Tenants Rise: Resistance to the Gentrification Process in West Harlem

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Tenants Rise:
Resistance to the Gentrification Process in West Harlem

By

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Abstract

Vita
Chapter I: Introduction

As the New York City landscape expands and changes, so do its neighborhoods. So much so, that nearly every pocket of the city begins to look like the other, and the social character takes on a new face never imagined. Even more tremendous than the city’s transformation has been the pace at which it has morphed. According to 2010 Census data, New York City’s population is numbered at nine million, having an unmatched population increase compared to other large cities in the United States.¹

With such a population packed into the five boroughs, one may wonder where all of the city’s inhabitants rest their heads at night. Is there enough space to house each individual? Is housing easily accessible? And how have the individual neighborhoods in New York City adjusted to these population influxes?

As I will explain in this work, the process of gentrification has become a deciding factor with regards to shelter and access to affordable housing in New York City. Many scholars have described this phenomenon as a contentious issue because it has become synonymous with the “wholesale removal” of a former population for the sake of a new one.² Harlem, a historic New York neighborhood, has become a brilliant example of the expansion and changes that gentrification has wrought in New York because it is host to all of the questions, anxieties, and consequences of these changes.

An assumption, backed by many scholars on the issue, is that the gentrification process is a global phenomenon that is simply unstoppable, inevitable, and meets no feasible resistance in


² Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin Wyly, Gentrification (New York: Routledge, 2008), 111.
the communities it affects.³ The 2010 Census data showed that from 2000 to 2010 approximately 29,000 African Americans moved from the borough of Manhattan, including 9,500 from Harlem alone.⁴ Many observers pointed to real estate pressures as the main cause. Countless news articles, from the New York Times, for example, have speculated about a growing trend of Blacks moving out of northern cities to southern states, or places elsewhere.⁵ Meanwhile, besides Lower Manhattan, the greatest increase of the White population in New York City has been in Harlem.⁶ In 2000, the Census counted the White population of Central Harlem at eight percent,⁷ and though the numbers of that area remain small in comparison to Blacks, in other areas, like East Harlem, the White population rose by 55% from 2000 to 2010.⁸ Many scholars believe a shift in New York City real estate trends to attract the middle and upper class is responsible for converting affordable housing into market rate residential enclaves.⁹ The impact of this real estate shift is the elimination of affordable options for low-income neighborhoods like Harlem.

Despite these trends, in this work I will present evidence of resistance to the gentrification in West Harlem. Because of a collective identity and strong sense of community,

³ Newman, Kathe (2005); Wyly, Elvin (2005); Lees, Loretta (2008); Glass, Ruth (1964); Schaffer, Richard (1986); Smith, Neil (1986); Sassen, Saskia (1999); Keyder, Caglar (2005).


⁶ NYC 2010 Results, 20.


⁸ NYC 2010 Results, 20.

as well as a historical record of organizing in resistance to a common threat, I believe that tenants in Harlem, though low-income, have the social capacity to delay, disrupt, and deter the gentrification process. Drawing from Robert Fisher’s model of new social movements, I will stress the significance of the Harlem Community in the resistance to gentrification.\(^\text{10}\) In his work on grassroots community organizing, Fisher posits five elements of a new social movement, stating that any kind of local organizing, such as members of a community or tenants, deals with a larger political or cultural movement.

Fisher’s Five Elements of New Social Movement are:\(^\text{11}\)

1. **Location**- Generally, new social movements are community based. They occur around communities of interest.

2. **Transclass Groupings**- New social movements consist of a diversity of individuals, such as women, Blacks, Hispanics, Gay men and women, students. Rather than one homogenized group, individuals of different backgrounds converge over common interests.

3. **Democratic Politics**- There is rejection of authoritarianism. Organizational form is typically small, flexible, and open for revision. The use of resources is decided upon collectively.

4. **Cultural and Social Identity**- Where the purpose of the movement is defined on a cultural terms, such as feminism, Black Power, sexual identity, ethnic nationalism, and victim’s rights.

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5. **Community Self-Help** - The promotion of common interest through self-empowerment and limited input from a larger governing body. Organizers seek community participation in order to solve common problems.

I will focus on a particular entity where I believe the capacity for resistance is strongest: tenant associations. In the past, tenant associations have played an integral role in providing low-income tenants a platform from which they are able to voice grievances and overcome barriers that inhibit affordable housing. In this work, I will examine the process of gentrification and its impact and implications in the neighborhoods of West Harlem, New York City. Moreover, I intend to focus upon two particular neighborhoods, Manhattanville and Central Harlem-North, measuring their methods, actions, and success in resisting the gentrification process in specific cases.

In both the cases I present evidence of tenant resistance to gentrification and use Fisher’s model as a measuring tool for evaluation. Also, like grassroots community organizing, tenant organizing thrives mainly from engaged individuals in order to establish and sustain networks. In the context of a larger political or cultural movement, tenant organizing in West Harlem has historically sought to expose the punitive nature of gentrification in New York City. Further, gentrification, which has been described by scholars as having crucial human rights implications, is symbolic of a global and political phenomenon that compels cities to deny affordable housing to certain populations on economic and racial lines.

Tenant organizing, though historically significant, has not received much scholarly attention on the question of effective resistance to the expulsion of a population. For the purposes of 

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of this thesis, I use Fisher’s model in order to measure how tenant organizing can be effective in resisting the process of gentrification.

The Interdisciplinarity of the Study

The research in this thesis will be analyzed from two different traditions: Sociology and History. The reason why both disciplines are necessary is because they paint a richer image of the realities that gentrification has presented to West Harlem, as well as its effects on low-income communities. From a sociological standpoint, I have conducted data collection and analysis using Census tracts, social movement theory and qualitative interviews. From an historical standpoint, I have researched and compared articles, news stories, essays, novels, non-fiction books and documentaries to provide context to the circumstances and conditions that may have influenced my two cases, citing past events that exhibited examples of protest and or acts of resistance used by tenant associations in West Harlem.

Chapter Design

The body of this thesis will present the various perspectives of the gentrification process and its effects on communities. Through the examination of two case studies, I will identify instances of gentrification and explore how different entities and individuals reacted to it. In chapter 2, “Literature Review and Theoretical Considerations,” I analyze gentrification as a byproduct of globalization, unearthing a larger economic context with in which modern cities are organized. I introduce writings and theories of noted scholars on gentrification, as well as provide an explanation of how both globalization and gentrification are inextricably intertwined.

Finally, I explain how the gentrification process negatively impacts affordable housing and the lives of low-income individuals both in the United States and nations abroad.

In chapter 3, “Data and Methods,” I offer a thorough explanation of how I conducted research in both of my cases. I explain my research methods, such as qualitative interviews and analysis of census data, as well as the motive behind why I used those particular methods in my studies. I introduce my case sites and how I went about choosing them for this work. Also, I formally introduce the key informants who participated in my interviews and their significance to their respective case. Lastly, I describe any setbacks, limitations, or challenges I encountered while researching my cases.

In chapter 4, “The Current State of Housing and the Harlem Community,” I examine New York City’s current state of housing with regards to apartment affordability, and recent changes in policy such as the decline of the Mitchell-Lama program in favor of market-rate housing. Also, I analyze literature on gentrification as it relates specifically to Harlem, such as Schaffer and Smith’s “Gentrification of Harlem?” and Loretta Lee’s work on gentrification. Moreover, in this chapter I reach beyond scholarly considerations and describe the history of tenant mobilization in Harlem and how historic instances of resistance are significant to the study of my two cases.

In chapters 5 and 6, “The Case of Tall Towers Broadway” and “The Case of Malcolm’s Grove,” I describe at length my cases and their outcomes. I first introduce demographic information on each site, as well as details that will give readers an objective view into each case and the events that occurred. Further, I provide an analysis of articles and interviews surrounding each case, showing the conditions in each case and the media’s perspective on them. I describe at length the acts of resistance that each tenant association took in order to contest the renovations that were being imposed on their buildings by the developer, and therefore resist the
gentrification process. Lastly, I examine and analyze each act of resistance based on Fisher’s model and deduce the effectiveness of the acts of resistance.

Chapter 7 concludes this work by explaining which case had a more effective resistance to the building developer and thus gentrification itself, using Fisher’s model as a rubric. Further, I anticipate the future circumstance of each site in terms of its significance for affordable housing and its place in Harlem’s future. I will summarize follow-ups I had with some respondents, describing both their predictions for the future and where they see themselves in it.
Chapter II: Literature Review and Theoretical Considerations

The process of gentrification has remained a constant reality in many cities across the world. In London, for example, one of the earliest researchers and coiner of the term “gentrification,” Ruth Glass, articulated it as “a rapid process that displaces most or all of the original class occupiers in a given district and the social character of that district is changed.”\(^\text{14}\) Though her observations were from mid-1960, her definition of the process remains consistent with many authors today.

Professor of Urban Politics, Jonathan L. Wharton defined the process in 2005 as an occurrence “when business professionals of the so-called ‘gentry class’ locate (or relocate) to an urban community resulting in the displacement of low-income residents. Consequently, housing and living expenses increase significantly thereby impacting a variety of long-term residents.”\(^\text{15}\) Wharton’s definition focused on the indirect impact of the growing presence of the professional class in formerly low-income neighborhoods through rising property values. He explains that the gentrification process will inevitably shift ownership of the city to individuals who are of a wealthier class.

Authors Kathe Newman and Elvin Wyly spoke of the gentrification process as an elusive phenomenon that may not immediately or intentionally displace low-income individuals, but has the capacity to change the economic structure and means of acquiring resources for a particular class of people.\(^\text{16}\) For example, jobs that have become integral to certain segments of the city,


such as low-income communities, may be pushed out for a different industry, which would compel individuals dependent on that industry to migrate. Another example is in land use, where property becomes blighted over time and then redeveloped into luxury condos. In these instances, gentrification may not deal with a direct expulsion of low-income individuals, but rather introduces a transitional process of class transformation. What does become evident over time is a changing of the social character and amenities offered in formerly low-income neighborhoods as the presence of the wealthy rises.

Newman and Wyly focused upon the difficulty of identifying displacement due to gentrification and the difficulty in measuring displacement. One example they provided was their inability to locate those displaced by rising rent costs and lack of affordable housing. Many who have moved from a neighborhood going through gentrification cannot be found after they leave because they may have not have left contact information, or may have left for reasons other than being priced out. However, with analytical data from the New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey, Newman and Wyly were able to deduce that 176,900 renters in Harlem were displaced between 1989 and 2002, including 10 percent of all moves from the 1990’s, as Harlem tenants sought cheaper housing in the outer-boroughs.\textsuperscript{17} In sum, though there may be great difficulty in discovering if gentrification is actually displacing tenants, it is evident that many Harlem residents have been leaving to find places for cheaper rent. They also go on to say that the process of gentrification is at a pace that has been unmatched historically, adding to the assumption of it as being unstoppable.

However, some scholars look into the critical role race plays in the gentrification process. Lees, et al., looked at gentrification as a process that is racially implicated, where the considerable influx of White people in particular leads to the eventual displacement of non-

\textsuperscript{17} Newman and Wyly, "Gentrification and Resistance in New York City," 1.
White individuals in a formerly low-income neighborhood. Lees, et al., explain that the gentrification process can intensify disparities between different groups, distributing space and resources one-sidedly. In *Gentrification*, Lees, et al., found that gentrification was empirically predicated on the spatial exclusion of one group, typically of color, in favor of another group who has the capacity and interest in occupying that space.

In 1986, authors Richard Schaffer and Neil Smith posited similar claims of race in their writings on gentrification, however, unlike Lees, et al., they did not see the process of gentrification as rapid. In their work, they claim that the process of gentrification would be slower with regards to the removal of Black people in Harlem, but they did concede that the gentrification process should be considered a continual process that would be very difficult to completely stop. Whereas Glass and Wharton explain gentrification in a completely economic context, Schaffer and Smith, and Lees et al., claim that the gentrification process has racial implications that determines who remains in a changing neighborhood.

**Economic and Political Theories Surrounding Gentrification**

In order to understand gentrification we must have a strong theoretical understanding of globalization. Since the 1990’s globalization has become a political and economic standard system from which gentrification is born and thrives. The A.T. Kearney organization, a global management-consulting firm, defined globalization as “the increasing integration of economies, societies and cultures around the world.” Further, globalization encourages the speedy exchange of capital through communication, faster transactions, and limited regulation. And, as

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18 Lees, Slater and Wyly, *Gentrification*, 111.

the A.T. Kearney Index explains, the aim of a city in the process of globalizing is to remain competitive in the world market:

They (global cities) are crowded with those who are creating the future, noisy with the clash of deals and ideas, frantic in the race to stay ahead.21

A global city is the physical product of globalization, playing out the experiment of modern capitalism in real time. More specifically, a global city has strategic economic functions that enable transnational commerce, typically through producer services.22 Influenced by current economic attractions and ventures, such as real estate, for example, the global city seeks to engage and retain global citizens who have the capability of doing the world’s business.23 Banks, online businesses, property owners, entertainment companies and airports are what the A.T. Kearney report characterized as the “movers and shakers” greatly desired by the global city in order to exchange information and news regarding ways to make even more capital.24 According to the report, in 2010 New York City was voted the number one global city in the world, based on a five-dimension rubric:25

1. Business Activity
2. Human Capital
3. Information Exchange
4. Cultural Experience
5. Political Engagement

21 A.T. Kearney, The Urban Elite, 2.
23 A.T. Kearney, The Urban Elite, 1.
24 Ibid., 1.
New York ranked highest in business activity in the world as well as having the largest capital markets. Based on these results, New York has not only operated from a context of global competition, but has also sought to strengthen its capital by transforming itself into a strong foundation for unfettered commerce. Also, the Kearney Index showed that despite a recession, New York City maintained its top ranking because of its private ventures and ties to global corporations, meaning that having a great amount of business activity and capital relationships helped the city of New York reign supreme in the global ranking. However, the Kearney report does not fully explain the domestic circumstances that are wrought by a city that may now focus more on international investments.

Some scholars believe that the focus of the global city minimizes assistance to city-dwellers who do not have the capacity to be “global citizens.” Further, the failure to properly serve and uplift historically disadvantaged sectors of the city may leave entire communities unequipped to remain in an increasingly competitive city. Because the city is now a place for global exchange, only those who are involved in those exchanges would need the convenience of living in that city, while those who live in the city based on necessity and not capital exchange may be viewed as “in the way.”

In 1999 sociologist Saskia Sassen wrote an article on the dilemmas of a globalizing city. Titled “Whose City Is It?” The article examines place in the context of transnational commerce

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25 Ibid., 3.
26 Ibid., 7.
27 A.T. Kearney, 7.
and explains the role that the underserved city-dweller plays in this context. Sassen makes clear that, “within the city, these new claims are being shaped by global capital that uses the city as an organizational commodity.” Using the city in this way pits two sides against each other: On one side you have the financially wealthy or well off who seek to accommodate the global capital market by patronizing global services, and on the other side you have the low-income population, who Sassen calls the “disadvantaged workers,” who may not be as ready or financially prepared for the expanding borders of a global market. But because global capital is a deepening paradigm, and has been for at least the last decade, the expansion of transnational commerce provides amenities and services in the city solely to those who can afford them. At a local level each community then becomes identical, following the same model, no matter the neighborhood, state, or community. In the end, according to Sassen, the only outcome is the “overvalorization of corporate capital and the devalorization of disadvantaged workers,” meaning that the wealthy or well off hold claim to the city.

Sassen also explains more specifically the many layers to this claim. First she explains the demographics of the “disadvantaged worker”:

Many of the disadvantaged workers in global cities, moreover, are women, immigrants, and people of color, that is, men and women whose sense of membership is not necessarily adequately captured in national terms.

Because the trend of most cities in the world, and particularly in the United States, is to globalize and make the city a place of commerce and private venture, the representation of low-

30 Ibid., 99.
31 Ibid., 99.
32 Ibid., 100.
income individuals, who are disproportionately minorities, becomes ignored. When that happens, crucial supports for low-income communities such as affordable housing suffer, aggravating the decline of low-income communities. However, one may assume that the global city would help low-income community become upwardly mobile, and this assumption is yet another layer addressed by Sassen.

Regarding the assumption of the global city as a tool for economic uplift, Sassen posits that only those who already enjoy some measure of financial access can feasibly attain mobility. As part of what she describes as the “Hypermobility of Capital,” Sassen explains that most individuals who move to a global city may already have a reasonable amount of resources to help them enjoy global services as well as position themselves to be economically viable in global exchange.34 Problematically, hypermobility creates a deterministic reality for low-income individuals in the city by structurally enabling those who already have resources the ability to attain more, while those without may never have the same chance.

Sociologist Caglar Keyder addresses this deterministic relationship in his work, “Globalization and Social Exclusion in Istanbul, Turkey.” In 2005, Keyder investigated the social ramifications of the changes taking place with the globalization of Istanbul. He argued that as the “employment opportunities and social integration mechanisms of the previous period deteriorated,” it led to “growing inequality between the two poles of the social spectrum”, and these disparities are identified in “income, spaces of residence, and cultures of consumption and practices of everyday life.”35

33 Ibid., 100-101.
34 Ibid., 102.
Istanbul’s private sector adopted a first-world model, or global city model, of modernity throughout the 1990’s, opening the city to outside wealth, revenue, and investment for the sake of generating more services in the city center.\textsuperscript{36} Mass privatization of Istanbul also had political implications, such as creating “policies aimed at making Istanbul a gentrified city pleasing to the tourist gaze.”\textsuperscript{37} By the year 2000, Istanbul, like New York, was seeing a record rise in population growth, primarily from immigrants who relocated to the city. “From 1 million in 1950, to 5 million in 1980, and 10 million in 2000,” Istanbul saw mass social diversity and physical integration as wealthier immigrants, among others, made their influx into the city-center.\textsuperscript{38} Consequently, like New York, the jobs that became available in the city catered to a global service economy, moving industry jobs, such as manufacturing, out of Istanbul’s city center resulting in job offers for Istanbul’s immigrant population, who were more skilled in global services.\textsuperscript{39} Keyder described this population influx as something that would have an inevitable impact of city life. One major aspect of city life Keyder highlights is shelter:

\textit{[The] incorporation of the new immigrants into the modernizing social order could not have occurred without their physical integration operating through the acquisition of housing.}\textsuperscript{40}

In this statement Keyder emphasizes that gentrification is a process facilitated by globalization. Keyder’s inference can be used to explain the same dilemma confronting Harlem, New York, where new residents enter the neighborhood to take advantage of economic opportunities, and look to settle in the area until their endeavors are met. Keyder further points

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.,125.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.,125.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 129.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.,125.
out that the social integration of new wealthier citizens is an aspect of globalization where “social integration through employment was incorporat[ed] into the urban fabric through settlement and housing.” Consequently, the wealthy will continue to seek economic opportunities exclusively in the city and will desire to live in the city.\textsuperscript{41} Since economic opportunity and mobility is the primary motivator of the wealthy, they settle in the cities they work in, causing competition for resources in the housing market. Consequently, individuals of lower income who are not equipped to compete for housing will be replaced by the wealthy.

Besides the obvious economic implications of globalization, there also exists a racial and ethnic component in Keyder’s work that correlates to the racial and ethnic antagonism that is symptomatic of globalization and the process of gentrification. Social exclusion played an integral role in the take over of Istanbul by the wealthy in the late 1990’s because as the city modernized, it failed to meet the needs of individuals who were devastated after the city was de-industrialized.\textsuperscript{42} Further, Istanbul’s welfare system could not properly serve public need as the nature of the Turkish market itself thrived on less government regulation. It is in this observation where Keyder correlates the plight of low-income Turks to Black Americans, citing Williams Julius Wilson’s work on low-income Blacks as evidence:

The kind of analysis offered by W.J. Wilson for inner city Blacks in the US can be applied here as well. Where there were unskilled jobs available in the manufacturing sector there was work; when the manufacturing sector disappears, young Black males are left behind by the new service economy in which there is demand for the more educated, the more culturally endowed.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 129.
Keyder’s claim of the Black American plight being applicable to the social exclusion in Turkey is powerful because it speaks to a strong recognition of urban inequalities but also speaks to the parallel processes of globalization within countries and the negative effects that the process of gentrification has on low-income individuals. Further, Keyder’s citing of Wilson calls attention to the significance of race in the patterns of inequality in American global cities.

Theoretically, the gentrification process has been explained as an unstoppable force, informed by race, income, or both, that has the capacity to negatively affect every city it touches, no matter the country or continent. The scholars previously mentioned, though presenting different voices, all agreed that gentrification dealt with some measure of displacement of a former population. Whether rapid or slow, whether racial or economic, Sassen and Keyder’s works validate the claims of these scholars in their explanations of the Global City.

Because professionals and the wealthy are needed in the cities for the sake of global ranking, the process of gentrification is accelerated. Since globalization deals with individuals living in cities with the capacity to make money and follow lucrative careers, it tends to undermine the conditions and value of low-income individuals. The result of course is the exclusion of the former population on a global scale, where no country will consider the cultural or social value of any neighborhood, but rather how much money that neighborhood stands to make.
Chapter III: Data And Methods

In order to obtain pertinent data from each of my case sites, I decided that direct interviews with key informants would yield the most accurate information. In her work on qualitative research, Sharan B. Merriam described an interpretive technique used to demystify or unearth a particular phenomenon, an activity that locates a circumstance through rigorous observation.\textsuperscript{44} By using a qualitative method of research, I was able to dig deeper into the motives, challenges and outcomes of the two cases. My interviews also exposed caveats and nuances in each case that I was not privy to previously. When I began my research I sought out twenty key informants, ten from each case site.

From each case site (pseudonyms were provided for each site), I sought to find informants who worked with or for the tenant association of the building, worked for the developer of the building, or lived in the greater community. Appendix A shows the number of my intended informants, the category they fall under, and their position in that category.

Upon my researching and interviewing, I discovered that more perspectives on my cases were required. Seeing that many of the scholars on gentrification wrote about the significance of new tenants versus original ones, I also sought the perspectives of individuals not involved with the tenant association nor the management or developer. In all I interviewed three such individuals: two who had lived in their particular building for more than five years, and 1 who just moved into the community less than two years ago. The significance of my informants was in the range and diversity of their answers. Logically, having different individuals account for the same case regardless of affiliation would bolster a better narrative for each case site and offer analytical balance to any biases that I or any informant may have had.

After I identified my categories of informants, I formulated a list of questions that would provide context to the case site, the actual case itself, and the specific perspectives of the informant in regards to the category they identified with. Most of the questions that I asked my informants were virtually identical, especially in regards to their respective positions and the population they served. However, as the Appendix B and Appendix C show, specific questions were also designed to obtain information from informants based on the case in which they were involved.

All of my interviews were conducted in places of the respondents’ choosing. I offered them the choice of public venue: a café, public library, park, or community center. My reason for extending the respondent the choice of venue was to better establish a sincere rapport and record an honest account with the least amount of distress. All respondents but one, Marie Martin, consented to being recorded during my interview with them. All names of respondents, tenant associations, buildings and their developers were given pseudonyms to protect their identity and right to privacy (all respondents in both cases chose their own pseudonyms.).

The list of my key informants was as follows:

**Informants for the case of Tall Towers Broadway**

**Isis Eno** was a volunteer organizer for the Tall Towers Tenants Association, and a key member in organizing the protest against Patriot Properties’ new security system installation. She assisted with canvassing the Manhattanville area with the Association’s flyer and pamphlets.

**Misty Columbia** was the president of the Tall Towers Tenants Association and has been a resident of Tall Towers for over 30 years. She was the main individual responsible for devising and coordinating the protest against Patriot Properties, including furnishing flyers, petitions and other protest materials. Ms. Columbia also led and facilitated the monthly association meetings.
Phyllis (who wanted to be addressed by first name only) was the treasurer of the Tall Towers Tenants Association. Her responsibility was to allocate funds given to the Association, either through donation, dues or rent allocation, for the daily operation of the association. Phyllis was also in charge of the door-knocking campaign in efforts to garner support for the protest against Patriot Properties, collecting signatures for the petition from tenants.

Fiji Flower was a resident of Manhattanville who moved into the neighborhood in 2011. She lived in a five-bedroom apartment with three other roommates. Paying a combined $3,000 dollars a month for a market rate apartment, Fiji said she recognized that she and her roommates were paying more than other tenants who had been in the building longer, however considered the rent to be more affordable than elsewhere in the city. Fiji admitted that moving to the area was a significant change from her home in Virginia Beach, which she said was not as diverse or integrated as Manhattanville. Fiji also was a college graduate and was now pursuing her Master’s degree at a music academy in Harlem.

Mark Murray was a resident of the Tall Towers complex for over eight years. An ex-cop and former bodyguard of former New York Governor George Pataki, Murray promoted higher security measures in the interest of a more progressive community. In Murray’s opinion, Manhattanville was a generally unsafe place to live because of the criminal activity, and he felt that many residents of Tall Towers were the contributors. Mr. Murray also felt that the Tall Towers Tenants Association was inhibiting improvements that would make Manhattanville more economically viable and physically attractive to outsiders.

Marie Martin was a property owner and broker in the Manhattanville area. She said she had been in the real estate business for nearly thirty years and has developed dozens of relationships with renters and developers. Marie said that she has seen a boom in real estate speculation in Harlem since 2006, including renters who have come for affordable apartments
and developers, like Patriot Properties, have come to purchase brownstones and condos below market rate.

**Informants for the case of Malcolm’s Grove**

**Sarah Bond** was the President of Malcolm’s Grove Association of Concerned Tenants (MGACT) and has lived in Malcolm’s Grove for a decade. She has held the position of president for four years and was responsible for issuing the appeal against the building developer, Conglomo, in 2009.

**J.L.** was a resident of a neighboring building adjacent to Malcolm’s Grove, “Belmont Village,” also owned by Conglomo. J.L. mentioned that he had lived in the building for over ten years and has seen the neighborhood dramatically change, as well as his neighbors. J.L. felt that Conglomo was making unnecessary renovations to their properties in the area that undermined the supply of affordable housing. J.L. said that he had seen at least two rent hikes since moving into his building in 1999, however, he says that the facilities were falling apart and were not equipped to handle such fast renovations from the developer.

**Ms. Sour** was an Administrative Assistant and Public Representative for Conglomo. She had been working for Conglomo for nine years. Her responsibilities including scheduling appointments between the MGACT and Conglomo, as well as recording complaints from tenants and facilitating solutions for tenant grievances. Ms. Sour, who had recently received her Masters degree in public administration, mentioned that she felt tenant replacement was the optimal objective behind improving the façade of Malcolm’s Grove. In her perspective, the renovations meant that the building would look more modern, which would attract more affluent individuals and ultimately would enable more improvements in Conglomo’s properties, as well as in the greater Central Harlem-North community.
Census Data Used

The population data used for my research was comprised of findings from the U.S. Census Bureau for tracts in New York City. Based on the Census tracts I was able to accurately outline the demographics of my two neighborhoods of interest: Manhattanville and Harlem Central-North, as well as my specific case sites in those neighborhoods. The Census data was the most accurate and easily accessible information on demographic changes occurring in the areas. For Tall Towers Broadway, my Census tracts included the following tract numbers: 213.03, 217.03, 219, 223.01, and 223.02 (see Appendix E). For Malcolm’s Grove, my Census tracts included the following: 206, 208, 212, 214, 215, 221.02, 224, 226, 228, 230, 232, 234, 235.02, 236, 243.02, 259 (see Appendix F).

Tall Towers Broadway

The Tall Towers Broadway complex, located in West Harlem in the Manhattanville neighborhood of Harlem, is composed of 1200 units, or apartments, and five buildings. According to the Census tracts of 2010, the population of the complex is predominantly Black and Hispanic residents. However, though individuals of Hispanic or Black background remain the majority, the 2010 Census tracts of the Manhattanville neighborhood bring to light a declining trend. The Black population as of 2010 was at 5,918, a decline of nearly 22 percent from the population size of 7,574, recorded in 2000. A similar decline has also been realized in the Hispanic population of Manhattanville, from 15,921 in 2000 to 14,413 in 2010. Though the numbers encompass more than the Tall Towers complex itself, these numbers provide the most accurate estimate of the population, especially those who have most likely been displaced by gentrification. To give readers a more specific look into the population breakdown of Tall Towers Broadway, I searched the demographic profile of the tract that the Tall Towers complex lays within. In the Tall Towers tract (223.02), Blacks numbered at 820 in 2010, a 32 percent
decline from more than 1200 in 2000. Hispanics numbered at 2,248, a more than 15 percent decline from near 2700 in 2000. However Whites saw a near 300 percent increase from 55 individuals in 2000 to 207 in 2010.

The private developer who owns the complex, “Patriot Properties”, recently began converting vacant apartments from affordable units to market rate in an attempt to attract professionals and students from local universities in the area, like Columbia University. According to accounts from my respondents, these new market rate renters are mostly White and are said to have the capacity to pay market rate rent, versus the majority tenants of color who have rent subsidies from the government. In sum, the members of the Tall Towers Tenants Association were anxious about what they considered a decline of affordable units and a rise of expensive units in the complex.

My research on Tall Towers Broadway focused on an event where the Tall Towers Tenants Association mobilized to protest and petition against Patriot Properties’ installation of a new security system. The system was said by Patriot Properties to be a measure that would “take the safety of the residents seriously,” by actively identifying each individual who entered and exited the complex. What developed was a paradox of improvement, whereby the quality of life for new residents in Tall Towers was predicated on the inconvenience of residents already living there. Tenants association members were outraged, claiming the new security policy to be a marketing tool used to attract students and professionals to living in a heavily stigmatized

affordable housing complex, while simultaneously invading the privacy of individuals who had lived there for years. What ensued was a battle that received media attention, included voices of public officials, and left open two sides of a larger argument on gentrification in Manhattanville.

I believe that this site serves as a significant example of complex resistance to the gentrification process because it addresses important cultural aspects that undergird the process. Though the Tall Towers Tenants Association was literally battling the installation of a new security system, they were also fighting a more subtle battle against Patriot Properties’ racist perceptions of crime and misuse of property. Consistent with historical legacies of community mobilization in Harlem, Tall Towers Tenants Association took matters into their own hands when dealing with issues in their community that they felt were of detriment to its residents.

**Malcolm’s Grove**

The Malcolm’s Grove complex spans several blocks in the Central Harlem-North neighborhood. It is a 6-building complex comprised of 1,700 units with a population, like Tall Towers, that is predominantly Black and Hispanic. Again, just as in the case of Tall Towers Broadway, though Blacks and Hispanics have remained the numerical majority for the past decade (also seen in Malcolm’s Grove’s specific tract, 212), a declining trend has begun among residents of color and a rising trend has occurred for White residents. According to 2010 Census tracts for the Central Harlem-North Neighborhood, (206, 208, 212, 214, 215, 221.02, 224, 226, 228, 230, 232, 234, 235.02, 236, 243.02, 259), the Black population saw a decline of nearly 10 percent: from 55,947 in 2000, to 50,494 in 2010. But unlike Tall Towers, the Hispanic population actually increased in North-Central Harlem by nearly 60 percent: from 10,838 in 2000, to 17,188 in 2010. However the most significant rise in population was in White residents, by nearly 400 percent: from 871 in 2000, to 4,344 in 2010. Though still a very small
population by comparison, the increase is significant given historic patterns of segregation in American cities and the reluctance of many Whites to live in minority neighborhoods.

As I did at Tall Towers, I looked into the specific tract that encompassed Malcolm’s Grove in order to give my case more focus. My findings from my search of the tract for Malcolm’s Grove matched the prevailing trend of the neighborhood. Black residents of Malcolm’s Grove saw a decline of over 12 percent: from 3,776 in 2000, to 3,306 in 2010. Hispanics saw an increase of over 150 percent: from 230 in 2000, to 580 in the year 2010. Lastly, Whites of Malcolm’s Grove saw an increase of nearly 400 percent, from 56 residents in the year 2000, to 270 in 2010.

The event that I was researching was an on-going appeal made by Malcolm’s Grove Association of Concerned Tenants (MGACT). In 2005, Conglomo, the property developer of Malcom’s Grove, decided to install new windows at the complex. Based on my interviews with respondents, I have deduced two leading motives behind the reason why Conglomo installed the new windows:

1. Because the former windows were very old and in a state of disrepair.
2. Conglomo, in an attempt to attract wealthier tenants, decided to “boost” the façade of the complex.

MGACT president, Sarah Bond, has maintained that no matter what motive Conglomo had in the installation of new windows, the implications of the installation have resulted in the price-out and eventual displacement of many long-term residents who could not afford the rent hikes used to pay for them. In 2009 Conglomo was granted approval for a Major Capital Improvement (MCI), allowing them to add an additional charge to tenant’s monthly rent for payment of the new windows. Poised to challenge the rent hikes, MGACT decided to make an appeal to the Department of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) in an effort to have the
window charge taken off the monthly rent, as well as demanding repayment for charges already paid from 2009 onward.

Based on my interviews for this case I found that, more than in Tall Towers Broadway, the Malcolm’s Grove complex hosted a range of individuals, from low-income to middle class. Many of the tenants either have or had careers such as teachers and judges, meaning that some of the tenants may not be affected by rising rent costs. Many of the residents have lived in their units for decades, including President Bond. Ms. Bond oversees the Malcolm’s Grove Association of Concerned Tenants (MGACT) and has been fighting the developer of her complex, Conglomo, over several conflicts, such as maintenance, rent increases, and lack of communication between tenants and the developer.

I believe this particular case was interesting because, though the MGACT did not lead an outright protest, they used a method of resistance that is arguably just as powerful, the law. As this case progressed, Sarah Bond used her community ties and legal savvy to fight a major developer who had not been challenged (on record) by any residents of Harlem previously. An article in the Wall Street Journal from 2011 also chronicled a long struggle between the MGACT and Conglomo, stating that Ms. Bond and her cohorts have been at odds with the developer over the construction of new condos in the area, as well as modernizing the area around Malcolm’s Grove. This article affirms the magnitude of the MGACT’s resistance to Conglomo’s plans, as well as the contentious relationship between the two entities.

Public relations and senior management personnel were both contacted for interviews numerous times over the course of the past two years. Unfortunately the corporate managers,

CEOs, and the directors of both Patriot Properties and Conglomo (with the exception of Ms. Sour, who was an on-site administrator at Malcolm’s Grove) either refused to be interviewed, or failed to honor appointments for interviews. Because of this, my original goal of twenty interviews were modified, allowing me more time to have follow-up interviews with my respondents, as well as collect more circumstantial evidence of each case through analysis of articles, videos and other materials. By the end of my research I interviewed nine key informants and, though I was not able to reached my desired target of twenty, was able to gain a thorough perspective and context surrounding each case.
Chapter IV: The Current State of Housing and the Harlem Community

Harlem’s Significance

Gentrification is a global phenomenon. As cities throughout the world seek to globalize for economic advancement, new populations take interest in those cities to reap the opportunities. Harlem in particular is a space that has been informed and sustained by nearly a century of Black social connectedness and Black social familiarity that is recognized by many observers.

Noted Black writer James Baldwin wrote extensively about growing up in Harlem, emphasizing the social closeness between his Black neighbors and himself:

When I turn east on 131st Street and Lenox Avenue, there is first a soda-pop joint, then a shoeshine ‘parlor,’ then a grocery store…all along the street there are people who watched me grow up, people who grew up with me, people I watched grow up.47

The description Baldwin shared seemed to pervade many of my interviews with respondents who were born in Harlem long before spatial change had taken place. Also, the idea of watching generations grow old in the same neighborhood evokes a certain creative pride in Harlem’s fabric that has not been seen in other places. In his work on Harlem, sociologist Bruce D. Haynes explained Harlem’s uniqueness as a place that has signified Black Space culturally for nearly a century. He describes Harlem as an emphatic cultural hub, with which Black identity and imagination were realized through commercial ventures and artistic expression.48 Harlem was more than just a monolithic bloc of Black people, it was a matrix of “contiguous neighborhoods

above 110th street, where colored folks lived, loved and labored.”\(^{49}\) However, these idealistic accounts of Harlem are only one component of its significance as an historical space.

Harlem was a place of social exclusion as well. The 1960s deepened the lines of segregation with the expansion of public housing projects, which concentrated Harlem’s Black poor community, and with the increasing abandonment of the city by the White homeowners out of fear of lessening property value.\(^{50}\) However, concerns over property value were only a surface cause of the centrifuge. In his pioneering work, *Dark Ghetto* sociologist Kenneth Clark examined “White flight” as the direct alienation of the Black Community based on racist assumptions of inferiority. As an example of white flight from urban centers, Clark used the New York City public school system, which at the time was considered clear evidence of increased segregation. Clark found that, “In the minds of such middle-class whites, inferior schools and Negroes went together” and so, “whites were leaving the public schools at an alarming rate to escape what they believed to be inferior—and deteriorating—public schools, those in which the proportion of Negroes was increasing.”\(^{51}\) Clark’s findings made clear that the decline of the White population is what made Harlem Black, however the account also makes clear that the decline in social services and infrastructure were burdens to be shouldered by Black Harlemites.

In one sense, there is a prevailing narrative that Harlem was a unique space because Blacks treated each other with a high level of warmth and familiarity. But at the same time, there is an equally substantiated narrative that Harlem was a unique space precisely because it was comprised of Blacks who, despite social exclusion, devised ways to make life better through

\(^{49}\) Haynes, “In Terms of Harlem,” 111.

\(^{50}\) Todd Swanstrom and Dennis Judd, *City Politics* (Glenview: Pearson Education, 2012), 186-89.

collective action and expression. Yet, no matter which narrative is told, West Harlem remains the sole Manhattan neighborhood with a sizeable, though declining, Black population.

**Gentrification in the Media**

In the past two years, there have been numerous articles and news reports on the gentrification in Harlem and its effects on housing in New York City. *New York 1* (NY1), a 24-hour television news channel, hosted a special report on the 2010 Census and what it showed for the spatial future of New York City. In this report, the data showed a substantial movement of Black people out of the borough of Manhattan, where other ethnic groups had either stayed the same or increased their population in the borough. The report concluded that the mass removal of Blacks was the result of the rising costs of real estate. Many articles published by the *New York Times* on gentrification have also captured the transitioning Harlem landscape. A 2011 article on the Hamilton Heights neighborhood in Harlem provided a clear example of the current changes taking place. Author C.J. Hughes writes:

> As the wrecking ball claims more and more of Manhattanville’s motley collection of warehouses and garages, Hamilton Heights, largely unknown to those who have never cracked the 100s on the No. 1 train, is preparing for an influx of teachers, students and support workers. It is also anticipating the higher real estate prices that usually come with proximity to an Ivy League institution.

Since the popular assumption among scholars, social scientists and the media is that the process of gentrification is relentless, it is also assumed that as time progresses, more skilled,

52 “Making Census Of It,” 2011.

white, educated professionals will be making Harlem their new home. As a result, property values would rise, leaving the former tenants of low-income buildings displaced. In Hughes’ article he uses the term “preparing” in reference to the inevitable transition Hamilton Heights will face with the influx of a different population into Harlem.

**The Scarcity of Rent Stabilized Apartments**

A 2012 *Times* article on the increasing erosion of rent stabilization in New York City echoes notions of the inevitable influx of a wealthier population into formerly low-income areas. Writer Marc Santora reminds readers that rent stabilization was a policy that sought to ensure housing affordability in New York City.⁵⁴ Rent stabilization policy stipulates that after a lease is up the landlord can only raise rents as authorized by the City’s Rent Guidelines Board, a measure that would ensure shelter for residents who could not afford hikes at market rate. Rent-stabilized apartments in the borough of Manhattan have held a long presence. Any apartment building built after 1974 in the city of New York City is rent stabilized, and 47 percent of the apartment buildings in the City are currently rent stabilized.⁵⁵ However, despite the assumption that rent stabilized apartments are supposed to preserve affordable housing, the gap between rent stabilized apartment rates and market rates have become wider in the past two years. As Santora explains, “even before the spike in market-rate rents over the past year, rent-stabilized rates were, on average, $1,245 a month cheaper.” The influx of new tenants into Manhattan, however,

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may already be financially well off, as indicated by their ability to pay higher market rents. For example, the director of the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy explains: the median income of all renters of stabilized apartments in the Manhattan core — defined as below 96th Street — is $57,780, but the median income of those entering in the past five years (from 2007 to 2012) is closer to the average income of about $100,000. In sum, as the number of wealthier individuals rise in Manhattan so does the creation of market rate units, which may eventually lead to the decline of affordable housing units.

As fewer affordable units are built, there comes a scarcity of rent-stabilized apartments in Manhattan. In addition to the limited supply, obtaining a rent-stabilized apartment has increasingly involved a rigorous process. Executive Vice President of the Rent Stabilization Association, Jack Fruend, said that landlords are justifiably more selective in their process of choosing tenants for a rent-stabilized apartment because they want to ensure that the tenant can pay the annual increases and is financially secure for the right to have stabilized rent. So, if a tenant wants an apartment at $2,000 dollars a month, the tenant must show an expected salary above $80,000 dollars annually, serving as a barrier to many low-income families who do not make a high enough salary.

**The End of Mitchell-Lama**

On the subject of affordable housing, it is worth noting the new implications that came with the decline of the Mitchell-Lama program. The Mitchell-Lama program, established in 1955, is a state-run program put into place to ensure affordable housing in private

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57 Ibid., 2.

58 Ibid., 2.
developments. The aim was to place a cap on the amount of increase a landlord was allowed to charge to low-income tenants, where in return, the landlord would receive mortgage subsidies.

For example in 2005 Patriot Properties decided to take Tall Towers Broadway out of the program by refusing to renew their twenty-year Mitchell-Lama contract, and began renting vacant apartments at market rate. Further, by 2007 Patriot Properties had purchased a total of nearly 4,000 apartments formerly under Mitchell-Lama regulation, resulting in a property portfolio of over 900 million dollars. Housing advocates publicly challenged Patriot Properties, stating that the opt-out of Mitchell-Lama was leading to the accelerated sale of formerly affordable apartments to realtors and apartment brokers, thus becoming subject to expensive market rates. However, supporters of the opt-out, such as the CEO of Patriot Properties, stressed the profitability of changing affordable units into market rate apartments:

Patriot Properties’ general business plan embraces the concept of purchasing buildings that are in need of improvement, improving them and selling them at the proper opportunity to generate the best results for our investors…

Since peaking at approximately 149,000 units in the 1980’s, New York City has lost more than 30,000 Mitchell-Lama co-op and apartment units, many of which have been lost since the year 2000. Yet, supporters of the housing opt-outs argue that other programs, such as rent


63 Brown, “Increasingly, Mitchell-Lama Beneficiaries are Opting Out.”
subsidized housing under Section 8, serve the same purpose as Mitchell-Lama had, ensuring the retention of low-income tenants. Further, supporters also claim that buyouts, such as paying low-income tenants to move out of their apartments for a large sum, assist low-income residents with monetary gain and assurance of shelter. Still, advocates of affordable housing argue that the benefits of opting out of Mitchell-Lama are only front-end, meaning that long term retention of residents depending solely governmental assistance, and/or the payout of lump sum cash will lead to an ultimate decline of affordable units in New York City.

According to my interviews with members of the Tall Towers Tenants Association, many rent-stabilized residents of Tall Towers were left to the mercy of Section 8 vouchers, a government stipend that has been continuously de-funded over the past decade, and the market itself after the Mitchell-Lama program was scaled back. Unfortunately for advocates of affordable housing, Tall Towers Broadway serves as one example of a larger trend. Also, the tenant association members I interviewed shared that the decline of affordable housing units was evidence of a widening gap between market rate tenants and rent-subsidized tenants, where any individual in the middle would not make enough income to afford market rate rents, and make far too much to income be eligible for government assistance.

Scholar Loretta Lees explains the inevitability of middle and upper class influx into Harlem based upon the same process of gentrification mapped by Glass’ study of London. Like Glass, Lees focuses on recent and historical examples of economic and social exclusion. The inevitability of exclusion is something that Lees describes as being the end result of gentrification: “The inescapable conclusion is that unless Harlem defies all the empirical trends…wholesale rehabilitation of central Harlem would necessarily involve a considerable

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influx of middle and upper-class whites." Further, Lees presents many of her findings in a racial context, something that is vital when researching tenant organizations in a place like Harlem, where the population is predominantly Black and Hispanic. Since most of the low-income tenants in Harlem are either Black or Hispanic, it would be important to tap into the cultural, historical and societal aspects that may or may not inform these tenants’ capacity to resist expulsion.

Another example is Richard Schaffer and Neil Smith’s article, “The Gentrification of Harlem?” written in 1986. In this work, the history of Harlem’s population trend is tracked back to the 1970’s. Though at this time Schaffer and Smith claimed that the changes in Harlem, especially on racial lines, were slow and not hugely consequential, they did concede that, “Although gentrification has begun in the western corridor, albeit on a small scale, it is important to be cautious about its extent.” Because of its sporadic nature throughout the city at the time, causing spatial changes and displacement in Lower Manhattan, Yorkville, and the Upper East Side, scholars were able to notice a trend in motion. Moreover, low-income populations were also cited as being especially anxious about the process of gentrification coming to their neighborhood. For example, Schaffer and Smith mentioned, “Those who oppose gentrification (because wholesale displacement is likely and finding adequate and affordable alternative housing is difficult) stress the fact that once gentrification begins in a neighborhood it is difficult to stop.” Despite these challenges, there are historical instances where members of the Harlem community came together to make reforms on societal issues such as adequate and affordable

65 Lees, Slater, and Wyly, *Gentrification*, 111.


housing. These instances frequently involved complex forms of resistance typically against the state or a more powerful entity in order to retain the former population in their apartments or neighborhood.

**Resistance to Gentrification**

Where most of the respondents I interviewed speak to the negative effects of gentrification, they also recognize its benefits. However many of the residents I interviewed were frustrated by the reality of imminent displacement and the fact that they would not be able to enjoy the benefits of the changing community. In their work on gentrification in New York City, Kathe Newman and Elvin Wyly spoke to the core of this dilemma:

> Not surprisingly, residents appreciate many of the changes taking place in their neighborhoods – increased safety, less overt drug dealing, better transportation, improved governmental responsiveness and more stores. After all, many of these long-term residents have been working to make just these improvements for decades. But they don’t remain merely to appreciate the improvements occurring in their neighborhoods. They remain because these are their communities. Their families, networks and lives are all there.68

As stated by Wyly and Newman, many improvements made in low-income communities were based on a determined set of individuals who sought to make circumstances better for themselves and fellow residents. Tenant organizing has a history in Harlem of providing to residents a platform to address social inadequacies such as the lack of affordable housing. In some instances tenant organizing has produced successful outcomes. One example is the Tenant Interim Lease (TIL) program.

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68 Newman and Wyly, “Gentrification and Resistance in New York City”.

Gamble 39
Harlem’s Housing Crisis and the Tenant Interim Lease

During the 1970’s the New York City government began taking control of buildings in which landlords had failed to pay property taxes. Rather than the massive take-over of property by the city becoming a burden, city officials and tenant activists used the occasion as a huge opportunity. A policy developed in the late 1970’s called the Tenant Interim Lease was one of the “primary methods of privatizing city-owned property and has been responsible for converting 527 buildings with 11,620 apartments into tenant-owned, low-income, cooperatives.” Before the TIL policy, the city had lost hundreds of thousands of units of low-cost housing, as landlords abandoned properties. And as properties became blighted in low-income communities, homelessness plagued many Black folks of New York. In 1992 alone, one in twelve African Americans in New York City spent some amount of time in a homeless shelter.

By the 1980’s the city owned half of the housing stock in Harlem, which became for some housing advocates a large safety net to buttress tenant empowerment and retention in Harlem. In 1987, the City’s department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) got the title to 29-33 Convent Ave, an apartment that exemplified the horrid examples of blight and mismanagement that plagued many other Harlem buildings.


70 White and Saegert, “Return from Abandonment,” 158.

71 Ibid., 160.
29-33 Convent Avenue

29-33 Convent Avenue was an apartment building that had both major infrastructural and safety hazards. Like other apartments in the area, 29-33 had fallen behind on tax payments, as well as on services and amenities to the tenants.73 There was no hot water for weeks, the ceiling in many apartments leaked when it rained, and the main door to the building had a broken lock. As far as safety, the building was host to both drug peddlers and users, further lessening the functionality of the building and the morale of the residents. A third of the residents were on public assistance or disability, or were underemployed. However despite the pressing economic barriers, “grassroots community organization throughout the city had begun to gain control of a small number of apartment buildings whose landlords had given up hope of paying taxes or mortgage debts,” leading to city ownership and eventually conversion to co-ops under the TIL program.74

The TIL program “refers to the period between the moment tenants gain city government approval to join the program and the time they purchase the building and convert it into a low-income cooperative.”75 The significance of such a policy is that it seeks to save and empower tenants by giving them the opportunity to “save themselves” from the negligence of housing privateers, while facilitating the rehabilitation and financing necessary to maintain the building.

Paid for by HPD’s capital budget housing program, the Tenant Interim Lease incubated tenant leadership by affording them opportunities, under the supervision of the city, at self-governance. An example of this self-governance is the amount of involvement by the occupants

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72 Ibid., 150-160.
73 Ibid., 159.
74 Ibid., 159-60.
75 Ibid., 164.
of the apartment building. First, the program required the apartment building to form an association, “in which more than half of the occupied apartments are represented, hold meetings, and elect a group of officers.” Second, as a program requirement before acceptance, the elected officers of the tenant association had to take courses on building management, maintenance and financial management, and many activists and members took the courses as well. These efforts further buttressed the success of TIL program by giving tenants the proper tools and education to establish their self-governance, while funding these endeavors for successful results.

Opponents of the program may cite the bureaucratic nature and possible risk of dependency in TIL cooperatives, but through the education and participation in classes, voting, and meetings the program was able to foster civic responsibility, camaraderie and empowerment in 29-33 Convent. The Vice President of the 29-33 Tenant Association stated:

People (tenants) who never talked to each other before are talking all the time… I have seen individuals develop more confidence in their capabilities, develop leadership qualities. We have all learned to grow. We have all had to stretch ourselves to make this happen.

In addition to empowerment, the tenants of 29-33 had used their newfound confidence to make positive, tangible, changes in the building. In the TIL cooperative, rents did increase for tenants, however the increases were for the sake of “bring[ing] revenues closer in line with expenses of management and routine maintenance, and gives tenants an inkling of what it will take to run the building as a cooperative.” Moreover, having a strong hand in the finances of

76 Ibid., 165.
77 Ibid., 165.
78 Ibid., 169.
79 Ibid., 169.
80 Ibid., 166.
the cooperative gave tenants more freedom in decisions that directly affected their quality of life, as well as being acknowledged in those decisions. One such example is when the tenants decided as a cooperative to make renovations on the walls of the building. Vice President Calloway and her fellow tenants decided to hire an outside contractor to completely repair walls that had been long damaged. Ms. Calloway said, “They (the city) wanted to laminate over crumbling walls…we said no way, demolish these and put up new ones.” Needless to say, the contractors did as they were told. Because a TIL demanded serious tenant participation, members were able to feel comfortable in their apartments knowing that other members were united in common purpose. And when individuals felt that their presence was of worth to the bettering of their community, the tenants of 29-33 were then able to solve common problems.

In sum, the Tenant Interim Lease works synergistically between tenant activism and good governance. The city created a policy that kept tenants in their homes, and the tenants worked just as hard to shape and better their spatial realities rather than facing expulsion. The issue that confronts Harlem presently is not as accommodating as the case of 29-33 Convent. Harlemites now work with few resources in order to meet tenant needs, a challenge that confronts both of the tenant associations I have researched.

**The Harlem Tenants Council**

Another example that clearly and specifically illustrates resistance to gentrification in Harlem is in the film by Natasha Florentino and Tamara Gubernat called *Rezoning of Harlem*, a documentary about the Harlem Tenants Council (HTC) and its battle against the City Planning Commission of New York City.

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81 Ibid., 167.
The major conflict was the rezoning of Central Harlem’s 9th, 10th, and 11th community board districts; a rezoning that would result in a large-scale redevelopment of the entire thoroughfare (ranging from 1st to 12th avenues on 125th street). HTC opposed the rezoning because they felt that it sought to raise property values in Harlem through the development of high-rise condos and luxury houses, which would result in the eventual displacement of many Harlem natives. Central Harlem, which is historically commercial and comprised of many small businesses and street vendors, was not viewed by the HTC as an appropriate residential enclave. However, the New York City Planning Commission, which had major political support from city officials, felt that rezoning the area would bring revenue to a historically low-income part of the city, and luxury houses would only boost the appeal of the Central Harlem landscape.

With the support of Harlem tenants, HTC leaders were able to take the fight to the media, staging protests in Albany, downtown Manhattan, and other places where the New York City Planning Commission met. Their aim: to bring the New York City Planning Commission’s “back door” meetings to light and keep low-income residents in Harlem abreast of new developments. These protests, though largely ignored by the commission and their political supporters, brought the concerns of tenants and small business owners to a higher platform, making the intricacies of housing law accessible through concise sound bites. Signs, chants, and fiery press conferences thrust a small tenant association into a larger political debate over the future of Harlem, and the low-income population’s place in it. By educating the natives of Harlem, the HTC hoped to mobilize both low-income tenants and small business owners to protest the rezoning of their neighborhood, and ultimately remain in West Harlem.

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Using protest and picketing, the HTC attempted to slow down the commission’s plan to rezone Central Harlem. As their media attention gained traction, more Harlem natives got involved in the rallies and protests, pressuring otherwise complacent New York City council members to help stop the rezoning proposal. In the end, a majority decision from the planning commission voted for Harlem to be rezoned, further proving the difficulty tenant associations experience when combating an increasingly expensive housing market. The passing of rezoning in Central Harlem meant a loss sustained by the HTC. This case displays the degree to which the gentrification process has become ingrained in city governance and planning. What this case also made clear was that there exists a population who believe the security of low-income residents is threatened by gentrification, which justifies their acts of resistance.

In sum, though tenant associations have been proven to be useful agents of resistance, the magnitude of the process of gentrification may make it harder for them to win. In both of the case studies I will present, the tenant associations used various means of resistance against the developers of their apartment complexes in order to slow the process of gentrification and its negative effects on the original residents. The writings that I have cited prove that the effects of gentrification can take many forms. In some instances, gentrification results in the racial clearing of an area for the sake of a new population. In other instances gentrification means the rezoning of a historically low-income community for the sake of private commerce, or speculative disinvestment in older housing in anticipation of redevelopment and capital gain. In both case studies I will examine the form gentrification takes in relation to decisions made by the developer, identify how it is a threat to the retention of the original residents, and analyze the response the tenant association took in order to resist the process.
Chapter V: The Case of Tall Towers Broadway

On March 19th, 2012, Tall Towers Tenants Association staged a protest against Patriot Properties. The event was attended by dozens of organizers from the association and other community organizers. Four members of the Tall Towers Tenants Association stood at the outer-most entrance of the complex, distributing flyers that read “Protest Against Patriot Properties’ Lockdown” in bold letters, and “we are not a mini Alcatraz,” suggesting that the security system sought to criminalize those already living in complex. Two Association members placed tables along the walls of the entrance, intercepting the flow of tenants either entering or exiting the complex, and asking for them to sign petitions. The petition called for the immediate end of Patriot Property’s implementation of the security system.

Television news anchors and network trucks were dotted along and across the street, where every 30 minutes a different Association member, but primarily the president, would float to each production truck to deliver statements on behalf of the association. Public officials and other familiar faces supporting the protest were on-site to answer questions of the public, and they remained in the front of the outer-most entrance, where they could be seen and recognized. “This is not a prison!” proclaimed President Misty Columbia, as quoted in a local paper. The protest lasted for 14 hours, with the Association collecting nearly a thousand signatures for their petition. When asked what her aim was, President Columbia said she was hoping that the original tenants would be made aware of the planned improvements to security, and then demand


* Some respondents interviewed claimed that they had over one thousand petitions signed, however, Isis Eno, a volunteer organizer for Tall Towers Tenant Association is the only respondent who mentioned an estimate on the record.
to be included in the final decision to install the system. For Ms. Columbia and the other organizers of Tall Towers Tenants, the ideology of community mindedness was the pillar of the association.

The Concept of Community and Safety

The protest was voted on and approved by the Association in the month of January 2012, and from then on strategy and logistics meetings were convened weekly to delegate roles for each protestor. Isis Eno, who had spent the greater part of 2011 getting the word out about the eminent “lockdown” of Tall Towers, stressed in our interview that the concept of community was the driving force behind tenant organizing in Tall Towers, where individuals struggle for a unified cause:

I think people create a shared identity when they struggle together, and a lot of times in tenant organizing, specifically, an entire apartment building will be struggling to keep their affordability or to fight against their landlord for repairs.\textsuperscript{84}

With regards to “shared identity,” Eno emphasized the essence of Harlem’s history of resistance to the gentrification process. Just as they had in the 1980’s and more recently in Central Harlem, low-income residents collectively stood up to powerful opposition, despite the probable outcome of expulsion, in hopes of sustaining their existing community.

Phyllis, the treasurer of Tall Towers Tenants, explained a feeling that the community she was used to was degenerating due to the rapid amount of students paying market-rate rent moving in:

\textsuperscript{84} Isis Eno, Interview by Miles Elijah Gamble, New York, NY, September 8, 2012.
There are a lot of tenants moving in here that are students… So their parents probably help pay the rent every month. And then when the lease is up, everybody goes wherever. They're not tenants, they're not a family, they're not gonna be here. They're gonna go…back to California, Hawaii, wherever they live. They're not gonna make a life here.\(^\text{85}\)

As was explained in the previous chapter, there was a theme of shared identity and community mindedness. Just as James Baldwin felt a social connection with the individuals who lived in his neighborhood, Phyllis saw her idealized view of her Harlem apartment building being stifled by those she considered to be outsiders.

President Columbia, who had lived in the complex since it was built in the 1970’s, also emphasized the significance of community:

> There’s a certain familiarity and what I’m reading in these articles is that somehow or some way over time, there has been a loss of familiarity regarding the turnover of tenants. Versus who comes in, how many years they stay, what they put into it and what they do before they leave.\(^\text{86}\)

However, what members of Tall Towers Broadway saw as a negative change in the social character of their building, others believed to be a vast improvement. Some of the other respondents in my interviews explained that community in the Manhattanville neighborhood of Harlem was long undermined by social deviance and high-crime rates. Specifically, the concept of safety was constantly brought up in my interviews with individuals who either opposed or felt indifferently about the Tall Towers protest.

\(^\text{85}\) Phyllis Adams, Interview by Miles Elijah Gamble, New York, NY, October 8, 2012.

\(^\text{86}\) Misty Columbia, Interview by Miles Elijah Gamble, New York, NY, August 9, 2012.
Mark Murray, who was a resident of Tall Towers for five years, felt that the security system was a necessary response to newcomers:

You create a safe environment; you get a lot of students in there. If I create a dorm of students, you get a lot of college students from all over living there...So, the building had to take whatever step necessary to make that atmosphere safe. 87

In his description of some of the older tenants living in Tall Towers Broadway, Mr. Murray characterized them as “nasty” and “filthy,” suggesting that the integrity of the complex with regards to safety and infrastructure was being compromised by the “neglect on [the] part [of the tenants]” and not outsiders.

Mr. Murray described the protestors of the new security system as perhaps being implicated in the illegal activities that made the complex unsafe:

I feel that, a lot of people feel that, this monitoring of their actions or behavior [means] that they are doing illegal things... I think that those people have a significant amount of things that they’re hiding within themselves.

In Murray’s opinion, the concept of community was predicated on the safety of its residents, and if the residents that exist in the community are reluctant to keep it safe, then assertive safety measures, as well as new residents, are completely necessary. Other Manhattanville residents shared this idea of new members and safety measures being important for community creation as well.

As Sassen explained in her work, as cities become global, services and resources become accessible to individuals who can afford to live in those cities. 88 Marie Martin, an owner and broker of numerous brownstones and apartments in Manhattanville since 1985, said that she has


always sought individuals who were young, and were able to pay market-rate rents for vacancies. To Ms. Martin, any form of payment for rent or a mortgage that was subsidized was considered “inefficient” because it meant that the resident was not economically stable, which she attributed to the lack of personal responsibility among poor Blacks. Also, when asked about her feelings toward the Tall Towers protest that took place, Martin responded by saying the protest of a security system was a “foolish cry” from individuals who felt “entitled” to making demands despite their low-income status. Further, Martin asserted that law enforcement “crackdowns” were good and necessary for Manhattanville because “it is proven that higher police presence in any capacity brings crime down in low-income areas,” assuming that community wants to socially progress.89

Despite Mr. Murray’s assertion, a recent report from the Furman Center For Real Estate and Urban Policy showing the empirical findings of 10 cities in the United States dispels his theory. While Mr. Murray alludes to issues of poverty, this report found, “while crime is higher in census tracts in which higher numbers of households use vouchers… the statistically significant association between the number of households with vouchers in a neighborhood in one year and crime levels in the following year disappears after controlling for pre-existing differences between neighborhoods where voucher holders settle and other neighborhoods.”90 This means that there is not a direct connection between low-income residents, who are the individuals eligible for government housing vouchers, and crime in a particular neighborhood. Rather than low-income residents causing crime in their own communities, the Furman report affirms that crime or ill conditions may have more than likely existed in that particular


neighborhood before they lived there. However, the stigma of crime being caused by individuals living off of governmental assistance for housing remains strong in many cities and communities.

Fiji Flower, a respondent who moved into Manhattanville two years ago, spoke of the concerns she had when moving in to the neighborhood. Like Mr. Murray, she also felt unsafe in the area, claiming that she, a graduate student, was fearful of living anywhere above 125th street:

> I am from Virginia. So I was nervous moving to New York in the first place, but I was excited. But my parents said you need to live in the dorm for the first year just ’cuz you don’t know anything about apartments, you don’t have a roommate. And that was good. And then the second year, I was an RA (Residence Assistant), so it was free rent and I figured I might as well. But, I had this stigma in my head that above 125th is like DANGEROUS! And I don’t know why, but I feel like a lot of students of this school carry that stigma.

Some individuals in the Manhattanville neighborhood feel the stigma of being identified as criminal or dangerous whether the attitude comes from students moving into the neighborhood or individuals who already reside in Tall Towers Broadway. Specifically, Ms. Flower’s comments about living in a college dormitory environment, echoes Mr. Murray’s comments of how Tall Towers should work to make a safe environment for college students. Again, the idea of community progress and safety seemed to leave no consideration for the comfort or retention of the tenants who had lived in Tall Towers and Manhattanville for decades before students began moving in.

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92 Ibid., 1.

93 Fiji Flower, Interview by Miles Elijah Gamble, New York, NY, February 20, 2013.
When I asked about his considerations of a neighborhood that was perhaps “safer” at the expense of the displacement of tenants, Mr. Murray responded by saying that the change in Tall Towers should be accepted more enthusiastically for the sake of a better neighborhood:

I can afford it [the rising cost of rent], so I’m gonna embrace it. I think part of the people in the neighborhood are so accustomed to having things a certain way…. No one wants to say, you know what? This could be good for the neighborhood, let me try to upgrade myself. People are accustomed to living the way they live for a long decade or years. No one’s looking for that next level.⁹⁴

However, the members of Tall Towers Tenants Association feel that the security system further antagonized the relationship between the new residents and the old. President Columbia felt that the security system would serve no purpose but to ignore the mounting infrastructural issues of the complex that negatively affect the original tenants. As she said, “[Their] lack of repairing and lack of consideration or care for your tenants makes [them] like a slumlord.”³⁹⁵ President Columbia also said that there was a lack of communication between the association and the developer, which led to decision-making that sought no input or feedback from the association regarding new security measures. In President Columbia’s words, Patriot Properties’ lack of communication sent a message that there was no longer a concern for the concept of community she grew up with. As she said, “They’re doing something to help us [our building] in a sense, but at what cost?”³⁹⁶

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⁹⁴ Mark Murray, March 15, 2013.
⁹⁵ Misty Columbia, Interview by Miles Elijah Gamble, New York, NY, August 9, 2012.
Tall Towers Broadway Case on Fisher’s Model

To analyze Tall Towers Tenants Association’s protest, I used Fisher’s model to evaluate how effective their resistance was:

Location:

In terms of mobilization, Manhattanville was a community in Harlem where the Tall Towers Tenants Association had numbers on their side. Tall Towers Broadway is located at the corner of a busy intersection in the Manhattanville neighborhood, so having association members at strategic points, in front of and around the complex, handing out flyers to passersby, would result in large amounts of exposure for the Association and their cause.

Transclass Groupings:

Though not all of the tenants of the Association make the same income, the majority of them were subsidized renters, some partially and others fully. What they did have in common, if not income or social status, was their risk of being priced out by market-rate renters, students who could afford the higher amounts of rent, who have been desired by Patriot Properties to live in Tall Towers Broadway.

Democratic Politics:

Mobilization was also facilitated by the Association’s internal democratization practices, for instance the way that the protest was organized was by majority vote. Every member of the Association was allowed to voice their opinion of the protest and discuss ideas that they each believed would be effective. Also, all Association members are elected by majority vote and they must present a reasonable premise for re-election. There are also town hall meetings and debates.97

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97 Misty Columbia, Interview by Miles Elijah Gamble, New York, NY, August 9, 2012.
Cultural and Social Identity:

Tall Towers is comprised mostly of Black and Brown individuals. From my interviews and observations of the association meetings, both populations felt anxiety over the increasing number of market-rate tenants, as well as the new security measures that they were reluctant to agree too. Many of the members grew up in the complex and had an ideal image of the complex as a place of racial solidarity and collective work, an image that did not include White people. In all of the meetings I attended, there was only one White family present.

Community Self-Help:

The Tall Towers Broadway Tenants Association conducted strategy meetings to decide what media outlets to reach out to and where to place protesters, and used donations from the public and association members to create and print outreach flyers. Door knocking and word of mouth were also used by the Association to insure that their protest would be widely advertised at a local level. Furthermore, self-orchestrated publicity demonstrated on the day of the protest proved to the observers and Patriot Properties that the Association was not going to wait for the changes they wanted to see.
Chapter VI: The Case of Malcolm’s Grove

In 2005, the Conglomo Corporation sought to replace every window in the six-building complex of Malcolm’s Grove. Their attempt, in the words of Ms. Sour, Conglomo’s on-site public representative at the complex, was to “brighten the façade of the property.” However, many tenants, namely the members of Malcolm’s Grove Association of Concerned Tenants (MGACT), were of the opinion that the windows did not need to be changed and that the installation was an attempt to attract newcomers to the building. By 2007, all of the windows at Malcolm’s Grove were changed. In 2009, new rent rates went into effect.

According to New York State Tenants and Neighbors, an organization dedicated to ensuring affordable housing to thousands of New Yorkers, a Major Capital Improvement (MCI) is a qualified expense to be shared or passed down to the tenants after a repair is made.98 The cost of an MCI is first divided by the total number of rooms in a building, or complex, and is then divided again by the number 84 (or 12 months times 7 years). Thus, one’s monthly rent would only increase by the MCI divided by 84, multiplied by the number of rooms that individual rents.99 However, despite this timeframe Conglomo never articulated to MGACT when the rent hikes would stop. MGACT President Sarah Bond expressed doubts that the increase would ever stop:

The way they do it is that it’s a permanent increase. Another way they can do it, it will be on your rent until the debt is paid off and then it comes off. But they were able to get this and this is all rules that has to do with Albany.100

98 Tenants & Neighbors, “What should I do if I get a Major Capital Improvement Increase?”
99 Tenants & Neighbors, “What should I do if I get a Major Capital Improvement Increase?”
100 Sarah Bond, August 11, 2012.
What initially alarmed the MGACT was the cost of the windows that residents would incur. Fifteen extra dollars would be attached to the monthly rent, per window. The members of MGACT felt that Conglomo was purposely scheming to attract new tenants and were pricing out original residents by making hasty renovations with little communication to the residents who would have to pay an increased rent because of the renovations. This claim was also repeated in my interview with J.L., a ten-year resident of Central Harlem-North, who was a renter at another Conglomo owned building adjacent to Malcolm’s Grove:

> There’s no talking [between the management and the tenant]. Basically [Conglomo did] work that needs to be done for the condition of the development of the building… They would submit the cost to the Housing Preservation Department, with the request to turn the cost over to the tenant. It would be up to the Housing Preservation Department to agree or disagree in handing over that cost. So in most cases, you would get some notification after the fact.\(^\text{101}\)

When I asked Ms. Bond how she felt about the windows, she did concede that the new windows were a needed improvement in that they were “safer” and “energy efficient” with regards to insulation. However, she stressed her contention that it was not the improvements, but rather the pricing out of former tenants that was the problem.

> Now, don’t get me wrong, there’s nothing wrong with improving a neighborhood… [However] I think why can you not improve a neighborhood without systematically kicking out the people who are in the neighborhood already?\(^\text{102}\)

**Implications and Reactions to the MCI**

To Ms. Bond, this was a direct attempt to expel former residents from their homes in exchange for wealthier tenants who could afford market rate units. In the *New York Daily News*

\(^\text{101}\) J.L., Interview by Miles Elijah Gamble, New York, NY, August 29, 2012.

\(^\text{102}\) Sarah Bond, Interview by Miles Elijah Gamble, New York, NY, August 11, 2012.
Ms. Bond was quoted as saying “Harlem would not be Harlem anymore” in response to the state’s relaxing rent regulations.\textsuperscript{103} It can be argued that Lee’s hypothesis of gentrification changing the character of a given community on racial lines resonates with the MGACT, though Ms. Bond argues that race is not the immediate cause, rather the dominating factor is the dollar.

Gentrification is an economic thing but the effect of this economic gentrification is racial. It has racial implications, because the people--when they raise the rent to almost double what the people are paying currently or what people who moved out who were in it for twenty years or whatever, it has the effect of you know, the same effect. The majority of people who can afford the rent are not people of color.\textsuperscript{104}

According to findings of Prudential Douglas Elliman, a prominent New York real estate firm, the median price of a Manhattan apartment saw an upsurge of 7.9\% from 2011 to 2012, making the new median rent $3,125.\textsuperscript{105} With regards to the article written by Schaffer and Smith nearly thirty years ago, the progress of gentrification has dramatically intensified to the point where the entire borough of Manhattan will continue to become more expensive at a less gradual rate.\textsuperscript{106}

Ms. Sour, who repeated this many times in my interview with her, replied that Malcolm’s Grove was in need of an upgrade, which the renovations would satisfy:


\textsuperscript{104} Sarah Bond, August 11, 2012.


\textsuperscript{106} Furman, “Manhattan Rents Experience Highest Rise in 5 Years.”
I would say that if they’re customarily trying to improve the way that the tenants are living and are trying to improve the façade of the property, that’s why I agree with the Major Capital Improvement…we have doctors, we have dentists, we have all sorts of medical professionals that come and reside at Malcolm’s Grove. So it [the renovations] has been very productive and it has enhanced the ability for Malcolm’s Grove to lease the apartments.107

Ms. Sour’s response was indeed consistent with Professor Wharton’s definition of the gentrification process.108 By mentioning doctors and dentists in the context of tenants who now live in Malcolm’s Grove, it can be assumed that the renovations and improvements that boost the “façade” are attracting a “business professional” class, or generally speaking, a wealthier population. It is also important to note that some experts say that the housing market in New York City, though booming, has been held back in the past year due to the slowing development of new buildings.109 The slowing of new developments may mean larger opportunities for existing apartment buildings in Manhattan because new tenants moving into neighborhoods would have a limited amount of housing options. As Ms. Sour explained, the “enhanced” look of Malcolm’s Grove would enable management to not only deliver better services to market rate tenants, but also retain and attract more of them.

Complications with Major Capital Improvements Increase

Sarah Bond and other tenant leaders suspected collusion between Conglomo and the Department of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR). This suspicion becomes important when considering the relationship between local government and private interest because some

109 Furman, “Manhattan Rents Experience Highest Rise in 5 Years.”
residents feel that developers are being allowed to change or specialize MCI stipulations in order to charge tenants more for rent. But others who disagree with the MGACT’s stance, such as Ms. Sour, argue that the state is not in collusion with Conglomo and the state acts in accordance with their own rules and technicalities that the tenant association does not understand:

States have to allocate approval. Without the state’s approval, those charges would have never been implemented. So that’s something that’s dealt with by the state. It’s not the organization. If the state approves it, therefore that means it’s written in stone.\footnote{Ms. Sour, September 4, 2012.}

Still, tenants of Conglomo’s properties feel that the amount of an MCI increase, state authorized or not, is at times too high and not representative of the quality of service actually being received. Malcom’s Grove neighbor J.L. felt that he was paying too much of an increase based on repairs that should have been standard renovations completed and paid for by the developer:

With the MCI charges, [it] easily added another $150 dollars to the rent over the course of the four or five years. When you’re receiving increases that are not within your budget, [they] are unexpected costs, and quite frankly, [they are] things that are not relevant to the inside of your apartment… When you’re talking about basically [repairing] intercoms or whatever, those things, those costs, from where I sit, should be covered by the landlord.\footnote{J.L., August 29, 2012.}

In turn, Ms. Sour responds this statement by accusing the tenants of Conglomo’s various properties of having a false sense of entitlement, similar to the claims made by Ms. Martin in regards to the Tall Towers protest, where tenants encourage the notion of not having to pay their fair share of the building rent:

\footnote{Ms. Sour, September 4, 2012.}
\footnote{J.L., August 29, 2012.}
[Some] have been here [at Malcolm’s Grove] for years. And if we raise it [the rent] a dollar, you go into a conniption because you can’t deal with any kind of adjustment. You[’re] used to it [the affordable rents]… I would say that there are people that are moving in that are spending close to $3000. So, fifteen dollars is a drop in the bucket.\textsuperscript{112}

The MCI speaks to a larger theme of affordability, economic security, and policy. Ms. Bond’s primary concern was that the MCI gave Conglomo \textit{carte blanche} to do as they pleased in renovating Malcolm’s Grove at the expense of the original tenants who may have not been able to afford the increase. J.L. also believed that the increases in rent had been unreasonable and wrongly charged to tenants. On the other side of the argument, Ms. Sour contended that the increases were reasonable and in no way suggested collusion between the State of New York and Conglomo. However, in 2008, a U.S. Congressman who represented the Central Harlem-North neighborhood was accused of renting four market-rate apartments in Malcolm’s Grove at cheaper rates to use as an office for his campaign, which goes against election regulation.\textsuperscript{113} Another finding made by observers was that the same congressman received over five thousand dollars in donations from the head managers of Conglomo from 2004 to 2008.\textsuperscript{114}

\textbf{The Tenant Gang}

Using her deep ties to the community and connectedness, Ms. Bond sought the assistance of other tenant associations in Central Harlem-North and elsewhere in order to address the rent hike. Organizing the leaders of other tenant associations, President Bond formed “The Tenant

\textsuperscript{112} Marie Martin, Interview by Miles Elijah Gamble, New York, NY, July 10, 2013.


\textsuperscript{114} Westfeldt,”Rangel: Not Unfair to Have 4 Rent-Stabilized Apartments”.
Gang,” an organization dedicated to the collective goal of keeping rent affordable in low-income apartment buildings and ensuring quality housing for tenants. The Tenant Gang was actually formed in 2007, before Conglomo’s MCI was approved. The coalition was comprised of groups from Malcolm’s Grove and two other complexes owned by Conglomo in the Central Harlem-North neighborhood. According to Ms. Bond, the original goal of the organization was to get the attention of all city officials up for re-election in 2008. By joining forces, The Tenant Gang would be considered a sizable bloc consisting of hundreds of Black voters.

Recognizing the diverse demography of middle and working class renters in the area, Ms. Bond wanted every eligible voter under The Tenant Gang umbrella to be not only politically aware of their changing community, but also aware of the influence their numbers could garner among public officials. As in Keyder’s work on Istanbul, there is a belief that policies implemented by local government and city officials tend to ensure the economic interests of private sector, placing secondary concern on the needs of the citizens themselves. Ms. Bond punctuated this point by stating, “Our numbers will force them (elected officials) to pay attention to our issues, because we are a community of people who vote,” which would provide the MGACT with an amount of leverage in response to Ms. Bond’s suspicion of the Conglomo’s political power. Similar to the HTC in 2008, the MGACT wanted to get the attention of city officials and hoped to hold them accountable for servicing residents of the communities they represented, rather than placing their allegiances with private entities.

In 2009 the MGACT, as part of The Tenant Gang, responded to the DCHR’s approval of the MCI by filing an appeal. They claimed that Conglomo’s application was flawed, missing necessary components, and made fraudulent claims about the conditions of the windows. Pooling their resources, The Tenant Gang consolidated funds and hired a lawyer who would head a “Tenant Protection Unit” for Malcolm’s Grove. The job of the lawyer was to identify cases in
which tenants won DHCR appeals based on the developer’s negligence in filling out their MCI application improperly.

According to Ms. Bond, the lawyer found evidence of procedural flaws, such as Conglomo’s MCI application being submitted two months late and without necessary documentation. Though these infractions were seemingly minor, there have been real examples where they have cost building owners their MCI approvals, (see Appendix D).

Lateness of application submission, or failure to present required documentation with the application has disqualified landlords from MCI in past instances, meaning that no rent hike would be placed on the tenants of the building. With the help of a paid lawyer, the MGACT sought not only to get rid of the rent hike, but also demanded to be compensated for the three consecutive years of rent overages (from 2009 to 2012) that had been shouldered by the tenants of Malcolm’s Grove.

When I interviewed Ms. Sour, Conglomo’s public representative, about the appeal, she responded by stating:

This is not their [MGACT] entity, you are not the owner, and you are not a shareholder: these are not shares, you are renters. You don’t really have any say so. Just as the major capital improvements were placed, going forward, anything else that needs to be facilitated by the organization, it will be done.\(^{115}\)

Through resisting the rent hikes, the MGACT are resisting the larger gentrification process. Because the rent hikes are likely to price out tenants of a lower income, President Bond’s combating of the hikes not only exhibited legal contestation, but also sought to politically challenge the public policy that so easily enabled rent hikes. Rather than becoming a part of the mass displacement caused by gentrification, President Bond sought to organize and educate the mostly low-income tenants of Malcolm’s Grove, and hired a lawyer in hopes of staving off the

\(^{115}\) Ms. Sour, September 4, 2012.
rent hikes. However, the success of this resistance must be measured by Fisher’s model in order to have a more conclusive analysis.

Malcolm’s Grove Case on Fisher’s Model

Location:

The North-Central Harlem neighborhood has an identity and history that is included in other uprisings against gentrification. One example, previously mentioned, was the mobilization the Harlem Tenants Council against the rezoning of Central Harlem.

Transclass Groupings:

According to my interviews with MGACT president, members of the association are a diverse population. Members of the MGACT range from ex-judges, to schoolteachers, to the elderly, all coming from different income levels. However, despite differences in income, profession and social standing, MGACT may have joined forces because of a common threat: displacement.

Democratic Politics:

The MGACT conduct their own elections for association leadership, specifically allowing the presidents up to two terms. Decisions of the MGACT, such as protests and fundraisers, are decided by vote and town hall meetings are scheduled for community support and input. However the president, as well as the representative, both informed me that meetings in the past year have been shorter and more sporadic.

Community and Social Identity:

Based on my interviews and other writings, the community of Central Harlem-North is one that is deeply political and concerned with solidarity. Like in Baldwin’s nostalgic description of Harlem, the idea of having a common identity with neighbors in Malcolm’s Grove was significant for many of my respondents. Further, news reports I read on the antagonistic
relationship between Conglomo and MGACT involved community complaints and community outcry to elected officials.\textsuperscript{116} The MGACT convened a “state of housing” talk in 2008 that demanded public officials say upfront what their plan was to keep housing affordable in Harlem and other low-income neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{117}

**Community Self-Help:**

Rather than just accepting the outcome of the DHCR’s decision, the MGACT decided to hire a lawyer to examine Conglomo’s application. After nearly five years, this appeal and dispute still lives on. Also, “The Tenant Gang” serves as an example of solidarity among Central Harlem-North natives. Despite the odds, the Tenant Gang served as a moral and organizational reinforcement to the MGACT, playing the role of “the Cavalry”. Furthermore, in my follow-up with President Bond, I was informed that the Tenant Gang is now working on their next project, a protest against Conglomo’s plans to build another six-building complex in the area.


\textsuperscript{117} Sarah Bond, Interview by Miles Elijah Gamble, New York, NY, February 11, 2012.
Chapter VII: Conclusion

Although different in timing and in method, both Tall Towers and Malcolm’s Grove presented evidence of resistance to the gentrification process in Harlem. Mobilizing either through law or picketing, both cases speak to a larger anxiety and frustration felt in their respective communities. Furthermore, both of the cases I have presented took place in a Harlem that is going through rapid spatial change, which most observers regard as an inevitable phenomenon. However, despite the obstacles in each case residents attempted an act or acts of resistance and it is appropriate to gauge which case was more effective.

Final Remarks About Malcolm’s Grove

The MGACT as of this writing was still going through what President Bond described as a “transition,” as members have either quit the association or have moved out of Malcolm’s Grove since the appeal commenced four years ago. As of the 2012, President Bond and The Tenant Gang have not been as active in the Central Harlem-North community as they were when the group was established. Since 2011 President Bond has begun a new campaign, resisting Conglomo’s plans to build six new apartment towers in Central Harlem-North.¹¹⁸ Though without many existing members, President Bond has made it a point to remain in the public eye and outspoken on the appeal against Conglomo’s rent hikes:

What we as the tenant’s association need to do is start putting some pressure on the commissioner and the head [of the DHCR] and let them know there needs to be a decision about this.¹¹⁹

Yet when asked what she believed the outcome of the lawsuit would be, President Bond said plainly, “It’s an issue we’re dealing with, with our attorney. But, when it will

¹¹⁸ Lowery, “Harlem Growth Plans Face Hurdles.”

Gamble 65
be over? Your guess is as good as mine.” When I asked Ms. Sour what her final considerations was regarding the on-going appeal, she replied:

Well, you cannot expect a person that is pro to agree with something when they are totally con. They are not in agreeance with what we’re doing, but you have no choice but to accept it or move out.120

President Bond sought a more institutional method of resistance by using law and political influence in order to offset the spatial consequences of Conglomo’s actions. To her credit, President Bond decided to take rightful action against the perpetrators of what she saw as an attack on the social character of her community. Rather than becoming politically, economically, or socially complacent, President Bond formed relationships with other organizers to create a local bloc with a political objective. However, President Bond also decided to resist within the same structures that enabled the rent hikes at Malcolm’s Grove. Though it was never made clear that the DHCR were making the MCI approval process easier for Conglomo, it is clear that Conglomo had imposed hikes for similar renovations at their other properties, such as Belmont Village, where my respondent J.L. resided.121

Final Remarks About Tall Towers

In my interview with the Tall Towers Tenants treasurer, Phyllis, I was informed that Tall Towers Tenants Association’s resistance failed to stop the installation of Patriot Properties’ new security system in September of 2012.122 Despite hundreds of signatures on petitions and media

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119 Sarah Bond, August 11, 2012.
120 Ms. Sour, September 4, 2012.
121 J.L., August 29, 2012.
attention following the protest in March of that year, Patriot Properties installed a new security system into each building of the five-tower complex. Since the installation, some residents have received new identification cards, giving them exclusive access to the building they reside in. Mark Murray, for example proudly showed me his card, stating that he felt that the measure would account for the safety of leaseholders and serve as a hindrance to criminal elements in Manhattanville. However, according to members of the association, many residents have chosen a different form of resistance by not getting their picture taken for their identification cards. “And I'd say, not even a quarter of this building have those ID cards” explained Phyllis, which serves as a profound statement for those who sought to challenge the gentrification process despite their failed campaign.

At both case sites, there was an ideology of community and collective action, where tenants of color realized that the social character of their neighborhood was waning in the wake of building improvements and eventual price-outs. Yet, what was starkly different between the two cases was the way in which they expressed their anxieties about gentrification. I believe through personnel, resources, and a dogged ability to stave off amenities associated with the gentrification process, the Tall Towers Tenants Association exhibited a more effective example of resistance.

**Comparison By Fisher’s Model**

In accordance to Fisher’s model, Tall Towers Tenants Association effectively used their “cultural and social identity” in a more assertive manner than the MGACT. Rather than waiting for an official form of resistance, such as an appeal, organizers sought to “beat the street” as a form of collective action. Furthermore, though the MGACT was comprised of mixed-income

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residents like Tall Towers Tenants Association, they lacked assertiveness when it came to public action. MGACT’s legal appeal to the DHCR may have taken a form of collective action, but the action was one that was strictly monetary in the hiring of a housing lawyer. The organizers of Tall Towers sought a more vigorous measure of resistance that called on every member of the complex to play a crucial and active role, rather than cooperating with institutional forms of protest.

Tall Towers Tenants Association was most effective because of the active, participatory character of their campaign against Patriot Properties. Tall Towers Tenants Association had more strategy meetings than MGACT, exhibited more enthusiasm in organizing and supporting themselves, and effectively used their neighborhood, both physically and symbolically, as a stage to express their grievances, shedding a most negative light on their landlords for all to see. However, some observers may argue that the MGACT led a more intelligent or cerebral form of resistance by seeking a legal challenge to Conglomo because of the substantial amount of money they stood to make if they won the appeal. However, though the money that could be potentially won by the MGACT would be a tremendous resource for the tenants of Malcolm’s Grove, their victory would lack a more profound narrative of solidarity and community-mindedness as seen at Tall Towers. Though the organizers of Tall Towers lost completely, they were able to reinvigorate a collective consciousness that took form in a different act of resistance, unlike the MGACT who were locked in a stalemate with their developer.

The Significance of this Study

The reason why the study of these cases is significant is because they describe how the gentrification process negatively affects communities, particularly ones of low-income and color. It is important for the academic community to continue examining and analyzing this modern phenomenon, realizing the multiple ways to study gentrification, as well as the multiple ways it
can impact our neighborhoods. As New York City sits atop the global city totem pole, we as social scientists, urbanists, historians, and planners must be willing and able to explain what keeps the city at such a level of economic supremacy and what that means for those who have limited resources. To study Harlem is to study the conditions of many neighborhoods in transition due to gentrification, because it represents a sacred home to many individuals who were forgotten by their city or larger society. Harlem represents a place of solace and history, culture and art, however the process of gentrification may change its entire complexion.

It has been proven that gentrification is a process brought on by the intensity of a capitalist-driven economy, yet individuals who decide to fight back do so because they are preoccupied with an intangible ideology, be it community solidarity or cultural obligation, that may transcend money itself. Tenant associations may provide examples of individuals who seek to build a platform for complex and assertive protest in order to defend a place they consider their permanent homes. As historical events show, these associations may succeed in certain forms of resistance, and many times fail in others. However, these cases of resistance prove that gentrification can be challenged even if the process appears to be unstoppable.
Bibliography


Tenants & Neighbors. “What should I do if I get a Major Capital Improvement Increase?” New York, NY.


# Appendix A

## List of Ideal Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number of Informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenant Organization</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>At least two informants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Board Members</td>
<td>At least two informants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assistants / Volunteers</td>
<td>At least two informants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Managers and Developers</td>
<td>Superintendents</td>
<td>At least two informants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security Guards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>President / CEO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outreach Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Residents</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>At least two informants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix B

## Questions Asked To Informants of Malcolm’s Grove Case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenant Association Member (Malcolm’s Grove)</th>
<th>On-Site Management / Property Developer (Malcolm’s Grove)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job Description</strong></td>
<td><strong>Specific Case</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the responsibilities of your position?</td>
<td>1. Describe in detail what took place when the developer installed new windows?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are your daily tasks?</td>
<td>2. How would the installation affect the tenants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How many did you have on staff when your campaign started?</td>
<td>3. How did your organization react to the installation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How many organizers do you have on staff currently?</td>
<td>4. What were the motives of the developer to install them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How long have you been working in your position?</td>
<td>5. Who was involved in the reaction to the installation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What is the mission of your organization?</td>
<td>6. How many years has this issue existed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Case</strong></td>
<td><strong>Job Description</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Why were the new windows installed?</td>
<td>1. What are the responsibilities of your position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How long did the application process for the MCI take?</td>
<td>2. How long has your company worked in Harlem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What was the necessary paperwork to apply for the MCI?</td>
<td>3. How many properties does your company own?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Was there any pushback from the tenants when the MCI process went through?</td>
<td>4. What were the motives of the developer to install them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Are there any other improvements you are planning for Malcolm’s Grove?</td>
<td>5. Who was involved in the reaction to the installation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix C

### Questions Asked To Informants of Tall Towers Broadway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenants Association Member (Tall Towers)</th>
<th>On-Site Management / Property Developer (Tall Towers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job Description</strong></td>
<td><strong>Specific Case</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the responsibilities of your position?</td>
<td>1. Describe in detail what took place when the developer installed new windows?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are your daily tasks?</td>
<td>2. How would the installation affect the tenants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How many did you have on staff when your campaign started?</td>
<td>3. How did your organization react to the installation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How many organizers do you have on staff currently?</td>
<td>4. What were the motives of the developer to install them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How long have you been working in your position?</td>
<td>5. Who was involved in the reaction to the installation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What is the mission of your organization?</td>
<td>6. How many years has this issue existed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. What was the end result?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Is there any success that you have found in your campaign/case?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job Description</strong></td>
<td><strong>Specific Case</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the responsibilities of your position?</td>
<td>1. Why was the new security policy enacted when it was?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How long has your company worked in Harlem?</td>
<td>2. What were some of the goals your company was hoping to accomplish with the new security policy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How many properties does your company own?</td>
<td>3. What was your reaction to the petition/protest that took place last March?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Have there been any more discussions since the petition/protest?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. What are the next steps you are planning to take as far as interfacing with tenant leaders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Will your company do anything different to the new security policy as far as revisions or amendments?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix D

### Examples of DHCR Cases Identified by MGACT’s Lawyer

#### “Application for Windows and Pointing/Steam Cleaning Not Filed On Time”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlord applied for MCI rent hike based on new window installations.</td>
<td>DHCR’s District Rent Administrator (DRA) ruled against the rent hike because the landlord submitted the MCI application late, approximately two years after the work was complete.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Parkoff Management: DHCR Admin. REV. Docket No. IE2301270R0 (8/6/02)) [2-pg. doc]

#### “Application Missing Information”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlord applied for MCI rent hike for the installation of a burner, new windows and plumbing.</td>
<td>DRA ruled against landlord’s application because of the landlord’s failure to present necessary documentation, such as cancelled checks, proving a need for an MCI.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Linden Boulevard: DHCR Admin. REV. Contracts Docket No. FB230026R0 (7/8/02)) [2-pg. doc]
Appendix E (Census Tract Maps)

Census Tract Map of Manhattanville Neighborhood
Appendix F (Census Tract Maps)

Census Tract Map of Central Harlem-North Neighborhood
Abstract

In 2010 Census data showed that 29,000 African Americans moved out of the borough of Manhattan,\(^1\) including 9,500 in Harlem alone.\(^2\) Many observers pointed to real estate pressures as the main reason. Countless news articles, from the New York Times, for example, have speculated a growing trend of Blacks moving out of New York to southern states, or places elsewhere,\(^3\) while one of the city’s greatest increases of white population was in Harlem in the past ten years.\(^4\)

The popular assumption among scholars, social scientists, and the media is that the process of gentrification is relentless and as time progresses, more skilled, white, and educated professionals will be making Harlem their new home. Consequently, buildings in Harlem will experience a sharp rise in property value, leaving former tenants of low-income neighborhoods priced out.

However, there are deviant cases where the relentless nature of the gentrification process is challenged. I set out to unearth events where tenant associations led campaigns against their building owners in an effort to keep housing affordable and to maintain the social character of their community. Through qualitative research and social movement theory, I evaluate the success of tenant resistance to gentrification by exploring their methods, motives, and desire to remain in a changing neighborhood.

\(^2\) “Making Census Of It,” 2011.
Vita

Miles Elijah Yawada Gamble was born in Harlem, New York. After graduating from The Beacon School in New York in 2006, he attended the College at Brockport, State University of New York to pursue a double major in Communications and Africana Studies. In his junior year of college, he studied abroad at University of Ghana at Legon. Miles was the first ever recipient of the Departmental Scholar award in Africana Studies and was also inducted into the Triota Honor Society for Women’s Studies in 2010. After graduation, Miles joined Americorps and served Harlem residents as a public benefits screener and tax preparation specialist. In Fall of 2011, Miles entered Fordham’s Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in the Urban Studies program. Also, since entering Fordham, Miles has presented work at The Fordham English Department’s “Art of Outrage” Graduate Conference, as well as the Society for the Study of Social Problems Annual Meeting.

As an artist and social scientist, Miles has a passion for capturing the human condition in cities. As an avid blogger, photographer, and documentarian, he has created films and projects aimed at identifying social problems in urban spaces. Miles has also transferred his passion for urban improvement into the nonprofit sector, assisting low-income families in becoming financially stable. Miles has participated in various public service initiatives, including food stamps advocacy, housing court advocacy, financial literacy, advocacy for the formerly incarcerated, as well as a strong opponent against street harassment in New York City.