

Training Session #1: Manhattan History

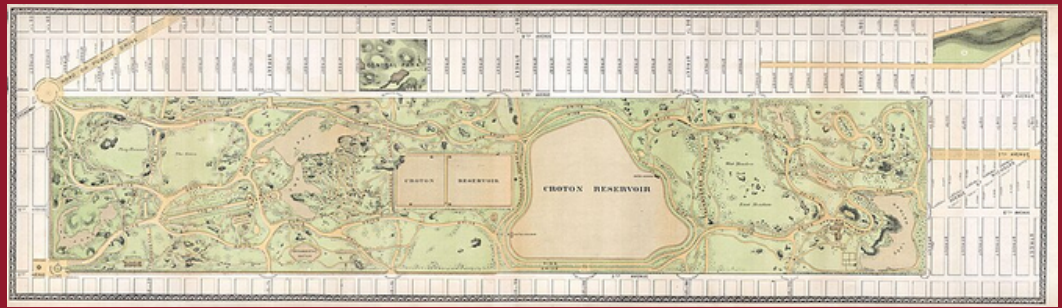
Urban Plunge 2026



The original inhabitants of Manhattan were the people of the **Lenape tribe**, whose way of life was defined by a reliance on and respect for the natural environment. In 1624, the European settlers purchased the island of Manhattan from the native people for what equates to \$24 in today's currency.

The diseases introduced by the Europeans played a major role in decimating the Lenape population in Manhattan. The surviving Lenape were forced to move West, but **the presence of the Lenape people can never be fully erased.**

Inspired by other cities such as Paris, **Central Park** was built with the idea of having an open green space that allowed residents to experience nature within a bustling city. Seneca Village was an African American neighborhood which was completely displaced by the construction.



The loss of property meant many residents lost the crucial right to vote. At the time, African Americans could vote if they owned a certain amount of land, but that right had now been taken away.



San Juan Hill was a mostly Black and Puerto Rican neighborhood that was razed to make way for Lincoln Center. The effort was led by urban planner, Robert Moses. San Juan Hill was a hub for African American and Caribbean culture. Many jazz greats lived and played there, including alto saxophonist **Benny Carter**, who grew up in the neighborhood.



Today, 12 percent of low-income neighborhoods are experiencing **ongoing or advanced gentrification** (an increase in housing values or rents accompanied by an influx of high-income, high-educated residents). Modern gentrification marginalizes low-income residents, as rising rents cause longtime residents to be expelled. In turn, neighborhood diversity declines and small businesses are forced to close. **Hackworth and Smith** divide the process into three waves:



1950s-1970s:
sporadic but
widespread



1970s-1990s:
displacement of
historic neighborhoods



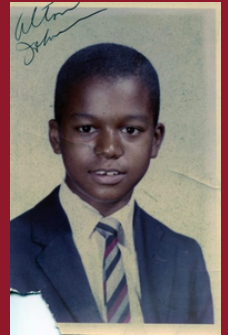
1990s onwards:
driven by economic
forces

Training Session #1: Manhattan Initiatives

Urban Plunge 2026



The [Amsterdam Houses](#) are a New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) public housing development located between West 61st and West 64th Street. Construction required the demolition of approximately 100 tenement buildings and displaced around 1,400 residents, nearly 80 percent of whom were African American. The development remains one of the few surviving residential communities in the former San Juan Hill neighborhood.



[Alton Johnson](#),
Amsterdam Houses
former resident, at 14

In 2023, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts launched [Legacies of San Juan Hill](#), a digital history project created in collaboration with the Center for Puerto Rican Studies (CENTRO) at Hunter College and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The initiative acknowledges the institution's role in the displacement of the San Juan Hill community and seeks to preserve the neighborhood's history through [scholarly essays](#), [archival photographs](#), [interactive maps](#), and [interviews](#) with former residents.



"Once all the new construction was complete, there stood Lincoln Center in all its glory, with new housing, schools and subway stops (66th Street) bordering it. But right behind, in the middle of all this newness, **still stand the Amsterdam Houses.**"

"The new design for Damrosch Park will repair what for so long has been one of the great failures of Lincoln Center, the cold shoulder it turns toward its neighbors to the west, replacing an uninviting open space with a vibrant new park gracefully connected to its surroundings."

Lincoln Center's [A New West Side](#) initiative aims to reconnect the campus with the surrounding neighborhood by transforming the Amsterdam Avenue entrance and Damrosch Park into a more accessible, welcoming public space. Developed through extensive community input, the initiative seeks to strengthen Lincoln Center's relationship with nearby residents, including those living in the Amsterdam Houses.



Sidewalk improvements, including an improved bus waiting area



Art and light interventions within the concourse



Gardens at the new entrance to Damrosch Park



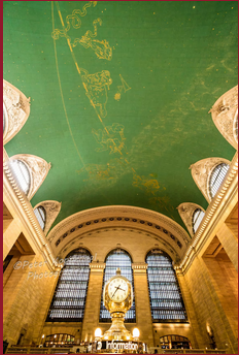
New opportunities for seating at the West 65th Street corner of campus

Training Session #1: Manhattan Today

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"Grand Central's clock, located in the center of the famous train terminal in Manhattan, is so famous it even supposedly birthed a saying: 'Meet me at/under the clock.' Countless commuters use the Grand Central clock, located in the atrium, to denote where to meet in Grand Central."
([Untapped Cities](#))

When it opened, [Grand Central](#) reshaped the neighborhood. Air rights allowed developers to build above the tracks, beginning a new era of vertical architecture. Skyscrapers soon rose up along Park Avenue, transforming New York City's skyline. Today, Grand Central Terminal is globally recognized as a center of transportation, civic architecture, and commerce, embodying the historic, economic, and cultural spirit of New York City.



At the turn of the 20th century, theaters migrated uptown from Union Square and Madison Square, drawn by cheaper land and improved transportation. This cemented Broadway as New York City's [Theater District](#). Historic venues like the [Lyceum Theatre](#) and the [New Amsterdam Theatre](#) opened in 1903. Soon, vaudeville evolved into full-scale musicals and dramatic productions, and the surrounding blocks began to fill with restaurants, hotels, and neon signs.



In New York City, Dominicans are widely represented among small business owners. Dominican signs and symbols, such as the Dominican flag, images of revered historical figures, or names of historic battles, provinces, and towns, adorn storefronts along Broadway, Saint Nicholas, Audubon, and Amsterdam Avenues in northern Manhattan. In September of 2018, "[Little Dominican Republic](#)" was officially designated in Washington Heights' Inwood neighborhood, home to one of the largest Dominican communities in the world.

"The story of Dominican immigration to Upper Manhattan began in early to mid 1980s, and continues to be written today. Walking around Upper Manhattan can often feel like walking through the streets of a town in the Dominican Republic. As you walk down Broadway, you will find bodegas on every corner; barber shops, salons, taxi bases, and restaurants in between; older gentlemen playing dominoes all along Amsterdam and Broadway; and of course, Spanish spoken fluently by an entire community of hundreds of thousands of Dominicans. I am proud to be able to designate Washington Heights and Inwood as the historic district of Little Dominican Republic. We can finally hold a claim over the incredible contributions Dominicans have made to Upper Manhattan and all of New York City."

— [Senator Marisol Alcántara](#)