarter of all such tonnage through American ports. The worldwide depression caused a precipitous decline in the flow of absolute tons, but New York's share remained fairly constant. Thanks to the war, however, tonnage increased dramatically in the 1940s, cresting in 1943 and 1944 to about thirty million tons each year, when New York's share represented more than 40 percent of all American long tons. Although imports and exports rose steadily after the war, peaking in 1965, when the foreign tonnage handled by ports of the New York region reached fifty million, the region's share of the country's waterborne trade had already dropped back to only 15 percent. Pacific and Caribbean ports were becoming the real growth centers.

Fluctuations in the "competitive share" of general cargo were even more marked. The year 1941 was noteworthy because New York ports were then handling almost half of all U.S. general cargo, thus temporarily interrupting a gradual but steady decline from 40 percent in 1923 to only 17.5 percent by 1965. (What New York ports lost in oceangoing activity in later years, however, they would make up in air cargo; in the 1960s New York's airports accounted for half of all U.S. long tons of foreign air cargo.)⁵²

Physical Fragmentation in Port Facilities

The complexity of the region's harbor and its fragmentation among multiple government jurisdictions, however, meant that New York City itself would never reap the full financial benefits or multiplier effects of the region's ports. Indeed, as time went by, the center of the region's shipping activity was continually displaced, until it eventually abandoned the city proper altogether. But up through World War II, port activity was still concentrated in Manhattan and Brooklyn, which together accounted for about four-fifths of all traffic. Across the state line in New Jersey, Hoboken and Jersey City accounted for another 12 percent of traffic, whereas Port Newark handled only 2 percent. During the war, Brooklyn's facilities became more important, especially in the vicinity of its shipbuilding naval yards. By 1960, Brooklyn was handling some two-fifths of all traffic. It was not until containerization of cargo in the early 1960s that New York's assorted piers and terminals began to be abandoned in favor of the new modern facilities at Port Newark.⁵³

Governmental Integration

The physical and jurisdictional fragmentation of the region's ports called for administrative innovations in governmental structure, ones that would later serve as models for other multistate conurbations. Although the quasi-independent Port Authority of New York and New Jersey had been established by an interstate compact as early as 1921, its scale and functions expanded tremendously in the ensuing years. (Today, the Port Authority also has jurisdiction over the region's multiple airports.)

Robert Wood's remarkable contribution to the New York Regional Plan Association's studies in the late 1950s divided the more than fourteen hundred governmental units within the New York tristate metropolitan region into two major types: strictly "local" governments of cities and towns as well as special-purpose districts for schools, fire or water; and a newer system of "metropolitan giants"—at the center of which were the "Port of New York Authority" and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority.⁵⁴ Wood emphasizes how distinct the latter were from ordinary concepts of government, despite their incredible power to shape the metropolitan region:

In place of more or less fixed governmental boundaries, of formally developed public institutions, of long-established rules of procedure, of more or less clear-cut allocations of responsibilities, is a much more elusive political system. The public functions which seem most critical to the course of Regional development . . . are carried out . . . by unique organizational devices and *ad hoc* understandings, developed in a maze of divided responsibility and authority. The statutory basis for action is more complex; so is the involvement of different levels of government; so are the provisions with respect to financial support and the participation of local constituencies. And the pattern of activity . . . emerges without clear reference to the characteristics of the Region's population and economic activity. *The definitions of needs, of resources, and of appropriate action take on increasingly the coloration of the institutions involved.*⁵⁵

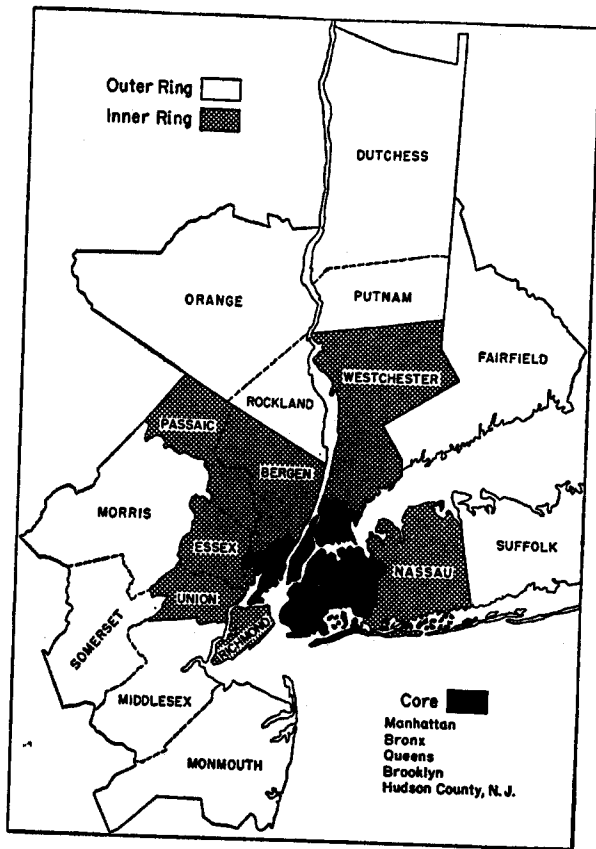
All of this is a polite way of saying that necessary as these quasi-independent empires are, given the obdurate reality of political fragmentation, each has tended over time to develop vested interests of its own, unaccountable to the people the authorities are intended to serve. Furthermore, their very insulation from ordinary politics offers unprecedented opportunities for unchecked, and possibly arbitrary, power. Much of the animosity many New Yorkers harbored toward Robert Moses was due to his unrivaled power to shape the transportation pattern of the region through control over the tolls from the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority.

Furthermore, the conspiratorial "theory" that appears in Robert Fitch's muckraker *The Assassination of New York* arises from his recognition of the power of the Port of New York Authority (and specific individuals in the power structure of city and state), which Fitch blames for the *intentional* destruction of the city's economic base.⁵⁶ Conspiratorial or not, the changing policies of the Port Authority and the alterations in the technology of waterborne transport had as much to do with the "migration" of port activities as did the geographic complexity of the harbors that made it possible. For example, as early as 1947 the Port Authority began to invest more heavily in Port Newark and in 1962 opened its first prototype container facilities there. After that, New York City harbors, including the extensive waterfront land in Brooklyn, essentially ceased their active roles as ports. By the end of the 1970s, New Jersey piers were handling seven times the amount of seaborne commerce as those on the New York side, and long-derelict lands along New York's waterfronts were being planned for "recycling."⁵⁷ But we return now to our chronological account.

Decentralization of Manufacturing

Although the maximum "benefits" from World War II were felt at New York's ports, manufacturing was not neglected. However, the newer industrial plants, including defense-related ones such as aircraft, were much more likely to be located on the peripheries of the built-up urban areas, not only because their larger scale required more space than was available closer in, but also because it was the systematic policy of the War Production Board to *decentralize* factories to protect them from wholesale bombing.⁵⁸ Thus the major airplane manufacturing plants were placed far out on Long Island, which put them beyond the taxing jurisdiction (and easy mass-transit access) of the city. This decentralization did not initiate a new trend, but rather intensified one that had been observed as early as Pratt's 1911 survey and was certainly becoming more evident in the 1930s.

The New York Metropolitan Region Study reprised some of these observations when it found that whereas New York City's share of manufacturing employment in older "declining" industries had remained relatively constant at about half of all manufacturing employment in the twelve-county New York industrial area between 1929 and 1939, its share of employment in the new and growing industries of the region declined from 73 to only 65 percent of manufacturing employment in the industrial area over the same period.⁵⁹ During the war, manufacturing employment



Map 7.1. The New York region in 1958, according to the New York Regional Plan Report. Source: Raymond Vernon, *Metropolis 1985: An Interpretation of the Findings of the New York Metropolitan Region Study*. Courtesy of the Regional Plan Association.

grew in all parts of the region, but by the mid-1950s New York City's share of old and new industrial employment in the region had dropped to about half of the total.⁶⁰ This relative decline was compounded by a drop in the New York region's share of all manufacturing jobs in the country. Deindustrialization in New York was already well under way before the recent "restructuring."

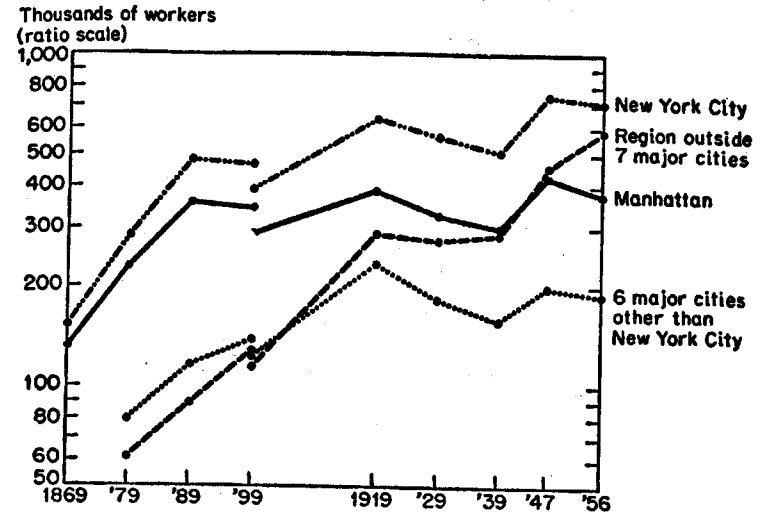


Figure 7.3. Manufacturing production workers by parts of the New York metropolitan region, 1869 to 1956. Raymond Vernon, *Metropolis 1985*. Courtesy of the New York Regional Plan Association.

RACE AND NEW YORK'S CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

Despite the facts that (1) a sizable migration of African Americans to New York City dated only back to World War I, (2) blacks suffered disproportionately during the Depression in comparison with whites, and (3) in comparison to Chicago or Los Angeles, New York's employment opportunities did not expand as markedly during World War II, steady migration to the city persisted, perhaps because of Harlem's reputation as America's largest and most vital "black city," and perhaps because of the city's reputation as the most politically liberal of all destinations.⁶¹ New York was the "promised land" to which another 145,000 blacks came between 1930 and 1940. By the latter year, some 6 percent of New York City's population of almost 7.5 million were African American, up from 3 percent a scant decade earlier. By then, some 90 percent of the state's black population lived inside the city limits. Although the close to four hundred city blocks that by then constituted Harlem (roughly between 110th and 155th Streets and stretching between Third and Amsterdam Avenues) held most of this population, there were secondary settlements in Brooklyn and, by wartime, in the Bronx as well.⁶²

Despite its small proportion, but perhaps because it was so concentrated, the black population had built up considerable political strength within the city government, which had a long history of sensitivity to new "ethnic" voting blocks. Even during the Depression, blacks in New York sought, and sometimes gained, more power through economic as well as political actions. Capeci notes:

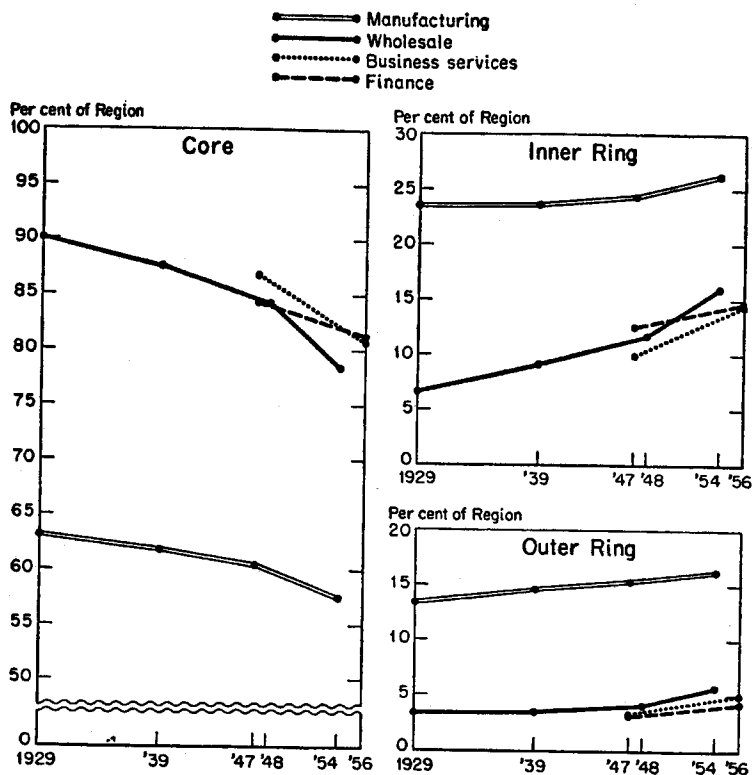


Figure 7.4. Employment distribution in manufacturing, wholesale trade, business services, and finance for the three main zones of the New York metropolitan region, 1929 to 1956.

Raymond Vernon, *Metropolis 1985*. Courtesy of the New York Regional Plan Association.

Economic boycotts, for example, were organized against businesses that refused to hire black personnel. Relief programs enacted after 1933 indicated concern. . . . Roosevelt included black Americans in his New Deal programs . . . and in New York, . . . Lehman and . . . La Guardia . . . [committed] state and municipal governments to the economic and civil rights of black residents.⁶³

And even though New York's war-induced labor shortage was modest in comparison to those of Chicago and Los Angeles, new opportunities for employment opened up for blacks and women, due partly to conscription and partly to a decline in foreign immigration.⁶⁴ But expectations rose faster than performance.

Racial Unrest in 1943

By the summer of 1943, racial tensions were boiling over in several American cities: in Mobile, in Los Angeles, and especially in Detroit, which in June experienced one of the bloodiest race riots ever. Because Detroit had heavy concentrations of war industries, it had attracted many black workers; a false rumor that whites were being assigned to a new public housing project intended for black war workers triggered an attack by whites (reinforced by police) on the black applicants who had pre-empted occupancy. But tensions were more general. They finally exploded over the weekend at Belle Isle recreational area and quickly spread throughout the city. For two days, whites attacked blacks caught outside their neighborhoods, and blacks retaliated by assaulting invading whites and destroying white-owned businesses in the ghetto.

[The] police exchanged continuous gunfire with black snipers on the ghetto fringes. . . . More than a hundred fires burned out of control as riot activity covered three-fourths of the city. Finally, federal troops entered the fray and restored order. . . . In the riot's wake, thirty-four lay dead—including twenty-five blacks, most of whom were killed by policemen—more than seven hundred were injured, and more than two million dollars' worth of property was destroyed.⁶⁵

Repercussions in New York

Some observers expected that New York, given its more "liberal" attitudes and laws, would be immune to the racial tensions developing elsewhere, but most of the precipitating grievances were not location specific. Even in wartime, unemployment rates remained high for New York blacks, who held only 1.3 percent of all defense jobs in the state.⁶⁶ And the irony that blacks, even as they were called upon to risk their lives for their country, were subjected to segregation and discrimination in the armed services was not lost on them. Thus, although the city took precautions to avoid a Detroit-type riot, setting up its by-then routine interracial committees, it failed.⁶⁷

A large-scale riot erupted in Harlem the night of August 1 and lasted twelve hours, but New York's response during the outburst was quite different from the responses in other cities. The immediate casus belli was an altercation between a white policeman and a (female) client at a local hotel. An uninvolved black soldier intervened; he allegedly shoved the policeman, who then fired at him as he escaped. False rumors spread that a white policeman had killed a black soldier, and within hours fires were set, windows were broken, and stores looted in an area that, although it centered on commercial 125th Street (the "main drag"), extended all the way from 110th to 145th Streets along Seventh, Eighth, and Lenox Avenues.⁶⁸ When the curfew the city imposed on the quarter was finally lifted some two weeks later, the toll was six African Americans dead, hundreds injured, more than 550 blacks arrested (mostly for looting or receiving "stolen goods"), and property damage estimated at two million dollars.⁶⁹

Space Matters

Social scientists engaged in the growth industry of analyzing American racial tensions single out the 1943 Harlem riot as the paradigmatic event presaging the series of racial outbreaks that would wrack American cities in the second half of the 1960s. They talk about a "transition from the communal to the commodity type of riot," suggesting that "it was the Harlem upheavals of 1935 . . . and [even more so] 1943 that ushered in Watts, Newark, and the second Detroit."⁷⁰ Later, in the 1960s, naive observers were to question why *they* were destroying *their own communities*. Leaving aside the symptomatic "they" and an implied "us," this question ignores the spatial elements that allowed police to follow a control strategy of cordoning off "riot" areas, keeping whites out and making it impossible for blacks to choose alternative targets.⁷¹

By 1943, Harlem was so large, racially homogeneous, and densely settled that during the hostilities only armed police, among the white population, dared to enter. Soon after the first incidents, La Guardia ordered all police on full duty and by 1:30 a.m. had deployed five thousand of them to Harlem. (He simultaneously ordered the closing of all bars and liquor stores in the area.) In time, the riot zone was sealed off. (As had happened during the 1935 riot, even the exits to relevant subway stops were closed.)

Traffic was diverted around the entire area of West Harlem. . . . As rioters burned themselves out on the morning of August 2, the Mayor moved to prevent a recurrence. . . . [His radio broadcast] carefully [avoided] any condemnation of the ghetto's citizenry as a whole [and described] measures taken to restore full order. Traffic would be limited and nonresidents denied entrance to Harlem. Liquor stores would be closed indefinitely.⁷²

Volunteers, mostly black, helped the city and military police to restore order, and the eight thousand New York State guardsmen who were on standby at city armories never had to be deployed. Emergency medical services operated and food was distributed. Only one day after the riot, 90 percent of Harlem's milk deliveries had been restored, pushcarts and emergency shops were operating, and vendors were allowed to enter. Gradually, the curfew and traffic bans were lifted, stores began to reopen (even the liquor stores), and by August 14, the police force in Harlem "returned to normal size."⁷³

New Yorkers tended to blame the uprising on "hoodlums" and congratulated themselves on how well the city had weathered the crisis.⁷⁴ But as Capeci notes, although this may have "eased their consciences," it also caused them to "*disregard the reasons for ghetto resentment and the need for measures to improve the living conditions of black residents.*"⁷⁵ There was a growing discrepancy between what blacks were expected to contribute to the war effort and how little they benefited from it. Segregation in the military, exclusion from defense jobs, and an inflationary spiral in rents and prices (which blacks blamed on white landlords and shopkeepers) were a few of the more obvious underlying grievances. A survey conducted in Harlem by Kenneth Clark just

after the riot found that at least a third of those queried thought the riot might trigger some positive results; perhaps they were right.

Up to that time, New York had not imposed rent controls or enforced price regulations, even though other cities had already done so.

Within one week of the riot, the Office of Price Administration announced plans to open an office in Harlem. . . . In addition, the OPA announced in mid-September "that a special study was being made of the possibility of establishing rent control in New York City." . . . *Federal rent control was . . . implemented before the year ended, making New York the last major city to be regulated.*⁷⁶

And as had happened after the 1935 riot, additional public housing was promised on a nondiscriminatory basis. Delivery had to await the end of the war, however. So, too, did the delivery of the World's Fair's (white) "suburban dream," although the achievement of both simply widened the fissure between the races.

VISIONS OF THE FAIR MATERIALIZE IN THE POSTWAR PERIOD

It was not until after the war that the visions of the suburban utopia projected at the fair materialized, but whether utopia represented "hope" or "disaster" remained untested. In any case, the decade and a half after the war's end was a period of population churning and very high mobility.

White Flight: An Only Incomplete Diagnosis of New York's Postwar Suburbanization

Suburbanization, as a general phenomenon, was almost as old as urbanization in the United States, as Kenneth Jackson has stressed in his history of early suburban developments.⁷⁷ And the massive expansion of urban areas into the suburbs during the immediate postwar era was too general a phenomenon to be attributed simply to white flight. For one thing, it occurred in places that had few or no "minority" populations, as well as in cities with growing numbers of "people of color"; indeed, it was so pervasive that no single cause can be expected to account for it.

Among the multiple causes were the cessation of housing construction during wartime, which created a pent-up demand for additional units once demobilization occurred; resumption of marriages and births that had been delayed by military service, which generated a pent-up demand not only for wedding gowns and bassinets but also for "starter" housing units to accommodate the new families; and federal housing policies that facilitated the purchase of single-family homes by returning veterans who sought to achieve the ideals of suburban life (formerly restricted to the upper middle class) that had been portrayed in the media and partially popularized in the world's fairs of Depression days. And all this was facilitated by the "revolution" in transportation foreseen in Futurama—not only commuter rails stretching out into the countryside, but government-subsidized freeways and limited-access highways that opened large parts of formerly peripheral lands to urban development.

Robert Moses's Highways

Even before the Depression, New York had innovated in the construction of limited-access highways to facilitate suburban growth: the Long Island Motor Parkway (1906–11, the world's first), the sixteen-mile Bronx River Parkway (1906–23); the Hutchinson River Parkway (1928), and the Saw Mill Parkway (1929). Using state legislation that Moses had drafted in 1924, his parkways made it possible for commuters to reach their Manhattan offices from twenty to thirty miles away. "There was an immediate effect: the population of Westchester and Nassau Counties, served by the new roads, increased by 350,000 during the 1920s. But the full implications would emerge only in the suburban building boom after World War Two."⁷⁸

Filling the Land with Single-Family Houses

In the postwar period the country as a whole experienced a remarkable building boom. Annual single-family home starts, beginning from a level of about 114,000 in 1944, approached a million in 1946, climbed to almost 1.2 million by 1948, and peaked in 1950 at an all-time high of 1.7 million.⁷⁹ Enterprising "community builders" emerged from humble beginnings to take advantage of these pent-up needs and a chance to reap enormous profits, leveraging small (or totally risk-free) investments into fortunes by the clever manipulation of government and banking incentives designed to encourage mass construction.⁸⁰ In all fairness, however, they also innovated in building techniques, cutting costs by applying "factory" methods to the assembly of uniform parts on extensive sites that had been bulldozed of all obstructions.

Aesthetes may have been appalled by these "cookie-cutter" developments, and social snobs may have dismissed them derisively, assuming that mass-produced houses would mass-produce homogeneous inhabitants, but in actual fact, it was a remarkable quantitative if not qualitative achievement—to build so much housing so quickly. The sheer magnitude of these operations created their own ancillary needs for community facilities of all kinds—public and private. The multiplier effects were impressively large.

Levittown, New York: Everyone's Quintessential Case

Levittown, the community whose name came to symbolize this entire genre, was referred to in an emergency survey made by the School of Education of New York University in 1954 as a "Community without Precedent."⁸¹ This is not an inaccurate description, for when six thousand "basic" single-family houses are suddenly constructed on more than six square miles of farmland that formerly "housed" potatoes, *everything* else that goes with life—schools, shops, community facilities, health services, not to mention jobs—also has to be provided in a hurry.

The model established by the Levitts was replicated at the suburban fringes of every large city. Suburbia had begun to be "the American Way of Life" (more than half of the U.S. population now lives in suburbs). The repercussions on the central cities

were equally significant, although they certainly did not attract the encomiums reserved for the new areas at their edges.

THE DARKENING OF THE OUTER BOROUGHES

If young middle- and working-class whites "decentralized" from the Manhattan and outer-borough neighborhoods where they had grown up to raw suburbia and eventually to "exurbia," a similar decentralization, but within the city limits, was also occurring among minorities who had previously been concentrated so heavily in the northern part of Manhattan. But because the net growth rates for minorities within the city limits exceeded those for whites, there was a gradual shift in their proportions between 1940 and 1960.

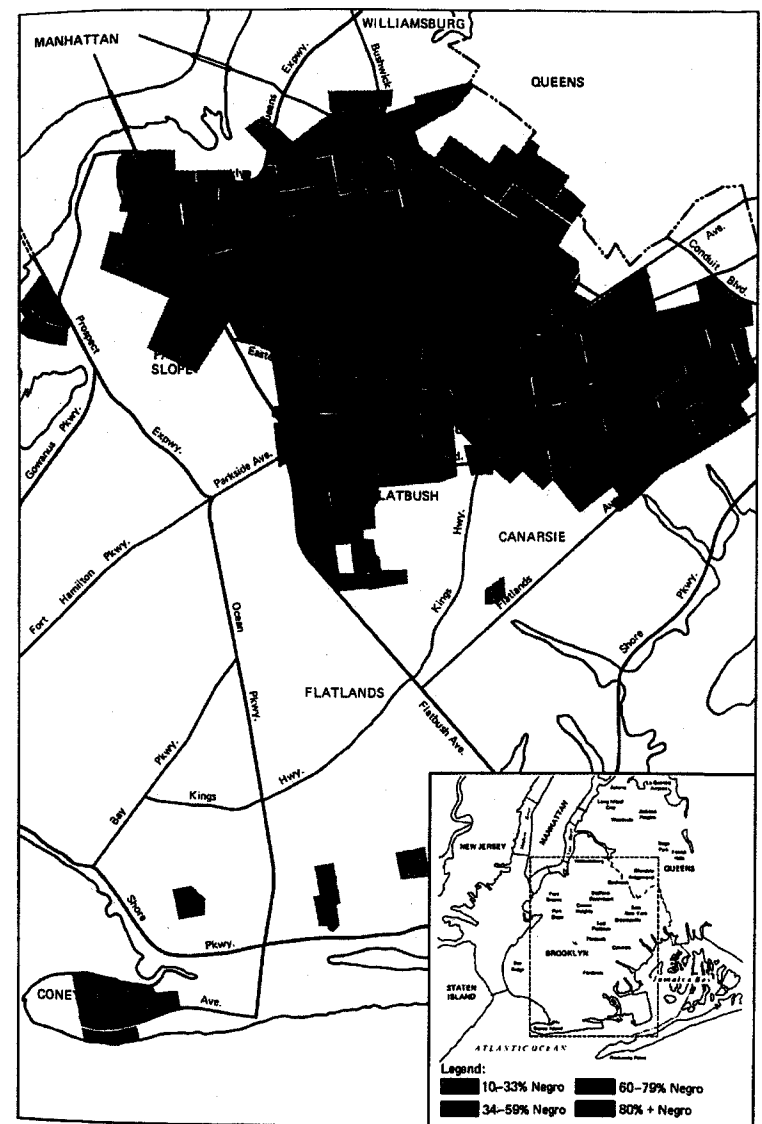
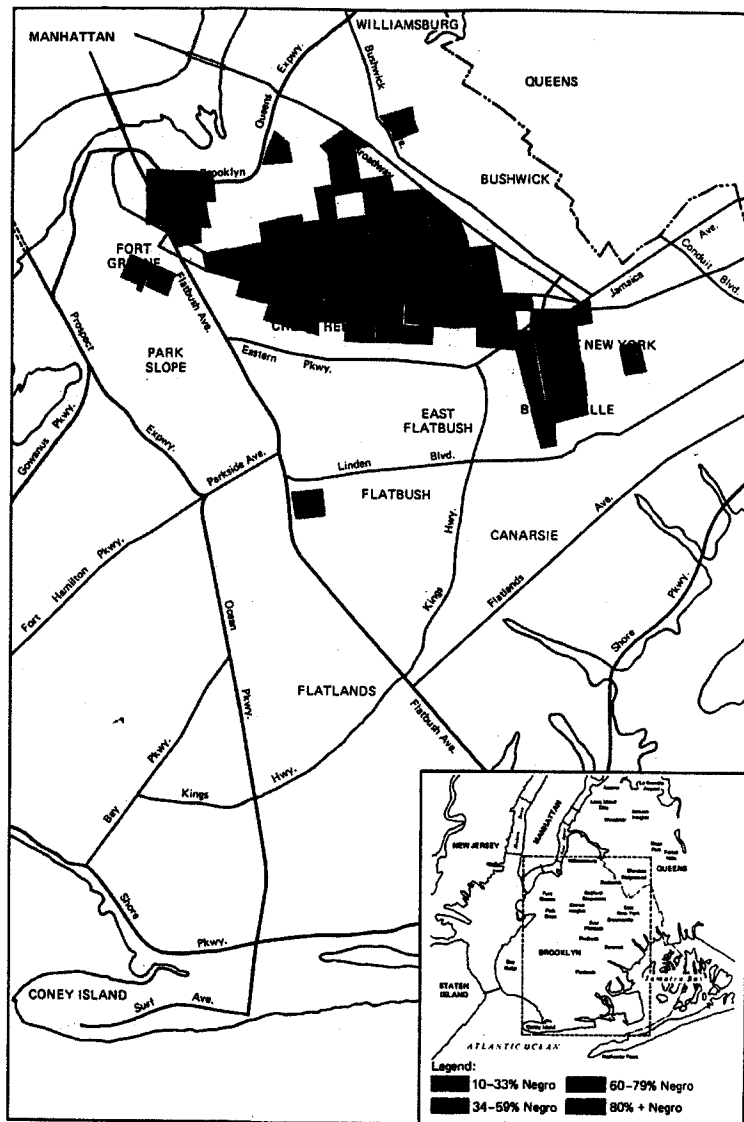
As late as 1940, 94 percent of the city's total population was classified as "white." Thanks to Harlem's size and, to a lesser extent, such enclaves as Chinatown and other small "minority" pockets, Manhattan was the only borough with a significant proportion of "nonwhites" (17 percent). In contrast, the outer boroughs, while containing large numbers of "ethnics" (mostly Jews, Italians, and Irish),⁸² were overwhelmingly white: 95 percent in Brooklyn, 98 percent in the Bronx and on Staten Island, and 97 percent in Queens. And yet it was from those boroughs that the majority of suburban settlers were recruited. The vacancies thus created opened up housing opportunities in the outer boroughs and allowed for partial (and very spotty) decentralization of Manhattan's overcrowded black population.

But because of additional migration to the city by nonwhites and Puerto Ricans, the proportion of non-Hispanic whites decreased throughout the city. By 1960, 85 percent of New Yorkers were still classified as "white." The highest proportion of nonwhites was found in Manhattan (with 26 percent), followed by Brooklyn (with 15 percent). Staten Island, Queens, and the Bronx still remained overwhelmingly white (with 95, 91, and 88 percent, respectively).⁸³

Decentralization of minorities, however, was not a random affair. Rather, certain subareas within Brooklyn and the Bronx changed "complexion" in radical fashion, while leaving other parts of the boroughs almost untouched. The role that public housing played in "opening up" the boroughs increased the "spottiness" of this distribution (see below). Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant provides a relevant example, in part because it was one of the first outer-borough zones to contain a significant proportion of blacks, and in part because it became the setting for one of the first "new round" urban uprisings that exploded in hundreds of American cities in the later years of the 1960s. Although the 1965 Los Angeles Watts riot is sometimes considered the opening round in this later sequence, events in Harlem and "Bed-Stuy" (as well as in New Jersey) actually preceded it by a year.⁸⁴

Bedford-Stuyvesant

Bedford-Stuyvesant lies at dead center of the borough of Brooklyn and also at the geographic center of the five boroughs.⁸⁵ Although its historic transformation into a



Maps 7.2 and 7.3. The thickening of the Bedford-Stuyvesant ghetto, 1950 to 1970. Source for both maps is Harold X. Connolly, *A Ghetto Grows in Brooklyn*; used with permission of New York University Press.

ghetto is remarkably parallel to Harlem's, it is important to recognize that blacks had been a presence in Brooklyn (King's County) from the very beginning, albeit as a minority and mostly as slaves. As early as 1663, when the village of Bedford was still an agricultural/trading way station for Dutch farmers, many of its residents owned a slave or two. By the end of the seventeenth century, 15 percent of the entire population of King's County were black slaves, and more than 40 percent of the freeholders owned at least one slave. From the middle of the eighteenth century to 1790, one-third of Brooklyn's population consisted of black slaves, the highest proportion of any county in the region. Early in the nineteenth century, they had been joined by some free black farmers.⁸⁶

Gradually, however, as farms began to be replaced by residential developments, the number of whites in Bedford-Stuyvesant began to increase rapidly. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, once transportation lines to Manhattan had improved, the area began to be transformed into a fashionable zone of two-story houses for middle- and upper-class white buyers. As was happening in Harlem at the same time, real estate speculation was rampant.

With the influx of the upper-class, and the formation of the fashionable "Stuyvesant Heights" section and its mansions of the wealthy, came servants. And the servants needed places to live. They formed the first [*sic*] Negro community in the Bedford area. . . . The [cycle of] collapse of Stuyvesant Heights society came during the early 1920's when prices soared, and then, with the Depression, many of the lovely brownstones became too much for their original owners to maintain. They moved out and the prices dropped until the houses were within reach of Negro families.⁸⁷

Houses were subdivided, and blockbusting "developed into a fine art." As happened elsewhere (e.g., on Prairie Avenue, south of Chicago's Loop), panic selling preceded the major black influx into this "in-town" leafy suburb. Gradually, the first nucleus along Fulton and Atlantic Avenues expanded. By 1940, the area around Pratt Institute was becoming predominantly black, and ten years later nonwhites constituted more than half the population of an expanded Bed-Stuy. By 1970, most whites had left the surrounding area for points farther out in Brooklyn, in Queens, or on Long Island. By then, more than four-fifths of the population in a greatly enlarged "ghetto" were either African American (many of them of Caribbean origin) or Puerto Rican.⁸⁸

Confounding a simple model of "white flight," however, was the role that slum clearance and public housing played in changing the racial composition of Brooklyn. Even though, unlike in Chicago, early public housing in the borough was not concentrated within the ghetto itself, some of the earliest projects were in or near Bedford-Stuyvesant, which may have speeded up the racial transition. In the 1940s and 1950s, large projects were built in Brownsville, Fort Greene, and Crown Heights, all districts into which the ghetto would expand. By 1964, nine projects with almost fifty thousand (mostly black) residents were located in the Bedford-Stuyvesant ghetto, where the total population by then had climbed to an estimated four hundred thousand.⁸⁹ (See Maps 7.2 and 7.3.)

The Thickening of the Sparsely-Settled Outer Boroughs

Although the stereotypical narrative speaks in such metaphorical terms as "white flight," "racial succession," and "neighborhood burnout/blowout" (especially with reference to the South Bronx and Bedford-Stuyvesant, where this sequence is not totally inaccurate), its major flaws are its failure to acknowledge that New York City's "suburban" expansion in the immediate post-World War II period took place not just in outlying villages or newly constructed subdivisions or even whole towns such as Levittown, beyond the city limits, but in the outer boroughs themselves, where vacant land was still available. The white population leaving Brooklyn may have left more space for the expanding number of blacks and Puerto Ricans, but whites were as likely to move to newer developments within the city limits as to the suburbs. This was particularly true in Queens and the Bronx, where white, black, and Puerto Rican populations all increased between 1950 and 1960.

But by the 1960s this began to change. Toward the end of that decade it was evident that the demographic trajectories of the three groups had split apart. Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn had begun to experience sharp declines in their white populations, compensated for by substantial increases in the number of their black, Hispanic, and Asian populations. The transition in Queens took another decade, but eventually it also joined this trend. In 1930, only a million persons lived in Queens, most of them white. The population in that borough rose steadily to peak at almost two million by 1970, of whom only some 15 percent were classified as "nonwhite." In the decade of the 1970s, however, the total population of Queens declined by about 5 percent, the net effect of a loss of some 344,000 white residents (a decline of about 20 percent) and an increase of 38 percent of its nonwhite population.⁹⁰ Between 1930 and 1990, the number of black residents increased from few than 19,000 to almost 421,000, and "others" increased from 877 to approach 400,000, but white flight accounted for less of the change than one might have imagined. Although Queens is perhaps the most extreme case, many of these observations apply also to Brooklyn and the Bronx. Outlying portions of those two boroughs also experienced not so much population succession as additional growth, as blacks and others inherited older zones and whites relocated in newer developments within the borough.

The Characteristics of "Invading" Minorities

Not only is "white flight" an inaccurate and partial description, but racial succession in New York in the 1960s also deviated somewhat from the usual stereotype of an invading underclass spearheaded by public housing. One of the only studies to examine racial changes in New York City during the 1960s found a far more complex pattern. Ronald Denowitz studied the socioeconomic status of blacks who moved into previously white neighborhoods in New York City and found a number of fairly distinctive patterns, depending upon the *location* of the neighborhoods with respect to existing zones of minority concentration, the *density* of settlement (which varied by borough),

and the *newness* of the housing stock. In high-density areas there were at least three different patterns of racial succession.

One was found in tracts near areas of black concentration . . . led by younger adult renters with above average educational attainments but low incomes. . . . A second pattern characterized white residential sections . . . distant from black ghettos—in which one-third of all housing was in single and two-family structures. Invasion was led by middle-age adult home buyers with high incomes and education. Although immigrant blacks were higher in SES than most white residents, their entry tended to precipitate substantial out-movements by white renters. . . . A third pattern occurred in white residential sections with rather large numbers of recently constructed housing units. Initial black populations [were predominantly] . . . middle-age adults with above average incomes and education. [At least during the ten-year period studied, there was] relative stability in racial composition and above average increases in black income levels.⁹¹

Denowitz identifies a “tipping point” at about 25 percent, but questions “whether the specific patterns of succession found in New York are generalizable to other cities.”⁹² I will argue that they are not—especially with reference to Chicago.

AMBIGUITIES OF RACE AND ETHNICITY

In the above discussion, I have used the distinction between “black” and “white” as if it had a transparent and firm meaning. Race, however, is a highly ambiguous category, telling us more about the values of the society that defines and uses the concept than about any abstract characteristic possessed by individuals. My previous generalizations are confounded in New York by two additional factors: first, the wide range of variation within New York’s black community itself, and second, the existence of racial “infill” groups—constituted chiefly by Puerto Ricans, who, before the “new immigration” that began in the mid-1960s, constituted New York’s dominant “Hispanic” group.⁹³ (Later variations in the Hispanic category are explored in Part IV.)

Freed Slaves and the Caribbean Influx

Given New York’s demographic diversity, race is an especially inaccurate concept having very limited statistical and analytic value. Just as “whites” are crisscrossed by dimensions of national ancestry, religion, time of arrival, class, and political power, not to mention linguistic and phenotypical characteristics,⁹⁴ so New York’s “black” population challenges the boundaries of simple dichotomies. Contrary to the situation in Chicago, for example, where poverty, rural southern origin, and dark-skinned appearance are characteristics that have tended to go together, this congruence between phenotype and nativity has broken down in New York.

A sizable minority of New York’s “blacks” are of “foreign” origin (largely from Jamaica, but also from other Caribbean islands);⁹⁵ indeed, many of the political leaders and entrepreneurial elite of New York’s black community have been drawn from

this subgroup. Second, native “blacks” have varied widely by superficial appearance. Especially after the Civil War, the freedom of the city drew ambitious newcomers of mixed parentage, some of whom “passed” while others, of equally indeterminate appearance, remained identified with the black community.⁹⁶ New York “blacks,” like “whites,” have varied by class, ethnicity, accent, ancestry, and, increasingly, by language (the largest group of recent immigrants to New York is made up of Spanish speakers from the Dominican Republic).

Puerto Ricans Arrive: The Formation of East Harlem

The second-largest “minority” in New York from the 1950s onward consisted of persons of Puerto Rican birth or descent. In this highly mixed population, “race” (i.e., skin shade) was an even less relevant marker, and “immigration status” was not a desideratum. The island had first become a U.S. “colony” as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898, and in 1917 the Jones Act conferred the rights of “partial” citizenship upon its residents. Migration between the island and the mainland was freed of legal routines and restrictions, and Puerto Ricans’ eligibility for welfare, public housing, and other social services was the same as that enjoyed by “full” citizens.

Nevertheless, the number of Puerto Ricans in the city remained tiny until mass migration began in the 1950s, spurred by economic involution on the island and facilitated by the introduction of inexpensive direct air travel, which, although it actually began in 1945, became much cheaper in the 1950s. The mechanisms of labor placement that were put into operation during World War II further assisted in “steering” Puerto Ricans into the city and into industrial jobs. As late as 1940, Puerto Ricans in New York City numbered only some sixty thousand, less than 1 percent of the total. The 1950s, in contrast, were the years of peak migration to New York. By 1960, Puerto Ricans’ numbers exceeded eight hundred thousand, or about one-tenth of the city’s population.⁹⁷ The main concentration of Puerto Ricans at that time was in East Harlem (La Guardia’s old congressional district), which by then was being referred to as “El Barrio,” although it was not exclusively Puerto Rican, nor did all Puerto Ricans live there by any means.

To what extent did the categories “black” and “white” overlap with this growing “Hispanic” group? Nowhere is the issue of “race” so ambiguous as among migrants from the island, whose “racial” stock has long been mixed. Glazer and Moynihan capture the changing “social definitions” of racial identity within this group:

While in their own minds a man’s color meant something very different from what it meant to white Americans, [Puerto Rican migrants] knew very well its meaning for Americans. About one-fifth of the Puerto Rican group in New York in the thirties was listed in census returns as Negro (a slightly smaller proportion than were then listed as colored in the Puerto Rican census). . . .

. . . [By 1940, this had dropped in East Harlem] to about 11 per cent. . . . By 1960 the proportion of colored among the New York Puerto Ricans was only 4 per cent.⁹⁸

This is stunning information. Given that there is no reason to believe that suddenly there was a highly selective out-migration of light-skinned "Spaniards" from the island, one can only surmise that the progressive "whitening" of New York's Puerto Ricans was a social act.

Given this, one must question all figures that "divide" borough populations into dichotomies of white and black.⁹⁹ Such figures both overestimate and underestimate the amount of integration that was occurring in various parts of the city. This is particularly true within New York's public housing projects, where Puerto Ricans (who may report themselves as "white" or, increasingly, as "other") and African Americans now make up the largest proportion of tenants.

The "Disembourgeoisement" of the Puerto Rican Community

Distancing themselves from the presumed low status of blacks, however, did not protect most Puerto Ricans from eventually sinking to a socioeconomic status even below that of African Americans. They were to be trapped between the "rock" of deindustrialization and the "hard place" of newer (Asian) immigrants willing to work for even lower wages. In the early 1950s, Puerto Rican migrants "increasingly found jobs in the labor market niche of center-city blue-collar positions left behind by the exodus of workers to new industries in the suburbs or by the occupational advancement [or aging] of existing workers. Puerto Rican migration was viewed as crucial to salvaging New York industries that depended on inexpensive labor, such as the garment industry."¹⁰⁰ Labor force participation rates for Puerto Rican men and women, mostly in the category of "operatives," were higher than those of other groups, and dual- (or triple-) income families seemed on their way to economic security.

However, the situation began to unravel soon afterward, as such jobs increasingly disappeared from the New York economy and as circular migration stirred the pot of tenuous family arrangements, often breaking them apart. Female-headed households multiplied, becoming increasingly dependent upon public housing and Aid to Families with Dependent Children, two programs for which, because of their citizenship status, they enjoyed immediate eligibility. By the mid-1960s, the sex ratios within the Puerto Rican community were tipped heavily toward women, and the rates of dependency for the Puerto Rican community as a whole exceeded those of any other subgroup in the city.¹⁰¹

The plight of Puerto Ricans was further intensified by programs that were intended to enhance living conditions for inner-city residents. At the peak of urban renewal and urban redevelopment activities, the city engaged in large-scale slum clearance concentrated in zones where the most deteriorated tenements were to be found. Because these were also zones in which Puerto Rican communities had formed, this entailed considerable shifting from one slum to another. If in Chicago urban renewal became known sarcastically as "Negro removal" and in Los Angeles "Chicano removal," in New York the common phrase for it was "Puerto Rican removal."

East Harlem became a prime target for slum clearance, which was not an illogical choice, given that, along with the Lower East Side (which also housed a sizable

Puerto Rican community), it contained an enormous concentration of badly deteriorated tenements. Kessner called it perhaps the worst slum in the city:

Here [in East Harlem] stood the ugly offscourings of American industrialism, grimy factories amidst junkyards, warehouses, used-car lots, and repair shops. Coal yards and oil storage depots belching gaseous pollutants tinted the sky an ashen gray and raw sewage fouled the river. A transient population filled East Harlem's bars and whorehouses, while its residents occupied seedy tenements and deteriorating housing.¹⁰²

Once the Jews and Italians, who had previously predominated in the area when La Guardia had represented it, died or deserted, the Puerto Ricans inherited it. And once their quarters were razed and public housing projects were put up, many eventually moved back in.¹⁰³ And although the original inhabitants were mostly non-Hispanic, by 1980 some 80 percent of project residents were Spanish-speaking, largely Puerto Rican. A similar transformation occurred in Red Hook Houses in Brooklyn, which changed from reputedly Jewish white occupancy when it was built to Puerto Rican preponderance today.

Public Housing Changes Its Functions

As earlier noted, unemployed persons and single mothers were originally disqualified from obtaining entry to public housing, admission was highly selective, and during the war priority was given to war workers. Over time, however, these rules were changed, and despite efforts by the NYCHA to retain non-Hispanic whites and to "integrate" housing on a stable basis, gradually many of the projects became almost entirely black and/or Hispanic, as working-class whites moved out. Because public housing projects had been constructed in all boroughs, and sometimes on open land rather than slum-cleared sites, minority populations were introduced into many formerly white parts of the outer boroughs, albeit in isolated pockets. It *may* be this that prompted the erroneous quip in Meyerson and Banfield's otherwise superb analysis of race and public housing in Chicago that it is possible for public housing "to ruin" a city, which they imply happened in New York.¹⁰⁴

NEW YORK TAKES FULL ADVANTAGE OF URBAN RENEWAL/PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE 1950S

In marked contrast to Los Angeles or even Chicago, New York City took full advantage of all federal assistance programs designed to clear slums and build subsidized housing. Whereas in the 1930s and 1940s, these programs were government initiated, built, and managed, the 1949 urban renewal law brought private entrepreneurs into the act, and later the programs shifted to rehabilitation and rent subsidies. Whatever the program, New York participated with alacrity. The results have been impressive.

According to a report issued by the New York City Housing Authority, by 1989 the Authority was supervising 316 operating projects containing a total of 179,045

dwelling units serving a population of 472,088 in 2,787 buildings, not including FHA-recovered and -resold houses.¹⁰⁵ The overwhelming majority of these projects had been federally funded (291 out of 316, containing 157,040 out of the 179,045 dwelling units and serving 412,702 out of the total resident population of 472,088). In contrast, the city had sponsored only seven projects serving some 20,000 occupants, and the state had sponsored eighteen projects serving fewer than 39,000 occupants.¹⁰⁶ Clearly, federal funding was absolutely essential to New York.

An examination of the dates of completion of the 316 projects reveals that New York City has been providing public housing since 1936, that projects have been scattered throughout all the boroughs, but that the pace of construction has closely paralleled expansions and then contractions in federal funding. By counting the number of units added in each decade and calculating the "average" size of projects by decade, one can learn much. Before 1940, New York had built only four projects—First Houses, with only 123 apartments; Harlem Houses, with 577 units; Red Hook, with 2,545 units; and Williamsburg Houses, with 1,630 apartments—yielding a total of 4,875 units. During the 1940s, close to 25,000 dwelling units were added to the city's public housing supply. Almost all of the more than twenty projects completed in that decade contained between 1,000 and 2,000 units each. Only four had fewer than 1,000 apartments, and one, in Queens, had more than 3,000.

This pattern of building large high-rise projects (usually Le Corbusier-type towers that left large common green space) persisted into the 1950s. In that decade, when Los Angeles discontinued its modest public housing program and Chicago's program ground to a temporary halt when it ran aground on the rock of racial integration, New York City added the largest number of public housing units ever—more than 75,000 subsidized apartments in some seventy new projects scattered throughout the five boroughs. As had been the case in the preceding decade, these projects were large in scale (the average number of dwelling units per project was more than a thousand) and high-rise. Many were on the sites of cleared tenement areas and were located on "prime" land.¹⁰⁷

Given the growing opposition of planners and sociologists to large-scale projects, the 1960s witnessed a general decrease in the average size of the projects. In that decade, only 42,500 dwelling units were added, scattered among some seventy-eight projects. By then it was already becoming more difficult to obtain federal funds for public housing. In any case, the 1950s and 1960s represented the heyday of public housing: some 43 percent of all NYCHA units were built in the 1950s and another 24 percent in the 1960s. Retrenchments at the federal level subsequently and drastically curtailed New York's capacity to provide subsidized housing. During the decade of the 1970s, fewer than 18,500 units were added (accounting for about 10.5 percent of the supply), but these tended to be in much smaller units (some infill, some rehabilitated buildings, some new state-supported construction), distributed among close to eighty separate projects. And in the 1980s (up to January 1989 only, the date of the report's publication), some sixty additional projects were completed, but these yielded fewer than 10,000 total units—mostly in small turnkey or rehab projects, and deriving an increasing share of funds from New York State. The public housing

cycle in New York was coming to an end. Thus the recent decline in public housing construction has been due not to local opposition, but to the disappearance of sources of funds.

But the very act of massing so much public housing, albeit in various boroughs, had two unanticipated consequences: first, it triggered heightened white flight, and second, like Marx's thesis about how the aggregation of workers in large factories inadvertently contributed to the growth of class consciousness, the massing of large numbers of impoverished families in housing projects created potentially explosive conditions for rebellion.

NEW YORK TOUCHES OFF THE RACIAL CONFLICTS OF THE MID-1960S

Despite the construction of massive amounts of subsidized housing on a nondiscriminatory basis, the existence of a long-standing and vigorous set of institutions in the mayor's office intended to defuse racial tensions and to "empower" minority leaders, and a tradition of appointing blacks to higher offices and to civil service positions, New York City was not immune to the rising national racial tensions of the 1960s. But the manifestation that did occur, beginning on July 15, 1964, tells us much about the changes that had taken place in the racial distribution of population in the city between 1943 and then.¹⁰⁸

The trigger was "typical," in this instance the shooting in Manhattan of a fifteen-year-old black boy by a white off-duty policeman. The incident had escalated from an altercation between some kids "on break" and the janitor of one of the nearby buildings into a pitched battle—between hundreds of other students who saw the dead boy and the seventy-five police reinforcements who had been called in to quell the riot.¹⁰⁹ The spark

fell into Harlem and, with fire-tending, intentional or unintentional, flamed into the Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant [Brooklyn] riots of 1964. . . . For six nights, mobs roamed the streets of the two boroughs. As many as 4,000 New Yorkers dedicated themselves to attacks on police, vandalism, and looting of stores. When it was all over, police counted 1 rioter dead, 118 injured, and 465 men and women arrested. . . . [The 1964 New York riots] can be said to have caused the riots that plagued other cities in succeeding weeks, because those riots were patterned on the ones touched off in New York.¹¹⁰

The well-organized civil rights movement distinguished this riot from that of 1943, when black leadership had joined the city "establishment" to cool things out. This time the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized picketing of the school the next day to protest the violence and demonstrate for the establishment of a civilian review board to discipline the police, and at the end of the march, "teen-agers gathered around television cameras and told the reporters how angry they were."¹¹¹ This anger was manifest in Harlem during the next few days, peaking on Saturday, July 18, a particularly hot day.¹¹² It was certainly bloody. "Louis Smith, a CORE field secretary who said he was just back from Mississippi, was at Harlem Hospital that

night and was upset by what he saw. "This is worse than anything I ever saw in Mississippi," he said.¹¹³ The scene the next morning was sobering. There were

broken windows, ransacked stores; streets littered with broken glass, rubbish, and empty cartridges; crowds of sullen Negroes; and tired policemen, semimilitary in their helmets. Most startling were the gates which merchants had put across their windows the night before and which now snaked crazily across the sidewalks amid the litter on Lenox, 125th, Seventh, and Eighth. . . . Police Commissioner Murphy [gave a press conference in which he reported] the statistics for the night: 1 dead; 12 policemen and 19 civilians injured, 30 persons arrested, 22 business places looted.¹¹⁴

Cleanup began the next day, but the deeper problems defied "cleaning."¹¹⁵ That night hostilities recurred, and by early Monday morning, twenty-seven police officers and ninety-three civilians were officially listed as injured (although hospitals reported treating more than two hundred), forty-five stores had been damaged or looted, and 108 arrests had been made.¹¹⁶ On the third night, despite the appointment of a commission of inquiry and attempts by Harlem clergy to deflect anger, rioting began again, even though all of Harlem had been cordoned off to traffic and special units of "technical" police were sent in—to break up crowds and to take over the rooftops, from which residents were throwing loose bricks and even Molotov cocktails.

But just as things seemed to be "under control" in Harlem,¹¹⁷ the police got a call for reinforcements in Bedford-Stuyvesant, to which looting had spread by Tuesday night.¹¹⁸

With the approach of dusk [on Wednesday night], loungers had already begun to gather on Fulton, and if the mayor's speech had little effect in getting them off the street, neither did it seem to bring anyone onto the street. . . . the crowds increased, and, as on the previous night, at least nine out of ten came not to riot or loot, but "for a look-see around." . . . Wednesday evening they had something new to gawk at. . . . The cavalry had arrived. A troop of mounted police had taken over the four corners of Nostrand and Fulton. . . . Police had been afraid to use horses in Harlem because of their vulnerability to the Molotov cocktail, *but the lower buildings and wider streets in Bedford-Stuyvesant reduced the danger from the rooftops.*¹¹⁹

From then on, the battle escalated and spread, with wide-scale looting and property destruction, until rain ended Wednesday night's rioting.¹²⁰ By the next day, Bed-Stuy had calmed, although in Harlem it took a few more days before the riot ran its course.¹²¹

THE "COLLAPSE" OF NEW YORK'S INDUSTRIAL BASE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF RESTRUCTURING

The rioting in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant, however, needs to be placed in a wider context. The late 1960s were troubled times, not only in the United States but in the world. Perhaps nowhere were the symptoms of America's economic decline

more evident than in New York. The 1964 "riot" may not have been a trigger to more widespread racial conflict, but rather an early warning that despite the progress made in the civil rights movement and the apparent health of the American economy, troubles lay ahead.

It must be recalled that the so-called restructuring of the global economy in 1973–74, the date analysts have used as a "marker" between eras, was actually preceded by considerable industrial contraction and unrest. In the 1960s, anti-Vietnam War protests, student uprisings, civil rights struggles that seemed to be reaching a limit, and the rash of riots in minority areas where populations were most affected by marginalization had become common occurrences in major American cities. Defense investments connected to the Vietnam War were partially masking this decline, but such investments had little impact in the ghettos of the country. Just as canaries are the first to perceive and suffer from gases in mining shafts, so the black ghettos in the United States may have been the first to experience signs of more pervasive distress. I address the full impact of such restructuring on New York in Chapter 10.