

**Urban Parks:
A Study on Park Inequity and Eco-Gentrification in
New York City**

By: Bernadette Corbett
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Prologue

This thesis examines park equity and eco-gentrification within the boroughs of New York City. Uninhibited private fundraising has caused park inequity. Different parks receive varying amounts of funds due to fundraising abilities and political power. Statistically, an urban park in a low-income neighborhood on the city's periphery has a lower maintenance budget and fewer staff. On the other hand, redeveloping an urban park causes eco-gentrification or environmental gentrification. Dr. Melissa Checker, the Hagedorn Professor of Urban Studies at Queens College, coined the term "environmental gentrification." She defines it as the "process by which the push for sustainable cities, both intentionally and unintentionally, has been coopted by high-end real estate developers at the expense of the low-income residents" (Checker). This thesis examines case studies of environmental gentrification. The conclusion debates if an urban park can be improved without pushing out the native population.

Chapter One examines the positive and negative effects of urban parks onto their communities. Throughout the US, studies have shown that urban parks are supposed to be assets for cities. City parks have the ability to strengthen urban communities and improve physical and mental health. Parks can create a more attractive and improved living environment for neighborhoods. However, these benefits depend on the quality of the urban park. In some cases – most commonly in lower-income neighborhoods populated by minorities or immigrants – deteriorating city parks can cause social, economic, environmental, and health detriments.

Chapter Two focuses on the history of the City of New York's Parks and Recreation Department. New York City has one of the largest urban park systems in America. The Parks

Department surged during the mid-twentieth century and urban parks prospered. Then, the 1970s financial crisis caused drastic budget cuts in the Parks Department. As public funds were cut and park staffs were laid off, urban parks fell into despair. Private entities created park conservancies, such as Central Park Conservancy, to fundraise and advocate for parks with private fund revenues. Therefore, urban parks in more-affluent areas were repaired, while urban parks within less-affluent neighborhoods were left untouched. This two-tier funding model still exists. Today, the amount of private funding of a park drastically affects the quality and safety of that park.

Chapter Three defines park equity and eco-gentrification. Additionally, expert social theories about public spaces are examined within the context of New York City. Basically, urban parks are supposed to represent symbols of democracy. However, when private fundraising essentially privatizes public parks for an elite few, all other groups are excluded.

The next two chapters examine case studies of eco-gentrification within Manhattan and the Bronx. The Fourth Chapter examines two high-profile cases of eco-gentrification in New York City: the High Line and Central Park. The High Line is one of the city's newest redeveloped parks. After the High Line was completed, the area around Chelsea became incredibly expensive; consequently, the native residents and businesses were pushed out. Similarly, the property values surrounding the perimeter of Central Park are some of the most highly valued properties in the city. Additionally, Central Park Conservancy was the first established park friend group. Chapter Five discusses the fear of eco-gentrification in the Bronx. The Bronx River Alliance and the Bronx River Greenway will be examined. The Bronx River Alliance leads a crusade effort to provide clean and safe public spaces for Bronx residents.

However, activists such as Morgan Powell fear gentrification will occur around the Bronx River Greenway if native business and residents are not protected from rising land values. Moreover, a source at the Bronx River Art Center reported that a housing development is being constructed next to the Greenway. When completed, this apartment complex will be the largest housing project in the New York City's history.

And lastly, the Sixth Chapter concludes this thesis. Various solutions to park inequity are discussed. Also, urban planning designs that counter eco-gentrification are presented. Overall, I believe the Bronx River Alliance has given the best model to prevent eco-gentrification, and should be replicated throughout different communities.

CHAPTER 1: Urban Parks Throughout the US

“Urban planners believed the parks would improve public health, relieve the stresses of urban life, and create a democratizing public space where rich and poor would mix on equal terms” (Sherer).

Urban parks are a staple within city life. As 80 percent of Americans live in metropolitan areas (and this percentage is projected to increase as time goes on), urban parks affect the majority of citizens in the United States. (Sherer) Urban parks have economic, social, health and environmental benefits. However, the extent of these benefits depends on the quality of the urban park. In some cases – particularly in lower-income neighborhoods populated by minorities or immigrants – urban parks can become a detriment to the neighborhood. But in a catch-22 situation, cleaning or improving parkland can lead to gentrification within low-income neighborhoods.

Urban parks provide **economic** benefits to local governments, residents, and commercial businesses. An examination by the National Recreation and Parks Association reports on the economic impact of parks throughout the United States. The report found that parks are not just public amenities or enrichments to the quality of life in their neighborhoods; parks provide economic benefits to the community. The study concentrated on the direct, indirect, and induced effects that local parks have on their local and regional economy. According to the report, in

2013, “America’s local and regional public park agencies generated nearly \$140 billion in economic activity and supported almost 1 million jobs from their operations and capital spending alone” (Economic Impact). Therefore, parkland – both national parks and urban parks – hold tremendous financial value by facilitating economic activity.

The National Recreation and Parks Association analyzed parks on a national, state, and local scale. New York state parks generated the third most economic action, behind California and Florida. In 2013, the parks in New York State generated \$6 million in economic activity through transactions, \$2.8 million in wages, and 43,000 jobs. (Economic Impact) The report looked at case studies from individual parks throughout the US system, and some of those will be discussed through this chapter.

On a local scale, urban parks can facilitate a rise in real property values, an increase in tax revenue, and the attraction of affluent retirees. Urban parks can also attract new homebuyers and draw talented people into an area. Basically, urban parks can entice money into a neighborhood. In a 2001 study produced by the National Association of Realtors, 50 percent of survey responders were found to be more likely to choose a home near a neighborhood park, and are willing to pay more to live near a park or open public space. 57 percent said that they would purchase a house near an urban park over another location. (Sherer) Thus, parks can generate rising property values.

Research shows that people are willing to pay more money for a home near an urban park or green space than for a home lacking this amenity. John Crompton, a professor at Texas A&M University, has studied parks and recreation extensively. In 2000, Crompton released a report that researched how parks and open public spaces contribute progressively to property values.

Out of 25 cases, 20 indicated that there was a positive relationship between urban parks and property values. Consequently, higher property values leads to higher property taxes. Crompton states “In some instances, the additional property taxes are sufficient to pay the annual debt charges on the bonds used to finance the park’s acquisition and development” (Sherer). For example, a study found that the \$200,000 purchase of land for a small urban park would yield additional property taxes revenues of \$13,000 per year. Therefore, the additional tax revenues could pay for the park in 15 years. (Sherer)

Essentially, the revenue generated by higher property taxes could eventually cover the cost of new urban park. One key study focused on neighborhoods in Boulder, Colorado. Researchers examined the effect of neighborhoods close to greenbelts. They found the median value of homes next to the greenbelt was 32 percent higher than property that was 3,200 feet away from the green space. Additionally, one neighborhood “generated \$500,000 per year in additional potential property taxes, enough to cover the \$1.5 million purchase price of the greenbelt in only three years” (Sherer).

Clean and safe urban parks also positively affect commercial property values. For example, New York City’s Bryant Park positively affects its surrounding commercial spaces and businesses. Bryant Park used to be a site of urban decay; it was known as “Needle Park” in 1980. Drug dealing and overall crime was out of control, with 150 robberies occurring each year. Citizens were afraid of entering. The city decided to renovate the entire structure of the park; Bryant Park closed for 4 years and reopened in 1992. The park’s redesign made it safer, cleaner, and more welcoming to guests. Today, Bryant Park attracts thousands of visitors and is home to outdoor movies, cafés, and major fashion shows. (Bryant Park) How did the

redevelopment of the park affect commercial spaces and surrounding businesses? Between 1990 and 2000, a study conducted by Ernst & Young found that “rents for commercial office space near Bryant Park increased between 115 percent and 225 percent, compared with increases of between 41 percent and 73 percent in the surrounding submarkets” (Sherer). Furthermore, the report examined 36 neighborhoods within the five boroughs and found that “commercial asking rents, residential sale prices and assessed values for properties near a well-improved park generally exceeded rents in surrounding submarkets” (Sherer). This phenomenon is a trend throughout big cities. Similar results occurred in Atlanta when the Centennial Olympic Park was built; commercial rents rose dramatically in the surrounding area.

Another economic incentive for urban parks is tourism. *High-profile* urban parks can become major tourist attractions. Parks such as New York City’s High Line, Boston Public Garden, and Baltimore’s Inner Harbor are used as marketing tools to draw visitors to each city. Public events are usually hosted in these high-profile parks as well. Arts festivals, food festivals, or music and theater productions positively impact local businesses because visitors book hotel rooms, eat at restaurants, and shop at local stores while attending these events. Essentially, visitors contribute a lot of money that neighborhood. For example, “San Antonio’s Riverwalk Park, created for \$425,000, has overtaken the Alamo as the most popular attraction for the city’s \$3.5 billion tourism industry” (Sherer). Moreover, some researchers believe high-profile parks help shape city identity and are a source of pride for residents.

Urban parks add **social** benefits to their neighborhoods. Facilities within urban parks can be utilized as community development tools by building a sense of community and pride for local residents. “In addition to real estate, tourism, and environmental benefits, parks also

provide health, community or social, and “direct use” benefits” (Green). Urban parks generate social benefits in a variety of ways. First, urban parks simply build a more livable social environment to inner-city neighborhoods. They are places where low-income children and at-risk youth can play and participate in recreational activities. One study claims that urban parks have been linked to lower crime rates among at-risk youths. “Access to public parks and recreational facilities has been strongly linked to reductions in crime and in particular to reduced juvenile delinquency” (Sherer). This study claims that recreational facilities located in urban parks lower crime rates because they can keep at-risk teenagers off the street and offer them a safe environment. For example, in Fort Myers, Florida, the police department recorded a 28 percent decrease in juvenile arrests after the city created a recreational program in a low-income neighborhood. Furthermore, teenager’s grades in that area improved. In another example, many communities have seen a decrease in crime rates with “midnight basketball” programs. These basketball programs leave their courts open late at night, giving teenagers alternative activities, which lessens the possibility of getting into trouble. Communities in Kansas City and Fort Worth with “midnight basketball” programs reported that the crime rate dropped 25 percent and 28 percent, respectively, within a one-mile radius of their facilities. In Fort Worth, crime actually grew by 39 percent within the same time period near five community centers that did *not* offer “midnight basketball.” (Sherer)

Urban parks also offer social benefits for communities because they provide recreational activities to residents. For example, urban parks play a critical role in children’s development. Research has also shown that play, exercise, and recreational activities are essential for children’s learning and growth. Thus, children with access to an urban park are more likely to

experience healthier development than children who do not have access to an urban park.

(Sherer)

Community gardens are also a source of social capital within urban parks. Community gardens increase residents' pride and create a sense of ownership for their neighborhood.

Leadership skills can be built and practiced within a community garden. Perhaps most importantly, community gardens can bring a community closer together. "Research shows that residents of neighborhoods with greenery in common spaces are more likely to enjoy stronger social ties than those who live surrounded by barren concrete" (Gies). Furthermore, greenery and vegetation within urban parks promotes common space use as it entices residents to stay outside. Informal contact among neighbors is more likely to occur, and residents' sense of safety and adjustment is more inclined to be high. Community gardens and greenery also exposes inner-city residents to nature.

Urban parks have many physical and mental **health** benefits for city residents. Essentially, urban parks contribute to physical and mental health because they give residents a place to exercise through some type of physical activity. Physical activity has been proven to have endless benefits for one's overall health. The U.S. General Surgeon states that people who participate in regular physical activity have reduced risk of premature death and disease, including heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, colon cancer, as well as improved muscle and joint strength and a healthier weight. Physical activity also provides psychological benefits. Exercise can relieve symptoms of depression, help with anxiety, and overall, improve one's mood. (Sherer)

Access to urban parks leads to higher rates of exercise. In a study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity led to a 25.6 percent increase in the percentage of people exercising on three or more days per week” (Sherer). The American Journal of Preventive Medicine claims enhanced access to spaces that allow physical activity increases physical activity by nearly 50 percent. (Sherer) Their studies also proved that increased access to an exercise facility led to improvements in flexibility, to weight loss, and an increase in energy among the residents.

The physical design of an urban park and its neighborhood correlates to that neighborhood’s overall physical and mental health. Ultimately, obesity is more likely in neighborhoods that do not provide opportunities for physical activity. “Dense housing, well-connected streets, and mixed land uses reduce the probability that residents will be obese” (Sherer). Therefore, the planning and implementation of urban parks is paramount to the health of the community.

Urban parks contribute to the neighborhood’s health because they provide nature and greenery to inner-city residents. Research shows that people who have contact with nature have improved physical and psychological health. For example, one study in a Pennsylvania hospital examined occupants of two room types: those with a view of greenery and those with a view of brick walls. “A review of ten years of medical records showed that patients with tree views had shorter hospitalizations, less need for painkillers, and fewer negative comments in the nurses’ notes, compared with patients with brick-wall views” (Conservation Benefits). This case is important because it shows that the greenery positively affected the patients’ health and overall outlook on their situation. Additionally, plants have consistently been used in mental health

treatment. There are therapeutic effects of gardening, many of which are used in prisons for rehabilitation and special education.

In 2001, a study published in the Netherlands examined the correlation between health and green space. The study used two databases. One database was a landuse record of the whole country (allowing researchers to know which groups of people lived near nature) and the other database providing a catalogue of the health information of 10,000 residents. (Sherer) The study found that people who lived near greener environments tended to be in better physical shape and stronger mental health than those who did not live near green areas. “A ten percent increase in nearby greenspace was found to decrease a person’s health complaints in an amount equivalent to a five year reduction in that person’s age” (Sherer). Essentially, the people who lived closer to parkland or green space perceived themselves to be in better physical condition than their counterparts who lived farther away from greenery. Additionally, the study found that all green areas seemed to be equally effective in promoting health. In other words, the same health benefits can be found from living close to urban parks, forests, or agricultural areas.

Urban parks provide **environmental** benefits to their neighborhoods. Namely, trees within urban parks provide many environmental benefits to the city. Trees help reduce air pollution, treat polluted water, and provide cooling effects to the city. These environmental benefits also help reduce a city’s overall costs. “The U.S. Forest Service calculated that over a 50-year lifetime one tree generates \$31,250 worth of oxygen, provides \$62,000 worth of air pollution control, recycles \$37,500 worth of water, and controls \$31,250 worth of soil erosion” (Sherer). Thus, urban parks are a smart investment for city government and taxpayers.

In 1994, trees in New York City removed approximately 1,800 metric tons of air pollution. Trees can block ozone, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide from reaching the earth. The roots and soil of trees are natural filters for water, and can effortlessly treat polluted particulate matter in water. Trees can also absorb nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium from the soil, chemicals that otherwise would pollute waterways. Urban parks also help treat stormwater and help control stormwater runoff. Urban parks are actually less expensive and more effective at controlling stormwater runoff than concrete sewers. Instead of letting the water immediately run-off into the sewer systems such as concrete and pavements does, parks absorb the water into the ground. This lessens the amount of water crashing into the draining system. According to the F, “By incorporating trees into a city’s infrastructure, managers can build a smaller, less expensive stormwater management system” (Sherer). A conservation organization called American Forests predicts that trees within urban areas save cities \$400 billion in stormwater retention facilities. More trees also make summer months more bearable for city residents. The vast amount of glass and concrete within New York City traps all of the sun’s rays, turning the city into an oven in the summer months. “The evaporation from a single tree can produce the cooling effect of ten room-size air conditioners operating 24 hours a day” (Sherer). Thus, trees stimulate a cooling effect within cities which can make the city much more livable during hotter months.

As explained thus far, urban parks have the potential to add economic, social, health, and environmental benefits to a neighborhood. However, these benefits depend greatly on the quality of maintenance and budget size of that particular park. In fact, a poorly maintained park has negative economic effects on the neighborhood. The Gotham Gazette reported, “[parks] have

a negative effect when they are neglected, attracting vandalism, drug-dealing and other crime. During the New York City fiscal crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, dirty, worn, and dangerous parks became a potent symbol of the city's decline" (Schwartz). Therefore, parks can be unsafe and damage the community's overall quality of life if not properly maintained.

Why are some public urban parks allowed to fall into decline? In fact, data shows that there is a huge disparity in park quality between different neighborhoods, based on socio-economic class. Moreover, a lot of lower-income city residents do not have access to a near by urban park. In Los Angeles, only 30 percent of citizens live within walking distance of a city park. Additionally, some cities do not have enough land allocated for urban parks. In Atlanta, all parks are smaller than one-third of a square mile. San Jose, New Orleans, and Dallas face the same obstacles. Furthermore, even if cities have extensive park space as a whole, certain residents can still lack access to a nearby park. (Sherer)

However, perhaps the most crucial issue regarding urban parks is the clear equity imbalance of park quality that exists when comparing higher-income neighborhoods to lower-income neighborhoods. Data shows that there is an inequitable distribution of park space between different cultural communities. "In Los Angeles, white neighborhoods enjoy 31.8 acres of park space for every 1,000 people, compared with 1.7 acres in African-American neighborhoods and 0.6 acres in Latino neighborhoods" (Sherer). Clearly, there is an unequal amount of urban parks throughout communities of different races.

However, as will be explained in proceeding chapters, redeveloping urban parks within low-income neighborhoods causes gentrification within that neighborhood. Ebenezer O. Aka defines gentrification as "the upward change in land use to middle and upper income

residential...the upgrading of devalued or deteriorated urban property by the middle class or affluent people” (Aka). Basically, redeveloping an urban park forces the native population out, as property values and commercial space rents rise.

Overall, urban parks can create a more attractive and improved living environment for city neighborhoods. Urban parks provide communities with economic, social, health, and environmental benefits. Generally, urban parks have the ability to strengthen urban communities and improve the neighborhood’s quality of life. “Quality of life is a determining factor in real estate values and economic vitality” (Sherer). These public spaces provide a place where people from different, diverse cultures can meet and interact. However, creating these benefits for low-income people without displacing them has been proven difficult.

CHAPTER 2: The History of the NYC Parks Department

“Parks are about so much more than our aesthetics and beauty, as important as that is. Parks are about healthy neighborhoods; they’re intimately tied to the health of their neighborhoods; they promote community building, social capital, and even in ways we’re only just beginning to understand, our physical health.” (Shakarian)

14% of the city is made up of public parks, strewn throughout the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. (nycgovparks) The City of New York’s Department of

Parks and Recreation is responsible for these public resources. The history of the Parks Department and the current funding trends within the NYC park system are two vital aspects of urban parks. To fully understand the issue of park inequity throughout New York City, the history of park development and funding within New York City must be examined. Parks in New York City are funded through private and public channels. The Parks Department has undergone different funding models within the past 50 years. Originally, the Parks Department was primarily funded with public, government money. However, the 1970s financial crisis caused severe cuts to all city departments and agencies, causing parks to deteriorate. Private funding methods began to become popular, as conservancies and friends groups formed to support specific parks. Today, the amount of private funding of parks drastically affects the quality and safety of a park.

The City of New York's Department of Parks and Recreation is also referred to as NYC Parks. This department manages and maintains one of the largest urban park systems in the country. NYC Parks has a long and unique history. Created over 300 years ago, the department originated after constructing its first park – Bowling Green – in lower Manhattan in 1733. Today, NYC Parks maintains over 2,000 parks and playgrounds covering 29,000 acres on parkland throughout the five boroughs (Shakarian). The park system includes nearly 1,941 parks and playgrounds, 1,800 basketball courts, 67 pools and 14 miles of beaches (Shakarian).

The majority of NYC Parks' facilities and public spaces were created during the mid-twentieth century. "For much of the twentieth century, the city's public parks represented a robust vision of egalitarian, governmental support for public welfare" (Soskis). Robert Moses's dream for New York City – as well as President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies –

facilitated a surge of public projects. (Incidentally, Robert Moses was actually Parks Commissioner from 1934.) Public funding supported the building of these projects. In fact during the 1960's, the City allocated one-and-a-half percent of its budget to Parks Department, and parks flourished. This top-down approach of parks budgeting and management style ensured that each individual park received a fair budget. (nycgovparks)

However, in the 1970s the financial crisis wrecked havoc among New York City's public agencies and many parts of the city suffered. The financial crisis caused budget cuts across all of New York City's governmental departments. As the Parks Department was deemed one of the more unessential resources to the city's citizens, their budget was slashed. According to Council Member Levine, "by 1986 Parks had fallen to just 0.86% of the budget...by 1990 Parks spending had fallen further to 0.65% of the total budget, and by 2000 it had reached just 0.52%" (Shakarian). (Council Member Levine has talked extensively about the challenges facing urban parks and will be looked on as a leader for park equity.) Basically, the Parks Department's budget was hacked in half. Consequently, the Parks Department faltered and urban parks throughout all of the boroughs deteriorated. Without the necessary maintenance budgets and adequate staffing, urban parks became shabbier and less usable.

An article published in 1990 illustrated the deterioration of the parks. "Maintenance has been cut, land acquisitions have been put on hold, the number of employees has fallen 12 percent since 1986 and tens of millions of dollars in capital projects have been delayed" (Yarrow). Betsy Gotaum –the Parks Commissioner during the 1980s – stated that the parks department had to reduce the number of people who plant, clean, or prune. Neighborhoods with lower-income residents were especially affected. "The projects in poorer areas, like ones in Thomas Jefferson

Park in East Harlem and Belmont Playground in the Bronx, have been especially hard hit” (Yarrow). But even in Central Park, amenities waned. The green lawns became a dust bowl and the pond almost completely silted up. There are no statistics available for crime in specific parks from this time, but the article states that fear of walking alone in parks after dark rose among the general population. Parks such as such as Tompkins Square, Washington Square and Marcus Garvey Park were notorious for drug use. The amount of homeless people living in the parks also rose after the 1970s. (Yarrow)

Additionally, not only could the Parks Department no longer sufficiently support their own urban parks, they also could not afford to buy new land. According to the NYC Parks website, “vacant and abandoned lots – both public land and newly public land acquired by foreclosure – were endemic” (nycgovparks). Abandoned buildings and undeveloped land sat untouched throughout Manhattan. Urban neglect became apparent through these deserted lots. Private developers eventually bought a lot of the land, taking away potential parkland. (Yarrow)

Today, the majority of the city’s government agencies have recovered from the 1970s financial crisis. And yet, the Parks Department has never recovered to its pre-financial crisis budget. In fact, the City Council’s Parks and Recreation Committee reported that the NYC Park’s 2013-2014 budget “only represents 0.5 percent of the City budget” (nycgovparks). However, New York City’s flagship parks, such as Central Park or Bryant Park, are beautiful and clean. They clearly have recovered from the 1970s period of deterioration; these high-profile urban parks make it hard to believe they were ever declining. Additionally, under Bloomberg’s three terms, 871 acres of city parkland have been added to the park system (Shakarian). This

parkland includes urban parks such as the High Line, Hudson River Park, Brooklyn Bridge Park and Governor's Island. But some parks face horrible conditions.

How are certain public parks flourishing while the Parks Department budget remains low? This is possible because of the two-tier budget system created in response to the massive budget cuts of the 1970s. During this time, the Parks Department created public-private partnerships with several private nonprofit organizations. The agreement between the city and the nonprofit organizations sanctioned that the private nonprofit organization would take on the responsibilities of supporting and maintaining certain parks. These conservancies and friend groups became the main source of revenue for particular parks, gaining funds mainly for private donations. According to Shakarian, private financing has "become the status quo in park financing, thereby cementing the decrease in public investment" (Shakarian). Obviously, these groups have been very successful. The Central Park Conservancy, the Friends of the High Line, and the Bronx River Alliance are three friends groups that will be further examined later in this thesis. Other friend groups include the Prospect Park Alliance, the Bryant Park Corporation, Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy, the Randalls Island Parks Alliance, and the Madison Square Park Restoration Project.

As stated, New York City has rebounded from the 1970s financial crisis and has recovered economically. The city has the capacity to revive the parks budget, and yet political leaders have not acted on that opportunity. This conservancy model was supposed to be a temporary way to preserve NYC parks, but it grew in popularity. Furthermore, the conservancy model was never properly regulated, and now functions unconstrained. The visible success of high-profile urban parks that benefit from private fundraising has pushed urban parks that do not

receive generous donations to the back of public view. Hence, the excess of private funding caused a decrease in public investment. “Some argue that the influx of private funds into signature parks has silenced political will to restore the parks budget to an independently-operable level” (Shakarian). On one hand, advocates of the conservancy model claim private entities do not replace public services, but act as a supplement to those funds. On the other hand, opponents argue that the conservancy model allows private interests to encroach on public spaces. Conservancy groups were created to temporarily replace public funding when there was none. Overall, opponents worry the conservancy model had replaced public funding.

The increase of private funding has caused a “two-tier” system. In this system, signature parks within affluent parts of the city, such as Central Park or the High Line, receive millions in donations that fund the staff and amenities. Meanwhile, the average neighborhood parks, usually located in lower-income neighborhoods, are “left to deteriorate on meager budget allotments” (Shakarian). Even conservancies and friends groups within different boroughs have startling different fundraising budgets. For example, in 2012, Central Park received \$10 million in one gift from a private source, while Flushing Meadows Park only received \$5,000 for the entire year (Shakarian). Friends of Wingate Park, in Brooklyn, won a grant from Partnerships for Parks – a program run by the parks department and the City Parks Foundation – for a mere \$800.

Experts state that the unequal distribution of donations is not surprising. Linda R. Cox, the Parks Department’s Bronx River administrator and director at the Bronx River Alliance, states, “After all, most major philanthropists tend to live near a few parks in the city’s most affluent neighborhoods” (Foderaro). Private funders could donate however much money they want to towards the parks where they live. Consequently, the nicer parks are found in wealthier

neighborhoods. But recently, this park inequity has been highlighted by public officials and concerned citizens. Some advocates and legislators insist that the City must provide a “dignified amount of care to all its parks” (Shakarian).

According to the New York Times, city officials *are* delighted at the generosity of the public towards conservancies such as Central Park, because it ensures that New York’s signature parks have the resources to accommodate millions of tourists and their wealthier residents. “But the donations have also highlighted the disparity between parks in Manhattan’s high rent districts and those, like Flushing Meadows-Corona or Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, that are in less affluent communities. In those parks, conservancies and friends groups must struggle to raise any money at all” (Foderaro). Additionally, some fear that the inflation of philanthropic money will cause a drop in public financing for all parks.

Lately, there has been a movement towards a more equitable funding system. According to Shakarian, there are three main solutions for a more equal funding system: “increasing DPR’s budget; capitalizing on private sector solution; and passing legislation that increases transparency and efficiency within DPR” (Shakarian). Senator Squadron asserts that it is a tragedy of the commons to allow parks to fall into disrepair because the community does not have access to the resources or amount of income that other communities have. He calls it a failure of the system. Squadron proposes several pieces of legislation to address park inequity. His legislation would require wealthy conservancies and friend groups to distribute a portion of their donation funds to neighborhood parks in less affluent communities.

Increasing the parks department budget to have adequate and consistent funding is the first solution. Tupper Thomas – Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks (NYP) – believes

park equity must start by increasing the city budget for the parks department. According to the Gotham Gazette, NYP recommends a two-fold plan. First, NYP wants the city to increase the agency's expense budget, so the department could hire full-time employees. According to the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation, presently nearly 75% of the all maintenance staff are Job Training Participants, who are hired temporarily and seasonally. Second, NYP suggests increasing the department's capital budget for construction and physical enhancements. (Tupper) Currently, the capital project funding is made at the discretion of council members and borough presidents. Each council member or borough president naturally has a bias towards supporting funding for their district's park projects. Thus, the allocated funding may not be going to where it's most needed. A larger capital project funding could fix this.

The second solution is capitalizing on private sector solutions. Even though experts agree that increasing the budget is necessary, they concede that private funding will most likely not go away. As discussed earlier, Squadron proposes to take a small portion of philanthropic funds given to more endowed conservancies, and reallocate that money to parks in less affluent neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Parks Alliance Act is a piece of legislation written by Squadron and Assembly Member Brian Kavanaugh that would "require well-off, private conservancies to share portions of their funds with parks in underfunded communities" (Shakarian). If this bill passes, friend groups with an operating budget larger than \$5 million (such as the Central Park Conservancy and the Prospect Park Alliance) would have to donate 20% of funds to the Neighborhood Park Alliance, which would redistribute the money to finance underfunded parks. Souskas believes there is a positive relationship between philanthropy and perpetuation of inequality. (Souskas) However, some say that diverting private donations to a

beneficiary other than what the donation had intended is inappropriate and could lead to a slippery slope. One opponent claimed that this bill could destroy the future of charity, because philanthropists would be less inclined to contribute to public works if they knew the money could be diverted towards another recipient.

The third solution to park inequity is writing and passing legislation that would increase transparency and efficiency within the park system. One main concern within the park system is the lack of data available for specific parks or neighborhoods. For example, different parks have varying levels of security. Battery Park City has 26 Park Enforcement Control (PEP) officers for 26 acres of parkland. However, the Bronx has 26 PEP officers for 7,000 acres of parkland. Disparities like these have to be targeted and eliminated. (Shakarian) Council Member Levine insists the city needs to generate more data for individual parks to assess the effects of inequitable funding and park security. In fact, until 2005 crimes in urban parks were not even being tracked. The police had been recording incidents to the closest street address instead of inside the urban park. However, a law was passed to mandate that crimes be recorded within the physical boundaries of each urban park. “This year’s Local Law 2 builds on Local Law 114 of 2005, which intended to phase in the tracking of crime in all parks from a small pilot of the 20 largest” (Shakarian). However, in 2013 it was revealed that the Bloomberg administration did not keep records of individual parks, instead, each park crime was reported by district, making the data murky. Therefore, a system to track individual park data still needs to be implemented.

Additionally, there is no clear record of individual park funding available to the public. The Park Department does not release information on funding or resource distribution on a park-by-park basis. Most private park conservancies do not release information to the public

either. The overall worth of park conservancies can be approximated, and some of their grants or private donations may be announced, but their full financial records are not presented anywhere. Therefore, it is very difficult to find data on combined public and private spending on any given park. Levine and Brad Lander have presented Intro 154 – a bill that mandates the Parks Department to release the funding data for each individual park. (Shakarian) Levine also states that another bill will be coming out soon that will mandate conservancies to report their budgeting process on a timeline that's consistent with the Park Department. This way, their total budget is much more transparent.

Overall, urban parks are one of the most valuable yet fragile public resources within New York City. The history of the NYC Parks Department and the financial crisis of the 1970s continue to affect the quality of parks today. By allowing uncontrolled private fundraising, the two-tier budget system is segregating New York City's public spaces.

Chapter 3: Park Inequity and Eco-Gentrification

“A creeping encroachment in previous years has in the last two decades become an epoch-making shift culminating in multiple closures, erasures, inundations, and transfigurations of public space at the behest of state and corporate strategies” (Smith 1).

Urban parks can provide social benefits to neighborhoods because they are public spaces where people from different cultures and backgrounds can convene. In fact, urban parks are *supposed* to be symbols of democracy within New York City. Experts believe urban parks theoretically represent fairness and civic virtues within society. In other words, urban parks provide society with public places where the rich and the poor can “meet as equals” (Penalosa). However, these symbols of democracy become warped when private fundraising is the main source of maintenance and upkeep. When urban parks are maintained through private funds, they only cater to the needs of the elite few. Therefore, certain groups no longer feel welcomed in these public spaces. “Some of the most glaring inequities are becoming manifest in the way our public spaces are designed, maintained, and regulated” (65 Ulam). Thus, our society becomes segregated. Many academics and urban planners have opinions on how our society becomes segregated through urban parks, and their theories are analyzed within this chapter.

Setha Low – an anthropologist in New York City – conducts spatial research on public parks and environmental gentrification. Low believes diversity is essential within New York City urban parks to promote a fair society. She claims that for a public space to be diversified, it has to attract every socio-economic and cultural group. However, when planning practices and private developers are allowed to build and create for a limited audience, this leads to the

exclusion of all other groups, usually less-affluent individuals within minority communities.

Low asserts that there is “a different kind of threat to public space...patterns of design and management that exclude some people and reduce social and cultural diversity” (Low 1).

Therefore, the design and structure of urban parks must be planned and designed to encourage different ethnic groups to use the public spaces. Low believes:

“we are facing a different kind of threat to public space – not one of disuse, but of patterns of design and management that exclude some people and reduce social and cultural diversity. In some cases this exclusion is the result of a deliberate program to reduce the number of undesirables, and in others, it is a by-product of privatization, commercialization, historic preservation, and specific strategies of design and planning. Nonetheless, these practices can reduce the vitality and vibrancy of the space or reorganize it in such a way that only one kind of person – often a tourist or a middle-class visitor – feels welcomed.” (Low 1)

As the director of the Public Space Research Group at City University, Low believes environmental gentrification is transforming the city’s public spaces. Low claims public spaces are becoming progressively off limits to low-income individuals. “As parks get beautified...poor people feel uncomfortable in what increasingly feels like an elite landscape” (Low). She asserts that as parks are redeveloped, they are being designed for the elite, thus only the elite feel welcomed. The lower-income community feels uncomfortable in these areas. For example, Low examines Union Square and claims since the public space has been updated, tourists and affluent locals appreciate the now heavily-policed public space. But Low claims that black and Hispanic men avoid Union Square, afraid of being harassed. In other spots

in Lower Manhattan, the homeless are scared away from public spaces that are enclosed by security barriers and gates. Even street vendors – a quintessential part of New York’s street life – feel uncomfortable in gated areas. In the panel “Public Spaces in New York: Immigration, Gentrification, Work, and Conflict,” given at the American Sociological Association, Low claims that as New York becomes more heterogeneous, public spaces and neighborhoods are becoming less heterogeneous. “Local environments are experiencing increased vernacularization and homogeneity – immigrant enclaves are growing in the city, and gated communities are developing in the suburbs and edge cities.” (Low 3) Basically, she claims that even though New York’s arrival of immigrants increases the city’s overall diversity percentage, the neighborhoods of New York become more and more segregated as public spaces are being designed to serve different populations. Overall, Low claims that to have a diverse park, the city must have culturally diverse representation of the people that use that certain park.

Kevin Loughran, a Professor of Sociology at Northwestern University, also studies inequality in public spaces. He believes that public parks measure the social and economic divisions throughout society. According to Loughran, different economic and social classes have stratified access to economic and cultural resources, which creates a stark difference within their public spaces. Modern cultural and economic practices in public parks are “equally segmented, as privileged public spaces such as New York’s High Line reflect the consumption habitus of the new urban class, while violence, disinvestment, and revanchist policing permeate public spaces on the urban periphery” (Loughran 49). In other words, the high-profile urban parks within New York City have amenities that serve the wants of the elite, such as state-of-the-art tennis courts or nearby access to expensive restaurants and shops. On the other hand, urban parks in the outer

boroughs are riddled with crime and disinvestment, making opportunities for recreation or relaxation nearly impossible. The state of parks within low-income neighborhoods reflects the lack of opportunities presented to that neighborhood's population.

J. Locke Grove and Jarlath O'Neil-Dunne are cartographers who have conducted research in New York City. Grove and O'Neil-Dunne released a report entitled "Ecology of Prestige in New York City; Examining the Relationships Among Population Density, Socio-Economic Status, Group Identity, and Residential Canopy Cover." Their work provides evidence of an uneven distribution of tree coverage and vegetation throughout New York City. The report provides datasets and maps that detail the patterns of vegetation throughout different residential neighborhoods in the five boroughs. "Collectively, these residential parcels cover 65,931 acres of land, representing 35% of total land area and the largest land use category by both area and number of owners." (Grove 405). (In comparison, the Parks Department owns 14% of the City's total area.) The authors claim the pattern of vegetation throughout New York City represents the "ecology of prestige." The "ecology of prestige" implies that different amounts of vegetation throughout New York City reflect different lifestyles and socio-economic classes. In other words, a higher socio-economic class correlates to more trees within one's neighborhood, while a lower socio-economic class correlates to fewer trees in one's neighborhood. The authors claim that their findings could affect policy decisions because policies could be implemented in order to manage land in a way that includes different social classes.

Lawrence Lessig – an American academic and political activist – states in *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World*, that "Keeping [the town square] in the hands of the community is a way to assure that no single actor takes advantage of the value the

community has created” (Lessig 87). This idea relates to a series of articles published by The Huffington Post about the privatization of the commons of Greenwich Village – Washington Square Park. In 2013, Washington Square Park’s management changed. Once run and overseen by the Parks Department, the Bloomberg Administration privatized the park by giving the management over to a new Conservancy. Since the new management, Washington Square Park has been completely redesigned without input from the surrounding community. “The City...ignored most of the input it received from the public, choosing instead to bust up and rebuild a park loaded with historical import that functioned well as a free space for so many decades” (Swan). In fact, since the switch in management, the park has catered to commercial needs of NYU over the surrounding community.

Washington Square Park serves as an example of what is happening to neighborhoods throughout New York City. As more and more spaces are gated, privatized, and redesigned for new purposes, the number of truly public spaces declines. Thus, the number of places where citizens can participate in public life is decreasing rapidly. The Huffington Post series also claims public spaces within a town are associated with the neighborhood’s history and customs. Therefore, a change to a public space affects and can potentially erase that neighborhood’s history. Furthermore, the privatization of the commons takes away citizens’ rights to that public space. “Common property is an individual’s right not to be excluded from the uses or benefits of resources” (Smith 51). And yet, under the Bloomberg administration, more public parks were privatized, threatening the character of the communities they once each contributed towards. Consequently, there was evidence of discriminatory disparity within attention and care given to parks throughout different boroughs.

Lance Freeman – an urban planning associate professor at Columbia University – is the author of “There Goes the Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up.” He also believes that public spaces change as the character of the neighborhood changes through eco-gentrification. He claims that gentrification can have positive effects on public spaces. He interviewed a black resident in Fort Greene Park who said “I’ve seen the improvement in services. You can go to Fort Greene Park and now there are activities during the summer here. Before, you were afraid to go into the park. Now there’s more security because white people make sure there is more security” (Chan).

However, gentrification usually causes more harm than good. Dr. Freeman gives multiple examples of how eco-gentrification makes the local population feel unwelcomed and excluded. One woman in Clinton Hill describes the changes she has seen in Fort Greene Park. “Previously, she said, mostly black residents used the park, and often barbecued there...now, that’s where you see a lot of white people...they sit outside tanning and walking their dogs” (Chan). Dr. Freeman gives another example of a woman living in an apartment complex in Clinton Hill who says that the neighborhood children are being discouraged from riding bikes in the street. In that neighborhood, “a homeowners’ association ...expressed concerned about young black men gathering outside, even though there was no evidence that the men were doing anything wrong” (Chan).

Dr. Freeman believes that gentrification within public spaces such as parks exemplifies a clash of ideologies:

“You have on one hand the more romantic view of public space as a place where people can come together unfettered, unrestrained, compared with the view of

public space as a place of ordered, controlled recreation. Gentrification is typically associated with the later, as a place where space is controlled and privatized, with less opportunity for random interaction” (Chan)

In “The Right to the City,” social theorist David Harvey examines how cities are being redesigned to cater to moneyed interests. “While it appears as politically-neutral, consensus-based planning that is both ecologically and socially sensitive, in practice, environmental gentrification subordinates equity to profit-minded development” (Checker). Basically, there is a paradox in politics when implementing sustainability plans in cities. Politicians or private developers can take advantage of the name of sustainability by using the term as a cover for profit-driven goals.

All of these academics agree that urban parks are becoming less democratic as private funding increases. This causes the native population of that area to suffer. Furthermore, when urban parks are redeveloped, the area becomes a victim of eco-gentrification. Eco-gentrification (also referred to as environmental gentrification) is when a native population is forced out of an area due to city greening or sustainable development efforts. And yet, urban parks within New York City continue to be redeveloped or given to private entities. Namely, parkland is being redeveloped because redevelopment benefits the city government, private groups and corporations, and the global elite.

New York City is starved for land. As such, parkland can be considered the easiest available land to acquire for new development purposes, as urban parks do not require purchase from private entities nor eminent domain. Thus, more parks are being taken and redeveloped for commercial purposes. In particular, sport stadiums and other commercial spaces are often built

in park space, completely hijacking that community space. For example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Central Park Zoo were built in Central Park, despite opposition from their designers, Olmstead and Vaux. However, urban parks within less-affluent communities are more likely to be taken and used for commercial spaces than parks within more-affluent communities. Less-affluent neighborhoods often have less political influence, so commercial endeavors by the government or large private developers are hard to oppose.

For example, the U.S. Tennis Association plans to expand its National Tennis Center within the Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens. In addition, plans for a pro soccer stadium and a retail mall are being considered. However, communities in the outer-borough are contesting park inequity. The community within this part of Queens protested, claiming the city would never take away parkland from more prominent public spaces, such as Central Park. Similarly, complaints were raised when the new Yankee Stadium was built on the demolished Macombs Dam Park and when the Croton Water Filtration Plant was placed in Van Cortlandt Park. In the prior scenario, the community loudly protested against the redevelopment. “When Yankees president Randy Levine rhetorically asked a Bronx community meeting on his team’s stadium desires, ‘Where do we build?’ some in the crowd shouted back, ‘In Central Park!’” (deMause). And yet, their concerns were not addressed. “This land grab includes physical dislocation as well as the actual stifling of political discourse” (Ulam 66). In other words, those with less political clout will see their public spaces suffer.

There are several laws in place that are supposed to help counteract the loss of parkland that has been redeveloped for commercial purposes. By one law, private developers in public parks are required to compensate the lost park space by creating new, nearby parkland.

However, how “nearby” is not always clear. For example, when tennis courts were destroyed for the new Yankee Stadium, the replacements were built on the far side of the Major Deegan Expressway. Some politicians are striving to address this problem. “State Senator Tony Avella introduced a bill that would not only codify the replacement parkland requirement, but would force developers to replace triple the park space that they destroy” (deMause). Laws such as these are important because developers or urban planners tend to view open parkland as potential project sites without thinking of the community it is already serving.

Park advocates also point out that the parks that do host sport stadiums or private entities do not share any portion of that money. If that was so, then “Flushing Meadows should be the most well-funded park in the universe,” according to Will Sweeney – member of the Fairness Coalition of Queens, an organization that fights proposed developments within Flushing Meadows (deMause). Flushing Meadows hosts a professional baseball team and a corporate tennis event that is supposedly one of the most profitable events in the city. And yet, the park sees none of that money.

The problem with private funding – as with education throughout different neighborhoods – is that raising money for one prominent park does nothing for other parks in less affluent areas. So, even though the Parks Department is well distributed to parks in all neighborhoods, public parks such as Central Park have tremendous capital spending budgets compared to smaller community parks. The budget reports are not published to the public either. In 2008, the city council passed a law mandating annual reports of the private funds for city parks. However, the Parks Department gave the city council a list of groups with general spending ranges. And Central Park Conservancy was not even mentioned! Additionally, Central

Park and Prospect Park are landmarked. This makes the area off-limits to potential developers. On the other hand, neighborhood parks that are not landmarked are often targeted for development projects, especially if the park is decrepit due to lack of sufficient funding. (deMause)

Another reason why urban parks are being redeveloped is because it helps cities stay competitive within an increasingly globalized world. Cities now compete for tourism. Within the past decade, extensive greening projects have grown in size and popularity. “Large-scale projects for ‘greening’ cities, such as the High Line, have become bigger and more targeted to more specific audiences, contributing to the problem of residential segregation” (Haffner). Additionally, there are more high-profile urban greening projects coming soon. For example, a “Lowline” is opening in the Lower East Side in 2018. Modeled after the success of the High Line, the Lowline will be an underground park rebuilt over old, repurposed train tracks. Absolut Vodka will fund the project. Moreover, the trend is spreading past New York City. In London, the London Garden Bridge will open also in 2018. This park will similarly target the elite economy and tourists. (Haffner) As examined repeatedly throughout this thesis, these high-profile parks will exclude certain groups and cause gentrification.

As seen by this chapter, urban park redevelopment comes at a heavy cost. Not only can eco-gentrification occur, but the cultural identity of the neighborhood can disappear. Urban parks are supposed to strengthen communities and represent democracy. Different cultures and people from different socio-economic classes need places to mix and mingle together. However, when public spaces are privatized for the needs of the few, democracy is no longer present within that public space. In fact, private fundraising is causing a polarization of ethnicities.

The city's government must control private fundraising to keep democracy alive within our public spaces. In addition, the community must have input into how they want their public spaces to be maintained. "Municipal democracy in our public spaces will remain hollow unless we place the highest values on our active, responsible participation in the management of our common affairs" (Roussopoulos 5). We must integrate the city's diverse communities by keeping public spaces welcoming and available to all citizens. To do this, the inclusion of all socio-economic classes must remain apart of the discussion. For urban parks to represent democracy, all people have to feel welcomed in a public space and they need to feel like the urban park is for their use. Access to urban parks should not be a privilege, but a right to every resident living in New York City. Furthermore, redevelopment can cause eco-gentrification. In the next chapters, this thesis will examine a case studies that exemplify how eco-gentrification can negatively affect a certain neighborhood.

CHAPTER 4: The High Line and Central Park

“In a city as dense and expensive as New York, parks are not a luxury or an amenity; they are our backyards, our oxygen” (Squadron).

The High Line is one of New York City’s newest redeveloped parks. The High Line was previously an industrial area that has been repurposed into a green public space. However, due to eco-gentrification, this park has changed the socio-economic character of West Chelsea. The Guardian defines environmental gentrification as “the growing phenomenon of rising property values in the wake of a large-scale urban greening project” (Haffner).

As a part of the West Side Improvement Project, the High Line opened in 1934. The freight train tracks begin at 34th Street and ended at Spring Street. Running for 13 miles, the track was suspended over the blocks of West Chelsea and the Meatpacking District. From the 1930s to the 1970s, Manhattan’s industrial and manufacturing industries were thriving. The

tracks were used by freight trains to shuttle goods to and from the area. However, the growth in the interstate trucking industry led to the decline of manufacturing within cities, and New York's manufacturing sector suffered. The last trains ran along the High Line in 1980, and then the High Line became obsolete. (High Line)

After the train tracks were closed, the High Line deteriorated. The tracks became overgrown with weeds and the structure rusted. Property owners living around the decomposing tracks wanted the High Line demolished. However, activist Peter Obletz fought the demolition. Joshua David and Robert Hammond advocated for the High Line's preservation. In 1999, David and Hamond founded Friends of the High Line. Through an open ideas competition – Designing the High Line – Diller Scofidio + Renfro, James Corner Field Operations, and Piet Oudolf were selected as the design team for the High Line. Thus, the idea of an urban park was born. In 2005, New York City accepted ownership of the High Line. By June 2009, the Friends of the High Line opened the first section of the redeveloped park to the public. Since then, two more segments of the park have been opened. The design of the park is world-renowned; the interspersed wildlife and narrow special layout has attracted millions of tourists. Today, Friends of the High Line raises 98% of the public park's annual budget. Private companies have invested heavily in the High Line. For example, Toyota supports the High Line's Horticulture staff. (High Line).

Friends of the High Line's mission states that “through excellence in operations, stewardship, innovative programming, and world-class design, we seek to engage the vibrant and diverse community on and around the High Line, and to raise the essential private funding to help complete the High Line's construction and create an endowment for it's future operations”

(High Line). It is true that the park brought a tremendous amount of economic growth and activity to the area. In fact, “A study done by Friends of the High Line finds that the High Line project is economically rational” (High Line). However, the claim that the friends group engages the “vibrant and diverse community” of West Chelsea is laughable. (High Line) The redevelopment of the High Line has drastically changed the character and residential composition of this iconic New York City neighborhood.

Experts assert that the High Line has created some of the fastest and intense gentrification in New York City’s history. Two decades ago, West Chelsea consisted of light-industrial businesses and working-class residents. Now, the elite economy and wealthy tourists control the area. The Guardian reports that the High Line has over 5 million visitors per year. The greening project has transformed the entire neighborhood. “Many small businesses and moderate-income residents have been forced to relocate due to rising land values, while even those who can afford it have begun to experience the downsides of living of working in an area that panders to tourists” (Haffner).

Since the creation of the High Line, property values have risen exponentially, as the popularity of the park attracted luxury developers. The New York City Economic Development Corporation published a study on that gentrification caused by the High Line. Before the High Line was redeveloped, local properties were valued 8 percent below the median of Manhattan. But between 2003 and 2011, property values “near the park increased 203 percent” (Moss). As a result, local residents have been forced out of the area. Native businesses have been pushed out as well. “Once-thriving restaurants like La Lunchonette and Hector’s diner, a local anchor since 1949, have lost their customer base” (Moss). One of the hardest hit business areas was “gasoline

alley.” For example, D&R Auto Parts profits fell by over 35 percent, Bear Auto Shop closed after decades of successful business, and the Olympian parking garage closed when it’s rent quintupled. (Moss) According to the New York Times, Brownfield Auto – a century-old business – lost their lease. “Its third-generation owner, Alan Brownfield, blames the High Line for taking away the thriving business he’d inherited from his grandfather. ‘It’s for the city’s glamorous people,’ he said” (Moss). The New York Times claims that within the next few years, “regular” New Yorkers will no longer be found near the area. The area’s sole purpose will be a tourist attraction for the elite.

Some have expressed a lot of the anger at the new High Line. These people believe the High Line has become a “tourist-clogged catwalk.” Indeed, the area has become overrun with sightseers. In 2011, 3.7 million people visited the High Line. And the park destroys the neighborhoods as it expands. According to the New York Times, the park has become “another chapter in the story of New York City’s transformation into Disney World” (Moss). The community has also spoken out against the insane amount of people crammed onto the structure. In 2012, a local resident posted an anonymous posters throughout the park stating “Attention High Line tourists. West Chelsea is not Times Square. It is not a tourist attraction” (Moss).

The High Line is the perfect illustration of environmental gentrification. Its intention *may* have been to serve local residents. But, like traditional infrastructure projects such as new transportation hubs or sports complexes, the greening initiative ended up increasing land values and pushed people out. “This exodus transforms the sociological contours of the area and, by extension, the spatial segregation of the entire city” (Haffner). In other words, the greening

project may have “improved” the area in general by increasing economic activity, but it also pushed out the native population.

The High Line is an example of privileged space. Originally, the park was a part of a progressive grass-roots movement, determined to preserve a part of New York City’s history. The original drive for preservation can be labeled as liberal. But, the city government and the elite private sector developed the park for profit. After the City had received ownership of the park, the Bloomberg administration rezoned West Chelsea for luxury development. The city government used the park to their advantage by creating a new, corporatized West side. A “discourse of sustainability [was] used to rationalize and mask the end goal of gentrification and development” (Wells). Once again, this is the paradoxical politics of urban greening projects. Sustainability is used as a means for political agenda and economic growth.

Additionally, the High Line is a textbook example of neoliberalism, a political philosophy that recommends privatization. Its sustainable goal has been commercialized, and now prioritizes private, corporate goals. (Wells) The High Line has become an outlet for elite, private needs; the Friends of the High Line does not cater to the public, but to the *elite* public. Artisanal food vendors such as La Newyorkina, Taco Truck, and Terrior on the Porch position themselves along the High Line, targeting a “high” clientele. Additionally, the inequality among the local residents is staggering. The local community consists of luxury apartment complexes and subsidized public housing, creating a vast wealth disparity. Some experts argue that the park itself is not a real reflection of New York street life. Instead, visitors are viewing an extremely artificial view of the city, as the High Line’s “faux cityspaces appear to provide the benefits of

the city while actually shelter visitors from the problems of city life” (Wells). Instead, they see a display of an alternative green utopia.

Overall, change should not be feared, but “change that stifles diversity is, in fact, a disquieting detriment to any city” (Chan). New York City already has such intense income inequality. “The city must step in to ensure that less powerful and less affluent parties are protected, that different socioeconomic groups can still coexist when something desirable pops up on the market” (Chan). However, the city actually encouraged luxury zoning. The High Line is a magnet for wealthy tourists, and wealth begets wealth. The neighborhood became restructured into a more glamorous New York and erased the history of the old West Chelsea. Overall, there are benefits and negatives of the elite park. The park brought greenery to the area, attracted financial investments, and increased property values. However, the High Line has also forced local businesses and working-class citizens out of the West Chelsea neighborhood, unable to afford the rising rents.

CENTRAL PARK

Obviously, the High Line is not the only high-profile urban park in New York City. Central Park is also an extreme example of gentrification and demonstrates how a public space can be malformed into an elite space. Furthermore, the park serves as a major tourist attraction for New York City, along with Hudson River Park and Brooklyn Bridge Park. Central Park is

perhaps one of the most prominent examples of elite parks, as the property values bordering Central Park are some of the highest in the city. In addition to high property values, the Central Park Conservancy has a multi-million dollar endowment. Indeed, the Central Park Conservancy has the largest endowment of any friends group or conservancy in the country.

Central Park is one of the New York City's oldest parks. In 1857, New York State created a contest to develop the parkland. Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux won, and began to plan the park. "One of the main reasons behind the construction of New York City's Central Park – designed by Frederick law Olmstead after a trip to Birkenhead – was to raise property values and tax revenues for the city" (Haffner). Thus, Central Park is actually one of the earliest examples of gentrification. In fact, Olmstead conducted studies on rising land values around Central Park in the mid 1870s after construction and even used the findings to promote the construction of parks in other cities. The designers admit that the park would clear the area of "undesirables" and made the area attractive to wealthy residents. (Haffner)

Central Park's history of gentrification continues to this day. The Central Park Conservancy was established in 1980 and pioneered the private fundraising model. Indeed, private supporters launched the non-profit group with the support of the City. At the time, the 1970s budget crisis had left Central Park a dustbowl perforated with crime and drugs. The Central Park Conservancy was designed to be a private nonprofit that would advocate the renovation of Central Park. It was easy for the conservancy to privately raise funds "with the blocks on either side of the park experiencing the first wave of the city's gentrification boom, the Conservancy was able to raise hundreds of millions of dollars toward renovating and cleaning its namesake park" (deMause). Obviously, Central Park was thoroughly renovated and today it is a

pristine piece of parkland. However, the Central Park Conservancy continues to receive incredibly large donations from the surrounding residents. For example, the Central Park Conservancy reported a \$144 million endowment in 2012 (Ulam). The conservancy raises these funds through investment revenue and charitable contributions. The Central Park Conservancy actually provides 85% of Central Park’s maintenance budget. The conservancy employs 90% of the park’s maintenance staff, resulting in the park’s overall country-club quality fields and tennis courts, perfect lawns, and pruned shrubbery. Therefore, Central Park’s large staff is paid mainly by donations rather than taxpayer dollars. Moreover, the higher administration and leadership team are paid well. The president of the Central Park Commission makes nearly twice the amount of money as the city’s Parks Commissioner. (Ulam)

Recently, some of the donations given to the park have made headlines. In 2012, hedge fund billionaire John Paulson made a \$100 million donation to the Central Park Conservatory. “Paulson is spending a small percentage of his money to decorate what is, in effect, the front yard of many of Wall Street’s largest investors” (Ulam). The donation generated controversy and sparked a public conversation of how parks are financed. Columnist Michael Powell states that when officials in New York’s outer borough parks ask for more funding to help better their park, city officials suggest selling off naming rights instead of giving them financial assistance. This trend has occurred throughout the country, with parks depended on charity and friends groups to support their mission. The chart provided on the next page displays the reported donations of some of the more prominent urban parks in the city.

Conservancies/Friends Groups	Revenue in 2011
Central Park Conservancy	47,282,563

Prospect Park Alliance	9,807,616
Van Cortlandt Park	248,872
Flushing Meadow Corona Park Improvement Fund	53,772

(Data provided from citylimits, writer Neil deMause)

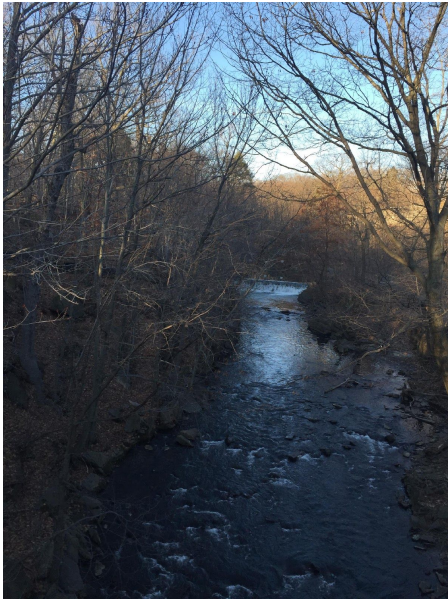
As one can see, only some of the urban parks receive large donations while other urban parks deteriorate. In fact, “The city Parks Department’s operations and maintenance budget has been slashed for the past five years and its staff cut by more than 30 percent” (Ulam 66). These luxury parks are being built for the elite and tourists, while middle-income and low-income individuals are being denied this service.

Alvaro Seville-Buitrago, an Associate Professor of Town and Regional Planning at the Association of European Schools of Planning, writes about sociospatial theory and explored Central Park in one of his publications. Seville-Buitrago describes the problem with Central Park as an issue of the commons. He claims that the elite class was upset at the “communing” of Central Park by the working class. In response, the elite creates an “enclosure dialectic” that attempted to instill civic order onto the public space. “[Central Park] is understood here as an early episode in the project of imposing new social relations through the enclosure of public spaces – a first effort to tame the urban commons” (Sevilla-Buitrago). According to Seville-Buitrago, Central Park may have been the first park in New York City to be privatized.

In conclusion, The High Line and Central Park exemplify how the elite private sector and city government have developed public parks for profit within New York City. These two high-profile parks are textbook examples of eco-gentrification. These public parks have acted as a catalyst for some of the most rapid gentrification in the history of NYC. Friend groups and conservancies were necessary during the 1970s fiscal crisis. But, they were never contained. Central Park Conservancy has been around since the 1970s and Friends of the High Line is celebrating 15 years of service. Today the private fundraising of these groups creates a disparity between the public spaces offered to the socio-economic classes. The city government and private entities have used sustainability as a means for economic growth, disregarding the social affects the parks would have on the native populations. The next chapter will explore a case study within the Bronx.

CHAPTER 5: The Bronx River Greenway

“As the 21 century moves on, people are retuning to the Bronx River, drawn back to a



place that has remained true to itself in a region where much else has changed” (Bronx River Alliance).

In recent years, the Bronx River Alliance has worked tirelessly to clean up and improve the parkland located near the Bronx River. The Greenway renovation aims to clean up the waterfront and create a continuous link of parks for the residents of the Bronx. Overall, the Bronx River Alliance hopes to elevate the quality of life for

native Bronx residents.

The Bronx River is 23 miles long, running from the top of Westchester County through the Bronx, and emptying into the East River and the Long Island Sound. The Bronx River serves as a natural fresh-water resource and is actually New York City’s only freshwater river. From the start of New York City’s urbanization, the surrounding residential population and industries have polluted the Bronx River. “The history of the river since the 1880s has been one of the efforts to reclaim and protect it from the escalating forces of urbanization” (Bronx River Alliance). The land that has become the Bronx River Parkway and the Bronx River Greenway was first set aside by the city to provide a physical barrier from the polluted waters. “The consolidation of various properties to form the 662-acre Bronx Park in 1888 (718.1 in 2002) provides a buffer against development on either side of the river” (Bronx River Alliance). Thus,

the Bronx River Parkway was finished in 1925. “The 15.5-mile ribbon of parks, lakes and limited access roadway stretching from the Kensico Dam to Bronx Park provided a landscaped recreation zone and a pleasure drive for cars passing through at low speeds” (Bronx River Alliance.)

In addition to the polluted waters, the highways that flank the river and the parkland also devalued the neighborhood. Robert Moses – the renowned and controversial city planner – had an affection for highways that reshaped the city and created a lot of divided neighborhoods. The Bronx was one of the boroughs that was most affected by Moses’s plans. The construction of the Sheridan and the Cross-Bronx Expressway divided residential neighborhoods and devalued the



residential properties. At the same time, the borough fell into urban decay and deterioration. Quality of life dropped. (Bronx River Alliance)

Thus, the Bronx River and its surrounding parkland were in grim conditions. In 1974, local residents took a stand against the pollution and litter that decorated the Bronx River Parkway. Bronx community leaders and activists formed the Bronx River Restoration Project, Inc. Ruth Anderberg – a “Founding Mother” of the restoration effort – became the leader of the Bronx River Restoration Project. “Bronx Police Chief Anthony V. Bouza, who had already an intergovernmental dialogue to clean the river” (West Farms), inspired Anderberg to spearhead the

organization. The grassroots cleanup project started near 180th Street, near that West Farms area. In fact, “West Farms Rapids (formerly Bronx River Park, originally Restoration Park) marks the genesis of those efforts” (West Farms). The Bronx River Restoration Project removed tires, refrigerators, and other debris from the water.

For 27 years, the Bronx River Restoration Project was dedicated to cleaning up the Bronx River and the surrounding land for the benefit of the community. Then in 1997, the Bronx River Restoration Project converted into the Bronx River Working Group. The Bronx River Working Group became responsible for including nearly 60 community groups, schools, businesses, and government agencies combined efforts into the restoration of the Bronx River and surrounding area. Other grassroots organizations were also founded during this time. For example, Partnerships for Parks and Waterways & Trailways coordinated with the Bronx River Working Group. Additionally, in 1996, the Bronx Riverkeeper program became partners with the City’s Parks Department and Con Edison. (Bronx River Alliance)

Finally in 2001, the Bronx River Working Group created the Bronx River Alliance. The Bronx River Alliance would serve as a permanent nonprofit 501 © (3) organization that focuses on long-term projects to keep the Bronx River and surrounding parkland clean for the neighboring communities. “The Bronx River Alliance is the next step in the effort to restore and protect the Bronx River” (Bronx River Alliance). Moreover, the Alliance works closely with the New York City Parks Department.

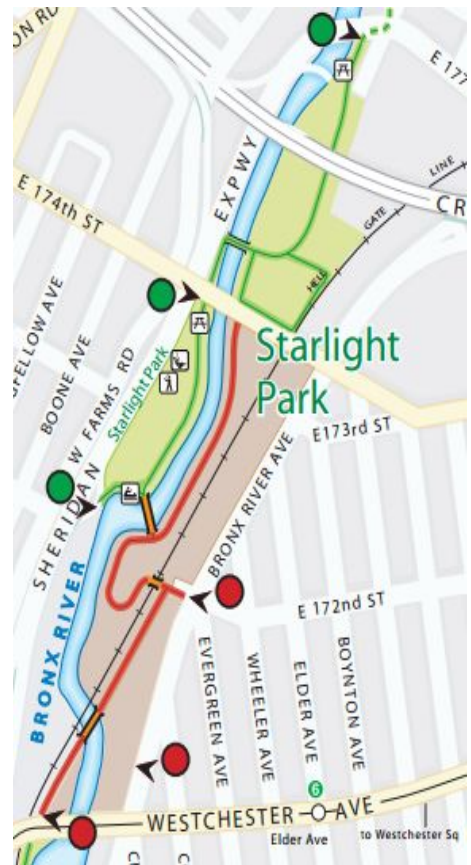
One of the major projects of the Bronx River Alliance is the Bronx River Greenway. In total, the Greenway is 23 miles long, made up of connections of paths stretched out along the Bronx River. It rushes through Westchester County and the Bronx. “Approximately 19 miles of

the greenway are now in place, and the Bronx River Alliance is working to ensure that a fully-realized greenway is a reality within the decade” (Bronx River Alliance). The Greenway allows for both pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Most importantly, the Greenway is intended to create to open, public urban parks within communities severely lacking this amenity.

The Bronx River Alliance is responsible for the eight-mile stretch of the Greenway within the Bronx. The Bronx River Greenway Plan was published by the Alliance in 2005.

“The Greenway is not only an eight-mile-long bike’s pedestrian path, but a new linear park in the heart of the Bronx, providing access to the river itself, and bringing green space to communities that have long lacked it” (Bronx River Alliance).

The plan is ambitious; when completed, the Bronx River Greenway will consist of a continuous strip of trails and parks along the Bronx River. The trails will allow residents to run, walk, bike, and explore for 10 miles along the Bronx River (2 miles of which are located on surrounding streets). Different sections of the Greenway are in different conditions. Currently, there are 44 acres of usable parkland on the Greenway; within the Bronx, there are 9 miles of trails. Once the Alliance and



community partners have completed their design plans and renovations, 633 acres of parkland will be available to the public and the full trail will be 12 miles long. In the North Bronx, most of the parks have to be simply renovated. Within the South Bronx, “completion of the Greenway involves the development of new open space and parkland at sites which include as abandoned

concrete plant [and] a reclaimed street end” (Bronx River Alliance). Additionally, a long piece of land across from Starlight Park, bordering the Sheridan Expressway must be developed. This area is where my case study is most heavily focused.

This area near Starlight Park is a critical link in the Bronx River Parkway. In October 2015, the U.S. Department of Transportation awarded a \$10 million grant to construct walking and biking paths along this park of the Greenway, as well as building for three bridges that will connect two parks along the Bronx River (Meyer). Senator Kristen Gillibrand stated that this “link is essential to making the Bronx River Greenway a truly viable non-motorized transportation network that promotes sustainability and healthy transportation options for South Bronx neighborhoods, which have historically been deprived of open space, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and waterfront access” (Meyer).

The Bronx River Alliance published their proposal and research on the Starlight Park section renovation on their website. They claim that the construction is not expected to have any major economic effects on the surrounding area. However, the development of this specific area actually requires the permanent displacement of four businesses. Two are being acquired through the New York State Eminent Domain Procedure. These businesses are Apex Auto, the NYC Marshall Impound Lot, a commercial parking lot, and Christy’s Rubbish Removal. In addition, two businesses – Bronx River Tire and Wheel, Inc. and Villa Ramos Grocery – will have their customer parking permanently reduced. Although this is a small number of businesses, it is a troubling trend and reminiscent of what happened with the High Line. However, the NYSDOT did help relocate these businesses. “These businesses are entitled to relocation packages that will assist them in relocating to other areas of the Bronx” (Bronx River

Alliance). Thus, the companies are not being priced out of the area, unlike what occurred around the area of the High Line.

However, some experts are concerned that the renovated Greenway will cause eco-gentrification, such as what happened with the High Line. Morgan Powell, a Bronx historian who was heavily invested in environmental justice, dedicated his life to activism. Powell was devoted to cleaning up the area around the Bronx River solely for the benefit of Bronx residents. He actually gave educational tours of the river and parkland. He worked with the Bronx River Alliance, and was one reason why this crusade effort to provide clean and safe public spaces for Bronx residents was successful. However, Powell feared gentrification would occur around the newly cleaned and renovated parts of the Bronx River Parkland. He dreaded that developers and new policies would displace the native population surrounding the Bronx River Greenway. Powell was afraid the improved conditions would encourage rezoning and attract developers to the area, effectively raising rents and displacing the native populace. Indeed, “a market-level housing complex is going up along a formerly industrial strip on West Farms Road, right next to Fannie Lou Hamer High School” (Naison). Could this be the first sign of eco-gentrification?

I interviewed Gail Nathan, the Executive Director of the Bronx River Art Center, for this thesis. She gave some information about the updated parks within walking distance of the Bronx River Arts Center (pictured below).



Additionally, Nathan stated that construction of a new apartment complex is being built adjacent to the Bronx River Greenway. When completed, the apartment complex will be “larger than Co-Op City” (Nathan). However, Nathan believed that this was not a sign of eco-gentrification, but an improvement to the area. The New York Times reports that Signature Urban Properties

will be responsible for the construction of the first two of buildings of this plan. “Construction could begin as soon as early next year ... with the entire 10-building project taking seven to nine years to complete” (Mooney). The apartments will be a mixture of middle-income and low-income housing. Derrick A Lovett, president of the Mid-Bronx Desperadoes Community Housing Corporation, approves of the new apartment complex. He states that the “biggest demand in the Bronx is for affordable housing” (Mooney). Unlike the area around the High Line, the area around the Greenway will not be luxury housing. Instead, it will provide much needed affordable housing to the neighborhood’s residents.

However, one of the largest changes in the area may be the deconstruction of the Sheridan Expressway. Community groups have been advocating for the removal of the Sheridan as a part of the Greenway initiative. The Sheridan Expressway connects the Bruckner and Cross-Bronx expressways, which “cuts South Bronx neighborhoods off from the Bronx River waterfront and its growing networks of parks and greenways” (Meyer). The city recommended converting the highway to a surface road in 2013. The plan would turn the Sheridan Expressway into a surface boulevard; basically, the highway will be narrowed by 100 feet, signalized intersections will be created so walkers and cyclists can cross to the riverfront, “and opening up the land for development” (Meyer). According to StreetsBlog NYC, in April 2016, the New York State commissioned a \$97 Million Boost in the State Budget to remove the Sheridan Expressway (Meyer).

In general, the improvement of the Greenway by the Bronx River Alliance is prompting redevelopment and major changes to that area. Still, some experts believe that the Bronx River Alliance provides the best model for park redevelopment without displacing the native

population for a variety of reasons. First, the Bronx River Alliance began as a coalition of community non-profits. Therefore, the community has a clear say in what projects would be good for the area. Obviously, the community groups want to cater to the needs of their neighborhood, not the elite. Second, the Alliance has a relatively small budget, but managed to make great impacts by being vocal. Tupper Thomas – the founding president of Prospect Park Alliance – stated, “you don’t have to be a rich community. You just have to be vocal.” (deMause) Therefore, the Bronx River Alliance is not trying to benefit from economic profit. Tupper recommends that other neighborhoods, or cities, should replicate their model. Overall, the Alliance brought attention and raised city funds for the Bronx River Parkway and Greenway. The project is still happening, so the full effects of the urban park will not yet be in motion.

CHAPTER 6:

Conclusion

“We may not all have a view of Prospect Park, but we can all have a tree, a bench, a patch of green to be proud of” (Lange).

Eco-gentrification within New York City is prevalent. As examined within this thesis, research and data shows redeveloped urban parks lead to higher residential property values,

higher commercial space rents, and economic incentives for local governments. But I believe that eco-gentrification can be slowed with the correct procedures and policies to ensure that the native residents of an area are not displaced. Overall, within New York City, the Parks Department funding should be increased for all urban parks, the city government needs to enact different policies to ensure park equity, and community-based planning needs to be used when improving or redeveloping parks. Following these guidelines, I believe park equity can be increased and urban planners can halt rapid eco-gentrification.

First, the city must increase the Parks Department funding budget. As explained in previous chapters, the Parks Department budget has not been enlarged since it's funding dropped dramatically in the 1970s financial crisis. The financial crisis is what originally led to the rise of the two-tier budgeting system. Therefore, if the budget was increased to the proportionate amount that it had been before the 1970s, urban parks could have better staffed facilities and improved maintenance funding and capital spending.

Restoration of the Parks Department budget is vital because some believe that the two-tier system of private funding will never be equally distributed throughout all parks. These people want to ban private fundraising and donations. For example, "the Reuters columnist Felix Salmon argued that all private funding for public parks is inequitable, shaping park-building priorities to suit development interests" (Lange). Salmon suggests that to make the park system more equitable, only the public should be able to pay for public parks. Basically, he wants to return to the pre-1970s funding for the Parks Department. Others are not as extreme in their solutions. For example, New Yorkers for Parks – an organization dedicated to improving New York City's urban parks – suggested that a discretionary capital be given to smaller parks to help

with their maintenance costs. Therefore, there are different funding models that the city could mandate to help with park inequity. Overall, the private funding model needs to be updated.

Another idea that would make the funding of New York City's urban parks more equitable is to create friends groups or conservancies that are responsible for parks within different socio-economic areas. Alexandra Lange suggests creating alliances between neighboring communities that have different income levels. Basically, different neighborhoods of different economic levels would be combined under one conservancy. For example, we could combine Cobble Hill, Red Hook, and Carroll Gardens under a single conservancy. This way, the donated money could be raised from residents within any of these neighborhoods. Then, the donation funds would be split according to the different amounts of need between all of the urban parks located in those neighborhoods. All the parks in the overall area could get the labor and attention they need. Lange claims that, "the economics here would not be trickle-down but leveling-up, creating cleaner, safer, more appealing spaces for people living in a variety of housing" (Lange). The idea would allow the public to give private money to the smaller parks they visit every day, rather than just the larger, more popular ones with hefty endowments.

Lange also suggests starting a network of Neighborhood Parks Conservancies. These neighborhood conservancies would fund park maintenance costs and provide staff to all parks in their specified area. "They would also assist neighborhoods in thinking strategically about their park and open-space needs" (Lange). In other words, each urban park will be planned with the community's specific needs in mind. "When they are looked at as parts of an open-space catchment zone, rather than as individual entities, different sets of needs will come out" (Lange). Basically, the conservancy would offer a master plan of what all parks should offer. Each park

within a different neighborhood would cater to the different types of park-user: the newspaper reader, the athlete, the dog-walker, etc. Basically, Lange suggests redeveloping parks by taking into consideration all neighboring parks, to ensure that each park offers something unique to that particular community's wants. Lange's suggestion is a holistic park system.

Second, the city government must actively fight park inequity throughout the five boroughs. The leadership must be willing to enact policies that improve parks in need and that provide parks with adequate funding. Luckily, Mayor Bill de Blasio claims to address park inequity during his term. Park equity refers to the concept that all parks throughout each district should be sufficiently funded and well-kept. De Blasio has included a plan for urban parks within his budget; Council Member Mark Levine claims park equity is a priority within Mayor de Blasio's agenda. (Brian Lehrer Show)

In March 2014, de Blasio appointed Mitchell Silver as the new Parks Commissioner. Mitchell Silver was interviewed on the Brian Lehrer Show, and he explained some of Mayor de Blasio's and his goals to make parks more equitable throughout New York City. Their main initiative is called Parks Without Borders. The aim of the program is to provide better park accessibility and safety through a new design initiative to make urban parks feel welcoming and safe to more city residents. To accomplish this task, the Parks Commissioner asked the public and experts what designs could be implemented that make urban parks more accessible for the general public. One main point that he explained in detail was lowering or removing fences and unnecessary barriers from public parks. As pointed out in previous chapters, fences and gates make urban parks feel unwelcoming to low-income populations. Thus, taking away fences and barriers makes urban parks more inclusive to all groups. By taking away unnecessary barriers,

Silver wants to integrate each park into the cityscape. Incorporating each selected urban park into the street will make the public space feel more open and welcoming. The initiative also wants to focus on safety within urban parks. Silver claims they will impose designs that make people feel safer to walk through a park alone or late at night. Namely, they will make parks more visible by installing additional lights. The initiative also aims to increase the “sightlines” of the selected urban park by taking away any unnecessary brush or hedges, so citizens can clearly see through an urban park.

Silver claims that this program is important because a more equitable and connected park system could create a more inclusive community throughout New York City neighborhoods. The program asks communities to nominate their park specifically through the city’s website. I believe this is an interesting condition of the program, because it means the city will be able to cater specifically to that communities needs and wants, instead of imposing outside initiatives that could disrupt the community. Silver claims that de Blasio’s budget allocated \$50 million to Parks Without Borders. This amount of money could improve a lot of urban parks that need simple updates. (Brian Lehrer Show)

Another recommendation that the city government could implement would be to pass a law that mandates each conservancy and friend group to disclose the amount of combined public and private funds they have received for that fiscal year. Right now, there is a major lack of transparency in the amount each park or neighborhood receives in both public funding and private donations. The public deserves to know the proportion of private donations to public funding each parks receives. If the budgets of the conservancies were more transparent, perhaps

the City could allocate its funding to the urban parks that need it the most. In other words, parks with large private endowments could give their portion of public funding to urban parks in need.

Third – and perhaps most importantly – urban planners and private developers could actively implement certain planning solutions that counter eco-gentrification. Some believe that architects and urban planners probably do not mean to cause eco-gentrification when redesigning a park. But the data within this thesis proves that park redevelopment displaces native populations and facilitates socio-economic segregation within New York City. Despite this research that is available for the public, the current trend within park development – as seen through the High Line – is to build as large-scale and luxurious urban parks as possible. The Guardian believes that “such a myopic approach is a sign of our times: we want big projects that can be ‘unveiled’ to spectators at a specific point in time” (Haffner).

Urban planners and spatial experts have many responses to eco-gentrification. The Guardian believes that small-scale parks should open throughout one neighborhood, instead of one large-scale park in one neighborhood. A more modest and piecemeal approach to park redevelopment would benefit the native community without drastically changing the character of the neighborhood. Therefore, plans such as the Bronx Greenway plan may be the best solution to eco-gentrification.

Some urban planning ideas counter eco-gentrification by avoiding certain features that have been common within high-profile urban parks. Jeanne Haffner, a Lecturer on the History of Science at Harvard University, labels this trend as “conscious anti-gentrification.” “Conscious anti-gentrification” signifies greening projects that aim to increase the environmental quality and public health of communities, *without* altering the neighborhood’s socio-economic character. To

do this, the plans for each park must exclude classic elements that lead to environmental gentrification, such as extravagant water features or corporate sponsorships. The neighborhood's residents must have a say in the planning process of the park, so community needs are addressed and understood. If an urban park needs improvement, Haffner claims that changes must also be implemented slowly. This way the park's designers can continually monitor and evaluate how the park's changes are impacting the neighborhood. Rather than giving a community a completely new park, small changes could be implemented over time before the whole park is completed.

Winifred Curran and Trina Hamilton, academics in the Department of Geography at the University of Buffalo, believe that to prevent eco-gentrification, cities must adopt the "just-green-enough approach." Similar to "conscious anti-gentrification," the "just-green-enough approach" focuses on slowly implementing small-scale improvements throughout a community. (Haffner)

Newton Creek, a neighborhood of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, is an example of this "just-green-enough approach." During the 1800s, Newton Creek was an industrial center for oil refineries, fertilizer factories, and coal yards. As such, it was one of the most polluted waterways in America. However, the Newton Creek community took initiative and decided to clean the polluted waterway. The Newtown Creek community has become increasingly involved in its environmental cleanup throughout the years. In 2010, Newton Creek was made a Superfund site. In other words, the federal government became responsible for the cleanup of Newton Creek's hazardous pollutants. The Newtown Creek Alliance Community organizes and facilitates community participation. Furthermore, this grassroots movement to clean up Newton Creek

deliberately excluded design models that have facilitated environmental gentrification. The community leaders have stayed away from the waterfront-model and focused on building up their strong manufacturing base instead.

Timothy Beatley – an urban planner – developed another way to green cities without causing socio-economic changes. Beatley created the Biophilic Cities Project. Basically, his project aims to find ways that make cities more biophilic – or closer to nature. Biophilic design aspires to integrate nature and greenery within the spaces where we work and live. It does this by enhancing the “emotional connection of urban residents to life outside” (Haffner). In other words, biophilic design caters to our innate love and connection with nature. Essentially, the Biophilic Cities Project calls for urban planners to take nature into serious consideration when planning buildings and housing projects, rather than an afterthought to be built later.

Overall, I believe the solution to eco-gentrification is to find a balance between equity and sustainability when redeveloping urban parks. Community needs must be placed over economic profit, and if “a bigger project does make sense, it should at least incorporate local input and protect local culture” (Jaffe). The Bronx River Alliance’s work on the Bronx River Greenway is a good example of combining equity and sustainability because they have listened to their community’s needs and thought about the impact of their work on local businesses. (Although, the plan is not yet fully developed, so eco-gentrification *may* occur within the following years, albeit on a much lower scale than the High Line.) Overall, collaboration between urban planners and the community is key to stopping eco-gentrification.

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Maps provided by the Bronx River Alliance website and StreetsBlog NYC.

Photos taken by Bernadette Corbett.