Every Inch of Ground

A History of New York City from Lenape Mannahatta to the Present

inspired by

ELEANOR WHITLOCK

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Company Town and Crown Colony, 1609–1783

From the Lenape homeland and the Dutch trading post to the English port, its enslaved labor force, and seven years of British military occupation.

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CHAPTER 1

Mannahatta and the Company, 1609–1626

Twenty-Eight Canoes

On September 12, 1609, a small Dutch ship with a mixed English and Dutch crew left the harbor and began to work its way up the river that would later carry its captain's name. According to the journal kept by Robert Juet, one of the crew, people in twenty-eight canoes came out from the shore to meet it. Women and children were among them. The ship's company would not let them come aboard. It did buy food from them, and then it continued north.

The visitors' offer of food is the most revealing detail in that entry. The people in the canoes had come to trade. They had food to sell, they knew the water, and they had evidently decided as a community, families included, that the strangers were worth approaching. The crew's refusal to let them board had its own history. Six days earlier one of the ship's sailors had been killed by an arrow, and three days earlier the crew had seized two local men as hostages. Within the first ten days of documented contact between Europeans and the people of the harbor, the pattern of the next half-century was already present: trade on the water, violence over the terms of meeting, and a European record written entirely from the deck.

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The people in the canoes were Munsee-speaking Lenape, or their immediate neighbors, and the ground the ship was passing had been theirs, in the sense that mattered to them, for a very long time. They lived in communities scattered across the islands and shores of the harbor, the lower Hudson valley, western Long Island, and the mainland to the north and west. They planted maize, beans, and squash in cleared fields, fished the rivers and bays, gathered shellfish, and hunted inland. Their settlements were not fixed in a single place the year round. A community might plant at one site, fish at another, and move to hunting grounds in the colder months, returning to the same places over years and generations.

Archaeologists and historians have placed several such communities on the island the Dutch would call Manhattes. One of them, Sapokanikan, sat in the island's southwest, beside a trout stream later known as the Minetta, in what is now Greenwich Village. It was a seasonal settlement, and its name may have meant wild tobacco. The connection proved durable in an unexpected way: within a few years of the Dutch arrival, the Company granted the same ground to one of its officials for a tobacco plantation. Farther east, a settlement usually called Werpoes is placed on the banks of a freshwater pond the Dutch would name the Collect, near today's Foley Square, with oyster-shell middens accumulating nearby at a spot the Dutch later called Kalck Hoek, or Shell Point. Those mounds of discarded shell, built up over centuries of eating, were among the most visible marks the Lenape left on the island's landscape. The small wooded island off Manhattan's southern tip, later Governors Island, was used for fishing and planting in season.

These places were claimed. They were also shared, used, and passed down under rules that differed from the ones the Dutch brought with them. Among the Lenape, a community's relationship to a piece of ground rested on use: the right to plant a field, fish a stretch of river, or camp in a particular cove. Such rights could be extended to others, by agreement, for purposes and periods that both sides understood. What was not part of the Lenape repertoire, so far as any evidence shows, was the idea that land could be sold outright, cut off from the people who used it, and held thereafter by a distant owner who might never set foot on it. The Dutch arrived with exactly that idea, along with the paper and the courts to enforce it. The first contest over the islands at the mouth of

the river was a collision between two theories of what it meant to hold ground, and it began with traders on a river, years before anyone drew a deed.

The Halve Maen

Henry Hudson, an English navigator, had not been hired to find a river. In 1609 the Dutch East India Company engaged him to search for a northeast passage to Asia, a sea route over the top of Russia that would let Dutch ships reach the spice markets of the East without sailing around Africa. He set out in a small ship called the Halve Maen, or Half Moon. When ice blocked the northern route, he turned west across the Atlantic toward North America, where a passage through the continent was still thought possible.

On September 3, 1609, the Halve Maen came into the Lower Bay of what is now New York Harbor. Only fragments of Hudson's own logbook survive. The fullest account of what happened over the following month comes from Juet, whose journal was later printed and whose day-by-day entries have been the basis of every history of the voyage since.

The journal records trade almost from the start, and it records violence almost as quickly. On September 6, Hudson sent five men in the ship's boat to explore. Men in two canoes attacked them. John Colman, an English sailor and the ship's second mate, was killed by an arrow in the throat, and two others were badly wounded. The journal gives no reason for the attack, and none can be recovered from the other side, since no Lenape account of the encounter exists. What is clear is that the crew now treated every approach with suspicion. On September 9, two Native men came aboard to trade, and the crew seized them. One later jumped overboard and escaped. The reasons for taking hostages were tactical and familiar from European voyages elsewhere: captives might serve as guides, as guarantees against attack, or as specimens to carry home.

Three days later the ship entered the river itself, and the canoes came out to meet it. Over the following weeks the Halve Maen worked its way north, past the stretch of shore where Manhattan gave way to the mainland, past the high cliffs on the western bank, and on beyond the site of present-day Albany, where the river grew too shallow to promise any passage to the Pacific. Along the way the crew traded, observed, and noted the land's fertility and the abundance of fur-bearing animals. On October 4, 1609, the ship left the river and headed back across the ocean.

The voyage failed in its stated purpose. There was no passage to Asia up this river, and Hudson had not found one. What he had found, and what his employers and their competitors in Amsterdam grasped quickly, was a deep, sheltered harbor at the mouth of a navigable river that reached far into a continent rich in beaver. The furs the crew had seen being offered, and the eagerness of the people along the river to trade them for European goods, were the most valuable information the Halve Maen carried home.

Hudson's report also fixed a claim. The Dutch Republic, then in the middle of its long struggle for independence from Spain, would argue for decades that Hudson's voyage under a Dutch commission gave it title to the river and the lands around it. The English, who had a competing claim from earlier voyages along the coast, would dispute this. Neither European claimant asked the people in the canoes. From the European point of view, the river and its shores could be discovered, mapped, and claimed by a sovereign whether or not anyone was already living there. That premise, which was never argued but simply assumed, governed everything that followed.

Block's Winter

Within a few years of Hudson's return, merchants in Amsterdam were sending ships back across the Atlantic to trade for furs on the river. Their ventures were small, competitive, and private. Each voyage was a gamble: a ship, a crew, a cargo of trade goods, and the hope of returning with enough pelts to cover the cost and turn a profit. Several merchant groups were operating in the same waters at the same time, and each wanted the trade for itself.

Adriaen Block, a Dutch ship captain and trader, was among the most important of them. In the fall of 1613 he took his ship, the Tijger, up the river, sailing alongside the Fortuyn, commanded by Hendrick Christiaensen, another trader who had made the crossing before. While moored at Manhattan, the Tijger caught fire and was destroyed. The loss stranded Block and his crew for the winter of 1613–14 on the island, far from any European help.

What happened next is the first documented instance of Europeans living on Manhattan for an extended period. Block's men built huts and stayed through the winter. They also built a new ship. The vessel they launched, the Onrust, a name meaning restless, was a small yacht about forty feet long, and they built it with help from the Lenape. That help is rarely dwelt on, but it says

a good deal about the balance of power on the island in 1613. A shipwrecked crew without its vessel was entirely dependent on the goodwill of the people around it for food, for knowledge of the country, and for safety. The Lenape chose to assist rather than drive the strangers off, presumably because a trading partner who could return with more goods next year was worth keeping alive.

It was also in these early years, according to a widely repeated account, that a sailor named Juan, or Jan, Rodrigues, a free man of African and Portuguese descent from Santo Domingo, stayed behind on or near Manhattan to trade when his ship sailed home. If the account is correct, the first person from across the Atlantic to make a home in the harbor, living among the Lenape and trading on his own terms, was a man of African ancestry who was neither a Company servant nor anyone's property. Whatever the details, his presence is a reminder that the Atlantic world that reached the harbor was already mixed, and that the categories the Company would later enforce were not yet fixed.

In the spring of 1614 Block took the Onrust east. He sailed through the East River and the treacherous tidal rapids at its northern end, which he named Hellegat, the name that survives as Hell Gate, and out into Long Island Sound. He went up the Connecticut River, then continued along the coast toward the island that still bears his name and on toward Cape Cod. The voyage was a commercial reconnaissance: Block was looking for new places to trade and for the extent of the territory his backers might claim.

The most lasting product of his voyages was a map. Drawn from Block's observations and presented in 1614, the document known as the Figurative Map showed the coast from the Delaware region north toward New England with a precision no earlier chart had achieved. It was the first map to show Long Island as an island, separated from the mainland by the Sound that Block had just navigated. It also carried, for the first time in any known document, the name Nieu Nederlandt, New Netherland, written across the territory between the English settlement in Virginia and the French in Canada. The original survives in the Dutch National Archive in The Hague.

The map was a commercial instrument as much as a geographic one. On October 11, 1614, Block, Christiaensen, and twelve other merchants presented it to the States General, the governing assembly of the Dutch Republic, with a petition for trading privileges. They argued, in effect, that they had found and charted the territory and should be rewarded with the exclusive right to exploit

it. The States General agreed and granted the merchants, organized as the New Netherland Company, a three-year monopoly on trade in the region.

The monopoly settled a dispute among Dutch merchants, not between the Dutch and anyone else. It gave a group of Amsterdam traders the right to exclude other Amsterdam traders from the river. It said nothing about who owned the land and conferred nothing on the people who lived there. The grant lapsed after its three years, around 1617, and was not renewed. For the next several years Dutch traders operated on the river under shorter licenses and more open competition, building small posts upriver and returning each season for furs.

Beaver and Sewant

The trade that brought the Dutch to the harbor and kept them there rested on one animal. In Europe, beaver fur was the essential raw material for felt hats, the fashionable headgear of men across the continent, and for coats and trim. Centuries of trapping had nearly wiped out the beaver in western Europe by the early 1620s, which meant that the supply had to come from somewhere else. North America, where beavers remained plentiful, became the source. The pelts traded on the river were shipped across the Atlantic to be processed into felt and sold.

The Dutch did not trap the beaver themselves. They bought pelts from Native hunters and traders who had the skills, the territory, and the networks to supply them. Around the harbor, the Munsee-speaking Lenape were the immediate trading partners. Up the river, around the posts that would eventually become Fort Orange and then Albany, the Mohicans controlled access to the trade, and beyond them lay the Mohawks and the other nations of the Iroquois confederacy, who drew pelts from still farther inland. The Dutch position at the mouth of the river was valuable because the river connected the harbor to those inland suppliers. The traders at the harbor were at the end of a long chain of exchange that they neither controlled nor fully understood.

The Native traders wanted European goods, and they were selective about which ones. Duffel, a heavy woolen cloth, was among the most important. So were glass beads, iron axes, awls for piercing leather, and knives, tools that replaced stone and bone equivalents and made daily work faster. Firearms, gunpowder, and lead entered the trade as well, over the objections of officials

who understood the danger of arming the people they were trading with. These goods were not trinkets. An iron axe or a length of good cloth had practical value, and the people who acquired them knew what they were getting.

Payment soon came to involve a second medium, one that the Dutch did not invent and never fully controlled. Wampum, which the Dutch called sewant or zeewant, consisted of small tubular beads cut and drilled from the shells of whelks and quahogs. The white beads came from whelk shell; the dark purple beads, which were scarcer and more highly valued, came from the quahog. Making them was slow, skilled work, and much of it was done by Algonquian communities along the shores of Long Island and the Sound, where the shells were abundant. The Lenape name for Long Island, Sewanacky, is often said to reflect this association with wampum making.

Among the Algonquian peoples of the coast and their neighbors inland, wampum carried meanings that went far beyond exchange. Strung into belts and strings, it recorded agreements, marked alliances, accompanied condolences, and conveyed messages between communities. It was used in ceremonies, given as gifts, worn as personal adornment, and offered to settle disputes. A wampum belt could stand for a treaty and be read aloud, its patterns recalling the terms. Europeans observed these uses without ever grasping them entirely.

What the Dutch grasped was that wampum could be used as money. They had little silver coin to spare in the colony, and the inland suppliers of beaver valued wampum. So Dutch traders began acquiring wampum from the coastal peoples who made it, in exchange for European goods, and then using it to buy pelts from the inland traders who wanted it. Within the colony, wampum soon circulated among the settlers themselves as currency, used to buy land, goods, and services in the absence of enough coin. An object that had carried diplomatic and ceremonial weight among the peoples who made it became, in Dutch hands, the small change of a commercial settlement.

This conversion was the first of many in which the Dutch took something with a meaning in Lenape and Algonquian life and fitted it to a meaning in their own. Wampum went from record and gift to coin. Land, in the same years, was about to go from use right to property. The fur trade made these conversions profitable and the Dutch presence permanent. It also bound the Lenape into an Atlantic market whose demands they could influence but not

set. As the beaver around the harbor were hunted out, as they soon were, the Lenape around Manhattan found that the trade that had made them valuable partners was moving upriver, beyond their reach, while the Dutch remained on their ground.

The Company

In 1621 the States General chartered the Dutch West India Company and gave it a twenty-four-year monopoly on Dutch trade in the Americas. The new company was modeled on the Dutch East India Company, the same enterprise that had sent Hudson out in 1609. Like its predecessor, it was a joint-stock corporation, financed by investors in the major Dutch cities and governed by boards of directors organized into regional chambers, with the Amsterdam chamber the most powerful in matters concerning New Netherland. The States General kept a representative on the board to watch over the Republic's interest.

The timing was not accidental. The Twelve Years' Truce between the Dutch Republic and Spain expired in 1621, and the war resumed. The Company was meant to make money, and it was also meant to carry the war against Spain and Portugal, then united under the Spanish crown, into the Atlantic, where their colonies and treasure fleets were vulnerable. Its charter reached across the Atlantic coasts of Africa and the Americas. Its investors' attention went chiefly to the richest prizes: the sugar colonies of Brazil, the slave and gold trade of West Africa, the Caribbean. New Netherland, a fur-trading outpost on a cold northern river, was one of its smaller concerns.

That ranking shaped the colony from the start. The Company did not want a society on the river. It wanted a profitable trade at minimal cost, a secure base to defend the trade against rival Europeans, and enough settlers to grow food for the traders and soldiers and to give the Dutch claim substance against the English. It owned the land it claimed, or asserted that it did, and it would decide who could use which pieces of it, on what terms, and for what purposes. Settlers who came under its auspices came as its employees or its tenants, bound by contracts that told them where to live and what to plant. The Company also held the monopoly on the fur trade, which meant that individual settlers were forbidden to trade on their own account.

Here was the second theory of landholding brought to the harbor, laid on top of the first. In the Company's view, the territory of New Netherland belonged to it by virtue of a charter from a European government and a claim based on Hudson's voyage and Block's map. The Lenape were present on the ground, and the Company would find it prudent to negotiate with them, but its title did not depend on their consent. What it would seek from them, in time, was not permission so much as a cleaner title, a document that would show to the States General and to rival Europeans that the land had been acquired by legitimate means.

Nut Island and the Fort

In 1624 the Company sent its first shipload of settlers. The ship was the Nieu Nederlandt, under the command of Cornelis Jacobsz May, and it carried about thirty families of Walloons, French-speaking Protestants from the southern provinces of the Low Countries that remained under Spanish rule. Many had fled religious persecution and spent years as refugees in the northern Dutch provinces. For them, a contract with the Company offered land and a fresh start; for the Company, they were a ready supply of farmers who had reason to want somewhere to go.

The Company did not concentrate them. Its aim was to plant its claim across the whole territory it asserted, from the Connecticut to the Delaware, and to establish trading posts where the furs could be acquired. So the settlers were dispersed. About eighteen families went up the river to the site that became Fort Orange, near present-day Albany, where the Mohican trade was richest. Others went to the Delaware River in the south and to the Connecticut River in the east. Only eight men, by the usual reckoning, stayed at the harbor, on the small island off Manhattan's tip that the Dutch called Noten Eylandt, Nut Island, for the walnut and chestnut trees that grew there. Their job was to trade furs.

The choice of Noten Eylandt for the harbor post made sense for traders. It was small, defensible, and close to the shipping channel, and the Lenape had long used it for fishing and planting in season rather than as a permanent home. But it was too small to support a real settlement. Within a short time, and the dates are disputed, with accounts placing the first landing on the island in May 1624 and the main settlement's move to Manhattan in 1625 or 1626, the

Company shifted its harbor base across the narrow channel to the southern tip of Manhattan itself.

The decision to build a fort there came in the mid-1620s. The Company wanted a strong point at the river's mouth to protect its trade against rival Europeans, who could reach the river only by passing the tip of the island. Kryn Fredericksz, the colony's engineer, laid out the design: a four-sided earthwork with a bastion at each corner, to be named Fort Amsterdam. It stood near the spot where Bowling Green and the old Custom House are now, on the high ground above the meeting of the two rivers. In its first years it was more plan than structure, an earthen enclosure that would be built and rebuilt for decades.

The move to Manhattan changed the colony's center of gravity. Until then, the Company's presence in New Netherland had been spread thin across a vast claimed territory, with the harbor just one post among several. Once the fort was placed at the tip of Manhattan, the island became the seat of government, the port of entry, and the place where ships from Amsterdam would arrive and depart. The Company began pulling settlers back from the outlying posts, including the Delaware, to concentrate them around the fort. Over the following decades, the small settlement that grew up beside Fort Amsterdam would take the name New Amsterdam.

The colony's government in these years was a Company administration, with a director appointed by and answerable to the directors in Amsterdam. Willem Verhulst served as director in 1625 and 1626. He was replaced by Peter Minuit, a Company official born in the Rhineland of Walloon descent, who had made an earlier trip to New Netherland in 1625 and arrived back in the colony as director on May 4, 1626. Minuit's instructions, like his predecessor's, put the Company's interests first: secure the trade, build the fort, keep the settlers working, and give the Company a defensible claim to the land around it.

Sixty Guilders

On November 4, 1626, a ship called the Arms of Amsterdam reached the Netherlands from the colony. It had left New Netherland, from what the Dutch then called the River Mauritius, on September 23. The next day, Pieter Schaghen, the States General's representative on the Company's board, wrote a letter to the States General in The Hague summarizing the news the ship had brought. The letter survives in the Nationaal Archief, in the archive of the

States General, and it is the only contemporary record of the event for which Peter Minuit is chiefly remembered.

Schaghen's letter is short and businesslike. He reported that the colonists were in good spirit and lived in peace, and that women among them had borne children there. They had sown grain by the middle of May and reaped it by the middle of August. As evidence of the land's fertility, the ship had brought home samples: wheat, rye, barley, oats, buckwheat, canary seed, beans, and flax. He listed the cargo of furs and timber. And in the middle of this report he wrote one sentence that has been quoted more than any other in the city's history. In the New York State Library's translation, it reads: "They have purchased the Island Manhattes from the Indians for the value of 60 guilders. It is 11,000 morgens in size."

The morgen was a Dutch measure of land, and 11,000 of them came to roughly 22,000 acres. The phrase "for the value of" is worth noticing. It suggests that the payment was made in goods, probably the cloth, tools, and other trade items that the Company carried for the fur trade, and that the figure of 60 guilders was a Dutch accounting of what those goods were worth, recorded for the benefit of the directors.

That is nearly all the record contains. The letter does not give the date of the transaction, which is usually placed in the late spring or summer of 1626, after Minuit's arrival in May. It does not describe the exchange. It does not name the goods. Most important, it does not name the people from whom the island was bought. Schaghen was in Amsterdam; he took no part in the transaction and was reporting what the returning ship's officers or letters had told him. No document from the colony survives that names the Lenape parties, describes what they were told, or records how they understood what they were doing. Even which community took part is uncertain, and more than one has been proposed.

The figure of $24, which every schoolchild in New York once learned, comes from nowhere in the seventeenth century. It was the work of John Romeyn Brodhead, a New York historian, who converted the 60 guilders into dollars in 1844. The conversion turned a Company accounting entry into a fable about a bargain, and the fable became a fixture of the city's idea of itself: the island bought for a handful of beads, the Lenape cheated or naive, the Dutch shrewd.

The fable rests on almost nothing. It assumes that both sides understood the transaction the same way, and that one of them simply got the worse of the deal.

There is a better way to read the exchange, and it begins with the gap in the record. The Company needed a document showing that it had acquired the island by purchase. A purchase strengthened its claim against the English, satisfied its directors, and gave a legal foundation to its distribution of land to settlers. From the Company's point of view, the payment transferred title: the land now belonged to the Company, to grant, lease, or sell as it chose, and the people who had lived on it had given up their claim.

From the Lenape point of view, the transaction is unlikely to have meant anything of the kind. Their own practice was to extend rights of use, to share ground with others on agreed terms, and to mark such agreements with gifts, the exchange of goods that confirmed a relationship. A community that accepted cloth and tools from the Dutch in 1626 had every reason to think it was agreeing to let the newcomers live and plant on part of the island, alongside the people already there, and to be compensated for doing so. It had no reason to think it was surrendering its own right to fish, plant, hunt, and travel on the land, or agreeing to leave. The very idea of selling land outright, so that the seller lost all claim to it forever, had no settled place in Lenape custom. And if the community that received the goods did not in fact use the whole island, or was one among several with rights to parts of it, then it was in no position to sell the whole even if it had wanted to.

Both sides, in other words, could have walked away from the exchange believing they had gotten what they wanted, and both could have been right about their own understanding. The difference lay in which understanding would be enforced. The Dutch had the written record, the courts, the fort, and the backing of a European state. The Lenape had their own customs and their own memory of the agreement, and no instrument that the Company was bound to respect. In the years that followed, the Company and the settlers it brought acted on the theory that the island was theirs, and Lenape communities who continued to use the land found that they were now regarded as trespassers on property that had been bought.

The Schaghen letter is thus less a deed than a report that a deed-like event had taken place. It established, in the archive of a European state, that the Company owned Manhattan. Every grant of land on the island over the next

four centuries descends, at least in legal theory, from that claim. A city whose history would be dominated by the question of who held title to which piece of ground began with a title that one party believed it had acquired and the other almost certainly did not believe it had given up.

The same pattern played out across the territory. In 1629, Wouter van Twiller, a Company official who would later serve as the third director of New Netherland, received a Company grant for a tobacco plantation at Sapokanikan, the seasonal settlement beside the Minetta. The ground where Lenape families had camped and planted became, by the Company's say-so, a private farm. The grant required no fresh negotiation with the people who had used the place. In the Company's view, that question had been settled by the purchase.

The Company's Men

The colony that Schaghen described as living in peace was also, by 1626 or within a year or two of it, a colony that held people in slavery. The first enslaved Africans in New Amsterdam belonged to the Company. Eleven men are usually counted among the first group, and they arrived around 1626, perhaps a year earlier or later. They bore Portuguese names, which suggests that they had been taken from Portuguese or Spanish ships, probably seized by Dutch privateers or Company vessels in the Atlantic war against Spain and Portugal, and then sent north to the colony. Most of the earliest enslaved people in the settlement came from West Central Africa, the region of present-day Angola and Congo, from which the Portuguese were shipping enormous numbers of captives across the Atlantic.

Some of their names survive in the colony's records. Among them was a man known as Cleijn Anthonij, little Anthony, also recorded as Antonio van Angola, his name preserving the place from which he had been taken. Another was Manuel de Gerrit de Reus, who was in the Company's service by 1625 or 1626. The names are fragments, assigned by Portuguese and then Dutch owners and clerks, but they are the first names of Africans recorded as living on Manhattan under European ownership, and they place these men at the very beginning of the settlement's history.

They were brought to work. The Company needed labor for the heavy tasks of a new settlement, and it had trouble attracting and keeping European

workers willing to do them on Company terms. The enslaved men cleared land, planted and harvested crops, and built houses, roads, and bridges. Their labor is also credited with the building of Fort Amsterdam and the cutting of the road north from the fort that later became Broadway, though the record for those particular works is thinner. What is beyond dispute is that the physical infrastructure of the Company settlement, its fields, its buildings, and its fortifications, depended from the start on the work of people who owned none of it and could claim none of it.

Within a year or two, enslaved women are said to have arrived as well, three of them, in a settlement of roughly thirty wooden houses and fewer than two hundred people. Whether or not those figures are exact, the settlement in the late 1620s was small enough that the Company's enslaved workers made up a visible part of its population. They lived among the colonists, worked alongside Company servants, and attended the same church. They were also the Company's property, listed among its assets, subject to its orders, and unable to leave.

The legal position of these men and women in New Netherland was unsettled in ways that would matter. The Dutch Republic had no body of slave law comparable to the codes the English and Spanish would develop in their colonies, and the Company's practice in New Amsterdam evolved case by case. The enslaved could appear in court, marry in the church, and in some cases accumulate property of their own. These openings were narrow, and they existed at the Company's discretion. But they existed, and the first generation of Africans on Manhattan would use them, petitioning the Company and pressing for terms under which they might hold ground themselves.

By the end of 1626 the Company had a fort under construction at the tip of the island, a director in residence, a population of Walloon settlers and Company servants, a group of enslaved Africans working its land, and a letter in The Hague recording that the whole island had been bought from the Lenape. The Lenape were still there, fishing the rivers, planting their fields, and trading furs and wampum with the newcomers. The island was now claimed by two peoples under two incompatible ideas of what it meant to hold it, and worked by a third group who were allowed to hold none of it. All three would press their claims on the same small piece of ground in the decades that followed, and

the Company's paper title, resting on Schaghen's single sentence, would be the instrument by which its claim prevailed.

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CHAPTER 2

Fort, Wall, and Bouwerie: New Amsterdam, 1626–1664

When the investor Michiel Reyniersz Pauw gave up his patroonship of Pavonia, the colony he had pledged to plant on the west bank of the Hudson consisted of little more than a hut and a ferry landing at Paulus Hook, in what is now Jersey City. In 1630 he had bought two tracts from the Lenape, Hopoghan Hackingh and Ashasimus, the ground of present-day Hoboken and the Harsimus section of Jersey City, which together took in the peninsula between the Hudson and the Hackensack rivers. He had bought Staten Island as well. Pavonia was a Latin rendering of his own surname, the Dutch word for peacock. On paper the holding commanded both shores of the harbor's western approach, directly across from the Company's fort at the tip of Manhattan. Pauw never sent the colonists his grant required, and he sold his rights back to the Dutch West India Company. By 1635 Pavonia had ceased to exist as a patroonship.

The failure was typical. Over the next three decades the Company tried several ways of filling the ground around its trading post: private feudal colonies, free farmers holding small grants, English settlers under Dutch patents, and Africans it had enslaved and then partly released. It also made war on the Lenape communities who still lived on and used that ground. Each method produced a different kind of landholder with a different set of rights, and by

1664, when an English fleet arrived in the harbor, those rights had become the colony's most valuable possession. The surrender that followed was negotiated largely as a guarantee of who owned what.

Patroons

The Company that bought Manhattan in 1626 was a trading and privateering enterprise, and it had little appetite for paying to settle farmers on the far side of the Atlantic. Its fortunes changed in 1628, when the Company admiral Piet Heyn captured the Spanish silver fleet off Cuba. The windfall drew the directors' money and attention south, toward the sugar coast of Brazil, which the Company was then trying to take from Portugal. New Netherland, a fur post with a few hundred settlers at most, looked like a poor place to spend capital. A faction within the Company argued that if the directors would not colonize the province, private men should be allowed to do it for them.

That faction won. On June 7, 1629, the Company issued a charter of Freedoms and Exemptions. Its central offer was the patroonship. Any member who planted fifty colonists in New Netherland within four years, at his own expense, could claim 4 leagues of land along one bank of a navigable river, or 2 leagues along both banks. He would hold it from the Company as a perpetual fief of inheritance, with high, middle, and low jurisdiction, which meant he would run his own courts and appoint his own officers over the people who farmed his land. The settlers would be his tenants. The charter also recognized purchase from the Native occupants as the way to acquire the ground, so each patroon had to buy his tract from whichever Lenape or Mahican community held it before the Company would confirm it.

Manhattan was excluded. The island stayed in Company hands, along with the fort, the warehouses, and the farms the Company worked directly. The arrangement divided New Netherland into two kinds of ground: the Company's own island at the center, run by salaried officials, and a ring of private domains, run by Amsterdam investors who would carry the cost of peopling them.

The charter's leading advocate was most likely Kiliaen van Rensselaer, an Amsterdam jeweler who had subscribed to the Company early. Many merchants expressed interest, but only three patroonships were actually established. Van Rensselaer's Rensselaerswijck lay on the upper Hudson around Fort

Orange, near present-day Albany. Swanendael lay on Delaware Bay. Pavonia faced Manhattan. By 1635 Swanendael and Pavonia were gone. Rensselaerswijck survived the Dutch period and outlasted it by well over a century.

The pattern says something about the ground near the harbor. Fifty colonists was a substantial outlay for a single investor: their passage, their tools, their livestock, and their food until the first harvest. Upriver, the Rensselaerswijck tenants farmed ground well removed from the Company's officials at Manhattan. Near Manhattan, a patroon's domain overlapped the Company's own interests and lay beside Lenape communities that had not agreed to leave. Pauw's purchase of Staten Island produced no lasting colony either. A later attempt by another patroon, Cornelis Melyn, to settle the island beginning in 1639 also came to nothing durable. The harbor's shores would be filled by smaller holders, and the way they got their ground was through the Company's director rather than through a feudal lord.

A Farm Across the Harlem, and a War

One of those smaller holders was Jonas Bronck, a Swedish-born sea captain. He married Teuntje Joriaens in Amsterdam's Nieuwe Kerk on July 6, 1638, and arrived in New Netherland in June 1639 aboard De Brant van Troyen. He settled north of the Harlem River on about 500 acres near today's Mott Haven. He called it Emmaus.

Bronck's farm sat on the edge of Wecquaesgeek country, and for a brief moment it served as neutral ground. On April 22, 1642, Dutch authorities and two Wecquaesgeek sachems, Ranaqua and Tackamuck, signed a peace treaty at Bronck's house. The treaty was meant to settle tensions that had built up since 1640, as the Company's director pressed Native communities around the harbor for payments and as settlers' livestock trampled Lenape cornfields. Bronck died in 1643, and his land was sold off. The river that bordered it kept his name, and later the borough took it from the river.

The peace of 1642 did not hold. The director was Willem Kieft, who had succeeded Wouter van Twiller in 1638, and his relations with the communities around Manhattan worsened through the following winter. In February 1643, refugees from the north arrived on the edges of the Dutch settlement. They were Wecquaesgeek and Tappan people who had fled south after attacks by Mahican and Mohawk warriors, and they made two camps: one at Pavonia, on

the west bank of the Hudson where Pauw's patroonship had been, and one at Corlaer's Hook, on the bend of Manhattan's East River shore in what is now the Lower East Side. They had come to the Dutch for protection.

Kieft had recently removed the main check on his authority. In 1641 he had allowed the settlers to choose a body of advisers, the Twelve Men, and its members had opposed his war policy. About two weeks before the attacks he dissolved it. One of the Twelve was David Pietersz. de Vries, a ship captain, and he argued directly against the plan.

On February 25, 1643, the director's council recorded a resolution, preserved in the register later sent to the States General, authorizing Marijn Adriaensz, a settler, to lead an attack on the people camped at Corlaer's Hook. The resolution cited settlers' fear after recent killings. That night Company soldiers crossed the Hudson to Pavonia, and armed settlers went to Corlaer's Hook. Both camps were attacked while the people in them slept. De Vries watched from the ramparts of Fort Amsterdam and later wrote in his journal that he "saw nothing but firing, and the shrieks of the natives murdered in their sleep."

Accounts of the dead differ widely; estimates for the two attacks together run from about 80 to more than 120, the greater share of them at Pavonia. Most of the dead at both sites were people who had fled one war and come to the Dutch expecting shelter.

The response united Munsee and other Algonquian communities across the region against the Dutch. Over the next two years, war parties burned or emptied farms in present-day Westchester and New Jersey, and settlers crowded back into the shelter of the fort. Dutch forces answered with raids of their own on Native towns. Farms on both sides were destroyed. Fields went unplanted, and cattle were killed or scattered. The war ended in the summer of 1645.

The war decided much about land around the harbor. The Lenape communities did not vanish in 1645, and for decades afterward they continued to sell, use, and return to ground in Westchester, on Long Island, and on Staten Island. But on Manhattan itself, the war broke their hold. The camps at Corlaer's Hook had been within walking distance of the fort, and after 1645 no comparable Native settlement stood that close again. The ground that settlers had abandoned in 1643 was regranted and resettled in the years that followed, and

the Company's director now held the power to give it out. Kieft was recalled. The man sent to replace him would govern the province until its end.

Half-Freedom

In February 1644, while the war was still being fought, eleven enslaved men belonging to the Company asked its council for their freedom. The council's record of their manumission noted that they had served the Company for eighteen or nineteen years. That puts their arrival at about 1625 or 1626, the years when the fort was going up, and makes them among the first Africans brought to Manhattan. They had worked for the Company for nearly two decades.

The council granted something less than freedom. The men were released from bondage on three conditions. They owed the Company an annual payment in produce. They could be called back to labor for it at any time. And their children, born and unborn, remained the Company's property. Later historians called the arrangement half-freedom. It turned these men from enslaved laborers into something closer to tenants of the Company, with their own households and their own land, whose sons and daughters would stay hostages for their continued service.

The land came with the status. Grants to free and half-free Africans had already begun: on July 13, 1643, Catalina Anthony, the widow of Jochim Anthony, received 8 acres. In December 1644 the Company granted 8 acres to Simon Congo on December 15 and another 8 acres to Manuel Groot, Big Manuel, on December 21. Further grants followed through the late 1640s and 1650s. The parcels lay north of the town, along the road that ran up the island past the Fresh Water Pond and on toward the district that would become Greenwich Village.

Their placement was strategic. The farms occupied the strip between the Dutch settlement at the island's tip and the ground farther north where Lenape communities still moved, and several historians have read them as a deliberate buffer. The Company settled men who owed it military service on the ground it most needed defended. If war came again from the north, the half-free farmers would meet it first.

The farms were also real property, worked by families who intended to keep them. By 1664, African landholders held about 130 acres north of the town. Roughly thirty grants were held by free Black men and women between 1643

and 1716. Historians have since called the district the Land of the Blacks. It was the first place on Manhattan where people of African descent held ground under their own names, and it produced a small class of Black farmers.

The protections were weak. Ownership by Black New Yorkers came under pressure soon after 1664 and was largely stripped away by the early eighteenth century, as people of African descent were barred from owning property. The farms that half-freedom created rested on whatever terms the government of the day was willing to honor.

Breuckelen, the Long Island Towns, and Vlissingen

Across the East River the land was flatter and the soil good, and Dutch farmers had begun moving onto it in the mid-1630s. On June 6, 1636, Wolfert Gerritsen van Couwenhoven took a deed from the Lenape for a tract on the south shore of western Long Island. That deed became the basis of New Amersfoort, later Flatlands. Other farmers bought or were granted land along the shore facing Manhattan, across the river from the town.

The East River was the obstacle and the connection. In 1642 a ferry began running across it, landing on the Long Island side at the property of Cornelis Dircksen Hooglandt, on the road that would later become Fulton Street. The ferry turned the scattered farms along the shore into a hinterland of the town, close enough to sell produce in New Amsterdam and to ride to the fort when danger threatened.

The farms suffered during Kieft's war, and when it ended the settlers organized. In 1646 a contract named Jan Tonissen as schout of Breuckelen, the town's chief law officer, and that contract is the earliest surviving record of the name. Breuckelen was named for a village in the province of Utrecht. It was a cluster of farms and a ferry landing with a local officer and, soon, magistrates of its own, and the name would pass down unchanged in sound through every later stage of the city.

Five other towns grew up beside it on the western end of Long Island, and together they became Kings County under English rule. Gravesend came first, in 1645, settled by English followers of Lady Deborah Moody, a widow who had left Massachusetts over her religious views and received a Dutch patent for the town. New Amersfoort was organized in 1647. Midwout, the middle wood, was settled in the early 1650s, after Tomys Swartwout, Jan Snedeker,

and Jan Stryker asked Peter Stuyvesant, the director-general, for leave to settle the vlacke bosch, the flat woods between Breuckelen and Amersfoort. In April 1655 Stuyvesant's council appointed Midwout's first court, and the town became Flatbush in English. New Utrecht followed in 1657, and Boswijck, later Bushwick, in 1661.

Farther east, beyond the Kings County line in what is now Queens, English settlers founded Vlissingen in 1645 under a Dutch patent. The English called it Flushing. Its patent promised the settlers liberty of conscience in the manner customary in Holland, a clause that would matter a dozen years later.

The pattern on Long Island differed from the patroon model in nearly every respect. These towns were settled by families who held their own farms, organized under town patents granted by the director, and governed through local magistrates. The Company had failed to fill the ground with feudal tenants; it filled it instead with small proprietors, many of them English. By the 1650s the Dutch province included whole towns whose residents spoke English, worshiped outside the Reformed church, and looked across Long Island Sound to New England as much as across the East River to New Amsterdam.

Staten Island remained the hardest ground to hold. After Pauw and Melyn, settlers returned only slowly, and the first lasting Dutch village there, Oude Dorp, today's Old Town, dates to around 1661.

Stuyvesant's Town

Peter Stuyvesant arrived as director-general in 1647, sent by the Company to restore order after Kieft's war. He had served the Company in the Caribbean and lost a leg there. He would govern New Netherland for seventeen years, longer than any of his predecessors, and he took a farm of his own on Manhattan northeast of the town. The Dutch word for a farm was bouwerij, and the road that ran to his was called the Bouwerij road. It is still called the Bowery.

The town he governed was a company town in the most literal sense. The director and his council made its laws, judged its disputes, and controlled its land. The settlers wanted a say. In the late 1640s a group of them, led by Adriaen van der Donck, drafted a remonstrance against the Company's rule and carried it to the States General in The Hague. They argued that the colony would not grow while the Company treated it as a trading post and that its residents deserved the municipal institutions common in Dutch towns.

The petition worked in part. In April 1652 the Company directors authorized Stuyvesant to create a municipal government for New Amsterdam: one schout, two burgomasters, and five schepens, the standard officers of a Dutch town. On Candlemas Day, February 2, 1653, Stuyvesant proclaimed it. He appointed the officers himself rather than allowing the residents to choose them. The first burgomasters were Arent van Hattem and Martin Cregier. The first schepens were Allard Anthony, Maximilian van Gheel, Willem Beekman, Paulus Leendertsen van der Grist, and Pieter van Couwenhoven. The town they governed had about 800 people.

The date of February 2, 1653, is the formal beginning of New York's municipal government, and the institution it created would survive conquest, revolution, and consolidation. In 1653 its powers were modest, and its officers were the director-general's choices. Still, the town now had a body of its own, composed of its own merchants, with courts that heard its civil cases and minutes that recorded its business. Those minutes survive in the Municipal Archives, and the first emergency the new court faced is set down in them.

The Wall

England and the Dutch Republic had gone to war in 1652, and by early 1653 word reached New Amsterdam that English forces were gathering in New England. The town lay open to the north. The fort at the island's tip faced the harbor, and nothing stood between the settlement and an army landing farther up the island.

On March 13, 1653, Stuyvesant's council met in joint session with the new burgomasters and schepens. They agreed to repair the fort and to build a defensive work across the northern edge of town. Four days later, on March 17, the court minutes recorded the details, and in the margin someone drew the plan in cross-section: a ditch, an earthen embankment behind it, and a palisade of upright logs on top. Thomas Baxter, an English resident, was charged with supplying the logs.

The work ran from river to river across the island along the line of present-day Wall Street. Near its eastern end it skirted the Heere Gracht, an inlet of the bay that ran inland where Broad Street runs today. Construction went on through the spring and summer of 1653. The English attack never came, and the war ended the next year.

The wall's cost was levied on residents' estates. Each property owner was assessed according to his means; the merchant Joannes Nevius, for example, paid 100 guilders. The first major public work of the new municipal government was thus paid for with a tax on the property it protected, and the line it drew fixed the northern limit of the town proper. Inside the wall lay the fort, the church, the warehouses, the merchants' houses, and the lots along the inlet and the shore. Outside lay the Company's farms, Stuyvesant's bouwerij, the half-free farmers' fields, and the ground beyond. The palisade decayed and was taken down at the end of the century, and the street that replaced it took its name, and later its place in the vocabulary of finance.

The wall also marked a shift in who governed the ground. Before 1653 the Company decided what was built and where. After 1653 the burgomasters and schepens shared that power, assessed the property owners who would pay for it, and recorded their decisions in a court of their own. The merchants who sat on that court were the same men who owned the town's best lots, and from the start the municipal government was an instrument through which they protected and improved their holdings.

Who May Settle

In early September 1654, twenty-three Jewish refugees landed at New Amsterdam. They had come from Recife, the capital of Dutch Brazil, which had fallen to the Portuguese in January. Portuguese rule meant the Inquisition, and the Jewish community of Recife had scattered. This group reached Manhattan as refugees.

Stuyvesant wanted them gone. He wrote to the Company directors in Amsterdam asking that "blasphemers of the name of Christ be not allowed further to infect and trouble this new colony." The directors overruled him and instructed Stuyvesant to let the refugees settle and trade in New Netherland, on condition that the poor among them be supported by their own community rather than by the Company or the church. Stuyvesant complied with the order but gave no more than it required. He refused them permission to build a synagogue.

The decision established a principle that would recur in New York's history: the right to settle and trade could be separated from full membership in the town. The refugees could live in New Amsterdam and buy and sell. They could

not worship in public. The line between private toleration and public practice was the one the Dutch Republic itself drew, and the Company's 1640 revision of the Freedoms and Exemptions had written it into the colony's founding terms: no religion other than the Reformed could be practiced publicly in New Netherland.

The test that followed came from the English towns on Long Island. In 1657 Quaker missionaries arrived in New Netherland and began preaching in the outlying settlements. Stuyvesant issued ordinances against them. Anyone who sheltered a Quaker faced a fine of £50, and any vessel that brought one into the province was to be seized.

On December 27, 1657, the town clerk of Flushing, Edward Hart, and about thirty other residents signed a protest. Among them was Tobias Feake, the town's schout. The Flushing Remonstrance, now held by the New York State Archives, invoked the town's patent and its promise of liberty of conscience, and it refused to enforce the director-general's orders. Its signers wrote that any Quakers who came to them in love would be given "free egress and regress unto our town."

The document claimed no right for Quakers to worship in New Amsterdam. Its argument was local and territorial: the patent had promised Flushing's settlers that they could order their own consciences on their own ground, and the town's officers would not police their neighbors for the director-general. Stuyvesant answered by replacing Flushing's town government and arresting signers, Hart and Feake among them. A few years later he banished John Bowne, a Flushing farmer who had opened his house to Quaker meetings. In 1663 the Company directors told Stuyvesant to stop the persecution. As long as dissenters kept the peace, they wrote, they should be allowed to live quietly in the colony.

The Recife refugees and the Flushing remonstrants posed the same question from different directions: who could claim a place in the colony, and on what terms. In both cases the answer came from Amsterdam, where the directors weighed the colony's need for settlers against the director-general's insistence on one church. In both cases the directors chose settlers. A province that could not fill its own ground could not afford to turn people away.

The Overgaen

In late August 1664, four English warships anchored off New Amsterdam. They carried soldiers under the command of Richard Nicolls, an officer sent on behalf of James, Duke of York, the brother of King Charles II. Charles had granted James a vast American territory that included all of New Netherland, without regard to the Dutch claim. England and the Dutch Republic were not yet formally at war.

Nicolls sent terms ashore and moved two of his ships within firing range of Fort Amsterdam. Stuyvesant wanted to resist. The town had little powder, the fort was poorly built and badly placed, and the residents had no wish to see their houses bombarded. Ninety-three leading residents, including the burgomasters and Stuyvesant's own son, signed a petition urging him to accept the English offer. The colony surrendered without a shot.

Six Dutch deputies negotiated the terms, led by Johannes de Decker, a lawyer and member of the director-general's council. Seven English commissioners, Nicolls among them, met them. In early September 1664, they signed the articles of capitulation at Stuyvesant's bouwerij, the farm on the road north of town. When the articles were printed in Amsterdam, the title called them the articles of the Overgaen, the transfer.

The word fit the document. Most of its articles concerned property and the ordinary business of the town. Inhabitants who wished to leave could do so with their families and goods within a year and six weeks. Those who stayed would keep their houses, lands, and goods. Dutch customs of inheritance would remain in force, so that estates would pass to heirs as they had under Dutch law. Existing contracts would be honored and debts collected. Article VIII guaranteed freedom of worship and church discipline. Under Article 16, the sitting magistrates would serve out their terms. The fort, the guns, and the Company's property passed to the Duke of York. The residents' property stayed with the residents.

Nicolls renamed the town and the province New York, after his patron. Almost everything else continued. The burgomasters and schepens kept their seats until their terms ran out. The Reformed church kept its pulpit. The merchants kept their lots inside the wall, the Long Island farmers kept their patents, and Stuyvesant, who had pledged to fight, kept his bouwerij. He went to the Netherlands to defend his conduct to the directors and the States General, then

returned to New York and lived out his life on the farm where the surrender had been signed. The Company that had founded the colony as a trading post lost it in a transfer of title that left nearly every private claim in place.

The guarantees reached the half-free farmers north of the town as well. Nicolls, the new governor, confirmed the 1644 grant that Manuel Groot had received twenty years earlier. Those 8 acres had been given to a man whose children the Company still owned, on ground the Company had wanted held against the Lenape, by a director whose war had emptied the island of the people who had used it before. Under the articles of transfer, the new English government recognized the grant as property.

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CHAPTER 3

Charter and Water Lots: English New York, 1664–1763

New Orange

In the 1680s the East River met Manhattan along the line of Pearl Street. Someone walking east from Broadway today crosses Pearl, then Water, Front, and South Streets before reaching the river. Every step past Pearl is on ground that did not exist when the English first took the town. Merchants made that ground lot by lot after buying the right to fill it from the city corporation, and the corporation's power to sell it came from two royal charters, one granted in 1686 and the other in 1730–31. Before either charter could be written, the question of which crown held the harbor had to be settled once more.

In August 1673 a Dutch squadron from the province of Zeeland, commanded by Cornelis Evertsen and Jacob Benckes, sailed into the harbor and opened fire on the fort at the tip of the island. England and the Dutch Republic had been at war since the previous year. The garrison was unprepared and surrendered soon after the shooting began. Nine years after Peter Stuyvesant signed the articles of surrender at his bouwerij, the town that the English had named New York was in Dutch hands again.

The council of war that took charge renamed the place New Orange, after Prince William of Orange, the stadholder who was leading the Republic's war against England and France. The town court went back to keeping its minutes in Dutch. Anthony Colve, a captain from the fleet, was installed as governor of a restored New Netherland. Through the late months of 1673 and into 1674 his men worked to strengthen the town's defenses against the English counterattack they expected, adding stone bastions named Hollandia and Zeelandia after two of the ships that had brought them.

The counterattack never came, because the colony's fate was decided in Europe. The Treaty of Westminster, signed on February 19, 1674, ended the war and returned New York to England. In exchange the Dutch kept Suriname, the plantation colony on the South American coast that they had taken from the English in 1667. The States General's choice made commercial sense. A sugar colony worked by enslaved Africans promised more to Dutch investors than a fur port surrounded by English colonies and worth what its merchants could ship out each season. Colve governed until November 10, 1674, when he handed the town to Edmund Andros, the new English governor sent by James, Duke of York, who held the province as a personal proprietary grant from his brother, King Charles II.

The fifteen months of New Orange can look like a footnote, but the episode exposed something about property on the island. In ten years Manhattan had changed sovereigns three times, and through all three changes the house lots, farms, and bouweries stayed with the families who held them. The articles of 1664 had confirmed Dutch titles. The reconquest of 1673 confirmed them again, and the English return in 1674 left them where they were. The landholders of New York learned that flags were negotiable and deeds were durable. The fights of the next century were seldom about who owned the ground already granted. They were about who controlled the institutions that granted new ground, collected rents and fees, sat on the bench, and wrote the rules for the people who did the town's labor.

The Waste, Vacant, and Unappropriated

Thomas Dongan, an Irish Catholic soldier appointed by the Duke of York, arrived as governor in 1683. The Duke became King James II two years later. The name of the Battery, the open ground at the island's southern tip, is usually

traced to gun emplacements built along that shore in Dongan's first years, though the origin story is less certain than its repetition suggests. Dongan's lasting work was a document. In 1686 he issued the city a charter that gave it a governing body and, more important for the long run, a landed endowment.

The Dongan Charter set up a Common Council made up of a mayor, a recorder, and aldermen representing six wards. It then granted that council "All the Waste, Vacant, unpatented, and Unappropriated lands" on the island, reaching out to the low-water mark. The words were the ordinary legal language of a royal grant, and they swept in more than any colonial official could have mapped. Most of Manhattan north of the town was already granted to farmers and patentees, so the land that was truly unpatented lay mostly along the edges. The richest part of the gift was the strip of shore between high and low tide, mud and rock that the river covered twice a day and uncovered twice a day, and that no private person owned.

The council soon found a way to turn that strip into money. It began selling what New Yorkers came to call water lots. A water lot was the right to build out into the tideway, to put up a wharf and to make dry land between the high-water and low-water lines. The buyer paid the corporation for the grant and then did the work. Each buyer had to fill the lot at his own expense and build the street and the wharf along its outer edge at the low-water line. The corporation collected the purchase price and later the quitrents. It added a new street to the town at no cost to the public treasury, and it gained a taxable lot where there had been mud. The buyer got a parcel with direct access to shipping, the most valuable kind of property in a port town.

The results can be traced in the street names of Lower Manhattan. When the Dongan Charter was adopted, the East River shoreline ran along Pearl Street, three blocks inland from today's South Street. Filling did not happen evenly, cove by cove. Because buyers were required to build a continuous street along the low-water line, the new land took the form of block-wide ribbons running parallel to the old shore. Each ribbon became a street of warehouses and counting houses facing a new edge of river. Water Street, as its name says, marked the new waterline. By around 1730 the filling done under the Dongan grant had pushed the Manhattan shore about 200 feet into the East River.

The system served the merchant families who dominated the Common Council and the import trade. It was a public power used for private building.

The corporation held the tideway as a kind of trust, and it discharged that trust by selling it off in pieces to the people best placed to profit from waterfront warehouses. No one in the 1680s or 1690s seems to have thought this remarkable. A colonial city had little tax base and the crown provided no money for docks. Selling land that did not yet exist was the cheapest way to get a working waterfront. That bargain, with the public granting the edge and private capital doing the filling, became the model for the New York shoreline for the next three centuries.

The second charter extended the bargain into deeper water. The Montgomerie Charter, named for Governor John Montgomerie, was granted in 1730 and confirmed in 1731. It let the corporation sell water lots beyond the low-water mark, as far as 400 feet out into the river. Along the East River it pushed the city's boundary 400 feet past the old low-water line, from Whitehall at the island's tip to Corlears Hook, the bend in the shore where Willem Kieft's soldiers had killed sleeping Lenape families in February 1643. The ground of that massacre now marked the far end of a municipal real estate grant. The terms were the same as before: the corporation sold the right, and the buyers filled their lots at their own expense.

The Montgomerie grant gave the corporation an asset it would draw on for generations, and it gave New York a legal problem that outlived the colony by two centuries. Who owned the land under the rivers around Manhattan, the city, the state, or the private holders of colonial grants? The 1777 state constitution confirmed the royal charters to the city, but the question kept coming back to court as the shore moved outward. In 1926, in Appleby v. City of New York, the Supreme Court of the United States held that the city had acquired title to the tideway around Manhattan under the Dongan and Montgomerie charters and that the state constitution of 1777 had confirmed those grants. A grant drafted for a town of a few thousand people, whose wharves ended at Water Street, was still deciding property rights in the age of steamship piers.

Leisler's Fort

The man who brought the factional politics of the merchant town into the open had come to New Amsterdam as a soldier. Jacob Leisler was born in Frankfurt around 1640 and arrived in 1660 in the pay of the West India Company. He married well, traded in furs and tobacco, became one of the richer men

in town, and rose to the rank of captain in the militia. He was German-born and Calvinist and sided with the Dutch-speaking majority. By the late 1680s he had a long list of enemies among the town's English and anglicized Dutch merchants.

The opening came from England. In late 1688 James II fled the throne, and in early 1689 William of Orange, the same prince for whom New Orange had been named, took the crown with his wife, Mary. The news crossed the Atlantic slowly and unevenly. In New York, the king's officials held their posts in the name of a deposed Catholic monarch. Lieutenant Governor Francis Nicholson led the province while the royal governor was away in Boston. On May 31, 1689, militiamen seized Fort James, the fort at the tip of Manhattan. Leisler soon took command of them, with the support of Dutch laborers and artisans in the town. Nicholson sailed for England. For roughly two years Leisler governed the southern part of the province, claiming to act for William and Mary.

His regime divided the town along lines of class and language that had been forming since 1664. Leisler's supporters were mostly Dutch-speaking craftsmen, carters, and small traders. His leading opponents were merchants who had done well under English rule and held the offices that came with it: Nicholas Bayard, Stephanus Van Cortlandt, and Frederick Philipse. Philipse was the richest of them, with a manor north of the city and a fleet of trading ships. Van Cortlandt had served as the first mayor born in the colony. Leisler jailed some of his enemies and drove others out of town. They wrote to London describing him as a usurper. The quarrel was religious and ethnic in its rhetoric, but it was also a contest over who would hold the fort, the customs house, the Common Council, and the courts. Those were the offices through which land was granted, trade was licensed, and debts were enforced.

London decided the matter by sending a governor. Henry Sloughter arrived in March 1691. Leisler at first refused to surrender Fort James, possibly suspecting that Sloughter's advance officers did not carry proper commissions. A standoff followed, with some fighting, and then Leisler surrendered. A court packed with his enemies tried him for treason and convicted him. On May 16, 1691, Jacob Leisler and his son-in-law Jacob Milborne were hanged, and Leisler's estate was forfeited to the crown.

The execution settled who would run the city for a generation. English merchants and their allies took back the aldermen's seats and passed measures that

reduced the political and commercial influence of Dutch residents. Leisler's son and Abraham Gouverneur, who had served in Leisler's government, went to London to lobby for the dead man's reputation, and in time they won support from Whig politicians there. For decades afterward New York politics split into Leislerian and anti-Leislerian camps, and the labels outlasted many of the men who had first carried them.

The forfeiture of Leisler's property shows the pattern of the age in a single act. Holding the fort meant holding the power to take an estate. The men who regained the Common Council in 1691 also regained the authority to sell water lots under the Dongan Charter. Over the following decades the ribbons of fill along the East River were sold by a council that answered to the merchant class Leisler had fought.

The Market at Wall and Water

In late 1711 the Common Council passed a law setting the place where enslaved workers could be hired out. It was on Wall Street between Pearl and Water Streets, at the edge of the East River. Owners who wanted to rent out enslaved men and women as day laborers, and some Native Americans whom the law also treated as property, had to bring them there. The market would operate on that spot until 1762.

The location ties together the two subjects of this chapter. In 1686 the shoreline had run along Pearl Street. The block of Wall Street running east from Pearl to Water had been built up under water-lot grants in the decades after the Dongan Charter. The ground the merchants had made out of the river became the ground where people were bought, sold, and leased. Merchants walking down Wall Street from their offices to the wharves passed a market whose goods were human beings, set up by the same council that sold the waterfront.

Hiring out was the core of urban slavery in New York. A shipwright, a cooper, a baker, or a merchant with a cargo to unload might not need a laborer every day, and might not want to feed and house one all year. An owner with more workers than chores could rent them by the day or the week and collect their wages. The market at Wall Street made the arrangement public, regulated, and visible to the city's officials, who preferred to know where enslaved people gathered. Enslaved men loaded and unloaded ships, carted goods, built the wharves, and worked in the ropewalks and shipyards along the new shore. En-

slaved women cooked, washed, and nursed in the households of merchants and artisans. Much of the physical work of filling water lots, and of the commerce that justified filling them, was done by people who could own nothing.

Slavery in the English city ran deeper than in many towns of the southern colonies. Around the time the market opened, New York held somewhere between 6,000 and 8,000 people, about 1,000 of them Black, most of those enslaved. By the early eighteenth century nearly half of the city's households held at least one enslaved person. Among colonial cities only Charleston had a higher share. Enslaved Africans reached their peak as a share of the population around the middle of the century, at roughly one in five residents. A marker placed by the city in a small park near the old market site now gives these figures to passers-by. In the eighteenth century they were simply the structure of daily life: the person carrying water, splitting wood, or rowing a merchant out to his ship was, more often than not, enslaved.

* * *

A few months after the market opened, a group of enslaved New Yorkers made the most direct challenge to that structure in the city's colonial history. On the night of April 6, 1712, more than twenty enslaved people, many of them born in Africa, set fire to an outbuilding belonging to Peter Van Tilburgh, whose house stood on Maiden Lane near Broadway, then the northern edge of the town. When white residents came running to fight the fire, the rebels attacked them with guns, hatchets, and swords.

About nine white people were killed and six or seven wounded before the attackers scattered into the woods and swamps north of town. The governor, Robert Hunter, called out the militia, which spent the following days hunting the rebels. Hunter reported that six of them killed themselves rather than be captured. The militia arrested about seventy Black people. Some two dozen were brought to trial, and around twenty were executed.

Hunter described the punishments in a letter to London. "Some were burnt, others hanged, one broke on the wheel, and one hung alive in chains in the town," he wrote. He called it "the most exemplary punishment inflicted that could be possibly thought of." The word "exemplary" carried its old meaning: the punishment was meant as an example, staged before the whole town and especially before its enslaved population. Bodies burned at the stake

and a living man left hanging in chains were instruments of policy as much as acts of justice.

The colony followed with legislation. New laws barred enslaved people from gathering in groups and from owning firearms, and they made the freeing of an enslaved person expensive: an owner who wished to manumit had to post a bond of £200, a large sum in a colonial town, to guarantee that the freed person would not become a charge on the public. The bond closed off much of the path out of slavery that had existed under the Dutch. In the 1640s the West India Company had given half-freedom and farmland to men who had worked for it for nearly two decades. After 1712 an enslaved New Yorker's freedom depended on an owner's willingness to risk a fortune.

The laws of 1712 also answered the question that runs through this book. They set terms for where Black New Yorkers could be, how many could be together, and on whose authority they could be in the street at all. The market at Wall Street fixed the one place where enslaved people were expected to gather in public, and that was to be rented. Everywhere else, their assembly was now a crime.

Outside the Town

Black New Yorkers could not be buried where they liked either. A rule adopted in 1697 barred Africans from burial in the city's main churchyard. From about the 1690s until around 1795, free and enslaved Africans buried their dead outside the town's boundary, on low ground east of the ridge that carried Broadway north. The burial ground lay near the Collect Pond, the freshwater pond that the Lenape had known as part of the country around Werpoes. It covered about six and a half acres.

The site was outside the town because no one with property wanted it inside. It was low, wet, and at the time of little value. Black New Yorkers made it their own anyway. Over the century perhaps 15,000 people were buried there, men and women, adults and children, African-born and colonial-born, enslaved and free. The burials were the one setting in which large numbers of Black New Yorkers gathered openly, a fact that troubled officials who were enacting laws against their assembly. The city eventually set limits on the size and timing of Black funerals.

As the town spread north after the Revolution, the ground filled in and was built over, and by 1812 many of the graves lay under as much as twenty-five feet of fill, with streets and buildings on top. The burial ground disappeared from the map and from public memory until 1991, when workers excavating for a federal office building found it again and recovered the remains of 419 people. It was designated a national monument in 2006.

* * *

Across the East River, in the towns that had begun as Breuckelen and its neighbors, enslaved labor took a more rural form. The Dutch villages on the western end of Long Island became Kings County when the English organized the colony into counties in 1683. Through the eighteenth century Breuckelen, Flatbush, Flatlands, New Utrecht, and Bushwick remained farming communities. Their families had arrived under the West India Company, and many of them kept the Dutch language in church and at home long after it had faded in Manhattan. The English town of Gravesend, founded by Lady Deborah Moody and her followers, sat among them.

These towns grew grain and vegetables, raised livestock, and sent their surplus across the river by the ferry that had run from the Breuckelen landing since the 1640s. They were farms in a colony where hired farm labor was scarce, and the Kings County families relied on enslaved workers to clear fields, plant and harvest, and tend animals. Enslaved people in these towns lived in their owners' households or in outbuildings on the farm. The laws passed after 1712 against gathering, carrying weapons, and manumission applied to them as fully as to the enslaved laborers at the Wall Street market. Slavery weighed more heavily in Kings County than in the more commercial city: by the end of the Revolution about a third of the county's people were enslaved. The orderly Dutch villages that later Brooklyn writers would remember as a pastoral past were built on that labor.

The Governor's Court

The courtroom in City Hall, on Wall Street a few blocks west of the slave market, was where the factional fights of the merchant city were settled. In the 1730s one of those fights produced the case New Yorkers still cite when they talk about the freedom of the press.

John Peter Zenger was a German-born printer with a small shop and no political standing of his own. In 1733 he began publishing the New-York Weekly Journal, a newspaper financed and largely written by opponents of the governor, William Cosby. Cosby had arrived in 1732 and quickly made enemies among the province's leading men, partly through his dealings with the colony's courts. The Journal attacked him in satire, in mock advertisements, and in essays on liberty and tyranny that left no doubt about their target. The governor's side had its own paper, but the Journal was livelier and more widely read.

Cosby tried to silence it through the institutions he expected to control, and one by one they refused. Two grand juries in 1734 declined to indict Zenger. The Assembly refused Cosby's request to have the common hangman burn issues of the paper. Cosby's Attorney General, Richard Bradley, then went around the grand jury entirely, proceeding against Zenger by information, a charge brought on the prosecutor's own authority. Zenger was arrested in November 1734. The chief justice, James De Lancey, a young man and a firm ally of the governor, set Zenger's bail at £400, far more than a printer could raise, and Zenger stayed in jail for about nine months awaiting trial. His wife kept the paper going.

His original lawyers, James Alexander and William Smith, were both leaders of the faction behind the Journal. In April 1735 they challenged the legitimacy of De Lancey's commission as chief justice, and the court responded by disbarring them. When the trial opened in City Hall on August 4, 1735, Zenger's defense was led by Andrew Hamilton of Philadelphia, a former attorney general of Pennsylvania and one of the best-known lawyers in the colonies, whom Zenger's backers had quietly engaged.

Under English law at the time, truth was no defense in a seditious libel case, and the only question for a jury was whether the defendant had published the words. Hamilton conceded at the outset that Zenger had printed the articles. He then argued that the jury should decide whether the words were false and malicious, and that a true statement about a public official could not be a libel. De Lancey ruled against him on the law. Hamilton took the argument directly to the jurors, all of them New Yorkers with their own views of the governor. They deliberated for about ten minutes and returned a verdict of not guilty.

The Zenger verdict did not change the law of libel, and later royal officials continued to prosecute printers. What it showed was the limit of a governor's power over the town's institutions when the town's propertied men turned against him. Grand juries, the Assembly, and finally a trial jury all declined to act as instruments of the governor's will. The case belonged to the same tradition of factional politics as Leisler's rebellion, fought this time with newspapers and pleadings instead of muskets. It was a quarrel among the men who owned New York over who would govern it, and it ended with a printer's freedom because a jury of property owners decided it so.

* * *

Six years later the same courtroom staged a quarrel of a very different kind, and the town's juries showed no such independence.

The winter of 1740–41 was severe, and the city was anxious: Britain was at war with Spain, and rumors circulated of Spanish agents and Catholic plots. In March 1741 a fire destroyed Fort George, the old fortress at the tip of the island that had been Fort Amsterdam and then Fort James. Over the following weeks a run of smaller fires broke out across the town, in warehouses, stables, and houses. Some were probably accidents. White New Yorkers, remembering 1712, began to suspect the enslaved.

The inquiry that followed was run by Daniel Horsmanden, a justice of the provincial Supreme Court and the city's recorder. He served both as the investigation's chief examiner and as one of the judges who tried the accused. Beside him on the bench sat James De Lancey, the chief justice who had presided over Zenger's trial, and Frederick Philipse, who bore the name of the merchant who had opposed Leisler half a century earlier. No grand jury balked this time.

The prosecution's case rested above all on Mary Burton, an indentured servant in the tavern of John Hughson, a waterfront establishment where enslaved men, sailors, and poor whites drank together. Burton, offered a reward, told the court of a conspiracy hatched at Hughson's: the enslaved would burn the town, kill the white men, and make Hughson king. As the arrests multiplied, accused people named others in the hope of saving themselves, and the circle of suspects widened. More than 150 Black people were jailed, along with a number of whites.

The punishments went far beyond those of 1712. Thirteen Black men were burned at the stake. Seventeen Black men were hanged, along with two white men and two white women, thirty-four executions in all. Hughson and his wife were among those hanged, as was John Ury, a schoolteacher and dancing master. The bodies of the two men named as ringleaders, John Hughson and an enslaved man called Caesar, were hung in chains and left to rot in public. Some seventy or more Black people were shipped out of the colony and sold into slavery in the Caribbean, where conditions on the sugar plantations were much harsher than in New York. Seven white men were banished. Mary Burton received a reward of £100.

In 1744 Horsmanden published his own account of the proceedings, under a title that stated his verdict as fact: A Journal of the Proceedings in the Detection of the Conspiracy Formed by Some White People, in Conjunction with Negro and Other Slaves, for Burning the City of New-York in America. It remains the main surviving source for the trials, and it was written by the judge who conducted them. Historians, Jill Lepore among them, still argue over whether there was any plot at all, a smaller conspiracy among a few men at Hughson's tavern, or nothing but fires, rumor, and the confessions of frightened prisoners.

Whatever happened in the tavern, the trials served the same purpose as the laws of 1712, enforced with far greater violence. They targeted the places where enslaved and poor white New Yorkers met on their own terms: a waterfront tavern, a back room, the street at night. The same men who presided over the Common Council's sales of the East River shore and the courts that protected merchants' property conducted the prosecutions. The verdicts were a response to a threat to that property, in the form of burning warehouses and in the form of human beings who had been bought and might refuse to stay bought.

The market at the foot of Wall Street kept operating for another two decades after the trials. It closed in 1762, after half a century at the corner of Wall and Water Streets, a site that had been part of the East River when Thomas Dongan signed the charter of 1686. By then the water lots of the Montgomerie grant had carried the shore farther out still, and enslaved laborers were filling in the new ground.

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CHAPTER 4

Occupied City, 1763–1783

In 1783, with the British army preparing to leave New York, Brigadier General Samuel Birch, the British officer in charge of the city's Black refugees, signed passes for the men and women who meant to leave with it. Each pass certified the same thing. The bearer had come within British lines under the proclamations of the British commanders Sir William Howe and Sir Henry Clinton, and was free to sail for Nova Scotia "or wherever else [he] may think proper." The document said nothing about character, loyalty, or service. It recorded a crossing. Somewhere in the preceding years the bearer had left a farm in New Jersey, a household in Virginia, or a plantation in the Carolinas, and had reached territory held by the king's troops. That act of standing on a particular piece of ground had turned property into a person who could choose a destination.

New York's Revolution was a contest of that kind, over who controlled a piece of ground and what that control meant for the people on it. The British took the city in September 1776 and held it until November 1783, longer than any other American city. For seven years the islands at the mouth of the Hudson were a garrison, a refugee camp, a prison, and for some thousands of enslaved people the only place on the continent where freedom could be claimed. The occupation remade the town's population, burned a large part of its streets, filled the mud of Brooklyn's Wallabout Bay with the dead, and ended with a transfer of land and people as large as any in the city's history.

Twenty years before Birch signed his passes, the quarrel had centered on a patch of open field north of the town and a wooden mast planted in it.

The Pole on the Commons

Parliament passed the Stamp Act on March 22, 1765, to take effect on November 1. It taxed the paper of colonial life: legal documents, newspapers, licenses, almanacs, playing cards. New York was a merchant city that ran on contracts, bills of lading, and court filings, and the tax reached into every countinghouse along the East River wharves that the corporation had been granting and filling since the Dongan Charter.

In October 1765 delegates from other colonies came to New York to answer the act together. The Stamp Act Congress sat in City Hall, the building at Wall and Broad Streets that would later be remodeled as Federal Hall, from October 7 to October 25. Twenty-seven delegates from nine of the thirteen colonies attended, and John Cruger Jr., the mayor of New York, acted as their host. The Congress drafted a joint objection to taxation by a Parliament in which the colonies had no members. It was the first time representatives of several colonies had met to protest a British law, and they met in New York because the city was central, accessible by water, and already the busiest point of contact between the colonies and the empire.

The streets moved faster than the delegates. When boats carrying the stamped paper came into the harbor in October, a crowd of about two thousand gathered at the Battery to prevent them from landing. They failed. The stamps were carried into Fort George, the old fort at the tip of the island, and placed in the keeping of Cadwallader Colden, the lieutenant governor. On November 1, the day the act took effect, a crowd marched down Broadway and massed outside the fort. The confrontation turned on access to a single fortified piece of ground. Colden held the fort, and with it the paper. The crowd held the streets around it, and with them the practical question of whether anyone would dare to use what was inside.

No one in New York would sell or buy the stamps, merchants agreed to stop importing British goods, and in April 1766 Parliament repealed the act. On May 21, 1766, the Sons of Liberty, the organized core of the city's resistance, raised a liberty pole on the Commons, the open field that is now City Hall Park. A sign on it read "George 3rd, Pitt – and Liberty." The inscription paired

loyalty to the king with gratitude to William Pitt, the British statesman who had argued for repeal. In 1766 the men who planted the pole still described themselves as loyal subjects celebrating a victory within the empire.

The Commons was public land at the northern edge of the built town, used for grazing, militia drills, executions, and gatherings, and British troops were quartered nearby. The pole put a political claim on ground that both sides considered theirs to use. Soldiers cut it down in August 1766. A second pole went up and came down soon after. A third stood until 1767, when soldiers felled it after colonists marked the anniversary of the repeal. The fourth was bound with iron bands to make it harder to cut. For nearly a decade the struggle over the poles was the city's running argument with British authority, carried on with saws, axes, and fists over a few square yards of the Commons.

The argument turned violent in January 1770. The Sons of Liberty had circulated a broadside by Alexander McDougall, a merchant and one of their leaders, titled "To the Betrayed Inhabitants of the City and Colony of New York," attacking the provincial assembly for voting money to supply the troops. On January 17 soldiers sawed down the pole on the Commons. Two days later, on January 19, dozens of British regulars and colonists fought in the streets at a rise in the lower city called Golden Hill. The brawl came about six weeks before the shootings in Boston that became known as the Boston Massacre. New Yorkers later claimed it as the first bloodshed of the Revolution, a claim that rested on the city's sense that it had been in the fight from the start.

That sense concealed deep divisions. New York's great merchant families had grown rich inside the imperial system, trading through London, supplying the army, and holding offices and land grants from the Crown. Many of them were Tories, and those who opposed Parliament wanted resistance on their own terms: petitions, boycotts managed by committees of substantial men, and a settlement that left property and trade intact. The crowds that gathered at the Battery and on the Commons were made up largely of artisans, sailors, laborers, and small shopkeepers, men who had less to lose from a break and more to gain from a voice in the city's government. Through the early 1770s the two tendencies competed for control of the resistance, and the city's committees were shaped and reshaped as each side tried to keep the other from running them.

The news of the fighting at Lexington and Concord, which reached New York in late April 1775, settled the question for the moment. Large numbers of Loyalists left the city. Organized resistance now worked through the Committee of Sixty and then through the New York Provincial Congress, and by the end of 1775 rebels controlled the city. Across the East River and the Narrows the balance was different. In the farm towns of Queens and on Staten Island, sympathy for the Crown ran strong, and when the British came those districts would fall behind British lines and stay there for the rest of the war.

Brooklyn, August 1776

By the summer of 1776 the city had become the point on which the war turned. Whoever held New York held the best harbor on the Atlantic coast and the mouth of the Hudson, the river route that ran north toward Canada and could split New England from the other colonies. Over the summer a British fleet and army gathered on Staten Island and in the lower harbor, a very large expeditionary force. On July 9, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was read to George Washington's troops in New York, and Patriots pulled down the gilded statue of George III at Bowling Green, at the foot of Broadway, a few hundred yards from the fort where Colden had kept the stamps.

The fighting began on the farmland of Kings County, in the old Dutch towns that had been Breuckelen, Flatbush, and Gowanus. Washington had fortified Brooklyn Heights, the bluff across the East River from Manhattan, because guns there could command the lower city. Late in August Howe landed his army on Long Island. On August 27, 1776, about 20,000 British and Hessian troops under Howe attacked a defending force of roughly 10,000. The Americans had posted men along the wooded ridge that ran across Brooklyn, but a British column swung around the eastern end of the line through a lightly guarded pass and came in behind them. The American front collapsed.

The fiercest fighting of the day came near a stone farmhouse in Gowanus, now known as the Old Stone House, at what is today Park Slope. General William Alexander, an American officer who claimed a Scottish title and went by Lord Stirling, led about 400 Maryland soldiers in repeated attacks against roughly 2,000 British troops under Charles Cornwallis. The counterattacks failed, but they held the British long enough for other American units to escape across Gowanus Creek and the marshes behind it to the fortified lines on

Brooklyn Heights. The cost to the Marylanders was severe. Three days later, on August 30, Major Mordecai Gist, one of their officers, wrote that the battalion's "killed, wounded, and missing amount to two hundred and fifty-nine." Most of the men who had gone into the fight at Gowanus did not come back from it.

Tallies of the whole battle vary. The British lost somewhere around sixty killed and three hundred wounded. American losses were far heavier: roughly three hundred killed, about eight hundred wounded, and something over a thousand captured or missing. Many of the captured would end up in the prisons and prison ships of the occupied city.

By nightfall Washington and about 9,000 men were penned on Brooklyn Heights with the East River at their backs. A direct assault might have ended the war that week. Howe chose instead to dig trenches and prepare a siege, a decision historians have argued over ever since. On August 29 Washington's council of war met at the Livingston mansion on the Heights and voted to retreat. During the night of August 29–30 the army crossed the East River to Manhattan in small boats, along the same water the Breuckelen ferry had worked since the 1640s. Every regiment got across, with its supplies. When British troops moved forward in the morning, the American works were empty.

The crossing saved the army. It gave up Brooklyn. From the end of August 1776 until the evacuation of 1783, Kings County lay under British rule, its farms within reach of foraging parties and its shoreline at the disposal of the Royal Navy.

Kips Bay to Harlem Heights

The fall of Brooklyn made lower Manhattan impossible to defend. Guns on Brooklyn Heights could now fire into the town, and British warships could move up either river at will. Washington's advisers had proposed burning New York before abandoning it, so that the British would gain little by taking it. The idea was dropped, and the army began moving north while a rear guard stayed in the city.

On the morning of September 15, 1776, four British warships anchored close to the East River shore at Kip's Bay, a cove on the Manhattan side near what is now East 34th Street. At dawn they opened fire on the shallow trenches along the bank, and boatloads of British and Hessian troops crossed from Long Island and landed behind the barrage. The defenders, mostly inexperienced

militia, broke and ran. Washington, arriving from the north, could not rally them. The American army fell back up the island to Harlem Heights and King's Bridge, the crossing over the Harlem River into what is now the Bronx. The troops still in the lower town escaped up the west side of the island, and by nightfall the British held the city.

The next day, September 16, the two armies fought on the high ground of northern Manhattan in the Battle of Harlem Heights. The fight was inconclusive, a few hours of skirmishing across fields and buckwheat patches that ended with the British pulling back. After Brooklyn and Kip's Bay, the sight of British regulars giving ground did a great deal for American morale. It changed nothing about who held the city. Washington withdrew from Manhattan into Westchester in October, and in November the British took Fort Washington, the last American post on the island. From then until the end of the war, British lines enclosed the city proper, about one square mile at the tip of Manhattan, together with the rest of the island, Staten Island, Long Island, the modern Bronx, and part of southern Westchester. Nearly all the territory that would one day make up the five boroughs belonged to a single military government.

The Fire

Five days after the British marched in, the city burned. The fire broke out in the night of September 20–21, 1776, in the lower town on the west side. It is usually said to have started at the Fighting Cocks Tavern, near the waterfront below the fort, though even that point is disputed. Driven by wind, it spread north and west through rows of wooden houses packed tightly on narrow lots, the old Dutch and English streets where buildings shared walls and roofs nearly touched. It burned up the west side toward the Commons before it was stopped.

How much it destroyed is uncertain. Counts range from about four hundred buildings to a thousand. The figure most often given is 493 houses, nearly five hundred buildings, perhaps more, amounting to somewhere between a quarter and a third of the city. Trinity Church, built in 1698 on Broadway at the head of Wall Street, facing the Hudson, burned to the ground, along with the Lutheran church. The Trinity congregation moved its services to St. Paul's Chapel, its outpost farther up Broadway, which the fire had spared. The parish did not consecrate a new church until 1790.

Who set it, if anyone did, is unknown. British officers and Loyalists blamed rebel incendiaries, and the fact that Washington's advisers had discussed burning the city gave the charge plausibility. Men were seized in the streets that night on suspicion of arson. Washington himself wrote afterward that Providence, or some good honest fellow, had done more for the Americans than they had been disposed to do for themselves, a remark that proves only that he welcomed the result. No one was ever shown to have started the fire, and an accidental blaze in a crowded town, with many residents gone and no organized fire service, needs no conspiracy to explain it.

The practical effect was clear. The British had taken New York partly as a base for winter quarters, and within a week of arriving they had lost much of the housing they meant to use. The town they had captured was smaller than the one they had besieged, and it was about to become far more crowded.

Torytown

Under the occupation New York had no civil government. The commanders-in-chief, first Howe, then Clinton, then Sir Guy Carleton, governed the city and Long Island through military rule, with a commandant, a superintendent of police, and courts run by the army. Prominent Loyalists worked closely with them: James Rivington, the printer whose Royal Gazette became the occupation's newspaper; William Smith, a lawyer and former member of the governor's council; and Oliver DeLancey, from one of the great merchant families, who raised Loyalist regiments. The colonial assembly did not sit. The charters under which the corporation had granted water lots and governed its wards for nearly a century were in suspense, and the city's affairs were decided by officers.

The movement of people reversed. Patriots who had stayed in the city through the summer fled when the British came, and Loyalists from across the colonies came in. New York filled with refugees from New Jersey, Connecticut, the Hudson Valley, and eventually from the South. To the rebels outside its lines it became Torytown.

Housing went by military priority. Houses left empty by departed Patriots were taken over and, in many cases, assigned to British officers. Churches outside the Church of England, the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed among them, were stripped and used as barracks, hospitals, riding schools, and prisons.

Sugar houses, the large brick warehouses where merchants had refined West Indian sugar, also held prisoners. The town's institutions were converted to the uses of an army, and the people who had built and filled them had no say.

The poorest of the newcomers lived in ruins. Among the burned blocks near Broad and Water Streets grew a district of shanties and tents roofed with old sailcloth, known as Canvas Town. Water Street ran along ground the corporation had made by filling the shoreline under its charters, the land it had granted to merchants on the promise that they would wharf it and build. By the late 1770s that made land held a squatter settlement of refugees, sailors, camp followers, and runaways, living in the shells of burned houses and under canvas. It was the closest thing the occupied city had to public housing, and it was built by its own residents out of salvage.

The garrison made New York a city of soldiers. Thousands of troops were quartered in and around it, along with the seamen of the fleet, and through the war the city's population swelled with refugees and shrank with each departure of troops for campaigns elsewhere. Supplies came by sea or from the farms of Long Island, Staten Island, and Westchester, and the army's demands for firewood stripped trees from much of Manhattan and Long Island. The economy of the port, which had lived on trade with the whole Atlantic world, now lived on contracts with the army and on the privateers who sailed from the harbor to prey on American shipping.

Wallabout Bay

The captured privateers came back to Brooklyn. Prisoners from the battles of 1776 had filled the sugar houses, churches, and jails of the city, and as the war went on the British increasingly held captured seamen on decommissioned ships anchored in the East River. Most were moored in Wallabout Bay, a shallow cove on the Brooklyn shore, where the Brooklyn Navy Yard would later be built. By one count there were as many as sixteen of them at various times over the course of the war. The largest and most notorious was HMS Jersey, an old warship that had served as a hospital ship and was put to use as a prison ship from the winter of 1779.

The Jersey was crowded far beyond what it had been built to carry, the men below decks breathing foul air in summer and freezing in winter. Smallpox, dysentery, and fevers spread through the holds. Rations were short and often

spoiled. A newspaper extract dated August 10, 1781, printed a letter from aboard the ship, "vulgarly called HELL," describing disease, starvation, and neglect. The prisoners were mostly sailors from American privateers and naval vessels, men whom the British treated as rebels rather than as prisoners of war, and whom they had no particular interest in keeping alive.

Each morning the dead were collected. Burial parties rowed the bodies to the Wallabout shore and buried them in shallow common graves near the high-water mark. No list of the dead was kept. In the years after the war, tides and storms washed the sand off the graves, and residents of the Brooklyn shore found bones along the beach for decades.

Without records, the toll can only be estimated. The figures most often given are eleven or twelve thousand, and a plaque placed at the monument in 1960 gives 11,500. More than ten thousand Americans, perhaps eleven thousand, died as prisoners in Wallabout Bay. That is more than died in all the battles of the Revolution combined. The deaths occurred within sight of the farms of Kings County and within a mile of the ferry landing to Manhattan. When the British left in 1783, they abandoned the Jersey on the Wallabout mud flats, and it rotted where it lay. The remains gathered from the shore were eventually placed in a crypt beneath the Prison Ship Martyrs Monument in Fort Greene Park, dedicated on November 14, 1908.

Behind the Lines

For the enslaved, British lines meant something else. On June 30, 1779, Sir Henry Clinton, then commander-in-chief, issued a proclamation from his headquarters at Philipsburg Manor in Westchester. It promised "to every NEGROE who shall desert the Rebel Standard" security within British lines and the freedom to follow "any Occupation which he shall think proper." The offer was a military measure meant to strip labor from rebel farms and households and to frighten slaveholders. It applied only to people enslaved by Patriots, and it said nothing about the thousands held by Loyalists, including many in New York itself, where slavery continued under the occupation. For those who could reach the lines, though, it turned British-held territory into a place where a claim to freedom could be made and defended.

People came. They escaped from New Jersey farms across the Hudson and the Kill van Kull, from the Hudson Valley, from Connecticut, and by sea

from the Chesapeake and the Carolinas, where earlier British offers had already drawn thousands. Some of them were from Kings County and Queens, from the Dutch farm towns where slavery had been woven into agriculture since the seventeenth century, though most farms there belonged to families who had stayed under British rule and whose workers the proclamation did not touch. Black refugees in occupied New York worked as laborers, teamsters, cooks, and servants for the army, as pilots and sailors, and as soldiers in Loyalist units. Some lived in Canvas Town and in the crowded lanes near the waterfront. They built households, married, worshiped, and in a few cases ran businesses.

By 1782 the war on the continent was over in all but name. Savannah was evacuated in July 1782 and Charleston at the end of the year, and New York became the last major British post in the United States. The provisional peace terms required the British to leave without "carrying away any Negroes or other property of the American inhabitants." Slaveholders and their agents came into the city to reclaim people they considered theirs.

Sir Guy Carleton, the last British commander-in-chief, refused to hand them over. He argued that people who had come in under the proclamations had been freed by them, and that returning them would be a dishonorable breach of the Crown's word. The peace terms, in his reading, applied only to people who had been property at the time the provisional treaty was signed, and those who had reached British lines earlier were property no longer. Birch's passes were the instrument of that policy. Washington, who met Carleton in May 1783 to press the point, appointed commissioners to supervise the embarkations. On June 14, 1783, two of them, Egbert Benson and William Stephens Smith, wrote to him that "all applications for the delivery of property will be fruitless." By their count, at least 130 Black people whom they considered American property had already been allowed to leave.

As a concession, Carleton agreed to keep a list. His inspectors boarded each departing ship and recorded every Black passenger: name, age, a brief physical description, the name of any former owner, and the circumstances under which the person had come within British lines. The ledger, now called the Book of Negroes and held at the National Archives in Britain, covers departures from late April through November 30, 1783. It lists 1,336 men, 914 women, and 750 children, about 3,000 people in all, most of them bound for Nova Scotia.

Among them was Harry Washington, who had escaped from George Washington's Mount Vernon around 1776. The man who led the Continental Army had been born a Virginian slaveholder, and one of the people he held as property sailed out of New York as a free man, under British protection, in the same months that Washington was pressing for the return of escaped slaves. Thousands of others did not make it onto the list: people retaken before they reached the lines, people who died of disease in the camps, people who stayed and were reclaimed. For the three thousand who boarded the ships, occupation had been the condition of their freedom, and the evacuation was the moment they left the country that would have returned them to slavery.

They were part of a much larger exodus. Nearly 30,000 Loyalists left New York before the final evacuation, sailing for Nova Scotia, Britain, Quebec, and the West Indies. Merchants, officeholders, refugee farmers, soldiers and their families, and the Black Loyalists emptied the city of a large share of its wartime population over a single year. Few departures in the city's history before or since compare in proportion.

Evacuation Day

On November 25, 1783, the last British troops left New York. That morning Washington led the Continental Army from its camp north of the city, across the Harlem River at King's Bridge, and down the length of Manhattan to the Battery, following the road the British had marched up in 1776. At Fort George the departing garrison had left the British flag nailed to the flagpole and greased the pole so that it could not be easily climbed. An American soldier worked his way up with cleats, tore down the British colors, and raised the American flag in their place. For more than a century afterward, New Yorkers celebrated November 25 as Evacuation Day, an anniversary that marked the end of the occupation and the return of the ground to American control.

The city the army reentered was battered. The burned blocks of the west side were still largely in ruins, Canvas Town still stood among the debris of the lower east side, the churches had been stripped, and the forests of upper Manhattan and Long Island had been cut for firewood. Thousands of returning Patriots came back to find their houses damaged, occupied by others, or gone. The Jersey lay on the mud flats at Wallabout with the graves of its dead in the sand beside it.

The question of who owned what had to be settled again. During the war the New York legislature had passed laws to confiscate the property of Loyalists who had sided with the Crown, and after the evacuation forfeited estates were sold off, putting land that had belonged to prominent Tory families into new hands.

The transfer worked in only one direction. Loyalist estates were treated as forfeit because their owners had been on the wrong side of the line. Black New Yorkers who had stayed behind, including many held by Loyalist owners whose property was confiscated, did not receive any of the land, and slavery remained legal in New York. For the enslaved who had not reached the British ships, the end of the occupation brought a change of rulers and no change of status. The three thousand who left had found freedom in the brief period when British-held New York was the only place on the continent where crossing a line could make a person free, and when the lines were withdrawn, that freedom went with them to Nova Scotia.

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The Grid and the Harbor, 1783–1899

How a republican port laid down a street grid, filled its shoreline, absorbed mass immigration, and merged its towns into Greater New York.

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CHAPTER 5

The Grid and the Canal, 1783–1835

In 1808 the three men appointed to lay out the streets of Manhattan replaced their chief surveyor, Charles Frederick Loss, with John Randel Jr., who was about twenty years old. Randel took on the commission's secretaryship along with the surveying. His assignment was to fix on the ground a plan that did not yet exist, across an island that north of the settled city was still mostly farmland, country estates, and rough country cut by old lanes. Its owners did not want him there. Landowners in the Out Wards fought the survey in court and on their own property, and the legislature had to pass a further law in 1809 before the work could continue.

Randel finished the job. He drew three copies of the commissioners' map, each roughly 100 inches long and 30 wide, and once the plan was adopted in 1811 he spent about ten more years marking its streets and avenues on the actual terrain, into the late 1810s and perhaps as late as 1821. The map turned Manhattan into a stock of rectangles that could be bought and sold. Fourteen years after it was signed, the Erie Canal connected the harbor at the foot of that island to the Great Lakes. Both were acts of the State of New York, imposed from Albany over local objections. Between them they set the terms on which the city's land would be valued and its port would grow for the rest of the century. The city that produced them had spent the years after the Revolution deciding what kind of place it would be. It had briefly been the national capital,

it was becoming the country's money market, and it was ending slavery as slowly as the law allowed.

The Capital on Wall Street

The city the British left in November 1783 had been scarred by the fire of 1776 and seven years of occupation. Six years later it was the seat of the new federal government. New York had housed the Confederation Congress since 1785, and when the Constitution took effect the city offered its old City Hall, at the head of Broad Street on Wall Street, for the first Congress. Pierre Charles L'Enfant, a French-born engineer who had served in the Continental Army, remodeled the building into Federal Hall, with a second-floor balcony facing the street.

On April 30, 1789, George Washington took the presidential oath on that balcony. The day began with a gun salute from the Battery at dawn. Washington wore a plain suit of brown broadcloth, chosen because it had been made in America and he meant his clothes to encourage domestic manufacture. Robert R. Livingston, chancellor of the State of New York and the state's highest judicial officer, administered the oath. Samuel Otis, secretary of the Senate, held the Bible. The vice president, John Adams, stood beside Washington. No Bible had been provided in advance, and one was borrowed for the occasion from a Masonic lodge nearby. Thousands of people filled Wall Street and Broad Street below.

The choice of location carried its own meaning. Federal Hall stood a few yards from the line of the Dutch palisade that had given Wall Street its name, in the district where the city's merchants kept their counting-rooms and houses. The new government took over the corporation's own civic building, which signaled that the city's leading men expected the capital to stay and expected its presence to pay. The merchants who had dominated colonial politics wanted the federal government near their ships and their credit.

It did not stay. In 1790 Congress agreed to move to Philadelphia while a permanent capital was built on the Potomac, part of a bargain that also secured Alexander Hamilton's plan for the federal government to assume the states' war debts. New York lost the President, the Congress, and the departments. Federal Hall was torn down in 1812. The building that now stands on the site at 26

Wall Street, the Federal Hall National Memorial, was completed in 1842 as the United States Custom House.

What New York kept from those eighteen months was more durable than the capital itself. Hamilton, the secretary of the Treasury, had moved to the city and opened a law office on Wall Street as soon as the British left in 1783 and had built his financial program around instruments that New York merchants understood and wanted to trade. The government left. The paper it created remained on Wall Street.

Paper under the Buttonwood

Hamilton's funding plan converted the tangle of Revolutionary debts into new federal securities that paid interest and could be bought and sold. In 1791 Congress chartered the Bank of the United States, whose shares were also traded. The city already had its own institution, the Bank of New York, which Hamilton had helped to found in the mid-1780s. In 1792 these were nearly the whole market: federal debt certificates, the shares of a few insurance companies, and stock in the Bank of New York and the Bank of the United States. A handful of brokers and auctioneers handled them, some in coffeehouses, some outdoors along Wall Street.

William Duer showed what this market could do to a man and to a city. Duer had been Hamilton's assistant secretary of the Treasury, and after leaving office he became the most ambitious speculator in New York. He borrowed heavily, from wealthy investors and from small lenders alike, to buy government securities and bank shares on the bet that their prices would rise. In March 1792 his schemes collapsed. He could not pay, his creditors had him jailed for debt, and the city had its first financial panic. Prices fell, credit dried up, and people who had lent Duer money found it gone. Hamilton used about $150,000 from the Treasury's sinking fund to buy securities and steady the market. Duer remained in prison and died there in 1799.

The brokers drew their own conclusion. In March, while the panic was still under way, a group of them met privately at Corre's Hotel to work out rules for their trade. On May 17, 1792, twenty-four of them signed a short agreement. They had often done business under a buttonwood tree near 68 Wall Street, and the document took the tree's name. It made two promises. The signers would charge their clients a commission of at least one quarter of one percent, pledg-

ing not to buy or sell public stock for anyone "at a less rate than one-quarter per cent." And they would give one another preference in their dealings. The New York Stock Exchange counts the Buttonwood Agreement as its founding.

The agreement was a price-fixing compact among insiders, and its signers wrote it that way. It did not regulate fraud or speculation, and it said nothing about the kind of borrowing that had ruined Duer. It created a club on a few hundred feet of one street: members traded with members at a guaranteed commission, and outsiders paid more or stayed out. In 1793 the trading moved indoors, to the new Tontine Coffee House at the corner of Wall and Water Streets. That corner had been under the East River a century earlier. Water Street lay on the first band of landfill the corporation had sold off as water lots, and New York's securities market began on made land, a short walk from the slips where merchants unloaded the cargoes their stocks and insurance policies financed.

Freedom by Statute

The men who organized New York's banks and markets also decided, over four decades, when and how the state's enslaved people would be freed. In 1785 a group of prominent New Yorkers formed the New York Manumission Society, with John Jay as its first president. In 1787 the society opened the African Free School for the children of Black New Yorkers, enslaved and free alike. It began under white teachers, and in later years it hired Black teachers as well. The school was a real institution that educated generations of Black children, and it was run by a society that pressed for an end to slavery gradually and on terms acceptable to property owners.

Those terms arrived in 1799. The Gradual Emancipation Act, Chapter 62 of the Laws of 1799, was signed by John Jay, by then governor. It freed no one immediately. Children born to enslaved mothers after July 4, 1799, would be legally free, but they were bound to serve their mother's owner until the age of twenty-eight for males and twenty-five for females. Every person born before that date remained enslaved with no end date at all. Only New Jersey, among the Northern states, began ending slavery later.

The statute was a settlement between property and conscience, and property set most of the terms. Owners lost no one they already held. For children born under the law, the owner kept the years of labor that mattered most,

through the late teens and twenties, and released the person at an age when much of a working life had already been spent in service. The indenture was compensation paid in labor by the people being freed. On the farms of Kings County, where enslaved Africans had worked the land since the Dutch years, and in the households and shops of Manhattan, the law changed the future status of children while leaving their parents exactly where they were.

The second step came in 1817. Governor Daniel D. Tompkins asked the legislature to set a date "not more remote than the 4th day of July, 1827," by which slavery in the state would end. The legislature agreed. The law passed that year freed, as of July 4, 1827, everyone who had been born before July 4, 1799, the people the first act had left enslaved for life. Children born after 1799 still owed the remainder of their indentures.

Black New Yorkers chose their own day to celebrate. Independence Day was a holiday of crowds and drink, and a Black procession on July 4 invited attack. Many held their commemorations on July 5 instead, and Fifth of July celebrations continued for years. The choice of date was a decision about public space: who could safely occupy the street, and on which day.

The end of legal slavery did not happen on a single date even after 1827. The 1830 census still counted seventy-five enslaved people in the state. The 1840 census listed none in New York City. Emancipation in New York came without any grant of land, money, or tools to the people freed, and it left those who had owned them with every lot, farm, and building they had held before. Freed New Yorkers entered a city whose ground had already been divided and priced.

The Commissioners' Plan

By 1807 the settled city reached roughly to the line of present-day Houston Street. North of it lay estates, farms, and villages connected by roads that followed the terrain and the old property lines. The city corporation had been laying out streets piecemeal as owners subdivided, and the Common Council was divided over how to plan the land above the built-up wards. The aldermen asked the state to settle the matter. On April 3, 1807, the legislature passed an act that took street planning away from the council and gave it to three commissioners, whom the council itself had recommended as "fit and proper persons to be appointed."

They were Gouverneur Morris, the former senator and diplomat who had drafted much of the final text of the federal Constitution; Simeon De Witt, the surveyor general of the State of New York; and John Rutherfurd. The commission had wide power. It could lay out streets, avenues, and public squares on land it did not own, across the property of people who had not asked for them, and its plan would be final.

The commissioners left almost no record of how they reached their decisions. Morris's diary, the fullest personal account by any of them, mentions the commission mainly in passing. His entry for March 28, 1811, as the work was being completed, reads in full: "Raw damp and NEast Wind. Go to town on Business of the Comm[ission] to lay out Manhattan Island—Dine with Mr. Rutherford and execute the Maps—Much indisposed." The plan that would govern how Manhattan was built for the next two centuries appears in the private papers of its leading author between the weather and his health.

The finished manuscript is titled "A Map of the City of New York by the Commissioners appointed by an act of the Legislature passed April 3rd 1807," and it is dated March 22, 1811. It is now held by the New York Public Library. Randel's three copies were filed by early April: one in Albany, one at Morris's estate at Morrisania across the Harlem River, and one at the New York City Clerk's office, which received its copy on April 1. The three commissioners signed the plan. On May 4, 1811, so did the mayor, DeWitt Clinton, who held that office for most of the years between 1803 and 1815.

The map laid twelve numbered avenues running north and south, with four lettered avenues added where the island bulged east of First Avenue, and 155 numbered cross streets running east and west over the island from about Houston Street to 155th Street. The streets were straight and met at right angles. The plan took almost no account of Manhattan's hills, streams, and ridges, which would have to be cut down or filled in to meet its grades. It ran over farms, estates, and old lanes, and over the villages of Manhattanville and Harlem. Where an owner's house stood in the bed of a future street, the house would eventually have to go.

The commissioners explained themselves briefly in their accompanying report. They said they had chosen the plan that "appeared to be the best; or, in other and more popular terms, attended with the least inconvenience," and they justified it on grounds of economy and utility. They meant this literally. A

rectangular block divides into narrow, deep, uniform lots. Uniform lots can be surveyed, described in a deed, mortgaged, and sold without dispute over curved boundaries or odd corners. Rectangular houses on rectangular lots are cheap to build. The commissioners were not designing a capital or a cathedral town. They were designing a land market.

That is the plan's significance, and it was a choice. The grid treated every piece of Manhattan north of Houston Street as interchangeable with every other, distinguished only by its distance from the built-up city and its position on the numbered streets. It removed topography and history from the calculation of value and left location. It also fixed in advance where the public's land would lie: in the beds of the streets and avenues, and in the very few open spaces the map reserved. Everything else was private and for sale. The plan anticipated growth that would take decades to arrive, and in the meantime it told every owner, buyer, and lender exactly what each parcel would become.

Landowners fought it because the survey made those consequences concrete. Randel's crews drove markers into fields and gardens and through orchards, and owners whose property the streets crossed took him to court. The legislature's 1809 law kept the survey going, and the 1811 plan made the result binding. From then on the island's future was legible on paper. Speculators could buy a block of farmland in the 1810s knowing it would one day front on a numbered street, and the value of that knowledge drove much of the city's investment for the rest of the century. The plan stopped at 155th Street, and the land north of it, along with the Harlem River shore, would be laid out later.

South Street and the Packets

While the commissioners were imposing straight lines on the interior, the merchants were extending the island at its edges. Manhattan's East River shore had once run near today's Pearl Street. In the colonial period the corporation had sold water lots, grants of land underwater, and buyers had filled them to make Water Street. In the later eighteenth century more filling produced Front Street, which for a time marked the island's eastern edge. By about 1810 South Street had been created beyond it. At each stage, slips were dug to let ships come in, and then many of the slips were themselves filled, so that wharves and piers could reach deeper water farther out. The waterfront of the early republic was

a staircase of made land, each step owned by whoever had bought the water lot and paid to fill it.

The new shore served a port that was reaching farther than it ever had under British rule. On February 22, 1784, three months after Evacuation Day, the ship Empress of China sailed from New York for Canton, the first voyage in the American trade with China. Independence had freed New York's merchants from the British Navigation Acts, and they sent ships wherever cargo and capital would take them.

The decisive innovation of these years came out of South Street. On January 5, 1818, the 424-ton packet ship James Monroe left New York for Liverpool on the day her owners had advertised. She belonged to the Black Ball Line, and her departure began regularly scheduled transatlantic sailings. Until then a merchant ship generally sailed when her hold was full and the wind was right, and a shipper could wait weeks to learn when goods or letters would leave. The Black Ball packets left on fixed dates whether full or not. Merchants on both sides of the Atlantic could now plan shipments, payments, and correspondence around a calendar.

Competitors quickly followed from the same piers. The Red Star Line began sailing to Liverpool, and in 1822 the firm of Fish, Grinnell & Co. started the Swallowtail Line. By 1825 packets were advertised to leave New York on the 8th of each month and Liverpool on the 24th. The schedule gave New York an advantage that compounded. Cotton from the South, manufactured goods from Britain, and immigrants, mail, and news all came to the port where ships left on time, and the more traffic came, the more ships sailed. The scheduled packet made South Street the point where the Atlantic economy touched the American continent. The question by the mid-1820s was how much of the continent New York could reach.

Clinton's Ditch

DeWitt Clinton had signed the grid as mayor. As governor he answered the second question. He had promoted a canal across the state from the Hudson River to Lake Erie for years, and in 1817 the state began building it with its own money, after efforts to get federal funding failed. Doubters called it Clinton's Ditch. The route ran 363 miles from Albany, through the Mohawk Valley gap

in the Appalachian barrier, to Buffalo. Mountains blocked the other Atlantic ports from the interior. New York had a water-level route.

On October 26, 1825, Clinton left Buffalo aboard the canal boat Seneca Chief to open the finished canal. Cannon had been placed along the route, within earshot of one another, and as the procession set out they fired in relay, carrying the signal east along the canal and down the Hudson to New York City and back. The boats then made the journey themselves, down the canal and the river to the harbor. On November 4, 1825, off New York, Clinton poured a keg of Lake Erie water into the Atlantic in what was called the wedding of the waters. On the return trip, Atlantic water was carried back and emptied into Lake Erie.

The cost of moving goods collapsed. Shipping freight from western New York to the coast had cost about $100 a ton. On the canal it cost about $6. Grain, timber, and potash from the lake country and the territories beyond could now reach New York and the Atlantic at a price that competed with anything else in the country, and manufactured goods and settlers could travel west the same way. Upstate towns along the route, Rochester, Syracuse, and Utica among them, grew on the canal trade.

The largest beneficiary was the port at the end of the line. The canal made New York the outlet for the commerce of the Great Lakes, and the packet lines already sailing from South Street gave that commerce a direct, scheduled route to Liverpool. Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston, which had competed with New York for the Atlantic trade, lacked any comparable route west. The combination of a continental hinterland and a scheduled ocean link is the main reason New York became, within a generation, the country's commercial and financial center by a wide margin.

The canal and the grid worked together. The canal increased the volume of trade passing through the harbor, which increased the number of merchants, clerks, laborers, sailors, and craftsmen who needed somewhere to live and work. Their demand moved up the island, onto the lots the grid had already drawn. Every expansion of the port raised the value of land on the numbered streets, and the plan of 1811 meant that anyone holding that land knew in advance what it would become when the city reached it.

The Ferry and the Heights

Across the East River, a smaller version of the same transaction was under way. In 1796 the Town of Brooklyn, in Kings County, had about 1,600 residents, most of them on farms and in a cluster of buildings near the ferry landing. The ferry was old, but it was rowed or sailed, and its schedule depended on weather and tide. The bluff above the landing, Brooklyn Heights, looked directly across the river at the merchants' city.

In May 1814 Robert Fulton, whose steamboat had begun service on the Hudson in 1807, put a steam ferry, the Nassau, into service across the East River between the foot of Fulton Street in Manhattan and the landing at the foot of the Brooklyn street that had been renamed Fulton Street in his honor. A crossing took between five and twenty minutes, depending on conditions, and the boat ran on a schedule regardless of the wind. One of the venture's backers was Hezekiah Beers Pierrepont, a merchant who owned land on the Heights. He wanted the ferry because a dependable crossing would allow him to subdivide his land into house lots and sell them to people who worked in Manhattan.

Pierrepont's interest is the clearest early example of a pattern this book follows into the twentieth century. Transit created land. The acreage on the Heights did not change when the Nassau began running. Its value changed, because a merchant could now live on a quiet bluff in Brooklyn and reach his counting-room on the Manhattan waterfront in less time than it took to walk from the Battery to the edge of the settled city. Pierrepont and other landowners laid out streets and sold lots for houses, and the Heights became a residential district for men whose business lay across the river.

The landowners wanted local government to match. In 1816 Pierrepont and others obtained a charter making Brooklyn a village, with the power to lay out and regulate streets and to raise money for improvements. The village grew around the ferry and the Heights and along the waterfront. Downriver, on the shore of Wallabout Bay where the British prison ships had been moored, the federal government operated the Brooklyn Navy Yard, which brought its own workforce and trades. In 1834 the Town of Brooklyn was incorporated as the City of Brooklyn, with a population somewhere between 12,000 and 15,000. It had grown eight- or ninefold in less than forty years.

The new city had its own mayor, its own council, and its own interests, and it would remain a separate municipality for the rest of the century. Its growth depended on access to Manhattan, and its landowners pushed for more crossings. In 1836 the South Ferry began running from Atlantic Street in Brooklyn to Whitehall Street at Manhattan's southern tip, opening another stretch of Brooklyn land to the same arithmetic. The City of Brooklyn was the first large place in the region to grow on the promise of a short trip to work, and the ferry company, the landowner, and the municipal charter had arrived in that order.

The Fire of 1835

The canal trade enriched the district between Wall Street and the East River more than any other part of the city. Dry-goods merchants, commission houses, and importers packed the blocks around Hanover Square, Pearl Street, and the streets running down to Front and South, much of it on filled ground, in warehouses stocked with goods brought in by the packets and sent out by canal. On the night of December 16, 1835, a fire broke out in one of them.

It started at about nine o'clock in the warehouse of Comstock & Andrews, a dry-goods firm at 25 Merchant Street, now Beaver Street, near Hanover Square. A watchman, William Hays, later recalled that within about fifteen minutes "fully fifty buildings were blazing." The weather made the fire almost impossible to fight. It was so cold that the rivers and the hydrants froze. Firemen cut holes in the ice of the East River to reach water, and the water froze in their hoses. Wind drove the flames through the packed warehouses, whose stocks of cloth and other goods burned readily.

Philip Hone, a merchant who had served a one-year term as mayor in the 1820s and kept a detailed diary, watched the fire spread. He wrote that "a few minutes sufficed to level the lofty edifices on every side." The Merchants' Exchange on Wall Street, which housed the stock market that had grown out of the Buttonwood Agreement, was destroyed.

The mayor, Cornelius Lawrence, in office since 1834, and the fire department's chief engineer, James Gulick, decided to create a firebreak by demolition. They sent men across the river to the Brooklyn Navy Yard for gunpowder. In the early hours of December 17 the crews blew up buildings in the fire's path, clearing ground the flames could not cross, and the fire was brought under control.

It destroyed about 700 buildings over roughly seventeen blocks, the heart of the commercial district. Only two people were killed. Damage was put at around $20 million, a staggering sum for the time. The claims bankrupted several insurance companies. Many merchants whose goods were insured found that the insurers had nothing left to pay them.

The rebuilding followed the logic of property rather than any new plan. The street pattern of lower Manhattan, the narrow, irregular streets inherited from the Dutch and colonial town and extended over the water lots, stayed as it was. The grid had never applied below Houston Street, and the fire did not prompt anyone to impose it there. Owners rebuilt on their own lots, on the old street lines, and the merchants who could raise new credit put up larger stores and warehouses in place of the ones that had burned. The stock exchange found temporary quarters and then a new building. Within a few years the district was again the commercial center of the country, rebuilt on ground that had been underwater a century and a half earlier, by owners whose title rested on water-lot grants from the colonial corporation.

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CHAPTER 6

Five Points and Seneca Village, 1835–1860

Paradise Square

In December 1852 the Methodist Ladies' Home Missionary Society demolished the Old Brewery on Cross Street. The society had bought the building, so it needed no ordinance, no court order, and no vote of the aldermen. A group of churchwomen owned the most notorious dwelling in the Sixth Ward, and they used their ownership to end it. On the cleared lot they put up a mission house.

The Old Brewery faced Paradise Square, a small triangle of ground where Orange Street, Cross Street, Anthony Street, and Little Water Street came together a few blocks northeast of City Hall. Orange Street is now Baxter Street, Cross is Mosco, Anthony is Worth, and Little Water Street no longer exists. The junction of so many corners gave the neighborhood its name, the Five Points. The ground under it was made land. It lay over the Collect, the freshwater pond that had served the Lenape settlement of Werpoes and then the Dutch town, and which the city drained and filled early in the nineteenth century, close to the old burial ground of the city's enslaved Africans. Houses went up on the fill in the 1810s and 1820s. The made ground settled and stayed damp, and the households that could afford drier lots moved on. What remained was cheap

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land a short walk from the docks, warehouses, and workshops of the lower wards. For people arriving with nothing, cheap land near work was the first necessity.

Coulthard's Brewery stood across Cross Street from the square. After the Panic of 1837 ruined merchants and closed workshops across the city, the building stopped producing beer and was converted to housing. Under the name the Old Brewery it became the best-known multiple dwelling in the district, its interior divided into living quarters for families who could pay for nothing better. By the 1840s most people in the Five Points were Irish, and they lived alongside Black New Yorkers whose families had been in the ward since before slavery ended in the state. Saloons, groceries, dance halls, and secondhand dealers filled the ground floors. Owners and leaseholders built on every part of their lots they could, including the back yards. No law yet limited how many people a lot could hold, how much of it could be covered, or whether a room needed a window.

Most New Yorkers who lived elsewhere knew the Five Points through what visitors wrote about it. Charles Dickens, the English novelist, came to New York early in 1842 and toured the district in the company of police officers. In *American Notes for General Circulation*, published that October, he described its houses and summed them up in one sentence: "All that is loathsome, drooping, and decayed is here." The same tour took him into Almack's, a dance hall in the district, where he watched the Black dancer William Henry Lane, known as Juba. Dickens wrote as a man descending into a lower world for a night. Lane was working there, earning a living from a style of dance that paying crowds came to see.

The two accounts suggest the gap between the Five Points as described and the Five Points as lived. Dickens's version was the one that traveled. Missionaries, journalists, and reformers repeated it through the 1840s and 1850s, and it turned a neighborhood into an argument for intervention. The Methodist women acted on that argument with the instrument available to them, a deed. Their demolition removed one building and the people in it. It did nothing about the price of land near the docks, the absence of rules for what could be built on a lot, or the steady arrival of tenants who had nowhere else to go, and the blocks around Paradise Square stayed full. The rules came later. They came in part because of what visitors had written about the Sixth Ward.

Croton Water

At five o'clock on the morning of June 22, 1842, the gates were opened at the Croton Dam in northern Westchester County, and water from the Croton River entered the new aqueduct. A small boat named the *Croton Maid* went in behind it. About twenty-two hours later the boat reached the Harlem River. The water reached the city's mains the following month.

For most of its history the city had drunk from wells and cisterns, and in its early decades from the Collect itself. In 1799 the state chartered the Manhattan Company to supply water. Its charter allowed it to employ surplus capital in other business, and the company directed its energy to the bank it opened under that clause, while delivering water through wooden pipes to a limited part of town. By the 1830s the private arrangement had plainly failed. The cholera epidemic of 1832 killed thousands of New Yorkers, most of them in the poorest and most crowded wards. The fire of December 1835 burned through the commercial district while firemen struggled to find water they could use. The city decided to build its own supply, paid for with its own borrowing.

Construction ran from 1837 to 1842. The aqueduct was a masonry conduit that carried water by gravity about 41 miles from the Croton Dam to Manhattan, dropping slightly over its length so that no pumps were needed. The hardest crossing was the Harlem River. The High Bridge, a stone arched bridge meant to carry the aqueduct over the water at full height, was not finished until 1848; until then the water crossed the river in temporary low pipes. On Manhattan the aqueduct fed two reservoirs. The receiving reservoir, between 79th and 86th Streets, was a walled tank 1,826 feet long and 836 feet wide that held up to 180 million gallons. It stood on the ground now covered by the Great Lawn and Turtle Pond in Central Park. The city's waterworks had claimed a large rectangle in the middle of the island about a decade before the city proposed a park around it. From there water ran south to the distributing reservoir at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, a raised basin enclosed by heavy walls in the Egyptian style, where the New York Public Library's central building stands today. Mains under the streets carried the water from the distributing reservoir into the city.

The official celebration came on October 14, 1842. A parade some 7 miles long wound through the streets and ended at City Hall Park, where the New York Sacred Music Society sang an ode written for the day by George P. Morris,

the poet and newspaper editor, and a fountain threw water about 50 feet into the air. Two days earlier Philip Hone, the merchant and former mayor, had written in his diary: "Nothing is talked of or thought of in New York but Croton Water."

The system cost the city about $13 million. It was the largest public work New York had undertaken, and it set a pattern that the city would follow for the rest of the century and beyond: borrow against the future, build at a scale no private company would attempt, and treat the result as common property. Croton water made possible a city several times larger than the one that built it, and by the early 1880s that larger city had outgrown it. The public good had limits. The mains ran beneath the streets, and what happened between the main and a household tap was left to each owner, so a crowded rear building in the Sixth Ward and a new row house on Washington Square drew on the same reservoir under very different terms. Still, in 1842 New York accepted that the city itself would own and deliver something every resident needed. It was a different kind of claim on land than the ones that came before: a strip of right-of-way through Westchester, a bridge over the Harlem, and two walled basins on Manhattan, all held for everyone.

The Landing and the Ward

The potato blight reached Ireland in 1845, and over the next several years famine and eviction drove more than a million people from the country. A large share of those who crossed the Atlantic came through New York. German emigrants followed in growing numbers in the late 1840s and 1850s, many after the failed revolutions of 1848, along with others leaving farms and workshops in the German states for reasons that had nothing to do with politics. The arrivals of those years were the largest the port had ever handled. They changed who lived in the lower wards of Manhattan and in Brooklyn faster than anything since the Revolution.

They landed at whatever pier their ship used. On the docks waited runners, men paid by boardinghouse keepers, ticket agents, and forwarders to take charge of newcomers and their baggage. A runner might seize a trunk and hold it until its owner agreed to lodge at a particular house, or sell a railroad ticket at several times its price, or change money at a rate that left a family nearly broke. The state's answer was the Board of Emigration Commissioners, created in

1847. Its ten members were six appointees of the governor, the mayors of New York and Brooklyn, and the presidents of the German Society and the Irish Emigrant Society. The commissioners collected a fee on each arriving passenger and used the money for relief. In 1848 they opened a hospital and refuge on Ward's Island in the East River for the sick and destitute.

What they lacked was a single landing place under their control. They found one at the Battery. Castle Garden had been built as a fort on a small island off the southern tip of Manhattan before the War of 1812, and had been named Castle Clinton for DeWitt Clinton, the city's mayor and later governor of the state. It later became a place of public entertainment, a theater and concert hall where Jenny Lind, the Swedish soprano, made her American debut in 1850 under the management of P. T. Barnum. By 1855 landfill along the Battery had joined the old fort to Manhattan. The commissioners proposed to take it over as an immigrant depot. Residents and property owners of the First Ward protested against concentrating immigrants at their end of the island, and the commissioners went ahead. The Castle Garden Emigrant Landing Depot opened in early August 1855. Arrivals were brought there by barge, registered, and directed onward inside an enclosure the runners could not enter. It handled the port's immigrants until 1890.

The Irish who stayed in the city settled thickly in the lower wards, and the men among them could become voters once they met the federal residence requirement of five years. Tammany Hall, the Democratic organization that took its name from the Society of St. Tammany founded in 1789, drew its strength from those wards. Its system ran through saloonkeepers, volunteer fire companies, and ward leaders who helped men with naturalization papers, found them work on city contracts, and expected their votes in return. A ward was a piece of ground with a population that could be counted, organized, and delivered. Tammany understood that earlier and better than its rivals did.

The most effective politician of the decade in this system was Fernando Wood, a merchant who served as mayor from 1855 to 1857. Wood drew heavily on the immigrant vote, and among his supporters in the Sixth Ward was an Irish gang known as the Dead Rabbits. His opponents included the nativists of the Know-Nothing movement, which surged in the mid-1850s on hostility to immigrants and Catholics, and their street allies the Bowery Boys, whose base was the Bowery on the eastern edge of the Five Points. They also included the

new Republican Party, which by 1857 held the state legislature in Albany and regarded Wood's city government as a Democratic fortress to be taken apart.

One group of New Yorkers stood outside this bargaining almost entirely. The state constitution of 1821 had required Black men, and only Black men, to own $250 in property before they could vote, while it reduced and soon removed the property test for white men. Few Black New Yorkers met the requirement. For those who wished to vote, the only way in was to acquire ground.

Seneca Village

In September 1825, the year the Erie Canal opened, Andrew Williams, a twenty-five-year-old Black shoeshiner, paid $125 for three lots of land well north of the built-up city. The sellers were John and Elizabeth Whitehead, who had divided their farmland in what would become the West 80s and 90s into lots and put them up for sale. The second buyer was Epiphany Davis, a store clerk, who took twelve lots. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church also bought several. By 1832 roughly two dozen more lots had gone to Black buyers. Slavery in New York did not end until July 4, 1827, so the first of these purchases were made by free Black New Yorkers in a state that still held others in bondage.

The settlement that grew on the Whitehead land became known as Seneca Village. It stood roughly between West 82nd and West 89th Streets, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, the second of which is now Central Park West. In 1825 the site was miles above the city's northern edge, on rocky, uneven ground the grid had mapped but not yet reached. The distance was the point. Land so far from the docks and markets was cheap enough for a shoeshiner to buy, and far enough from the lower wards to escape their crowding and violence.

The residents built houses, gardens, and churches. Josiah Landin, a neighbor of Williams, ran a business planting ornamental shrubs and reported real estate worth $5,000 in the 1850 federal census. By the 1855 state census the village had about 225 residents living in some fifty homes, with three churches and a school. About two-thirds of the residents were Black. About a third were Irish immigrants, and there were some German families as well. About half of the Black residents owned their homes. Seneca Village was one of the few places in the city where Black New Yorkers held land in a body, and through that land

a number of its men held the vote. Its mix of residents also set it apart from the Five Points, where Irish and Black neighbors lived crowded together as tenants. In Seneca Village many of the Black residents were the owners, and some of the Irish newcomers were their neighbors on ground the Black residents had bought first.

That ground lay in the path of an idea. Through the 1840s and early 1850s a group of wealthy and literary New Yorkers argued that the city needed a large public park, one big enough to bear comparison with the parks of London and Paris and to give the city's crowded population somewhere to go. In 1852 the Board of Aldermen formed a Special Committee on Parks, which proposed what it called "The Central Park" in the rectangle bounded by Fifth Avenue, Eighth Avenue, 59th Street, and 106th Street. The site was two miles long and half a mile wide, about 778 acres of schist outcrops, bogs, farms, and scattered settlements, with the Croton receiving reservoir set in its middle. It was cheap ground by Manhattan standards, which was part of its appeal, and it was not empty. Nearly 1,600 people lived on it. The residents of Seneca Village were among them.

On July 21, 1853, the state legislature authorized the mayor to issue stock, called the Central Park Fund, to compensate the owners of the land inside the rectangle. There were 561 of them, holding more than seven thousand lots. The city took the land by eminent domain, the power to compel a sale for public use at a price set by commissioners. Owners were paid. Tenants and squatters, who had no title to be paid for, received nothing beyond the obligation to leave. The process was slow, and it lasted four years.

Owners could, and did, dispute the valuations. Andrew Williams, who had paid $125 for his three lots in 1825, argued that his property was worth at least $4,000. The figure measured three decades of building, planting, and the city's own growth toward his door. For a speculator who had held vacant lots on the site, the condemnation was a payout. For the families of Seneca Village it was the end of a community, and for its Black men something more. The land had been the price of their ballots. Selling under compulsion, they lost the ground that the constitution required, unless they could buy again somewhere else in a city where that was not easy. The last residents of the park site were gone by the fall of 1857.

The pairing with the Five Points is exact. Reformers described the Five Points as a place to be cleared, and the Methodist women bought one building there and tore it down. Seneca Village, built by people who had done everything the city's property laws asked of them, was cleared by the city itself, in the name of a public that its residents had paid to join. The city counted the Black landowners of Seneca Village closely enough to pay them for their lots. It did not count them as part of the public for whom the park was being made.

Williamsburgh and Bushwick

Across the East River, the City of Brooklyn was assembling ground on a different principle: by absorbing its neighbors. The largest of them was Williamsburgh. Its history began in 1802, when the speculator Richard M. Woodhull bought 13 acres near what is now Metropolitan Avenue and had Colonel Jonathan Williams, an army engineer, survey them into lots. The settlement took the surveyor's name. Woodhull's venture faltered, but the site on the river opposite Manhattan's growing east side kept drawing people. Williamsburgh was incorporated as a village in 1827 and later became a city in its own right. Inland lay the old Town of Bushwick, one of the Dutch towns of Kings County, whose farms were giving way to streets, and whose territory included Greenpoint at the northern tip of the county.

In 1855 the City of Brooklyn absorbed both the City of Williamsburgh, which dropped the "h" from its name at that point, and the Town of Bushwick. The two became Brooklyn's Eastern District. The merger was the same move Manhattan's leaders would make on a far larger scale four decades later: a city bargaining that its neighbors would gain more as part of it than as rivals, and that the combined tax base and borrowing power could build what none of them could build alone.

The Eastern District grew quickly. Its population doubled and then tripled in the twenty-year spans that followed the merger. German immigrants settled there in such numbers that the district became a Little Germany, and their breweries became its signature industry; by 1880 Bushwick and Williamsburg had eleven of them between them. The East River shore of the district filled with ferry landings, shipyards, and factories, facing the docks of Manhattan's Lower East Side across the water.

A little to the south, on Wallabout Bay, where the British prison ships had lain during the Revolution, stood the Brooklyn Navy Yard, established by the federal government in 1801. It tied Brooklyn's waterfront to federal spending in a way no Manhattan pier was tied. Shipbuilding, rope making, and the trades that supplied them grew up around it.

By the mid-1860s the consolidated City of Brooklyn was probably the third-largest city in the United States, after New York and Philadelphia. It had its own waterworks, its own government, its own newspapers, and a self-image as the respectable home of the merchants and clerks who worked across the river. It also had what Manhattan had: immigrant wards, crowded waterfront districts, and an expanding edge where speculators bought farmland and waited for the city to arrive. The two cities were converging on the same patterns from opposite sides of the East River.

The Year 1857

In the spring of 1857 the Republican legislature in Albany moved to take the government of New York City out of Democratic hands. It created a Metropolitan Police, under a state-appointed board, to replace the municipal police that answered to Mayor Wood, and it passed liquor laws aimed in part at the saloons that anchored his support. Wood refused to disband his force, and for several weeks that summer two rival police departments claimed the streets of Manhattan. The same legislature created a Board of Commissioners of Central Park, taking the park out of the hands of the city government as well. Andrew Haswell Green, a lawyer who would later lead the campaign to consolidate the five boroughs, became its leading member and drove its work forward against the resistance of Tammany politicians. The state's seizures of the police and the park were the same decision applied to two kinds of ground: the streets and the public land. Albany had decided that the city could not be trusted to govern either.

The conflict reached the Five Points on Independence Day. On July 4, 1857, the Dead Rabbits, the Irish Sixth Ward gang that backed Wood, fought the nativist Bowery Boys in a battle that spread from the Bowery near Bayard Street, around Nos. 40 and 42 Bowery, into the Five Points and continued into the next day. When the new Metropolitan Police tried to intervene, the Dead Rabbits drove them out of the neighborhood. The fighting ended only when

the state militia under Major General Charles W. Sandford arrived, supported by police. Accounts of the dead range from eight to a dozen.

The riot is remembered as a gang war, and it was one. It was also a fight over who would police the Sixth Ward. For the Dead Rabbits and their neighbors, the Metropolitans were an occupying force sent from Albany by a legislature that disliked Irish Catholics and wanted to close their saloons. For the nativists and their Republican allies, the Dead Rabbits were proof that the immigrant wards had to be brought under outside control. Both sides understood that the question was territorial: whose officers, answering to whom, would walk which streets. Wood lost his bid for reelection at the end of the year.

Seven weeks after the riot, on August 24, 1857, the New York branch of the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company failed. Its cashier had embezzled its assets, and it left liabilities of about $7 million. The failure exposed a bust that had been building in speculation on western land and railroad securities, much of it financed through New York. Banks called in loans, merchants failed, and by mid-October the New York banks had suspended payments in gold. Factories and shipyards closed or cut their workforces. Through the winter of 1857–58, hundreds of thousands of urban workers across the country were out of work, many of them in New York, where the immigrants of the previous decade had the least to fall back on. Public meetings of the unemployed gathered in Tompkins Square and in front of City Hall that fall to demand work.

The panic struck as the park commission was finishing the clearance of the park site. The last residents of Seneca Village and the other settlements inside the rectangle left that fall, at the moment when jobs and housing in the city were hardest to find. The commissioners had already hired Frederick Law Olmsted as superintendent of the site. Olmsted was a Connecticut-born writer, surveyor, and farmer with no experience in landscape design, and the commissioners had chosen him by a vote of eight to one. His job was to clear and drain the ground and manage the laborers.

The commission then opened a competition for the park's design. Calvert Vaux, an English-born architect who had come to the United States to work with the landscape designer Andrew Jackson Downing, proposed to Olmsted that they enter together. Olmsted knew the ground better than anyone, having spent months walking it as superintendent, and Vaux had the design training. They worked on their plan at night and on weekends, since Olmsted's days

belonged to the commission. The original deadline was March 1, 1858. When the commission expanded its requirements to cover roads and the preparation of the land, it pushed the deadline back to April 1. Thirty-three entries came in.

On April 28, 1858, the Board of Commissioners of Central Park chose the plan by Olmsted and Vaux, which they had titled Greensward. The plan covered an area exactly three blocks wide and forty-seven blocks long, from Fifth Avenue to Eighth Avenue between 59th Street and 106th Street. Within that rectangle it abandoned the 1811 grid. Its carriage drives curved through the site, around the rock outcrops and along the contours of the land, and met the grid only at the park's edges, where they joined the avenues and the cross streets. Olmsted and Vaux sank the crosstown roads that the city's traffic needed below the level of the park, so that carts and wagons could pass from east to west without crossing the landscape above them. The Croton receiving reservoir, too large to move, was worked into the design as a fixed feature in the middle of the park.

The Greensward Plan was a public claim on Manhattan land of a kind the city had never made, and the most ambitious answer anyone had yet given to the grid's insistence that every acre become a lot for sale. Seven thousand lots that would otherwise have been sold, built on, and resold were withdrawn from the market permanently, and the land around them rose in value as a result, to the profit of those who owned the blocks facing the park. The design's landscape was an artifice built over the bogs and rock of the original site, with lakes dug where there had been marsh and meadows laid where there had been farms and houses. The plan said nothing about the people who had lived there. The rectangle the aldermen had drawn in 1852 was extended north to 110th Street in 1863, and the grid resumed on the other side of the park wall.

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CHAPTER 7

Riot, Ring, and Tenement, 1860–1880

The Free City

In early January 1861, Mayor Fernando Wood, who had held the office in 1855–57 and was serving again in 1860–61, sent the Common Council a message that took the breakup of the country as settled. "It would seem that a dissolution of the federal Union is inevitable," he wrote. South Carolina had left the Union on December 20, and other states of the Deep South were preparing to follow. Wood asked the council to consider what New York City should do when the break came. His answer was that the city should leave as well, separating from the Union and from the State of New York to become a free city.

The proposal followed from the business of the port. For forty years New York merchants had stood at the center of the cotton trade. They extended credit to planters, insured and shipped the crop, and sold the cloth and hardware that returned south on the same vessels. The packet lines that had made South Street the country's busiest waterfront carried much of that traffic to Liverpool. Planters owed money to New York houses, and New York houses depended on the next crop to collect it. Wood's argument was that the city's

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interest lay with the customers who paid its bills, and that a federal government at war with the South would wreck the commerce on which Manhattan lived.

The free city he described would have levied only a nominal duty on imports, so that cheap goods could enter almost free, and it would have relied on the support of the Southern states. In effect, Wood proposed turning the island into a duty-free entrepôt, a port with its own government whose revenue came from trade passing through. The plan treated Manhattan as a piece of ground that could be detached from the country around it and run for the benefit of its commerce, which was how many of its merchants already thought of it.

Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune and the city's loudest Republican voice, answered in a single sentence: "Fernando Wood evidently wants to be a traitor; it is lack of courage only that makes him content with being a blackguard." The proposal produced a flurry of argument in the newspapers and went no further. When Confederate guns fired on Fort Sumter in April, the city's mood turned, at least for a season, toward the Union. Merchants who had dreaded war subscribed to its loans, and regiments formed in the wards.

The ties Wood had described did not disappear when the shooting started. The war cut off Southern trade, and the federal government's demand for uniforms, ships, and supplies replaced much of it. The city's Democratic organization never fully accepted a war fought to end slavery. Its working-class voters, many of them Irish-born laborers who competed with Black workers on the docks and in service jobs, heard Republican war aims as a threat to their wages. Wood's free city was a joke within months. The resentments it had spoken to were still there in the summer of 1863.

Four Days in July

The Enrollment Act that Congress passed in March 1863 imposed the first federal draft. Each district received a quota, and names were drawn by lottery from the rolls of eligible men. The law allowed a drafted man to pay for a substitute or buy his way out, which meant that men with money could stay home. It did not apply to Black men, who were not counted as citizens for the purpose. Both provisions were understood in the tenement wards as proof that the war would be fought by poor white men for the benefit of others.

The first names for New York's quota were drawn and printed in the newspapers in the days before the trouble began. On the morning of Monday, July 13, 1863, as the drawing resumed, crowds gathered and violence broke out. Workers left their jobs and marched uptown. Rioters attacked the draft office where the lottery was under way and set it on fire. By afternoon the crowds had moved past their stated grievance. They fought the police, sacked the homes of Republicans and officials, and turned on the city's Black residents, whom they blamed for the war.

The Colored Orphan Asylum stood on Fifth Avenue between 43rd and 44th Streets. In July 1863 it housed more than two hundred Black children, with some accounts putting the number closer to 230. Its physician was Dr. James McCune Smith, the first Black American to hold a medical degree and one of the most prominent Black intellectuals in the city. On the afternoon of July 13 rioters broke in. They carried off the beds, mattresses, trunks, and furniture, then set the building on fire. The staff led the children out a rear door, and every child escaped. The building burned to the ground. One of the objects that survived, a Bible singed by the fire, is now held by the New-York Historical Society.

The asylum's managers rebuilt in 1867, in upper Manhattan, far from Fifth Avenue. In 1907 the institution moved again, to Riverdale in the Bronx. It never returned to the site the mob had cleared. Over the following decades the blocks of Fifth Avenue in the low Forties became some of the most valuable commercial ground in the country. The riot settled, among other things, that a Black charity would not hold that ground.

For three more days the violence went on. Mobs hunted Black men on the streets and along the waterfront, and they attacked boardinghouses and homes where Black families lived. Eleven Black men were lynched. On July 15 a crowd dragged Abraham Franklin, a twenty-three-year-old coachman with a disability, from his home and hanged him from a lamppost at West 28th Street and Seventh Avenue. Other killings went unrecorded, or were recorded only as bodies found later. At least twelve Black victims can be accounted for by name or circumstance. Junius C. Morel, the Weeksville correspondent of the Christian Recorder, a Black newspaper published in Philadelphia, wrote that more than one hundred Black New Yorkers had been killed outright.

Order returned only when federal troops, some of them just back from Gettysburg, came into the city and fired into the crowds. Many of the dead were rioters shot by soldiers. The official count of deaths was 119. Historians have generally thought the true number higher, and estimates have run as high as about 1,200. The most that can be said with confidence is that at least 119 people died, possibly far more.

The Draft Riots remain the deadliest civil disturbance in American history, and they were a contest over who could live where in Manhattan. The rioters attacked Black people in their homes, at their workplaces, and in the one institution on a fashionable avenue that served Black children. When the violence ended, much of Manhattan's Black population had been driven from the places it had occupied. Many Black New Yorkers left Manhattan in the months that followed, in response to what the mobs had shown them about their safety on the island.

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Vincent Colyer, secretary of the Merchants' Relief Committee for Suffering Colored People, a group of businessmen who raised money for the victims, described where the refugees had gone. In a report published in the New York Daily Tribune on October 10, 1863, he wrote that they had been forced to shelter "on Blackwell's Island, at police stations, on the outskirts of the city," and in Weeksville, among other places. The committee distributed aid to some thousands of people in the weeks after the riots.

Weeksville lay in the eastern part of the City of Brooklyn, on high ground in what is now Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant. It took its name from James Weeks, one of several Black buyers who acquired land there in the late 1830s. The community grew as a deliberate project of Black landownership. Since 1821 New York had required Black men to own $250 in property before they could vote, and owning a lot in Weeksville was one of the few ways a Black worker could meet that requirement. By 1855 the settlement had more than five hundred residents, with its own churches and a school. It had a newspaper correspondent in Morel, and its residents looked to their own institutions in a city that excluded them from most others.

After the riots Weeksville took in families from Manhattan. Black New Yorkers moved across the East River to Brooklyn and farther out on Long Island

in numbers that permanently changed the distribution of the region's Black population. Weeksville was not large enough to absorb them all, but it offered what Manhattan had just shown it could not: ground held by Black owners, among neighbors who would not hand them to a mob.

The settlement also became a recruiting station. Governor Horatio Seymour, a Democrat, opposed raising Black regiments from New York, so regiments organized in other states sent recruiters to Weeksville. In December 1863 the Union League Club found recruits there for the 20th United States Colored Troops. Five months after mobs in Manhattan had killed Black men for a draft that excluded them, Black men in Brooklyn were enlisting in a federal army that would take them.

The Courthouse on Chambers Street

The building that came to stand for the next decade of city government sits directly behind City Hall, on Chambers Street. The New York County Courthouse was authorized in 1858 and designed first by the architect John Kellum, in a white marble Italianate style with a portico and a rotunda. It was supposed to cost a fraction of what it eventually did. By 1871 the bills for the courthouse had passed $13 million by some tallies and at least $10 million by any reckoning, and the building was still not fully occupied.

William M. Tweed had risen through the volunteer fire companies and the Democratic clubs of the Lower East Side to become the leader of Tammany Hall, a state senator, and the dominant figure in the city's government. By the late 1860s Tweed and a small circle of allies controlled the offices that let contracts and paid bills. Mayor A. Oakey Hall, who served from 1869 to 1872, signed what was put in front of him. The comptroller paid the claims. Judges owed their places to the organization. The arrangement depended on a simple practice: contractors submitted inflated bills, the city paid them, and the contractors returned most of the excess to the ring.

The courthouse accounts show the method at its most extravagant. One carpenter was paid $360,751 for a month's work. A furniture contractor received $179,729 for three tables and forty chairs. A plasterer was paid $133,187 for two days. Estimates of how much the ring took in all have varied enormously, from about $45 million to well over $100 million, with some reaching $200

million. Any of these figures made the Tweed ring the largest municipal theft in American history to that time.

Tweed's ring stole by building. Its members drew their money from the courthouse, from street openings and pavings, from the new boulevards and parks in upper Manhattan, from the armories and markets and docks, from every public project that required a contract. The machine's power rested on its ability to put men to work, and the work it provided was real. Tweed's years in power coincided with the grading and paving of much of the grid north of 59th Street, the extension of water mains and sewers, and the improvement of the park. A city growing as fast as New York needed this work, and the machine supplied it at whatever price it chose to set. The voters who returned Tammany's candidates were often the same men who swung the picks.

For years the machine's opponents had evidence of fraud but could not prove it. In July 1871 the New York Times began publishing secret financial records, copied from the city's books and supplied by a former insider of the ring, that showed exactly how the overcharges worked. The courthouse figures were the centerpiece. The Times printed the payments line by line, under headlines that left no room for doubt, and other papers followed.

Thomas Nast, a German-born illustrator, had been attacking Tweed in the pages of Harper's Weekly since the late 1860s. Over the course of the campaign he drew more than 140 cartoons of the boss and his associates. He gave Tweed a diamond stickpin and a bloated body, drew the ring as a circle of figures each pointing at the next, and showed Tammany as a tiger tearing apart the Republic. The cartoons reached readers who could not or did not read the Times's columns of figures. Tweed tried to buy off the newspaper and failed. Nast was offered $500,000 to drop the campaign and go to Europe to study art, and he refused.

As the revelations piled up, Mayor Hall tried to make light of them. "We are likely to have what befell Adam, an early Fall," he said. The fall came that autumn. A committee of reformers took over the investigation, the November elections went against Tammany, and Tweed was arrested. He was tried more than once, convicted, and imprisoned, escaped for a time, and died in custody in 1878. Several of his associates fled the country. The courthouse was finished in the 1880s, long after the ring that had built it was gone.

The fall of the ring did not end the machine. Tammany survived Tweed, reorganized under new leaders, and governed the city for much of the next six decades. What the scandal established was a pattern. New York's government would be judged in large part by what it built and what it paid for building it, and every major public project of the next century would be shadowed by the question of who profited from the contract.

A Window onto Something

The Tenement House Law that the New York State Legislature passed on May 14, 1867, was the first comprehensive housing reform law in the United States. Its most consequential provision was a definition. A tenement, the law said, was a rented dwelling housing more than three independent families. With that sentence, the legislature made the tenement a legal category, a kind of building subject to its own rules, separate from the house and the shop. Every later housing law in New York, down to the present, has built on the idea that the state can tell the owner of a multiple dwelling what the building must provide.

The provisions of 1867 were modest. Every tenement had to have a fire escape. There had to be one toilet or privy for every twenty inhabitants, connected to the sewer where a sewer existed. Interior bedrooms, which in many buildings had no window at all, had to have a transom three feet square over the door to let air pass from the next room.

The law was written for a city in which tens of thousands of families lived in buildings designed to extract as much rent as possible from a single lot. The standard Manhattan lot laid out under the grid was twenty-five feet wide and one hundred feet deep. A builder who wanted the maximum return covered as much of it as the law allowed, typically with a five- or six-story building that left only a narrow strip of yard at the back. Inside, each floor was divided into four apartments, two at the front and two at the rear, with rooms arranged in a line from the street or yard toward the stair hall. Only the front and rear rooms had outside windows. The rooms in the middle had none.

Builders met the requirements of 1867 in the cheapest way available. Where the law asked for windows, they cut openings in the walls between interior rooms, so that a dark bedroom opened onto a dark kitchen and the kitchen onto the front room. The building complied, and the interior rooms remained without light or outside air.

The legislature tried again in 1879. The new act required that every habitable room have a window opening onto a street, a rear yard, or an air shaft. On a lot twenty-five feet wide, the only way to give a middle room an outside window was to pinch in the side walls of the building, leaving a gap between it and its neighbor. When two such buildings stood side by side, the indentations met to form a narrow shaft running from roof to cellar. Seen from above, each building was wide at the front and back and narrow in the middle, and the plan took its name from that shape: the dumbbell.

The dumbbell met the letter of the 1879 law. The shafts were often only a few feet across, too narrow to admit much light below the top floors. Tenants threw garbage into them, and in a fire they acted as flues, carrying flames up through the building. Dumbbell tenements, known later as Old Law tenements, went up by the thousands until the legislature replaced the rules in 1901, and many still line the side streets of the Lower East Side.

The tenement laws of 1867 and 1879 show how a rule about a building becomes a rule about a lot. The legislature did not tell owners how much of their land they could cover or how many people they could house on it. It told them what each room needed and left the owners to fit those requirements onto ground whose shape had been fixed in 1811. The dumbbell was the result of that arrangement, a plan drawn by the intersection of a property line and a statute.

The Answer to Distance

In 1860 the practical limit of settled Manhattan was set by how far a worker could walk or afford to ride in a horsecar. The city's working population was crowded into the lower wards because the docks, warehouses, and factories were there. North of 42nd Street the grid was largely a paper plan, with farms, shanties, and squatters' settlements on unopened streets. The tenement problem was in large part a problem of distance, and the first answer to it went up over the streets.

Charles T. Harvey, an engineer and promoter, proposed carrying passengers on an elevated track above the traffic. Local opposition kept him off Broadway, where property owners objected to a railway over their frontage, so he built along Greenwich Street on the West Side. His West Side and Yonkers Patent Railway opened in 1868, starting from Battery Place. It ran on a single track

supported by a line of iron columns, and its cars were pulled by a cable wound by stationary engines.

The cable failed repeatedly. The company ran out of money, and on November 15, 1870, its assets were sold at auction. The line was reorganized as the New York Elevated Railway Company and reopened in 1871 with small steam locomotives pulling the cars. That arrangement worked, and the line was extended north along Ninth Avenue. By 1879 the Ninth Avenue elevated reached the Harlem River at 155th Street. Other lines followed on Second, Third, and Sixth Avenues, and by the end of the 1870s the Manhattan Railway Company operated all four.

The elevated trains were noisy, dirty, and dark beneath. The locomotives dropped cinders and oil onto the street, and the structures cut off light to the buildings along the avenues. Property owners along the routes complained that their frontage had been ruined. But the elevated did what the horsecars could not. A worker could now live in a new building on the Upper East Side or in Harlem and reach a job downtown in a reasonable time. Land along the elevated routes that had been worth little as farmland became worth a great deal as building lots, and builders filled the avenues and side streets of the upper wards with tenements and row houses.

This was the first time in New York that transit created ground. The grid had already divided northern Manhattan into lots, and the elevated made those lots usable for the people who needed them most. Each extension of the line was a decision about where the next neighborhood would rise and who would be able to live in it. The pattern, in which transportation lines turned open land into housing and housing into value for whoever owned the land along the route, would repeat itself on a far larger scale with the subways of the next century.

* * *

Across the East River, the City of Brooklyn was making its own claims on ground. Before the war, Brooklyn had begun planning a large park on the high land near its center. James S. T. Stranahan, a businessman and president of the park commission, brought Calvert Vaux into the project after the war, and Vaux persuaded Frederick Law Olmsted to rejoin him. The two began work in 1866. Through the 1860s the City of Brooklyn bought land until it held 526 acres.

Prospect Park opened to the public in 1867, though work on it went on for about seven more years. Its design centered on the Long Meadow, a rolling lawn of about ninety acres, a wooded ravine, and a lake of about sixty acres. Olmsted and Vaux had learned from their work in Manhattan, and many critics have judged Prospect Park the more accomplished of the two. In July 1868 alone, a report to the Brooklyn Park Commissioners counted more than 100,000 visitors to the unfinished grounds.

The park was Brooklyn's great public taking of land, and like its Manhattan counterpart, it was planned as an amenity for a growing city and an engine of property values around it. The streets along the park's edges filled with substantial houses for Brooklyn's merchant and professional families, and the park's presence shaped the development of the neighborhoods that became Park Slope and Prospect Heights.

Stranahan's ambitions extended beyond the park. In the 1870s and 1880s he was among the strongest backers of a bridge across the East River, which would join Brooklyn to Manhattan directly and free its residents from dependence on the ferries. The engineer John A. Roebling had designed a suspension bridge with towers of granite and a main span longer than any yet built. In the summer of 1869, while fixing the position of the Brooklyn tower, Roebling was injured in an accident at the ferry slip and died weeks later. His son Washington Roebling took charge of the work. The bridge's foundations went down in the following years, sunk into the riverbed inside huge timber caissons, and the towers rose slowly above the water through the 1870s.

Tompkins Square

In September 1873 the failure of the banking house of Jay Cooke and Company, which had overextended itself financing railroads, set off a financial panic. The New York Stock Exchange closed for ten days. Banks and brokerage houses failed, factories shut, and construction stopped. By the winter of 1873–74 roughly a quarter of New York's workforce was out of a job. Families who could no longer pay rent faced eviction from the tenements in the coldest months of the year.

On December 11, 1873, a meeting at the Cooper Institute appointed a Committee of Safety, fifty members strong, to speak for the unemployed. The committee demanded that the city start public works to provide jobs, distribute

relief to the destitute, and halt evictions through the winter. Mayor William F. Havemeyer, a sugar refiner serving his third term in the office, refused to meet with it. The committee called a mass rally for January 13, 1874, in Tompkins Square on the Lower East Side, to be followed by a march to City Hall.

The square had been laid out in the 1830s as a public park in the Eleventh Ward and later turned into a parade ground. By the 1870s it sat at the center of the city's German immigrant neighborhood, surrounded by tenements whose residents were among the hardest hit by the depression. On the morning of January 13, a crowd variously estimated at 7,000 to more than 8,000 people gathered there. Many in the crowd did not know that the authorities had withdrawn permission for the rally.

The police moved in, mounted officers among them, and drove the crowd from the square with clubs. They chased people through the surrounding streets and beat those who did not move fast enough. Around forty-six people were arrested. Samuel Gompers, a young cigar maker from London who would later found the American Federation of Labor, was in the crowd that day. He drew from the experience lessons about how vulnerable labor was when it took to the streets without organization behind it.

The newspapers described the event as a riot and blamed it on radicals and foreigners. City officials treated it as a threat to public order that had been put down. The demands of the Committee of Safety went unmet. The city did not provide public works, relief remained a matter for private charity, and evictions went on through the winter. The question of whether a tenant could be put out of an apartment in the middle of a New York winter would come back again and again in the next century, and its answer would depend on who could claim the city's streets and squares to demand it.

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CHAPTER 8

The Bridge and the Consolidation, 1880–1899

The Bridge

The first person to ride across the Brooklyn Bridge was Emily Warren Roebling. She crossed the finished deck in a carriage, carrying a rooster as a sign of victory. Accounts disagree on whether she made the trip shortly before the opening ceremony or on the day itself, but none disputes that hers was the first ride. Her husband, Washington Roebling, held the title of chief engineer. He had taken the post after his father, John A. Roebling, died in 1869. During the 1870s he was disabled by caisson disease, the decompression sickness that struck men who worked in the pressurized chambers sunk beneath the river to set the towers' foundations. For most of the decade that followed he could not visit the work. He watched some of it from the couple's house in Brooklyn Heights. Emily Roebling went to the site in his place, carried his instructions to the assistant engineers, attended meetings of the bridge's trustees, and in practice managed much of the project while he kept the title. In 1882 his long absence put that title at risk. She lobbied engineers and politicians on his behalf, and he kept the post through completion.

The bridge opened on May 24, 1883. President Chester A. Arthur came, as did Governor Grover Cleveland, Mayor Franklin Edson of New York, and Mayor Seth Low of Brooklyn. Abram S. Hewitt, the iron manufacturer and New York congressman who gave the principal address, used part of his speech to praise Emily Roebling and to tie her name to the structure, a public acknowledgment that was unusual for its time. Within roughly a day of the opening, well over a hundred thousand people had walked the elevated promenade that ran above the roadways and the cable railway tracks.

The structure justified the attention. Its main span measured about 1,595 feet between the granite towers, and it was then the longest suspension bridge in the world. The stone, the steel wire of the cables, and the scale of the towers above the low brick waterfronts on both shores made it the tallest thing most people on either side had ever seen. It had taken about fourteen years to build and cost something over $15 million. At least twenty men died building it, and the real number was probably higher.

On May 30, 1883, which was Decoration Day, the promenade was packed with holiday walkers. A panic began, and the crowd surged in a crush that killed twelve people, by most accounts. Six days after the ceremony, the bridge had shown the cost of putting tens of thousands of people onto a narrow walkway with no plan for controlling them. For the rest of the century city officials would face the same problem in the tenement districts and on the elevated platforms.

The bridge was the first permanent crossing of the East River between New York and the City of Brooklyn. Until 1883 every trip between the two cities had depended on ferries, starting with the steam service of 1814 that Hezekiah Pierrepont had used to sell lots on Brooklyn Heights. The ferries kept running. What the bridge changed was the idea of what the two cities were. It was a joint enterprise, run by a board of trustees drawn from both municipalities and paid for out of both treasuries. Two governments with separate mayors, councils, and political machines now owned a single piece of infrastructure that ended at Park Row on one shore and near Fulton Street on the other. Brooklyn was among the four largest cities in the United States, and its residential blocks, much of its middle class, and its churches depended on Manhattan's offices, exchanges, and wholesale houses for a living. The bridge made that dependence plain to see. The question of whether the two cities should remain separate followed directly from it, and within fifteen years it had been answered.

Up Fifth Avenue

Two months before the bridge opened, in March 1883, Alva Vanderbilt gave a fancy-dress ball at 660 Fifth Avenue, her new house on the northwest corner of 52nd Street. Richard Morris Hunt had designed it, and it went up from about 1878 to 1882 as a French Renaissance chateau set among the brownstones of the avenue, a deliberate import of a European aristocratic form onto a lot laid out by the Commissioners' Plan. The ball drew wide coverage in the newspapers. Its purpose was social. The Vanderbilt fortune came from steamboats and railroads, most recently the New York Central, and it was new money. The ball helped the family win acceptance from the older mercantile and landholding families who had organized the city's society since before the Revolution. Within a short walk, Cornelius Vanderbilt II was finishing his own chateau at Fifth Avenue and 57th Street in the early 1880s, and it would be enlarged over the following decade until it filled the block front to 58th Street.

The location of these houses traced a movement that had been going on for half a century. Each generation of wealthy New Yorkers had settled a little farther from the commercial district at the island's tip. They moved to Bond Street and Washington Square in the 1830s, to Union Square and lower Fifth Avenue in the 1840s and 1850s, and to Murray Hill after that. Trade followed them each time, along with boardinghouses, hotels, and eventually lofts. The opening of Grand Central Depot at 42nd Street in 1871 and the steady growth of Central Park as a landscaped frontage pulled the fashionable line north again. By the 1880s the stretch of Fifth Avenue from the 50s toward the park had become the most expensive residential street in the country.

The grid made this possible and also left it fragile. The 1811 plan had divided the island into uniform lots and given no lot greater protection than any other. A family could build a palace on Fifth Avenue, but it could not keep a boardinghouse, a stable, or a store off the next lot except by owning that lot, or by persuading its neighbors to bind their own deeds. The rich protected their streets the only way the grid permitted, through price and by buying in bulk. When the money moved on, the land kept its value and the houses lost theirs. Alva Vanderbilt's chateau was sold to a developer and torn down in the mid-1920s, about forty-five years after it went up. Its lot passed to commercial use, as nearly all of that stretch of Fifth Avenue eventually did.

Brooklyn had its own version of this movement. Brooklyn Heights, the city's oldest fashionable district, sat on the bluff above the ferries and close to the bridge. Farther out, along the western edge of Prospect Park, developers in the 1880s and 1890s filled the blocks of Park Slope with brownstone and limestone row houses and large freestanding mansions for merchants and manufacturers. Some of these owners worked in Manhattan. Others ran the breweries, sugar refineries, and shipping businesses along the Brooklyn waterfront. The park that Olmsted and Vaux had laid out there two decades earlier did for Park Slope what Central Park did for upper Fifth Avenue. It turned open ground into a premium on the lots that faced it.

East of the Bowery

Starting in the early 1880s, the people arriving in New York came increasingly from eastern and southern Europe. Jews left the Russian Empire after the pogroms that followed the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 and the restrictive laws that came after them. Italians came from the agricultural provinces of the south and from Sicily, many of them young men who planned to work for a few seasons and go home, and many of whom stayed. Smaller groups came from Bohemia, Hungary, Greece, and the Ottoman lands. Until the end of the 1880s most of them landed at Castle Garden at the Battery and walked into the city along the routes that the Irish and Germans had used a generation before.

They settled first on the ground those earlier groups had occupied. The German quarter east of the Bowery, which had centered on the blocks around Tompkins Square, gave way through the 1880s and 1890s to a Jewish quarter that stretched from the Bowery to the East River and from Houston Street south toward the bridge approaches. Italians filled the blocks of Mulberry Street around the old Five Points and spread north toward Greenwich Village and into East Harlem. A small Chinese community on Mott, Pell, and Doyers Streets grew slowly under the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred most new laborers from entering the country.

The building that received all of them was the tenement, which by the 1880s had become a standard real estate product. A typical one stood on a lot twenty-five feet wide and a hundred feet deep, the unit the 1811 grid had made universal. It rose five or six stories and held four apartments on each floor. After

the 1879 law, many were built on the dumbbell plan, pinched at the middle to create a narrow air shaft between neighboring buildings. That shaft carried noise, cooking smells, and garbage, but little light or air. A family of six might live in a two- or three-room apartment and take in boarders to make the rent. Reformers measured the most crowded wards of the Lower East Side at several hundred people per acre.

The apartment was often a workplace as well. Garment manufacturing, which became the largest industry on the Lower East Side, was organized through contractors who took cut cloth from manufacturers and had it sewn into coats, trousers, and cloaks in rented rooms, many of them in tenements. Workers, often whole families, were paid by the piece. The word sweatshop described that arrangement, a shop that made its profit by squeezing labor in space that cost the contractor almost nothing because someone already lived in it. The tenement lot therefore produced two kinds of rent, one from the people who slept in the rooms and one from the work done in them during the day.

Jacob Riis knew these blocks as a police reporter. He was born in Denmark and arrived in America in 1870 at twenty-one, with about $40. He spent several hard years doing odd jobs and sometimes sleeping in police-station lodging rooms before he found newspaper work. By the 1880s he was covering the police beat, including for the Evening Sun, which put him in the tenement districts at night. He wanted his readers to see what he saw. Magnesium flash powder, a new technique, let him photograph rooms, cellars, alleys, and lodging houses that had no light worth the name. In 1889 he published an eighteen-page article in Scribner's Magazine. A year later Charles Scribner's Sons brought out the expanded version, How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York, with seventeen photographs.

The book moved through the tenement districts one group at a time. It gave the Italians, the Jews, the Chinese, the Bohemians, and the Black residents of the West Side each a character, and the portraits mixed real sympathy with the stereotypes of the day. Its argument was clearer than its ethnography. Riis held that the tenement itself, as a system of ownership and construction, produced disease, crime, and despair, and that the landlords and the public that tolerated them carried the blame. His remedies were moderate: model tenements built by philanthropic investors willing to accept a limited return, stricter building rules, and the demolition of the worst blocks. The book sold widely and reached

readers who had never been east of the Bowery. Theodore Roosevelt was one of them. As president of the city's police board in the mid-1890s, he walked the tenement districts at night with Riis.

The book's lasting effect was to make density a matter of public conscience. The tenement had been built because, under the grid, the tenement was the most profitable use of a twenty-five-foot lot in a district where people needed to live within walking distance of their work. Riis showed middle-class New Yorkers the results of that calculation. He did not show them who would pay to change it, and that argument was left to the reformers and legislators of the next century.

Ellis Island

At the start of the 1890s the federal government took control of immigration inspection away from New York State, and Castle Garden, which the state had operated since 1855, stopped receiving immigrants. For a brief period arrivals were processed at the Barge Office at the Battery. On January 1, 1892, a new federal immigration station opened on Ellis Island, a small island in the upper bay near the New Jersey shore that the government would enlarge many times over with fill in the decades that followed.

The first immigrant inspected there was Annie Moore, a teenager from County Cork. She had sailed from Queenstown with her two younger brothers to join their parents, who were already living in New York. Her story was in many ways the old pattern. She was Irish, she was traveling to family, and she settled in the city. The ships that followed hers over the next decade carried a higher and higher share of passengers from Italy and the Russian Empire.

Ellis Island was a sorting station. Passengers traveling first and second class were usually inspected aboard ship and allowed to go ashore directly. Steerage passengers were ferried to the island, where they underwent medical and legal examination before they could take the ferry to Manhattan or the railroad terminals in New Jersey. Most passed through within hours. A minority were held for further examination, and a much smaller number were sent back. The original station was built of wood. It burned in June 1897, and inspection moved back to the Barge Office until a fireproof building opened at the end of 1900. Over its working life, until it closed on November 12, 1954, more than 12 million immigrants passed through the station.

The opening of the federal station moved the decision about who could enter the country away from the city and the state. The question of where the arrivals would live remained with New York. A large share of the people inspected on the island boarded trains for the interior. A great many others crossed the harbor and walked to the tenement districts, where relatives, landsmen, and employers were waiting. The city had no say in how many came and no responsibility for housing them. What it owned were the streets, the building rules, the transit franchises, and the power to annex land. In the 1890s it began using all four.

Absorbing the Mainland

New York had begun growing beyond Manhattan Island before the immigration station opened. In 1873 the state legislature authorized, and in 1874 the city carried out, the annexation of three Westchester County towns lying west of the Bronx River: Morrisania, West Farms, and Kingsbridge. The annexed territory became the 23rd and 24th Wards of the city and county of New York, and city officials called it the Annexed District. It was the first time the city had extended its government onto the mainland. The ground was a mix of estates, farms, small manufacturing villages along the rail lines, and the old Morris family lands, the same ones that had given Gouverneur Morris his country seat when he served on the commission that drew the grid. The city took charge of laying out streets there. Transit followed. By the late 1880s the Third Avenue elevated had crossed the Harlem River and was pushing north through the district, repeating on the mainland what the elevated lines had done on upper Manhattan a decade earlier.

The second annexation came after the 1894 vote. In 1895 the city took in the eastern Bronx: the town of Westchester and the southern parts of the towns of Pelham and Eastchester. The town of Westchester had voted against consolidation in November 1894, by a single vote. The legislature annexed it anyway. That result showed how the expansion of the city actually worked. Local referendums expressed sentiment, but the state legislature drew municipal boundaries, and a town of farms and shore villages on Long Island Sound had no veto over the ambitions of the largest city in the country.

The rest of the future city was still a patchwork of separate governments. In Kings County, the City of Brooklyn had spent the 1880s and 1890s absorbing

the old Dutch towns around it. New Lots, Flatbush, Gravesend, New Utrecht, and finally Flatlands came in, and by 1896 the City of Brooklyn and Kings County covered the same territory. Brooklyn had gone through on its own side of the river the same process of annexation that New York was now proposing to carry across it.

Queens County was more scattered. In 1870 the western part of the town of Newtown, including the village of Astoria and the factory waterfront facing Manhattan, was incorporated as Long Island City. It became a small industrial city of rail yards, oil and chemical works, and factories. Among them was the Steinway piano works in Astoria. East of Long Island City lay the towns of Newtown, Flushing, and Jamaica, still largely farmland and market gardens dotted with villages, and beyond them the town of Hempstead, whose southern edge took in the barrier beaches of the Rockaways. Staten Island, organized as Richmond County, consisted of five towns, Castleton, Middletown, Northfield, Southfield, and Westfield. Its villages were strung along the shore, its interior was farmland and woods, and its link to Manhattan was the ferry.

None of these places had asked to belong to New York. What they shared was the harbor, and the logic of the harbor was the strongest argument the consolidators had.

Two Votes, November 6, 1894

Andrew Haswell Green had been making that argument for decades. He had been a commissioner of Central Park and its effective chief administrator in the years when Olmsted and Vaux's plan was being built. After the Tweed Ring collapsed, he served as city comptroller from 1871 to 1876 and was charged with sorting out the wreckage of its finances. He had proposed joining New York, Brooklyn, and the surrounding towns as early as the 1860s. Proposals of the kind dated back further still, to around 1820. In 1890 the state created a commission to study consolidation, and Green became its president. He was later called the father of Greater New York.

The consolidators' case started from the water. New York and Brooklyn faced each other across the same river and shared the same harbor. Jersey City and Hoboken lay on the far side of the Hudson in another state, beyond any plan's reach, but every pier, ferry slip, and warehouse on the New York side of the harbor was governed by one of several separate municipalities, each with its

own dock department, its own rules, and its own set of leases. Consolidation would put the docks and waterways of the port under a single government that could plan and invest in them as one system. Supporters added that a larger city would carry more weight against competing ports, that its credit would stretch further, and that it would reclaim from Chicago, which had been gaining fast, the claim of being the country's leading metropolis. Behind these arguments lay a question about land. Manhattan was filling up. The Annexed District, Queens, and Staten Island held the open ground on which the next several million New Yorkers would have to live, and Brooklyn held the developed waterfront and residential blocks that already functioned as part of a single metropolitan economy.

The opposition was strongest in Brooklyn. Brooklynites had a civic identity of their own. Their city had its own mayor, its own city hall on Joralemon Street, its own parks, newspapers, and churches, and a reputation as a city of homes and of Protestant respectability, which its boosters set against what they saw as the commercial disorder and the immigrant tenements across the river. There was also a partisan calculation. Brooklyn's government was more often Republican than New York's, and its leaders feared that consolidation would bury their city's voters under Manhattan's Democratic majority and hand Brooklyn's budget to Tammany Hall.

The legislature put the question to a non-binding referendum on November 6, 1894. The results were officially tallied on December 14 and reported in the New York Times. New York County voted 96,938 in favor and 59,959 against, roughly 62 percent yes. Queens and Richmond voted yes, as did Eastchester and Pelham. Mount Vernon and the town of Westchester voted no. In Kings County the result was 64,744 for and 64,467 against, a margin of 277 votes out of more than 129,000 cast. The proposal that would end the City of Brooklyn after sixty years of independent existence carried there by about one fifth of 1 percent.

The same ballot in Manhattan carried another question. On May 22, 1894, Governor Roswell P. Flower had signed the Rapid Transit Act, which the Chamber of Commerce had pressed for after years in which private companies declined to build a subway on their own account. The act created a new Rapid Transit Commission and gave it two options. It could sell a franchise to a private company to build and run an underground line, or it could arrange for the city

to own the line, building it with public money and leasing it to an operator. The second option required voter approval. On November 6 voters approved municipal financing of the subway by an overwhelming margin. On the same day that the residents of New York County voted to enlarge the city they were also voting to use the city's credit to build the transit that would bring people into the new territory.

The commission's chief engineer was William Barclay Parsons, thirty-five years old in 1894. In early 1895 the commission adopted his plan for a shallow four-track line running just below the street surface, which avoided both the expense of deep tunneling and the elevated railways' shadow over the avenues. The line would run north from the business district to a junction at 96th Street, where it would split into one branch under Broadway and another toward Lenox Avenue. Years of negotiation and litigation lay ahead before a shovel went into the ground. But the decision that the city would pay for the tunnel, rather than wait for private investors to find it profitable, had been made at the polls in 1894. This was the transit counterpart of consolidation. The city was taking direct responsibility for creating usable land on a scale no landowner or railroad company had been willing to attempt.

The Brooklyn vote did not settle the matter. Opponents treated the 277-vote margin as no mandate at all, and the referendum had no binding force. Consolidation advanced through the legislature anyway. On May 11, 1896, the legislature passed the consolidation bill over the vetoes of the mayors of both New York and Brooklyn. Under the state constitution then in force, the mayors had the right to reject legislation affecting their cities, and the legislature had the power to override them, which it did. A charter commission spent the following months writing the government of the new city. It divided the city into five boroughs, each with a borough president, under a single mayor, a municipal assembly, and a set of citywide departments. In November 1897 voters across the territory elected the first mayor of the consolidated city. Tammany's candidate, Robert A. Van Wyck, won. Brooklyn Republicans had warned for years that Manhattan Democrats would control their fate, and the first election of the new city confirmed what they had feared.

Greater New York

On January 1, 1898, Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Richmond became the City of Greater New York. It was the second-largest city in the world, after London. When the census counted it in 1900, its population was about 3.4 million. Greater New York contained the dense wards below Houston Street, where several hundred people lived on an acre, as well as the farms of eastern Queens and the woods of interior Staten Island, where a single family might hold dozens of acres. It took in the Annexed District, the eastern Bronx, the oyster beds of Jamaica Bay, the beaches of the Rockaways, and the waterfronts of both sides of the East River. It held a bridge that had been built by two governments and was now owned by one.

Some of the arrangements carried over from the separate counties lasted for years. The Bronx remained part of New York County after consolidation. The legislature created a separate Bronx County in 1912, and it began operating on January 1, 1914. Queens kept the western towns, including the Rockaway section of Hempstead. The eastern towns of Queens County, left outside the consolidated city, separated and in 1899 became Nassau County, setting the city's eastern boundary along a line that runs through farmland and suburban subdivisions to this day.

In Brooklyn, some residents came to call consolidation the Great Mistake. The city that had incorporated in 1834, absorbed Williamsburg and Bushwick in 1855, built Prospect Park, and shared the cost of the bridge stopped existing as a government. The building on Joralemon Street that had housed Brooklyn's city government since 1848 became Brooklyn Borough Hall. The borough kept its name, its neighborhoods, and its attachment to its own identity, but its budget, police, schools, water supply, and docks now came under a government whose mayor sat across the river at City Hall in Manhattan.

Green had argued that the harbor should be governed as one system. The consolidated city went further and claimed the right to govern the land around the harbor as one system as well. This meant deciding where streets would run in Queens, where a subway line would turn in the Bronx, which waterfront in Brooklyn would get new piers, and how many people a tenement on a twenty-five-foot lot could legally hold. These questions had been answered piecemeal for two and a half centuries by a trading company, a series of colonial charters, a state legislature, and the governments of half a dozen towns and cities. In 1898

one municipal government became responsible for them across roughly three hundred square miles. The 1894 subway vote had given that government the means to reach the open land it now controlled. Most of the 3.4 million people counted in 1900 still lived in Manhattan and the older parts of Brooklyn, close to the docks and factories where they worked, in a city that now extended well beyond the neighborhoods they knew.

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Subway City, 1900–1945

Rapid transit, tenement reform, zoning, Harlem, the skyscraper, and the Depression-era state of La Guardia and Moses remake who can live where across five boroughs.

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CHAPTER 9

Underground, 1900–1913

Contract Number One

On January 15, 1900, the bids for New York's first subway were opened. The winner was John B. McDonald, a contractor who offered to build the line for $35 million, plus another $2.7 million for stations and terminals. No municipal work in the city's history had cost so much at once, and the arrangement behind the figure was as new as the sum. Under the rapid transit law that voters had approved in 1894, the city would pay for construction through its own borrowing and would own the tunnel when it was finished. A private company would run the trains and collect the fares under a long lease. New York was pledging its credit, the power of a government to borrow against future taxes, to dig a railroad under its own streets. A private operator would then earn a return on what the public had paid to build.

McDonald had the low bid but not the backing. The contract required a financial security he could not post on his own resources, so he turned to August Belmont Jr., a financier who had what McDonald lacked. Belmont formed the Rapid Transit Subway Construction Company to stand behind the work. On February 21, 1900, the Board of Rapid Transit Railroad Commissioners executed Contract 1 with the McDonald and Belmont company. It covered construction of the line and a fifty-year operating lease that would begin on

the day the trains started running. The contractor whose name was on the bid became, within weeks, the junior partner of the man who financed him.

The rest of the structure followed over the next two years. In April 1902 Belmont incorporated the Interborough Rapid Transit Company to operate the subway, and McDonald assigned the lease half of his contract to it. A second contract, for an extension under the East River into Brooklyn, went to Belmont's construction company for $8 million. The company's name declared that it meant to cross borough lines. By 1902 the people building the tunnel and the people who would run trains through it for half a century belonged to the same circle of capital. They were tied to the city by a lease. The city bore the cost of the digging and the risk of overruns. The operator stood to collect the nickels for fifty years.

That division of risk and reward ran through every later argument over the subway, and the city did not choose it out of naivety. Private capital alone had declined to build a subway in Manhattan for thirty years, because the cost of tunneling was too high and the return too uncertain. Public money alone was, in 1900, politically unthinkable as a way to operate a railroad. The compromise put the heaviest and least profitable part of the enterprise, the hole in the ground, on the public ledger. It left the steadiest part, the daily fare, in private hands. In the short run it got the subway built. In the long run it gave the operating company a stake in keeping costs down and service lean, and it gave the city a permanent claim on a system it did not control.

Construction ran for more than four years. The commissioners hired the architects Heins & LaFarge in 1901 to design the underground stations, and they finished the platforms and walls in tile and mosaic. Ceramic plaques marked station names, and panels of colored relief showed local emblems. The decoration announced that the underground was a public room, to be furnished as carefully as a library or a courthouse, and it told the riders that they had paid for it.

On October 27, 1904, the subway formally opened. It ran from City Hall north under the East Side to Grand Central, crossed west beneath 42nd Street to Longacre Square, which was renamed Times Square that year after the newspaper that had built its tower there, and then turned up Broadway to 145th Street. Along that route there were twenty-eight stations. The fare was five cents.

The flat fare mattered as much as the tunnel. A rider going from City Hall to 145th Street paid what a rider going three stops paid, so distance cost nothing extra. Land seven or eight miles from the counting houses of lower Manhattan was suddenly, for the price of a nickel and half an hour, as close to work as a tenement on Cherry Street had been to the docks. The commissioners and reformers who had argued for the subway since the 1890s understood this. They wanted it to pull people out of the downtown wards and onto open ground uptown. They were less certain what would be built on that ground, or by whom, or for whom.

Lots at 181st Street

Some people did not wait to find out. Before the route of the subway was public, a syndicate headed by Henry Morgenthau, a lawyer and real estate investor who would later serve as Woodrow Wilson's ambassador in Constantinople, bought tracts in Washington Heights, at Fort Dyckman near the northern tip of Manhattan, and in the South Bronx. Among them were about 140 lots around the projected express station at 181st Street and Broadway. In 1900 that intersection was a scattering of frame houses and empty hillside, where rock outcrops broke through the old estates above the Hudson. A subway express stop would turn it into a place where thousands of people could live within reach of downtown. Whoever owned the lots on the day the trains arrived would collect the difference between farmland prices and city prices. The city had borrowed to make that difference. The syndicate bought in early to capture it.

The line reached the edges of its territory in stages. The New York Times of October 28, 1904, the morning after the opening, reported the company's announcement that the East Side branch would open as far as the Harlem River on November 3. The rest of the Manhattan and Bronx system would follow in the spring. The Bronx connection came on July 10, 1905, when the link to the Lenox Avenue line opened and subway trains began running up into the borough on the West Farms line, toward a terminal at 180th Street and Bronx Park. The line had been planned to run farther north. During construction it was cut short and the Bronx Park station was made the end of the line, after protests that trains passing over the park would harm the animals at the Bronx

Zoo. The New York Zoological Society's tenants had a voice in the route, and the families who would have lived along the extension did not.

The South Bronx was not empty when the subway arrived. Mott Haven, Melrose, and Morrisania, the old villages and estates of the lower Bronx, had begun to urbanize after the Third Avenue elevated crossed the Harlem River in 1888. Brick row houses and the first apartment buildings went up along the el's route. The subway accelerated what the el had started. The Landmarks Preservation Commission, in designation reports written generations later, describes the 1904 line as setting off a wave of land speculation and a building boom across the borough. Landowners sold farms and estates to developers, who cut them into building lots. The commission calls the turn-of-the-century Bronx a refuge for thousands of second-generation New Yorkers leaving the crowded tenements of East Harlem and the Lower East Side. These were the children of immigrants, many of them Jewish, Irish, Italian, and German, who could afford a few dollars more in rent and wanted the air, light, and newer plumbing that came with it.

The trade press saw the pattern within months. In its review of 1904, the Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide reported that the Bronx was preparing to take in a large share of Manhattan's tenement overflow by building cheap tenements. It found Bronx land transfers running 50 percent above their level of four years earlier. The Record spoke for the city's builders, brokers, and lenders, and it did not treat the overflow as a problem. Its readers saw a market.

The reformers had hoped for something else. The historian Clifton Hood, in his history of the subway, 722 Miles, argues that the IRT's greatest impact fell on the undeveloped land of the Bronx and northern Manhattan. There, he finds, speculators put up tenements for working people in place of the private houses that Progressive reformers had expected. The reformers' picture was drawn from the suburbs of their own class: the clerk or skilled mechanic in a small house with a yard, riding in to work. The economics of the new ground ran the other way. Land along a subway line was valuable because so many people could reach it, and the way to recover that value was to put as many paying households as the law allowed on every lot. A cottage on a fifty-foot frontage near an express station made no sense to a builder who had paid speculative prices for the ground. A five- or six-story walk-up with sixteen or twenty apartments did.

The subway produced new ground in the sense that mattered to owners. It did not add a square foot of land to the Bronx. It changed what the existing land could earn, and it put that change in the hands of whoever held title. The city paid for the tunnel, and the increase in land value went to the syndicates and builders along its route. The tenants who moved north received more space and better buildings than they had left, and they paid rents set by the new value of the ground. The subway's champions had promised to relieve crowding, and in a measured way they did. The crowding moved outward. On the new lots it took a form that a state law, passed the year after the subway contract was signed, had made more expensive and more substantial.

The New Law

The tenement reform campaign of the 1890s reached its height in the Tenement-House Exhibit of 1899. Its organizer, Lawrence Veiller, was a young reformer working with the Charity Organization Society, and he chose a venue that guaranteed attention: Sherry's, the fashionable restaurant and ballroom on Fifth Avenue. He filled it with maps, photographs, statistics, and models. One showed a single block of the Lower East Side with its census of residents, its counts of disease, and its absence of light and plumbing. The exhibit set the evidence of the downtown wards in front of the families who lived along the avenue and who sat in the legislature's lobbies and on its committees.

The exhibit worked. The state created a Tenement House Commission in 1900, chaired by Robert W. De Forest, with Veiller as its secretary. The commission's report became the basis of the Tenement House Act of 1901, the measure New Yorkers soon called the New Law, to distinguish it from the Old Law of 1879 and the buildings erected under it. Veiller did much of the drafting. In 1903 he and De Forest published the commission's findings, with much else, as The Tenement House Problem, a two-volume work from Macmillan that became a standard text of American housing reform.

The New Law's requirements were specific. Every room in a new tenement had to have a window opening to the outside air. The narrow air shafts of the Old Law dumbbell, which had admitted little light and conducted fire and noise from floor to floor, gave way to open courtyards. New buildings had to supply running water and indoor toilets. They had to meet stricter fire standards, including fireproofed stairs and halls in taller buildings. The law also

reached back to existing buildings and required owners to make improvements, including indoor plumbing, in tenements that had stood for decades.

One of those buildings was 97 Orchard Street, between Broome and Delancey. Lucas Glockner, a Prussian immigrant, built it in 1863. Its first residents were twenty-two families who shared outhouses in the rear yard. In 1905, under the 1901 law, it was fitted with indoor plumbing. The changes to buildings like it were often makeshift: toilets in the halls shared between apartments, windows cut through interior walls to give dark rooms borrowed light from the rooms beside them. They were nonetheless the first time the state had told owners of existing buildings that the terms on which they held their property had changed.

The courtyard requirement altered the arithmetic of the lot. Manhattan's grid had divided the island into parcels typically twenty-five feet wide and one hundred feet deep, and the Old Law tenement was built to fit that parcel with only a sliver of open space. A courtyard large enough to satisfy the New Law consumed far more of the ground. On a single narrow lot, what remained could not hold enough apartments to pay for the building. Builders responded by assembling several lots and building across them, or by taking corner lots where two street frontages supplied light. The New Law tenement was therefore usually a bigger building, built by a better-capitalized builder, on a larger assembled site.

That shift fit the new ground beyond the Harlem River and across the East River. Assembling three or four contiguous lots on the Lower East Side meant buying out several owners, each with a standing building and tenants paying rent. In the Bronx or in the open blocks of Brooklyn and northern Manhattan, a builder could buy a whole frontage from a single estate. The New Law and the subway, enacted and contracted within eighteen months of each other, pushed in the same direction. One made the dense new tenement more expensive to build on cramped old lots. The other made cheap open land reachable. Together they sent the larger, better New Law buildings outward and left the downtown wards largely as the Old Law had built them.

Whether the law also raised rents by slowing construction was argued at the time and has been argued since. Landlords and builders blamed the costlier standards for shortages on the Lower East Side. Reformers answered that the old buildings had been cheap because they had been dangerous. Both claims

contained some truth. What is plain is that the 1901 law made decent housing a legal requirement for new buildings without supplying any money to build it. The full cost of each window and toilet was left to the market, and the market recovered it from tenants.

Three Bridges

The Brooklyn Bridge had been the work of two cities. In the decade after consolidation, the single city that replaced them put three more spans across the East River in six years. Each one landed in Manhattan near the crowded downtown and East Side wards and reached out toward open ground in Brooklyn and Queens.

The first was the Williamsburg Bridge, from Delancey Street on the Lower East Side to Broadway in Williamsburg. Its engineer was Leffert L. Buck, and the architect Henry Hornbostel worked on its design. After delays and funding shortfalls, it opened on December 19, 1903. Its main span ran 1,600 feet, the longest of any suspension bridge in the world at its completion, slightly longer than the Brooklyn Bridge's. Its steel towers were plain where the older bridge's were stone and Gothic. The bridge was built for volume. Its deck carried roadways and walkways, tracks for rapid transit trains, and four tracks for trolleys.

The Williamsburg Bridge did for the Lower East Side what the subway did for the Upper West Side and the Bronx. Delancey Street had been widened to receive it, and on the far side lay a Brooklyn neighborhood that had been a separate city until 1855 and was now a short trolley ride from Orchard Street. The bridge is credited with opening Williamsburg as a working-class neighborhood for people from Manhattan. In the years after 1903 tenements went up on its streets, and Jewish families from the Lower East Side crossed it in such numbers that a newspaper of 1904 called it the Jews' Highway. Beyond Williamsburg, farther east in the old town of New Lots, the Brownsville section was filling with the same population.

The second crossing went up just downstream. Planners in 1898 called it simply Bridge No. 3. It was renamed the Manhattan Bridge in 1902, and the engineer Leon Moisseiff, an advocate of new methods for calculating the forces on suspension spans, shaped its design. It ran from the foot of the Bowery and Canal Street to the Brooklyn shore near the old Fulton Ferry district, and it opened to traffic on December 31, 1909. Streetcar service across it began in

1912. Its tracks were built for the rapid transit lines that would eventually tie the Brooklyn system into Manhattan, an expansion still being negotiated when the bridge opened.

The third bridge was the most contested. As commissioner of bridges in the reform administration of Mayor Seth Low, who served in 1902 and 1903, the engineer Gustav Lindenthal took up the long-planned crossing from East 59th Street to Long Island City in Queens. He brought in Hornbostel to redesign it as a cantilever bridge resting on piers on Blackwell's Island, the narrow strip in the river then occupied by the city's penitentiary, almshouse, and hospitals. Low's reform coalition lost the 1903 election to George B. McClellan Jr., the Tammany-backed candidate who served as mayor from 1904 to 1909, and McClellan removed Lindenthal from the bridges department soon after taking office.

Construction dragged. An unfinished span collapsed in a windstorm, and labor unrest held up work. The bridge opened to the public on March 30, 1909, and a ceremonial opening followed on June 12. Its cost came to something like $18 million. It was a heavy steel bridge, with none of the suspended grace of its neighbors downstream, and it carried trolleys, roadways, and rapid transit tracks from Manhattan's East Side into a borough that in 1909 still consisted largely of farms, small towns, and the industrial waterfront of Long Island City.

The three bridges belonged to one program. Each was paid for by the consolidated city's credit, each landed near Manhattan's densest wards, and each was built to carry trains and trolleys as well as wagons and walkers. The planners who had promoted Greater New York in the 1890s had argued that only a single government could afford to tie the islands together. The East River crossings of 1903 to 1909 delivered on that argument. They also delivered what the subway had: a public investment whose value went largely to the owners of land at its far end, in Williamsburg and Brownsville, and soon in Long Island City and the Queens farmland behind it.

The Strike on the East Side

The ground the subway and bridges opened did not empty the Lower East Side. In the first decade of the century it grew more crowded than ever. Immigration from eastern and southern Europe ran at levels the country had not seen before, and for most new arrivals the first address was a tenement within walking

distance of the garment shops, the pushcart markets, and the relatives who had sent for them. The families who moved to Williamsburg and the Bronx were replaced faster than they left.

Manhattan's population reached its all-time peak in 1910, at about 2.2 million people. It has never returned to that figure. Parts of the Lower East Side approached 1,600 people per hectare, roughly 650 to an acre, a density higher than almost any other neighborhood in the world at the time. Residents averaged about 100 square feet of floor space each, the area of a modest bedroom today for each man, woman, and child in a household. Families took in boarders to make the rent, and boarders slept in kitchens and on chairs pushed together. Piecework for the garment trade filled the rooms by day. The housing law of 1901 had raised the standard for new buildings, but the great majority of Lower East Side residents still lived in buildings erected under the old rules or under no rules at all.

In October 1907 a run on New York's trust companies set off a financial panic. Banks called in loans, credit froze, and the country slid into depression through the winter. On the East Side, garment shops cut hours and laid off workers while landlords, by the tenants' accounts, announced a new round of rent increases. Some were reported as high as a third. The increases rested on the same scarcity that had pushed the density to its peak: a constant flow of new arrivals, the demolition of old tenements for bridge approaches, widened streets, and new buildings, and a slower pace of construction under the costlier New Law.

The tenants answered with a strike. It began on December 26, 1907, and lasted until January 9, 1908. Tenants in building after building refused to pay rent until increases were withdrawn or rents reduced. The strike started on the Lower East Side, spread to other parts of Manhattan, and crossed the new bridge into Williamsburg. At its height roughly 10,000 families took part.

The organizers were mostly Jewish immigrant women, and the best known of them was Pauline Newman, a garment worker still in her teens. Newman had come to New York from Lithuania around 1901 as a child. She went to work making hairbrushes and then in the garment trade, and she had spent the summer of 1907 camped on the Palisades across the Hudson with a group of self-supporting women. There they planned a campaign against the high cost of living. When the panic came, she and her comrades went building to building,

organizing tenants floor by floor. The New York Times called her the East Side Joan of Arc.

The strike's strength was that the housewives who paid the rent were the ones refusing to pay it. These women ran households, managed boarders, and kept the accounts, and they understood the price of an apartment as a share of a weekly wage. They turned the tenement's density into an organizing advantage. A single building held dozens of families who could be persuaded in an evening, and a single block held hundreds.

In early 1908 the Socialist Party's organization in the Eighth Assembly District took over direction of the strike. The landlords had the stronger legal weapon. A tenant who did not pay could be put out, and the courts and police enforced the dispossess notices. Mass evictions followed, with furniture piled on sidewalks in midwinter, and police action against the strikers broke the movement in January. About 2,000 households won rent reductions or saw planned increases withdrawn. The rest paid what their landlords asked or moved.

The strike failed in its larger aim, but it put a new claim into the city's argument over ground. The 1901 law had regulated what a landlord could build and how. It said nothing about what he could charge, and in 1907 almost no one in public life believed the state had any business setting rents. The East Side strikers acted as though the price of an apartment were a matter for collective bargaining, like the price of a day's labor in a garment shop. In 1907 they had no law behind them, only the willingness of thousands of families to risk eviction together. That claim would return, in a larger crisis and with a different result.

Under the Rivers

While the city built bridges east, private companies went under the Hudson. The Hudson River had always been the harder crossing: wider and deeper than the East River, with New Jersey a separate state whose railroads ended at the water's edge. The great trunk lines from the west and south brought their passengers to terminals on the Jersey shore at Hoboken, Jersey City, and Weehawken. From there, travelers and commuters crossed to Manhattan by ferry, in fog and ice as well as fair weather.

A tunnel under the river had first been attempted in 1874. In the 1880s the promoter DeWitt Clinton Haskin pushed partway across from Jersey

City before accidents and lost financing stopped the work, and the bores sat abandoned for years. William Gibbs McAdoo, a lawyer and promoter from Tennessee who had come to New York in the 1890s, revived them. In December 1906 he became president of the newly incorporated Hudson and Manhattan Railroad Company. On February 26, 1908, the first of its tunnels, the uptown tubes, opened to passengers.

The Hudson and Manhattan built a small but dense network. Its uptown line ran beneath Sixth Avenue in Manhattan. A downtown pair of tunnels ended at the Hudson Terminal, twin office towers on Church Street, a few blocks from Wall Street. On the New Jersey side the tubes connected with the Hoboken, Pavonia, and Exchange Place terminals of the railroads, so a commuter arriving from the suburbs could change to a fast electric train and be in Manhattan in minutes instead of waiting for a ferry. The tunnels still carry that traffic, as the PATH system, more than a century later.

McAdoo made public relations part of his business. When the last of the four tunnels opened, around 1909 or 1910, he stated his company's policy with a phrase aimed at the railroad barons of the previous generation: "The Tunnel Company believes in the 'public be pleased' policy and opposes the 'public be damned' policy. We believe that the railroad is best which serves the people best." The phrase he turned against was associated with William H. Vanderbilt of the New York Central, and every newspaper reader in the region understood the reference.

The greatest of the railroads was building its own way under the river. For decades the Pennsylvania Railroad, the largest corporation in the country, had ended its passenger lines in Jersey City. In the first years of the century it set out to bring them directly into Manhattan. Tunnels under the Hudson were through by the fall of 1906. Tunnels under the East River, which would connect the station to the Long Island Rail Road, now a Pennsylvania subsidiary, and to a yard in Queens, took until 1909. Work on the station itself began in June 1906, on a site of about two full blocks between Seventh and Eighth Avenues and 31st and 33rd Streets. About 500 buildings were cleared from part of the Tenderloin, then the city's principal Black neighborhood. The station that replaced them, designed by McKim, Mead & White, was a vast granite hall modeled on the baths of ancient Rome.

The Long Island Rail Road started running trains into Pennsylvania Station on September 8, 1910. The station opened to all rail traffic on November 27, 1910. A passenger from Philadelphia, Washington, or Chicago could now ride into the middle of Manhattan without changing to a ferry. A commuter from Jamaica or Flushing could ride under the East River into the same hall. The station placed the Pennsylvania's terminus on Manhattan ground, and the blocks around it, from Herald Square to the garment district taking shape along Seventh Avenue, rose in value in its shadow.

The New York Central answered at 42nd Street. Since 1871 its trains had come down Fourth Avenue, later renamed Park Avenue, into a station at the head of the avenue, and its open tracks and yards had cut a trench through the East Side for blocks to the north. From 1903 to 1913 the railroad replaced the old station and its successors with a new terminal on the same site, designed by Reed and Stem in partnership with Warren and Wetmore. The architects placed every platform below ground, on two levels, with the trains reaching them through tunnels beneath Park Avenue. Moving the railroad underground freed the surface above the tracks for streets and buildings, and the railroad, which owned the ground, stood to profit on both levels: from the trains below and from the property above.

Grand Central Terminal opened officially at 12:01 a.m. on Sunday, February 2, 1913, before construction was entirely finished. More than 150,000 people came through it on its first day. They walked down ramps into a concourse under a vaulted ceiling painted with the constellations, and beneath their feet the trains of the New York Central ran on two levels of track that no one in the hall could see.

In the dozen years since the subway bids were opened, New York had spent heavily on the means of getting into and across Manhattan. The city borrowed to dig the IRT and to raise three bridges over the East River. Private companies tunneled under the Hudson and buried their tracks beneath the streets of midtown. Each project carried more people into the island's center and spread the places they slept across more ground, in the Bronx, in Williamsburg and Brownsville, in Queens, in Hoboken and Jersey City and the suburbs beyond them. By 1913 a garment cutter in the Bronx, a clerk in Flushing, and a broker in a New Jersey suburb could each reach a Manhattan office, one by subway,

one by bridge or tunnel, one by tube or train. The owners of the land at the far end of each line had seen its value rise on the strength of those connections.

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CHAPTER 10

Triangle and Tammany, 1909–1919

On a street sixty feet wide, in what the planners called a "two-times" district, a building could rise 120 feet straight up from the sidewalk. Above that height the walls had to step back from the street, and keep stepping back as they climbed, in proportion to the width of the street below. Over one quarter of the lot, a tower could go as high as its owner was willing to pay for. The rule set no ceiling. It set a formula, and the formula, applied block after block in Manhattan over the next two decades, produced the stepped silhouette that New Yorkers came to call the wedding cake.

The formula belonged to the Zoning Resolution of July 25, 1916, the first comprehensive zoning code adopted by an American city. Taken by itself, it reads as a rule about light and air on crowded streets. It was also a rule about who worked where, and it came out of seven years in which the inside of a New York workplace stopped being the private business of the person who owned or leased it. The pressure came from two places. Garment workers, most of them young immigrant women, had struck, buried their dead, and forced the State of New York to send legislators into factories. Merchants on Fifth Avenue, watching the factories those workers filled creep up the side streets toward their shop windows, wanted the city to draw a line. The law that shaped the skyline answered both. Between them stood Tammany Hall, which had spent most of

its history opposing the kind of government that tells owners what to do with their buildings, and which in these years decided to sponsor it.

The Uprising

On the evening of November 22, 1909, Local 25 of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union filled the Great Hall of Cooper Union with shirtwaist makers. The shirtwaist, the tailored blouse worn by working and middle-class women across the country, was made in shops scattered through the loft buildings of lower Manhattan, and the union had been fighting a series of shop-by-shop strikes that autumn without much success. The question before the meeting was whether to call out the whole trade. Speaker after speaker, including union officials and sympathetic public figures, urged caution.

Clara Lemlich was twenty-three, a shirtwaist worker and union activist who had already been beaten on a picket line. After hours of speeches she made her way to the platform and spoke in Yiddish, the language of most of the hall. As the Jewish Women's Archive gives her words, she said: "I am one of those who suffers from the abuses described here, and I move that we go on a general strike." Other versions of the sentence circulate, and the exact wording matters less than its effect. The meeting carried the motion. The chairman then asked the crowd to take an oath, and most of those present raised their right arms and pledged in Yiddish: "If I turn traitor to the cause I now pledge, may my hand wither from the arm I now raise."

Within a day about 15,000 shirtwaist workers had left their machines. The number grew over the following weeks to somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000, and the walkout entered labor history as the Uprising of the 20,000. Most strikers were Jewish and Italian women, many of them between sixteen and twenty-five. Lemlich was one of the organizers who kept it going, along with Rose Schneiderman and Pauline Newman. They worked through the union and through the Women's Trade Union League, which brought wealthy allies onto the picket lines and into the courts where strikers were brought after arrests. The alliance was uneasy. It was also new: women from Fifth Avenue mansions and women from Rivington Street tenements standing on the same sidewalks outside the same shops.

The strike lasted through the winter, into February 1910 by most counts and into March by some. When it ended, more than 300 shops had signed

agreements recognizing the union and conceding gains in wages, hours, and conditions. Many of the largest manufacturers had refused, and the settlements varied from shop to shop. It was a partial victory, and it left the most basic questions about the workplace itself, about doors, stairways, fire escapes, and how many people could be packed onto a floor, where they had been: in the hands of the employer and the building owner.

The geography of the trade explains why. By 1909 the garment industry had largely moved its heaviest work out of the tenement apartments that Jacob Riis had photographed into the loft buildings that had gone up in the blocks around Washington Square, along Broadway below Fourteenth Street, and on the side streets of the old dry-goods district. A loft was a shell: open floors, large windows, freight elevators, and few interior walls. A manufacturer leased one or more floors and filled them with sewing machines, cutting tables, and workers. The building owner answered to the building code, which concerned itself with the structure. The tenant answered to almost no one about how the floor was arranged once the machines were in. The strikers had won the right to bargain over pay and hours in many shops. The physical shop, its exits and its crowding, remained the employer's to arrange.

Washington Place and Greene Street

The Asch Building stood at the northwest corner of Washington Place and Greene Street, a block east of Washington Square, ten stories of brick and stone that its builders had advertised as fireproof. The Triangle Waist Company, owned by Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, occupied the top three floors. It employed roughly 500 people, most of them young Jewish and Italian women.

Near closing time on Saturday, March 25, 1911, fire broke out on the eighth floor. Most accounts place its start in a bin of fabric scraps beneath a cutting table, a little before a quarter to five, when workers were collecting their pay and their coats. Cotton scraps, tissue patterns, and the lint that hung in the air of any shirtwaist floor burned fast. The fire climbed to the ninth and tenth floors within minutes. Workers on the tenth floor, where the executive offices were, were warned by telephone and many escaped over the roof. On the ninth floor, by the usual account, the warning never came.

The ninth floor held the largest number of workers and the fewest ways out. Of the two stairways to the street, one was locked, a practice the owners

defended as a guard against theft. The door to the other opened inward, against the press of bodies trying to get through it. Of the building's four elevators only one was fully working. The single fire escape was badly built and gave way under the people crowding onto it.

Most of the dead died within about eighteen minutes. Many jumped from the ninth-floor windows to the sidewalks of Greene Street and Washington Place, in front of crowds that had gathered at the sound of the engines. Among the people in the street that afternoon was Frances Perkins, the executive secretary of the New York City Consumers' League, who had taken a master's degree at Columbia the year before and who spent her working days investigating the conditions under which goods were made and sold. She watched the bodies fall.

The New York Times's front page the next morning, March 26, 1911, carried the headline "141 Men and Girls Die in Waist Factory Fire." The count rose over the following days, and the figure settled at 146: 123 women and girls and twenty-three men, some of them as young as fourteen. The Times noted something else that became central to the argument that followed. The building, it reported, showed hardly any signs of damage. The fireproof construction had worked. The structure stood, its floors and walls intact, while its occupants burned or fell.

The bodies were laid out on a pier on the East River so that families could walk the rows and identify their daughters, sisters, and wives. Some were never identified, and in early April a funeral procession for the unclaimed dead drew crowds that lined the route through lower Manhattan.

Blanck and Harris were indicted for manslaughter on the theory that the locked stairway door had caused the deaths. In December 1911 a jury acquitted them; the prosecution could not prove to its satisfaction that the owners knew the door was locked at the time of the fire. Civil suits dragged on until 1913, when they were settled for roughly $75 for each life lost.

The criminal and civil outcomes showed the limits of the law as it stood. The building code had been written to keep buildings from collapsing and from spreading fire to their neighbors, and the Asch Building had met it. The code said much less about how many people could work on an upper floor, how wide a stairway had to be, which way a door should swing, or whether an employer could lock one. Those questions belonged to the employer's management of his leased space. After March 25 a large and organized part of the city, including the

strikers of 1909 and their allies in the Women's Trade Union League, demanded that the state answer them.

The Commission

On June 30, 1911, three months after the fire, the State of New York created the Factory Investigating Commission. Its powers were broad for the period. It could subpoena witnesses and take testimony under oath, and it was charged with investigating fire hazards, sanitation, occupational disease, and manufacturing in tenements. At first its mandate extended only to the state's nine largest cities, of which New York was by far the most important.

The men who ran it came from the organization that reformers had spent decades fighting. The chairman was Robert F. Wagner, majority leader of the State Senate, a German-born lawyer who had grown up in Yorkville. The vice chairman was Alfred E. Smith, the Assembly leader, who had been raised on the Lower East Side near the Brooklyn Bridge and had worked in the Fulton Fish Market before entering politics. Both were Tammany Democrats from Manhattan. The commission's staff included Frances Perkins, who became one of its investigators and who led the legislators on inspection tours of factories across the state.

Perkins described those years later in a lecture, the text of which is held at Cornell's Kheel Center. Smith, she said, had appointed himself to the commission so that he could see conditions with his own eyes. She recalled that the commission sat for four years and produced a report that ran to about seven volumes. The tours she organized took Wagner and Smith into places that state legislators did not ordinarily enter: upstate canneries, bakery cellars, factories where children worked, lofts where the exits were blocked by stock. The commission's hearings put workers and owners under oath on the record. Its published reports, with their testimony and inspection findings, became the evidentiary foundation for a new body of law.

Between 1912 and 1914 the legislature passed most of the bills the commission sponsored, thirteen of seventeen by the usual count. Together they amounted to a rewriting of the state's factory code. New laws addressed fire safety in factories, and others restricted the hours of women and children and regulated sanitation in factories and bakeries. In the same period the state

adopted workmen's compensation, which shifted the cost of workplace injury from the injured worker and his family to the employer and the insurer.

The commission also turned its attention to manufacturing done in homes. Its investigators found garment finishing, artificial flower making, and other piecework still carried on in tenement apartments, where children worked beside their parents and where no factory inspector could practically follow the work. The commission recommended that tenement manufacturing be abolished entirely. The legislature did not go that far at once, but the recommendation and the tighter licensing that followed made home work costlier and riskier for manufacturers, and pushed still more garment production out of the tenements and into lofts. A consequence of the reform, in other words, was more demand for exactly the kind of building the Triangle Company had occupied, now built and run under stricter rules.

The commission's work marks a change in what the state of New York claimed the right to regulate. The tenement laws of 1867, 1879, and 1901 had established that the state could tell a landlord how much of a lot he could cover, how many windows a room needed, and what plumbing a building had to have. Those were laws about dwellings, justified by the health of the people who lived in them. The factory code of 1912 to 1914 applied the same logic to the workplace. The interior of a leased loft, the swing of its doors, the number of people on its floors, the hours they spent there, became public business enforceable by inspection and penalty. An owner's right to do what he liked with his space, and an employer's right to arrange his floor as he saw fit, were each narrowed by statute.

Silent Charlie

That the commission was led by Tammany legislators was the work, in large part, of Charles F. Murphy, who ran the organization from 1902 until his death on April 25, 1924. Murphy was the son of Irish immigrants and had come up through the saloons and district clubs of the Gas House district on the East Side. He was called Silent Charlie, for his habit of saying little in public and less to reporters. He had inherited a Tammany still carrying the reputation of the Tweed years and of the police scandals of the 1890s, an organization that reformers had beaten in 1894 and 1901 by running against its corruption.

Murphy's response was to make Tammany useful to the reform-minded voters who kept defeating it. He backed candidates with clean records and allowed his ablest protégés, Wagner and Smith above all, room to build careers on legislation that the organization's older leaders would have opposed. After Triangle he let them pass labor laws and building and fire code reforms that cost the organization some support among the manufacturers and landlords who had long been among its contributors. Murphy calculated that the much larger number of voters who worked in the lofts and lived in the tenements, Jewish and Italian as well as Irish, would reward the organization that delivered them. In districts where the Socialist Party was gaining ground among garment workers, the calculation had urgency.

The same reckoning shaped Tammany's position on woman suffrage. The organization had opposed it for decades. Around 1917 Murphy changed course and gave Carrie Chapman Catt, the national suffrage leader, his promise that Tammany would do nothing to block it. In November 1917 the state's voters approved a constitutional amendment granting women the vote, and the margin in New York City carried the measure. Many of the women who would now be voting had struck in 1909 and marched behind the Triangle coffins in 1911.

None of this made Tammany clean. Patronage, contracts, and the protection of favored businesses continued under Murphy, and the organization's methods of holding power changed less than its legislative program. The city's Landmarks Preservation Commission, in a 2013 designation report, described Murphy as "widely regarded as the most effective machine politician in the city's history." His effectiveness lay in reading which way the electorate was moving and getting there first. A machine that had for half a century treated government as a source of jobs and contracts discovered that regulating private property for the benefit of its tenants and workers was also a way to keep office.

The discovery did not protect Tammany from defeat at City Hall. In November 1913 the reformers of the Fusion movement nominated John Purroy Mitchel, a thirty-four-year-old lawyer and former president of the Board of Aldermen who had built a reputation investigating municipal waste. Mitchel was the grandson of the Irish nationalist John Mitchel and a Catholic, which blunted the ethnic appeal Tammany usually enjoyed against Protestant reformers. He won with 358,181 votes, 57 percent, against 233,919 for the Tammany

candidate, Edward E. McCall, and carried every borough of the consolidated city.

Mitchel took office on January 1, 1914, and served until the last day of 1917. His administration concentrated on the police department, which it worked to professionalize, and on the schools. He championed the Gary Plan, a reorganization of the school day borrowed from Gary, Indiana, that rotated pupils among classrooms, workshops, and playgrounds to use buildings more fully. Parents and labor groups protested, especially in immigrant neighborhoods in Manhattan and the Bronx, where many families read the plan as a way to steer their children toward industrial training and away from academic schooling. Mitchel also tried to bring rapid transit under municipal control, and failed; the private operators kept their leases under the Dual Contracts the city had signed in 1913. The Mitchel years were the second reform interlude of the consolidated city. They are remembered mostly for what happened to the city's land law while he was mayor.

The Shadow on Broadway

The Equitable Building at 120 Broadway, completed in 1915, filled its entire block between Broadway and Nassau Street, Cedar Street and Pine Street, and rose with no setbacks. It was built as one enormous slab, a straight extrusion of its lot into the sky. The shadow it cast at midday covered roughly seven acres of lower Manhattan. Neighboring buildings, some of them substantial towers themselves, lost their direct sunlight along their Broadway fronts. Owners nearby reportedly went to the city's tax assessors arguing that the Equitable's bulk had lowered the rents their buildings could command.

The Equitable was the most visible demonstration of a problem that New York's builders had been creating for twenty years. Steel frames and elevators had removed the practical limits on height, and no law replaced them. An owner could build to the property line and as high as his financing allowed, regardless of what it did to the street below or the buildings next door. In the narrow streets of the financial district, office towers had turned some blocks into canyons that saw direct sun for minutes a day. Proposals for height limits had circulated since the 1890s, and reformers had studied the zoning ordinances of German cities, but property owners had defeated every attempt

to restrict what they could build. The Equitable gave the cause a single building that even other property owners could resent.

The more decisive pressure came from three miles north. The Fifth Avenue Association had been formed in 1907 by merchants and property owners along the avenue, which by then had become the city's most fashionable shopping street. Their target was the loft building. As the garment industry moved north from its old quarters below Fourteenth Street, manufacturers had built and leased new lofts in the blocks between Twenty-third Street and Thirty-fourth Street and then above, on the side streets east and west of Fifth Avenue. Each loft brought hundreds of workers onto the sidewalks at the noon hour and at closing time, crowding past the windows of the department stores, jewelers, and dressmakers who catered to the carriage trade. The merchants saw their customers deterred and their property values threatened.

The association's campaign sharpened after 1911, as the new factory code pushed still more production into lofts and the industry needed still more loft space. In 1915 and 1916 it ran a public campaign under the slogan "Save New York." Its methods went well beyond appeals. It organized boycotts of manufacturers who refused to move away from the avenue. It pressed banks and insurance companies not to lend on new loft construction in the area. And it lobbied City Hall for a law that would keep factories off Fifth Avenue permanently.

The city had already begun to study the question. A Commission on Building Districts and Restrictions, appointed in the Mitchel years, took testimony from property owners, architects, and reformers and published its final report in 1916. The resolution's chief authors were George McAneny, the reform official who had served as Manhattan borough president and pressed for the study, and Edward M. Bassett, a Brooklyn lawyer who spent much of the rest of his career defending zoning in the courts and promoting it around the country. They faced a legal difficulty. A law that simply limited what owners could build risked being struck down as a taking of property without compensation. Bassett's answer was to ground the restrictions in the state's police power to protect public health, safety, and welfare, the same power that justified the tenement laws and the new factory code, and to apply them uniformly across the whole city so that no owner could claim to have been singled out.

The Board of Estimate adopted the Zoning Resolution on July 25, 1916. It divided every block of the five boroughs into districts governed by three sets of rules. Use districts separated residential areas, where most business and all manufacturing were barred; business districts, where stores and offices were allowed but heavy industry was not; and unrestricted districts, where anything could be built. Height districts, five of them, set the height at which a building had to begin stepping back, measured as a multiple of the width of the street it faced. Area districts governed how much of a lot a building could cover and how large its yards and courts had to be.

The height rules produced the formula that opened this chapter. A building in a two-times district on a sixty-foot street could rise 120 feet at the property line before stepping back; one in a one-and-a-half-times district would step back sooner. There was no absolute height limit anywhere in the city. Above the setbacks, a tower occupying no more than a quarter of its lot could rise without restriction. An Equitable Building, a block-filling slab rising sheer from the sidewalk, could not be built again. A taller building could, so long as it narrowed as it rose.

The use rules carried the Fifth Avenue Association's victory. Manufacturing was barred from the blocks along and near the avenue in midtown, and new loft buildings with factory floors could no longer go up beside the department stores. Existing factories were allowed to remain, but the association's boycotts and lending pressure, now backed by law, made staying uncomfortable. By October 1916 the great majority of the garment manufacturers in the blocks near Fifth Avenue had agreed to relocate. They went west, into blocks the zoning code left open to manufacturing, between Thirty-fourth and Forty-first Streets west of Sixth Avenue, toward Ninth. There, mostly between 1919 and 1931, builders put up the setback loft towers of twelve to thirty stories that became the Garment District, each of them a factory shaped by the 1916 formula and run under the post-Triangle code.

A New York Times editorial greeted the law as "the most important step in the development of New York City since the construction of the subways." The comparison was apt. The subway had shown that public action could create value on land far from the existing city by making it reachable. Zoning showed that public action could protect or reduce the value of land already built on, by deciding what could rise on it and who could work there. It applied as much to

the open lots of Queens and the Bronx as to the towers of lower Manhattan, and as the subway lines built under the Dual Contracts pushed into farmland over the following decade, the zoning map was already in place to say which of those new blocks would hold apartment houses and which would hold factories. The resolution has been amended thousands of times since, and the city replaced it wholesale in 1961, but its basic premise, that every lot in the city falls under a public rule about what can be built on it, has held.

The premise had more than one source, and the sources pulled in different directions. The factory code that followed Triangle protected the workers inside the buildings. The zoning code that followed the Fifth Avenue campaign protected the merchants outside them, in part by moving the workers. Both rested on the same legal ground, the state's power to regulate private property for the public welfare, and both established that a building in New York was no longer the sole concern of its owner. The first New Yorkers to feel the full weight of that idea in their daily lives were the garment workers, who were made safer on their floors and then told which streets their floors could stand on.

Fusion's End and the Fall of 1918

Mitchel's reform administration did not survive the war. The United States entered the conflict in April 1917, and Mitchel made military preparedness and loyalty the themes of his reelection campaign that fall. His opponents built a coalition out of everyone his administration had alienated. Tammany, with William Randolph Hearst's newspapers behind it, nominated John F. Hylan, a Brooklyn county judge who had once worked as a motorman on the elevated railroad and who ran as a defender of the five-cent fare and an enemy of the transit companies. The Socialist Party ran Morris Hillquit, a lawyer who had represented garment unions and who opposed American participation in the war.

On November 6, 1917, Hylan won with 314,010 votes. Mitchel, running on the Fusion line, took 155,497. Hillquit drew 145,332, nearly as many as the sitting mayor. The Republican, William M. Bennett, took 56,438. Mitchel had won every borough four years earlier. Now he finished a distant second to a Tammany candidate whose program was largely a set of grievances against the reform government. He joined the Army Air Service after leaving office and was killed in a training flight in Louisiana on July 6, 1918, at thirty-eight.

The war had filled the harbor. Troopships, cargo vessels, and naval transports crowded the piers on both sides of the river, and the port ran at a pace it had never known, carrying men and supplies to France and bringing ships home with soldiers, sailors, and passengers. In the summer of 1918 the ships also brought influenza.

The new mayor had appointed Royal S. Copeland, a physician, as health commissioner in the spring of 1918. On August 17, as reports arrived of a severe influenza spreading in Europe, Copeland told the public: "We have not felt and do not feel any anxiety about what people call 'Spanish Influenza.'" On September 4 the French liner Rochambeau docked in New York with twenty-two influenza cases aboard; two passengers had already died at sea. On September 12 Copeland placed the Port of New York under quarantine, requiring inspection of arriving ships and the removal of sick passengers and crew to hospitals. By then the disease was already in the city.

Copeland chose a strategy that differed from the one adopted in many other American cities. He did not close the schools, the theaters, or the churches. His department isolated the sick, at home where possible and in hospitals where not, and the schools and theaters stayed open. His most distinctive measure addressed the crowding of the transit system. Copeland ordered businesses to stagger their opening and closing hours, so that the city's workers would not all pour into the subway and the elevated at the same moments of morning and evening.

The epidemic peaked in October. On October 23, 1918, 851 New Yorkers died of influenza, the highest daily toll ever recorded in the city. The disease and its companion pneumonia moved through the city in waves into the following year. The city's total deaths are usually put at around 30,000, a figure that rises or falls depending on how pneumonia deaths and later waves are tallied.

The staggered hours order was a small measure, but it rested on the same claim the factory code and the zoning resolution had made. In 1911 the state had told employers how to arrange their floors. In 1916 the city had told owners which streets their factories could occupy and how their buildings could rise. In the fall of 1918 the health commissioner told employers across the city when their workers could arrive and leave, because the trains that carried those workers from Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx to the lofts and offices of Manhattan had become places where the disease spread. The lofts of the new

Garment District, still mostly unbuilt, would fill the following decade with tens of thousands of workers arriving on the same trains, at hours the government now had shown it could set.

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CHAPTER 11

Dual Contracts and the Outer Boroughs, 1913–1929

On August 28, 1922, the Queensboro Corporation paid the radio station WEAF $50 for ten minutes of airtime and used them to sell apartments in Jackson Heights, Queens. The buildings on offer were a few years old, and the neighborhood was not much older. Until the second decade of the century, the land east of Long Island City had been mostly farms and country roads, too far from Manhattan for anyone who worked there to live on it. The corporation had bought that land expecting the city to carry a rapid transit line across the fields, and the city had done so. Trains reached the edge of Jackson Heights in 1917. They ran under agreements signed on March 19, 1913, under which most of the subway system that New Yorkers still ride would be built or rebuilt.

Two Companies, One System

The first subway was nine years old in 1913, and it was full. The census showed why. The consolidated city had counted 3.44 million people in 1900 and 4.77 million in 1910, a gain of more than a third in one decade. Manhattan alone held more than two million, most of them packed below Fourteenth Street and in the tenement districts of the East Side and Harlem. The 1904 line and its extensions had opened Washington Heights and the West Bronx, and the

bridges of the previous decade had begun to draw families off the Lower East Side. These were partial measures. The rest of the city's land remained out of reach of anyone who had to be at a workbench or a desk in Manhattan by eight in the morning.

Two private companies stood ready to build, and each wanted what the other had. The Interborough Rapid Transit Company, which ran the original subway, had pushed it under the East River to Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn in 1908 and wanted to go deeper into that borough. The Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company ran elevated and surface lines across most of Brooklyn, but it barely reached Manhattan, and only by way of the Brooklyn Bridge. Its owners wanted Manhattan riders and a share of the traffic the IRT had monopolized. The city could have given the whole future system to one operator. It chose to split the work, and the agreements took their name from that choice. The Dual Contracts were two separate sets of contracts, one with each company, signed in the last months of William J. Gaynor's mayoralty (1910–13). Gaynor died in office that September.

Under the contracts the IRT and the BRT would build new lines or rebuild old ones and then operate them for 49 years. The city committed its borrowing power to construction, and the companies brought their own capital and their experience running trains. The partnership was the same one that had produced the first subway, scaled up to cover three boroughs. The IRT received the Lexington Avenue and Seventh Avenue trunks that turned its single route into an H-shaped system in Manhattan. It also received extensions north into the Bronx, east into Brooklyn, and across the East River into Queens. The BRT received tunnels under the East River and tracks over the Manhattan Bridge, which gave its Brooklyn lines the Manhattan connections they had lacked. The fare on all of it remained a nickel.

The contracts were written as transit policy, and their largest consequence was for land. A station placed in open country raised the price of every lot within walking distance of it, and the gain went to whoever owned those lots when the route was announced. The city could pick the routes. In doing so it picked which farms in the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn would become apartment districts within fifteen years and which would wait a generation or more. Speculators understood this at once, as Henry Morgenthau's syndicate had understood it at 181st Street a decade earlier. What changed in 1913 was

the scale. The lines ran for miles through country with few houses on it, because the population they were meant to serve did not yet live there. They were built to bring that population out.

Rails Across the Fields

Queens showed the method most plainly. The Dual Contracts gave the IRT ownership of two new elevated lines that branched from a single interchange at Queensboro Plaza in Long Island City. One ran north to Astoria. The other, longer line ran east toward Flushing and was built first only as far as Corona. The BRT received trackage rights over both, so the two competitors shared the borough's fares. In a city that had just divided its transit between rival companies, Queens became joint territory, an undeveloped district whose future riders were split between operators before most of them had moved there.

Much of the Flushing line went up in the early 1910s over land that was still empty. Roosevelt Avenue, the street beneath its tracks, had not yet been built, and it was laid out under and after the steel structure. Queens civic leaders spent these years pressing for more Dual Contracts lines, because they could see what a line did to a district. They also saw that Queens, with its farms, marshes, and scattered villages, would remain a backwater without one. The structures cost less to put up than tunnels, which was one reason most of the new outer-borough mileage ran in the air. Building on stilts also meant the trains could precede the streets.

The Astoria line opened on February 1, 1917, as an extension from Queensboro Plaza. On April 21 the Flushing line opened as far as Alburtis Avenue in Corona, now the 103rd Street–Corona Plaza station, then the end of the line. On July 23, 1917, tracks across the Queensboro Bridge went into service, and Second Avenue elevated trains began running from Manhattan to Queensboro Plaza and on to Astoria or Corona. With that, a worker on the East Side could reach central Queens on a single nickel fare. Over the next decade the Flushing line was pushed in both directions. It was extended west under the river and across Manhattan to Fifth Avenue on March 22, 1926, and to Times Square on March 14, 1927. In 1928 it reached Flushing itself, the old village whose name it had carried from the start.

The Bronx line that mattered most ran up Jerome Avenue. The IRT's Lexington Avenue trains came up from Manhattan, surfaced in the South Bronx,

and climbed onto an elevated structure above Jerome Avenue that carried them north toward Woodlawn. Sections opened in stages through 1917 and 1918. The route ran a few blocks west of the Grand Concourse, a broad boulevard that had been laid out across the ridge of the West Bronx and had not yet been built up. A second IRT branch ran east toward Pelham Bay, through a part of the borough that was even less built up and that would fill more slowly.

In Brooklyn the IRT carried its 1908 line east from Atlantic Avenue under Eastern Parkway, the parkway that Olmsted and Vaux had designed as an approach to Prospect Park. It also agreed to build a branch south under Nostrand Avenue, into the farmland and scattered houses of Flatbush. Construction there set off the same pattern as in Queens and the Bronx: builders bought frontage near the planned stations before the trains ran and put up apartment houses and rows of two-family homes. The BRT, meanwhile, rebuilt its own lines and ran them through the new East River crossings into Manhattan. Southern Brooklyn's old excursion railways became part of a commuter system.

Taken together, these lines extended the old tenement districts' reach by miles. The people who would fill the new blocks were mostly not newcomers to New York. They were families who already lived in Manhattan, many of them the children of immigrants, and who could now afford a few more rooms farther from work at the same nickel fare. The question for each district was who would build for them and on what terms.

The Garden Apartment

In Jackson Heights one company answered that question for an entire neighborhood. Edward A. MacDougall, the developer behind the Queensboro Corporation, had watched the Queensboro Bridge go up and the Dual Contracts take shape. By most accounts he bought as many farms as he could along the route the Flushing line was expected to take. The land he assembled lay mainly north of the future Roosevelt Avenue. The corporation held enough of it to plan whole blocks at once, which the lot-by-lot builders of Manhattan and Brooklyn could rarely do.

The first buildings went up before the trains arrived. In 1916 the corporation advertised four- and five-room apartments at $24 to $45 a month and called them "Equal to the best in Manhattan." The pitch was aimed at a household that could pay more than the tenement districts charged, wanted light and

air, and would ride a train for both. In 1917 the corporation built a complex it called the Garden Apartments. The name described a central planted court shared by the tenants, and with it the company coined a term that spread so widely that in 1925 it renamed its own buildings the Greystone Apartments to keep them distinct from the imitations.

MacDougall set out his principles for multifamily housing in plain terms. Build on a full block. Leave the interior of the block open as a garden running its whole length, so that every apartment gets sunlight and cross-ventilation. Set the buildings back from the lot lines to leave room for lawns. Make the buildings freestanding where possible, so that more rooms are corner rooms with windows on two sides. Each point answered a defect of the narrow city lot. The 1901 Tenement House Act had forced builders on twenty-five-foot lots to provide courts and windows. A company that controlled two hundred feet of frontage could treat the whole block as a single site and put the open space in the middle, where all the residents could use it.

The architect who gave the idea its form was Andrew J. Thomas. In May 1919 the corporation announced that Linden Court, on the block bounded by 84th and 85th Streets between Roosevelt and 37th Avenues, would be the first building offered under its Cooperative Ownership Plan. Thomas designed it as low buildings around a long interior garden, and it is generally treated as the company's first true garden apartment complex. Thomas followed it with the Chateau in 1922, on 80th and 81st Streets south of 34th Avenue, and the Towers a year or two later, on the block just north. The Chateau's slate roofs and the Towers' rooftop pavilions gave each building an identity a buyer could name.

The Cooperative Ownership Plan changed what the corporation was selling. A cooperator bought shares in the building and received the right to occupy an apartment, so a family that could not afford a house could still own a stake in its home. For the company the plan moved capital back into its hands quickly and spread the risk of a large project across many buyers. In 1919, with a housing shortage worsening across the city, an apartment that could be bought rather than rented looked like protection against a landlord. That was the appeal the radio pitch of 1922 made to a mass audience. A family that bought into Linden Court or the Chateau was buying a home and also a defense against the rent increases that renters elsewhere in the city were fighting.

Jackson Heights was a private plan from start to finish, and its density, its gardens, its prices, and its choice of buyers were the corporation's decisions. The public's part was the train. Without the Flushing line the farms would have stayed farms. With it, the value created by the city's borrowing passed to the company that had bought the land in time, which spent part of that value on an unusually good design. The neighborhood showed what a well-capitalized owner could do with a new station and a full block. It also showed how much of the outcome depended on that owner's intentions.

Strike and Emergency

The new lines opened into a city at war. American entry in April 1917 pulled steel, lumber, labor, and credit into military production, and residential building in New York nearly stopped. By 1919 builders put up only 89 tenements in the entire city, with 1,481 apartments among them, for a population that was still rising. Soldiers came home and married. Workers came to the city for wartime jobs and stayed. With almost no vacant apartments, landlords could raise rents at each lease renewal and evict tenants who refused to pay.

Tenants answered by organizing, borough by borough and neighborhood by neighborhood. Between 1918 and 1920 a string of associations led rent strikes across the city: the Bronx Tenants League, the Harlem Tenants League, the Brownsville Tenant League, the Williamsburg Tenant League, the Washington Heights Tenants League, and the Brooklyn Tenants Union. The Socialist Party, strong in the Jewish neighborhoods of Brownsville, Williamsburg, and the East Bronx, gave the movement organizers and a political program. The strikers numbered at least in the tens of thousands, and estimates run far higher. The tactics were those of the 1907 East Side strike on a larger scale. Whole buildings withheld rent together, and families who were served with eviction notices answered with crowds in the hallway and lawyers in the municipal courts. The 1907 strikers had demanded that the law limit rents. Twelve years later the demand came from enough neighborhoods, and enough voters, that Albany had to respond.

In April 1920 the state legislature passed the Emergency Rent Laws, New York's first rent control. In September a special session extended and strengthened them. The laws did not fix rents at a set figure. They moved disputes over increases into the courts and changed the burden of proof there. Any increase

over the previous year's rent was presumed to be "unjust, unreasonable and oppressive" unless the owner could show otherwise. A tenant facing a raise could refuse to pay the increase and make the landlord prove in court that it was justified by costs. The laws also limited the grounds on which landlords could evict tenants who stayed and paid the old rent.

The Emergency Rent Laws accepted three propositions that would govern New York housing politics for the rest of the century. The first was that a shortage could be severe enough to count as an emergency. The second was that a tenant already in an apartment had a claim to stay in it at a reasonable rent. The third was that a court could decide what reasonable meant. Landlords challenged the laws as a taking of their property, and the courts allowed them to stand because they were framed as temporary. That framing became a habit. Each renewal of rent regulation in the decades to come would rest on a finding that the emergency continued.

The legislature knew that limiting rents would not create apartments, and its other answer to the shortage was a subsidy for supply. A 1921 state law allowed cities to exempt new housing from real estate taxes for ten years, applied to apartments built between 1920 and 1924. New York City adopted it. A builder who broke ground in those years would pay little or no property tax for a decade on a building that tenants in a shortage were eager to rent, and the rents were not covered by the emergency laws. The policy gave sitting tenants protection and gave builders of new housing a public payment, and it pointed both at the same shortage.

The Concourse

The two measures met on the Grand Concourse. The Landmarks Preservation Commission's 2011 report designating the Grand Concourse Historic District credits two things with setting off intensive residential building along the boulevard: the completion of the Jerome Avenue line in 1918 and the 1921 tax exemption. The train brought the boulevard within a short ride of midtown and the garment lofts. The exemption made the arithmetic of building there unusually favorable just as the shortage peaked.

The district the commission designated runs for about a mile along the Concourse, from East 153rd Street to East 167th Street. It contains 61 apartment houses built between 1917 and 1959. Nearly half went up in the single

decade from 1922 to 1931. Most are five or six stories tall, with a courtyard or a deep entrance court, a lobby, and a facade of brick and cast stone in the Renaissance, Tudor, or, later, Art Deco manner. The commission's report identifies the five- and six-story apartment house as the type that came to dominate the Bronx. Thousands of buildings on the same general model went up along Jerome Avenue, University Avenue, Walton Avenue, and the side streets of the West Bronx, and then across the borough.

The building did not stop with the 1920s. The Independent Subway System's Concourse line, opened under the boulevard in 1933, brought a second wave, and by the mid-1930s almost three hundred apartment buildings lined the Concourse. Their tenants were mostly upwardly mobile Jewish and Italian families, many of them the sons and daughters of immigrants who had first settled on the Lower East Side. For the city's rising Jewish families in particular, the West Bronx was the place to go, and an address on or near the Concourse, already called the Champs-Elysées of the Bronx, signaled that a family had arrived. The route from Orchard Street to the Concourse ran through a garment shop, a civil service examination, or a small business, and it ended up the Jerome Avenue line.

The Concourse buildings were tenements in the legal sense. Under the 1901 law, which had lowered the 1867 threshold of more than three families, any building housing three or more families was a tenement. In every other sense they differed from what the word had meant in 1900. Each apartment had its own bathroom and windows on a street or a planted court. Many buildings had elevators, and the rooms were larger and more numerous. They were built under the 1901 law's rules for light and air, on lots wider than the Lower East Side's, by builders paying almost no property tax for a decade. The city had run a train to the boulevard. The state had waived the tax that would otherwise have gone toward paying for the train. The families who moved in paid rent to private owners, at prices the market set during the exemption years. They received what the public had financed in better housing, and the owners received it in their returns.

Brooklyn and Queens followed the same course along their new lines. Apartment houses rose along Eastern Parkway and in Crown Heights. Along the Nostrand Avenue line and in Flatbush, apartment blocks went up beside the two-family houses. The BRT's rebuilt lines carried new rows of attached

houses into Bensonhurst and Borough Park, and the Flushing line brought apartment blocks to Sunnyside. The building types varied by borough. The pattern held across all three: a public line, a construction boom timed to the shortage and the exemption, and a population of families who had been born in the old immigrant districts, or brought to them as children, moving outward.

The Door Closes

The families filling these neighborhoods would not be followed by large numbers of new arrivals from Europe. Congress had begun shutting the door in 1921, with the Emergency Quota Act of May 19. On May 26, 1924, it made the restriction permanent with the Immigration Act of 1924, known after its sponsors as the Johnson-Reed Act. The law limited annual immigration from each country to 2 percent of the number of people of that nationality living in the United States in 1890. Choosing 1890 was deliberate. It came before the great migrations from southern and eastern Europe, so it held down the quotas for Italians, Russian and Polish Jews, Greeks, and Slavs while leaving larger ones for Britain, Germany, and Scandinavia. The act capped quota immigration at 164,667 a year. It also required immigrants to obtain visas at American consulates abroad before they traveled, so the decisive inspection now took place at a consulate in Naples or Warsaw and no longer in the harbor.

New York had been built in large part by the migrations the law cut off. Italy and the Russian Empire had been the leading sources of the city's newcomers from 1880 until 1924, the years when the population of the area that became Greater New York multiplied several times. After 1924 that flow fell to a fraction of its former size. In 1920, 36 percent of New Yorkers had been born abroad. The share was 34 percent in 1930 and 29 percent in 1940. It fell to 18 percent by 1970, after decades in which the law kept the door mostly closed.

The act shaped neighborhood formation as much as any subway line did. The garden apartments of Jackson Heights and the Concourse buildings were filled in the 1920s by the children of immigrants and by immigrants who had come before the war and spent a decade or two saving. They were not filled by a continuing stream of new arrivals. The tenement districts they left behind did not refill. Manhattan's population had peaked in 1910, and the borough never again held as many people. The Lower East Side, which had been the densest district in the city, emptied block by block as its residents moved up the Jerome

Avenue line or out to Brownsville and Flatbush, and no successors arrived from Europe to take their place.

For the outer-borough neighborhoods the result was a generation of relative stability. These neighborhoods were defined by a common origin and a common destination: the second generation, the first in their families to rent an apartment with a private bath, and in some cases to own shares in one. Their children went to the new public schools and high schools of the Bronx and Brooklyn. Their parents' languages, Yiddish and Italian and the rest, were heard on the Concourse and in Bensonhurst, but the newcomers who had once kept those languages refreshed stopped coming. When the next great wave of immigration came, after 1965, it would arrive in many of these same apartment districts, after the families who had built them had moved on.

Cooperators

The 1921 exemption had expired for new projects by 1925, and the shortage at the bottom of the market had not gone away. The new buildings on the Concourse and in Jackson Heights served families with steady earnings. Garment workers, laborers, and the low-paid clerks of the old districts mostly stayed where they were. In 1926 Governor Alfred E. Smith, the Lower East Side's own son and the former vice chairman of the Factory Investigating Commission, signed the State Housing Law, chapter 823 of the session laws of that year. It offered limited-dividend housing companies a twenty-year exemption from state and municipal taxes, along with access to low-cost building loans. In return a company had to cap its profits at 6 percent and accept limits on the rents it charged. The law also included a provision allowing eminent domain to be used to assemble sites. The state was now offering public subsidy in exchange for a ceiling on private return, a different bargain from the one the 1921 exemption had struck.

The first group to use the law at scale was a union. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, whose members cut and sewed men's clothing in lofts across Manhattan and Brooklyn, sponsored the Amalgamated Housing Cooperative. Abraham Kazan, who pushed the project forward inside the union, organized it as a limited-dividend corporation under the new law. Building Number One opened in 1927 on a full block of Sedgwick Avenue in the northwest Bronx, across from the Jerome Park Reservoir and near Van

Cortlandt Park, at the far end of the borough from the Concourse's southern blocks. It housed 303 families.

The residents called themselves cooperators. Each household bought shares in the corporation and received the right to occupy an apartment, with monthly charges held down by the tax exemption, the cheap loans, and the cap on dividends. Most of them were Jewish immigrant needle-trades workers who had come out of the Lower East Side, the same population whose strikes had filled the previous decade's labor news. The cooperative has a strong claim to being the oldest limited-dividend housing development in the country, and in the decades that followed it grew into a cluster of buildings around the original block.

The Amalgamated and Linden Court both used cooperative ownership, but they rested on opposite principles. The Queensboro Corporation sold co-op shares to raise capital and make a profit on land it had bought cheaply before the trains came. The Amalgamated used cooperative ownership to keep profit out of the building altogether, so that the tax exemption and the cheap loans reached the households who lived there. Both depended on the subway, since the Sedgwick Avenue block was within reach of the Jerome Avenue line. The Amalgamated also depended on Albany, and on a governor who had seen the inside of a Lower East Side tenement and a burned-out shirtwaist factory. It set a pattern for union and nonprofit cooperatives that the city would build on in later decades.

By the late 1920s the shortage that had produced the Emergency Rent Laws had eased. The tax exemption and the construction boom along the Dual Contracts lines had added apartments faster than households formed, and the end of mass immigration had slowed demand at the bottom of the market. The legislature had extended the emergency laws several times. It let them lapse once the city's vacancy rate approached 8 percent, a level at which tenants could again choose among apartments and landlords had to compete for them. The Emergency Rent Laws expired on June 1, 1929. Owners in the old districts regained the freedom to set rents as they chose. The legal tools the laws had created remained available to a future legislature: the finding of an emergency, the presumption against increases, and the court as a place to contest them.

The Island Without a Subway

One borough received none of the Dual Contracts lines. Staten Island was linked to the rest of the city by the municipal ferry from St. George to the Battery, and its own railway ran along the island's eastern and northern shores. The subway did not reach it. Through the 1910s and 1920s, while Jackson Heights and the West Bronx filled with apartment blocks, much of the island stayed in farms, woods, and salt marsh, with villages along the shore and pockets of industry on the Kill van Kull.

The island's advocates looked west for a remedy. The Port of New York Authority, created by New York and New Jersey in 1921 to manage the harbor shared by the two states, chose Staten Island's crossings to New Jersey as its first construction projects. John F. Hylan, mayor from 1918 to 1925 and a persistent champion of public works in the outer boroughs, was an early advocate of the bridges. The Authority allocated funds for both in the spring of 1924. It hired the engineer John Alexander Low Waddell to design them, and both went up over the Arthur Kill, the narrow tidal strait between the island and New Jersey.

Both bridges opened on June 29, 1928, the first facilities the Port Authority built. The northern span was named for George W. Goethals, chief engineer of the Panama Canal and the Authority's first consulting engineer. It ran from Elizabeth, New Jersey, to Howland Hook on the island's northwestern corner, a steel cantilever with a 672-foot main span set 140 feet above the water so that deep-sea ships could pass beneath it to the docks and refineries upstream. The southern crossing, from Perth Amboy to the island's southwestern shore, was named the Outerbridge Crossing for Eugenius H. Outerbridge, the Authority's first chairman.

The bridges joined Staten Island to the highways of New Jersey and gave its industries a route for trucks. They did not join it to the other four boroughs. A Staten Islander bound for Manhattan still took the ferry. A family in a Manhattan tenement looking for more room could ride the Jerome Avenue line to the West Bronx or the Flushing line to Jackson Heights for a nickel, and found no comparable route to the island's empty land. Traffic on the two bridges ran well below expectations in their first years, and their tolls fell short of the revenue the Authority had projected. Through the rest of the 1920s Staten Island remained

largely agricultural, the least populous of the five boroughs and the slowest growing.

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CHAPTER 12

Harlem, 1904–1935

Race War in Real Estate

On December 8, 1904, the New York Times ran a headline over a story about apartment leases on a few blocks north of 130th Street: "Race War Breaks Out in Harlem Real Estate." A year later, on December 17, 1905, the paper used nearly the same words: "Race War Started In Harlem." Nobody had been shot. The subject in both cases was a Black-run company that was leasing white-owned apartment houses and filling them with Black tenants. The Times called it war because a group of white owners and renters believed they were losing ground they had assumed was theirs. In the strictest sense they were. Within thirty years Harlem would be the largest Black urban community in the country, and the transfer began with the leasing of buildings that their owners could not fill.

That ground had been made valuable on credit. By the late 1890s builders knew the route of the city's first subway, and they knew that one branch would run north under Lenox Avenue into Harlem. The Harlem of that decade was a district of rowhouses, a few apartment houses, and a great deal of open land. It had been a Dutch farming village and then a suburb reached by steamboat and, from the late 1870s, by the elevated. The expected subway changed the arithmetic of every vacant lot. Between 1898 and 1904 almost all of Harlem's

remaining open land was built on. Speculators put up rows of brownstones on the side streets and five- and six-story apartment houses on the avenues, borrowing against rents that tenants carried north by the new trains were supposed to pay.

The six years of building ran on a single assumption: that the people who would fill the new apartments were the white clerks, shopkeepers, and professionals who had made Harlem a suburb in the first place, and that the subway would bring them north in numbers large enough to pay off every mortgage on every new building at once. Nobody in the trade appears to have asked how many such families there were, or whether they would all want to move in the same few years. Every builder counted on the same tenants, and every builder finished at about the same time.

The IRT opened its East Side branch under Lenox Avenue to 145th Street in November 1904, with a station at 125th Street and Lenox Avenue. By then Harlem had far more apartments than tenants willing to pay the rents the builders had counted on. The market broke in 1904 and 1905. Lenders stopped making new loans and called old ones. Mortgages were foreclosed. Landlords cut rents to draw anyone they could. Near Lenox Avenue and 135th Street, whole buildings stood empty or nearly so, new apartment houses with no one living in them, owned by men who still owed the banks for their construction.

The timing was cruel to the speculators. The line that had justified the building opened in the same season the market collapsed, so the subway arrived as a finished fact at the moment its promise was discounted. A tenant could now ride from 125th Street to downtown jobs on a single fare, which was exactly what the builders had been selling, and still the apartments did not fill at the prices their owners needed. An owner's interest payments came due whether or not his apartments were let. Cutting the rent kept some income coming in but lowered the value of the building against which the loan had been made, and a lender looking at a half-empty apartment house with falling rents had every reason to call the loan rather than extend it.

The bust is the hinge of the chapter. The subway did what transit had done in the city since the elevated: it manufactured ground for housing. But it delivered the ground to a market that could not absorb it on the builders' terms. A speculative surplus is a weak position for an owner, and in Harlem in 1905 it

was weak enough that some owners began to consider tenants they would have refused two years earlier.

Those tenants were already looking. Black New Yorkers at the turn of the century lived mainly in scattered West Side districts of Manhattan, in older houses that white landlords rented to them at prices higher than white tenants paid for similar rooms. Much of the ground under them was changing hands. In the first decade of the century, construction for Pennsylvania Station, the big department stores of Herald Square, new hotels, and loft buildings was clearing blocks where Black families had lived. The city's commercial growth was taking their housing away, and the rest of Manhattan offered them almost nothing. Harlem's empty apartment houses, among the newest residential buildings in the city, sat two or three miles to the north.

Payton's Leases

The man who joined the vacancy to the demand was Philip A. Payton Jr. He was born in Westfield, Massachusetts, on February 27, 1876, and came to New York in 1899. By his own later account, the idea for his business came to him at the 1902 meeting of the National Negro Business League, the association Booker T. Washington had founded to promote Black enterprise. Washington's league preached ownership and commercial self-help. Payton applied the doctrine to the one commodity every Black New Yorker needed and could rarely buy on fair terms, a place to live.

In 1903 he formed a partnership with nine Black businessmen to take five-year leases on white-owned buildings in Harlem and rent them to Black tenants. The arrangement worked because of the bust. An owner holding a half-empty building with a mortgage due could give it to Payton on a long lease and receive a guaranteed income. Payton managed the property and rented the apartments to Black tenants at about ten percent above the deflated market rent. The landlord got more from the building than white tenants were paying anywhere nearby. The tenants got entry to new apartment houses that had been closed to them, at a price higher than whites paid for the same space. Payton earned the difference between his lease payments and the rents he collected.

The risk sat with Payton. A five-year lease bound him to pay the owner whether or not he filled the apartments, and his margin depended on keeping them full at a rent above what the market would otherwise bear. He was

wagering that Black demand for decent housing was deep enough to outlast the bust, and that the owners who signed with him would not simply wait for white tenants to return. The length of the term mattered as much as the rent. Five years was long enough for a block of Black tenancy to settle in, for churches, lodges, and shops to follow, and for the change to become difficult to undo. An owner who signed for five years to save his building from foreclosure was, whether he intended it or not, deciding who would live on his block for the foreseeable future.

On June 15, 1904, a few months before the Lenox Avenue line opened, Payton chartered the Afro-American Realty Company. It was authorized to issue 50,000 shares at ten dollars each, a nominal capital of half a million dollars. Its backers included the Rev. William H. Brooks, a Manhattan minister, and Fred R. Moore, a newspaper publisher. The company sold its stock to Black investors as both a business proposition and a cause, and it bought outright some of the buildings it would otherwise have leased. By the end of 1904 Payton was managing roughly a dozen buildings and owned a handful of tenements. Within a few years the company controlled a few dozen buildings and well over a thousand tenants.

The pairing of minister and publisher on the list of backers indicates how the company presented itself. A ten-dollar share was within reach of a Black family with modest savings, and buying one was offered as a way to take part in claiming ground that white Manhattan had closed. Payton was raising capital from the same community whose housing he managed, and the company's fortunes became, for a few years, a public measure of whether Black enterprise could hold property in the city on its own account.

White Harlem noticed. Around 1905 the New York Herald, writing about the rowhouse market on 133rd and 134th Streets, called the arrival of Black tenants "an untoward circumstance." The paper reported that over three years the flats on 134th Street between Lenox and Seventh Avenues, once entirely white, had been taken over by Black tenants. The Times's "race war" headlines described the same movement. Some white owners and agents organized to buy back buildings or to keep leases out of Black hands. The method had its limits. A block could be held only if every owner on it held out, and owners carrying debt on empty buildings had every reason to break ranks. Each building that

went to Black tenants pushed nearby white tenants to leave, and each departure left another owner with vacancies and the same choice.

The Herald's phrase was the language of the appraiser. An untoward circumstance was something that affected the value of property, like a nuisance or a fire. The paper treated Black tenants as a condition of the land, and the white owners who organized against Payton treated them the same way. That framing would outlast the fight over 134th Street. For decades afterward, the presence of Black residents on a block was entered into the calculations of lenders and buyers as a reason to pay less, lend less, or refuse to lend at all, and Harlem's owners and tenants lived inside those calculations.

The Afro-American Realty Company did not survive the decade. In 1906 stockholders sued Payton. The company had leased and bought aggressively on borrowed money, and when the financial panic of 1907 and the recession that followed squeezed credit across the city, it could not meet its obligations. It defaulted and failed in 1908. Payton went on working in Harlem real estate and died in 1917.

The company's failure did not reverse what it had begun. The blocks around Lenox Avenue and 135th Street that Payton had opened stayed Black, and the territory spread outward street by street as owners concluded that Black tenants were their best market. The terms Payton had set also stayed. Black Harlem was founded on a premium. The first Black tenants of Harlem's new apartment houses paid more than white tenants had paid for the same rooms, and that surcharge was built into the neighborhood's economy from its beginning. The ten percent was a negotiated figure in a buyer's market. When the market turned, and Harlem became the only part of Manhattan where most Black New Yorkers could rent, the premium grew far beyond it.

The Church Buys a Block

St. Philip's Episcopal Church had been moving north with Black Manhattan for a century. It was founded in 1809 by free Black worshippers who had attended Trinity Church, and it became the oldest Black Episcopal parish in the city. Its first building stood on Centre Street in lower Manhattan, near what became the Five Points. By 1886 the congregation had moved to West 25th Street, in the West Side district where much of Black Manhattan then lived.

The ground under that church rose in value as Midtown commerce pushed west. Around 1909 St. Philip's sold its West 25th Street property for about $600,000. The parish could have bought a new church site with the money and stopped there. Instead it bought a church site in Harlem and a row of apartment buildings on West 135th Street, on blocks that until then had been restricted to white tenants. In 1911 the Black real estate firm of Nail & Parker negotiated the purchase of the apartment houses at 107 to 145 West 135th Street, the long row between Lenox and Seventh Avenues, for one million dollars. Nail & Parker kept its own office at No. 145.

The scale was new. Payton had worked through leases, short-term control of buildings that remained white property. St. Philip's held title. A Black institution with a century of history converted the value of a downtown lot into a full block front of uptown apartment houses and then rented them to Black tenants. The church became one of the larger landlords in the neighborhood, collecting rents that supported the parish and keeping the buildings out of the hands of owners who might have refused Black tenants or overcharged them. The row on 135th Street also lay at the center of the territory that was turning Black, so the purchase secured that ground at the moment it was most contested.

The difference between a lease and a deed was the lesson of the previous few years. Payton's leases had expired with his company; a lease runs for a term and then returns to its owner, and an overextended lessee can lose everything in a single credit squeeze. The church's purchase came three years after the Afro-American Realty Company failed, and it began with the proceeds of a sale rather than with the thin borrowing that had sunk Payton. A parish does not have stockholders who sue, and it measures its tenure in generations. A row of buildings owned by St. Philip's was about as secure a claim to Harlem ground as any Black New Yorker could make in 1911.

The church itself went up a block south, at 204 to 216 West 134th Street, in 1910 and 1911. It was designed by Vertner W. Tandy and George W. Foster Jr., Black architects, in a restrained Gothic style of brick. The building was designated a city landmark on July 13, 1993. Black congregations from downtown followed St. Philip's uptown over the next decade, selling their old buildings and building or buying new ones in Harlem, and the churches became anchors of property as well as worship.

The parish's movement from Five Points to West 25th Street to West 134th Street traces Black Manhattan's path across a century, a series of removals each set off by the growth of the city's commercial core. The 1911 purchase broke the pattern in one respect. Black New Yorkers had held land on Manhattan since the half-free grants of the 1640s and had lost it, by law and by pressure, again and again, most recently at Seneca Village. On 135th Street a Black institution bought a block of city ground at full price in a rising market, with no grant from anyone, and kept it.

A City Within a City

The population that filled Harlem in the next two decades came from two directions. From the American South came the Great Migration, which began in earnest around the First World War as Black families left sharecropping, lynching, and Jim Crow for jobs in Northern cities. New York drew migrants from Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida especially, many of whom came north on the coastal steamers and the railroad lines of the Eastern Seaboard. From the Caribbean came Black immigrants from Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, and the other islands of the British West Indies, as well as from the Danish Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. They brought different churches, accents, and politics, and the encounter between Southern migrants and West Indian immigrants shaped Harlem's public life for a generation. By 1925 New York's Black population was over 250,000, and most of it lived in Harlem. Writers of the period described the neighborhood as a city within a city, and in practical terms it was. It had its own churches, newspapers, fraternal lodges, theaters, cabarets, real estate firms, doctors, and lawyers, all serving a population that the rest of Manhattan largely excluded.

Every one of those newcomers needed a room, and the rooms available to them lay inside a boundary that moved only when white tenants left a block. The migration poured people into a fixed or slowly expanding stock of housing. That was the condition that made Harlem a capital and also the condition that made it expensive. The density that brought together writers, preachers, organizers, and musicians from the South and the islands within a few dozen blocks was the same density that let landlords raise rents year after year.

The institutions that made Harlem a capital rested on specific addresses. One of the most important was a public library. The 135th Street Branch of

the New York Public Library opened in 1905, a Carnegie library designed by McKim, Mead & White, built to serve the white neighborhood that the speculators had expected. The neighborhood around it turned Black within fifteen years, and the library changed with it. In 1920 the system hired Catherine Allen Latimer, its first Black librarian, who spent her career at the branch. In 1921 Ernestine Rose became head librarian and built the first integrated staff in the New York Public Library. That same year the branch mounted the first exhibition of Black art held in Harlem.

The library became a working room for the movement later called the Harlem Renaissance. Writers and scholars used its collections and its meeting rooms, and readings and lectures there drew audiences from the surrounding blocks. On May 8, 1925, the library opened the Division of Negro Literature, History and Prints at the branch. In 1926 it bought the private collection of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, a Puerto Rican-born bibliophile who had spent decades gathering books, manuscripts, and prints documenting Black history across the Americas and Africa. The purchase brought the library more than 2,000 volumes and more than 1,000 pamphlets, and the collection became the foundation of what is now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. A building put up for a neighborhood that never arrived became the country's leading archive of the people who did.

Schomburg's own path ran through the Caribbean migration that was remaking Harlem. A Puerto Rican-born collector had built, over decades and largely at his own expense, the record of a people whom the country's established libraries had not thought worth collecting, and in 1926 that private effort passed into a public institution on a Harlem street. The library had been a speculators' amenity in 1905. Twenty years later it held a claim of a different kind: a claim to the past, kept in a building on ground that the neighborhood's residents had come to regard as theirs.

Three blocks north stood a different kind of institution. Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican-born organizer, had brought his Universal Negro Improvement Association to Harlem during the war and built it into a mass movement of Black self-determination, aimed at economic independence and, in its largest ambition, a Black nation in Africa. In 1919 or so the association acquired a partly built church at 114 West 138th Street, roofed it over, and opened it as Liberty Hall, a meeting place that held several thousand people. Its purpose was

to give the movement a room of its own, on ground it controlled, in the center of the neighborhood.

On August 1, 1920, the association opened its First International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World at Liberty Hall. About 2,000 delegates came from twenty-two countries, and the convention met throughout the month, until August 31. On August 3 the association paraded through Harlem's streets in uniform and regalia, and that evening roughly 25,000 people filled Madison Square Garden for a rally. During the convention the delegates adopted the Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World. For a few weeks a neighborhood that its residents rented, mostly from white landlords, served as the headquarters of a movement that claimed to speak for Black people on several continents.

The geography of that August made the movement's argument visible. The delegates met in a hall the association owned on West 138th Street, marched through blocks that had been closed to Black tenants sixteen years earlier, and then carried the procession's crowd downtown to fill the largest arena in Manhattan. A movement whose program was Black ownership began its convention on Black-held ground and spent a night occupying a symbol of the white city.

The movement's own enterprises, including its Black Star Line of steamships, ran into financial trouble. Garvey was convicted of mail fraud in federal court in connection with the shipping line's stock sales, and in 1927 he was deported from the United States to Jamaica. The association declined without him, but Liberty Hall had made one point lasting enough to outlive its sponsor. A Black organization could hold ground in Harlem and fill it with people.

Garvey's insistence on Black ownership and the library's slow, patient collecting were two answers to the same condition. Harlem was Black by residence and largely white by title. Its people lived there because the rest of the city was closed to them, and most of the buildings they lived in, the stores they shopped in, and the jobs on its main commercial street belonged to others. St. Philip's, the 135th Street library, and Liberty Hall were places where Black New Yorkers controlled the ground, and much of Harlem's cultural authority came from them.

The Harlem Premium

The cost of living in the capital rose every year of the 1920s. Black Harlem's population grew rapidly while the territory open to it grew slowly, a few blocks at a time, at the edges where white tenants gave way. Little new housing went up in Harlem in the early 1920s, when construction across the city slowed and builders who did build put their money into the outer boroughs. Between 1919 and 1926 the average monthly rent paid by Black tenants in Manhattan roughly doubled, from a little over twenty dollars to about forty, by the count of the state's housing commission. White tenants elsewhere in the city faced rising rents too. Black tenants in Harlem paid more for comparable apartments and earned less, because the jobs open to them were mostly the lowest-paid in the city's economy: domestic service, porter and elevator work, day labor, laundry work.

The doubling took place without any meaningful addition to the housing it priced. The apartment houses of 1905 were the same buildings in 1926, older and more worn, and the rise in what they earned their owners came entirely from the number of people who had nowhere else to go. In the rest of the city a rent increase might push a tenant to look in another neighborhood or another borough. A Black tenant in Harlem who looked elsewhere found, for the most part, the same closed doors that had sent the first families uptown in 1904.

The premium Payton had negotiated in 1904 was a business concession in a falling market. By the mid-1920s the premium was a structural feature of Harlem's housing, sustained by the exclusion of Black tenants from nearly every other part of Manhattan. Landlords did not have to compete for Black tenants. They had a captive market and charged accordingly. The result was overcrowding. Families took in lodgers to meet the rent, and apartments built for one household held two or three. Large apartments on the avenues were divided into rooms rented separately. Buildings that had been new in 1905 aged fast under double occupancy and thin maintenance, and the neighborhood's density rose above that of most of the rest of Manhattan.

The lodger turned the tenant into a small landlord. A family that rented an apartment and let out a room was passing part of the premium down the line, collecting from a boarder what it could not earn in wages and handing it on to the building's owner. Each layer of subletting kept the rent paid and the owner whole, and each layer put more people into the same rooms. The overcrowding

that outsiders later blamed on Harlem's residents was the arithmetic of the premium, worked out apartment by apartment by people trying to keep a roof.

Tenants answered with the means at hand. The rent party was one of them. A tenant short of the month's rent would hire a piano player or a small band, lay in food and liquor, and open the apartment to anyone willing to pay admission or drop money in a hat. Printed cards advertised the parties, and admission might be a quarter. The parties began in the 1920s for an economic reason: Black tenants paid higher rents than white tenants on lower incomes, and the gap had to be made up somewhere. They also became a setting for music. Pianists in the stride style worked the circuit of Saturday-night parties, and dancing and gambling went on late into the night. Out of the gap between Harlem rents and Harlem wages came an institution that the rest of the city later sentimentalized, often without understanding where it had come from.

The rent party was the lodger system compressed into a single night. Instead of letting a room for the month, the tenant let the whole apartment for an evening to as many paying guests as it would hold. The music, the food, and the quarter at the door were the means by which a household turned its own living room into a source of rent, and the guests who paid were, many of them, raising money for their own parties on other nights.

The other answer was organizing. The Emergency Rent Laws of 1920 had allowed tenants to contest unreasonable rent increases in court, and for Harlem tenants they had been a partial shelter against the steepest increases. The laws were set to expire on June 1, 1929. Ahead of that date a group calling itself the Harlem Tenants League, whose organizers included Richard B. Moore and Grace Campbell, radicals of Caribbean and Southern birth, held meetings to prepare tenants for the loss of protection. By most accounts the league paraded through Harlem within hours of the laws' lapse. The protection was gone anyway. Rents in Harlem were now set by a market in which tenants had almost nowhere else to go, and the stock market crash came less than five months later.

The Depression struck Harlem hard. Black workers were often the first dismissed and the last hired, and the jobs they held in domestic service and unskilled labor disappeared as employers cut costs. Rents did not fall in proportion to incomes. Families that had stretched to pay 1920s rents on 1920s wages now faced the same apartments with less money or none at all, and the lodger, the divided apartment, and the rent party became more common. Eviction was

a regular sight on the side streets, and tenant groups and radical organizers sometimes gathered crowds to carry evicted families' furniture back indoors.

March 19, 1935

The grievance that Harlem residents felt most directly in the early Depression concerned 125th Street, the neighborhood's main commercial street. Most of its stores were owned by white merchants who relied on Black customers and would not hire Black clerks. Between 1933 and 1935 Harlem residents picketed and boycotted the stores that refused, demanding jobs behind the counters where Black shoppers spent their money. Some merchants gave way. Others went to court, and in 1935 the store owners won an injunction against the picketing. The street remained a place where Black Harlem bought and white Harlem sold and employed.

The injunction closed the most orderly route Harlem had found for contesting the arrangement. Pickets on the sidewalk in front of a store were a claim on the street itself, an assertion that the customers who kept 125th Street in business had a say in who worked there. When a court took that claim away, the grievance did not go anywhere. It stayed on the same blocks, in front of the same windows.

Around 2:30 in the afternoon of March 19, 1935, employees at the Kress five-and-ten store on West 125th Street caught Lino Rivera, a sixteen-year-old Black Puerto Rican, taking a penknife that cost ten cents. Store staff held him. The store decided not to press charges, and Rivera was let out through the back of the building. To the crowd that had gathered in front, he had disappeared.

The decision not to press charges was, on its face, the lenient one. A teenager who had taken a ten-cent knife was sent on his way rather than handed to the police. But the exit through the back meant that nobody on the sidewalk saw him leave. People who had watched a Black boy seized inside a white-owned store on the street where those stores had fought Black pickets in court saw only that he had gone in and had not come out.

A rumor spread that Rivera had been beaten to death inside the store. It was false, but it moved along 125th Street faster than any correction. Communist organizers, active in Harlem's tenant and unemployment campaigns, printed and distributed leaflets that connected the incident to the broader discrimination Harlem lived with, including the stores' hiring practices and the conduct

of the police. By evening crowds were breaking store windows along 125th Street and the avenues, and the window-breaking and looting went on through the night and into the next day. The targets were overwhelmingly white-owned businesses, the same stores that had refused to hire Black clerks and had fought the pickets in court.

When it ended, three Black people had been killed. About 125 people had been arrested and at least 100 injured, most of them by falling glass and thrown objects. Roughly 250 stores were damaged, and estimates of the property loss ran to some $2 million. On March 20 the police distributed photographs of Rivera alive and unharmed to calm the neighborhood. District Attorney William C. Dodge of New York County blamed Communist incitement.

The photographs settled the factual question that had started the night. Rivera was alive. They settled nothing else. Three people were dead who had not been dead the afternoon before, and the windows along Harlem's main street were broken over a death that had not happened. Dodge's explanation offered the city a reason to look at a handful of leaflets rather than at the street where they had been handed out.

That same day Walter White, secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, sent a telegram to Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, who had taken office in January 1934. White urged the mayor to "appoint immediately a biracial commission to make an investigation of rioting in Harlem last night." He also wrote that the trouble was "rooted in economic distress of Negroes." La Guardia did appoint a biracial commission, the Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem. It held hearings in the neighborhood through the spring of 1935, taking testimony from residents, officials, merchants, and police. Its report, The Negro in Harlem, was researched and largely written by the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, then at Howard University.

The report rejected Dodge's explanation. Communist leaflets had not made Harlem's grievances; they had named them. The commission found that economic discrimination was the most basic problem facing Black Harlem: exclusion from jobs, including jobs in the stores and public utilities that depended on Harlem's trade; exclusion from housing elsewhere in the city, which kept rents high and buildings crowded; and inadequate schools, hospitals, and relief. It identified police brutality as a major cause of the riot itself and described the deep distrust between Harlem residents and the police who patrolled them. A

rumor that a Black boy had been beaten to death in a white-owned store had been believable because Harlem residents had reasons to believe it.

The administration did not publish the report. La Guardia, who had won Harlem votes and was building a reputation as a reform mayor, received a document that indicted his police department and described the city's institutions as failing a whole neighborhood. The typescript stayed in City Hall until someone leaked it to the Amsterdam News, Harlem's leading newspaper, which printed it in full on July 18, 1936. Harlem read the commission's findings about Harlem in its own paper, more than a year after the riot that had produced them, because the city that ordered the study had chosen not to release it.

The riot was the outcome of three decades of decisions about Harlem ground. Speculators had overbuilt it on the promise of a subway. Payton's leases had opened it to Black tenants at a premium. Restriction everywhere else had turned the premium into a permanent surcharge, raised by the 1920s to double the old rents in a neighborhood where wages were among the lowest in the city. The main commercial street took Black customers' money and denied them work, and the police enforced an order in which Harlem's residents had little say. The broken windows on 125th Street were aimed with some precision at the people who had profited from those arrangements.

The city's most visible answer came two years later, at the northern edge of the neighborhood. The Harlem River Houses, completed in 1937 between West 151st and 153rd Streets, from Macombs Place to the Harlem River, were built for Black tenants with federal money. With the Williamsburg Houses in Brooklyn, they were the first public housing in the city built with federal funds. La Guardia, Walter White, and Harold Ickes, the secretary of the interior, attended the bricklaying ceremony. Archibald Manning Brown was chief architect, and the design team included John Louis Wilson Jr., one of the first Black architects registered in New York State. The complex had seven buildings arranged around landscaped courts, some 570 apartments in all. More than 11,000 people applied to live there, nearly twenty applicants for every apartment, and the opening rent was $21 a month, close to what Black tenants in Manhattan had paid on average in 1919, before the decade in which the Harlem premium doubled.

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CHAPTER 13

Skyline and Crash, 1925–1933

The Spire

The top of the Chrysler Building was assembled where nobody on the street could see it. Through the autumn of 1929, ironworkers put together a steel spire in sections inside the tapering crown that William Van Alen had designed for the automobile maker Walter P. Chrysler at 405 Lexington Avenue, on the corner of 42nd Street. Once complete, the spire sat hidden in the building's upper floors. It was aimed at a building downtown. At 40 Wall Street, a tower for the Bank of the Manhattan Company was rising toward 927 feet. Its designers were Yasuo Matsui and H. Craig Severance, who had once been Van Alen's partner. The press treated the two buildings as rivals in a race for the title of tallest in the world and reported each new floor as a lap.

The downtown tower topped out first. Then, late in October 1929, the hidden spire was hoisted up through the Chrysler crown and fixed in place. Some accounts say the work took about an hour and a half. The finished building rose seventy-seven floors to 1,046 feet at the tip of the spire, which put it above 40 Wall Street and above the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the tallest structure anywhere since 1889. Construction had begun on January 21, 1929. The steel frame topped out on October 23, and the building opened on May 27, 1930.

The secrecy mattered because the race was being scored in public. A spire visible on the crown during construction would have given the builders of 40 Wall Street something to answer. Kept out of sight, it let Van Alen wait until his rival had committed to a final height and then pass it.

October 23, 1929, was a Wednesday. The next day, the first of the great selling panics broke on the New York Stock Exchange, and the market collapsed the following Tuesday. The spire went up in the same week that the money behind such towers began to vanish. The building held its world title for less than a year. It lost the title to a tower on Fifth Avenue whose site, that same autumn, was still occupied by a hotel coming down.

The race made headlines, but the motive behind it lay in the price of the lots. Midtown and downtown land had been bid up through the 1920s by the same expansion that filled the outer boroughs with apartment houses: more clerks, more corporate headquarters, more trains bringing more people to fewer square blocks. A builder who paid a high price for a corner had one way to make the purchase pay, which was to stack rentable floors on it until each floor's share of the land cost was small. The arithmetic ran in one direction. The price of the corner was settled the day the deed changed hands, and interest on the money borrowed to buy it began running at once. The rents that were supposed to repay it arrived later, a floor at a time, and only if tenants signed. Every added story spread the fixed cost of the ground across more paying space, so a builder who had paid a boom price had every reason to go as high as the law and the engineering allowed. The 1916 Zoning Resolution set the shape of that stack. A tower could rise without a height limit over a quarter of its lot once the required setbacks had been satisfied, so the tall buildings of the late 1920s stepped back in tiers from the street and then shot upward from a narrowed base. The Chrysler crown, with its stacked arches of stainless steel, was the ornamental end of a legal formula.

The towers of 1929 were therefore wagers on the future rents of Manhattan land. Their sites were bought and their financing arranged in the boom, on the assumption that firms would keep crowding into the island's two business districts and pay more each year for the privilege. A tower took years to plan, finance, and build, and its owners had to guess, at the moment they committed, what offices would rent for when the doors opened. Height also served as advertising, which is why Chrysler wanted his name on the tallest building in the

world and why the bank's backers wanted theirs at the top of Wall Street. In the speculative office tower, though, the advertising served the leasing. A famous address was supposed to fill the floors. The test of the wager came after the buildings opened, and by then the economy that had justified them was gone.

The First of May

The tower that took the title from Chrysler was conceived as a speculation from its first sketch. John J. Raskob, a financier who had made his fortune with General Motors and the du Pont interests, put the project together. His partner and public face was Alfred E. Smith, the former governor, who had lost the presidential election of 1928 to Herbert Hoover and became president of the Empire State Corporation after his defeat. The site was on Fifth Avenue between 33rd and 34th Streets. The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel had stood there until it closed in 1929, and it was demolished to make way for the new building. The wreckers were at work on the old hotel around the start of October 1929, a few weeks before the panic, so the site for the tallest office building in the world was being cleared at the very top of the market.

William Lamb of the firm Shreve, Lamb and Harmon worked within limits his clients set in advance. The plot measured about 200 by 425 feet. The budget was fixed at $60 million. The zoning law dictated the setbacks. The building also had to be finished by May 1, 1931. Raskob held to that date because May 1 was the customary day in New York for signing commercial leases. A building that missed it would wait most of a year for the next round of tenants deciding where to move.

The Empire State Building's real competitor was the calendar. Finishing by the end of April meant entering the market alongside every other landlord in the city with space to fill. Finishing in June meant carrying the construction loan, the taxes on the lot, and an empty building for most of a year before the next season of moves.

The deadline governed every construction choice. Glass, stone, and steel came to the site in standard, mass-produced pieces, and the crews assembled them in a repeated sequence, floor after floor. The 6,500 windows were fastened to the outside wall with metal brackets so that no mason had to set each pane in stone. Work on the building proper began in the spring of 1930, and the tower was ready in a little over a year. At the peak, accounts put the workforce on the

site at well over three thousand. The frame went up at a pace that made each week's progress news, and the finished cost came in well under the budget. The building was in this sense an industrial product, assembled from parts made elsewhere on a schedule set by the leasing calendar.

On May 1, 1931, President Hoover pressed a button in Washington, and the lights came on in the 102-story building. At 1,250 feet it was the tallest building in the world. Smith presided over the ceremony in New York. The arrangement placed the two candidates of 1928 at opposite ends of the occasion: the man who had won the presidency in the White House, and the man he had beaten at the foot of the building he now ran. The date was the one the leasing calendar required.

The tenants did not come. In its first year, by most estimates, less than a quarter of the office space was rented, and New Yorkers took to calling the tower the Empty State Building. The companies that might have taken whole floors in 1929 were cutting staff, merging, or failing, and the firms that survived could rent space cheaply in older buildings whose owners were desperate. By the middle of the decade the building was still losing money, perhaps a million dollars a year, and its observation deck, where visitors paid to look at the city from the 86th floor, took in roughly the same sum. The tallest office building in the world was earning much of its income from sightseers. The height that was supposed to advertise the building to tenants drew paying visitors instead, and for years the view from the top was one of the owners' most dependable sources of income.

The Empire State Building was the purest form of the decade's wager. Nothing in its design responded to a known tenant. It had a site bought at boom prices, a budget, a legal envelope, and a date on which leases were signed, and its builders met every condition but the one they could not control. The fault did not lie in the building. The structure was sound, efficient to build, and finished early. What failed was the forecast of rents on which the purchase of the Waldorf site had been made.

Columbia's Lease

The third of the great Depression-era projects began as an opera house. In 1928, Columbia University leased a block of midtown land it owned, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues from 48th to 51st Streets, to John D. Rockefeller Jr. The

term was eighty-seven years, and the rent was about $3 million a year. The plan was to build a new home for the Metropolitan Opera there, with commercial buildings around it to help pay the costs. Columbia kept title to the land, and it would go on owning the ground beneath the complex until 1985.

The crash broke the plan. The Metropolitan Opera could no longer afford to move, and Rockefeller was left holding a long lease with heavy annual payments and no anchor tenant. He turned to the Radio Corporation of America, which was building the business of broadcasting and wanted studios, offices, and theaters. A new plan built around RCA appeared in January 1930, and the final design for the site was unveiled in March 1931. The opera house became Radio City, a complex of office towers and theaters organized around broadcasting and film, named for the tenant that rescued it.

The dates mark the turn. The RCA plan appeared about three months after the crash, when the depth of the collapse was not yet clear. The final design was unveiled in March 1931, two months before the Empire State Building opened to its empty floors, when the collapse was beyond doubt. Rockefeller went ahead anyway.

The early estimate for acquiring the leaseholds, clearing the old buildings, and putting up the new ones was $250 million. Construction proceeded from the early 1930s to 1940, through years when almost no one else in Manhattan was building offices on that scale. Estimates of the workforce employed over the decade run to tens of thousands.

Rockefeller Center was begun at the bottom of the market, and the reason lies in the terms of the lease. Rockefeller owed Columbia rent on the land every year whether he built or not. An empty block would cost him millions with no return, while a finished complex might eventually earn enough to cover the rent and more. The obligation he had signed in the boom pushed him to build in the slump. The Empire State Building's owners had gambled on rents and lost. Rockefeller had committed himself to paying rent and could only hope to recover it by finding tenants over the long term. Columbia, for its part, held the stronger position. It had kept the ground and leased out the risk. Whatever happened to the buildings, the university's rent fell due in every year of the Depression, and title to the block would stay with it for more than half a century. The result was the largest private building project in the city during

the Depression, made possible by the size of one family's fortune and the length of one university's lease.

Walker's City

The mayor during these years was James J. Walker, a Tammany Democrat and former state senator who took office on January 1, 1926. Walker had written popular songs before he went into politics, and he governed as a man of the town. He made no secret of his drinking. National Prohibition had been law since 1920, and Walker visited the city's better speakeasies openly and often. His conduct matched how many New Yorkers saw the dry law: a federal rule the city tolerated rather than enforced.

His own police commissioner saw the trade differently. In 1929 Grover Whalen, a strong supporter of Prohibition, sent the mayor a police department report on the illegal liquor business. It described the people the trade drew in as "the stickup thug, the gangster, the degenerate." The report, preserved in the city's Municipal Archives, put the commissioner's view of the speakeasy in writing before the man whose habits were well known to all. The department's own records showed what the business could cost. Its annual report for 1928 recorded that Patrolman James Masterson had been shot and killed during an armed robbery at a speakeasy at 214 West 103rd Street, on an ordinary residential block of the Upper West Side. The illegal saloon, scattered through cellars and back rooms in every borough, was a source of payoffs and a site of violence, and the city's government was implicated in both.

Walker was re-elected in the autumn of 1929, weeks after the market broke. Voters returned him on the record of the boom, and his second term would be judged on the record of the slump. The early years of that term were the first years of the Depression. With few exceptions, the office towers already under way when the market fell were the last of their kind for years, and few new ones were started in Manhattan for the rest of the decade apart from Rockefeller Center. The work that had employed carpenters, ironworkers, elevator installers, and laborers through the boom ran out as each project was finished. Because the buildings already under way kept their crews until they were done, the loss in the building trades deepened as the boom's last projects closed out in 1930 and 1931, just as other industries were cutting hardest. Factory lofts in the garment district and along the waterfront emptied as orders dried up.

Wages fell for those who kept their jobs, and the number of people without any work rose steadily through 1930 and 1931.

Tenants met the slump without the protection they had had a decade earlier. The emergency rent laws passed in 1920 had lapsed in June 1929, a few months before the crash. Landlords who had been held to reasonable increases through most of the 1920s could now raise rents or evict as they chose, and many of their own mortgages were coming due at a time when banks were calling in loans. Tenants who fell behind faced city marshals, who carried out eviction orders by putting the family's furniture on the sidewalk.

The city's response under Walker rested on private charity. The Mayor's Committee on Unemployment was paid for by donations, and part of its work was to look into pending evictions to see whether aid could keep a family in its apartment. It was a case-by-case answer to a problem affecting hundreds of thousands of households, and it depended on the generosity of the same banks, merchants, and landlords whose own incomes were falling. The committee's investigators could sometimes find a month's rent for a family on the eve of eviction. They could not change the terms on which the city's housing was owned and let.

The men who lost both work and housing went looking for land nobody was using, and some of the most visible unused land in the city was in Central Park. Below 86th Street, in the middle of the park, lay the Lower Reservoir, the rectangular basin that had received Croton water since 1842. It had been drained so that it could be filled in and turned into a lawn, the future Great Lawn. In 1930 that work stalled for lack of money, leaving a broad, half-filled pit with the park's walls and the skyline beyond it. Unemployed men moved onto the site and built shacks from whatever they could find. By 1932 the camp was called Hoover Valley, after the president. The name placed the blame in Washington, but the land was the city's, and the city's failure to finish filling its own reservoir was what had opened the ground to settlement.

Police and the parks department broke up the camp from time to time, but it kept coming back and some of its structures grew permanent. By 1932 it included a stone building about twenty feet long, with a roof and a tile floor, which press photographs of the period call "the Mansion." Its builders were by most accounts skilled tradesmen, masons and bricklayers out of work. Another shantytown stood in Riverside Park near 72nd Street. The residents of Hoover

Valley could see the towers of the San Remo and the Eldorado, apartment houses just completed on Central Park West for tenants who could still pay.

Central Park had been made by condemning the ground of 561 owners and removing the residents of Seneca Village. Seventy-five years later, men who had lost their homes made shelter on a corner of it the city had left unfinished. The park was public land, and in 1930 and 1931 it was one of the few places in Manhattan where a person with no rent money could stand still without being moved on for good.

Olinville Avenue

In the Bronx, tenants decided to fight. Early in January 1932, the Upper Bronx Unemployed Council, one of the neighborhood organizations the Communist Party had built among the jobless, called rent strikes at three large apartment buildings in the Bronx Park East neighborhood: 1890 Unionport Road, 2302 Olinville Avenue, and 665 Allerton Avenue. These were newer elevator and walk-up buildings in a district of mainly Jewish garment workers, and they stood near the United Workers Cooperative, the housing colony that residents called the Coops, whose members were among the most politically organized tenants in the city. The strike buildings and the cooperative were close enough that a call for support could fill a street within the hour. The strikers demanded rent reductions and an end to evictions of the unemployed.

The landlords went to court, and the marshals came. Late in January, when marshals and police arrived to evict seventeen striking tenants at 2302 Olinville Avenue, a crowd of about four thousand gathered in a vacant lot nearby to back them. Most of the crowd came from the Coops. By the account in the Bronx Home News, the crowd sang the Internationale. The numbers favored the tenants for an afternoon: seventeen households facing eviction, thousands of neighbors standing with them, and the marshals and police whose task was to carry out a court's order in front of all of them. The vacant lot, a piece of unbuilt land in a borough still filling in along its subway lines, became the meeting ground for a tenants' movement.

The strikes alarmed the borough's officials. State Senator Benjamin Antin described the district as a "hot bed of Communism and radicalism" whose people "are mostly Communists and Soviet sympathizers." His words were meant to place the strikers outside the community of legitimate tenants. The

charge had some basis: the organizers were Communists, and the Coops had been founded by left-wing garment workers. What the senator left out was that the strikers' demands were the same ones the emergency rent laws had addressed in 1920. Those laws had been passed by the state legislature on the finding that the housing shortage was a public emergency.

Most of the Bronx strikes ended in compromise. Landlords cut rents by two or three dollars an apartment. At 692 Beck Street in the East Bronx, a block committee won the same cuts and a promise that unemployed families would not be evicted. These were small sums, but in a building where every tenant's rent fell by the same amount, the landlord's loss was real, and the winners had shown that a building's tenants acting together could set terms with its owner.

The landlords answered with the courts. A judge granted an injunction against picketing in the strike district, and the Real Estate News, the trade paper of the borough's property owners, called the order in May 1932 a "body blow" that "broke the Bronx rent strikes." The movement shifted rather than ending. Through 1932 and 1933, rent strikes spread to Crotona Park East in the Bronx, to Brownsville, Williamsburg, and Borough Park in Brooklyn, and to the Lower East Side. The spread followed the map of the city's crowded working-class districts, from the newer apartment houses of the Bronx to the old tenement blocks of Brownsville and the Lower East Side. In Harlem, Richard B. Moore of the Harlem Tenants League was among the leading organizers. The historian Mark Naison, writing on Depression tenant activism in Ronald Lawson's The Tenant Movement in New York City, traced how the Unemployed Councils turned eviction resistance into a citywide campaign.

The tenants of 1932 lost most of their battles in court and won some at the building level. Their larger achievement was political. Within a few years of the strikes, rent and eviction had become public questions that no mayor, governor, or legislature in New York could leave entirely to landlords and marshals. Unlike the hand-to-mouth committee the city had run under Walker, the tenants' movement made the claim that people who lived in a building had a stake in it alongside the people who owned it.

Seabury

While tenants in the Bronx were fighting eviction, a lawyer in Manhattan was taking apart the government that ran the city. Samuel Seabury, a former

judge of the state's Court of Appeals and an old opponent of Tammany, had been looking into the city's magistrates' courts since around 1930. That first inquiry turned up a vice squad practice of framing innocent women as prostitutes: officers made arrests with paid informers as witnesses, and lawyers and bondsmen in the magistrates' courts shared the money to be had from women who paid to escape conviction. Then Vivian Gordon, who had agreed to testify, was found murdered in Van Cortlandt Park. The killing led Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt to widen the investigation. A scandal about the lowest courts in the city became a question about the whole government that appointed their judges and directed their police.

In April 1931, Seabury became counsel to the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate the Affairs of the City of New York, known after its chairman as the Hofstadter Committee. It was the third and largest of his inquiries. Over the following twenty months it examined more than two thousand people and held hearings until December 1932. Seabury's method was the bank account. He asked officials whose salaries were modest to explain large deposits, and many of the answers, offered under oath and reported in the newspapers, did more damage than any accusation.

Eventually the inquiry reached the mayor. Seabury found evidence that politicians had financed letters of credit for Walker's use while a bus franchise was under consideration. He found that Walker shared a safe-deposit box with his financial agent, Russell Sherwood, who left for Mexico before the committee could examine him. Among the charges that followed was that Walker had accepted $26,000 in bonds from J. A. Sisto, a stockbroker whose clients had invested in a taxicab company with business before the city. Walker denied wrongdoing. He was never charged with a crime.

Seabury questioned Walker in public in May 1932. The questioning turned on the documents the committee had spent a year gathering: the letters of credit, the safe-deposit box, the bonds from Sisto. With Sherwood in Mexico, the mayor had to explain without his agent the contents of a box they had shared. Walker was quick and charming on the stand, but his answers about the money did not hold up well against the documents. The case went to Roosevelt, who had the power to remove a mayor and who was also seeking the Democratic nomination for president. He waited until after the party's convention in Chicago that summer, where he won the nomination, and in August 1932 he

held a removal hearing in Albany. Walker appeared, and the hearing went on for days.

Before Roosevelt ruled, Walker ended it. On September 1, 1932, he sent a message to the city clerk: "I hereby resign as mayor of the City of New York, the same to take effect immediately." Joseph V. McKee, president of the Board of Aldermen, became acting mayor. In the special election that November, the Tammany candidate, John P. O'Brien, won the right to serve out the term. Walker left for Europe. He said he would prove his innocence, never did, and stayed away about three years. In May 1935, three sterling silver quart flasks from his drinking set turned up in a pawn shop.

The Seabury inquiry showed the machine at the limit of what it could survive. Tammany had governed through the boom by giving out the city's favors, franchises, jobs, judgeships, and tolerance of speakeasies, and taking its share in return. That arrangement could absorb a great deal of scandal so long as the city's economy was growing and taxpayers felt they were getting something back. In the Depression the bargain no longer worked. The city's revenue fell while the demand for relief rose, and each disclosure from the committee landed on voters who had lost their jobs. The money Seabury traced was small next to the sums Rockefeller owed Columbia. What made it ruinous was that it showed the city's franchises, its streets and bus routes and taxi licenses, being sold off privately by the people who held them in trust. A bus franchise was the right to run vehicles for profit over streets the public owned, and a taxicab company lived by its access to the same streets. These were claims on the most valuable public ground in New York, the roadway itself, and the charges Seabury laid out held that access to it had been traded for money given to the man who granted it.

Chambers Street to 207th Street

Nine days after Walker resigned, the city opened its own subway. At midnight on Saturday, September 10, 1932, without a major ceremony, trains of the Independent Subway System began running on the Eighth Avenue line between Chambers Street and 207th Street in Inwood. The fare was a nickel. The trains ran under Eighth Avenue through Manhattan's west side, beneath Central Park West along the edge of the park where Hoover Valley stood, and on under St. Nicholas Avenue through Harlem and Washington Heights.

The line had a long political history. John F. Hylan, Walker's predecessor as mayor, had made war on the private transit companies the center of his politics. In 1922 he proposed a city-owned subway system of more than one hundred miles of new lines, along with taking over nearly one hundred miles of existing ones. The takeover never happened, but the new lines went ahead as a municipal project built with the city's credit. When the time came to choose an operator, no private company made a successful bid, so the city ran the trains itself through its Board of Transportation. For the first time since the Interborough opened in 1904, a New York subway was both owned and operated by the city.

Building the whole Eighth Avenue line cost $191.2 million. Its route ran parallel to the IRT's Broadway line a few blocks to the west for much of its length, and the duplication was intentional. The Independent was meant to compete with the private companies on their busiest corridors and to draw away the riders whose fares had supported the private lines, even as their owners complained that the nickel no longer covered their costs. That served the political argument Hylan had made. It also meant that much of the system's first trunk line served neighborhoods that already had trains, rather than opening new land the way the Dual Contracts lines had opened Queens and the Bronx. The line had been conceived as a weapon in a fight over who would control the city's transit, and it opened into a city where the private lines it was built to undercut were already pleading that their fare no longer paid.

The Independent's opening carried no ceremony because the circumstances allowed none. The city was in the middle of a mayoral crisis, its treasury was strained by relief, and its tenants were on strike in the Bronx. Yet the new line was the largest piece of construction completed in the city that year apart from the towers whose financing had been arranged before the crash. The city had planned its subway in a decade of private plenty and opened it in a year of private collapse. In 1929 and 1930, private money had raised the Chrysler Building and the Empire State Building on the strength of land values that collapsed before either was full. By the autumn of 1932, the only party still able to borrow at that scale to build under the streets of New York was the city itself. Its trains ran north from Chambers Street through the night of September 10, past stations finished in plain tile, bearing passengers who paid five cents to ride to the top of Manhattan.

CHAPTER 14

La Guardia and Moses, 1934–1945

Ready on Arrival

In November 1933, weeks before he took office, the mayor-elect of New York handed Harry Hopkins a list. Hopkins, Franklin Roosevelt's relief administrator, was designing the Civil Works Administration, a federal program to put the unemployed on a public payroll through the coming winter. Most cities had to invent their projects after the money was announced. Fiorello La Guardia had his ready: parks to regrade, streets to repave, playgrounds to repair, each one specific enough for a foreman to start on a Monday. By January 1934, New Yorkers held about 20 percent of all the CWA jobs in the country, spread across some 4,000 projects. Eight weeks into his mayoralty, the city held a fifth of a national program while holding a far smaller share of the national population.

Each job was modest: a park path regraded, a block of street repaved, a playground's equipment put back in working order. The number was what counted. Four thousand projects turned the city's relief rolls into a public works force spread across all five boroughs. They also taught La Guardia the rule that governed the rest of his administration. Federal money went to the city that could spend it fastest. The city that could spend it fastest was the one whose engineers had already drawn the plans and whose officials already controlled the sites.

La Guardia had reached City Hall on a vote the Democrats split for him. He was a Republican, a former congressman from East Harlem, running on the Republican and City Fusion lines, and on November 7, 1933, he took roughly 869,000 votes. Joseph V. McKee, who had briefly served as acting mayor after Jimmy Walker's resignation, ran on a new Recovery Party line and drew about 609,000. John P. O'Brien, the Tammany incumbent who had served out the rest of Walker's term, finished third with about 587,000. La Guardia won with around 40 percent of the vote. He took office on January 1, 1934, the machine's hold on the mayoralty broken by a man who had never belonged to it, and he would serve until January 1, 1946, the first mayor of the consolidated city to win three terms. In 1937 he was reelected with about 1.34 million votes, 60 percent of the total, against roughly 891,000 for the Democrat Jeremiah T. Mahoney. He won again in 1941.

The order of finish mattered for what followed. Tammany's candidate had come in last, a year after the Seabury inquiry had driven Walker from office, and the machine had no claim on the new administration's appointments. The patronage that had run through borough offices and city departments for a decade was now in the hands of a mayor who owed it nothing, and La Guardia was free to give whole departments to men whose qualifications were their plans rather than their clubhouse service.

The city he took over could not pay its bills without help. The borrowing power that had financed the Independent subway was exhausted, and the banks that held the city's paper wanted economies before they would lend more. Federal money came with its own condition. Harold Ickes, secretary of the interior and head of the Public Works Administration, told La Guardia that New York would have to balance its budget before the PWA would fund its projects. The new administration cut the municipal payroll, reduced salaries, and imposed new taxes, and the 1934 budget balanced. The money followed. By June 1940 the city had received more than $250 million from the PWA alone, and La Guardia had persuaded Roosevelt to release construction money from the Works Progress Administration as well. The city's Municipal Archives, which hold his papers, list among the federally funded works of those years the Triborough Bridge, the Lincoln Tunnel, the East River drive later named for Roosevelt, the Henry Hudson and Belt Parkways, and the airport that would eventually carry the mayor's name.

Ickes's condition tied the city's ground to its ledger in a new way. New York's own credit had built the Independent subway, and the collapse of that credit had stopped the city from building much of anything. Now the right to build depended on a federal official's judgment of the municipal books, and the municipal employees whose salaries were cut in 1934 paid part of the price of admission to the federal program.

The arrangement had a logic that shaped everything built in the next decade. Washington wanted to move money quickly into wages, and it gave money to whoever could show plans, surveys, and a site. Ready projects won. The official who controlled the drawings, the engineers, and the land on which to build them controlled the flow of federal dollars into the city's ground, and in New York that official was rarely the mayor. La Guardia supplied the political alliance with Roosevelt, the balanced budget, and the public energy. The plans, in a great many cases, belonged to Robert Moses.

The Park Commissioner

Moses had been building on Long Island for a decade before La Guardia reached City Hall. He had risen as an aide to Governor Alfred E. Smith, and in 1924 he drafted the bill that created the Long Island State Park Commission, which was formally organized on January 8 of that year. The law produced the nation's first consolidated state park system, and Moses ran the commission until 1963. Its first great work was a beach that had to be manufactured before anyone could lie on it.

Jones Beach lay on a low barrier island off the south shore, about 20 miles from the city line, a strip of sand and marsh that the tides covered and uncovered. Moses's engineers dredged the State Boat Channel behind it and pumped the spoil onto the island until it stood 14 feet above sea level. On the raised ground they built two bathhouses of brick and stone, a boardwalk two miles long, and a water tower designed to look like an Italian campanile, all facing a beach that ran six and a half miles. The park opened on August 24, 1929. About 350,000 people came in its first month. The city parks department would later describe Moses's Long Island parks as the model for everything he built inside the city, and the method was as much a model as the design. The land was new, raised from the bottom of a bay the way the merchants of the eighteenth

century had filled their water lots along Pearl and Water Streets, and the agency that made it answered to a commission Moses had written into law himself.

The opening came two months before the stock market crash. Through the early years of the Depression, Jones Beach stood as proof that one official with a commission of his own design could take a stretch of shifting marsh, make it into solid ground, and fill it with hundreds of thousands of visitors within weeks of finishing. That record was Moses's principal asset when La Guardia came looking for projects that could absorb federal labor on short notice.

In 1934 La Guardia gave Moses the city. Until then each of the five boroughs had run its own park department, a structure that suited borough presidents and their patronage and produced five sets of maintenance crews and five sets of priorities. La Guardia abolished the borough departments and made Moses sole commissioner of a unified Department of Parks. Moses did not give up his state posts to take the job. He kept the Long Island commission, and he took a seat on the Triborough Bridge Authority as well. No one in the city's history had held public offices that overlapped in this way, with power over state parkland on Long Island, city parkland in all five boroughs, and a bridge agency with its own revenue.

The reorganization did more than simplify an organization chart. It took control of every park, playground, and parkway right-of-way in the five boroughs away from the borough presidents, who had answered to local voters and local clubs, and placed it in a single office whose holder already ran a state agency with its own engineers and its own way of working. Moses brought the Long Island methods into the city along with the Long Island staff, and from 1934 on, decisions about the use of public open space in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, Staten Island, and Manhattan were made in one place.

The federal relief rolls supplied the labor. The CWA projects La Guardia had handed Hopkins included hundreds of park jobs, and when the CWA ended the WPA took up the work on a larger scale. Moses had the plans and now had the men. Playgrounds went into vacant lots and the corners of existing parks across the boroughs. Old parks were regraded and replanted. The parkways that had begun on Long Island crossed the city line. The Grand Central Parkway, one of the first of the city parkways, ran through Queens to connect the Northern State Parkway on Long Island with the Interborough Parkway, which wound through the cemeteries along the Brooklyn and Queens border.

On the West Side the Henry Hudson Parkway ran up the Manhattan shore and into the Bronx, and in Brooklyn and Queens the Belt Parkway traced the edge of the harbor and Jamaica Bay.

The Grand Central Parkway made the connection between the two systems literal. A driver leaving the Interborough in Queens could continue onto the roads Moses had built on Long Island in the 1920s and on toward the state parks at their end. The city's first parkways began as extensions of the state's, designed by the same office and built to the same standard, and they tied the city's road network to a regional plan whose author held posts on both sides of the line.

These were roads for private cars, and their landscaping and their limited access made them parkways in the sense Olmsted and Vaux had used the word in Brooklyn in the 1860s. They also claimed shoreline. The Henry Hudson Parkway took the riverbank below Riverside Drive; the Belt took the edge of the bay. In each case the waterfront, which earlier generations had filled for piers and warehouses, was assigned to the motorist, and the assignment was made by a commissioner who held the land, the plans, and the federal labor at once.

The Authority

The Triborough Bridge had begun as a Tammany project. Ground was broken on October 25, 1929, during Walker's mayoralty, for a crossing that would join Manhattan, the Bronx, and Queens at the point where the Harlem River met the East River, using Randall's and Wards Islands as stepping stones. Then the money ran out. The city could not borrow to finish it, and for four years the bridge consisted of some foundations and a set of drawings.

In 1933 the state legislature, with Governor Herbert Lehman's support, created the Triborough Bridge Authority, a three-member public corporation empowered to build the bridge, collect tolls on it, and sell bonds secured by those tolls. The PWA agreed to provide about $9 million in direct funds and a loan in the range of $35 million to $37 million, and the first new construction contract was awarded on December 7, 1933, three weeks before La Guardia took office. When La Guardia appointed Moses to the authority in 1934, Moses joined as parks commissioner, and he soon became its dominant member.

The bridge nearly lost him. Moses had run for governor in 1934 as the Republican candidate and been beaten badly by Lehman. In the winter of

1934–35, Ickes tried to force Moses off the Triborough board. The PWA was paying for much of the bridge, and Ickes held the money. La Guardia was in the middle. His whole program depended on Ickes and on Roosevelt, and his parks program, his parkways, and his bridge depended on Moses. Moses kept his seat. When Ickes came to inspect the construction in April 1935, the New York Times noted that Moses was not there to meet him.

The episode showed where Moses's protection lay. Ickes controlled the money and La Guardia controlled the appointment, but Moses controlled the work already under way: the contracts let since December 1933, the engineers who understood them, and the schedule on which thousands of federal wages depended. Removing him would have stalled a project Washington was itself financing. An official who held the drawings and the job sites could outlast a cabinet secretary who held only the purse, and Moses would rely on that leverage for the rest of his career.

On July 11, 1936, the Triborough opened. Thousands of people came to Randall's Island for the ceremony, and Moses presided. He introduced the speakers, among them President Roosevelt and Secretary Ickes, who had tried a year and a half earlier to remove him. In his own remarks he described public works on the Triborough's scale as "too big for personal enmities." The phrase was a public reconciliation, and it was also a statement of who was introducing whom.

What opened that day was less a bridge than a system of them. Three long spans and miles of viaduct crossed the islands: a suspension bridge over the Hell Gate channel to Astoria in Queens, a truss bridge over the Bronx Kill to the South Bronx, and a vertical lift bridge over the Harlem River to East 125th Street in Manhattan, billed at the time as the largest lift span of its kind in the world. The approaches and the islands' own roads were finished by September 1937. The complex cost about $60.3 million, and the federal grant and loan together covered roughly three quarters of it. Randall's Island, which the city had used for institutions and which lay beneath the bridge's interchange, passed into the parks system as well, so that the toll plaza and the playing fields came under the same man.

The Triborough's real significance lay in its finances. The tolls were set to repay the authority's bonds, and once the bonds were sold the authority had an income that did not pass through the city's budget or depend on a vote of

the Board of Estimate. The Port of New York Authority, created by the states of New York and New Jersey in 1921, had pioneered the form in the harbor. The Triborough proved that a single crossing in the right place could generate money on a scale that made a public authority a political force. Cars paid. Revenue piled up. Bondholders had to be satisfied before anyone else, and the authority's chairman could tell a mayor or a governor that the covenants left him no choice.

The federal share points to the transformation the authority accomplished. Most of the money that built the Triborough came from Washington, but the larger part of it came as a loan, and a loan to be repaid from tolls turned federal relief money into a permanent debt owed by drivers to an agency that answered to its bondholders. Once that debt was paid down, the tolls would keep coming.

The model gave Moses a source of capital that voters could not reach and that mayors could not easily redirect. In the 1930s it worked in the public's favor in obvious ways: the bridge was built, the federal loan was carried, and the Depression city got a crossing it could not have financed from its own exhausted credit. But the same structure meant that decisions about where the next highway or bridge would go, and whose houses would stand in its path, were made inside an agency whose first obligation ran to the people who had bought its bonds. For the next three decades, a great deal of the city's ground would be allocated that way, and the Triborough Authority would remain independent until the state folded it into the new Metropolitan Transportation Authority in 1968.

Public Housing on Condemned Ground

On January 20, 1934, three weeks into his first term, La Guardia filed the certificate that established the New York City Housing Authority. It was the first public housing authority in the United States, created under a state law that empowered it to issue bonds, seek federal aid, and acquire land, including by condemnation. The tenement problem the reformers of 1901 had tried to solve by regulating private builders would now be addressed by a public agency that owned and ran its own buildings.

The authority's first project showed both its ambitions and its limits. First Houses occupied the blocks between First Avenue and Avenue A from East Second to East Third Street on the Lower East Side, in the tenement district that

Riis and Veiller had described. The method was rehabilitation. The authority acquired the existing row of Old Law tenements, part of it bought from Vincent Astor and the rest taken by eminent domain, and tore down every third building so that light and air could reach the rooms behind. The remaining buildings were gutted and rebuilt with a private kitchen and a private bathroom in every apartment, which in that neighborhood was itself a reform. The result was a little more than 120 apartments. Several thousand families applied for them, by the highest count about eleven thousand. On December 3, 1935, Eleanor Roosevelt dedicated First Houses during a national radio broadcast.

The Astor sale carried its own history. The family had built its fortune on Manhattan lots, buying ground at the city's edge and collecting rent as the city grew around it. On the Lower East Side in 1935, one of those lots passed from an Astor heir to a public agency that intended to house working families on it at rents set by policy rather than by the market. The transaction was small, but it marked the entry of a new kind of landlord onto ground the city's great private holders had long controlled.

The method proved too expensive to repeat. Buying out landlords at prices inflated by the prospect of a public purchaser, demolishing a third of what had been bought, and rebuilding the rest within old walls cost more per apartment than building from scratch. First Houses was a demonstration that the public could own and manage housing, and the authority drew from it the lesson that it would have to clear land and build new.

It did so first in Brooklyn and Harlem, with federal money. Williamsburg Houses covered twelve blocks of the old City of Brooklyn's Eastern District, from Scholes Street to Maujer Street and from Leonard Street to Bushwick Avenue. To build it, the authority demolished 568 buildings and relocated about 5,400 people. The architect was William Lescaze, a Swiss-born modernist, working with Richmond Shreve, one of the designers of the Empire State Building, and a team from the authority. Construction began in September 1936. Lescaze turned his four-story buildings at an angle to the street grid, so that they faced the sun and each other across landscaped courts rather than lining the old block fronts, and the complex was finished in 1938. The grid Brooklyn had inherited from its nineteenth-century surveyors was broken on purpose, block by block.

The scale of the clearance set Williamsburg apart from First Houses. On the Lower East Side the authority had kept two of every three buildings and rebuilt them in place. In Brooklyn it removed everything on twelve blocks, and the 5,400 people who had lived there were the first New Yorkers moved in large numbers to make way for public housing. The modernist plan required a clean site, and a clean site required that a whole neighborhood's residents go elsewhere before the first foundation was poured.

Harlem River Houses, the project the city had committed to after the 1935 riot, opened in October 1937. It and Williamsburg were segregated from the outset. Harlem River Houses was built for Black New Yorkers because the authority and its federal partners assumed that public housing would follow the color line of the neighborhood around it, and Williamsburg, in a white working-class district, filled accordingly.

The assumption shaped the map of public housing for decades. A federal program that might have been used to open new ground to Black families was instead used to build them better housing where they already lived. Harlem River Houses was a real gain for the families admitted to it, and it also confirmed Harlem's boundaries with public money.

Queensbridge Houses, opened in 1940 on the Long Island City shore beside the Queensboro Bridge, was the largest of the prewar projects. Its six-story buildings covered only about 18 percent of the site, leaving the rest to open courts and walks, a density far below that of the tenement blocks the reformers had condemned. Federal cost limits pressed the other way. The apartments were smaller than in the earlier projects, and the plan included few shops or community rooms for the thousands of families who would live there.

Every one of these projects began with an act of public taking. The Housing Authority acquired private lots, displaced the people on them, and erased the street pattern beneath them, on the theory that the families who came after would live better than those who had been removed. For the families admitted, the theory held: First Houses and Harlem River had waiting lists many times their size because the apartments were plainly better than the tenements. The families displaced from Williamsburg's 568 buildings had no comparable claim on the new ones. The authority decided who would live on the cleared ground through its own tenant selection, and from its first years that selection sorted New Yorkers by race as well as by income.

Ash, Fill, and the World of Tomorrow

The site of the 1939 World's Fair was a garbage dump. For years the meadows along the Flushing River in Queens had received the ash from the coal furnaces of Brooklyn, piled into gray mounds that rose beside the tracks of the Long Island Rail Road and the Flushing subway line. F. Scott Fitzgerald had put it into The Great Gatsby in 1925 as the valley of ashes, the wasteland between West Egg and Manhattan. In September 1935 the Board of Estimate approved it as the fairground.

Moses saw the fair as a way to get a park. The fair corporation would pay to fill and grade the land, build the roads, and put in the drainage, and when the exhibitors packed up the city would be left with a cleared site of more than a thousand acres in the middle of Queens. Work began on June 16, 1936. Crews leveled the ash mounds and spread them over the marsh. They dug two lakes, Meadow Lake and Willow Lake, and confined much of the Flushing River in culverts. Some of the ash would end up as fill beneath the roads that ring the site.

The land work was the part of the fair that lasted. The river that had wandered through the marsh was put underground for much of its course, the low ground was raised with the borough's own waste, and two bodies of water were dug where none had been. It was the Jones Beach method applied to a dump instead of a barrier island, and the ground it produced was as much an artifact as the beach.

Grover Whalen, Walker's former police commissioner, ran the fair as president of its corporation. Its theme was "Building the World of Tomorrow," and it covered about 1,200 acres around a pair of white structures, the needle of the Trylon and the great globe of the Perisphere, which became its emblem. It opened on April 30, 1939. In the General Motors pavilion, visitors rode past Futurama, a model of the United States in 1960, crossed by superhighways that carried cars between towers and suburbs. The fair's vision of the future was a landscape organized around the automobile, and it was presented on a site that Moses was already wrapping in parkways.

The world of tomorrow arrived early and in a different form. Germany invaded Poland four months after the opening, and when the fair reopened for its second season in 1940 its theme had been changed to "Peace and Freedom." The fair ended on October 27, 1940, after drawing roughly 44 million to 45 million visitors, and it recovered only about a third of its cost. Its investors lost

money. The park Moses had wanted from the start did not materialize at once; the grounds would stay a work in progress for decades. But the dump was gone, the land had been raised and drained, and the ground that had been a borough's ashpit now belonged to the parks department.

The division of costs and gains followed the design Moses had intended. The fair's backers absorbed the losses of a two-season exhibition that tens of millions attended and that never paid its way. The city kept the graded, drained, and lake-studded ground, the roads that served it, and the parkway connections around it. Private and corporate money had paid to turn an ash dump into a park site, and the public came away with the land.

A few miles north, at the edge of Flushing Bay, La Guardia was building an airport on another piece of made ground. The site had begun as the Gala Amusement Park, owned by the Steinway family, whose piano factory stood nearby in Astoria. In 1929 it became a small private field, the Glenn H. Curtiss Airport, later renamed North Beach. New York had no major commercial airport of its own. Its mail and passenger flights used Newark, across the Hudson in New Jersey. The Port Authority would later trace the push for a city airport to a 1934 episode in which La Guardia, flying home on TWA, refused to leave the plane at Newark because his ticket said New York, and insisted on being flown on to a field within the city.

The stunt made a point about jurisdiction. A flight sold as a trip to New York ended in another state, at an airport the city did not own and could not govern, and the traffic, jobs, and revenue that came with it accrued across the river. La Guardia's insistence on being carried to a field inside the city line was an argument that air travel, like the harbor and the rail terminals before it, should land on the city's own ground.

In 1937 the city and the WPA broke ground on a 558-acre airport at North Beach. Of that total, 357 acres were filled from the waters of the bay, with material brought from Rikers Island and from a nearby dump. Thousands of relief workers built the runways, the hangars, and a curving terminal. The project cost about $40 million in all, and critics called it a boondoggle. The field was dedicated as New York Municipal Airport on October 15, 1939; within a few weeks it was being called LaGuardia Field. Commercial service began on December 2, 1939, when a TWA DC-3 from Chicago landed a few minutes

after midnight. Within a year the airport handled more traffic than any other in the world.

More than three fifths of the airport's acreage had been underwater before the WPA crews arrived. The city's oldest method of making land, filling the shallows at its edge, had been put to the service of the newest form of transportation, and the bay that had once been extended into for wharves was now extended into for runways. In 1939 the fairground and the airport stood a short drive apart in northern Queens, each of them built by federal relief labor on ground that had been marsh, dump, or open water a few years earlier.

New Yorkers also came simply to watch. The terminal's rooftop Skywalk charged ten cents for a view of the runways, and in the first year the turnstiles took in about $150,000 in dimes. The figure suggests how novel commercial flight still was, and how readily the city's residents treated a WPA project on filled marsh as a public attraction. The airport's future traffic and noise would fall on the neighborhoods of Jackson Heights and East Elmhurst around it, the same districts the Queensboro Corporation had advertised in the 1920s as garden suburbs. In 1939 the ground was new and its costs were still in the future.

The City Buys the Subway

Just after midnight on June 1, 1940, La Guardia took the controls of the last train run by the Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit Corporation, the successor to the BRT, and drove it from 57th Street to Times Square. At that hour the city's Board of Transportation assumed operation of the BMT. On June 12 it took over the Interborough Rapid Transit Company, which had gone bankrupt. The first city-run train pulled out of Times Square at 12:08 in the morning. The two private systems were merged with the city's own Independent subway, whose first line had opened in 1932, into a single public network.

Unification ended an arrangement that went back to the first subway contract of 1900. Under that contract and under the Dual Contracts of 1913, the city had paid for most of the tunnels and the private companies had operated the trains and kept much of the fare. The arrangement worked while the nickel covered costs and left a profit. By the 1930s it no longer did. Wages and materials had risen; the fare had not, because no mayor could survive raising it, and the companies' revenues had collapsed into deficits and receivership. When the city

bought out the operators, it bought their liabilities along with their cars and their franchises. By then city taxpayers had put roughly $400 million into the IRT and BMT systems and about $750 million into the Independent, and the debt on all of it now fell entirely on the municipal budget.

The figures show how much of the system the public had already paid for. Taken together, the city's investment in the three networks came to well over a billion dollars before it owned a single private car or signal. The Independent alone, the line the city had built and run itself since 1932, accounted for nearly twice what taxpayers had put into the two private systems. Unification did not so much nationalize a private enterprise as bring the last of the operators onto ground the city had largely financed for forty years.

The city also inherited the elevated lines, which no longer fit its plans. The els had carried the first wave of population north in the 1870s and 1880s, and they still darkened the avenues beneath them. Soon after unification the city began closing and tearing down the lines that duplicated subway service, among them the Ninth Avenue El in Manhattan and several Brooklyn routes. The riders who had depended on the el walked farther to a station.

Public ownership settled the question of who controlled the transit system that had created so much of the city's residential ground since 1904. It did not settle who would pay for it. The nickel fare was now a political commitment of the city government, defended at the expense of maintenance and new construction. The public authority model Moses had built at the Triborough offered a sharp contrast. His bridges collected tolls from drivers and used the money to build more roads. The city's subway collected a fare fixed by politics and drew on the general budget to make up the difference. The money for movement in New York was flowing toward the automobile.

Wartime Ground

The Brooklyn Navy Yard stood on Wallabout Bay, the inlet where British prison ships had been anchored during the Revolution, on ground the federal government had held since the early nineteenth century. During the Second World War it became one of the country's major shipyards, employing tens of thousands of workers. The battleship Missouri, on whose deck the Japanese surrender was signed in Tokyo Bay in September 1945, was built there. The yard was federal property inside the city, outside the reach of the Board of Esti-

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mate, Moses, or the Housing Authority, and for the war's duration it sustained the industrial waterfront of northern Brooklyn and the neighborhoods behind it.

The war stopped most civilian construction, and with it the housing program of the 1930s. It did not stop planning. In 1943, with the city's housing shortage growing worse, La Guardia announced that the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company would build a housing development on the Lower East Side. Stuyvesant Town would rise on about 72 acres north of 14th Street, along the East River, in the old Gas House District: some 35 buildings of thirteen and fourteen stories, set at angles in a landscaped park, for roughly 24,000 people of moderate income. The project would cost about $50 million. The city would condemn the land, clear it, and relocate the tenants. Metropolitan Life would build and own the buildings and keep the rents. The company would receive a long tax exemption, usually given as twenty-five years. The legal basis was a state redevelopment law that Moses had championed to bring private capital into large-scale clearance.

The deal was a new arrangement of public and private power over land. At First Houses and Williamsburg the city had condemned blocks and kept them for public housing. At Stuyvesant Town it would condemn eighteen blocks of private property, displace the families who lived there, and hand the cleared ground to a private insurance company, subsidized by forgone taxes, to run at a profit. The public's powers of eminent domain and taxation were placed at the service of a private landlord.

The site was far larger than Williamsburg Houses, and the clearance would be correspondingly larger. In the 1930s the Housing Authority had justified condemnation by pointing to the public ownership of what replaced it. Stuyvesant Town dropped that justification. The families removed from the Gas House District would make way for tenants chosen by an insurer, in buildings the city would never own, on land the city had taken on the insurer's behalf.

The question that split the city was whether that landlord could choose its tenants by race. Frederick H. Ecker, Metropolitan Life's president, made clear that Stuyvesant Town would not admit Black families; he is widely reported to have said that Black and white tenants did not mix and might in a hundred years but not yet. Opponents tried to write a ban on racial and religious discrimina-

tion into the contract. Among them, in most accounts, were City Councilmen Stanley Isaacs and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. The City Planning Commission approved the plan in May 1943, and the Board of Estimate approved the contract. No anti-discrimination clause was included.

The record of that decision was later reviewed by the state's highest court in Dorsey v. Stuyvesant Town Corp., decided in 1949 after Black veterans sued over their exclusion. The Court of Appeals found that the contract had been approved without any clause barring discrimination, and that at least three votes on the Board of Estimate had been cast against it because of the racial exclusion. It also found that Moses had told the governor and the board publicly that no private enterprise would participate in such a venture if it lost the right to select its own tenants. The opponents had raised the question openly, Moses had answered it openly, and the city had voted with full knowledge of what it was approving.

Moses's statement framed exclusion as the price of private capital. Without the right to choose its tenants, he told the officials deciding the matter, no private investor would come, and without private investment there would be no rebuilding on this scale. The argument set the city's need for housing against Black New Yorkers' claim to share in it, and the Board of Estimate resolved it in the investor's favor. The dissenting votes the court recorded show that the alternative had been on the table and that a majority chose against it.

Metropolitan Life was building at the same time, in Harlem, a smaller development called Riverton for Black tenants, a parallel that mirrored the Housing Authority's sorting of Williamsburg and Harlem River. Stuyvesant Town carried that sorting into a new and larger form. At Harlem River the authority had followed a color line it found in the neighborhood around the site. At Stuyvesant Town the exclusion was a condition of the deal itself, demanded by the investor and accepted by the city before the first building went up. Ground taken from its owners by public power, cleared at public cost, and exempted from public taxes would be closed to a whole class of the public by a private company, and the arrangement would serve as a template for the clearance projects of the postwar years.

When La Guardia left City Hall on January 1, 1946, Stuyvesant Town was still being cleared. He had not run for a fourth term. The federal money that had sustained his administration had dwindled with the war, and the city faced

the postwar years with a public subway, a public housing authority, a unified parks department, an airport on filled marshland, a park site on an old ash dump, and a debt load to match. Much of what had been built in those twelve years stood on ground that had not existed in 1933 or had belonged to someone else, made by dredge and fill or taken by condemnation. Moses held his posts at the parks department, the Long Island commission, and the Triborough Authority, and with them the capacity to plan, finance, and condemn that he had built during the mayoralty that had just ended.

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Towers and Expressways, 1945–1977

Public housing, highways, suburban growth inside city limits, deindustrialization, and preservation fights lead to the burning Bronx and the fiscal crisis.

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CHAPTER 15

Towers in the Park, 1945–1960

The Line at February 1, 1947

The Housing and Rent Act of 1947 was written to wind down the wartime economy. By the time Congress passed it, most wartime price controls had already lapsed. The act kept ceilings on rents in housing that already stood and released everything else, and it drew the dividing line with a date. An apartment in a building completed after February 1, 1947, could rent for whatever a landlord could get. An apartment in a building standing before that date stayed under the ceiling. The date was meant to encourage construction without exposing existing tenants to a market that had been short of housing since the Depression. It outlasted the act, the emergency, and nearly everyone who voted for it. In New York, the shrinking stock of apartments under the city's oldest form of rent control was still defined by that line in the 2020s.

New York had built little private housing since 1929. Depression and war had halted the apartment boom that the Dual Contracts subways set off, and in 1945 and 1946 returning veterans and their families moved into a city with almost nothing vacant. The federal ceilings held the rents of the old stock in place. Albany prepared for the day Washington let them go. In 1946 the legislature passed what lawmakers called stand-by legislation, a state rent law to take effect if federal controls lapsed. By 1950 federal control was clearly on

its way out, and the state put its own system into operation. The Emergency Housing Rent Control Law, Chapter 250 of the Laws of 1950, froze rents and created the Temporary State Housing Rent Commission to administer them. Governor Thomas E. Dewey, a Republican, signed it. In 1951, as federal controls approached their end, the state adopted a full regulatory system modeled on the federal one. It covered more than two million apartments, and about 85 percent of them were in New York City. In 1950 nearly every rental apartment in the city was regulated. In 1953 the federal government withdrew from rent regulation in every American city, and New York was left alone with what it had built.

The law's title repeated the legal premise of 1920. Rent regulation rested on a declared emergency, and the declaration had to be renewed. Every renewal was a fight over how much of the old stock would stay inside the system. The 1953 renewal began the process of decontrol by exempting vacant apartments in one- and two-family houses, which mattered most in the outer boroughs, where small houses were common. Further decontrol laws followed in 1958. Each exemption moved a slice of housing out of the regulated city and into the market, and each was argued block by block in the language of fairness: landlords pointed to frozen rents and rising costs, tenants to the absence of anywhere else to go.

The arrangement had consequences that extended beyond the rents themselves. Rent control kept millions of tenants in apartments they could afford and gave them little reason to move. It gave owners of older buildings a fixed income from aging structures and little reason to spend on them. It sent investment toward new construction, which was exempt, and away from the tenement and walk-up stock where most working New Yorkers lived. The postwar city thus divided its housing into a frozen old part and a free new part. Meanwhile government at every level was preparing to clear large pieces of the old part and replace them with new buildings, public and private, whose tenants would be chosen by someone other than the market.

The Captain's Lawsuit

Stuyvesant Town opened to its first tenants in 1947 on the ground east of First Avenue between 14th and 20th Streets, where the Gas House District had stood. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company built it under the 1943

agreement with the city, which supplied condemnation of the site and a long tax exemption. Charles Abrams, the housing reformer and lawyer, wrote in Commentary in 1949 that the city had condemned the land and pushed out some ten thousand low-income tenants, along with their shops, churches, and schools and another publicly regulated housing project. In their place rose a walled precinct of brick towers set in lawns, rented to families who had to pass Metropolitan Life's screening.

Metropolitan Life had made its exclusion of Black tenants a condition of the 1943 deal. In 1947, as the first families moved in, Joseph R. Dorsey, a Black veteran who had served as an Army captain, and two other Black veterans sued for apartments.

Their case went to the core of the postwar bargain. Stuyvesant Town existed because the city had used eminent domain to take private land and had given up years of property taxes. If the government's powers had assembled the site, was the result a public project bound by the state's prohibitions on discrimination, or a private one free to rent as it pleased? A lower court answered in 1947 with a sentence that the plaintiffs carried up through the appeals: "Housing is not a civil right." The veterans' lawyers were an unusual team for a state court case. Abrams argued alongside Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP, with Joseph B. Robison, Will Maslow, and Shad Polier. Polier also brought a companion taxpayer's suit against Mayor William O'Dwyer, the former Brooklyn district attorney who had taken office in January 1946, challenging the city's support for a project that excluded Black New Yorkers.

The Court of Appeals, the state's highest court, heard argument on April 11, 1949. On July 19, 1949, it ruled four to three against the veterans. Judge Bromley wrote for the majority that Stuyvesant Town was private enterprise and that Metropolitan Life could choose its tenants, including on the basis of race. The court distinguished between discrimination in public housing, which was illegal, and discrimination by what it described as "private enterprise aided by government," which was not. Judge Fuld dissented. In 1950 the United States Supreme Court declined to review the case.

The decision set the legal terms for a decade of building. Title I of the federal Housing Act, passed that same summer, was about to send money into New York to assemble land for private developers through condemnation. The Dorsey ruling told those developers that the government's help did not oblige

them to rent to everyone. It also defined the strategy of those who had lost. If the courts would not treat subsidized private housing as public, the legislature could be made to forbid discrimination in it directly, and eventually in private housing generally.

The NAACP had called the company's Harlem complex for Black tenants, Riverton Houses, a "Jim Crow housing project," and the court had now approved the arrangement that phrase described.

The fight over Stuyvesant Town produced an organization that outlived it. Civil rights, labor, religious, and civic groups that had joined in the campaign formed the New York Committee against Discrimination in Housing, which became the forerunner of the National Committee against Discrimination in Housing. The coalition shifted its attention from the courts to the City Council and the legislature. Its first victories came in the 1950s.

Title I and the Committee on Slum Clearance

Moses did not wait for Congress. On December 17, 1948, Mayor O'Dwyer appointed a Committee on Slum Clearance, with Moses as chairman, to speed the clearance of slums by private capital under the federal law that everyone expected to pass. When the Housing Act of 1949 passed that summer, its first title offered cities federal loans and grants to acquire land designated as slum by eminent domain, clear it, and sell it at a discount to private developers who would build on it. The federal government and the city together covered the difference between what the land cost to take and what the developer paid. The committee made its preliminary report on July 4, 1949, days before the Dorsey decision. By then Moses had his sites in mind.

The committee's own documents show the scale. On August 29, 1956, it sent Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr. a report on a project at Seward Park on the Lower East Side. The report described it as the committee's seventeenth Title I proposal. The earlier ones made a map of the city's older neighborhoods: Corlears Hook and Washington Square South in Manhattan; Harlem, North Harlem, and Morningside-Manhattanville uptown; West Park on the Upper West Side; Columbus Circle and Lincoln Square in midtown; NYU-Bellevue on the East Side; Fort Greene, Pratt Institute, and Williamsburg in Brooklyn; and Seaside Rockaway in Queens. Some sites served universities and hospitals that wanted room to expand. Some served middle-income cooperatives or

luxury rentals. All of them began with people living on the ground who would have to leave. Under Moses the committee's major projects displaced an estimated 170,000 people from eleven large renewal sites, a figure larger than the population of most American cities. The law required relocation, and on paper the developers provided it. In practice tenants received small payments and lists of apartments, and many moved into nearby blocks already crowded.

The committee's methods are clearest at West Park, the project the developers called Manhattantown. It covered six blocks along Central Park West between West 96th and West 100th Streets, a stretch of brownstones and tenements with a substantial Black and Puerto Rican population. The land was appraised at about $15 million. The city sold it under Title I to a group led by Samuel Caspert for about $1 million. The sale gave the developers the buildings along with the land, and with the buildings came the tenants who had not yet moved out. The group did not clear and build. For years it collected rents from the remaining tenants of buildings it had been given at a fraction of their value and was supposed to tear down. Robert Caro's The Power Broker, drawing on Senate testimony, describes a further step. Manhattantown sold the tenements' stoves and refrigerators for $33,000 to a corporation run by the developer's son-in-law and then rented them back.

The Senate Banking and Currency Committee held hearings on Manhattantown in 1954, and they drew little notice in New York. In 1956 Gene Gleason and Fred Cook, reporters for the New York World-Telegram and Sun, published a series that laid out the arrangement for city readers: the discounted land, the delay, the rents from condemned buildings, and the political connections of the sponsors. Moses defended the program as the only way to rebuild at scale. He argued that private capital would come only on terms private capital found attractive, and that a city that wanted new housing had to accept the developers who would build it. The project was eventually completed as Park West Village, a group of slab towers designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, in the late 1950s. The rents in the finished buildings bore no relation to what the displaced tenants had paid.

Manhattantown made clear what Title I actually did with the ground. Federal money and municipal condemnation took land from owners and tenants in neighborhoods the committee chose and transferred it at a loss to developers the committee chose, on a schedule the developers largely controlled. The pub-

lic absorbed the cost of the write-down. The developer gained the difference between the appraisal and the price. The tenants received relocation payments. A program sold as slum clearance worked, at its worst, as a mechanism for moving land value from the poor to the well-connected, with the government doing the moving.

Opposition grew slowly and from below. In 1959 a new tenant federation, the Metropolitan Council on Housing, campaigned to remove Moses from the Committee on Slum Clearance and distributed 100,000 leaflets about his management of Title I. The council's founders were labor and housing activists, among them Jane Benedict, who had organized her Yorkville neighbors against demolitions earlier in the decade. Moses kept his chairmanship until the end of the decade. The record that the reporters and the tenants assembled in the late 1950s made Title I a political liability for the mayors who had approved it.

The Authority's Towers

The New York City Housing Authority built differently from Moses's private sponsors and on the same principle of clearance. Its prewar projects had been low buildings arranged around courtyards. Its postwar projects rose higher and spread across larger superblocks, with the street grid closed off inside the site and towers set at angles in open lawns. The design followed the planning doctrine of the time, which held that light, air, and open ground would cure the diseases of the tenement. It also followed cost. Taller buildings on fewer footprints let the authority house more families per acre of expensive condemned land while leaving most of the acre open.

On December 31, 1950, the authority completed Patterson Houses in the South Bronx. Its first tenants were a mix of Black migrants from the South and Caribbean and Puerto Rican families, the populations then arriving in the city in greatest numbers and the ones the private market served worst. Through the 1950s the authority filled long stretches of East Harlem and the Lower East Side with tower developments. In some blocks a public tower stood across the street from a Title I cooperative built on land cleared by Moses's committee, and in some neighborhoods the public and private clearances together removed most of the nineteenth-century fabric within a decade.

Brooklyn's eastern edge received some of the last projects of the decade. On September 30, 1959, the authority completed the Louis Heaton Pink Houses

in East New York, twenty-two buildings on a site bounded by Autumn Avenue, Linden Boulevard, Loring Avenue, and Crescent Street. The project was named for Louis H. Pink, a housing reformer who had served on the authority's first board in the 1930s. The project's 1,500 or so apartments brought several thousand new tenants to a neighborhood at the far end of the subway lines that brokers were simultaneously working to turn over, a combination whose results became visible in the 1960s.

Public housing sorted its tenants as surely as Metropolitan Life did, by different rules. The authority could not exclude applicants by race; state law and the Dorsey court itself had drawn that line. It selected by income and by its own judgment of who would make a suitable tenant. Federal and state law set income ceilings, so that only families below a certain earnings level could get in, and families whose incomes rose above the limit could be required to leave. The rule had a clear purpose: public housing was for those the private market could not house. It also meant that the projects lost tenants as they prospered and kept those who did not. The authority screened applicants for conduct and housekeeping, and its managers had discretion over which families the developments accepted. By the end of the decade the authority's tenants numbered in the hundreds of thousands, and the towers had become a defining landscape of East Harlem, the Lower East Side, the South Bronx, and eastern Brooklyn.

Where the towers went was decided largely by where clearance was possible. Neighborhoods with low property values, old buildings, and politically weak residents were easier to condemn. Those were disproportionately the neighborhoods where Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers already lived or were arriving. The authority therefore concentrated public housing in the districts that the private market and federal mortgage underwriting had already marked as poor and nonwhite. The towers improved the physical housing of many families who moved into them; the apartments had heat, hot water, private bathrooms, and elevators that many tenements lacked. They also fixed the location of the city's poor more firmly than the tenements ever had, because a tenement could be sold, converted, or abandoned, while a public housing project was permanent.

The Six-Hour Flight

Puerto Ricans had been coming to New York since before the First World War, and had been American citizens since 1917. The earliest settlement clustered in East Harlem, which Spanish speakers called El Barrio, and in parts of Brooklyn near the waterfront. Until the war the trip ran by steamship and took several days. After 1945 it ran by air. Puerto Rico's governing Popular Democratic Party, led by Luis Muñoz Marín, who in 1948 became the island's first elected governor, lobbied for cheap air service between San Juan and New York. A commercial flight took about six hours. Night-coach fares on the route fell to a few dozen dollars, within reach of a worker who had saved for months. The airplane replaced the steamship as the main route, and the migration that followed was among the largest in proportion to the sending population of any in the city's history.

An estimated 470,000 people, about 21 percent of Puerto Rico's population, left the island for the mainland between 1950 and 1960. In 1950, 80 percent of mainland Puerto Ricans lived in New York City. They came for work, in the garment shops of the West Thirties, the hotels and restaurants of midtown, and the factories of the Bronx and Brooklyn. They came to a city whose old housing was frozen under rent control and whose new housing was either exempt and expensive or public and rationed. They took what was available: the tenements of East Harlem that earlier Italian and Jewish tenants had left, the older buildings of the Lower East Side, and the walk-ups and apartment houses of the South Bronx, where Puerto Rican settlement spread rapidly through the 1950s along the routes of the subway lines to Hunts Point, Morrisania, and Mott Haven.

The newcomers arrived in time to be cleared. The Title I sites on the Upper West Side, in Harlem, and on the Lower East Side included blocks where Puerto Rican families had only recently found apartments, and Manhattantown's tenants were partly Puerto Rican. Some displaced families moved into public housing; Patterson Houses had Puerto Rican tenants from the start. Others moved into blocks of rooming houses and subdivided apartments. The pattern resembled what earlier chapters showed in Five Points and on the Lower East Side: a new population arriving in the city's oldest and most crowded housing just as the city decided that the housing should be torn down.

Puerto Ricans also built institutions on the ground they held. Hometown clubs, bodegas, Pentecostal storefront churches, and political clubs established themselves along East 116th Street and the avenues of the South Bronx. In 1958 Puerto Rican New Yorkers held the first Puerto Rican Day Parade in Manhattan, a claim to the city's main streets by a population that had been treated in much of the press of the decade as a problem of welfare and crowding. They were citizens who could vote on arrival, which gave them leverage that foreign-born immigrants of earlier generations had to wait years to acquire. The Democratic clubs of East Harlem and the Bronx began to register them, slowly, in the late 1950s.

Red Lines in Brooklyn

The federal government had drawn its maps of Brooklyn long before the postwar boom. In 1938 surveyors for the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, the New Deal agency that refinanced mortgages during the Depression, graded the borough's neighborhoods for lending risk. Their notes on the district that included Bedford-Stuyvesant and Weeksville, the free Black settlement where refugees had fled during the 1863 riots, read: "Colored infiltration a definitely adverse influence on neighborhood desirability." Parts of Crown Heights and Flatbush, where the surveyors listed the Black population as "Nil," received the second-best grade. The maps did not create segregation by themselves. They recorded the judgments of local brokers and bankers, and they put the federal government's authority behind a rule that a Black family's presence lowered the value of a block. Private lenders and federal mortgage insurers made the same judgment in the following decades.

The historian Craig Steven Wilder, in A Covenant with Color, wrote that by 1953 a "vast black ghetto stretched across Brooklyn." He traced it in part to the grading that had made mortgages scarce in Black neighborhoods and plentiful in white ones. Postwar Black migrants from the South and the Caribbean could rent in Bedford-Stuyvesant and could sometimes buy there, often on worse terms than white buyers elsewhere. They found it hard to buy almost anywhere else, because the lenders would not finance them and the brokers would not show them houses. The neighborhood grew outward block by block from its edges.

That outward growth became a business. Brokers known as blockbusters chose blocks they considered ripe, usually white neighborhoods next to growing Black districts, and flooded them with scare literature warning that the neighborhood was changing. In some cases they hired or recruited Black families to walk along the streets to frighten white owners into selling. White owners sold cheaply to the brokers, who resold to Black buyers at high prices, often on installment contracts or with mortgages the brokers arranged. East New York and East Flatbush, among other neighborhoods, were worked this way in the 1950s and 1960s. Similar methods spread through parts of the Bronx as Black and Puerto Rican families moved north from Harlem and the lower Bronx. The broker profited twice from the same house. The white seller lost money on a falling market. The Black buyer paid an inflated price for a house the banks had already marked down, often without the financing that would have let the purchase build wealth.

The racial line on the map had been drawn by federal agencies, enforced by private lenders, and exploited by brokers. The city's first serious attempt to legislate against it came from the coalition the Stuyvesant Town case had assembled. Stanley M. Isaacs, a liberal Republican who served as minority leader of the City Council from 1950 to 1962, championed a bill to forbid discrimination in private housing. Joseph T. Sharkey, a Democratic Council leader who also served as acting Council president, joined it, as did Earl Brown, a Harlem member of the Council, and the measure took their three names. The Council adopted the Fair Housing Practices Law, Local Law 80, known as the Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs Law, in late 1957, and it took effect in 1958. It was widely described as the first municipal law in the nation to ban discrimination in private housing. New York State followed in 1961 with a law covering both public and private housing.

The law made illegal what the Court of Appeals had permitted eight years earlier. A landlord or seller of multiple dwellings could no longer refuse an applicant because of race, religion, or national origin, and complaints went to a city commission empowered to investigate them. Enforcement was slow and depended on complaints, and the law did nothing about the lending decisions, made by banks and federal insurers, that shaped where buyers could get mortgages. It changed the legal status of the color line in housing without moving it much on the ground. Its passage nevertheless marked a turn. The postwar

settlement had treated the choice of tenants as a private right that government aid did not touch. By 1958 the city had declared that the choice was subject to public rules.

The Mayor and the Unions

The three mayors of the postwar years governed through the transition from the Tammany organization to something else. William O'Dwyer, who served from 1946 to 1950, was an Irish-born former policeman and Brooklyn prosecutor, a machine Democrat who presided over the first years of Title I and the Stuyvesant Town litigation. He resigned in the summer of 1950 to become ambassador to Mexico. The City Council president, Vincent Impellitteri, became acting mayor and won a special election that November running on an independent line against the organization's candidate. He served through 1953. In the Democratic primary that year he lost to Robert F. Wagner Jr., the Manhattan borough president, who took office in January 1954 and held it for three terms, until the end of 1965.

Wagner was the son of Senator Robert F. Wagner, the author of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which guaranteed private-sector workers the right to organize and bargain collectively. That act did not cover public employees, and in the early 1950s the city's workers had no legal right to bargain with their employer. Three months after Wagner took office in 1954, his labor commissioner, Joseph O'Grady, began studying how bargaining rights might be extended to city workers. The research took years. Ida Klaus, a former solicitor of the National Labor Relations Board, drafted recommendations that included certification of unions by card check: a union that collected signed cards from a majority of workers in a bargaining unit could be certified to represent them without a contested election.

The unions pressed for action. District Council 37 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, led by Jerry Wurf from the early 1950s, grew to 25,000 members by 1957 and lobbied Wagner to act. In 1958 he issued Executive Order 49, which became known as the little Wagner Act. It gave city employees bargaining rights and allowed a union representing the majority of workers in a unit to be certified as their exclusive representative. The order took up Klaus's card-check recommendation. In January 1962, on January 17, President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10988, which

extended bargaining rights to federal employees and followed the New York model.

The order changed the composition of the city's governing coalition. Tammany had held the city through patronage: jobs given by district leaders in exchange for votes and loyalty, with the job holder dependent on the club. Executive Order 49 set up an alternative. City workers could now organize as workers, bargain over wages and conditions through unions certified by the city, and support mayors as blocs. Wagner broke with the Tammany leadership in 1961 and won a third term with labor and reform support, and the municipal unions became a central part of the coalition behind him and his successors. The unions represented sanitation workers, hospital aides, clerks, and caseworkers, many of them Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers who found in public employment the job security the private economy denied them. The contracts they negotiated became one of the largest fixed obligations in the city budget.

By 1960 the postwar housing settlement was in place. Rent control froze the prewar stock and its tenants. Title I and the Housing Authority had cleared and rebuilt large parts of Manhattan, the South Bronx, and Brooklyn. The Dorsey decision and then the Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs Law had set, and reset, the rules for who could live in what was built. The city's public workforce had secured the right to bargain collectively over the terms of its labor, under an order signed by a mayor whose father had won the same right for private workers a generation earlier.

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CHAPTER 16

The Suburban Edge: Queens and Staten Island, 1945–1975

Addisleigh Park

In 1952 Our World, a national magazine for Black readers, described a neighborhood in St. Albans, Queens, as home to the "richest and most gifted" African Americans. The neighborhood was Addisleigh Park, a district of detached houses in southeast Queens, most of them in the Tudor Revival style, with steep gables and leaded windows set back behind lawns. Its residents in those years included W. E. B. Du Bois, Lena Horne, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, and Jackie Robinson. The houses had been built for buyers who were meant to look nothing like them. Developers laid out Addisleigh Park in the first decades of the century for white families only, and the deeds carried restrictive covenants that barred sale to Black people.

A covenant was a private agreement written into a deed, binding each later owner. It did the work that the 1916 Zoning Resolution could not legally do. A city could limit the height of a building on a lot or the use to which it was put, but it could not lawfully assign blocks by race. A seller and a buyer could agree to do exactly that, and courts would enforce the agreement against anyone who broke it.

Black buyers came anyway. The pianist Thomas "Fats" Waller lived on Sayres Avenue until his death in 1943, and he may have been the first prominent Black resident. Others followed in the 1940s, some of them buying through white or other third-party intermediaries who took title and passed it along, a tactic the New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation recorded on the historic-district markers it sponsored in 2025. The owners of neighboring houses went to court to enforce the covenants, and state courts upheld them in two separate lawsuits during the 1940s. In 1948, in Shelley v. Kraemer, the Supreme Court of the United States held that state courts could not enforce racial covenants. The clauses stayed in the deeds, but they lost the backing of a judge.

The federal government had spent the previous fourteen years doing the opposite. The Federal Housing Administration, created in 1934, insured the long-term, low-down-payment mortgages that made the postwar house affordable to a clerk or a machinist. Its underwriting standards treated a mixed or changing neighborhood as a bad risk and recommended covenants as a protection for the loans it insured. Federal appraisal maps of the late 1930s had already marked older and mixed districts as hazardous. A white veteran with a steady job could buy a new house in eastern Queens on federally insured terms. A Black veteran with the same job could not, in most of those subdivisions, buy at all.

The result was a racial line drawn across the borough's map of one- and two-family houses, and Addisleigh Park sat at one of its fault points. The Black families who bought there in the 1940s and 1950s were doctors, lawyers, entertainers, ballplayers, and civil servants whose incomes were high enough to meet the price and whose determination was high enough to absorb the lawsuits. Around them, in the postwar decades, St. Albans and the neighboring districts of Hollis and Cambria Heights became predominantly Black neighborhoods of owner-occupied houses with driveways and backyards. They were the part of New York where Black families most fully took hold of the suburban form that the federal programs had been designed to deliver to white ones.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the Addisleigh Park Historic District in 2011, roughly 80 acres and about 420 houses. Robert Tierney, the commission's chairman, said the district had a "history that illuminates African Americans' struggle for, and achievement of, the basic civil right

of homeownership." The commission was protecting the Tudor facades. The history it named was the purchase of those houses against the terms on which they had been built.

Garden Apartments for Veterans

In February 1946 the New York Life Insurance Company bought the site of a former country club in Fresh Meadows, in east-central Queens, to build a planned housing development with its own money. The city's housing shortage after the war was acute, and returning veterans, many of them doubled up with parents or living in Quonset huts and converted barracks, were the population that every builder and politician claimed to serve. Insurance companies had large reserves to invest and a state law of 1938 that encouraged them to put the money into rental housing.

Fresh Meadows opened by 1949, built for veterans and their families. It ran to about 140 buildings, most of them two- and three-story garden apartments arranged around landscaped courts, with one 20-story tower and two 13-story buildings rising from the low blocks. It was among the largest housing complexes in the city. It lay beyond the end of any subway line, and its plan assumed families who would travel by bus and, increasingly, by car. In density and appearance it sat between the six-story walk-ups of the older city and the single-family houses of Nassau County.

Black families were not admitted. New York Life's management, like Metropolitan Life's at Stuyvesant Town, chose its tenants, and its choice was white. The question surfaced in an unexpected quarter in the late 1940s, when the United Nations, newly settled in New York, contracted for staff housing at Fresh Meadows and at Peter Cooper Village. As the episode is usually told, the contracts left the landlords free to refuse tenants by race. UN employees protested, and the organization withdrew and leased apartments instead at Parkway Village, a garden complex in Queens near Kew Gardens Hills, where its diplomats and staff from Asia, Africa, and Latin America could live alongside Americans.

Farther east, on the Nassau County line, Glen Oaks Village went up in the late 1940s on the same model: rental garden apartments for veterans, close to three thousand units on more than a hundred acres of former farmland, two-story brick buildings set along curving lanes with parking courts behind.

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Decades later it was converted to a cooperative. Similar complexes spread through northeastern Queens, and they too left the choice of tenants to the owner.

These developments were the garden-apartment version of the suburb. They gave a family two bedrooms, cross ventilation, a patch of lawn, and a parking space, at rents that a young veteran could pay, inside the city limits and within the reach of city services and city schools. They also imported the suburb's exclusions. The open tracts that Queens still held in 1945 were mostly private grounds of one kind or another, golf courses, country clubs, a racetrack, estates and truck farms, and when insurers and builders converted them to housing the conversion came with a rule about who would occupy it. The rule was set by the landlord and, until the city's fair housing laws of the 1950s, almost no one could compel a change.

Idlewild and the Van Wyck

The largest such conversion in Queens was an airport. Along the edge of Jamaica Bay, in the early 1940s, the city began filling marsh and clearing the Idlewild golf course and resort to build a field larger than LaGuardia, which was already too small for the transatlantic aircraft then being designed. In 1944 the Board of Estimate authorized condemning roughly 1,350 more acres to enlarge the site. The airport's official name honored Major General Alexander E. Anderson, a Queens businessman and military commander who died in 1942: New York International Airport, Anderson Field. Almost no one used it. The airport was Idlewild in newspapers, on travel posters, and in conversation for the next fifteen years.

In 1947 the city leased its airports to the Port of New York Authority, which had the borrowing power to finish them, and the first commercial flight landed at Idlewild on July 1, 1948. Over the following decade the field grew into the main gateway for international travel to the United States, with airline terminals arranged around a central loop, each company building its own. A swamp and a golf links on the far edge of the borough became, within a generation, the country's chief gateway for international travelers.

The airport needed a road. Robert Moses, who as city construction coordinator and chairman of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority controlled most of the arterial program, built the interchange at the airport's

edge in 1948 as the southern end of the Van Wyck Expressway. The expressway's first segment, north from the airport to Queens Boulevard, opened in 1950. It carried the name of Robert A. Van Wyck, the first mayor of Greater New York, whose administration had overseen the consolidation of the borough into the city half a century earlier. The road ran north through central Queens, and in its path, as along every Moses expressway, stood houses and shops that were condemned and taken down.

Through the 1950s the Long Island Expressway was pushed east across Queens from the Queens-Midtown Tunnel, slicing through Maspeth, Elmhurst, Rego Park, and Fresh Meadows toward Nassau County. With the Grand Central Parkway, the Belt, and the Clearview, it gave eastern Queens a network of limited-access roads that made the car the ordinary way to reach work, shopping, and the airport. The neighborhoods that grew up along these roads in the 1950s and 1960s were built for drivers: semi-detached houses with garages under the living room, garden apartments with parking courts, and shopping strips with lots out front. Subway service ended at Jamaica and at Main Street in Flushing, and the city never extended it farther east. The expressways did the work that the Dual Contracts lines had done a generation earlier, turning farms into neighborhoods, with one difference. The subway had been a public utility open to anyone with a nickel. The expressway served people who could afford a car, and in the 1950s that meant a smaller and whiter share of New Yorkers.

On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. On December 4, Mayor Robert F. Wagner, in office since 1954, said he would send the City Council a bill renaming Idlewild for the dead president. The change was approved by December 18, and at a ceremony on December 24, 1963, the airport became John F. Kennedy International Airport.

Flushing Meadows and the Racetrack

The 1964–65 World's Fair opened on April 22, 1964, on the Flushing Meadows site that had held the fair of 1939, and it reused the earlier layout. Moses was president of the World's Fair Corporation. Its theme was "Peace Through Understanding," and its symbol was the Unisphere, a 12-story steel globe donated by United States Steel and set on the site of the 1939 fair's Perisphere.

Shea Stadium, the new home of the Mets, opened beside the fairground that same April.

Moses had predicted that the fair would draw 70 million visitors. Over two seasons, ending October 17, 1965, it drew about 51.6 million. The fair was widely judged a commercial failure. For Moses the fair had always been a means to an end he had pursued since the 1930s: the transformation of the old Corona ash dumps into a great park for Queens. After the second season the pavilions came down, and the land passed to the city as Flushing Meadows Corona Park, the largest park in the borough, with the Unisphere, the New York State Pavilion's towers, and the Hall of Science left standing. The park he wanted was built on the proceeds of an event that lost money for its backers.

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Six miles to the southeast, the Jamaica Race Course had opened on April 27, 1903, before a crowd of about 15,000. The Metropolitan Jockey Club ran it for half a century, on a site at the southern edge of Jamaica that was surrounded, by the 1950s, by the houses of South Jamaica, a neighborhood that had become predominantly Black. In 1959 the state's racing association closed the track to concentrate its racing at Aqueduct, and the roughly 120-acre site was cleared for housing.

The builder was Abraham Kazan, who had organized the Amalgamated Housing Cooperative in the Bronx in the 1920s and since then had built a succession of cooperatives through his United Housing Foundation. Kazan's co-ops were limited-equity: members bought shares at a low price and sold them back at roughly what they had paid, so the apartments stayed affordable to the next buyer. The name Rochdale came from the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, the English weavers whose 1844 store founded the modern cooperative movement. The architect was Herman Jessor, who had designed most of Kazan's buildings.

Rochdale Village was completed in 1963, bounded by Baisley Boulevard, Bedell Street, 137th Avenue, and what is now Guy R. Brewer Boulevard. It had twenty 14-story buildings arranged in a cluster of cross-shaped towers, with about 5,860 apartments and more than 25,000 residents, along with a shopping center, schools, and its own power plant. It was the largest housing cooperative in the world until Co-op City in the Bronx overtook it. Kazan acknowledged

that "Rochdale Village owes its existence to Robert Moses," whose influence over city housing programs had steered the site and its financing to the United Housing Foundation.

Kazan's earlier cooperatives had drawn their members mostly from Jewish families in the garment unions and allied trades. Rochdale was different by design. He planned it as a racially integrated community and built it in the middle of Black South Jamaica, with the expectation that white and Black middle-income families would buy shares in the same towers and send their children to the same schools. For a time they did. Over later decades the cooperative became a largely Black middle-income community, as white members sold and moved east or into the suburbs.

Rochdale belongs in this chapter because of its site, its residents, and its intent. It was built on a recreational tract at the edge of the city, like Fresh Meadows and Idlewild. Its residents were the same class of clerks, teachers, transit workers, and civil servants who were moving into garden apartments and small houses elsewhere in Queens. Its founder tried to do on purpose what the private builders of Fresh Meadows had refused to do: open new housing on the city's edge to Black and white families on equal terms. That the integration did not hold says less about the cooperative than about the market around it. The single-family houses of Nassau County and eastern Queens that drew white families away were the ones that federal mortgage policy had underwritten.

The Narrows and the Greenbelt

Until 1964 Staten Island was the city's most isolated borough. The ferry ran to Manhattan, three bridges, opened in 1928 and 1931, crossed to New Jersey, and the island remained, in large part, a place of farms, woods, and tidal marsh, with old villages along the north and east shores. A bridge across the Narrows to Brooklyn had been proposed for decades and repeatedly shelved. After the Second World War Moses revived it through the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, whose toll revenues gave him the means to build it without asking the city for money. The Army agreed to sell land at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn and at Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island for the anchorages.

Construction began on August 13, 1959. The engineer was Othmar Ammann, who had designed the George Washington Bridge three decades

earlier. The bridge carried the name of Giovanni da Verrazzano, the Florentine navigator who sailed into the harbor in 1524, though for most of its life it was officially spelled with a single z. Its main span, 4,260 feet between the towers, was the longest suspension span in the world, about 60 feet longer than the Golden Gate's, and it held that distinction until the Humber Bridge in England surpassed it in 1981. The upper deck opened on November 21, 1964, and the lower deck on June 28, 1969.

The Brooklyn approaches ran through Bay Ridge, a settled neighborhood of row houses, apartment buildings, and churches, many of them home to Norwegian, Irish, and Italian families. To make room for the approach roads and toll plaza, the authority demolished hundreds of houses and displaced some seven thousand people. Residents organized and protested through the late 1950s, and Moses refused to alter the route. The Bay Ridge clearance was one of the larger dislocations of his career outside Manhattan, carried out to deliver traffic to a borough where few of the displaced would end up living.

On Staten Island the effect was immediate. Builders bought farms and wooded parcels and covered them with row houses, semi-detached houses, and small apartment buildings, often on narrow lots with garages at street level. The island's population grew rapidly in the decade after the bridge opened, drawing families mostly from Brooklyn, many of them Italian American and Irish American, many of them leaving neighborhoods whose racial makeup was changing. Light industry and shopping centers followed the new roads. A borough that had been a rural edge of the city became, within fifteen years, its fastest-growing suburb, and its development came almost entirely through private building on open land with a car-dependent pattern, since no subway line reached the island and the old Staten Island Railway served only its eastern side.

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The bridge was one piece of a road network that Moses had drawn for Staten Island long before it was built. His 1930 parkway master plan proposed a Richmond Parkway running south and west across the island's wooded spine toward the Outerbridge Crossing. The state designated it a state arterial in 1945. The city began buying the right-of-way in 1948, and by 1961 it had acquired most of the land. In 1965 the Board of Estimate approved the route, a

9.5-mile road estimated at $34 million, and construction on one section began in 1966. That year Moses lost his post as the city's arterial coordinator, under a new mayor, John V. Lindsay, who took office in January 1966.

The section that remained unbuilt ran 4.8 miles between Richmond Avenue and the Staten Island Expressway, through the hills and woods of the island's center, past ponds and swamps. Residents who had watched the bridge transform the island's north and east shores organized against it. Their tactics differed from those of the Bay Ridge residents who had tried and failed to stop the approaches. They did not simply protest. They used the right-of-way, which the city already owned, for nature walks and outdoor education centers, cut hiking trails along it, and pressed for zoning rules that protected the island's slopes, wetlands, and woods. The strip of land assembled for a highway became a public landscape before the highway could be built on it. Over the following years the 4.8-mile section was canceled, and the route was removed from the city map.

The parkway's right-of-way became the core of the Staten Island Greenbelt, about 2,800 acres of connected parkland that holds the city's largest remaining forest preserve. A 200-foot mound of rock blasted out for the abandoned road stayed where the contractors left it, and for decades Staten Islanders called it Moses Mountain. In 2022 it was renamed Paulo's Peak.

The defeat of the Richmond Parkway is usually set beside the more famous fights over the Lower Manhattan Expressway and Washington Square. It deserves a place of its own because of who won it and where. The opponents were homeowners in a borough that Moses's own bridge had opened to development, and they used the language of open space and nature that his parks department had taught a generation of New Yorkers to value. They kept the land in public hands by putting it to a public use he had not planned. The Greenbelt survives as a record of a place where the residents of the suburban edge reversed a Moses road after the city had already bought the ground for it.

Hauser Street

On January 12, 1971, CBS broadcast the first episode of All in the Family, a comedy produced by Norman Lear and Bud Yorkin. It was set in Astoria, Queens, in the house of Archie Bunker, a World War II veteran who worked on the docks and owned the house he lived in with his wife, Edith, his

daughter, Gloria, and her husband, Michael, a graduate student from Chicago whom Archie called Meathead. The address was 704 Hauser Street. There is no Hauser Street in Astoria. The house shown in the opening credits stands at 89-70 Cooper Avenue in Glendale, on the Queens–Brooklyn border, and the episodes were taped in California. The show ran until April 8, 1979, and for much of that time it was the most-watched program on American television.

The comedy ran on Archie's bigotry. He had an epithet for every group, held opinions on welfare, busing, and crime that his son-in-law spent each episode contradicting, and treated his house and his block as possessions to be guarded against outsiders. In the early seasons a Black family, the Jeffersons, moved in next door, and much of the humor came from two homeowners on the same street, neither willing to concede the other's claim to it. George Jefferson eventually left Queens for a high-rise apartment on the East Side of Manhattan, in a spin-off series of his own.

Lear's Archie was a caricature, and the show's audience divided over whether it was laughing at him or with him. As an image of a place, the program fixed in the national mind a particular idea of the outer borough: a white working man, a small house he owned outright or nearly so, a street of similar houses, and a fierce sense that the arrangement was his by right and under threat. The idea had some basis. By 1971 hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers in Queens, Staten Island, and the outer parts of Brooklyn and the Bronx fit the outline. They had bought their houses with the help of veterans' benefits and federally insured mortgages, reached them by expressways and bridges that public authorities had built, and lived in neighborhoods whose racial makeup had been set, in many cases, by covenants, lenders' maps, and landlords' tenant choices that were legal when the neighborhoods were laid out.

The program left out most of what the borough was. It showed no Addisleigh Park, where Black families had bought into covenant-restricted houses and held them through two adverse court rulings. It showed no Rochdale Village, where twenty-five thousand people had moved into a cooperative built to be integrated. It showed no garden apartment of the kind that housed a large share of Queens families, and no airport, though the real Astoria lay a few minutes from LaGuardia and the real Glendale within reach of Kennedy. Archie's Queens was a fixed place of houses defended by their owners. The Queens that had been built between 1945 and 1975 was a moving arrangement

of public roads, federal credit, private developments on former golf courses and racetracks, and contested claims by Black and white New Yorkers to the same new neighborhoods. Its form was suburban. Its politics, as the next decades would show, were those of a city.

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CHAPTER 17

The Factory City Empties, 1950–1970

Fifty-Eight Boxes

On April 26, 1956, a converted World War II tanker called the Ideal-X cast off from Port Newark, on the New Jersey side of Newark Bay, bound for Houston. Fifty-eight metal containers, each 35 feet long, were fastened to a frame built over its deck. The ship belonged to Malcom McLean, a North Carolina trucking operator who had spent several years working out how to carry the trailer body of a truck by sea without its chassis and wheels. Cranes set the boxes aboard in less than eight hours. A conventional freighter of similar size could take days to load, because every sack, crate, bale, and barrel was handled separately by gangs of longshoremen. The Ideal-X reached Houston five days later, where the boxes were lifted onto waiting trucks.

McLean's case for the box rested on one comparison. By his reckoning, loading a medium-sized ship the conventional way in 1956 cost $5.83 a ton. Loading containers cost less than 16 cents a ton. Most of the difference was labor and time. A box sealed at a factory in Ohio could travel to a ship, across an ocean, and onto a truck at the far end without anyone opening it, so it was also far harder to steal from, and pilferage had been one of the heaviest costs of running a port.

New York's port in 1956 was built for the opposite method. Along the Hudson from the Battery to the West Fifties, along the East River, and down the Brooklyn shore from the Navy Yard to Bay Ridge, finger piers reached out at right angles from the bulkhead, each a long shed on pilings. A ship tied up beside one. Its cargo came out of the hold in slings, was broken down by hand on the pier, sorted in the shed, and carried off by truck through the streets behind. On the Manhattan side those streets were West Street and the narrow blocks of the Lower West Side and Chelsea, and on the Brooklyn side they were the cobbled lanes of Red Hook and the waterfront avenues under the Gowanus Expressway. The piers had been built over two centuries of filling and extending the shoreline. They employed tens of thousands of men, and the system of hiring them had become a scandal well before McLean's ship sailed.

Loan Sharks and Public Loaders

The scandal reached print first. In 1949 Malcolm Johnson's series "Crime on the Waterfront," published in twenty-four parts in the New York Sun, won the Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting. Johnson described a port in which organized crime and union officials controlled who worked and who did not, and his reporting supplied raw material for the 1954 film On the Waterfront. In the early 1950s the New York State Crime Commission, working with the New Jersey Law Enforcement Council, took the subject into public hearings and built a record of testimony about the piers on both sides of the harbor.

The picture that emerged was of a labor market run as a racket. Longshoremen were poorly paid and irregularly employed, and loan sharks lent to them at ruinous rates against the next day's wages. Bookmakers worked the piers. Cargo theft was routine. Truckers who came to pick up or deliver goods had to pay so-called public loaders, men with no employer but the pier boss, for the right to have their trucks loaded or unloaded at all. Hiring for the work gangs went to men who supported the union leadership that controlled the pier and kicked back part of their pay. A longshoreman who refused could stand at the pier head every morning and never be chosen.

The governments of the two states answered with a joint body. In August 1953 New York and New Jersey enacted an interstate compact, dated August 12 and approved by Congress and President Dwight D. Eisenhower, that created the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor. Its mandate was

to drive crime out of the port and to make hiring fair. It licensed pier superintendents, hiring agents, and stevedoring companies, registered longshoremen, and moved hiring out of the informal pier-head selection and into halls it supervised.

Its record was mixed. Historian Peter B. Levy, assessing the commission's first thirty-five years in 1989, concluded that it had not eliminated organized crime from the docks: federal prosecutions in the 1970s convicted a long list of waterfront figures, among them a vice president of the International Longshoremen's Association. He also found that it had suppressed the most open forms of corruption and improved working conditions for the men who remained. The public loader and the pier-head kickback became much harder to sustain under a licensing regime.

The timing turned the commission's work into something its authors had not planned. The states built an apparatus to clean up a labor system at almost the moment that a new technology began to make the labor itself unnecessary. Three years after the compact, the Ideal-X sailed. Each container that went aboard by crane was cargo that no longshore gang would sling, sort, or carry, and no loan shark or pier boss could tax. The racket on the piers was beaten down partly by regulation and partly by the disappearance of the work it fed on.

The Port Moves West

The Port of New York Authority grasped the change faster than the city did. The bistate agency, established in 1921, already ran Port Newark under a lease from the City of Newark, and it had the borrowing power and the land to build what containers required. Six years after the Ideal-X voyage, around 1962, it opened the Elizabeth–Port Authority Marine Terminal on the marshes beside Newark Bay, which the authority describes as the world's first terminal built specifically for container ships.

The choice of site was a choice about land. A container port needed wide aprons along the water for cranes, acres of flat paved ground on which to stack boxes and park chassis, rail spurs, and fast access for trucks to the highways that fanned out across the continent. The Jersey meadows offered all of these in quantity: open, flat, cheap, and next to the New Jersey Turnpike. Brooklyn and Manhattan offered narrow piers with sheds on them, a few hundred feet of upland between bulkhead and street, and truck routes through some of the

most congested blocks in the country. The finger pier and its shed, which had been the right shape for break-bulk cargo, were the wrong shape for the box, and there was no room behind them to become the right shape.

The city tried to hold on. In the late 1950s and 1960s it spent money rebuilding piers on the Manhattan and Brooklyn waterfronts, and some conventional cargo continued to move across them through the decade. But the general direction of the harbor's commerce was set. Shipping lines that adopted containers followed the cranes to New Jersey. The longshore jobs that remained on the New York side thinned, and the piers that lost their tenants were left to rot, to burn, or to wait for uses no one had yet proposed. The waterfront that the Dongan and Montgomerie charters had let the city sell off in water lots, and that merchants had pushed out block by block into the rivers, became a strip of surplus land along the edge of the busiest city in the country.

Some of the work that left the piers reappeared at the airports. Joshua Freeman, in his history Working-Class New York, notes that air transportation jobs in the city nearly doubled in eleven years, from 29,600 in 1958 to 56,700 in 1969. Most of those jobs were in Queens, at Idlewild, renamed for John F. Kennedy in December 1963, and at LaGuardia. They were real gains. They were also a different kind of work in a different borough, and they did not go to the same men in the same neighborhoods. A longshoreman who had lived in Red Hook, Greenwich Village, or Chelsea within walking distance of his pier did not easily become a baggage handler or mechanic twelve miles away.

Lofts and Runaway Shops

The piers were the most visible part of a larger industrial economy that was beginning to shrink. In the early 1950s New York held more than a million manufacturing jobs, a peak it never regained. According to the Department of City Planning, manufacturing accounted for almost a third of all employment in the city in 1950. Those jobs were spread across the five boroughs in a dense pattern that the subway and the tenement had produced together: garment lofts in the West Thirties, printing plants in lower Manhattan and the Hudson Square blocks near the Holland Tunnel, breweries in Williamsburg and Bushwick, sugar refineries on the Brooklyn shore, machine shops and metalworks in Long Island City, furniture and piano factories in the South Bronx, food processors along the railroad sidings of every borough. Most were small. Many

occupied a floor or two of a loft building, and their workers arrived by subway from apartments a few stops away.

The losses began while the totals were still near their height. In 1954, Robert F. Wagner Jr.'s first year as mayor (he served from 1954 through 1965), the city lost 41,000 manufacturing jobs. At the same time the region's factory employment was spreading outward. New York City held 56 percent of the metropolitan region's manufacturing jobs in 1953 and 54 percent in 1960. By 1966 most of the region's manufacturing jobs lay outside the city line, in northern New Jersey, Westchester, and Long Island, where new plants rose on single-story sites along highways.

The shift followed the same logic as the container. Postwar industrial production increasingly ran on long horizontal assembly lines, forklifts, and trucks, which wanted one-story buildings with loading docks and parking, set on cheap land near highway interchanges. The multistory loft, with its freight elevator and its loading entrance on a crowded side street, had been efficient when goods moved by horse, rail, and handcart and workers moved by subway. It was poorly suited to the truck. Suburban sites also offered lower taxes and, in many cases, freedom from the city's unions.

Garments showed the pattern most plainly, because garments were the city's largest manufacturing industry and remained so from the middle of the nineteenth century until 1970. The industry accounted for 27 percent of the city's manufacturing employment in 1940 and the same share in 1967. Its total workforce peaked in the 1950s at somewhere around 300,000, the great majority of them women, many of them Jewish and Italian in the earlier decades and increasingly Puerto Rican and Black as the 1950s went on. The 1916 Zoning Resolution and the loft towers that followed it had concentrated the trade in the blocks between Sixth and Ninth Avenues from the mid-Thirties to the low Forties, a few minutes' walk from Pennsylvania Station and the Times Square subway lines.

The industry held its share of the city's factory jobs because the rest of manufacturing was shrinking too, not because garments were growing. Between 1947 and 1956 the city's dress industry and its coat, suit, and skirt industry together lost nearly 22,000 workers. In the same years the counties around New York gained nearly 11,000 jobs in those trades, and Pennsylvania, Texas, and the South grew in importance. Manufacturers increasingly sent the sewing to

low-skill assembly-line shops outside the city, many of them nonunion, where the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union could not enforce the wage standards it had won in Manhattan. The rise of mix-and-match sportswear in the 1950s accelerated the move: separates were simpler garments that could be cut and sewn in long runs by less-skilled workers, and they rewarded the manufacturer who found the cheapest labor. Design, showrooms, selling, and the most fashion-sensitive production stayed on Seventh Avenue. The long runs left.

Labor writers called these runaway shops, and the term described more than a lower wage. A shop that left the West Thirties for a mill town in Pennsylvania left behind a loft floor, a subway ride, and a worker in the Bronx or on the Lower East Side whose rent had assumed a factory paycheck. The tenement and subway neighborhoods described in earlier chapters were built on a bargain in which the city supplied cheap transit and dense housing within reach of millions of jobs. The bargain held only as long as the jobs stayed within reach. In the 1950s and 1960s they began to move beyond the end of the subway lines and then beyond the region.

The decline was gradual through these decades and steep after them. City Planning's figures show manufacturing at about 2 percent of city employment by 2015, some 78,000 jobs, and the department dates the sharpest losses to the 1970s. In the 1950s and 1960s the factory city was still large. It was losing ground every year, and the jobs that replaced its losses, in offices, hospitals, government, and the airports, went disproportionately to people with more schooling and to places other than the old industrial blocks.

Brooklyn's Paper

On January 29, 1955, the Brooklyn Daily Eagle published what turned out to be its last regular issue. The paper had been founded in 1841, when the City of Brooklyn was seven years old; Walt Whitman edited it for a time in the 1840s. It had grown into the most widely read afternoon newspaper in the United States, and through the half century since consolidation it had served as the voice of a borough that still thought of itself as a city. It covered Brooklyn's courts, churches, schools, real estate, and ball club with an attention no Manhattan paper offered, and it argued Brooklyn's interests in City Hall and Albany.

The New York Newspaper Guild had struck the Eagle that winter. On March 17, 1955, the forty-seventh day of the strike, publisher Frank D. Schroth announced what he called his "irrevocable" decision to close the paper, saying the strike had "destroyed" it. The Eagle then employed 681 people and did about $6 million a year in business. Its newsroom and presses fell silent. In 1957 Schroth gave the paper's morgue of clippings, photographs, files, and records to the Brooklyn Public Library. A revived Eagle appeared from 1960 to 1963 and then folded too.

The strike was the immediate cause, but the Eagle had been weakening for years under pressures that bore down on every afternoon paper in the country: television, the shift of advertising to suburban papers and shopping centers, and readers who no longer bought an evening edition on the way home from work. Brooklyn's own changes added to the strain. Many of the middle-class families who had been the paper's core readers were leaving for Long Island, and the borough's factories and docks were beginning to empty.

The Eagle's closing removed one of the institutions that had kept Brooklyn's separate identity alive after 1898. The borough still had its own courthouse, its own borough president, its own college and museum and botanic garden. It no longer had a daily paper of its own. Two years later it lost the other institution that mattered most to its sense of itself.

The Corner of Atlantic and Flatbush

The Brooklyn Dodgers played at Ebbets Field, a brick ballpark that had opened in 1913 on a tight block in Flatbush, near the eastern edge of Prospect Park. By the 1950s the park seated about 32,000, had almost no parking, and sat in a neighborhood whose streets had not been built for the automobile traffic of a postwar crowd. Walter O'Malley, the lawyer who had become the club's principal owner, wanted a new stadium. He sold Ebbets Field to Marvin Kratter, a real estate developer, on terms that allowed the Dodgers to lease it back for three years, and he began pressing for a larger, domed ballpark at the intersection of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, over and around the Long Island Rail Road's Brooklyn terminal. Buckminster Fuller, the engineer and designer, worked on drawings for a dome.

The site had obvious advantages. It sat at a junction of subway lines and the railroad, which could carry fans from the Long Island suburbs where many

former Brooklynites now lived. It was also occupied: a terminal, rail yards, and blocks of small commercial and industrial buildings, a meat market among them, owned by many parties. O'Malley said he was willing to pay for the stadium itself with private money. He could not assemble the land himself. That required the city to condemn it.

To press his case, O'Malley scheduled fifteen Dodger home games at Roosevelt Stadium in Jersey City across the 1956 and 1957 seasons. The message was not subtle. The club could play elsewhere.

The man who decided whether the city would use eminent domain at Atlantic and Flatbush was Robert Moses. By the mid-1950s he controlled the city's parks, its slum clearance program under the federal Title I law, and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, and his judgment on any project that required public land was close to final. Moses had used the city's condemnation power on a vast scale to clear land for housing projects, expressways, and institutions. He refused to use it for a stadium that would belong to a private baseball club. He offered instead a site in Flushing Meadows, Queens, on ground he had already reclaimed from the Corona ash dumps for the 1939 World's Fair, where the city could build a stadium and lease it to the team. O'Malley rejected Queens. A Brooklyn team, he insisted, would play in Brooklyn.

The documents of 1957 record the fight ending. A memorandum in O'Malley's files dated April 11, 1957, notes that at a meeting that day Moses said "political apathy" had doomed the Atlantic and Flatbush project, and that the Flushing Meadow site was discussed again. Brooklyn Borough President John Cashmore had backed the Atlantic Avenue plan, and the state had created a Brooklyn Sports Center Authority to study it, but no official with the power to move the land acted. In August 1957 the engineering firm Madigan-Hyland reported that a Brooklyn stadium would cost about $20 million, of which Dodger management said it would put up $5 million. Moses then wrote to Peter Campbell Brown, the city's corporation counsel, that the Atlantic Avenue site was a "dead" issue.

In October 1957 O'Malley announced that the Dodgers would move to Los Angeles, where the city offered him several hundred acres in Chavez Ravine. The New York Giants left at the same time. Their owner, Horace Stoneham, took the club from the Polo Grounds, under Coogan's Bluff in upper Manhat-

tan, to San Francisco. For four seasons New York had no National League team. When an expansion club, the Mets, arrived in 1962, it played its first two seasons in the empty Polo Grounds, then moved in 1964 into Shea Stadium, built by the city in Flushing Meadows on the site Moses had offered O'Malley.

Brooklyn's grief over the Dodgers attached itself to O'Malley, and for a generation he was the borough's villain. Robert Caro, in The Power Broker, is among those who have placed more of the blame on Moses, arguing that a man who condemned whole neighborhoods for his own projects could have found the land for this one. Both men were making decisions about the same few acres. O'Malley wanted public power used to assemble private ground for his business at a location of his choosing. Moses wanted any stadium the public helped build to sit on public ground where he had chosen to put it. The city's power of eminent domain was the asset both sought to direct, and the dispute was over whose purposes it would serve. More than half a century later the same corner would be fought over again, for an arena.

The departure took something from Brooklyn that no economic table records. It also belonged to the same movement as the runaway shop and the container port. The Dodgers went where land was open and parking was possible, and a growing population lived in cars rather than on subway lines. Ebbets Field was torn down in 1960. Kratter's company replaced it with apartment towers.

The Yard

The Brooklyn Navy Yard, on Wallabout Bay at the bend of the East River, was one of the borough's oldest and largest industrial employers. It occupied 290 acres of piers, dry docks, shipways, foundries, and machine shops behind a wall along Flushing Avenue. Its postwar payroll had already fallen far below its wartime peak, and through the early 1960s it kept shrinking. Rumors that the Navy meant to close it circulated from 1961, and the yard's unions, the borough's elected officials, and local business groups lobbied Washington to keep it open. By July 1964 the payroll was under 10,000.

In November 1964, a few weeks after Lyndon Johnson's landslide reelection, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara announced that the yard would close as part of a program of base closings meant to cut the military budget. The Philadelphia Navy Yard, larger and with more room to grow, would stay

open. The announcement set off the last campaign to save it. Mayor Wagner, Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, Senator Jacob K. Javits, and Robert F. Kennedy, who had just won election as New York's other senator, all pressed the administration to reverse the decision. McNamara called it "without qualification irrevocable." The roughly 9,500 workers still on the payroll were told that the yard would close in June 1966.

The last major job was the modernization of the aircraft carrier USS Intrepid, which left the yard in October 1965. That year the yard's great hammerhead crane, built in 1941 to lift battleship gun turrets, was taken down. By the summer of 1966 the gates were closed and the shops empty.

The closing hit the neighborhoods around the yard hard. Fort Greene, Vinegar Hill, Clinton Hill, Williamsburg, and the blocks of Bedford-Stuyvesant to the east had sent workers through its gates for generations. Black workers had gained a foothold in its skilled trades during and after the war, and the yard had been among the better routes into stable industrial work open to them. The thousands of jobs that disappeared in 1966 were not replaced by anything comparable nearby.

The land itself changed hands. In 1969 the federal government sold the yard to the City of New York, which became the owner of one of the largest industrial properties on the eastern seaboard. The city's first major tenant was Seatrain Lines, which leased about 45 percent of the site to build oil tankers, under a deal that promised some 3,000 jobs. The rest of the yard, its old buildings and dry docks and piers, became the city's to fill or leave empty. From 1969 onward the question of what should happen to the Navy Yard was a question for City Hall, and it has stayed one.

Sunset Park

Five miles down the Brooklyn shore, Sunset Park had been built as an industrial waterfront from the start. At the end of the nineteenth century Irving T. Bush began assembling piers, warehouses, rail sidings, and factory lofts along the bay between roughly 32nd and 51st Streets. By the end of World War I Bush Terminal had grown into a complex of about 200 acres that employed tens of thousands of people. Ships unloaded at its piers, freight cars carried goods along its own railroad to the national rail network by float across the harbor, and manufacturers rented space in its concrete loft buildings to make and store

goods within a few hundred feet of the water. Just south of it, the federal government built the Brooklyn Army Terminal, completed in 1919, whose enormous warehouses shipped supplies to American forces in two world wars.

The residential blocks of Sunset Park rose behind the waterfront on the hill toward Greenwood Cemetery, a neighborhood of Scandinavian, Irish, Polish, and Italian families whose men and women worked on the piers and in the lofts. The connection between the two halves was physical. Workers walked down the cross streets to the shore. In 1941 Moses built the Gowanus Expressway on the structure of the old Third Avenue elevated line, and in 1955 the highway was widened. The expressway ran along Third Avenue the full length of the neighborhood, separating the industrial waterfront from the residential hill with a wall of steel and traffic. Third Avenue, once a commercial street, went dark under it.

The waterfront then lost its business. After 1950 the Army Terminal cut its workforce from a wartime peak in the tens of thousands to around a thousand. Bush Terminal's shipping fell steeply through the 1950s and 1960s as container ports and trucking in New Jersey drew away the cargo its piers had handled. The complex had been designed around the ship, the freight car, and the multi-story loft, the same combination that was failing everywhere else in the city. In 1963 a group of investors led by the real estate broker Harry Helmsley bought the terminal. Topps, the chewing gum company, which printed its baseball cards in the Bush Terminal lofts, moved out in 1965. Under its new owners the old lofts filled with garment shops and other light manufacturers paying modest rents, and the complex eventually took the name Industry City. The Bush Terminal Railroad ran its last trains in December 1971.

Sunset Park's experience was repeated along much of the Brooklyn and Queens shore: in Red Hook, where the piers emptied, along the Greenpoint and Williamsburg waterfront, in Long Island City, where factories closed or moved to the suburbs. The land did not vanish. It stayed in place, zoned for industry, owned by investors or by the city, half occupied, while the jobs that had justified it went elsewhere. Some of it would find new uses within a generation and some would sit for much longer. In the 1960s its emptiness was the visible sign that the industrial city that had grown up with the tenement, the pier, and the subway was coming apart.

Fulton Street

On February 4, 1966, Robert F. Kennedy, a little more than a year into his term as senator, toured Bedford-Stuyvesant on foot. His guides were members of the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, a federation of neighborhood organizations, block associations, and churches. Bedford-Stuyvesant, home to several hundred thousand people, was by then the largest Black community in New York and one of the largest in the country. It had absorbed the Black families who left Harlem's overcrowding and the families arriving from the South and the Caribbean; it had also absorbed the losses of the Navy Yard, the shrinking factories of north Brooklyn, and decades of disinvestment by banks that would not lend there. Its brownstone and row-house blocks were among the finest housing stock in the city. Many were in disrepair, and unemployment was high.

The activists who walked with Kennedy told him the neighborhood had been studied enough. They wanted action, and they wanted control of it. After the tour Kennedy met residents at the YMCA, where he heard the same demand.

Over the following months Kennedy's staff worked with the council's leaders, local businessmen, and planners on a structure that could bring money into the neighborhood and spend it there. On December 9, 1966, Kennedy, Mayor John V. Lindsay, who had taken office that January, and Senator Javits announced a community development effort for Bedford-Stuyvesant. It was incorporated in 1967 as the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, often called the first community development corporation in the country.

The project began as two corporations, an arrangement that reflected a tension between local leadership and the outside backers Kennedy had recruited. One body, the Renewal and Rehabilitation Corporation, was led by a group of Black women from the coordinating council, among them Elsie Richardson, who had worked with planners from the Pratt Institute, including Ronald Shiffman, on renewal proposals for the neighborhood. The other brought together white business and financial leaders whose role was to raise money and lend credibility. The two were eventually merged into a single Restoration under a board led from the neighborhood.

The money came from the federal Special Impact Program, created under the antipoverty laws, and from foundations, among them the Ford Foundation,

the Taconic Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Franklin A. Thomas, a lawyer who had grown up in Bedford-Stuyvesant and had served as a deputy police commissioner, became the corporation's first president. Restoration's early programs ranged across the neighborhood: hiring local men to repair the exteriors of thousands of brownstones, offering mortgage help to homeowners whom banks had turned away, financing local businesses, and training residents for jobs.

Restoration also needed a home. It bought a block of industrial buildings on Fulton Street, Bedford-Stuyvesant's main commercial avenue, among them the former Sheffield Farms milk-bottling plant at 1368 Fulton Street, built in 1915. The plant had been part of the industrial fabric that once employed the neighborhood. In the late 1960s, as factories, piers, and the Navy Yard closed around it, the building became the headquarters of a neighborhood organization trying to put Bedford-Stuyvesant's residents to work on their own blocks.

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CHAPTER 18

The Expressway Years, 1948–1972

Two Lines Through East Tremont

In the early 1950s two lines could be drawn across East Tremont, in the central Bronx, about two blocks apart. Each marked a possible path for the same stretch of highway. The northern line, the one Robert Moses had chosen, ran through 159 apartment buildings, and building along it meant removing 1,530 families. The southern line would have taken six dwellings, nineteen families, and the bus station of the Third Avenue Transit company. The East Tremont Neighborhood Association, a group of residents led by a housewife named Lillian Edelstein, studied both, backed the southern route, and asked for it. Moses refused. The Cross Bronx Expressway was built on his line.

The road had been coming for years. In 1945 Moses, then the city's parks commissioner and chairman of the Triborough Bridge Authority among several other posts, published a plan for more than 100 miles of new expressways across the five boroughs. The Cross Bronx was its hardest piece. On paper it was an 8.3-mile, six-lane highway joining the George Washington Bridge to the roads of the eastern Bronx. In practice it had to cross a borough whose streets, subway and elevated lines, and parkways ran mostly north and south, and to cut through them without stopping any of them. The planners counted 113 streets in the way, along with seven expressways and parkways, one subway line,

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five elevated lines, and three commuter railroads, and every one of them had to keep running while the trench beneath or beside it was dug. Work began in the late 1940s on the sections that were easiest to clear. The road then opened in pieces over the following two decades, a stretch at a time.

The middle section waited. In 1952, more than six years after Moses had announced the expressway, work had still not begun on Section 3, which ran west from the Bronx River Parkway to the Major Deegan Expressway through East Tremont and Morris Heights. This was the densest ground on the whole route, a district of walk-up apartment houses built in the decades after the subways had reached the Bronx, with shops on the avenues and schools and synagogues and churches on the side streets. The families on the line were mostly tenants. They owned nothing a condemnation proceeding was obliged to value, and the buildings themselves belonged to landlords who would be paid.

What the neighborhood association did was unusual for its time. Its members did not argue that the Bronx needed no expressway. They accepted the road and contested the alignment, and they came back with an engineering alternative that served the same purpose and spared most of the people. The southern route bent a short distance off Moses's line and passed through ground occupied mainly by the bus terminal. The arithmetic was plain: nineteen families against 1,530. Tenants on the line received notices to leave, giving them a matter of months, and the association held a public rally in the fall of 1953. None of it moved the route. The section was built where Moses had drawn it, and the buildings along it came down.

Why Moses held to his line has never been settled. Robert Caro, who reconstructed the episode in *The Power Broker* two decades later, tied the refusal to the bus terminal and to the interests of people close to Moses in the property around it. That is Caro's account, and it has stood as the standard one for half a century. Caro also described the blocks on either side of the finished road as badly decayed by the mid-1960s, and wrote that something like ten thousand residents had left East Tremont. Later historians, among them Michael Caratzas and Ray Bromley, have questioned how much of the neighborhood's decline the expressway caused, pointing to the forces that were emptying much of the borough in the same years. That argument is a real one, and it bears on how the Bronx of the 1970s should be explained. It does not

change what happened in Section 3. A neighborhood proposed a cheaper way to lose less, and the official who held the decision declined it.

Edelstein recalled the fight in 1988, in an interview for the PBS series *The American Experience*, by which time the expressway had become a byword for what highways did to cities. In the 1950s the episode drew far less notice. The association had no vote on the Board of Estimate and no seat on any authority, and the man it was arguing with held appointed office and answered to no one in the neighborhood. Its members were right on the numbers and had nothing else to bring to bear. Over the next fifteen years New Yorkers in other neighborhoods would find the leverage East Tremont lacked, and the difference between the places that found it and the places that did not became the story of these years.

The Heights and the Trench

The Brooklyn-Queens Expressway was supposed to pass through the middle of Brooklyn Heights. In 1941 Moses and the City Planning Commission proposed a route across the neighborhood, the old district of row houses on the bluff above the East River that Hezekiah Pierrepont had begun selling off in lots after the steam ferry made it a commuter's suburb more than a century earlier. The residents of the Heights fought the proposal and defeated it.

The planners came back around 1945 with a new line at the western edge of the neighborhood, a six-lane highway running along the face of the bluff, roughly at the level of what is now the Promenade. Here the road would not have demolished blocks of houses, but it would have cut off the gardens behind the houses on Columbia Heights and put traffic directly under their back windows. Residents opposed this version too. The solution came from one of them, a homeowner whose garden lay in the path, who suggested stacking the road in two levels and covering it. The engineers cantilevered the expressway out from the bluff, one roadway above the other, over the shore below. Moses took the cover and turned it into a public walk.

Construction began around 1946. The work changed the street pattern at the water's edge. Before the Promenade, Montague Street ran past Pierrepont Place and down the slope to Furman Street and the piers, the route by which goods and people had moved between the Heights and the river. The cantilevered road and its deck closed off that descent. The Promenade, running

along the top of the structure from Remsen Street to Orange Street, opened onto a view of the harbor and the towers of Lower Manhattan.

Moses dedicated it on October 7, 1950. "I don't know of anything quite like this in any city in the world," he said. He was probably right. The Promenade was a highway designed as a park for the people who lived above it, and it remains one of the most admired public spaces in the city.

A short distance to the south the same expressway was built differently. Through the blocks of South Brooklyn later called Carroll Gardens, the road went in as an open trench below street level. The neighborhood was divided into two halves that face each other across the cut, joined by bridges at the cross streets.

The contrast between the two stretches says more about the city of the 1940s than either does alone. Moses was the same official in both places, and the road served the same traffic. The Heights had won the first fight outright and then shaped the second, because its residents were owners, organized, and connected, and they knew how to make a proposal an engineer could accept. Their suggestion cost Moses nothing he wanted and gave him a monument. South Brooklyn and East Tremont lacked that kind of standing. In all three places the road went through, and only the Heights had a say in how.

Lincoln Square

On May 14, 1959, President Dwight D. Eisenhower turned the first spade of earth for Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts on Manhattan's West Side. As he did, Leonard Bernstein led the New York Philharmonic and a choir from the Juilliard School in the Hallelujah chorus from Handel's *Messiah*. The ground he broke lay in the Lincoln Square urban renewal area, a tract that ran from 60th Street and Columbus Avenue up to 70th Street and West End Avenue. It took in the site of the new arts complex and a new Manhattan campus for Fordham University, along with housing to be built by private developers on the land around them.

The project was a Title I clearance, assembled under the federal program Moses had used since the late 1940s to condemn neighborhoods and resell the land to private sponsors at a written-down price. What set Lincoln Square apart was the nature of its sponsors. Here the institutions were the Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera, the Juilliard School, and a Jesuit university, organized

into a single enterprise under John D. Rockefeller III, who became Lincoln Center's first president in 1956 and its chairman in 1961. The idea of gathering the city's leading cultural organizations on one campus had a long prehistory. Moses supplied the means of getting the land.

He also supplied the description of the land that justified taking it. Moses called the area "the worst slum in New York." The blocks around Amsterdam and West End Avenues in the West Sixties, long known as San Juan Hill, had been a district of tenements and rooming houses for generations, home to Black New Yorkers early in the century and, by the 1950s, to a large and growing Puerto Rican population that had settled there after the migration by air described in an earlier chapter. Many buildings were old and some were in poor condition. Calling the district the worst slum in the city turned those conditions into a legal finding, and the finding allowed condemnation.

Removals began in 1958. About 2,000 Puerto Rican residents were forced out of their homes in Lincoln Square and San Juan Hill. Counts of the whole displacement vary because they measure different things; the figures usually given run past seven thousand residents and some eight hundred businesses. The renewal plan called for roughly 4,400 new apartments. Few of them went to former residents, whose incomes did not match the new rents, and many of those displaced moved to Harlem and to the Bronx, where the arrival of families cleared from Manhattan added pressure to neighborhoods already crowded and already losing their industrial jobs.

The groundbreaking ceremony was a statement about whom the ground was for. A president, a conductor, an orchestra, and a choir marked the start of a campus for the city's most celebrated performing institutions, built on blocks whose residents had been told they lived in its worst slum. The complex that rose over the next decade, with its plaza and fountain set back from Broadway on a raised platform, gave the city a cultural center of real distinction. It also stands as the clearest case in this period of a public power over land, the power to declare a neighborhood blighted and take it, put to the service of institutions that would draw their audiences from across the region and few of them from the blocks that had been there.

Lincoln Center rose in the same weeks that the city made a decision about another piece of ground two miles south. In April 1959, a month before Eisenhower lifted his spade, the Board of Estimate permanently closed Wash-

ington Square Park to automobile traffic. The two decisions were made by the same government, under Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr. (1954–1965), and they pointed in opposite directions.

The Square

In February 1952 Shirley Hayes, a Greenwich Village resident and the mother of four sons, learned of a city plan to link Fifth Avenue with West Broadway by a roadway through the middle of Washington Square Park. The design called for a four-lane drive, 48 feet wide and partly sunk below grade, carrying traffic from the foot of Fifth Avenue south through the park. It was not a local improvement. The road was meant to feed cars into the planned Lower Manhattan Expressway, and it was tied to a Title I redevelopment project for the blocks south of the square.

The park was already crossed by traffic. Fifth Avenue buses used it to turn around, and cars drove through it. The plan would have made the crossing a highway approach. Hayes began organizing, first among the parents who used the park with their children and then across the Village. Her demand went further than stopping the new road. She called for closing the park to all motor vehicles, and she refused the compromise plans put forward over the following years, among them a tunnel beneath the park and a turnaround for buses alone.

The campaign gathered support well beyond the park's playgrounds. Raymond Rubinow chaired the Joint Emergency Committee to Close Washington Square Park to Traffic, which became the coalition's formal vehicle. Its supporters included Eleanor Roosevelt, who lived at 29 Washington Square West, the anthropologist Margaret Mead, the critic Lewis Mumford, and a writer and editor at *Architectural Forum* who lived on Hudson Street, Jane Jacobs. The coalition had something East Tremont had lacked: residents with access to newspapers, to national reputations, and to the Democratic organization itself. Carmine DeSapio, the leader of Tammany Hall, drew his own political base from the Village. He had backed the bus-only turnaround, one of the compromises Hayes rejected, but by 1958 he had come around to closing the park to cars entirely.

On October 23, 1958, the Board of Estimate voted to close the park to all but emergency traffic on a trial basis. On November 1, 1958, the activists staged an event they called the "Last Car Through Washington Square," a

final ceremonial passage before the barriers went up. In April 1959 the board made the closure permanent. The Fifth Avenue buses kept using the park as a turnaround for some years after private cars were banned, which was the one concession Hayes had not been able to prevent. The road to the Lower Manhattan Expressway was gone.

Hayes's papers, now held by the New-York Historical Society, record a campaign run from kitchens and park benches and through the mail over seven years. Its achievement was larger than a single closed road. For most of the postwar period the argument over a Moses project had been about where the road would go and how much it would take. Hayes argued about whether the road belonged in the park at all, and she won on those terms. The question she had insisted on, whether this piece of ground should carry cars, was one the city's planners had treated as already answered.

Hudson Street

Jane Jacobs wrote *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* from the street she lived on. Her house stood on Hudson Street in the West Village, and the book drew its evidence from the sidewalks, stoops, shops, and bars around it, and from what she had seen while reporting on redevelopment projects for *Architectural Forum*. Random House published it in 1961. The book announced itself in its first sentence as "an attack on current city planning and rebuilding," and it was.

Her argument went against nearly everything the city's builders believed. The planners of the postwar decades held that crowded, mixed neighborhoods of old buildings were the source of disease, crime, and disorder, and that the cure was to clear them and replace them with towers set apart in open grounds. Jacobs held that the crowded, mixed street was what made a neighborhood work. A street with shops, apartments, workplaces, and bars in close quarters was used by different people at different hours, and those people kept it safe by watching it. She called this "eyes on the street." The towers in the park, by contrast, emptied the ground around them of the activity that would have made it safe, leaving lobbies, elevators, and grounds that no one watched. Her book was full of specific observations from Hudson Street of how the sidewalks and the people who used them actually behaved, and they gave it a concreteness the planning literature lacked.

In February 1961, one morning soon after she had sent the manuscript to her publisher, Jacobs read in the newspaper that the West Village had been designated a blighted area eligible for urban renewal. The finding placed her own neighborhood in the same legal category as San Juan Hill. She and her neighbors organized against it, and they won by contesting the label itself. They showed that the West Village was not a slum: that its buildings were sound and occupied, its businesses viable, its residents unwilling to be cleared. The designation was defeated.

The West Village fight joined the book's argument to the mechanism Moses and his successors had relied on. Under Title I, a neighborhood's fate depended on a finding. Once planners declared ground blighted, it could be condemned, assembled, and sold. Moses's phrase for Lincoln Square had done exactly that work. Jacobs's book offered a different account of what a healthy neighborhood looked like, and the Village's residents used that account to challenge a specific finding about specific blocks. They proved that a planning label was a judgment and could be argued with.

The timing mattered. *Death and Life* appeared in the year the Village beat the blight designation, three years after Washington Square, and in the middle of the decade when the city's governing coalition was beginning to fracture. Its argument gave a name and a theory to the instincts of residents across the city who had been told that their neighborhoods were obsolete. It also had limits that its critics noticed. The neighborhoods that could best make Jacobs's case were often those, like the Village, whose old buildings and mixed streets were already attracting people with money and education, and the defense of the existing street was easier to mount there than in East Tremont or San Juan Hill.

Broome Street

The road that Washington Square was meant to feed had been on the city's maps since the 1930s and 1940s. The Lower Manhattan Expressway was planned as an elevated highway of ten lanes running along Broome Street across the width of the island, joining the Holland Tunnel on the west to the Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges on the east. It would have carried traffic between New Jersey and Brooklyn and Long Island without the vehicles touching the streets of Manhattan, and it would have taken Broome Street and the buildings along its north side to do it. Many of those buildings were the cast-

iron loft structures of the mid-nineteenth century, now part of a designated historic district, which in the early 1960s still housed small manufacturers and warehouses.

Moses pushed the expressway hard in the 1960s, and its opponents fought it through most of the decade. The struggle ran in rounds. A vote against the road at the Board of Estimate in 1962 looked for a time like the end of it, but the plan returned and was argued over again for years afterward. The opposition organized as the Joint Committee to Stop the Lower Manhattan Expressway, and Jacobs, by now the author of a widely read book and a veteran of two local victories, was among its most active members. The residents of Little Italy, the lofts of the cast-iron district, and the Lower East Side made common cause against a highway that would have run through all of them.

The opposition prevailed. In 1969, in the fourth year of John V. Lindsay's mayoralty (1966–1973), the city dropped the Lower Manhattan Expressway, and it removed from the official map the same year the Verrazano Street feeder that would have connected it to the network. Formal steps to clear the expressway's own line from the map followed, but the project was dead. The decades of uncertainty over whether the road would be built had left their mark on the blocks along its path. Owners had little reason to invest in buildings that might be condemned, and rents along Broome Street had stayed low for years.

The Broome Street fight completed the sequence that had begun in Washington Square. The park road was the expressway's feeder, and killing it in 1958 had weakened the case for the highway itself. The West Village victory in 1961 had shown that a neighborhood could defeat a planning finding. By the late 1960s a coalition of residents, preservationists, and writers had stopped a highway that Moses considered essential, across the width of Lower Manhattan. The tactics that had failed in East Tremont, and that Brooklyn Heights had used only to shape a road it could not prevent, now worked against the largest project in Lower Manhattan.

Part of the explanation lies in who opposed the road. Much of it lies in what had happened to Moses's standing by then. By the mid-1960s he had given up the city parks commissionership and his Long Island posts, and had spent the first years of the decade running the World's Fair in Flushing Meadows. The Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority was the center of what remained of

his power. It was precisely that base that the new mayor and the governor now set out to take from him.

The Authority Taken

On February 10, 1966, a little more than a month after taking office, Mayor Lindsay sent state legislative leaders a plan for a single agency to run the city's transportation. Under it the Transit Authority and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority would be merged, and Moses would lose his post at Triborough. Moses called the plan unconstitutional and impractical. He called the proposed merger of the two authorities "absurd" and "grotesque."

The stakes were financial as much as administrative. Triborough's bridges and tunnels collected tolls that ran well above what the authority needed to maintain them and pay its bonds, and that surplus had financed Moses's independence for three decades. The subways, by contrast, lost money on every fare. A merged agency would pool the two, using the tolls of drivers to help carry the riders of the trains. For Moses this meant the end of the separate pot of money that had let him build without asking the Board of Estimate or the legislature for appropriations. For Lindsay it meant using money already being raised from the city's traffic to support the city's transit.

Governor Nelson Rockefeller took the mayor's idea and widened it. In June 1966 he announced a regional transportation authority that would take in the subways, the Triborough authority, and the commuter railroads serving the suburbs. The plan moved through Albany over the following year and a half. In 1968 the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, which Moses had run since the 1930s, was folded into the new Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Moses had expected a role in the new arrangement. The MTA's new chairman and Governor Rockefeller shut him out of power. For the first time since the 1920s he controlled no agency, no budget, and no stream of revenue.

The merger is easy to read as personal retribution, and the politics of 1966 through 1968 certainly included an element of that. It also marked a turn in how the city's transportation would be governed. The authority model Moses had built, a public corporation with its own revenue and its own bonds, insulated from elected officials, survived him. The MTA was itself such an authority, and the Port Authority across the harbor was another. What changed was who controlled the surplus and what it was spent on. Under Moses the tolls had paid

for more bridges and more highways. Under the MTA they would subsidize the trains.

The Verdict

On September 16, 1974, the publisher Alfred A. Knopf brought out Robert Caro's *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. The book ran to about 1,300 pages. Caro had spent years on it, reconstructing from documents and from hundreds of interviews how a reformer of the 1920s became the most powerful unelected official in the history of the city. It won the Pulitzer Prize.

Its subtitle stated its thesis. Caro portrayed Moses as a man of extraordinary ability who came to care more for power than for the uses to which reformers had first meant it to be put, who controlled those around him, who was fixed on the automobile at the expense of mass transit, and whose projects fell hardest on poor neighborhoods and on Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers. The book's chapter on East Tremont, built around the alternate route that would have spared most of 1,530 families, became the best-known passage in it, and for many readers the expressway that resulted came to stand for everything that had gone wrong in the postwar city.

Moses was still alive when the book appeared, and he contested its portrait. He did not change the verdict. *The Power Broker* fixed his reputation for the rest of the century and beyond, and nearly every later argument about him, including the scholarship of Caratzas, Bromley, and others who have questioned parts of Caro's account of East Tremont or pointed to the parks, beaches, and pools that Moses built in the 1930s, has had to start from it.

The book also fixed an account of the years between 1948 and the late 1960s in which the fights described here appear as a single contest between a builder and the neighborhoods he built through. That account is broadly right about the pattern. Through the 1950s, the neighborhoods Moses cleared or cut through, from East Tremont and South Brooklyn to San Juan Hill, had little standing to stop him, and the neighborhoods that bargained successfully, like Brooklyn Heights, had owners with money and connections. Through the 1960s, residents of the Village and Lower Manhattan, armed with a theory of the street, a talent for organizing, and access to newspapers and political leaders,

stopped one project after another, while Lindsay and Rockefeller took away the revenue base that had made Moses independent.

What the residents won was a set of rules that still governs argument over city ground. A highway, a clearance project, or a new campus would now face neighborhood opposition organized from its first announcement. A planning finding of blight was a claim to be contested, not a fact to be accepted. The old street, the mixed block, and the existing building gained defenders who could argue for them in Jacobs's terms. Those rules favored the neighborhoods best equipped to use them, as the contrast between the Promenade and East Tremont had already shown in 1950. The Cross Bronx Expressway still runs along the line Moses drew through East Tremont, a few blocks north of the one the neighborhood proposed.

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CHAPTER 19

Penn Station to Stonewall, 1960–1969

Floor Area

On July 25, 1961, the New York Times reported that Madison Square Garden would move to the site of Pennsylvania Station, the McKim, Mead & White terminal that filled the blocks between Seventh and Eighth Avenues from 31st to 33rd Streets. The tracks would stay underground. Above them a new arena and office complex would rise, and the early report said the station's great waiting room would be kept as part of it. That promise was dropped. The Pennsylvania Railroad owned the building and the lot, its passenger business was shrinking, and in 1961 no city law gave anyone else a voice in whether a privately owned building stood or fell.

In the same summer, the City Planning Commission was finishing a different kind of claim on private land. Since 1916 the city had told owners how tall and how bulky a building could be, through a formula of height limits and setbacks that had produced the stepped towers of the 1920s. The Zoning Resolution adopted in 1961, which took effect on December 15 of that year, was the first full overhaul of that code. It divided the whole city into residential, commercial, and manufacturing districts and replaced the old envelope with a single number.

That number was the floor area ratio. Each district received one, such as 6, 10, or 15, and a building's total floor space could not exceed the area of its lot multiplied by it. On a 10,000-square-foot lot with a ratio of 10, an owner could build 100,000 square feet. How those square feet were arranged was left largely to the owner. He could cover the lot with a squat block or stack the same floor area into a thin tower set back from the street. The old code had regulated shape and left quantity to follow. The new one regulated quantity and let shape follow.

James Felt, the real estate man who chaired the City Planning Commission, pushed the code through from 1956 to 1961, against builders who feared it would cost them floor space. It did. The permitted bulk of new high-rise buildings in Manhattan fell, by roughly 15 percent below what the 1916 formula allowed. The code then offered some of that space back on conditions. A tower that gave the public a plaza or an arcade could build extra floor area, up to about a fifth more. This was incentive zoning, a trade of private floor space for public open space, and it changed how Manhattan looked within a decade. Developers took the bonus almost everywhere it was offered. The flat-topped slab standing back from the sidewalk behind an open plaza became the standard Midtown office building of the 1960s, and many of the plazas proved to be windy, empty stretches of granite that answered the letter of the bonus and little more.

Two other provisions mattered more over time than anyone could see in 1961. The code let an owner transfer unused floor area, the air rights above a low building, to an adjacent property, so that a church or a small building could sell the right to build in the sky over it to a neighbor. And it sharply cut the residential densities allowed in large parts of the outer boroughs. Large stretches at the city's outer edges were mapped for houses and small apartment buildings at densities far below what the old code would have permitted.

The city's own Zoning Handbook of 1961 explained the reasoning. Limits on the number of rooms per lot and on the conversion of apartments into smaller units were meant to stop the practices that had been creating new slums as fast as urban renewal could clear the old ones. The lower densities at the city's edges carried the same logic outward: if crowding made slums, then the way to prevent slums in the neighborhoods not yet built up was to forbid crowding there by law. The effect, over the following half century, was to fix the low-rise

character of much of the city's outer ground and to make it difficult to add housing there without a fight over the map.

The architectural historian Robert A. M. Stern, in New York 1960, called the passage of the new zoning "postwar New York's pivotal architectural event." The claim is defensible on architectural grounds alone, but the code's larger significance lay in the bargain it wrote into law. The city now asserted that the public had an interest in the light and air around a building, in the open ground at its base, and in the density of the neighborhoods at its edges, and it priced that interest in square feet. What the code did not do was give the public any voice over a particular building. A tower could be twice as handsome as its neighbor or half as old; the floor area ratio did not distinguish. Pennsylvania Station was legal to demolish under the old code and remained legal to demolish under the new one.

The Station and the Law

On August 2, 1962, a group of architects and writers calling itself the Action Group for Better Architecture in New York, known by the awkward acronym AGBANY, picketed in front of the station on Seventh Avenue. Their placards asked the railroad and the city to save the building. On January 3, 1963, the group filed a brief with the City Planning Commission arguing against an arena on the site. The commission's business was the zoning of the new Garden. It had no authority over whether the station could be torn down, and the railroad's plan went forward.

Demolition began on October 28, 1963. It took until 1966. The steel for the new Madison Square Garden went up while commuters continued to use the station below, walking through temporary passages as the granite columns and the glass-and-iron concourse were taken apart above them on a site of eight or nine acres. Much of the stone was trucked to the Meadowlands in New Jersey and dumped as fill. The trains kept running throughout, and the replacement station that emerged under the arena was a low-ceilinged warren of corridors and waiting areas below street level.

Ada Louise Huxtable, the architecture critic of the New York Times, wrote of the loss in terms that put the blame on public priorities as well as private ones: "It is a poor society indeed that can't pay for these amenities; that has no money for anything except expressways to rush people out of our dull and

deteriorating cities." Her sentence tied the station to the highway program that had dominated the city's public works for fifteen years and to the decline in rail travel that the highways had helped cause. The railroad's argument was simple: it could no longer afford to maintain a monumental building for a shrinking number of passengers, and the air above its tracks was worth more as an arena and office tower.

Penn Station was never designated a landmark, because there was no one with the power to designate it. Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr., in office since 1954, had moved toward preservation in small steps. On June 19, 1961, he created a Committee for the Preservation of Structures of Historic and Esthetic Importance. On April 21, 1962, he appointed an advisory Landmarks Preservation Commission chaired by the architect Geoffrey Platt. The commission could study buildings and draft legislation. It could not stop a demolition. It was still in that advisory form when the wreckers began taking Pennsylvania Station down, a city body charged with preserving landmarks watching the most prominent one in New York disappear.

The commission's draft law stalled in the City Council, where the real estate industry opposed it. What moved it was another demolition. On February 6, 1965, wreckers began tearing down the Brokaw Mansion at 1 East 79th Street, a turreted French Renaissance house built for the clothing manufacturer Isaac Vail Brokaw at the corner of Fifth Avenue. Its loss, a few blocks from the Metropolitan Museum and on the city's most prominent residential avenue, gave the bill the push it lacked. A council committee reported it out on March 23. The full council passed it on April 6, 1965. Wagner signed it on April 19, over the continuing opposition of developers.

The Landmarks Law created a permanent Landmarks Preservation Commission with the power to designate individual buildings as landmarks and whole neighborhoods as historic districts. Once a building was designated, its owner needed the commission's approval to alter its exterior or to demolish it. Wagner swore in the first eleven commissioners in June 1965. The first building designated under the new law was the Wyckoff House in Brooklyn, a farmhouse roughly three centuries old, built when the Kings County towns were Dutch farming villages and the island across the river was a walled port. The law originally covered building exteriors. Amendments in 1973 added

interior landmarks and scenic landmarks, the latter covering parks and other public landscapes.

Taken together, the 1961 zoning code and the 1965 landmarks law gave the city two separate claims over what stood on a private lot. The first set the quantity and the general form of what could be built, uniformly across a district. The second singled out particular buildings and districts and said that their value to the public, as history or architecture or as part of the look of a street, could restrain what their owners did with them. Neither law compensated the owner. Both rested on the premise that the city as a whole had a stake in private ground that the owner's title did not extinguish. That premise would be tested in court in the following decade, and the commission's designations would become one of the main instruments by which neighborhoods resisted, or at least slowed, the kind of rebuilding that Penn Station's owners had carried out freely.

Seventy-Sixth Street

On the morning of July 16, 1964, a group of students was standing outside an apartment building across from Robert F. Wagner Sr. Junior High School on East 76th Street in Yorkville, on the Upper East Side. Many of them were Black and Puerto Rican teenagers from Harlem and the Bronx who came to the school for summer classes in a neighborhood that was overwhelmingly white. Patrick Lynch, the building's white superintendent, turned a hose on them. A fight began. Among the students who went after the superintendent was James Powell, a fifteen-year-old from the Bronx.

Thomas Gilligan, an off-duty police lieutenant nearby, shot Powell. Powell died on the street. Gilligan said that the boy had come at him with a knife and that he had fired a warning shot first. Witnesses disputed his account. Gilligan was not charged. The killing came less than three weeks after President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964, and at a time when civil rights organizations in New York were pressing the police department for a civilian board to review complaints against officers.

On Saturday, July 18, after a rally held near the time of Powell's funeral, a crowd marched on a police precinct in Harlem. The confrontation there began six nights of rioting. Crowds threw bottles and bricks from rooftops and the street; police answered with nightsticks and gunfire, much of it aimed over the heads of crowds; stores along Harlem's commercial streets were smashed

and looted. By about July 20 or 21 the disorder had spread across the river to Bedford-Stuyvesant, where it centered on Fulton Street and Nostrand Avenue. It subsided around July 22. One person was killed. The number of injured is given as anywhere from roughly 120 to more than 500, and some 500 people were arrested. Estimates of property damage ran from half a million dollars to about $1 million.

The 1964 riot was the first of the urban uprisings of the mid-1960s in the North, a year before Watts in Los Angeles, and it followed a path that the 1935 Harlem riot had already traced: a confrontation involving a police officer or a white business, a rumor or report of violence against a young person, a crowd, and the destruction of property along the commercial streets that residents patronized but largely did not own. In 1935 the immediate trigger had been a teenager accused of shoplifting in a 125th Street store. In 1964 it was a teenager shot by a police lieutenant on a block in Yorkville where he was a visitor. The difference marks a shift in what was at stake. By 1964 the argument was centrally about the police themselves, about the power of a uniformed or off-duty officer to use force on a Black young man in a public street and face no consequence. The demand for civilian review of police conduct, which Wagner resisted and which his successor would take up, came directly out of that summer.

The riot also pressed on the question of who governed space in Black neighborhoods. Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant were by 1964 the two largest Black districts in the country's largest city, and in both the police force, the merchants on the main avenues, and the owners of much of the housing were largely white. The crowds of July 1964 attacked the visible signs of that arrangement. The federal antipoverty money and community-action programs that followed, along with the Bedford-Stuyvesant development effort of the next two years, were attempts to change who held power over those streets without changing the police. That gap remained open.

Lindsay and Quill

In November 1965, John V. Lindsay, a Republican congressman from Manhattan's East Side, was elected mayor. He defeated Abraham Beame, the city comptroller and the Democratic nominee, and William F. Buckley Jr., the founder of National Review, who ran on the Conservative Party line. Lindsay was forty-three, tall, Yale-educated, and conspicuously not a product of the

Democratic organizations that had run the city for most of the century. He campaigned as a reformer who would break the power of the old political arrangements, and the arrangement he collided with first was the one Wagner had built with the city's unions.

The Transport Workers Union contract with the Transit Authority expired at midnight on January 1, 1966, the day Lindsay took office. The union's president, Michael J. Quill, had led it since the 1930s. He was born in County Kerry in 1905, had fought in the Irish war of independence, and had built the TWU among the Irish workers of the IRT and the BMT into one of the most powerful unions in the city. Shortly after midnight, Quill walked out of the negotiations at the Americana Hotel in Midtown and dismissed the authority's offer, worth about $25 million, as a "peanut package." About 33,000 transit workers struck. Nearly 2,000 members of the Amalgamated Transit Union, who drove buses on private lines in Queens and elsewhere, joined them. For the first time, every subway and city bus in New York stopped.

The shutdown lasted twelve days. Commuters walked across the East River bridges, crowded into cars on highways that jammed by early morning, and in many cases stayed home. Lindsay called the strike "an act of defiance against 8 million people." On January 3, State Supreme Court Justice Abraham Geller ordered it ended, and on January 4 Quill and other union leaders were arrested under an injunction resting on the Condon-Wadlin Act of 1947, a state law that forbade strikes by public employees and set penalties so harsh they were rarely enforced. Quill's response became the most quoted line of the strike: "The judge can drop dead in his black robes." He was taken to jail and then, after he collapsed, to Bellevue Hospital.

The strike ended around January 13 with a settlement worth more than $60 million in wages and benefits, more than twice the authority's opening offer. Quill died of a heart attack on January 28, 1966. A later New York Times estimate put the strike's cost to the regional economy at about $1.2 billion. The settlement's terms violated Condon-Wadlin's ban on raises for striking workers. The experience persuaded Albany that the old law was unworkable. Its replacement, the Taylor Law of 1967, gave public employees the right to organize and bargain collectively while keeping the ban on strikes and setting fines against unions that struck.

The strike defined Lindsay's mayoralty from its first hours. Wagner had governed with the municipal unions as partners; his executive order of 1958 had given city workers the right to organize, and his administration had treated union leaders as members of the governing coalition. Lindsay came in as their adversary, a reformer who saw the unions as one of the entrenched interests he had been elected to confront, and he lost the first confrontation badly. The lesson that union leaders drew from January 1966 was that a strike against the city could win more than a negotiation. The lesson for the public was that the services on which every borough depended, the subways and buses and later the sanitation trucks and schools, could be shut down by the workers who ran them. Over the next three years the city's public workforce tested that lesson repeatedly, and each test split a different part of the coalition that had elected Democratic mayors since the war.

Ocean Hill–Brownsville

On May 7, 1968, the governing board of the Ocean Hill–Brownsville school district in central Brooklyn and its unit administrator, Rhody McCoy, sent letters to nineteen educators ending their employment in the district. The count is sometimes given differently, depending on whether administrators and later dismissals are included. All nineteen were members of the United Federation of Teachers, the union that represented the city's public school teachers. All but one were white; the one Black teacher on the list had been included by mistake. Most were Jewish.

Ocean Hill and Brownsville were poor neighborhoods whose population was by then largely Black and Puerto Rican. Brownsville had been a Jewish working-class district for much of the century, and the teachers in its schools, like much of the city's teaching force, were still predominantly white and largely Jewish, many of them the children of the immigrant families who had once filled those same blocks. Black teachers were a small fraction of the city's teaching staff, and Black principals and administrators rarer still. Parents and activists in Ocean Hill–Brownsville had argued for years that a centralized Board of Education, run from headquarters on Livingston Street in downtown Brooklyn, had failed their children, and they wanted control over who taught in their schools and how. The district was one of the experiments in decentral-

ization that the Board of Education undertook in the late 1960s, with a locally chosen board given authority whose limits were never clearly drawn.

The letters of May 7 tested those limits at once. The district board treated the action as a transfer of teachers it judged hostile to community control. Albert Shanker, the president of the UFT, said that it violated the teachers' due process rights and the union's contract, under which teachers could be moved or dismissed only for cause and through established procedures. Teachers in the district walked out in May. When the board refused to reinstate them in the fall, the dispute became a citywide confrontation. The UFT struck the entire system three times in the autumn of 1968, and the public schools were closed for a total of thirty-six days. More than a million schoolchildren stayed home. Teachers who crossed picket lines at Ocean Hill–Brownsville schools were met by community members; teachers who tried to return under union protection were met by community pickets of their own. Leaflets circulated in the district that the union reproduced and distributed citywide as evidence of antisemitism, and accusations of racism and antisemitism followed in both directions.

The strikes ended in November 1968 with the state taking temporary control of the district and the teachers reinstated. The settlement satisfied neither side. On December 5, 1968, McCoy said that Shanker had "participated in heaping as much degradation and humiliation on black people as is humanly possible." The following year the state legislature created a system of community school boards across the city, with powers narrower than those Ocean Hill–Brownsville had sought, and the experimental district was folded into a larger one.

The conflict was a fight over a building and the authority within it. A public school was city property, staffed by city employees who held their jobs under a contract negotiated citywide. The community control movement claimed that the people who lived around the school had the right to decide who worked in it. The union claimed that its members' jobs could not depend on the judgment of a neighborhood board. Both were claims about who governed a public institution on a particular piece of ground. Each side cast its claim in terms of rights won through long struggle: civil rights and self-determination for one, due process and union protection for the other.

The strikes broke the alliance between Black and Jewish New Yorkers that had been a foundation of liberal politics in the city since the New Deal. Many Jewish voters who had supported civil rights causes, and many of them the children of socialists and union organizers, came away from the autumn of 1968 convinced that the liberal city government and the advocates of community control regarded them as obstacles. Many Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers concluded that the union and its allies would defend white teachers' job security at the expense of children of color. Lindsay, who had supported decentralization, lost standing with both. The coalition of labor, Jewish liberals, and Black and Puerto Rican voters that had held together through the Wagner years did not recover its former shape.

Garbage

In February 1968, the city's sanitation workers struck. Led by John DeLury, the head of their union, they walked off the job for more than a week in the depth of winter, and uncollected garbage piled along sidewalks and curbs across the five boroughs. The strike ended only after the state intervened, and the dispute between Lindsay and Governor Nelson Rockefeller over how to end it was open and bitter. Like the transit strike, it showed that the city's basic services depended on the cooperation of the workers who delivered them, and that the street itself, clean or filthy, was a stake in municipal bargaining.

In East Harlem, the strike had changed less than it did elsewhere, because uncollected garbage was a constant. In March 1969 the Daily News published a series describing rotting refuse across a forty-square-block area of the neighborhood. Its reporters surveyed 160 streets, found that they were rarely swept, and counted only six trash receptacles in the entire area. The neighborhood was largely Puerto Rican, the destination of much of the postwar migration from the island, and its residents had long complained that the Sanitation Department collected less often there than in the neighborhoods to the south and west.

That summer, a group of young Puerto Rican activists who had just formed the New York chapter of the Young Lords asked the Sanitation Department for brooms and other equipment so they could clean the streets themselves. The department refused. The Young Lords took the brooms anyway. Beginning on July 27, 1969, they and East Harlem residents swept the garbage into piles

and dragged them into the avenues, blocking traffic, and set the piles on fire, including across 110th Street. About thirty Young Lords and volunteers took part in the first actions. The burning barricades drew police and firefighters to the neighborhood through the late summer, and the garbage offensive, the group's first campaign, made it known across the city.

The Young Lords framed the garbage as a question of equal treatment. The streets of East Harlem were public ground maintained, in principle, by a city department on behalf of every resident. The department's failure to sweep them as it swept the Upper East Side, twenty blocks south, told the residents that the city considered their streets worth less. Burning the trash in the avenues forced the city to see it, and to clear it. The demand was for a service, and behind the service for an acknowledgment that East Harlem's residents had the same claim on the city as anyone else.

In December 1969 the Young Lords occupied the First Spanish United Methodist Church on 111th Street for eleven days, renaming it the People's Church and running a breakfast program, a clothing drive, and classes from it. The occupation repeated the logic of the garbage offensive in another form. A building that stood in the neighborhood and was largely closed to the neighborhood's needs became, for eleven days, a space that its occupiers declared belonged to the community around it.

Christopher Street

The Stonewall Inn occupied 51–53 Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, across from the small triangle of Christopher Park near Sheridan Square. The building had been put up as two horse stables, in 1843 and 1846, and the two were joined behind a single facade in 1930. It housed a series of restaurants before it opened as a gay bar in 1967. Its owners were connected to organized crime, and it operated without a liquor license, as many gay bars in the city did. New York's liquor authorities and police treated the serving of gay customers as grounds for closing a bar, and the bars that existed paid for their survival in protection money and accepted periodic raids.

The 2016 presidential proclamation establishing Stonewall National Monument notes that police raids on gay bars tended to intensify in mayoral election years, and 1969 was one. On June 24, 1969, officers from the First Division's Public Morals squad raided the Stonewall. It reopened the next day.

At about 1:15 a.m. on June 28, undercover police officers raided it again. Raids of this kind followed a familiar pattern: patrons were lined up, their identification checked, and those dressed in clothing the police considered inappropriate to their sex were arrested, along with the bar's employees. This time patrons resisted, and so did people from the neighborhood who gathered outside. Street youth, many of them homeless gay and transgender young people who lived in and around Christopher Park, were among the first to fight. The police retreated inside the bar while the crowd outside threw objects at them. Demonstrations and confrontations with police continued in Christopher Park and the nearby streets for several nights.

The uprising was a fight over the right to gather. The Stonewall was one of the few places in the city where gay men, lesbians, and transgender people could meet openly, and its existence depended on the indifference of the police and the profits of a crime family. The law treated the gathering itself as the offense. What happened on Christopher Street in the summer of 1969 was a refusal by the people who used the bar and the park to accept that their presence in either was illegitimate, and it was carried out in the Village's streets, where many of them already lived or spent their nights.

The original Stonewall Inn closed in 1969, soon after the uprising. The building was later divided and passed through other uses. On June 24, 2016, the site became the center of Stonewall National Monument, which takes in the former bar's building, Christopher Park, and the surrounding streets where the crowds gathered. The two stables of the 1840s, joined behind one facade and run as a bar without a license, are now federally protected ground.

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CHAPTER 20

The Bronx Burning and the Broke City, 1970–1977

Policies on Empty Buildings

In the 1970s an underwriter in Miami, working through a single syndicate at Lloyd's of London, wrote fire policies on thousands of properties. A brokerage in the Bronx sold them, and a firm in Rio de Janeiro reinsured them. The buildings behind the policies were often worth almost nothing. Landlords bought them for as little as $2,500 and insured them for as much as $500,000, a ratio that made sense only if the building was expected to burn. Many did. When the scheme came apart, Lloyd's had lost about $45 million.

At its extremes the gap between purchase price and insured value was two hundred to one. A policy written this way passed through an office in Miami, a syndicate in London, a brokerage in the Bronx, and a reinsurer in Brazil, and each of them took a share of the premium before any claim was paid. The landlord at the bottom of the chain paid premiums on a value no buyer would have recognized. For everyone above him the business held together as long as premiums ran ahead of claims. For the landlord it paid off when the building burned.

A building worth $2,500 was a tenement still standing on its lot, often with tenants in it, in a borough that a generation earlier had been the destination of families leaving the Lower East Side. Its price showed what the market now thought of the ground. Its insured value showed how much money could be extracted from the building on the way down. Between the two figures lay the business that remade large parts of the Bronx and Brooklyn in the 1970s.

The insurance market had been withdrawing from these neighborhoods for years. After the riots of the 1960s, insurers across American cities offered weaker coverage or pulled out altogether from areas they classified as riot-prone, a label that served as a stand-in for race. The classification attached to the neighborhood and not to the building, so that a well-kept house and a neglected tenement on the same block were judged the same risk. Owners in Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and the South Bronx found that ordinary property policies were unavailable or came with conditions that made them close to useless. Federal and state governments answered with FAIR plans, for Fair Access to Insurance Requirements, pools that obliged insurers to share the risk of covering properties the private market had abandoned. The plans filled the gap, but with coverage that was worse and cost more. They insured what private companies refused to insure, and they did so without much scrutiny of whether the amount insured bore any relation to what the building was worth.

The historian Bench Ansfield, in Born in Flames: The Business of Arson and the Remaking of the American City, argues that these state-backed plans gave landlords a reason to burn their own buildings. An owner who could no longer collect enough rent to cover taxes, fuel, and repairs, and who could find no buyer, held an asset whose most valuable remaining form was a claim check. The policy paid on the fire. Rehabilitation brought in nothing, and the most a sale could fetch was a few thousand dollars. A fire paid at the insured figure, and the owner kept the lot. Arson for profit, in this account, was a rational response to a set of public and private arrangements that valued a burned building above a standing one.

Ansfield's argument treats the fires as a product of the insurance system itself. The FAIR plans had been created to keep property in the riot-scarred districts insurable after the private companies left. In the Bronx of the 1970s they kept a building insurable at the moment its owner had decided to give

it up, and they priced its destruction above anything the owner could get for keeping it.

The arrangements that left owners holding such buildings had a longer history. The Bronx neighborhoods south of Fordham Road had absorbed the families displaced by expressway construction and Title I clearance in the 1950s and 1960s; East Tremont, cut in two by the Cross Bronx Expressway, was one of many districts where the departure of white families and the arrival of poorer Black and Puerto Rican ones coincided with the collapse of private investment. Banks stopped writing mortgages. Owners stopped painting halls, then stopped fixing boilers, then stopped paying property taxes. Superintendents left and were not replaced. Tenants who could move did, and the empty apartments were stripped of pipe and fixtures. The same sequence ran through Brownsville in central Brooklyn, where blocks of walk-ups emptied through the late 1960s and 1970s and the vacant buildings burned or were sealed and then came down.

The number of fires in the Bronx each year roughly tripled between 1960 and 1974. Over the course of the 1970s, something like a fifth of the borough's housing was burned or abandoned, and much of the burning was the work of owners rather than tenants. The scale gave the South Bronx its place in national imagination as the emblem of urban ruin.

How much of it was arson is disputed among historians who have studied the same years. Joe Flood, in The Fires, published in 2010, went through the fire marshals' own classifications and found that in the 1950s they attributed less than 1 percent of the city's fires to arson, and that the share stayed at or below 1.1 percent until 1975. Flood argues that ordinary fires, started by faulty wiring, space heaters, cooking, and the hazards of buildings without maintenance, did most of the damage, and that what turned those fires into a catastrophe was the city's reduced ability to put them out. Ansfield and others stress the landlord's match. The marshals' figures can be read either way: as evidence that arson was rarer than legend holds, or as evidence of how seldom a fire in a building nobody cared about was investigated closely enough to be called anything but accidental.

The disagreement matters because each account assigns responsibility to a different party. If the landlord's match did most of the work, the fires were a crime made profitable by insurance, and the insurers and the agencies that

backed them carry much of the blame. If faulty wiring and space heaters did most of it, the fires were the ordinary hazards of neglected housing, turned deadly by a fire service that had been thinned, and the weight shifts toward City Hall.

The two accounts share more than their disagreement suggests. In both, the fires burned in buildings where no one with money had a reason to stop them. The owner had stopped investing, the insurer was paying on the loss, and the city was withdrawing the companies that answered the alarms. Whether a given fire began with a gasoline can or a frayed cord mattered to the people who lived upstairs. For the neighborhood the result was the same, and it was the result of decisions made elsewhere about whether this ground was worth keeping.

There was a third explanation, offered by those who thought the root cause lay in Albany and City Hall. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who had served in the Nixon White House and went on to represent New York in the United States Senate, wrote in a foreword to Jill Jonnes's South Bronx Rising that the crisis there was "elementally a crisis brought on by the destruction of rental housing," and he laid the blame on rent regulation, which in his view had made upkeep unprofitable. The argument had a long pedigree among landlords and economists. It explained why owners might walk away from buildings across the city. It did less to explain why they walked away from these buildings in these neighborhoods first and in such numbers, while rent-controlled apartments on the Upper West Side and in Forest Hills stood and appreciated. Rent law covered the whole city. Redlining, FAIR plans, and the closing of firehouses did not.

The Model

In 1970 Charles Kirby, a division chief in the Fire Department, wrote a memorandum predicting the South Bronx fire crisis in detail. He listed the companies he considered vital to handling the rising workload in the borough. Within a few years several of those same companies had been closed, on the strength of a computer analysis that reached the opposite conclusion.

Kirby's memorandum came from a chief who could see the workload climbing and named the companies carrying it. The analysis that overruled him came from outside the department, from a research organization with no firehouses of its own, and it arrived with the authority of the computer behind it.

The analysis came from the RAND Corporation, the research organization best known for its work on nuclear strategy for the Air Force. Under Mayor John V. Lindsay, who held office from 1966 through 1973, the city had contracted with RAND to bring systems analysis to municipal government, and the Fire Department was among its first subjects. The question RAND set out to answer was how to place a fixed number of engine and ladder companies so as to minimize response times across the whole city. Its models used data on travel speeds and alarm frequencies to estimate how long it took the nearest company to reach a fire in any given area, and how much those times would change if a company were moved or closed.

In 1972 RAND recommended closing thirteen companies, some of them among the busiest in the South Bronx, and opening seven new ones, including units on Staten Island and in the north Bronx. The logic of the recommendation was that firehouses in the densest districts sat close together, so that closing one added only a little to response times, while companies in the outer reaches of the city covered large areas thinly. The model measured travel time. It treated a company that answered a handful of alarms a night in a burning district as interchangeable with one that answered a handful a week in a district of detached houses, and it assumed that when the nearest company was busy, the next nearest would come almost as quickly. In the South Bronx of the early 1970s the next nearest company was often busy too.

The new units followed from the same arithmetic. Staten Island and the north Bronx were large areas where a single company might cover many miles of streets, and placing companies there shortened travel times over a great deal of territory. Measured by the average across the city, the trade improved the service. Measured by the alarms coming in from the South Bronx each night, it took companies from where the fires were and put them where the distances were.

The first unit was taken out of the South Bronx in 1972. More removals followed in the spring of 1974 and the spring of 1976, each justified by the RAND models. Month by month, fires in the South Bronx peaked in late 1974, so that the second round of removals came only months before the borough's worst stretch. The third came after the fiscal crisis had turned every company into a line in a budget the city no longer fully controlled. As the city's deficit deepened, the studies became the standard justification for cuts the budget demanded anyway. Over the whole period roughly fifty fire units were closed

or moved across the city; counts restricted to the South Bronx put the number of companies shut there at about six. Fire inspections, the work that might have caught a disconnected sprinkler or a blocked exit before the fire, were cut by around 70 percent.

The firefighters' union sued to stop the closings. The department defended itself with the same models, and a federal district judge, persuaded that the cuts rested on objective analysis, dismissed the case. Systems analysis had given the closings a scientific authority that a budget memo alone could not have carried, and it shifted the argument from whether a neighborhood deserved its firehouse to whether a number on a printout was correct. Once a federal court had accepted the models, a closing that rested on RAND's figures was that much harder to contest.

The models were not neutral in practice, whatever their designers intended. The data on which they ran undercounted the workload in the poorest districts, and the political weight of a neighborhood showed up in where the cuts landed. Elmer Chapman, a retired chief who had run the department's Bureau of Planning and Operations Research, later put it plainly: "if you try to close a firehouse down the block from where a judge lived, you couldn't get away with it." Communities with organized residents, newspaper attention, and elected officials who answered their calls could reverse a closing. The South Bronx in the mid-1970s had few of those things, and its population was falling as the buildings burned, which by the models' own arithmetic reduced its claim on the firehouses that remained.

The department's own accounting of the human cost was revised under pressure. In September 1977, after complaints from Charles Schumer, a Democratic state assemblyman from Brooklyn who chaired a subcommittee on city management, the department raised its count of fire deaths for 1976 from 236 to 292. The revision added fifty-six deaths to a single year, nearly a quarter more than the department had first reported. The correction did not settle how many people the fires of the decade killed, a figure that remains uncertain. It did show that the numbers on which the closings were defended were not as solid as the court had been told.

Radio Row

While companies were being withdrawn from the South Bronx, the north tower of the World Trade Center was topped out on December 23, 1970. The south tower followed in July 1971. Each was 110 stories, and the complex as a whole held about 10 million square feet of space, on ground that a decade earlier had been one of the busiest retail districts in Lower Manhattan.

That district was Radio Row, the blocks from Vesey Street south to Liberty Street and from Church Street west to the Hudson waterfront at West Street. Its shops sold radios, tubes, parts, and surplus electronics, along with the hardware, clothing, and lunch counters that served the people who worked there. At its height the area held more than 300 businesses and some 30,000 employees. In 1962 the legislatures of New York and New Jersey authorized the Port of New York Authority to build a trade center on the site.

The merchants fought the condemnation in court. They argued that the Port Authority, an agency created to run bridges, tunnels, and terminals, had no business taking private property for an office development, and that a building complex whose main tenants would be private firms and government agencies was not a public use. In November 1963 the United States Supreme Court dismissed their appeal. The land was taken by eminent domain, and by the middle of the decade the buildings were coming down. The streets went with them. Cortlandt Street, which had run from Broadway to the river, was cut back to a single block. In place of the small lots of the old district the Port Authority assembled a sixteen-acre superblock.

The exchange can be stated in its own figures. Before the taking, the blocks held hundreds of separate businesses on hundreds of separate parcels, owned and leased by people who had built trades there. After it, they held about 10 million square feet of space under a single public owner. The project ran eleven years from the 1962 authorization to the 1973 dedication, a span that took in the whole of Lindsay's two terms as mayor.

The towers were dedicated on April 4, 1973. At the ceremony the chief architect, Minoru Yamasaki, called the World Trade Center "a living symbol of man's dedication to world peace." The phrase belonged to the Port Authority's promotion of the project as a hub for international commerce, which had been its justification from the start.

The trade center and the South Bronx belong in the same chapter because they show public power used in opposite directions in the same years. The north tower reached its full height in 1970, the year Charles Kirby wrote his memorandum on the Bronx, and the complex was dedicated in the months between the first and second rounds of firehouse removals. In Lower Manhattan the instruments of the postwar city, eminent domain, bi-state authority, tax-exempt bonds, and the willingness of courts to defer to an agency's definition of public purpose, were concentrated on sixteen acres to create the tallest buildings in the world. A district of several hundred functioning businesses was judged less valuable than what could be built in its place, and the merchants' claim to their ground was overridden. In the Bronx the same government was withdrawing services from neighborhoods where the private market had already decided the ground was worthless. The public sector's choice of where to invest followed and reinforced the private sector's choice of where to divest. Ground that had value attracted public money in quantity, and ground that had lost value lost public service as well.

Co-op City

At the northeast edge of the Bronx, near the line with Westchester, a different public project was rising in the same years. Co-op City was built from about 1966 to 1973: 15,372 apartments in high-rise towers and townhouses, financed under the state's Mitchell-Lama program for middle-income housing and sponsored by the United Housing Foundation, the cooperative builder associated with Abraham Kazan. It was the largest cooperative housing development in the country. The first residents moved in around the end of the 1960s.

Co-op City drew many of its first families from the Grand Concourse and the West Bronx, from the same neighborhoods whose decline was under way to the south. Its promise was a new apartment with modern kitchens, schools and shopping on site, and carrying charges that working families could afford: in the advertising, about $23 a room per month. Residents bought shares at modest prices and paid monthly charges that covered the mortgage, held by the New York State Housing Finance Agency, along with operating costs. The arrangement put state credit behind a promise of stable housing for those who earned too much for public housing and too little to buy a house.

Construction costs, interest rates, and operating expenses all rose faster than the original budgets had allowed, and by 1975 the state wanted to raise carrying charges to $53.50 a room, more than double the advertised figure. Residents who had chosen Co-op City on the strength of the old number now faced charges that many could not meet. In June 1975, as the city's own finances were collapsing, they stopped paying.

The strike began in the same month that the state legislature created the Municipal Assistance Corporation, and for a year the two crises ran side by side. In Manhattan the state was trying to persuade investors to buy debt issued on the city's behalf. In the northeast Bronx its own housing agency was trying to collect from residents who had decided, in their thousands, to keep their money.

The strike was led by Charles Rosen, a Linotype operator who lived in the development. Rosen and the steering committee organized residents to send their monthly checks to the committee instead of the management, and Rolling Stone reported in October 1977 that the withheld checks were hidden in garbage bags. Holding the money was the strike's leverage and its exposure. As long as the committee kept the checks, residents could show they were able to pay and were choosing not to, and the agency could see the sum it was being denied. The leaders faced fines and the threat of jail for it. Between 75 and 80 percent of households took part, and the strike lasted from June 1975 to July 1976. By its end residents had withheld about $26 million. It was called the largest rent strike in American history, and it nearly bankrupted the Housing Finance Agency, whose bonds depended on the payments Co-op City's residents were refusing to make.

The settlement in 1976 removed the United Housing Foundation as manager, handed control of Co-op City to the strike committee, and dropped the fines and the threats of jail that had hung over the strike leaders. The historian Annemarie Sammartino calls the result a pyrrhic victory. The residents had won the ground, and with it every problem the state and the sponsor had been unable to solve: the construction defects, the debt, and the rising costs that had produced the increase in the first place. Self-government meant raising the charges themselves. The committee that had told residents to withhold their payments became the body responsible for collecting them.

The strike belongs in the story of the fiscal crisis because it showed the same pressure from the other side. The state had extended credit to build housing for a constituency it wanted to keep in the city. When the costs came due, that constituency had enough numbers and enough organization to refuse, and the state, already struggling to rescue New York City, could not afford a confrontation with some fifty thousand people in its own housing. The South Bronx tenants of private landlords had no such leverage. The difference lay in whose claim the system was built to answer.

The Notes Come Due

Abraham Beame took office as mayor on January 1, 1974. A former city comptroller and a product of the Brooklyn Democratic organization, he knew the city's books as well as anyone in government, and he inherited a budget that had been held together for years by short-term borrowing. The city routinely issued notes in anticipation of taxes and state and federal aid, then rolled them over with new notes when they came due, a practice that allowed operating deficits to be carried forward without being closed. The banks that underwrote and marketed the notes had been willing partners for years.

In the spring of 1975 the banks stopped. They declined to market further city notes and the investors who bought them were no longer willing to lend. With notes maturing and no new borrowing to repay them, the city faced the prospect of defaulting on its obligations. The question of who would decide what New York could pay for moved out of City Hall.

On June 10, 1975, the state legislature created the Municipal Assistance Corporation to issue bonds backed by state revenues and use the proceeds to refinance the city's short-term debt. Its chairman was Felix Rohatyn, an investment banker at Lazard Frères. The corporation's bonds were secured by revenues that had belonged to the city: the city sales tax and the stock transfer tax were converted into state taxes and pledged to MAC's bondholders. The public credit of New York City, which had built subways, bridges, and public housing over the previous seventy years, had been replaced for the time being by the credit of a state corporation that the city did not control.

The conversion of the two taxes was the core of the design. A purchaser of a MAC bond was lending against the sales made in New York's stores and the shares traded on its exchanges, but the revenue from them now passed through

the state, and the bondholders had the first claim on it. Whatever the city's departments needed, they would be paid out of what was left.

Investors were unreceptive to MAC's first bonds, and the corporation used the leverage that their reluctance gave it. MAC demanded a wage freeze, mass layoffs, a subway fare increase, and tuition at the City University of New York. Each demand was a decision about which public services the city could keep. The demands were framed as conditions for restoring market confidence, which made them in practice the terms set by the bond market for New York's continued existence as a borrower.

When MAC's bonds alone proved insufficient, the state went further. In September 1975 the Financial Emergency Act for the City of New York created the Emergency Financial Control Board, which took control of the city's finances. The board withheld money from the city until it approved the city's budget. Elected officials still governed in name, but the budget they submitted had to satisfy a body on which they did not hold a majority. In June the state had created a corporation to borrow on the city's behalf. By September it had created a board to approve how the city spent.

Washington refused to step in. On October 29, 1975, in a speech at the National Press Club, President Gerald Ford blamed city officials for the crisis and said he would veto any bill providing a federal bailout. His Treasury Secretary, William Simon, had argued that federal aid would amount to nationalizing municipal debt, encouraging other cities to borrow recklessly in the expectation of rescue. In that view New York was a precedent. A rescue of the largest city in the country would put the federal government behind every municipal borrower that came after it.

The next morning the Daily News ran the front-page headline "Ford to City: Drop Dead." The line was written by William J. Brink, an editor at the paper. Ford had not said those words, and he called the headline unfair. He later blamed it for costing him New York in the 1976 election, which he lost to Jimmy Carter.

The headline compressed a position, and the position was more complicated than five words. Within weeks the shape of a rescue emerged that involved every party with a stake in the city's survival. The second phase of the state's plan, enacted in November 1975, raised city taxes and secured a commitment of $2.5 billion from the five city pension funds to buy MAC bonds or city obliga-

tions, along with smaller commitments from the city's sinking funds and from the major banks. The money that city workers had saved for their retirements was put into the debt of the government that employed them, at the moment it was laying many of them off. The unions that agreed to the purchases tied their members' pensions to the city's solvency, and acquired in the process a stake in the austerity they were negotiating against. The banks, whose refusal to keep lending had started the crisis, were asked for less.

The same November legislation included the Emergency Moratorium Act, which deferred repayment of principal on city notes for three years. Holders of the notes went to court. On November 19, 1976, the New York Court of Appeals struck down the moratorium in Flushing National Bank v. Municipal Assistance Corporation, holding that the city's pledge of its faith and credit to its noteholders could not be suspended by statute. The ruling forced the city and the state to find other ways to pay. It also established that, in the hierarchy of claims on the city's revenue, the noteholders came first. The moratorium had been the one part of the rescue that asked the holders of city paper to wait, and the court removed it, which left the waiting to be done elsewhere in the budget.

Ford relented in December 1975, once the state's measures were in place. He signed the New York City Seasonal Financing Act, which provided up to $2.3 billion a year in short-term federal loans at about 1 percent above the Treasury's rate. The terms required the city to raise fees, cut labor costs, and balance its budget by June 1978. The loans were repaid.

The rescue saved New York from default and rewrote the rules under which it was governed. The Control Board, MAC, the pension funds, and the federal conditions together created an arrangement in which the bondholder's claim on city revenue was secured first and public services were paid for out of what remained. That ordering of priorities outlasted the emergency.

Shrinkage

The cuts that followed reached every city department. Thousands of city workers were laid off. Municipal hospitals were closed or consolidated, and clinics shortened their hours. Firehouses that had survived the first round of RAND closings were shut in the next. Maintenance of parks, streets, and subways was deferred, a decision whose costs would appear years later in breakdowns and fires underground.

The City University of New York, which had provided free tuition to city residents for more than a century, began charging tuition in 1976. The change fell hardest on the students the university had admitted under open admissions since 1970, many of them Black and Puerto Rican and the first in their families to attend college. MAC had named tuition among its conditions, and the board that set CUNY's budget had little room to refuse.

The cuts were presented as the price of solvency, applied as evenly as the city could manage. A senior official in Beame's administration suggested that they should be concentrated instead. Roger Starr, the city's housing and development administrator, had first set out the idea in 1966 in his book Urban Choices: The City and Its Critics, written while he ran the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council, a civic organization that studied housing policy. In November 1976, in the New York Times Magazine, he restated it. "We could simply accept the fact that the city's population is going to shrink," he wrote, "and could cut back on city services accordingly, realizing considerable savings in the process."

Starr had carried the idea for a decade before he published it as a city official. He first wrote it down when the city was still borrowing freely, before the RAND contract and before the fire closings. The fiscal crisis supplied what the idea had lacked in 1966, a budget that could no longer pay for everything, and a mayor's housing administrator now offered it in a national magazine as a way to choose.

The proposal had a name, planned shrinkage, and a logic that followed directly from the decade's fire closings and disinvestment. Neighborhoods losing population, Starr argued, should lose services in proportion; the city should stop trying to sustain districts that the market and their own residents were abandoning, and concentrate its shrinking budget where people and investment remained. Implicitly the neighborhoods in question were the South Bronx, Brownsville, Bushwick, and the other districts where fires and abandonment were already doing the work Starr proposed to formalize.

The reaction was immediate. Members of the City Council called the proposal inhuman, racist, and genocidal, and Starr left the Beame administration soon after. Planned shrinkage never became official policy or law.

It did not need to. Much of what Starr proposed was already happening, through the RAND closings, the withdrawal of insurers and lenders, the

deferred repairs, and the triage that the fiscal rescue imposed. His offense was to describe as a deliberate choice what had been presented as the result of objective analysis or unavoidable economic forces. Starr's frankness made visible the decision underneath the decade: that certain neighborhoods, overwhelmingly Black and Puerto Rican, would be allowed to empty because serving them cost more than the city and its creditors were prepared to pay. The fires and the fiscal crisis were two forms of the same triage. In the Bronx, landlords and insurers decided first, and the Fire Department's models followed. In Albany and Washington, banks and bondholders decided what could be financed, and the city's budget followed.

Broadway Under the El

At 9:27 p.m. on July 13, 1977, the Ravenswood 3 generating unit on the East River waterfront in Queens went down, and with it the last of the power holding up the Con Edison system. The whole city went dark, and it stayed dark for about a day.

In parts of Brooklyn the night turned into something else. Along Broadway, the commercial street under the elevated tracks of the J train that marks the line between Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant, hundreds of people broke into stores. When the blackout began, 189 police officers were on duty for the roughly one million residents of the Brooklyn North patrol borough, about one officer for every 5,000 people, and off-duty officers had to be brought in from other boroughs to reinforce them. In Bushwick the looting and fires continued through July 14, and the fires grew worse on the second day. Counts of the damage differ. The city's Department of Records puts the number of Bushwick stores looted in about twenty-four hours at eighty-eight and the number set on fire at forty-eight, most of them on Broadway; other tallies give the burned stores on Broadway alone as forty-five or so. Days after the power came back, the All Hands Fire began in an abandoned Bushwick factory and destroyed twenty-three more buildings.

Bushwick was not a stable neighborhood that the blackout destroyed in a night. By 1975 it had already seen some 4,000 fires, by the city's count. Its housing stock, the wood-frame and brick row houses and tenements of a nineteenth-century German brewing district, had been hollowed out in the preceding years by a mortgage fraud carried out by local bankers and real

estate brokers. They filed fraudulent paperwork on loans insured by the Federal Housing Administration for buyers who were poor or did not exist. The buyers defaulted, the federal government covered the loss, and the buildings sat empty. An estimated 500 Bushwick buildings were left vacant this way. The scheme was a variation on the insurance arbitrage in the Bronx: a public guarantee designed to support homeownership in neighborhoods that private lenders shunned became a means of extracting money from those neighborhoods while emptying them.

The blackout of 1977 was compared to the blackout of 1965, when the city had gone dark without much disorder, and the comparison was used to argue that New York had become ungovernable in the intervening twelve years. A more precise comparison would set the streets that burned against the streets that did not. Most of the city's neighborhoods passed the night without fires. The looting concentrated where the police were stretched thinnest, the stores were already marginal, and the surrounding blocks had been losing buildings for years. Bushwick's Broadway had been written off by lenders, insurers, and the city before July 13; the blackout exposed how far that withdrawal had gone.

On October 5, 1977, President Jimmy Carter visited Charlotte Street in the South Bronx. Two years after the Daily News had told the city that the federal government wanted nothing to do with it, a president stood on one of the most devastated blocks in the borough, among the shells of apartment buildings that landlords, insurers, and the city had given up on.

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The Broke City Rebuilds, 1977–2001

A nearly bankrupt city rebuilds abandoned housing, absorbs a new immigration, lives through crack, AIDS, and the crime peak, then watches crime fall and Manhattan grow expensive.

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CHAPTER 21

Koch and the Rebuilt Blocks, 1978–1989

Charlotte Street

One night in 1983 a convoy of trucks crossed the George Washington Bridge carrying houses. They had been built in sections in a factory in Pennsylvania, and they were bound for Charlotte Street in Crotona Park East, a few blocks of the South Bronx that by 1980 had become the country's shorthand for a dead city. The sections were set down on cleared lots and joined into ranch houses, each with a yard and a fence. They stood where apartment buildings had stood before the fires.

The houses were political objects before anyone lived in them. Jimmy Carter's walk down Charlotte Street on October 5, 1977, had made the place famous, and photographs of the rubble followed it through the next presidential campaign. Edward I. Koch, who took office as mayor three months after Carter's visit and held it through the end of 1989, tried early in his first term to put new housing on the site. The Board of Estimate, which then shared authority over city land and contracts with the mayor, voted him down. What eventually went up was smaller than any program a mayor would have announced, and it was built by people who were not at City Hall.

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Each house cost about $110,000 to build. Each sold for between $50,000 and $59,000. Federal, city, and foundation subsidies covered the difference, so that the public and its philanthropic partners paid roughly half the cost of every house on the street. The houses drew more than 600 applications in their first three weeks on the market, and about nine in ten of the buyers came from the Bronx. They were not newcomers arriving from the suburbs. They were people who had stayed in the borough through its worst decade and were buying back into it. More houses were added in stages over the following years until Charlotte Gardens held about ninety of them.

The development answered, for a few blocks, the question that ran through the decade: once the city had the ground, who would hold it? Charlotte Gardens put it in the hands of owner-occupants, at a density closer to Levittown than to the Grand Concourse. Ninety families lived on blocks that had once housed many times that number. The design was a wager that a deed and a yard would keep people in place where rent receipts had not. In the early 1980s that wager was defensible. The South Bronx had lost tenants faster than it had lost buildings, and a neighborhood of owners who had paid down their own money was a neighborhood with a reason not to leave.

A short distance south, on Kelly Street in Longwood, a tenant group had reached the same conclusion earlier and by another route. Its members lived along a curve in the street that gave the group its name, Banana Kelly, and in the 1970s they took as their motto "Don't Move, Improve." Harry DiRienzo, a co-founder, later described the period plainly: "there was a vacuum, and an opportunity to build." The vacuum had a precise legal shape. Landlords had walked away and the city had taken title but lacked the money or staff to manage what it owned. Groups like Banana Kelly had what the city lacked. They were already on the block, they knew which buildings could be saved, and they could vouch for the tenants. Over the next decade the city learned to treat such groups as partners, and that choice shaped what the rebuilt Bronx became.

The City as Landlord

Koch was a Democratic congressman from Manhattan when he won the mayoralty in November 1977. He took office on January 1, 1978, in a city whose budget was still answerable to the state's Emergency Financial Control Board, with federal loan guarantees on a short schedule and the banks watching every

quarter's figures. The fiscal crisis had shrunk the city's workforce and closed its access to the bond market. It had also handed the city a portfolio of real estate that no administration had set out to acquire.

The mechanism was tax foreclosure. When an owner stopped paying property taxes, the city could bring a proceeding in rem, against the property itself instead of against its owner, and take title once the arrears had run long enough. Through the 1970s owners in the South Bronx, Harlem, and central Brooklyn stopped paying in growing numbers. For many of them, nonpayment was the first stage of abandonment: collect rents, skip taxes and repairs, and walk away when the building was emptied out or burned. To improve its collections, the city sped up the procedure, shortening the time an owner could stay delinquent before losing title. The change worked as intended in one sense. Owners who meant to keep their buildings paid. Owners who meant to leave simply let them go, and the city found itself holding the deeds to thousands of buildings containing tens of thousands of apartments.

Many of those buildings were still occupied. Tenants who had lived through a landlord's withdrawal now had the City of New York as their landlord, which meant the city was responsible for boilers, roofs, fuel oil, and rent collection in buildings that private owners had already judged worthless. Other buildings stood empty and sealed, their windows covered with tin or cinder block. The scale was greatest where the decline had been worst. By the 1980s the city held title to roughly 60 percent of the property in Harlem. When the administration eventually wrote its long-range housing plan, it counted 82,000 apartments in occupied city-owned buildings needing renovation and 47,000 in vacant ones that would have to be gutted and rebuilt. Those totals measured what remained after years of demolition and piecemeal sales.

A collection device had become, by default, the largest land acquisition program in the city's history. Owners who quit transferred the liabilities of their buildings to the public treasury at the moment the treasury could least afford them. The city now had to decide what it was willing to own and for how long. It could keep the buildings and manage them as an unofficial public housing authority. It could auction them to private buyers, who might repeat the cycle that had produced the foreclosures. It could demolish them and land-bank the lots. Or it could hand them, with subsidy, to someone it trusted to keep them: nonprofit developers, tenant cooperatives, church coalitions, small landlords.

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Through the late 1970s the city did some of each, without a governing idea and without much money. By the middle of the 1980s Koch had chosen the last course and found the money to pursue it at scale.

The question had a racial geography that no one in City Hall needed explained. The in rem stock lay overwhelmingly in Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods. These were the same districts the federal mortgage maps of the 1930s had marked as hazardous and that clearance, redlining, and insurance withdrawal had stripped through the decades after the war. The city's title was the end of a long chain of private and public decisions to stop investing in that ground. Whoever received the buildings back would be deciding whether the people who had stayed would get the benefit of the rebuilding or watch it go to someone else.

Shelter and Board

On the Bowery, the old street of lodging houses below Cooper Square, the question of who could claim space had already narrowed to its smallest unit: a bed for one night. In 1979 lawyers filed a class action in state court on behalf of homeless men. The suit was Callahan v. Carey, named for one of the plaintiffs and for Governor Hugh Carey. It argued that Article XVII of the state constitution, which makes the aid and care of the needy a public duty, obliged the state and city to provide shelter to anyone without it. On December 5, 1979, a state justice ordered the city to make 750 shelter beds available for homeless men on the Bowery.

The case did not go to a final judgment. On August 3, 1981, the city and state signed a consent decree. Its central sentence was blunt: "The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it," provided he met the welfare standard of need or required shelter because of physical, mental, or social dysfunction. The decree set minimum standards for the shelters, covering space between beds, staffing, and sanitation, and it named the Coalition for the Homeless as monitor. A second suit, Eldredge v. Koch, filed in February 1982, sought the same protection for homeless women. The courts agreed, and the ruling was affirmed on appeal in 1983.

New York thus became a city with an enforceable right to shelter, something almost no other American jurisdiction had. The decree required a bed. It said nothing about where the bed would be or what kind of room it would stand in.

In the early years the city met its obligation with the space it already controlled and could open fastest, the cavernous drill halls of its National Guard armories. Hundreds of men slept on cots on concrete floors under the roof trusses of buildings put up in the age of the volunteer regiment. The armories satisfied the letter of the decree and served as an advertisement for its limits. The right was a right to be indoors, not to have a home.

The demand that filled the armories had several sources, and they were not easy to separate: the release of psychiatric patients from state hospitals without community housing to receive them, the recession of 1981 and 1982, cuts to federal housing assistance, and the disappearance of the cheapest housing in the city. For generations the bottom of New York's market had been the single-room-occupancy hotel and the rooming house, where a man on a pension or a disability check could rent a room by the week. That stock had been shrinking for years through demolition and conversion. The J-51 program, a tax abatement and exemption for owners who rehabilitated or converted older buildings, dated from 1955, when it was created to encourage owners to modernize old buildings. It also rewarded owners who emptied rooming houses and turned them into apartments for tenants who could pay more. A room that vanished from a West Side or Bowery hotel did not show up in the in rem inventory or the vacancy surveys. It surfaced, if anywhere, as one more man on a drill floor.

The Callahan decree therefore created a public claim on space at the moment the private market was eliminating the cheapest space there was. It turned homelessness into a line in the city's budget that could not be cut by administrative choice. That obligation pressed on every later housing decision. When Koch put a figure on the homeless share of his housing plan, he did so with a court-monitored shelter system behind him whose costs rose every year the shelters stayed full.

Grand Central and Fifth Avenue

The city's power to decide what rose on a lot had been tested in court before Koch had been in office six months. On June 26, 1978, the Supreme Court decided Penn Central Transportation Co. v. New York City. The dispute concerned Grand Central Terminal, which had been designated a landmark under the 1965 law. In 1968 the Penn Central, the railroad that owned the terminal

and that went bankrupt two years later, leased the air rights above it for fifty years to UGP Properties. UGP proposed an office tower of fifty or more stories to stand over the terminal. The Landmarks Preservation Commission rejected the design and a revised one. The railroad sued, arguing that by forbidding it to build in the air above its own property, the city had taken that property without paying for it. The city answered that the railroad could still run the terminal and earn from it, and it pointed to the transferable development rights it had offered. Those rights let the unused air above Grand Central be sold and used on other lots nearby.

The Court ruled for the city, six to three. Justice William Brennan wrote for the majority that the refusal was not a taking. Justice William Rehnquist dissented, joined by Chief Justice Warren Burger and Justice John Paul Stevens. The decision did more than save one building. It confirmed that a city could tell an owner what could not be built on a lot, for reasons of history and appearance, without buying the lot. Fifteen years after the demolition of Pennsylvania Station, the landmarks law had survived its most serious challenge, and every later designation in the five boroughs rested on that ruling. The case also strengthened the market in air rights that the 1961 zoning code had begun. If unused development rights could be peeled off a landmark and sold down the block, then the space above a building was a commodity separate from the building, priced and traded like any other.

Two years later the city tested a different power and lost. On Fifth Avenue at 56th Street stood the Bonwit Teller department store. Donald Trump, then a developer in his mid-thirties, acquired the site, demolished the store, and put up a fifty-nine-story tower with stores and offices on its lower floors and thirty-eight floors of luxury condominiums above. Trump Tower opened in 1983. In December 1980 the developer applied for a tax exemption under Section 421-a, a state program of the early 1970s designed to encourage apartment construction in a city where hardly anyone was building. The exemption was available for new multifamily housing on land that was vacant or under-utilized.

The Koch administration refused. The site, it argued, had held a working department store with hundreds of employees and about $30 million in annual sales, and by no reasonable reading was that under-utilized. The developer sued. In the Appellate Division, Justice Arnold L. Fein upheld the city, writing that 421-a "hardly contemplates the grant of benefits at the most choice, already

adequately utilized location in Manhattan." In 1984 the state Court of Appeals reversed. In Trump-Equitable v. Gliedman, named for the city's housing commissioner, the court held that the city had "impermissibly erected a barrier to the benefit." The statute, as the court read it, left officials no discretion to withhold the exemption from a qualifying project because they found the subsidy unseemly. Trump put the value of the abatement at $7 million to $10 million over ten years. The city lost a second round in 1988, over the commercial floors, and in 1990 a court ordered it to refund more than $6 million. After the case, the City Council passed legislation restricting 421-a benefits on certain sites where existing buildings had been torn down.

Penn Central and Trump Tower marked the two edges of the city's power over Manhattan ground in the 1980s. The city could stop a tower over a landmark without paying a cent. It could not stop a state tax program from paying for a tower on the most expensive avenue in the country. Tax benefits written for the conditions of 1971, when the problem was getting anything built at all, were still flowing to luxury construction in a market that no longer needed coaxing. The Trump case made that visible because the building was conspicuous and the developer litigated loudly. Most such benefits went to projects few New Yorkers ever noticed.

Nehemiah

Some five thousand people gathered in Brownsville on an October day in 1982 to break ground for houses. They had been brought there by East Brooklyn Congregations, a coalition of churches in Brownsville and East New York formed around 1980 and affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, the organizing network Saul Alinsky had founded. The coalition named its building program after Nehemiah, the Old Testament prophet who returned from exile and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. Mayor Koch came to the groundbreaking and praised the congregations for building affordable two- and three-bedroom single-family houses. The journalist Jim Sleeper caught the reversal of roles that day: "As in a civics text come to life, the people here were instructing their elected representatives, not the other way around."

The congregations had spent the previous two years building that leverage. Industrial Areas Foundation groups worked through disciplined meetings, member dues, and research. They identified specific officials and asked them,

in public and in front of large crowds, for specific commitments. East Brooklyn Congregations had used those methods on smaller demands before turning to housing. Its member churches paid into a revolving construction loan fund, so that the builders had money in hand without waiting on a bank. The city assembled the land, much of it vacant lots it had acquired through foreclosure and clearance, and sold it to the program for a nominal price. It also provided below-market second mortgages that brought the monthly payments within reach of working families earning modest wages. The houses were built in quantity on large assembled sites, which lowered the cost of each one.

By the end of 1987 about 1,000 Nehemiah houses stood completed in southeastern Brownsville. Over the following decades the coalition built toward some 4,500 in Brownsville, East New York, and Spring Creek. In a neighborhood already dense with public housing towers, the Nehemiah houses were the opposite form. They were low, owner-occupied, and built from the ground up by organized residents instead of being assigned to tenants by an authority.

Nehemiah worked because each party brought what it had. The churches supplied organized people and pooled money. The city supplied land it owned and could not use and the subsidy that turned a construction cost into a mortgage a bus driver or nurse's aide could carry. The arrangement inverted the pattern of the postwar decades, in which public power had been used to clear Brooklyn ground and hand it to institutions and developers from outside. Here public power cleared title so that residents could hold the ground themselves. The limits were those of the form. Nehemiah built for families with steady incomes, and it did nothing directly for the tenants of the armories or of the city's worst in rem buildings. It showed what the city's land could do in the hands of a constituency organized enough to claim it.

Landfill for Walk-Ups

The money for Koch's largest housing effort came partly from the edge of Manhattan, on ground that had not existed a generation earlier. Battery Park City occupied 92 acres along the Hudson west of West Street, built on fill from harbor dredging and from the excavation for the World Trade Center's foundations. The landfill was largely in place by the mid-1970s. It sat almost empty through the fiscal crisis, and through the 1980s it filled with apartment

buildings and the office towers of the World Financial Center, along with about 36 acres of parks, plazas, and an esplanade on the river. The state authority that ran it leased the land to developers and collected rents and payments in place of taxes. Lower Manhattan's oldest habit, extending its shoreline by filling water lots and selling or leasing the result, had produced its most valuable acreage yet.

A few blocks north, the same habit met defeat. Westway was a plan, years in the making, to replace the crumbling West Side Highway with an interstate buried in new landfill along the Hudson, topped with parks and development sites. Koch supported it, as did Governor Mario Cuomo and much of the city's business and construction establishment. Opponents in Manhattan neighborhoods and environmental groups took it to federal court. The decisive issue turned out to be the fish. A federal judge found that the fill would destroy the winter habitat of the river's striped bass and that the government's environmental review had not honestly accounted for it. In the fall of 1985, with Congress turning against the project, the city and state abandoned Westway and traded much of its federal highway money toward mass transit.

Battery Park City supplied the hinge for the housing plan. In his State of the City message in January 1985, Koch announced a five-year, $4.4 billion program, financed by the city, to build or rehabilitate about 100,000 housing units. He called it the most ambitious plan of his political career. Roughly $1 billion of the money was to come from bonds backed by Battery Park City revenues. The rest would come from the city's Housing Development Corporation, the regular capital budget, and whatever state and federal funds could be found. Within a year or two the plan had been stretched to ten years, with $5.1 billion committed to 252,000 units. The mayor's office formally restated it in the 1988 ten-year capital plan covering fiscal years 1989 through 1998. Of the $5.1 billion, $4.1 billion was city money.

The plan's targets mapped the in rem inventory. It called for renovating 82,000 apartments in occupied city-owned buildings and rebuilding 47,000 in vacant ones, building 37,000 new units, and upgrading 87,000 apartments in privately owned buildings. In Koch's later account, 60 percent of the housing was set aside for families earning under $19,000 a year, 27 percent for families earning up to $32,000, and the remainder for middle-income households. Some 15,000 new apartments were reserved for homeless people, which tied the plan directly to the obligations of the Callahan decree. Koch presented

the whole effort as an answer to Washington. The Reagan administration had ended federal support for building low- and moderate-income housing, and he wrote that his administration "was not immobilized by the federal retreat."

The plan was as notable for what it would not do. Its officials avoided new high-rise public projects, and they preferred to hand rebuilt buildings to private and nonprofit owners so that the city would not carry their maintenance costs indefinitely. The New York City Housing Authority had built the towers of the postwar decades. The Ten-Year Plan built almost none. Its signature product was the gut-rehabilitated walk-up in the South Bronx or Harlem, conveyed after renovation to a community development corporation, a tenant cooperative, or a small private landlord bound by a regulatory agreement. This was the course Banana Kelly and the Nehemiah congregations had pointed toward. The city would finance the rebuilding and then step back from ownership.

Not everyone accepted the income targets as a promise. A coalition called the Housing Justice Campaign sued Koch over the 1988 version of the plan. It argued that the plan excluded the lowest-income households and would cause displacement as rebuilt neighborhoods drew better-off tenants. The Appellate Division dismissed the claims as conclusory. The suit nonetheless named the tension at the center of the program. A plan that rebuilt a neighborhood made it more attractive, and a neighborhood made more attractive could price out the people who had stayed through the abandonment unless the subsidy's terms held rents down for decades.

The cross-subsidy ran from the newest ground in the city to the most abused. Rents paid by financial firms in towers on fill dug from the Trade Center's foundation helped retire bonds that paid for new boilers and floors in Morrisania and Central Harlem. Lower Manhattan's wealth had always rested in part on made land, and in the 1980s some of that made land's value was sent uptown and across the rivers. Whether the arrangement was generous or merely prudent depends on what one expected of a city that owned so much of Harlem. Either way, it was a deliberate decision that some of the returns from the most valuable ground would pay for rebuilding the least valuable. It was carried out at a scale that turned blocks of sealed shells into occupied housing through the 1990s.

Tompkins Square

On October 19, 1987, the stock market fell by more than a fifth in a single day. The crash came at the end of a long run in which Wall Street's hiring and bonuses had fed demand for Manhattan housing. Co-op conversions, renovated brownstones, and new condominium towers had spread outward from the Upper East Side and Midtown into neighborhoods that had been written off a decade earlier. One of them was the East Village. There, the tenements between Avenue A and the East River held an uneasy mix: Puerto Rican families who had lived on the Lower East Side since the 1950s, artists and musicians drawn by the cheapest rents in Manhattan, squatters in city-owned buildings, and new tenants paying prices the old ones could not have imagined. The crash did not end that pressure overnight. It sharpened the argument over whom the reviving neighborhood was for.

The argument came to a head in Tompkins Square Park, the ten-acre square between Seventh and Tenth Streets and Avenues A and B. Homeless people had been sleeping there, along with young people who used the park late into the night, and the city imposed a 1 a.m. curfew. On the night of August 6, 1988, protesters gathered to defy it. Accounts of the crowd's size differ widely. Some of the protesters carried banners reading "Gentrification is Class War." Police Captain Gerald McNamara arrived with about eighty officers and then called in some 400 more, some of them on horseback. Officers charged the crowd and clubbed protesters, bystanders, and people coming out of nearby bars and apartments. Many had covered their badge numbers. The fighting spread into the surrounding streets and went on until about 6 a.m. on August 7.

The New York Times reported forty-four people injured, thirteen of them police officers, and nine arrests. More than 100 complaints of police brutality followed. Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward criticized the department's conduct in public, an unusual step for a commissioner after a night of street fighting. The images of officers with masked badges beating people on Avenue A ran in newspapers and on television for weeks, and the park became a byword for the collision between the old neighborhood and the new.

The banner's language was blunter than the policy debates in City Hall, but it described the same contest. A decade after the city had become the reluctant owner of tens of thousands of apartments, ground that no one had wanted was worth fighting over again. Some of that value had been created by public

money: the Ten-Year Plan's rehabilitations, the land conveyed to churches in Brownsville, the subsidy that halved the price of a house on Charlotte Street. Some had been created by people who stayed through the worst years. In the East Village, as across much of the city, private buyers were collecting part of it, and the homeless people sleeping on the park's benches were the residents with the least claim to any of it. The city had a court order requiring it to give each of them a bed. It did not have, and had never had, a rule about whether they could stay in the neighborhood they were sleeping in. The protesters on Avenue A were arguing about that, and in 1988 the police settled the question for the night.

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CHAPTER 22

Lofts, Trains, and Block Parties, 1970–1989

On June 5, 1970, the SoHo Artists Association held its first official meeting as an incorporated body, and the proceedings were recorded. The members spent the evening on two questions no city agency had yet had to answer: who counted as an artist, and how much room did an artist need to work? They had been meeting informally since 1968 to press for a change in the zoning that governed the blocks south of Houston Street, where many of them lived in buildings the law said nobody could live in. The recording and the association's papers ended up in the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. They show a group of illegal tenants drafting the terms of their own tenancy, which is close to what the city then allowed them to do.

Neither question was academic. A definition of artist loose enough to cover everyone in the room would read to the city as an exemption anyone could claim. A definition strict enough to persuade officials would shut out neighbors who had wired and plumbed the same buildings. A standard for space, set in square feet, would decide whether a loft could be divided and how many households a floor could hold. Whatever the association settled on would become the shape of the district.

Who Counts as an Artist

The district between Houston and Canal Streets was a nineteenth-century warehouse and manufacturing quarter. Its loft buildings, many of them faced in cast iron, had been built for dry goods, printing, and the needle trades, with wide floors, high ceilings, and tall windows that let light reach workers at their tables. By the 1960s the manufacturers who had filled them were leaving, part of the larger emptying of the factory city. Floors stood vacant or rented cheaply to whatever light industry remained. The buildings survived largely because the Lower Manhattan Expressway, whose route would have cut across Broome Street, had been dropped in 1969. A district that planners had treated as expendable was still standing, and its owners had few customers.

Artists were among the few. A painter or sculptor wanted what a garment shop had wanted: square footage, north light, freight elevators, floors that could bear weight, and a rent low enough to leave money for materials. The lofts supplied all of it, at a price. Many had no modern plumbing or electrical service suited to a household. Tenants ran their own wiring, installed their own sinks and toilets, and built kitchens and sleeping areas inside spaces meant for cutting tables. Some turned that work into a trade and fitted out lofts for others. Every improvement went into a building the occupant did not own, under a lease that described the space as commercial, in a zoning district where residence was forbidden. A building inspector or a fire marshal could clear a loft. A landlord could evict at will, and the tenant's investment in pipes and walls stayed behind.

The association that formed loosely in 1968 was a lobby before it was a legal body. Its members had found their lofts one floor at a time, through landlords glad of any rent, and each of them held the same weak position alone. Organized, they could make a single case to the city on behalf of a whole district, and they could argue that the problem was not their presence but a zoning map that still described SoHo as a place of factories after most of the factories had gone.

The association's lobbying rested on an argument the city had reasons to accept. The artists were occupying buildings the market had abandoned, paying rent to owners who had no better tenants, and keeping blocks populated that would otherwise have gone dark. While negotiations and public hearings went on, the city declared a moratorium on evictions. The moratorium mattered as much as the amendment that followed. It froze the conflict in the tenants' favor while the terms were being written, so that the people asking for legal status

were still in the buildings when it arrived. Then, in 1971, under Mayor John V. Lindsay (1966–1973), the Zoning Resolution was amended to create a new use, Joint Living-Work Quarters for Artists. It applied in two special manufacturing districts, designated M1-5A and M1-5B, which covered SoHo and NoHo, the loft blocks north of Houston. Each unit had to house at least one artist certified by the city's Department of Cultural Affairs. In June 1971 the department announced that it had certified the first twenty-two. The gap between that short list and everyone else already living in the lofts was built into the rule from its first month.

The amendment answered the association's question of June 1970 in administrative form. A city office now decided, applicant by applicant, who was an artist, and that decision conferred the right to live on manufacturing ground. Aaron Shkuda, whose *The Lofts of SoHo* is the standard history of the district's conversion, described the city's earlier Artist in Residence policy as "a way to let people live illegally in an organized way." The 1971 rule went further and made the arrangement legal, but on narrow terms. It did not rezone SoHo for housing. It created an exception for one occupation and kept the manufacturing designation in place around it. A loft occupied by a certified painter was a lawful home; the same loft occupied by a lawyer, or by a painter who never applied, was not.

That design had a consequence the artists of 1970 could not have weighed. The right to live in a SoHo loft attached to a person's credential, which could not be sold with the lease or the deed. The space, meanwhile, was gaining value precisely because artists lived in it. Galleries followed studios. Restaurants followed galleries. The artists had taken ground no one wanted, improved it with their own labor, and won a legal status for doing so, and the status protected them only as long as the people who wanted the lofts next were also artists.

Sixth Avenue to the Sheep Meadow

On Sunday, June 28, 1970, three weeks after the SoHo meeting, a crowd gathered in Greenwich Village near Sheridan Square and Waverly Place for the first Christopher Street Liberation Day march. The date marked the first anniversary of the uprising at the Stonewall Inn. The marchers walked north up Sixth Avenue, about fifty-one blocks, to the Sheep Meadow in Central Park.

Estimates of their number run from around two thousand to several times that; by any count they were thousands, and the column lengthened as it went.

The march replaced an older form of protest. Through the second half of the 1960s, a small number of homosexual activists had held an Annual Reminder picket each Fourth of July at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. The pickets were deliberately respectable. Participants followed a dress code, with jackets and ties for men and dresses for women, and walked in an orderly line before a federal shrine to show that they were citizens asking for rights. The 1970 organizers moved the annual event to New York, tied it to Stonewall, and replaced the dress code and the single line with a crowd that filled an avenue. Karla Jay, the first woman to chair the Gay Liberation Front, later said of the march: "if we hadn't done that, nobody would remember the Stonewall today."

The change of city was also a change of ground. Independence Hall was a single national monument, a place where any group could stand to petition the country and then go home. The New York route ran through ordinary commercial blocks, past shops and offices and apartment buildings, from the neighborhood where the uprising had happened to the open lawn of a public park. The Philadelphia pickets had asked to be seen as respectable visitors at someone else's shrine. The New York march moved through the marchers' own city and ended on ground that belonged to all its residents.

The claim the marchers made was of a different kind from the artists'. They sought no lease and no zoning amendment. They took the city's central north-south avenue for an afternoon and walked through Midtown in daylight, from a neighborhood where gay life had long been policed to a meadow in the city's largest park. The march carried the name of a single street, and that naming did lasting work. Christopher Street became an address known far beyond the Village, shorthand for a neighborhood and a movement at once. The march returned the next June and every June after. Its hold on the street was never written into property law; repetition renewed it each year, and the claim depended on continued turnout.

1520 Sedgwick Avenue

On August 11, 1973, Cindy Campbell threw a back-to-school party in the recreation room of her family's apartment building at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue, in the Morris Heights section of the west Bronx. She wanted to raise money for

fall clothes. Her brother Clive, eighteen years old, Jamaican-born, and playing records under the name Kool Herc, supplied the music. The building held 102 apartments, and the rec room could take a few hundred people at most. Invitations went out, by later accounts, on hand-lettered index cards, and admission was remembered as a quarter for women and fifty cents for men.

The economics of the night were those of a household. A family needed money before school started, and the resource at hand was a room. A rec room in a large apartment building was shared space, held in common by the tenants and controlled by the landlord, available for a birthday or a tenants' meeting. The Campbells used it as a venue. A modest charge at the door turned a building amenity into a paying room for one evening, and the cheaper price for women was an organizer's way of filling a dance floor. Nothing about the arrangement required a license, a lease, or an investor.

What Herc did with his equipment that night has been described many times. He set up two turntables and played funk records, and he paid particular attention to the break, the passage where the singing dropped out and the drums and bass carried the beat. Dancers wanted those passages longer than the records allowed. With two copies of a record, or two records with compatible breaks, a DJ could switch between turntables and extend the instrumental section for as long as the floor stayed full. Herc did that. Over the following years, as other DJs adopted and refined the technique and MCs began rhyming over the extended beats, the practice became the basis of hip-hop. The city's Parks Department, which treats both the building and Cedar Playground next door as the music's birthplace, holds that the party grew so crowded the Campbells moved it outdoors into the park.

The setting matters to this book's argument. The Bronx of 1973 was losing housing faster than any part of the city, and young people there had little claim on commercial space of any kind. There were few clubs that would book them and fewer that they could afford. The music that came out of Sedgwick Avenue was made in the spaces available to people without capital: a shared room in an apartment building, a schoolyard, a park, a street corner where someone could run a cord to a lamppost or a building outlet. A party required a sound system, records, a few square yards of floor, and an electrical source. The early hip-hop DJs and their crews claimed such spaces temporarily, night by night, and those claims carried no title. No one could evict a sound from a playground.

The same impermanence shaped what became of the value hip-hop created. The genre turned into an industry measured in recording contracts and later in global sales. Almost none of that money attached to the places where it began. 1520 Sedgwick Avenue remained an ordinary apartment building on an ordinary Bronx street. The pattern ran opposite to SoHo's. In the lofts, artistic occupancy raised the value of the buildings themselves. In the Bronx, the art left the neighborhood, carried on records and tapes, and the ground stayed where it was.

The Bowery and King Street

In 1970 the Bowery was the city's skid row, a strip of flophouses, missions, and bars that served the men who lived in them. Hilly Kristal, a former Marine who had managed the Village Vanguard jazz club, opened a bar there around 1970 at 313–315 Bowery, near Bleecker Street, called Hilly's on the Bowery. In 1973 he renamed it CBGB, for Country, Bluegrass, and Blues, the music he intended to book. Most accounts date the renamed club's opening to December 1973. It held about 350 people.

The music that made the room famous was none of the three in its name. Kristal adopted a policy of booking bands that played their own songs instead of covers, and in a city with few venues open to unsigned groups, that policy drew a set of young musicians who had nowhere else to play. Television, the Ramones, Patti Smith, Talking Heads, Richard Hell, and Blondie all appeared there in the mid-1970s. The Bowery's cheap rents and the indifference of its other users let the club run late and loud without complaint. Its location was an asset because no one else wanted it.

Kristal's booking rule had a spatial logic. A band playing its own songs could not fill a large hall and could not compete with cover bands for the ordinary bar trade. A room of 350 on a street with no competing nightlife gave such bands an audience at a scale they could reach, and a stage they could return to. The club became a fixed address for a scene that otherwise had none, and the address was on a block whose landlords had little prospect of better tenants.

CBGB lasted more than three decades. It closed on October 15, 2006, after a long dispute with its landlord over rent. In April 2008 the designer John Varvatos took over 315 Bowery for a clothing store, and in 2013 the building became part of the Bowery Historic District listed on the National Register

of Historic Places. The sequence compresses the chapter's argument into one address. A club claimed a room in a district the market had written off. The club's reputation helped make the surrounding blocks desirable. When the rent rose to match that desirability, the club could not pay it, and the building was preserved for its history after the activity that produced the history had been priced out.

A short walk south down the Bowery, at its corner with Houston Street, a different claim was taking root at the same moment. In 1973 Liz Christy, an artist who lived nearby, led a group calling itself the Green Guerillas in planting window boxes and tree pits around the Lower East Side. They also made what they called seed bombs, balloons, condoms, and Christmas ornaments packed with seeds and fertilizer, and lobbed them over the fences that surrounded the neighborhood's vacant lots. The lots were the residue of abandonment, ground where buildings had burned or been demolished, much of it owned by the city or soon to be.

The seed bomb was a way of planting ground one could not enter. The fences around the lots asserted ownership without any use behind it. A balloon of seed and fertilizer thrown over the top put something living on the far side without cutting a lock or breaking a law of trespass. It was a claim made from the sidewalk, and it tested whether anyone on the other side of the fence would object.

The group then took a direct approach to one lot. They cleared a rubble-strewn parcel at Bowery and Houston and in December 1973 asked the city for permission to use it. Four months later, on April 23, 1974, the city's housing office approved renting it to them as the Bowery Houston Farm and Garden, for one dollar a month. They planted sixty raised beds of vegetables. After Christy's death in 1985 the garden was renamed for her. It covers about 7,500 square feet, is generally regarded as the city's first community garden, and now sits under the protection of the Parks Department.

The dollar lease was a precise legal instrument. It acknowledged the gardeners' work and gave them standing on the lot, and it reserved the city's ownership and its right to end the arrangement. The order of events also mattered. The gardeners cleared the lot first and asked afterward, so that the city was asked to approve a use already under way, on ground that already looked different from the lots around it. In the 1970s and 1980s that model spread. Residents

on blocks across the Lower East Side, Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx cleared city-owned lots, built beds and casitas, and secured permission or simply occupied the ground and kept it. The city, which had taken title to thousands of abandoned parcels and had no money to build on them, had little reason to object. The gardeners were holding ground the city held but could not use, and their tenure lasted exactly as long as that condition did.

On the west side of lower Manhattan, in the blocks now called Hudson Square, a nightclub made a claim of its own. The Paradise Garage occupied a 1924 auto garage at 84 King Street. Michael Brody opened it in early 1978, and it ran until the fall of 1987. It held around 1,400 people, and its resident DJ, Larry Levan, made it one of the most influential dance clubs of its era. Like CBGB, it depended on a building no one else needed: a vehicle garage on an industrial side street, with a floor large enough for a crowd and neighbors who were mostly trucks. Its size set it apart from the Bowery bar. A room for 1,400 dancers required a structure built for heavy vehicles and wide spans, the kind of building that existed in quantity only in the city's working districts and that became available only as those districts emptied. The building was demolished in 2018. Where CBGB's shell was preserved and its use changed, the Garage's use ended first and then the shell went too.

Interim Multiple Dwellings

The 1971 zoning amendment had covered SoHo and NoHo and only certified artists within them. It did nothing for the much larger population that had moved into loft buildings elsewhere, in Manhattan and in Brooklyn and Queens, as manufacturing kept contracting through the 1970s. These tenants included artists outside the special districts, artists who had never sought certification, and a growing number of people who were not artists at all and wanted large, cheap space. They lived under the same conditions SoHo tenants had lived under before 1971: commercial leases, self-built kitchens and bathrooms, no residential certificate of occupancy, and no protection against an owner who decided that a residential tenant was a liability or that the space would bring more as something else.

Below Canal Street the pattern repeated in the warehouse and loft buildings of the district that came to be called Tribeca, for the Triangle Below Canal. The buildings had served the produce and dairy trades and the merchants around

them; as those trades moved out, residential tenants moved in under commercial leases, often fitting out their spaces at their own expense. By the end of the 1970s loft living was a citywide fact without a citywide law.

The State Legislature supplied one on June 21, 1982. Article 7-C of the Multiple Dwelling Law, known as the Loft Law, created a new legal category, the interim multiple dwelling. A building qualified if it had been used for commercial or manufacturing purposes and if at least three families had lived in it independently between April 1, 1980, and December 1, 1981. The law created the New York City Loft Board to oversee these buildings and required owners to follow a statutory schedule of improvements leading to residential certificates of occupancy. Once a building was legalized, its units entered rent stabilization.

The schedule turned a standoff into a sequence. Before 1982 an owner of an occupied loft building had two choices, to tolerate tenants he could not lawfully house or to remove them. The Loft Law closed the second choice for qualifying buildings and gave the first a destination. The owner now had to move the building, step by step and under the board's supervision, toward legal residential use. The category was named interim because it described a condition the law expected to end, and it applied to former commercial and manufacturing buildings wherever in the city they stood.

The Loft Law rested on a principle different from the 1971 amendment's. SoHo's rule had asked who the tenant was. The 1982 law asked where and when the tenant had lived. Occupancy during a defined window of dates, in sufficient numbers, converted an illegal residence into a protected one and obliged the owner to make it safe. The tenants who had wired their own outlets and plumbed their own sinks were no longer squatters in the eyes of the law. They were stabilized residents, and the owner, who had collected rent on space he could not lawfully rent for living, now bore the cost of bringing it up to code.

The date window was also the law's limit. Anyone who moved into a loft after December 1, 1981, fell outside it. The legislature returned to the problem repeatedly, amending the law in June 2010, June 2013, and June 2015 to extend coverage to more units, among them hundreds of loft tenants in Brooklyn. Each amendment drew a new window around a new set of occupants. The method stayed the same across three decades: the state waited until people had

established themselves in space the law did not recognize, then recognized them, and set a cutoff that left the next arrivals outside.

Below the Bridge

Across the East River, in the industrial blocks of Brooklyn wedged between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges, the sequence ran to its commercial conclusion. The district held large concrete and brick factory and warehouse buildings, many of them built for the Robert Gair Company, a manufacturer of paper boxes and cartons. As the waterfront industries left, artists began moving into the buildings illegally in the 1970s, and they named the place DUMBO, for Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass. The name served partly as a deterrent, a label unlikely to attract attention.

In 1981 David Walentas, a developer who had converted loft buildings in SoHo, bought several of the DUMBO factories and warehouses, including the Gair complex, from Harry Helmsley through his company, Two Trees. Walentas had watched SoHo's progression from illegal studios to legal live-work lofts to a high-priced district, and he bought an entire neighborhood at the start of the same progression. The purchase concentrated ownership of much of the district in one firm before the market had priced in what the artists already living there signaled. In SoHo, rising value had been spread across many owners of many buildings. In DUMBO, whatever value the neighborhood gained would accrue largely to one.

The ground did not convert quickly. DUMBO's manufacturing zoning blocked residential use, and the legal path that SoHo's artists had opened in 1971 did not extend across the river. Walentas held the buildings for years, renting space to commercial and artistic tenants. Not until 1998 did he convert One Main Street, the Clocktower Building that Gair had built in 1914, into 124 condominiums, seventeen years after he bought it. Seventeen years is a long hold for any investor. It measured the distance between what the buildings were worth as industrial space and what they could be worth as housing, and the cost of waiting for the zoning to close that distance. The Clocktower's condominiums were also a different product from the lofts that had given the district its name: units sold with title, legal from the start, to buyers who had not wired a single outlet. In SoHo the artists had pushed the law and the market

had followed them. In DUMBO a developer bought the buildings early and waited for the law to permit the use he planned.

Clean Cars

Through the 1970s and into the 1980s the most visible claim on space in New York moved at thirty miles an hour. Graffiti writers, most of them teenagers from the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and upper Manhattan, painted their names and then whole-car murals on subway trains, entering the yards at night and working on the parked cars. A painted car ran through every borough it served, carrying the writer's name past hundreds of thousands of riders. Writers sought more than a wall. They wanted a surface that circulated, and the subway, publicly owned, poorly guarded, and covering much of the city, supplied it.

The authorities fought this claim for nearly two decades and lost for most of them. Under Mayor Lindsay and then under Mayor Edward I. Koch (1978–1989), the city and the Transit Authority tried arresting writers, detaining them, and making them clean cars. They tried fences, dogs, and solvents. The paint returned. Punishing individual writers did nothing to the reward, which was the moving car itself; as long as painted trains kept running, there were always new writers to replace the ones caught. By a later estimate, spending against subway graffiti between 1972 and 1989 ran to hundreds of millions of dollars. Riders, meanwhile, came to read the painted cars as evidence that no one was in charge of the system, and the cars' appearance became part of the general argument over whether the city could govern its public spaces.

The method that worked began in 1984 on the No. 7 line, the Flushing line that ran from Times Square through Long Island City and Jackson Heights to Main Street in Queens. Under what the Transit Authority called the Clean Car Program, any new or rebuilt car that was marked would be cleaned within two hours or taken out of service until it was. The rule went to the writers' purpose. A painted car that never left the yard, or that ran for a single trip before being scrubbed, put no name before the public. The work vanished before anyone saw it, and the incentive to paint that car fell away.

David Gunn, who became president of the Transit Authority after working with Robert Kiley in Boston, ran the program as the agency expanded it car by car. Once a car was declared clean, it was to stay clean, and the program grew only as fast as the agency could guarantee that. The targets rose year by year:

1,720 cars in 1985, 3,434 in 1986, 4,707 in 1987, and 5,946 in 1988, with the entire fleet to be clear in 1989. The target roughly doubled in the program's second year and by 1988 was more than three times the 1985 figure. The agency was reclaiming its property the way the Loft Law reclaimed buildings for legal use, one defined unit at a time, with each unit held once it was won.

On May 12, 1989, about five years after the program started on the 7 line, the last graffiti-covered car in the subway system was taken out of service. The graffiti that writers had put on the trains survived in photographs and in the galleries that, by then, had begun showing some of the same writers' work on canvas, sold through dealers in the SoHo lofts that artists had first occupied illegally two decades earlier. The trains themselves carried nothing. The Transit Authority had reasserted its ownership of the moving surface completely, with no lease, no certificate, and no window of protected dates for those who had claimed it.

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CHAPTER 23

The Immigrant Boroughs, 1965–2001

In 1979 Richard Hsueh, who had been a radio reporter in Taiwan, came to Flushing, Queens, to work for the World Journal, a daily newspaper published in Mandarin. Chinese residents were just beginning to settle around Main Street, the end of the line the IRT had pushed out from Manhattan in 1928. Over the next several years the readers of Hsueh's paper built a community in a recognizable order. Restaurants opened first. A Chinese Voters Association followed. Then came Golden Pacific, the first Chinese bank in the neighborhood. Each stage committed more money to a few blocks of Queens. Each also asked more of the city that governed those blocks, moving from selling meals to neighbors toward lending against buildings and organizing votes in a borough whose politics had been run for half a century by the Irish, Italian, and Jewish clubs of the Democratic Party.

The people who carried out that sequence were in Queens because of a law signed fourteen years earlier, within sight of the island where the last great migration had been processed. On October 3, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act at a ceremony on Liberty Island. The law took the informal name Hart-Celler from its sponsors, Senator Philip Hart of Michigan and Representative Emanuel Celler of Brooklyn. It ended the system of national-origins quotas that had governed admission for forty-one years, since the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. Those quotas had been

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written to favor northern and western Europeans, and the city's Department of City Planning would later trace to their repeal a large increase in immigrants from the rest of the world. Hart-Celler did not throw the door open. It kept numerical limits for each country and allotted visas through a new system of preferences. But it removed the rule that a person's birthplace in Asia, Africa, Latin America, or southern and eastern Europe counted against admission.

The law's effects arrived in a city that was losing people. New York's population fell from about 7.9 million in 1970 to about 7.1 million in 1980, the steepest decline in its history, as white families left for the suburbs and the fiscal crisis cut services, closed firehouses, and put whole districts on the list of places the city could not afford to maintain. The outer-borough neighborhoods built along the Dual Contracts lines in the 1910s and 1920s had housed the children of the Ellis Island generation, and many of those children were moving on to Nassau County, New Jersey, and Westchester. Their apartments, frame houses, and storefronts did not stay empty. The people admitted under Hart-Celler bought, rented, subdivided, and crowded into that housing stock, reopened the shops on its commercial streets, and in doing so carried the city back from the population losses of the 1970s. They did it mostly in Queens and Brooklyn, far from the Manhattan districts where the city's public argument about land was usually conducted, and largely without public subsidy.

Main Street, Flushing

Before the 1970s, most Chinese immigrants to New York had been Cantonese speakers from the south of China, and the center of their community was Manhattan's Chinatown, the streets around Mott and Pell below Canal. The Taiwanese immigrants who began arriving in larger numbers in the 1970s spoke Mandarin, and many of them felt out of place in a neighborhood whose language, associations, and family networks were Cantonese. Many had first come to the United States as university students and stayed after graduating. They had professional training and some capital, and they looked for a place of their own. They found it at the eastern end of the Flushing line.

Downtown Flushing in the early 1970s was a commercial district in decline. Its older residents were mostly white, many of them of Greek and Italian descent, and the departures of the fiscal-crisis years appear to have pushed down prices for houses and commercial space. What the newcomers found, in any

case, was cheap: storefront and apartment rents in downtown Flushing were very low, and streets along Main Street and Roosevelt Avenue were half empty. Chinese, Korean, and Indian immigrants rented those storefronts, opened shops that stayed open late into the evening, and filled sidewalks that had been quiet after the workday.

The population behind the storefronts kept widening. Mainland Chinese began arriving in 1979, the year Washington and Beijing established diplomatic relations. Residents of Hong Kong, uneasy about the colony's scheduled return to Chinese rule in 1997, joined them through the 1980s and 1990s. Korean immigrants built their own commercial district in Flushing, east of Main Street. By the early 1990s the capital accumulating in the neighborhood was visible on the skyline: the Sheraton LaGuardia East, backed by Taiwanese investors, opened around then as downtown Flushing's largest hotel.

The sequence Hsueh observed, from restaurants to a voters' association to a bank, is the core of the Flushing story, and it explains why the neighborhood became more than a satellite of Chinatown. A bank owned and run by immigrants could lend to immigrant buyers whom established lenders saw as risky or simply did not know. Every loan Golden Pacific and the banks that followed it made against a Flushing storefront or a two-family house in the surrounding blocks tied the community more firmly to its ground. A voters' association made a claim of a different kind, on a borough government that had not been built to answer to people who read the news in Mandarin. The commercial strip came first because it was the cheapest place to start, but the bank and the voters' association are what made it permanent.

There is a long arc here for anyone following the city's transit. The IRT's Flushing line reached Main Street in 1928 as part of the expansion that turned the farms of northern Queens into apartment districts for workers who commuted to Manhattan. Half a century later the end of that line had become a downtown in its own right, with its own banks, newspapers, and hotels. The trains still ran to Manhattan, but much of their traffic now moved toward Flushing as well as away from it. When the Museum of Chinese in America mounted an exhibition on the neighborhood in 2003, it called it Main Street, Flushing, USA, and described Flushing's Chinatown as one of the city's three major Chinese communities.

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The 2000 census measured what had happened. China was by then the second-largest source of the city's immigrants, with 262,600 residents born there, behind only the Dominican Republic. Flushing had 86,900 foreign-born residents, more than any neighborhood in the city except Washington Heights. A district that had been half empty in the early 1970s had become one of the largest immigrant neighborhoods in the city.

Roosevelt Avenue

West of Flushing, the same subway line runs on a steel elevated structure above Roosevelt Avenue. From the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway east to Junction Boulevard, the avenue forms the border between Jackson Heights to the north and Elmhurst to the south, and in the years after 1965 it became the main commercial street for a sequence of immigrant groups that rarely shared a language.

Jackson Heights had been designed for the opposite purpose. Edward A. MacDougall's Queensboro Corporation built it in the 1910s and 1920s as a planned garden community, and the developer's restrictive covenants kept Black and Jewish buyers out. That legal fence did not survive the postwar decades, and by the 1970s new buyers and renters were arriving from countries the covenant-writers had never imagined. South Asian immigrants began opening stores on 74th Street in the 1970s, and the blocks between Roosevelt and 37th Avenues came to be called Little India. A shopkeeper named Dass, who had arrived in 1966, recalled decades later in an interview with NY1 that the Indian community in Jackson Heights had been almost nonexistent when he came, and that some local residents had resented the newcomers who followed. The saris, sweets, gold jewelry, and groceries sold on 74th Street served a population spread across the region, and families drove in from New Jersey and Long Island to shop there on weekends.

Colombians fleeing violence at home in the 1970s and 1980s settled in Jackson Heights and opened restaurants, bakeries, travel agencies, and money-transfer offices along Roosevelt Avenue, and a stretch of the avenue became known as Little Colombia. Mexicans and immigrants from elsewhere in Latin America followed in the 1990s. The succession continued under the tracks: the Village Voice later described the Roosevelt Avenue strip as once mainly Colombian and then remade by Ecuadorian and Mexican arrivals. A single block might

hold a Colombian bakery, an Ecuadorian restaurant, a Mexican grocery, and a Bangladeshi or Tibetan shop within a few doors of one another, each serving customers who had come from a different country but who lived in the same co-op buildings and rented the same apartments.

The avenue's commercial geography had a logic of its own. A storefront under an elevated line, in shade and noise, rarely commanded the rent of a quieter street, and Roosevelt Avenue's shops changed hands often. That turnover kept the strip open to the newest arrivals in a way the residential blocks behind it, with their co-ops and long-held houses, were not. Jackson Heights and Elmhurst became a place where the first business a family opened was often on Roosevelt Avenue, and where the money it made went into a co-op share or a house a few blocks north or south.

The census recorded the result. In 2000 Elmhurst had 74,600 foreign-born residents, fifth among the city's neighborhoods, and Astoria, a few stops west on the elevated lines, had 84,700, third. Latin America supplied nearly a third of the city's immigrants, and four Latin American countries, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Ecuador, and Colombia, were among the top ten sources. Forty-six percent of New Yorkers spoke a language other than English at home, and along Roosevelt Avenue the share was far higher. A neighborhood laid out to keep certain buyers out had become one of the places where the city's population was most thoroughly mixed.

Little Odessa

Brighton Beach, at the southern edge of Brooklyn between Coney Island and Manhattan Beach, had been built as a seaside resort and had become, by the middle of the twentieth century, a neighborhood of older Jewish residents living in apartment houses near the boardwalk. By the 1970s it had declined, with an aging population, empty apartments, and a commercial street of tired stores under the elevated tracks. It was in that condition when the first wave of Soviet Jewish emigration reached New York.

Soviet Jews left in two waves. The first ran through the 1970s and ended in 1980, when the Soviet government sharply curtailed exit permits; the second came between 1987 and 1995, as the Soviet Union opened and then collapsed. Roughly forty thousand Soviet Jewish émigrés arrived in New York between 1975 and 1980 alone. The New York Association for New Americans, the

Jewish agency that handled their resettlement, placed many of them in Brighton Beach. The neighborhood offered what newly arrived families needed: public housing, low- and middle-income cooperatives, synagogues, relatives and acquaintances who had come a few months earlier, and the sea. Many of the newcomers came from Odessa and other cities on the Black Sea, and Brighton Beach soon acquired the name Little Odessa.

The émigrés began as renters and resettlement clients and moved quickly to ownership. As they bought houses and stores, prices in Brighton Beach rose, and the neighborhood that had been sliding toward vacancy became one where property was in demand. Brighton Beach Avenue, which runs beneath the elevated B and Q lines, filled with Russian-language bookstores, groceries, delicatessens, and, by the 1980s and 1990s, a set of cabarets and nightclubs where weddings, birthdays, and anniversaries were celebrated with floor shows and long tables of food. The commercial street that had served a dwindling elderly population now drew customers from across the city and the suburbs.

The newcomers did not merge seamlessly with the Jews already living there. City Journal described a gulf between two populations sharing the same apartment houses. The older residents spoke Yiddish, were often Orthodox in observance, voted Democratic, and descended from families who had fled the czar. The Soviet refugees spoke Russian, had been raised as atheists in a state that suppressed religious practice, and admired Ronald Reagan for his confrontation with the Soviet Union. They were Jewish by the nationality stamped in their Soviet passports more than by religious practice, and the synagogues and Jewish agencies that had sponsored their emigration found themselves serving people whose idea of Jewish life was very different from their own. The split showed up at the polls as well as in the synagogues. A Russian-speaking electorate inclined toward Republicans, in a Democratic borough, would become one of the more distinctive features of south Brooklyn politics.

The second wave, after 1987, was larger and spread farther, into Sheepshead Bay, Bensonhurst, and Midwood, and into Queens. In 2000 the Bay Ridge–Bensonhurst area counted 78,600 foreign-born residents, fourth among the city's neighborhoods. Brighton Beach itself remained the symbolic center. A resort built for day-trippers from Manhattan, and then left to age, had been refilled by people who arrived with refugee papers and within a few years were buying the buildings.

Upper Manhattan, Eighth Avenue, and the Unlisted Apartment

The largest single source of New York's immigrants by the end of the century was the Dominican Republic. In 2000 the city counted 369,200 Dominican-born residents, 13 percent of all its immigrants, more than from any other country. Their center was Washington Heights, on the ridge of upper Manhattan, which in 2000 had 90,300 foreign-born residents, more than any other neighborhood in the city. Manhattan's Dominican enclave ran north from Washington Heights through Inwood, along the commercial streets of upper Broadway, St. Nicholas Avenue, and Dyckman Street.

The housing Dominicans moved into had its own history. The large apartment houses of Washington Heights went up in the first decades of the century, after the IRT's extension up the West Side made the ridge accessible. Those buildings were built for an earlier generation of tenants moving up from the Lower East Side and Harlem. By the 1970s and 1980s many of their original families and their children had left, and Dominican families took their place, often several to an apartment, with relatives sharing rooms and renting space to newer arrivals. The commercial streets below filled with bodegas, travel agencies, remittance offices, and beauty salons whose owners sent money home and invested in property in both countries. The neighborhood's rent-regulated apartments, a legacy of the wartime controls that had never been fully lifted, helped hold the Dominican community in Manhattan at a time when other low-income Manhattanites were being priced out of the island's southern half.

In Brooklyn, a similar refilling took place in Sunset Park, on the hill above the industrial waterfront. By the end of the century Eighth Avenue had become a Chinese commercial street, while Latino residents held blocks closer to the water. Sunset Park became, with Manhattan's Chinatown and Flushing, one of the city's Chinese centers, built on the same base of low rents and empty storefronts that had drawn immigrants to Main Street in Queens.

Much of the housing that immigrants found in these years did not appear in any official count of apartments. In Queens and Brooklyn especially, owners of one- and two-family houses rented out basements and cellars, and landlords divided apartments into smaller rooms let to boarders, often without permits and in violation of the building and housing codes. These units were the cheapest way into the city for a new arrival without credit or documents, and for many immigrant homeowners the rent from a basement tenant was what

made the mortgage payable. They also reproduced, out of sight of inspectors, conditions the tenement laws of 1867, 1879, and 1901 had been written to end: rooms without adequate light or air, a single exit, and more people than the space was meant to hold. The city's housing law was built on the assumption that the dwelling unit was a defined, licensed thing. A large share of the immigrant city lived outside that definition, in space whose existence the government acknowledged mainly when something went wrong.

Eastern Parkway

On Labor Day each year, a parade of steel bands, costumed masquerade bands, and sound trucks moves west along Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, from Utica Avenue in Crown Heights to Grand Army Plaza at the entrance to Prospect Park. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux designed the parkway in the 1860s as a broad, tree-lined approach to their park, and the IRT's Eastern Parkway line, part of the Dual Contracts expansion, runs beneath it. By the end of the century the parade drew a crowd counted in the millions.

The festival began in Harlem. In the 1920s a Trinidadian woman organized pre-Lenten carnival parties for West Indian New Yorkers in Harlem ballrooms, the Savoy, the Renaissance, and the Audubon among them. These were indoor winter events, modeled on the carnival that preceded Lent in Port of Spain, and they later moved outdoors into a Harlem street festival. In 1964, after a disturbance, the city revoked the Harlem carnival's permit. A committee led by Carlos Lezama, a Trinidadian immigrant, then sought and won a permit for Eastern Parkway, and in the late 1960s the carnival moved to Brooklyn, where a growing Caribbean population was concentrating in Crown Heights, Flatbush, and East Flatbush. The route from Utica Avenue to Grand Army Plaza has been used ever since.

Lezama led the West Indian American Day Carnival Association from 1967 to 2001. In an oral history recorded for the Brooklyn Historical Society on October 19, 1994, he described how the event had changed from a small, mostly indoor winter affair into a late-summer street festival drawing millions. The size of the early Brooklyn parades is hard to establish. Ray Allen, a music professor at Brooklyn College, has estimated that the first Eastern Parkway parade had about half a dozen steel and mas bands. It grew, in Allen's account, in step with Brooklyn's Caribbean community, which expanded rapidly after the 1965

immigration reform opened the door to large numbers of immigrants from Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana, Barbados, Haiti, Grenada, and the other islands and mainland territories of the region.

The census gives a sense of the scale. In 2000 the city counted 178,900 residents born in Jamaica, the third-largest source country, and 130,600 born in Guyana, the fourth. Most of the Anglophone Caribbean population, and much of the Haitian population, lived in central Brooklyn and southeast Queens. In Flatbush and East Flatbush, West Indian immigrants bought the brick row houses and frame houses that earlier Jewish, Irish, and Italian owners were leaving, and the commercial strips along Flatbush, Church, and Nostrand Avenues filled with roti shops, Jamaican bakeries, record stores, and shipping companies that sent barrels of goods back to the islands. The Nostrand Avenue line that had brought apartment-house development to the area in the 1920s now carried a Caribbean workforce to jobs in Manhattan hospitals, offices, and households.

The carnival's move to Eastern Parkway is a small case of a larger pattern. A public street, designed by Olmsted and Vaux for carriages on the way to a park, became for one day each year the property, in practice, of an immigrant association that had negotiated for the right to use it. The permit functioned as a kind of temporary title, renewed annually, and the fact that the city granted it for Brooklyn rather than Harlem followed the movement of the people who would fill the route. The parade made visible, on a single afternoon, a population that the rest of the city often did not see on the other 364 days.

The Borough Apart

In the November 1993 elections, while Rudolph Giuliani was unseating David Dinkins, the mayor since 1990, voters on Staten Island took up a different question. In a nonbinding referendum, about 65 percent of them, nearly two-thirds, voted to secede from New York City and form a city of their own. Dinkins answered the result plainly: "We need them. And they need us."

The grievance behind the vote had accumulated since consolidation in 1898. Staten Island was the least populous borough and the most suburban in character, its growth accelerated by the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge after 1964 but still far below that of the other four. Many residents felt that their borough's interests were overridden in a city government where they could be outvoted

on almost anything. The 1989 abolition of the Board of Estimate, on which each borough president had held one vote regardless of population, removed one of the few institutions where Staten Island had held the same weight as Brooklyn. And at the island's western edge lay the most concrete expression of the grievance: the Fresh Kills Landfill.

Fresh Kills opened in 1948 on tidal marshes along the Arthur Kill, on a site the city would later put at some 3,000 acres. It was meant to be temporary. Instead it became the main destination for the household garbage of all five boroughs, carried by barge from marine transfer stations around the harbor. At its peak the landfill took in as much as 18,000 tons of garbage a day, and its mounds rose high enough to become, by the city's own later description, the world's largest landfill. For Staten Islanders the dump was a daily reminder of what the arrangement of 1898 meant in practice: the other boroughs sent their waste to Staten Island's ground, and Staten Island had no power to refuse it.

Secession went nowhere in Albany. Sheldon Silver, the Speaker of the State Assembly, refused to allow a binding secession vote unless the rest of the city also took part, and the legislature never enacted the measure. The movement faded for a more practical reason as well. Giuliani had run for mayor in 1993 with the crucial support of Guy Molinari, Staten Island's borough president, and he promised to close Fresh Kills. In 1996 he and Governor George Pataki agreed on a schedule for closing it, and in 1997 the city eliminated the fare on the Staten Island Ferry. Islanders had wanted out of the city, and they settled for having the city's garbage taken off their land and their commute made free.

On March 22, 2001, Giuliani, Pataki, and Molinari gathered at Fresh Kills to mark the arrival of the last barge of household garbage. The barge carried a banner reading "Last Garbage Barge to Fresh Kills," and Fire Department boats sprayed their water cannons as it made its way down the East River. "Five years ago, I promised the residents of Staten Island that the City would stop shipping its garbage to this landfill," Giuliani said at the ceremony. The mayor's press release estimated that more than 400,000 barges had sailed to Fresh Kills in fifty-three years.

The closing settled the island's grievance without settling the question underneath it. The city still produced garbage, and closing Fresh Kills meant exporting it, by truck and train, to landfills and incinerators in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and beyond, at a cost that would weigh on the city's

budget for years. A decision about which borough's ground would receive the city's waste had become a decision about which other states' ground would, and the price of that decision was paid in the city's sanitation budget. Staten Island had won what secession could not have delivered more quickly. The city had found that the one borough it could not afford to lose was the one that had held its garbage.

Eight Million

The census taken on April 1, 2000, counted just over 8 million New Yorkers, more than at any time in the city's history. The losses of the 1970s had been made up and then exceeded, and the reason was immigration. The foreign-born population, 2.1 million in 1990, had grown to 2.87 million, also an all-time high. The 788,000 immigrants added during the 1990s were the largest absolute increase in the city's foreign-born population ever recorded, larger than in any decade of the Ellis Island era. Because the city's total population grew by less than that over the decade, the native-born population must have declined; without immigrants, New York would have shrunk in the 1990s as it had in the 1970s.

The Department of City Planning set out the figures in The Newest New Yorkers, 2000. Immigrants made up 36 percent of the population, up from 28 percent in 1990, and the same share as in 1920, the last census before the quotas of 1924 took effect. The sources were different. Where the earlier city had drawn its immigrants from Italy, Russia, Ireland, Germany, and Austria-Hungary, the leading sources in 2000 were the Dominican Republic, China, Jamaica, Guyana, and Mexico. Nearly a third came from Latin America, and nearly half of all New Yorkers spoke a language other than English at home.

The geography had changed even more than the sources. The neighborhoods with the most foreign-born residents in 2000 were Washington Heights, Flushing, Astoria, Bay Ridge–Bensonhurst, and Elmhurst. Only one of them was in Manhattan, and none was on the Lower East Side, where Jacob Riis had counted the immigrant poor a century earlier. Three were in Queens, at stops along the elevated and subway lines that the Dual Contracts had built to carry the children of the earlier immigrants out of the tenements. The outer-borough neighborhoods those lines had created, and that the children's children had left,

had been refilled by people from countries the 1924 law had excluded. Forty-three percent of the city's immigrants had arrived in the previous ten years.

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CHAPTER 24

Crack, AIDS, and the Crime Peak, 1981–1993

A Telephone in Chelsea

In May 1982 Rodger McFarlane, a volunteer with an organization only a few months old, set up an information and counseling hotline on his home telephone. It took about 100 calls the first night. The organization was Gay Men's Health Crisis. It had begun on January 4, 1982, at a meeting in the apartment of the writer Larry Kramer, where six activists had gathered about eighty men. Since the previous year, doctors in New York and San Francisco had been reporting cases of Kaposi's sarcoma, a rare cancer, among young gay men, and other unusual illnesses were appearing alongside it. The disease had no settled name. Kramer, Nathan Fain, the physician Lawrence Mass, and others organized a response before any government did. The group became the first community-based AIDS service organization in the world. When it needed working space, it found rooms in a Chelsea rooming house owned by Mel Cheren, a co-founder of West End Records.

The first answers to the epidemic came out of private rooms. A movement that had spent the previous dozen years claiming streets, bars, and a yearly march route up Sixth Avenue now organized its survival from apartments and

a home phone line. A phone could be answered at any hour by someone the caller would never meet, and it could be run out of a bedroom while public institutions decided what, if anything, they owed. For the men who called, the hotline was the first place to ask questions that their doctors, employers, landlords, or families might punish them for asking.

The volume of that first night was an early, rough measure of the demand. One line in one apartment took about 100 calls before morning, and every one of them came from someone who wanted information he could not get, or did not dare seek, through any ordinary channel. The organization's first office told a similar story. The first AIDS service organization in the world began in a private building owned by a man from the city's record business, and for its early years its footing in the city rested on private property and private willingness. Nothing about its location was public. It had no lease from the city, no clinic space from a hospital, no storefront with a sign.

Gay Men's Health Crisis grew out of a particular part of the city. Its founders and early volunteers came largely from the white, middle-class gay community of Manhattan, and in its first years it mainly served men like themselves. The disease did not keep to that circle. As the organization expanded, its clients came to include heterosexual men and women, intravenous drug users, and hemophiliacs, people who had little in common with the founders except a diagnosis. The client list widened faster than the city's institutions did, and the organization took on case management, counseling, and advocacy that public agencies would later be expected to provide.

Kramer did not stay to see much of that growth. In 1983 he resigned from the board after disagreements over how aggressively the group should press government for action. The organization he left behind concentrated on care. The argument he lost, over whether a service group should also be a pressure group, went unresolved for four years.

On March 12, 1987, Kramer spoke at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in Manhattan. Two days later about 300 people met and founded the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, known as ACT UP. It had no president and no executive director. It was a direct-action group run by its weekly meetings, and it set out to force government agencies, drug companies, and religious authorities to change what they were doing. Its slogan, Silence=Death, printed

in white under a pink triangle on a black field, appeared on posters, stickers, and T-shirts across lower Manhattan.

The structure was itself a reply to the argument of 1983. A group with no board could not be held back by its board. Its decisions belonged to whoever came to the meeting and argued for them, and its tactics followed from that openness. Gay Men's Health Crisis had built an institution that could deliver meals, staff a phone line, and assign a volunteer to a dying client. ACT UP built something closer to a standing assembly, able to choose a target on a Monday and appear in front of it within days.

ACT UP chose its targets by place as much as by policy. Members demonstrated on Wall Street, the street where brokers had signed the Buttonwood Agreement in 1792 and where the city's financial institutions still stood, to protest the price and pace of drug development. They protested at the Food and Drug Administration over the slow approval of treatments. They disrupted a Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue, the seat of an archdiocese whose leadership opposed condom education. Each action put people with AIDS and their allies on ground owned or symbolized by an institution that had power over their lives, and each was built to be photographed there. Where Gay Men's Health Crisis had worked from private rooms because public space felt closed to its clients, ACT UP treated the most visible public spaces in the city as the place where the epidemic had to be argued.

The two organizations were the core of a much larger response. The historian Susan Chambré, writing on New York's AIDS activism, concluded that the city's response "included the largest number, and most specialized, of formal and informal AIDS organizations in the nation." Hospitals, churches, neighborhood clinics, and housing groups followed. The epidemic ran through the whole of the period this chapter covers, and by the early 1990s it had changed how New Yorkers buried their dead, cared for the sick, and talked in public about sex and drugs. It did so in the same years that violence was changing how they walked down a street or rode a train.

Fourteenth Street to Chambers Street

On the afternoon of Saturday, December 22, 1984, Bernhard Goetz, a thirty-seven-year-old self-employed electronics engineer, boarded a downtown IRT express, a No. 2 train, at 14th Street in Manhattan. Four teenagers from the

Bronx were in the car: Troy Canty, Barry Allen, James Ramseur, and Darrell Cabey. One of them asked Goetz for $5. Goetz drew an unlicensed .38-caliber Smith & Wesson revolver and fired five shots. All four young men were wounded. Cabey was left paralyzed. Goetz was white and the four were Black.

The train stopped short of Chambers Street. Goetz left the car, went down onto the tracks, and walked away through the tunnel. For nine days nobody knew who he was. The city's newspapers called the unknown gunman "the subway vigilante," and the name gave the shooting a meaning before any facts about the shooter were public. Mayor Edward I. Koch, who had governed since 1978, condemned the shooting as "animal behavior" and said that "a vigilante is not a hero." On December 31, 1984, Goetz walked into a police station in Concord, New Hampshire, and surrendered. He told investigators he had bought the gun after he was mugged in 1981.

The nine days of anonymity shaped everything that followed. The city argued about the gunman before it knew his name, his job, or his history, and the argument was about the subway and the four young men he had shot as much as about him. A shooter with no face could stand for any rider who had ever felt afraid on a train. The four wounded teenagers, whose names were public from the start, were measured against that figure. By the time Goetz surrendered in New Hampshire, the role had been written for him, and the mayor's condemnation had already marked one side of the dispute.

The case turned on what a reasonable person on a crowded train had to fear. In People v. Goetz the defense rested on the claim that he had believed he was about to be robbed and beaten, and that his belief was reasonable given what New Yorkers knew about the subway. His own account began with the 1981 mugging, and his lawyers asked jurors to see the shooting as the act of a man who had been a victim once and expected to be one again. In 1987 a Manhattan jury acquitted him of attempted murder and assault and convicted him only of criminal possession of a weapon. He served about eight and a half months of a one-year sentence. In 1996 a civil jury awarded Darrell Cabey $43 million against him, a judgment that, given Goetz's means, functioned more as a verdict than as compensation.

The two juries, nine years apart, reached opposite judgments about the same five shots, and the city divided along similar lines. For one set of New Yorkers, Goetz was a man who had done what the transit police could not: made the

train safe for the person who paid the fare. For another, he was a white man who had looked at four Black teenagers and seen a threat, then fired on them, one of them more than once by his own account, and been half-excused by a court for it. Both readings depended on the same fact about the subway in the mid-1980s. It was the most shared space in the city, the place where several million people a day sat or stood within arm's reach of strangers, and fear of crime there was real and racially charged at once.

The car in which Goetz fired was public ground in the plainest sense, owned by the city, operated by a public authority, paid for by the fare and by taxes. The shooting raised a question that would govern the politics of crime for the next two decades: who had the right to feel secure in that space, and who, by their presence, was taken to be the danger. The first criminal verdict gave one answer. A reasonable rider, it implied, could treat four Black teenagers asking for money as a threat grave enough to justify a gun, so long as the gun was licensed. Over the following years New Yorkers argued the question at the turnstile, in the precinct house, in courtrooms, and on neighborhood streets, and the arguments did not stay peaceful.

Cross Bay Boulevard

Late on the night of December 19, 1986, four Black men drove from Brooklyn into Queens. Michael Griffith, twenty-three, an immigrant from Trinidad who belonged to Our Lady of Charity church in Crown Heights, was going to collect a paycheck. With him were Cedric Sandiford, Timothy Grimes, and Curtis Sylvester. Their car broke down in Broad Channel, the settlement on an island in the middle of Jamaica Bay. Sylvester stayed with the car. Griffith, Sandiford, and Grimes walked north on Cross Bay Boulevard, across the water and into Howard Beach, to find help.

At about 12:40 a.m. on December 20, the three men came out of New Park Pizza on Cross Bay Boulevard. A group of white teenagers, some carrying baseball bats, attacked them. Grimes got away. Sandiford was beaten on the service road of the Belt Parkway. Griffith ran from his attackers onto the parkway itself, the highway that ran along the edge of the bay, and was struck by a passing car and killed.

The sequence took place in a small space. The pizzeria, the service road, and the parkway lay within a short distance of one another on the same boulevard,

and the men were chased across all three. A commercial strip gave way to a road built to carry cars past the neighborhood, and the road, which offered Griffith the only way out, killed him. The attack became a citywide story within days, followed closely in the Daily News and across the city's press, and the name of a quiet neighborhood at the bottom of Queens became shorthand for the danger a Black New Yorker could meet on the wrong block after dark.

The case went to trial in Queens. In December 1987, after twelve days of deliberation, a jury convicted Jon Lester and Jason Ladone, both seventeen, and Scott Kern, nineteen, of manslaughter. The verdict found them responsible for Griffith's death without finding that they had intended to kill him, a distinction that satisfied few people on either side of the case. The length of the deliberations showed how hard the jurors found it to assign responsibility for a death the attackers had set in motion and a passing driver had completed. The law had a category for that, and the category was manslaughter.

Howard Beach sat at the far southern edge of Queens, a neighborhood of single-family houses built in the decades when that borough grew like a suburb inside city limits. The attack drew on a habit of mind that the borough's postwar growth had built into its streets: the idea that a neighborhood belonged to the people who already lived there, and that outsiders, especially Black outsiders, had to account for their presence. Three men looking for a telephone and something to eat were treated as intruders on ground the attackers considered theirs. The pizzeria and the parkway were both public places. One was a business on a commercial street, the other a state-built road. Neither protected the men who used them.

Griffith had come from Trinidad to a city whose Caribbean neighborhoods in central Brooklyn were growing. His church was on the same Brooklyn streets where, five years later, a different conflict over a sidewalk would set off three days of rioting. The geography of the city's racial violence in these years was precise. It happened at the boundaries, on the commercial strip or the residential block where one group's neighborhood met another's, and on the roads and transit lines that carried people across those boundaries.

The Park and the Avenue

On the night of April 19, 1989, a woman jogging in Central Park was beaten, raped, and left for dead. She lost about 75 percent of her blood and survived.

For more than a decade she was known to the public only as the Central Park Jogger. In 2003 she gave her name, Trisha Meili.

Police arrested five teenagers from Harlem: Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam, Raymond Santana, and Korey Wise. They were Black and Latino, and the youngest were fourteen and fifteen. After long interrogations, the five gave statements, four of them on videotape. All five later recanted. At trials in 1990 they were convicted, largely on those confessions, and sent to juvenile detention or prison, where they served between roughly six and thirteen years.

The videotapes carried great weight at trial. They showed teenagers describing a crime in their own voices, and to jurors that was persuasive in a way that the long hours of questioning that preceded the recordings were not. The tapes captured the confessions and left out the interrogations that produced them. Nothing else in the case did as much to convict the five, and nothing else would look so different thirteen years later.

In 2002 Matias Reyes, already serving a life sentence as a serial rapist and murderer, confessed that he alone had attacked the jogger. DNA testing matched him to the evidence. On December 19, 2002, a Manhattan court vacated all five convictions. In 2014 the city settled the five men's lawsuit for $41 million, and in 2016 New York State settled for $3.9 million. The money came twelve years after the convictions were set aside and a quarter century after the arrests, by which time the five were grown men whose adolescence had been spent in custody.

The case is the sharpest instance in the period of fear producing a wrong verdict. Central Park was the city's most famous public ground, the landscape built in the 1850s on land taken from farmers and the residents of Seneca Village and offered to the public as a whole. In the spring of 1989 it stood for the opposite of what its designers had intended: a place where a woman alone could be attacked at night, and where groups of young men from the neighborhoods to the north were assumed to be the danger. Investigators, prosecutors, editors, and jurors moved quickly from the crime to five teenagers who fitted that assumption. The physical evidence did not connect them to it. The confessions did, and those confessions came from boys interrogated for hours. The five spent their adolescence and early adulthood in custody for a crime committed by a man acting alone.

Four months later, on August 23, 1989, Yusuf Hawkins, sixteen, of East New York, took the subway to Bensonhurst with three friends to look at a used 1982 Pontiac that had been advertised for sale. Near the corner of 20th Avenue and 68th Street, a crowd of white youths, perhaps thirty, armed with baseball bats and at least one gun, surrounded them. Someone in the crowd fired, and Hawkins was struck at least twice and killed. The crowd had gathered because a young woman in the neighborhood had said she was inviting Black and Latino friends to her birthday, and they took Hawkins and his friends for those guests. Joseph Fama was convicted of the shooting and sent to prison for decades.

The errand that brought Hawkins to Bensonhurst was as ordinary as any in the city. A used car had been advertised, and a teenager with friends went across the borough to look at it. The trip ran from the eastern edge of Brooklyn to its southwestern neighborhoods without leaving the borough, and it ended within a few hours at a street corner where the crowd had decided in advance who did not belong. The mistake about the birthday guests showed that the crowd had assembled to meet any Black or Latino young men who appeared. Hawkins and his friends happened to be the ones who did.

The killing of Hawkins repeated the logic of Howard Beach on a residential street in southern Brooklyn. A Black teenager had come to look at a car and was treated as an invader. The Reverend Al Sharpton, a Brooklyn minister and activist, led marches through Bensonhurst in the weeks that followed, and residents lined the sidewalks to jeer the marchers, turning the avenue itself into the argument. In 1991, as he prepared to lead another march in Hawkins's memory, Sharpton was stabbed in the chest. He survived.

Hawkins was killed in the weeks before the Democratic mayoral primary. In September, David Dinkins, the Manhattan borough president and a longtime figure in Harlem politics, defeated Koch, who was seeking a fourth term. In November Dinkins defeated Rudolph Giuliani, a former United States attorney, in a close general election and became the first Black mayor of New York. He took office on January 1, 1990. His campaign had presented him as a conciliator who could hold a divided city together. He inherited a city in which the divisions had been acted out on its streets, in its park, and on its trains, and a police department facing the worst year of violence in the city's recorded history.

The Trade

From about 1985, crack cocaine, a smokable form of the drug sold in small and cheap doses, spread through New York's poorer neighborhoods. Its price put it within reach of buyers who could never have afforded powder cocaine, and its short, intense high kept them returning. Selling it required little capital and offered fast money to young men in neighborhoods where legal work had thinned out. Selling it also required places to sell: corners, building lobbies, stairwells, the stoops of half-empty buildings. Control of those places became a matter of armed conflict between rival dealers, and the term the trade used for its territory, turf, was a claim to ground.

The trade's claims overlapped with everyone else's. A lobby used for selling was also the lobby that tenants crossed to reach their apartments, and a corner held by dealers was also the corner where children waited for a school bus. Residents of those blocks lived among the trade without belonging to it, and the line between a market and a home could run through a single stairwell. When the violence came, it came to the people who shared that ground as well as to the dealers fighting over it.

The worst of the violence concentrated in a few districts. In Brooklyn, the 75th Precinct, covering East New York, and the neighboring 73rd and 77th Precincts were among the most dangerous in the city through the late 1980s and early 1990s. As late as 1993, those three precincts together recorded 282 murders. In Manhattan, Washington Heights, with its bridges and highways to New Jersey and the Bronx, became one of the centers of the trade.

The map was not accidental. East New York and Brownsville were the districts where landlords had walked away from buildings in the 1970s, where fires had cleared whole blocks, and where the city had become the owner of last resort for thousands of tax-foreclosed apartments. The factories and piers that had once employed men from those neighborhoods were gone. The crack trade settled on ground the city's earlier withdrawals had emptied: vacant lots, sealed buildings, blocks with few legal businesses and few working adults on the street during the day. The rebuilding of those neighborhoods, which had begun in the early 1980s with church-built rowhouses and city rehabilitation programs, went on in the middle of the trade, sometimes on the same blocks.

The homicide count rose with the trade. Around 1960 the city had recorded somewhere near 500 murders a year. In 1990 the police department counted

2,245 homicides, more than six a day and nearly five times the level of a generation earlier, the highest number the city has recorded. The department logged more than half a million crime complaints that year. Not every killing was connected to drugs, and the trade did not by itself explain why murder climbed in every borough, but the press at the time and most accounts since tied the peak of the violence to armed competition over crack markets.

One killing that year changed how the city talked about all the others. On September 2, 1990, Brian Watkins, a tourist visiting New York with his family, was fatally stabbed on a Manhattan subway platform while defending his parents from a group of six to eight teenagers who had come to rob them. His father was slashed with a box cutter, and his mother was kicked in the face. Johnny Hincapie was convicted in the case. He maintained that his confession had been coerced, and in 2015, after he had served about twenty-five years, a court vacated his conviction; prosecutors did not retry him. Watkins was white, from outside the city, and killed in the system that every visitor used, and his death produced a sense of emergency that the far larger toll in East New York and the South Bronx had not. The disparity said something about which deaths counted as a citywide crisis and which were treated as the condition of particular neighborhoods.

Six years after Goetz, the subway again supplied the case that defined the city's fear. The two episodes ran in opposite directions. In 1984 the rider had fired on the young men; in 1990 the young men had attacked the riders. Both were read as verdicts on whether the city could keep order in the one space nearly everyone had to share. A murder on a platform reached commuters, visitors, and officials who might never set foot in the 75th Precinct, and it moved them in a way that hundreds of deaths in that precinct did not.

Dinkins answered with a program. Safe Streets, Safe City, approved in 1991, financed a large expansion of the police department, adding several thousand officers over the following years, along with youth and prevention programs. The officers hired under it were coming onto the force as the murder count began to fall. Later mayors, Bill de Blasio among them, credited the program with laying the groundwork for the crime decline that followed. That credit was given long after Dinkins left office. In the early 1990s, what most New Yorkers saw was the violence, and the confrontations over policing that came with it.

President Street and West 162nd Street

On the evening of August 19, 1991, a station wagon in the motorcade of Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, went up onto the sidewalk at President Street and Utica Avenue in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. It struck and killed Gavin Cato, seven years old, the son of Guyanese immigrants, and injured his cousin Angela. Crown Heights was home to the world headquarters of the Lubavitch Hasidim and to a large and growing Caribbean population, and the two communities shared its streets, its rowhouses, and its schools in a tense, unequal arrangement. The motorcade was a routine part of the Rebbe's movements through the neighborhood. A child playing on the sidewalk was killed by it.

Within about three hours, a group of young Black men surrounded Yankel Rosenbaum, a twenty-nine-year-old doctoral student from the University of Melbourne who was in Brooklyn doing research, at President Street and Brooklyn Avenue, and stabbed him. Before he died he identified Lemrick Nelson Jr., sixteen, as his attacker. He was taken to Kings County Hospital, where doctors missed one of his stab wounds, and he died that night.

The two deaths happened a short walk apart on the same street. President Street ran west from Utica Avenue to Brooklyn Avenue through the blocks the two communities shared, and in one evening it became the site of a child's death under a car belonging to one community and a stranger's death at the hands of young men from the other. Rosenbaum was a visitor with no part in the motorcade. He was attacked because of who he appeared to be, in the hours when the neighborhood's anger over Cato's death was spilling into its streets.

The rioting lasted roughly three days. Crowds of Black residents and Hasidic residents confronted each other and the police; stores and cars were damaged; people were beaten in the streets. On August 22, Dinkins, who had gone to the neighborhood and been jeered there, said, "The police are going to enforce the law, enforce it fairly." The disturbances ended soon afterward. A state report issued in 1993, often called the Girgenti report, counted more than 150 police officers and 38 civilians injured and examined the police department's handling of the first days. The injury count among officers, more than four times the civilian figure, recorded how much of the violence had been directed at the police themselves.

The legal outcomes satisfied neither community. A grand jury declined to indict the driver of the station wagon, Yosef Lifsh, who left for Israel. In 1992 a state jury acquitted Nelson of murder. He was later convicted on federal civil rights charges for the attack on Rosenbaum and served about ten years. For many Caribbean residents, the absence of any charge in Gavin Cato's death confirmed that the neighborhood's sidewalks belonged more securely to one group than to the other. For many Hasidic residents, the attack on Rosenbaum and the days that followed confirmed that the city would not protect them on their own street. Crown Heights became the episode by which much of the city judged Dinkins's command of public order, and the charge that he had been slow to act stayed attached to him for the rest of his term.

Less than a year later, a police shooting set off disturbances in upper Manhattan. On the evening of July 3, 1992, Michael O'Keefe, a plainclothes officer, chased Jose Garcia, a twenty-three-year-old Dominican immigrant known as Kiko, into the lobby of 505 West 162nd Street in Washington Heights. The two men struggled, and O'Keefe shot Garcia dead. O'Keefe said Garcia had been carrying a gun. Within hours rumors spread through the neighborhood that Garcia had been beaten and then executed.

The shooting took place in the kind of space the crack trade and the residents of Washington Heights shared: the lobby of an apartment building, a semipublic room that tenants passed through every day. No one outside the two men saw clearly what happened there. In the absence of a public account, the rumor filled the gap, and the rumor was the one many residents were prepared to believe about the police on their blocks.

From about July 4 to July 7, crowds in Washington Heights burned cars and buildings and threw bottles and debris at police from rooftops. One man died in a fall from a five-story building. Roughly fifteen people were injured and about a dozen arrested. The neighborhood had become in the previous two decades the center of Dominican New York, and it was also, in the same years, one of the city's most active drug markets, which meant heavy police presence on blocks where most residents had nothing to do with the trade. Garcia's death brought those two facts into collision on a single street.

Dinkins went to see Garcia's family. The city paid for his funeral and for his body to be flown to the Dominican Republic for burial. A grand jury later cleared O'Keefe. To the mayor's supporters, the visit and the funeral were the

acts of a mayor who understood that a neighborhood's trust in the police had to be maintained. To many police officers, they looked like a mayor taking the side of a man their colleague said had been armed against the officer who shot him.

That resentment came into the open on September 16, 1992. Dinkins had proposed replacing the police department's civilian complaint review board, which included officers among its members, with an all-civilian board independent of the department. The Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, the union representing rank-and-file officers, called a rally against the plan outside City Hall. Thousands of off-duty officers attended. Many had been drinking. They blocked traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge, climbed on and damaged cars, attacked reporters, and shouted racial epithets about the mayor. Giuliani, preparing for another run at City Hall, addressed the crowd. On-duty officers did little to stop the disorder.

The rally was a fight over the same question that had run through the subway shooting, Howard Beach, Bensonhurst, Crown Heights, and West 162nd Street: who controlled the city's public ground and who answered for what happened on it. The officers at City Hall were claiming that the police alone should judge police conduct on the street. They made the claim by taking over the plaza in front of the mayor's office and the bridge beside it, the same bridge whose opening a century earlier had joined the two cities that became one. The department whose expansion Dinkins had fought for in Albany was in the street against him, and the next election would be fought on the ground that rally had marked out.

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CHAPTER 25

Giuliani's City, 1994–2001

Late in 1998 the mayor's press office issued a release built around two numbers. As of that September, 735,795 New Yorkers were receiving public assistance. In March 1995 the figure had been 1,160,593. The release added that about 33,800 people were then enrolled in the Work Experience Program, which required welfare recipients to work in exchange for their checks, and that nearly 430,000 had passed through it since the expansion began.

Rudolph Giuliani governed by counts of this kind, and he governed at a moment when the counts moved his way. Murders, welfare cases, felony complaints, theater leases signed on 42nd Street: each could be published, compared with the year before, and offered as proof that a city written off in the 1970s and frightened in the early 1990s had been brought under control. The counts were real. Murders fell by half in three years, and the welfare rolls by more than a third. But a count records what an administration chooses to measure. It does not record who was arrested in order to lower it, where the people dropped from the rolls went, or who could still afford the apartment on a block that had become safe. The Giuliani years produced a safer city and a more expensive one, and the second followed in large part from the first.

He came to office on a margin of three points. On November 2, 1993, running on the Republican and Liberal lines, Giuliani unseated David Dinkins, the city's first Black mayor, by about 51 percent to 48 percent, a difference of

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roughly 50,000 votes. The Washington Post traced the result to late movement among the tenth or so of voters who had been undecided going into election day. Giuliani was the first Republican elected mayor since John Lindsay in 1965. He had lost to Dinkins four years earlier, and before that he had been United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York from 1983 to 1989, a prosecutor whose public reputation rested on convictions.

A margin that narrow, decided by voters who had not made up their minds until the last days, was not a mandate in the ordinary sense. It was a rematch between the same two men, four years apart, in which a small share of the electorate had changed sides. Giuliani governed as though the margin had been much larger, and the counts became his answer to the question of whether he had the authority to do so. Each published decline was a reply to the half of the city that had voted against him.

The ground of the 1993 campaign had been laid in the years before it. The recession of the early 1990s pushed local unemployment from under 7 percent in 1989 to about 11 percent in 1992. The Crown Heights riot of 1991 and the Washington Heights disturbances of 1992 had left Dinkins exposed on the question of public order, and the police rally at City Hall that September had turned the department's rank and file into open opponents of the mayor. On February 26, 1993, a truck bomb exploded in the parking garage beneath the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Conspirators were later convicted in federal court in Manhattan. The bombing came in the last year of Dinkins's term, and it added to a general sense that the city could not protect itself. Giuliani's campaign promised that it could, and the promise was specific: a police department that would enforce the law against small offenses as well as large ones, block by block.

Maps and Meetings

Giuliani's first police commissioner was William Bratton, appointed in 1994 as the department's thirty-eighth commissioner. Bratton had run the New York City Transit Police from 1990, then the Boston Police Department, and he brought with him a theory and a method.

The theory was broken windows, the argument set out by the social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in a 1982 article in the Atlantic Monthly: that visible disorder left unattended signaled that no one was in

charge and invited more serious crime. In the subway, Bratton had applied it to fare beating and to the men and women who lived on the trains and in the stations. In the streets after 1994, the department applied it to offenses that commanders had long treated as too small for a patrol officer's time: drinking in public, urinating in doorways, aggressive panhandling, the squeegee cleaners who worked the stoplights at bridge and tunnel approaches. Enforcement of these offenses was the visible face of the new policing, and it put officers in contact with large numbers of people who would not otherwise have been stopped. A summons or an arrest for a minor offense also gave officers a lawful reason to check a person for warrants and weapons, which was part of the purpose.

The theory located the cause of crime in the condition of a place. A broken window, a littered stairwell, a man sleeping across a subway bench were treated as signals sent by the ground itself to anyone who passed. It followed that the remedy lay in changing what the ground looked like and who was visibly on it. That was a different premise from the one that had guided city policy in earlier decades, when crime was explained by poverty, housing, and joblessness and the remedy was sought in programs. Broken windows did not deny those causes. It set them aside as matters the police could not reach and concentrated on what an officer could reach in a single shift.

The method was CompStat. It grew out of work by Jack Maple, a Transit Police lieutenant, in the early 1990s, and Bratton applied it to the whole department in 1994. It joined four things that police departments had generally kept apart: crime statistics current enough to act on, computer maps that showed where the crimes were happening, rapid deployment of officers to those places, and follow-up to see whether the deployment had worked. The statistics were not the novelty. The meetings were. Twice a week, precinct commanders appeared before the department's top leaders and answered for the crime in their precincts. A commander whose map showed a cluster of robberies along one avenue was expected to know about it, to have a plan for it, and at the next meeting to show whether the plan had worked.

The method had been worked out underground before it came to the surface. Maple developed it inside the Transit Police in the years when Bratton ran that force, on a system of stations, platforms, and tunnels where the territory was fixed and every incident could be pinned to a named stop on a named

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line. Carried into the street department in 1994, the same logic was applied to a city of seventy-odd precincts. The meetings made the logic personal. The four elements were each simple on their own: a figure that was days rather than months old, a dot on a map, a squad sent to the place of the dot, and a second look a week or two later. Together they meant that a commander could no longer describe crime in his precinct as weather, something that happened to it. The question put to him at the twice-weekly meetings was what he had done about a particular cluster of dots, and whether the dots had moved.

CompStat turned the precinct into a unit of territory for which one person was answerable. Before 1994, crime in New York had been reported by borough and citywide, as a condition of the city, and police officials had often described it as the product of poverty, drugs, and demography that a department could not be expected to change. After 1994 it was reported by precinct and by block, and the commander's career depended on the numbers. That shift is the most durable thing the Bratton years left behind. It moved the unit of police accountability from the city to the neighborhood, and it rested on the conviction that crime clustered in particular places at particular hours and could be pushed out of them.

The numbers moved quickly. The city recorded about 1,946 murders in 1993, the year before Bratton took office. In 1996 it recorded 983, the first year under 1,000 since 1968. Robbery and burglary fell with murder. The fall was larger and faster than anything the department had seen in its modern history, and it arrived in the middle of a mayoralty that had promised it.

Stated as a difference, the change was close to a thousand fewer killings in a single year. Most of the people who would have died in a year like 1993 were young men in the poorer neighborhoods of Brooklyn, the Bronx, upper Manhattan, and southeast Queens, the same neighborhoods where the crack trade had been fought over at the end of the 1980s. The decline was felt there first and most, in the stairwells and on the corners where the killing had been concentrated. Whatever its causes, its benefits fell on the people who had borne the costs of the years before it.

Bratton did not stay to share the result. He and Giuliani clashed over who deserved the credit for the decline, and Bratton resigned in 1996, after about two years in the job. The method remained in place under his successors. So did the question he and the mayor had quarreled over, which became a question

for economists, criminologists, and every politician who ran for office in New York afterward.

The Argument Over the Decline

In 2004 the economist Steven Levitt published a paper in the Journal of Economic Perspectives that tried to sort out why crime had fallen across the United States in the 1990s. He began by counting what newspapers had said. In articles published between 1991 and 2001, the explanation cited most often was innovative policing, with fifty-two mentions. It was followed by the growth of prisons, with forty-seven; changes in crack markets, with thirty-three; an aging population and gun control, with thirty-two each; the strong economy, with twenty-eight; and more police, with twenty-six. New York's experience, and the Giuliani administration's account of it, did much to put policing at the top of that list.

The order of the list said as much about the people doing the explaining as about the crime. An explanation that credited police strategy had a commissioner and a mayor to advance it at every press conference, and a set of precinct statistics released on a schedule to support it. An explanation that credited a change in the drug market or a shift in the age of the population had no office to speak for it and no official who could claim it as an achievement. Policing came first in the newspapers in part because policing was the only explanation with a public spokesman.

Levitt concluded that the list was nearly upside down. After adjusting for the conditions of each place, he found that New York's crime decline was about average among large American cities. Crime had fallen in cities that adopted nothing resembling CompStat or broken windows, and in some of them it had fallen about as fast. The effect of New York's policing strategy, in his view, had been exaggerated, and nationally it was probably minor.

Franklin Zimring, a law professor at the University of California, Berkeley, took up the New York case directly in The City That Became Safe, published in 2011. He accepted part of Levitt's argument and rejected the rest. About half of New York's decline, Zimring found, belonged to the national drop that every large city shared. The other half was New York's own, and it was very large. Robbery, burglary, and murder fell by more than 80 percent over the full span of the decline, a drop that no comparable city matched. Zimring attributed the

distinctive New York share to policing, but to a particular kind: the concentration of officers on the streets and public places where crime clustered, the hot spots CompStat's maps identified, and above all the open-air drug markets that had occupied particular corners and stoops since the crack years.

The difference between the two scholars lay partly in the span of years each examined. Levitt's comparison concerned the 1990s, when New York's decline ran roughly in step with that of other large cities. Zimring followed the city well past the end of the decade, as its crime rates kept falling after others had leveled off, and it was over that longer span that New York's numbers pulled away from the national pattern. Both could be right about the period they measured. Neither account gave the Giuliani administration's version, in which a new commissioner and a new method had by themselves reversed the city's course, the whole of the credit.

Two of Zimring's findings cut against the version of events that politicians on both sides tended to tell. The first was that New York's crime decline came with fewer prisoners, not more. From 1990 to 2009, the city's incarceration rate fell 28 percent while the national rate rose 65 percent. Whatever the police were doing, it did not depend on locking up an ever larger share of the population. The second was that drug killings in New York fell by about 90 percent while drug use stayed high. The trade continued. What changed was where it took place. Moved indoors and off the corners, it no longer produced the territorial shootings that had driven the murder count of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

There was a third account, which neither the Bratton camp nor the Giuliani camp emphasized. Crack-related violence had begun to decline around 1990, several years before the steepest drop in murders began in 1994. Ray Kelly, Dinkins's police commissioner, described a generational change: crack had fallen out of favor with younger people in the neighborhoods hardest hit. On this reading, Giuliani and Bratton had inherited a fall already under way and accelerated it.

The disagreement has never been settled, and the evidence allows more than one honest conclusion. What the competing accounts share is more useful than what divides them. All agree that the decline was real and that it was large. All agree that it was felt first in particular places, in the corners and building lobbies and subway platforms where the violence of the crack years had been concentrated. And the strongest version of the policing argument, Zimring's, is

an argument about public space: that the police reclaimed specific blocks from a drug trade that had held them. That is a claim about territory, and like every such claim in the city's history it had consequences for who could live on the blocks once they were reclaimed, and at what price.

Forty-Second Street

The New Amsterdam Theatre opened in 1903 at 214 West 42nd Street, in the year before the New York Times moved into its new tower at the south end of Longacre Square and the square took the paper's name. It was an Art Nouveau house built for musical theater, and for its first decades it stood at the center of the Broadway trade. The decline of the block between Seventh and Eighth Avenues is well known in outline: the legitimate houses turned to movies, then to second-run and grind-house movies running around the clock, and by the 1970s the street was known for peep shows, adult theaters, and the drug dealing and street prostitution around them. The New Amsterdam ended as a run-down movie house and closed in the 1980s.

By the 1990s the theater belonged to the 42nd Street Development Project, a state agency charged with redeveloping the block. In 1995 the Walt Disney Company signed a forty-nine-year lease on the New Amsterdam with the agency. Disney undertook a renovation that cost about $34 million, subsidized by the city and the state. In April 1997, Giuliani, Governor George Pataki, and Michael Eisner, Disney's chairman, unveiled the restored theater, and the mayor called it "the turning point" in the revival of Times Square. The house officially reopened on April 2, 1997. On November 13, 1997, Disney's stage version of The Lion King opened there.

The terms of the deal set the block's future for two generations. A lease of forty-nine years signed in the mid-1990s ran well into the 2040s, longer than most of the officials who signed it would hold any public office. The landlord was the state rather than the city, an agency created for a single stretch of a single street and answerable to Albany. The tenant brought its own production to fill the house: the reopened theater stood ready for seven months before The Lion King arrived to occupy it, and once the show opened it gave the block a long-running attraction aimed at families. All three officials at the April unveiling had a stake in the image. The governor's agency held the land, the

mayor's policing was credited with making the street safe for the tenant, and the chairman's company had put its name on the block.

The arrangement repeated a pattern older than Times Square. The public held the land. A private company held a long lease on terms the public had subsidized. In return the company supplied the use the public authority wanted: in this case a family entertainment company whose name stood for the opposite of what 42nd Street had become. The choice of Disney was a decision about the kind of tenant the block should have and the kind of people the tenant would draw. The businesses that had occupied the street through the 1970s and 1980s, the arcades, the adult houses, the cheap movie theaters that had been among the few places in Midtown where a person with little money could sit indoors for hours, held no claim the agency recognized. They were treated as the condition to be cured.

The same combination had built the first subways at the start of the century, when the city lent its credit to private operators who ran the trains and took the fares. On 42nd Street the public money paid for restoration rather than tunnels, and the thing manufactured was a reputation rather than new ground for housing, but the bargain had the same shape. The public bore the cost of making a piece of land usable, and a private company took the return on it.

Giuliani's phrase was a claim about what would follow, and it served the administration's larger argument. A cleaned-up 42nd Street was the most visible single proof that quality-of-life enforcement had worked, and the mayor presented the two together. The policing and the redevelopment reinforced each other: the subsidy and the lease brought a corporate tenant that would not have come to the block of the early 1980s, and the tenant's presence made the block a place the police were expected to keep orderly. Visitors from out of town, who had once been warned away from the Times Square subway station, could now be sent to it with their children. The transformation of the square became the image by which the decade's change in New York was known to the rest of the country, and it was built on public land, public money, and a state agency's judgment about who belonged on the street.

Work for Relief

The Work Experience Program was not Giuliani's invention. In some form it had existed for about twenty years before 1995. What changed in 1995 was

its scale. The administration began a fourfold expansion, and by 1997 more than 38,000 workfare workers were placed in city agencies and nonprofit organizations, working in exchange for their welfare checks. Much of the work was in parks and in offices. Recipients raked leaves, picked up litter, cleaned restrooms, and filed papers. The federal welfare law of 1996, which ended the old entitlement to cash assistance and set work requirements and time limits for the states, gave the program national backing, but New York's expansion had begun before it.

Giuliani was proud of it. In 1998 he called workfare "something that I think is probably the best thing that we've done." The welfare rolls supported his claim in one sense: the rolls fell from 1.16 million recipients in March 1995 to fewer than 750,000 in September 1998.

The administration's own figures held a second story. At any given moment in 1998 the program enrolled about 33,800 people, yet nearly 430,000 had passed through it since the expansion began. The gap between the two numbers meant that most participants stayed in their assignments briefly. They arrived, worked for a time, and were gone, and the release did not say where they had gone. The program functioned less as a long apprenticeship in city work than as a gate through which a very large share of the city's welfare population passed on its way off the rolls.

The New York Times examined what lay behind the fall. Alan Finder reported in 1998 that there was scant evidence that workfare led participants into full-time jobs. Other Times reporting that year found that the heart of the caseload decline was strict enforcement of the program's rules and sanctions, more than job placement. Recipients who missed an appointment, failed to show up for an assignment, or did not complete the paperwork could lose their benefits, and many did. A strong economy helped. As the decade's boom took hold, there were more jobs for those who left the rolls, and some found them. How many, and at what wages, the administration's counts did not say.

The program shrank as quickly as it had grown. By the end of 2001 it had about 17,000 participants, and only 12 percent of them were in workfare alone; the rest combined it with training, education, or other activity. By then the caseload had fallen so far that the pool of people available for assignment had shrunk with it.

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Workfare and quality-of-life policing were two parts of a single approach to the city's public spaces and the poor people who used them. The same administration that arrested people for drinking or sleeping in parks assigned other poor people to clean those parks as a condition of relief. Both policies treated the visible condition of public space as the measure of the city's health, and both pressed on people with little money to change their behavior in it. The cleaner parks of the late 1990s were, in part, the product of labor paid at the value of a welfare check.

The 70th Precinct and Soundview

In the predawn hours of August 9, 1997, police officers arrested Abner Louima outside Club Rendez-Vous in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, a neighborhood that had become the center of the city's Haitian community. Louima was thirty years old, a Haitian immigrant who worked as a security guard. The officers took him to the 70th Precinct station house. There, while he was handcuffed, Officer Justin Volpe sexually assaulted him with a broken broomstick. Louima was hospitalized with severe internal injuries.

The assault became public within days, and it drew large protests against the police. On August 29, 1997, an estimated 7,000 demonstrators marched to City Hall and to the 70th Precinct station house at 154 Lawrence Avenue. At the federal trial in Brooklyn in 1999, Volpe pleaded guilty. Louima's testimony helped send two officers to prison.

The route of the August march joined two pieces of ground. City Hall was the seat of the administration that had made aggressive enforcement its signature. The station house on Lawrence Avenue was the place where that enforcement had been carried to its worst extreme, inside a public building, against a man in custody. By marching from one to the other, the demonstrators made a claim that the mayor's office did not accept: that what happened in the precinct was connected to the policy announced downtown. The prosecution that followed was federal, brought in the Brooklyn courthouse two years later, and the officer at its center admitted his crime there.

Eighteen months later, shortly after midnight on February 4, 1999, four plainclothes officers of the Street Crime Unit approached Amadou Diallo on the steps of his building in Soundview, in the Bronx. Diallo was twenty-three, an immigrant from Guinea who sold videotapes, gloves, and socks on the

sidewalk along 14th Street in Manhattan. He was unarmed. The officers fired forty-one shots at him, and nineteen struck him. He died on the steps.

Diallo's working life and his home lay at opposite ends of the subway map. He earned his living on a Manhattan sidewalk and slept in the Bronx, a commute repeated by hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers whose jobs were in Manhattan and whose rents were not. He was killed in the vestibule of the building where he lived, the one piece of the city he could call his own, by officers sent to that neighborhood because the department's maps marked it as a place where guns were carried.

The officers were charged with murder. The trial was moved out of the Bronx to Albany, and on February 25, 2000, the jury acquitted all four of all charges. The Street Crime Unit, the plainclothes squad assigned to seize illegal guns in high-crime precincts, was later disbanded. The city settled the Diallo family's suit for $3 million.

The two cases were different in kind. Louima was tortured in a station house by an officer who was convicted and imprisoned for it. Diallo was killed on his own doorstep by officers whom a jury found had committed no crime. What joined them in the public mind was the identity of the victims and the places where the violence happened. Both men were Black immigrants. Both lived in outer-borough neighborhoods of the kind where CompStat's maps showed crime concentrated and where the department, accordingly, concentrated its officers and its most aggressive units. The policing that had reclaimed corners from drug dealers was the same policing that put large numbers of officers into contact with residents of those blocks who had done nothing, and the methods did not easily distinguish between them.

Supporters of the administration answered that the falling murder count had saved many more lives in those same neighborhoods than the police had taken, and that the overwhelming majority of the people protected were Black and Latino. The arithmetic was correct as far as it went. But the residents of East Flatbush and Soundview were being asked to accept a bargain that residents of the Upper East Side were not asked to make: greater safety from crime in exchange for greater exposure to the police. The terms of that bargain, and the question of who had agreed to it, would dominate the city's politics for the next two decades.

Vacancy

In the second half of the decade money returned to Manhattan in quantities the city had not seen since before the 1987 crash. The long rise of the stock market swelled Wall Street bonuses, and a wave of internet companies took space in the old loft buildings of the Flatiron district and SoHo, an area their promoters called Silicon Alley. The new money looked for apartments, and it found a city whose crime rate had fallen and whose central neighborhoods were newly desirable. Rents in Manhattan rose through the late 1990s, and the pressure spread outward into the parts of Brooklyn closest to the bridges.

The law governing much of that housing had already been changed. Under laws of 1969 and 1974, most apartments in buildings of six or more units built before 1974 had been rent stabilized, their increases set by the city's Rent Guidelines Board and their tenants entitled to renew their leases. The state's Rent Regulation Reform Act of 1993, passed in Albany in the last year of the Dinkins administration, opened the first door out of the system. An apartment with a legal rent of $2,000 or more a month would be deregulated when it became vacant. An occupied apartment at that rent could also be deregulated if the household's income had exceeded $250,000 in each of two prior years.

At first the rule touched only the most expensive apartments in the city, and only within a narrow window. In 1994 the City Council, pressed by its speaker, Peter Vallone, appears to have widened it, extending high-rent decontrol to any apartment that became vacant at a legal rent above $2,000. Rent regulation had begun in New York as an emergency measure in 1920 and had been renewed, rewritten, and defended ever since on the premise that the housing shortage it answered had never ended. The laws of the 1990s did not repeal that premise. They carved out an exit at the top of the market and left the rest of the system in place.

The Rent Regulation Reform Act of June 1997, signed by Governor Pataki after a fight in Albany over whether rent regulation would survive at all, made the exit far more powerful. Tenant groups mobilized across the city. The law that emerged lowered the income threshold to $175,000. More important, it adopted a mandatory formula for increases on vacancy, a bonus an owner could take each time a tenant left. Owners could add that bonus to the increases already permitted for improvements to an apartment, such as new kitchens and bathrooms. Combined, the two could push a unit that had rented for well

under $2,000 past the deregulation level after one or two turnovers. Once past it, the apartment left the system for good.

The 1997 law gave owners of stabilized apartments a direct financial interest in turnover. Every departure was an opportunity to raise the rent by a fixed percentage, and every departure brought the apartment closer to the point at which it could be rented at whatever the market would pay. In a falling market the provision would have mattered little. In the rising market of the late 1990s, and in the much stronger one that followed, it began the long loss of rent-stabilized housing in the neighborhoods where demand was greatest. Falling crime and rising prices fed each other here as well. The safer a block became, the more the market would pay for an apartment on it, and the greater an owner's incentive to see the existing tenant leave.

The same pressure reached the city's vacant land. In the 1970s, residents of the Lower East Side, Harlem, the South Bronx, and Brooklyn had reclaimed rubble-strewn lots left by fire and abandonment and turned them into gardens. Many of those lots had passed into city ownership through tax foreclosure, and the city had licensed the gardens through its own programs. In 1999 the Giuliani administration put more than 110 city-owned community gardens up for auction. At the time, the city owned some 11,000 vacant lots. The administration argued that the land was needed for housing and that the city should not hold property off the tax rolls indefinitely. The gardeners answered that the city had thousands of empty lots it was not using and was choosing to sell the few that residents had made into something.

The gardens on the list were a small fraction of the city's vacant holdings, about one lot in a hundred. What distinguished them from the rest was the work done on them. A garden that had been cleared, fenced, and planted for twenty years was a lot a buyer could see and build on without the cost of hauling away rubble, and in a rising market it was the kind of parcel most likely to draw a bid. The labor the gardeners had put into the ground had made it more valuable, and the value was what the city proposed to sell.

The auction was scheduled for May 14, 1999. That day, before it could take place, two private buyers removed every garden from the list. The Trust for Public Land paid $3 million for roughly sixty gardens, and the city agreed to sell the remaining fifty or so to the New York Restoration Project, the nonprofit the entertainer Bette Midler had founded in 1995, for $1.2 million.

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The gardens that the city had acquired for nothing, through the failure of their former owners to pay taxes, and that residents had cleared and planted without payment, were saved by private money on the morning of the sale.

The rescue cost $4.2 million in all, and it settled the gardens' fate by the same means the administration had proposed, a sale. The difference lay in the buyers. Two nonprofit landowners took title in place of developers, and the gardeners who had worked the plots since the 1970s became the tenants of private organizations rather than licensees of the city. Their claim to the ground, which rested on decades of use, had not been recognized by the city that owned it. It was preserved only because someone with money had chosen to buy it.

Not every garden was on the auction list, and the fight continued over those that were not. El Jardín de la Esperanza, in the East Village, dated to 1978. Supporters set up a protest encampment there, and it became a symbol of the gardeners' cause. In February 2000 the city bulldozed it. That same month, on February 15, a state court halted further sales of garden lots in response to a suit brought by Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, who argued that the city had sold the land without the environmental review state law required.

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The Flood Line, 2001–2026

September 11, the Bloomberg rezonings, the financial crash, Hurricane Sandy, the pandemic, and the housing and transit politics of the present.

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CHAPTER 26

September 11 and the Sixteen Acres, 2001–2016

In July 2001, Larry Silverstein, a New York real estate developer, took a ninety-nine-year lease on the World Trade Center for $3.2 billion. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which had condemned the blocks of Radio Row to build the complex, kept the land. Silverstein acquired the use of it: the right to manage the towers, lease their offices floor by floor, and collect the rents for the rest of the century and well into the next. He also took on the insurance. The policies on the complex were written for $3.5 billion per occurrence. In the summer of 2001 that phrase was ordinary language in commercial underwriting. Within three years two federal juries in Manhattan would be asked to decide what it meant.

Separating title from use was one of the oldest arrangements in the city's dealings with its ground. The colonial corporation had sold water lots, the right to fill and build on land it held beneath the harbor, while it kept the street ends and the power to say what might rise on them. The Port Authority's lease was the same bargain at a far larger scale. A public body kept the ground, a private party paid for the right to profit from what stood on it, and the price expressed a confident judgment about Lower Manhattan rents for a century to come. The insurance followed the same logic. The limit per occurrence exceeded what

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Silverstein had paid for the lease. Whether one plan carried out against two buildings counted as one occurrence or two depended on the wording of policy forms that differed from carrier to carrier.

The lease left several parties holding different rights on sixteen acres at the foot of Manhattan's West Side. The Port Authority, a bistate agency answerable to the governors of New York and New Jersey, held title. A private leaseholder held the buildings and their income. The tenants held space by the square foot under leases of their own, from financial firms on the upper floors to the shops of the underground concourse. The PATH trains to Jersey City and Newark ran into a terminal beneath the complex. The City of New York surrounded the site on every side and had less authority over it than over almost any other property of its size in Manhattan, because Port Authority land had always stood partly outside the municipal rulebook. Six weeks or so after Silverstein signed, the buildings were gone. Every one of those rights had to be renegotiated over a hole in the ground, and new claimants appeared that no lease had provided for.

Tuesday

At 8:46 a.m. on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, American Airlines Flight 11, seized by hijackers after it left Boston, struck the North Tower and tore a hole across roughly the 93rd through 99th floors of the 110-story building. Fifteen or sixteen minutes later a second hijacked airliner, United Airlines Flight 175, struck the South Tower. That interval later became the factual core of a lawsuit worth billions of dollars. A third plane hit the Pentagon outside Washington, and a fourth crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after its passengers fought the hijackers.

Because of the gap between the impacts, two separate buildings were burning at once for most of the morning. Each had its own stairwells, its own elevators, its own tenants, and its own fire. The North Tower's impact zone sat high in the building, with eleven floors above the 99th. The first responders of the Fire Department, the Police Department, and the Port Authority Police were already converging on the complex when the second plane struck. The morning's death toll among them came from that sequence. They had been sent in to get other people out of one tower, and the second impact and the collapses that followed caught them inside.

The South Tower, struck second, fell first. The North Tower came down at 10:29 a.m. Both had collapsed within about two hours of the first impact. Later that day 7 World Trade Center, a separate office tower across Vesey Street to the north, collapsed as well. The ruins burned. Fires smoldered inside the debris for months, through the fall and into the winter.

At the World Trade Center, 2,753 people were killed. The toll across the three attack sites, leaving out the nineteen hijackers, was 2,977. The dead in New York included 343 members of the Fire Department, twenty-three officers of the New York City Police Department, and thirty-seven officers of the Port Authority Police Department. The last figure is easy to pass over. The agency that owned the complex also policed it, and it lost more officers inside its own property that morning than the city's police department lost in total. Together, 403 of the dead belonged to the three uniformed services, and nearly all of them had gone into the complex that morning in the course of their work.

The figure of 2,753 is the official count. The exact number is not known and probably never will be. No one kept a complete record of who was in the towers, on the plaza, and in the concourse when the planes struck, and the remains of many of the dead were never recovered or identified. The city's Health Department, on its own pages, gives the toll as nearly 2,800. A complex that tens of thousands of people passed through on an ordinary weekday, on their way to offices, shops, and the trains below, had never had a door at which anyone was counted.

Physical loss can be stated more precisely. About 10 million square feet of office space had been destroyed, along with the hotel, the shopping concourse, and the PATH terminal. A temporary PATH station would not open at the site until 2003, and for roughly two years trains from New Jersey stopped short of the place they had been built to serve. The figure of 10 million square feet would run through everything that followed. Silverstein's lawyers put it before juries as the measure of what had to be rebuilt, and the master plan for the site adopted it as the commercial program to be restored.

The people with a stake in what would replace the towers included the Port Authority, the leaseholder, the insurers, the tenants who had survived, the families of those who had not, the residents of the blocks around the site, and the state and federal governments that would pay for much of the rebuilding.

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Their interests did not line up. They would spend the next fifteen years working out which of them would control which part of the sixteen acres.

The Pile

The people who worked in the wreckage called it the pile. It was a burning mound of steel, concrete, and everything the towers had contained, and for months the work there was recovery: digging through it by hand and by machine for the remains of the dead and for anything they had carried. Detectives from the Police Department's Crime Scene Unit documented what was found in three places: at the site itself, at the office of the city's Medical Examiner, and on Staten Island.

The site was a crime scene as well as a grave and a demolition job, and the work was organized to serve all three purposes. Material moved in a chain. It was excavated at the site and examined there. Debris that had been searched once was carried away to be searched again. Anything that might identify a person went to the Medical Examiner. Detectives recorded each stage, so that a fragment of bone or a personal belonging could be traced back through the places it had passed. The procedure treated every truckload as potential evidence and potential remains, and it made the recovery slow by design.

The Staten Island location was Fresh Kills. The landfill had received its last barge of city garbage that March, and its mounds were already slated to become parkland. Within days of the attacks it reopened for a different purpose. Debris from the World Trade Center was carried there to be spread out, searched, and analyzed, and workers sifted it for human remains and personal belongings that had not been found at the site. The ground on which the city had dumped its household waste for half a century became, for most of a year, a forensic field.

There was a symmetry in this that belonged to the city's oldest habits with land and water. In the late 1960s, the earth excavated for the towers' foundations had been dumped into the Hudson behind bulkheads and became part of the fill under Battery Park City. Material taken out of the site had made new land at the river's edge. What came out of the site in 2001 went to a landfill across the harbor, to be picked through for bone and paper before it was buried.

Identification proceeded slowly. By May 8, 2002, the remains of 1,107 victims had been identified, fewer than half of the people killed at the site. By the middle of July, when a separate ceremony closed the recovery work at Fresh

Kills, the number had reached about 1,200. Each identification gave a family remains to bury. Each name still absent from the list left a family whose dead, as far as anyone could establish, had stayed on the sixteen acres or gone across the harbor with the debris.

The official end of recovery at the World Trade Center came on Thursday, May 30, 2002. The ceremony had no speeches. It began at 10:29 a.m., the minute the North Tower had fallen eight months earlier, with a fire bell rung for a fallen firefighter. The choice of minute tied the close of the work to the collapse that had begun it. An honor guard carried a stretcher up the ramp out of the excavation. It held no body, only an American flag. A flatbed truck followed it with the last steel column to leave the site, a 50-ton piece of the South Tower's southeast corner wrapped in black cloth. Shrouded and following the flag-draped stretcher, the column was handled as a funeral cortege would handle a casket. It was the last standing fragment of the towers to leave the place where they had stood. Measured from the morning of the attacks, the cleanup and recovery had lasted eight months and nineteen days.

The empty stretcher said what the identification figures said. The recovery was over and most of the dead had not been found. For many families the site was therefore a grave, the only place where people they had lost might still be present in any physical sense. That conviction gave them a claim on the ground that no lease or deed recognized and that every later plan had to accommodate. The same ceremony also cleared the way for construction. With the column gone and the excavation empty, the sixteen acres were once again a building site, owned by a public authority, leased to a private developer, and now regarded by thousands of people as a burial ground. Every argument of the following decade began from those conditions.

Safe to Breathe

A week after the attacks, on September 18, 2001, Christine Todd Whitman, the former governor of New Jersey then serving as administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, issued a press release. "Given the scope of the tragedy from last week," she said, "I am glad to reassure the people of New York and Washington, DC that their air is safe to breathe and their water is safe to drink." The New York Stock Exchange, a few blocks from the site, had reopened the day before.

The release mattered because of what it permitted. It told residents of Lower Manhattan that they could return to their apartments, employers that they could reopen their offices, and parents that the schools near the site could fill again. It implied the same to the thousands of firefighters, police officers, construction workers, and volunteers working on the pile and around it. The dust that had poured through the streets when the towers fell had coated apartments, offices, lobbies, and lungs across a wide area. The city's Health Department later concluded that hundreds of thousands of people had been exposed, or possibly exposed, to dust and other contaminants on September 11.

For the people on the pile, exposure did not end that day. The fires inside the debris smoldered through the fall and into the winter, and the recovery crews worked in and over them for nearly nine months. The assurance of September 18 was a statement about a single moment, issued when the debris had barely begun to be moved, and it was relied on for the whole length of the work.

On August 21, 2003, the EPA's Office of Inspector General released its evaluation of the agency's response, Report No. 2003-P-00012. It found that the EPA had not had enough data and analysis to support the statement of September 18 that the air was safe to breathe. It found as well that the White House Council on Environmental Quality had persuaded the agency to add reassuring language to its early press releases and to remove cautionary language from them. The report also described a memorandum from Whitman's office, issued the day after the attacks, directing that statements to the press be cleared first through the National Security Council. The public assurances about the air of Lower Manhattan had been shaped, in other words, partly by officials whose concern was the reopening of the national economy and the management of a national emergency, and the scientific basis for them had been thin.

The report arrived nearly two years after the statement it assessed. By August 2003 Lower Manhattan had been reoccupied, the recovery at the site had been over for more than a year, and a master plan for the sixteen acres had been chosen. The finding could not reverse the decisions people had made on the strength of the assurance. It could establish only that the assurance had gone further than the evidence.

Whitman did not retreat. Testifying before a congressional panel in June 2007, nearly six years after the release, she said she stood by what she had said after the attacks.

By then the argument had moved from the air to the bodies of the people who had breathed it. Responders and residents who had worked on the pile or lived in the dust zone were sick, and treatment was expensive. Whether a given illness came from the site was a question that insurers, employers, and pension boards could dispute case by case. The people affected asked Congress to settle it. Representative Carolyn Maloney, a Manhattan Democrat, introduced H.R. 847, the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act, named for a New York police detective who had worked at the site. The House passed it on September 29, 2010, by a vote of 268 to 160. The Senate passed an amended version by voice vote on December 22, 2010, and the House accepted the amendment the same day, 206 to 60. The December vote drew 266 members, against 428 in September, and the margin of passage was wider. President Barack Obama signed the bill eleven days later, on January 2, 2011, in Kailua, Hawaii, as Public Law 111-347.

The act created the World Trade Center Health Program to monitor and treat people exposed at the site. It also reopened and expanded the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund. In its first incarnation, run by Special Master Kenneth Feinberg, the fund had paid out more than $7 billion over two years to the survivors of 2,880 people killed in the attacks and to 2,680 people who had been injured. That first fund had been built as a settlement of the attacks themselves, with a closing date, on the premise that the harm was done when the buildings fell. Reopening it meant conceding that harm had continued after the fund stopped taking claims, among people who had been told in September 2001 that the air around them was safe. Nine years elapsed between Whitman's press release and the Senate vote. Over that period the federal government reversed its position. In 2001 it had said there was no danger. In 2010 it agreed to pay for the consequences of the danger.

The air-quality record was still being contested in the present. On September 8, 2026, after a fight over the city's own files that had lasted nearly a quarter century, the city released about 170,000 pages of its records on post-attack air quality. The New York Post reported that the documents showed the city's Department of Environmental Protection had pleaded guilty to federal environmental crimes in August 2001, weeks before it took a leading role in the city's air-quality response. The release was about seven weeks old at the end of

October 2026. What the rest of the pages show, and what if anything follows from them, remained open.

Ten Blocks North

Two residential neighborhoods sat closest to the site. Battery Park City lay directly across West Street, on the landfill that the towers' own excavation had helped create, close enough that the dust and the closures reached it. Chinatown lay less than ten blocks to the northeast. Chinatown's losses were the better documented, because the Asian American Federation set out to count them. Its study, Chinatown After September 11th, released on April 4, 2002, was the first neighborhood-level account of the attacks' economic damage. That the first such count came from a community organization, nearly seven months after the attacks, showed where the neighborhood stood in the order of official attention.

The study described the effects of a security perimeter on a neighborhood that depended on movement. In the two weeks after September 11, nearly three in four Chinatown workers were temporarily displaced from their jobs. Three months after the attacks, nearly 7,700 workers, almost a quarter of the neighborhood's labor force, were still unemployed. Five months after the attacks, forty garment factories had closed for good, and 70 percent of garment workers and a third of restaurant workers were still on reduced hours. The causes the Federation listed were ordinary and physical: road closures, traffic restrictions, telephone and power outages, and security measures. A garment shop needed trucks to bring cut goods in and carry finished ones out. A restaurant needed customers who could reach it.

The three measurements traced the stages of the damage. The first two weeks were the shock, when almost the whole workforce was kept from its jobs. At three months the shock had become unemployment for nearly a quarter of the neighborhood's workers. At five months unemployment had hardened into closure, with factories that would not reopen and a majority of garment workers still short of full hours. A perimeter drawn around one site had reorganized the working life of a neighborhood that lay outside it.

The dollar figures were large for the businesses that reported them. One Chinatown garment trade group projected that its members would lose more than $33 million in the first six months. Summit Import Corporation, a major

food distributor in the neighborhood, reported $600,000 in lost sales in the first two weeks alone. The damage outlasted the emergency. Employment in Chinatown's two core ZIP codes, 10002 and 10013, fell by 5 percent, from about 136,000 jobs in the second quarter of 2001 to about 129,000, a loss of nearly 7,000. It had not fully recovered by 2004. Shops and restaurants that depended on tourists had barely returned to their earlier business.

Chinatown's case clarifies how the site's influence extended beyond its boundaries. The decisions that closed streets, rerouted traffic, and sealed off blocks were made to protect the site, to search it, and to secure the financial district, and they were justified. Their costs fell on garment workers and restaurant employees who had no stake in the World Trade Center's leases and no seat in the discussions about what would be built there. Chinatown had to document its losses itself and argue for a share of recovery aid. On a crowded archipelago, a claim to one piece of ground had always been paid for in part by the people on the blocks next to it, and the security perimeter of 2001 put that cost on a neighborhood that had never been party to the lease.

One Occurrence or Two

Silverstein's position after the attacks rested on his lease and his insurance. He intended to rebuild the roughly 10 million square feet of office space that had been destroyed, and he argued that the insurers owed him enough to do it. The policies paid up to $3.5 billion per occurrence. Two planes, striking two towers about sixteen minutes apart, were in his view two occurrences, which would double the maximum to about $7 billion. The insurers argued that the attacks were a single coordinated event and that a single limit applied.

Each side described the same morning differently. In Silverstein's account, two aircraft struck two buildings at two different times, and each tower burned and fell on its own. In the insurers' account, a single plan, conceived and carried out as one operation, destroyed a single insured complex. The interval between the impacts was the hinge of the leaseholder's case. Had both planes hit at once, his argument would have been much harder to make. Because they did not, a quarter of an hour on a Tuesday morning was worth, on his theory, $3.5 billion.

The question had an answer in neither common sense nor physics. It depended on which policy form each insurer had agreed to. The coverage had been assembled from many carriers in the weeks before the attacks, and some of

the policy language was still being negotiated when the planes hit. A long run of litigation in Manhattan federal court resolved the matter insurer by insurer.

On April 29, 2004, after a three-month trial, a federal jury found that for nine of the insurers the attacks were a single occurrence. On May 3, a jury found that Swiss Re, which carried 25 percent of the coverage, was also bound by a policy form that treated the attacks as one event. Jack Dubois, chief executive of Swiss Re's American operations, gave the insurers' view after that verdict: "In July of 2001, Mr. Silverstein and the insured parties insured the World Trade Center as if it were a single house."

The image put the insurers' theory in terms of ground: one property, one owner, one loss. Silverstein's theory treated the site as two buildings that happened to share a plaza and a lease. The juries were deciding what unit of ground had been insured, and so what unit of ground had been destroyed.

The next trial went the other way. On December 6, 2004, after six weeks of testimony and ten days of deliberation, another Manhattan federal jury found that nine other insurers owed Silverstein for two occurrences. With that verdict his potential recovery rose to about $4.6 billion. That was roughly $1.1 billion more than the single limit and about two-thirds of the doubled one. Different juries, reading different policy forms, had reached opposite answers about the same morning, and the split decided the sum.

The verdicts mattered beyond the dollar amounts. Rebuilding the site required money, and whoever brought the money had a stronger claim to decide what would be built. A leaseholder holding $7 billion would have dominated the site's commercial future. One holding $3.5 billion would have had trouble paying for what his lease required him to replace. The figure that emerged from the 2004 trials left Silverstein with a substantial sum and with a gap between that sum and the cost of the towers he had promised to put back. Because of that gap, the leaseholder and the landowner could not proceed independently. In the following years the Port Authority and Silverstein renegotiated repeatedly which of them would build which towers and on what terms. The Port Authority ended up owning the tallest building on the site, the one most closely tied to the meaning of the place, while the leaseholder kept the development of others.

The insurance fight is also where the interests of commerce on the site were most clearly expressed. The families' claim rested on memory and on the

remains still unrecovered. The leaseholder's claim rested on a contract that required office space and on the rents that office space would produce. Each was legitimate on its own terms, and the two claims competed for the same sixteen acres. The planners' task was to fit both onto the site.

Memory Foundations

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, created after the attacks to plan the rebuilding and to distribute federal recovery money, did most of that planning. In July 2002 it held a series of public forums under the title "Listening to the City," at which participants were shown six initial concept plans for the site. They largely rejected all six. The plans put too much commercial space too close to the place where the towers had stood. In August 2002 the corporation announced a competition for a master plan.

The forums were an unusual step for a body charged with redeveloping commercial property. They put the question of what the ground was for to people who held no title to it, no lease on it, and no insurance claim against it, and their verdict changed the course of planning. The six rejected schemes had been drawn largely around the obligation to replace office space. The rejection established that the families' claim, and the wider public's sense of the site as a place of mourning, would have to be designed into the plan from the start.

In February 2003, through what it called the Innovative Design Study, the corporation selected a plan by the architect Daniel Libeskind titled Memory Foundations. Its organizing decision was the one the families' claim required. The memorial would occupy the center of the site, and the commercial program would surround it. The plan also met the leaseholder's claim, providing for the replacement of roughly 10 million square feet of office space in a ring of towers. The tallest was to be a "Freedom Tower" 1,776 feet high, a height chosen to evoke the year of the Declaration of Independence. On September 17, 2003, the development corporation, the Port Authority, and Libeskind released a Refined Master Plan for the sixteen acres.

The refined plan carried the names of three parties: the development corporation, which held the federal money and the planning mandate; the Port Authority, which held the land; and the architect. The leaseholder, whose contract required the office space and whose insurance would pay for much of it, was not among them. The plan described what the site would hold. Who would

pay for each of its buildings was left to the negotiations between landowner and leaseholder, and in the next decade those negotiations changed much of the plan's commercial program.

The number 1,776 had a local meaning that the national symbolism overlooked. In 1776 the British army defeated Washington's troops in Brooklyn, took the city, and held it for seven years, longer than it held any other American town. The year the tower's height commemorated was, in New York, the year the city was lost.

The first building on the site to rise again was the one with the simplest ownership. Construction of a new 7 World Trade Center, on its own block north of the main site, began on May 7, 2002, three weeks before the recovery ceremony at the main site, and the building was completed on May 23, 2006. It replaced office space, and its developer did not have to wait for the master plan, the memorial, or the Port Authority's other decisions to settle. Four years from start to finish on a separate parcel showed how quickly building could proceed when only one party held the ground.

The tower at the center of the plan moved more slowly. Ground was broken for the Freedom Tower on April 27, 2006, three years after the refined plan. Around 2010 the name was dropped in favor of One World Trade Center, the more conventional address of an office building that needed tenants. Its owner was the Port Authority. The steel reached its full height of 1,776 feet on May 10, 2013, seven years after groundbreaking, fixing Libeskind's number on the skyline even though much else in the site's development had been reworked since 2003. A smaller tower, 4 World Trade Center, opened on November 13, 2013. One World Trade Center opened on November 3, 2014, eleven years after the plan that placed it, and its observatory opened to paying visitors on May 29, 2015.

The memorial opened before any of the main towers. On September 11, 2011, the tenth anniversary of the attacks, the families of the dead gathered there for the anniversary ceremony. The public was admitted the next day, September 12. The memorial placed two pools in the footprints of the towers, with the names of the dead set around their edges. The arrangement settled the most emotional dispute about the site: the ground where the towers had stood would not be built on. Offices were kept outside the footprints, and the land on which the towers had stood was given over to remembrance.

The order of that opening, families first and the public second, recognized that some claims on the site took precedence over others. The 9/11 Memorial Museum, built below the plaza, followed on May 21, 2014.

The last major piece was the transit hall. Work on a permanent PATH station began in 2008, five years after the temporary one opened. Its main hall, an elongated white structure of steel ribs called the Oculus, opened partly on March 3, 2016. The Westfield shopping mall inside it held its grand opening on August 16, 2016. Riders from New Jersey had passed through a temporary station for more than a decade, and the Port Authority's commuters were the last of the site's claimants to receive their permanent space. By that summer, nearly fifteen years after the attacks, the sixteen acres held a memorial in the footprints, a museum under the plaza, a Port Authority tower at 1,776 feet, privately developed towers on the surrounding parcels, and trains to New Jersey running under a hall of shops.

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CHAPTER 27

Rezoning the City: Bloomberg, 2002–2013

The Viaduct and the Map

In the last days of 2001, shortly before he left office, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani (1994–2001) signed an order to demolish the High Line. The structure was a disused elevated freight railroad on steel columns. It ran from Gansevoort Street in the meatpacking district north through West Chelsea to the rail yards near 34th Street, crossing the avenues on its own bridges and cutting through the middle of blocks. Two residents of the neighborhood, Joshua David and Robert Hammond, had founded Friends of the High Line in 1999 to keep the viaduct standing and open it as a public walk. The outgoing mayor's order was the last word his administration gave on the matter. It was never carried out. Within a few years the city was paying to turn the viaduct into a park and rewriting the rules for every lot alongside it.

The man who inherited the order was Michael R. Bloomberg, mayor from 2002 through 2013. He had founded the financial-information company that bore his name, and he ran in 2001 as a Republican in a city where Democrats outnumbered Republicans by a wide margin. The election came in the weeks after September 11. Bloomberg had Giuliani's endorsement, and in November

he beat the Democrat Mark Green with about half the vote. He took office on January 1, 2002, in a city whose financial district was still clearing rubble.

One of his first appointments set the direction of his three terms. Amanda Burden had sat on the City Planning Commission since 1990. Bloomberg made her chair of the commission and director of the Department of City Planning, the two posts the city charter joins, and she held both until 2013. Bloomberg did not have the instruments his predecessors had used. Robert Moses had spent federal money and authority bond proceeds to clear land and build on it. Edward Koch had come into ownership of tens of thousands of abandoned apartments through tax foreclosure and handed them to builders and nonprofits to rebuild. By 2002 the federal clearance programs were long gone, and the city's in rem stock was largely spent. What remained was the zoning map, the document that tells every owner how much can be built on a lot and for what use. Under Burden the planning department used that map more aggressively than any administration since the 1961 Zoning Resolution was adopted.

The map's power lay in a few figures attached to each lot. New York zoning expressed density as a ratio of permitted floor area to the area of the lot, and it added rules on height, setbacks, and the uses allowed. Change those figures and the value of a parcel changed with them, often by more than any subsidy the city could have offered. A waterfront block zoned for manufacturing was worth what a manufacturer or a storage company would pay for it. The same block zoned for apartment towers was worth what a developer expected to earn from renting or selling apartments on its upper floors, many of them with views across the river. The city did not need to own the land or spend capital to bring that change about. It needed to redraw the lines and carry the new map through public review, district by district. For an administration without Moses's federal dollars or Koch's foreclosed buildings, that was the main lever left, and it was a strong one.

The scale is not in dispute even where the exact count is. Over twelve years the department carried some 120 rezonings, which together covered roughly 40 percent of the city's land. Bloomberg Associates, the consulting firm the former mayor later founded, describes the work as plans for 124 neighborhoods and the largest planning effort since 1961. The rezonings went in two directions. Upzonings raised the allowed height and density in places the administration

wanted to grow: former industrial waterfronts, the blocks around major transit hubs, and the edges of the central business districts in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. Downzonings lowered the limits in low-rise homeowner neighborhoods in the outer boroughs, where residents had watched detached and semi-detached houses come down for apartment buildings that the old 1961 envelopes allowed.

The two directions served one strategy. Growth was steered to land where few voters lived, factories had closed, and subway lines already ran, and it was kept away from the blocks of owner-occupied houses whose residents turned out at community board meetings and on election day. That settlement explains much of the period's politics. Upzonings drew opposition from tenants and small manufacturers in neighborhoods that were about to change. Downzonings drew applause from homeowners who wanted to keep their neighborhoods the way they were. Each approval ran through the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure, which passes a proposal from the community board to the borough president, the City Planning Commission, and finally the City Council. The community board and the borough president gave advice; the commission and the council decided. An administration with a large planning staff and a mayor willing to bargain with council members could push many such proposals through that sequence at once, and the downzonings gave it something to trade. A council member whose district gained protection for its low-rise blocks had reason to look more kindly on density somewhere else.

The most consequential of the upzonings, and the one that set the terms for the decade's argument over who would live in the new buildings, came in 2005 on the Brooklyn waterfront.

Two Miles of Brooklyn Shore

The East River shore of Greenpoint and Williamsburg had been an industrial edge for more than a century: sugar refining, oil storage, warehouses, and shipping piers, backed by blocks of row houses and walk-ups. By the end of the 1990s much of that waterfront was vacant or underused, and most of it carried manufacturing zoning that barred new housing. The neighborhoods behind it held Polish families in Greenpoint, Puerto Rican and Dominican households on Williamsburg's South Side, Hasidic families farther south, and growing numbers of young renters, many of them artists, who had moved into

lofts and apartments in the 1990s. Some of those artists were living in buildings zoned for factories, the same kind of arrangement that had earlier played out in Manhattan's loft districts.

In May 2005 the city approved a comprehensive rezoning of Greenpoint and Williamsburg. It raised permitted density sharply along the water, allowing high-rise apartment towers on former industrial parcels. It lowered density on many upland blocks to protect the scale of the existing streets. And it permitted housing across a district where most new residential use had been prohibited. The Department of City Planning presented the plan as the recovery of two miles of East River waterfront, with more than 50 acres of new open space, among them a continuous public esplanade along the shore and a 28-acre park around Bushwick Inlet. The private builders who put up the towers were expected to build the esplanade segments on their own parcels.

The plan thus did two things to the same strip of ground at once. It turned land that had been closed to housing into some of the most valuable residential land in Brooklyn, and it turned a shoreline that had been fenced off behind warehouses and tank farms into public open space, much of it to be built by the same developers who gained from the new density. The public would get the water's edge. The developers would get the floors above it. The open question was what the people already living a few blocks inland would get.

The housing was the argument. City Planning expected the rezoning to produce thousands of new apartments, and Community Board 1, which covers both neighborhoods, wanted 40 percent of them reserved for low- and moderate-income households. The administration chose a different instrument. The rezoning introduced a voluntary Inclusionary Housing bonus on the waterfront. A developer who set aside about 20 percent of a building's floor area for affordable apartments could build additional floor area. The affordable units could be on the same site, at another site in the neighborhood, or provided by preserving existing apartments as affordable. The department's own booklet on the program projected that about a third of the new units in the rezoned area would be affordable to low- and moderate-income households if developers took the bonus. A longtime member of the community board later said the 20 percent voluntary figure was nowhere near enough.

The design of the bonus shaped what it could deliver. Because the extra floor area was a reward, a developer could decline it and build a smaller tower of

market-rate apartments, and the city would get no affordable units from that site. Because the obligation could be met off site, the affordable apartments generated by a tower on the water need not stand in that tower; they could go up on a cheaper parcel inland. Because it could be met through preservation, a developer could satisfy it by restricting rents in an existing building rather than adding new apartments at all. That last option had a logic of its own. An apartment kept affordable for a family already living in it addressed displacement more directly than a new unit offered by lottery. But each option was the developer's choice, made parcel by parcel according to the arithmetic of a given site in a given year.

The city added two further measures. It extended the exclusion area of the 421-a property tax exemption to the Greenpoint-Williamsburg waterfront, so that a developer there could collect the twenty-to-twenty-five-year exemption on new construction only by including affordable housing. And it created an anti-harassment program for existing rent-regulated buildings in the area, aimed at landlords who might try to drive tenants out to cash in on rising values. The two measures pointed builders and landlords in the same direction as the bonus. Neither changed the basic structure, in which the affordable share of the new waterfront depended on incentives rather than requirements.

The city's own review documents described the risk plainly. The final environmental impact statement for the rezoning found about 2,510 residents, in some 830 households, vulnerable to indirect displacement, which it classed as a significant adverse impact. These were tenants who were not in buildings the rezoning would tear down but who lived in unregulated apartments where rents were expected to rise as the waterfront filled with new buildings. Against that figure the statement projected that the revised inclusionary plan could yield up to 1,398 affordable units on the sites the city expected to be developed.

Those numbers do not offset each other. The displaced households were people already in the neighborhood, many of them long-tenured Latino families on the South Side, who faced higher rents on the apartments they had. The affordable units were a projection of future apartments, contingent on developers choosing the bonus and on new tenants winning admission through lotteries open to applicants from across the city. The figure of 1,398 was also a ceiling: "up to," on the sites the city projected would be built, assuming the bonus was taken. Even if every projected unit had been built, nothing guaran-

teed that the household priced out of a walk-up on South Second Street would be the household that moved into the new building on Kent Avenue. The voluntary design meant the city's share of the waterfront's new value depended on each developer deciding the extra floors were worth the cost of the affordable units. In a rising market that was often true. When the market softened, it was not.

The towers came. Over the following decade high-rise apartment buildings lined the Williamsburg and Greenpoint shore, and the neighborhoods behind them became among the most expensive in Brooklyn. Counted across every district where it applied, the voluntary program produced something on the order of ten thousand permanently affordable apartments by the end of the Bloomberg years, well short of the need that rising rents in the rezoned neighborhoods had created. The community board's demand for a fixed share, and the gap between the city's displacement estimate and its affordable-unit projection, became the main evidence in a dispute over whether the city should require affordable housing rather than reward it. That dispute was not resolved during Bloomberg's tenure.

A Park on the Tracks

On the West Side, Friends of the High Line found a more receptive city government than the one that had signed the demolition order. In 2004 the city and the group chose a design team: the landscape architecture firm James Corner Field Operations, the architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro, and the Dutch planting designer Piet Oudolf. The plan kept the viaduct's steel, laid a walking surface over the old trackbed, and planted it with grasses and perennials of the kind that had grown wild on the abandoned line. The finished park would carry walkers above the street grid, through the middle of blocks and across the avenues, along a route laid out for freight trains.

Burden took a direct hand in what surrounded it. In 2005 she drew up special zoning for West Chelsea, the district of warehouses, garages, and art galleries through which the line passed. The new rules allowed residential and commercial buildings on blocks that had been reserved for manufacturing and set controls meant to keep the viaduct open to light and view. The park and the zoning were designed together. Construction on the first section began in the spring of 2006.

The sequence is worth setting out, because it shows how far the city's position moved. In 1999 two residents founded a group to save a structure most of its neighbors considered an eyesore. In 2001 the mayor ordered it torn down. In 2004 the new administration helped choose its designers. In 2005 the planning department rewrote the zoning around it. In 2006 construction began, and in 2009 the first section opened. A decade separated the founding of Friends of the High Line from the day the public could walk on the viaduct, and in that decade the project went from a neighborhood campaign against City Hall to one of City Hall's signature works.

The money came mostly from the city. It committed $112.2 million toward the projected $153 million cost of the first two sections, with another $21.4 million from federal and state funds, so that public sources covered all but about $20 million of the estimate. Friends of the High Line raised private money for the rest and later for the park's operations. The first section, from Gansevoort Street to West 20th Street, opened in June 2009. More than four million people visited in the next two years. The second section, to 30th Street, opened in 2011, and the last, curving around the rail yards on the far West Side, in 2014.

Three things set the High Line apart from the other projects of these years. Residents had first proposed reusing the structure, against the outgoing administration's wishes. The city then adopted the idea, paid for most of it, and used zoning to make the land beside it more valuable. The result was a very popular public space and an equally strong real estate market. Condominium towers and hotels designed by well-known architects went up along the line, and West Chelsea's warehouses gave way to buildings whose apartments advertised views of the park. A viaduct whose owners and neighbors had once wanted it removed became the chief selling point of the new buildings beside it.

The High Line also became a model that cities elsewhere studied and imitated. In New York it showed that a park could serve as an engine of development, raising the value of every adjacent lot, and that the public investment could be recovered in the tax base of the new buildings. The other side of that lesson was that a well-designed public amenity in a rising market could raise prices for everyone nearby, including people who had been there before the park opened. In Greenpoint and Williamsburg the city had at least attached an affordable-housing bonus to the new density. In West Chelsea the zoning's

attention went chiefly to the viaduct itself: how much light reached it, how the new buildings framed it. The question of who could afford to live beside the park was left largely to the market.

The Far West Side

At the northern end of the High Line lay the rail yards. The Long Island Rail Road stored trains in open-cut yards between Tenth and Twelfth Avenues south of 33rd Street, and around them stretched a district of parking lots, garages, warehouses, and tenements that the 1961 Zoning Resolution had largely zoned for manufacturing. The Bloomberg administration intended to make it the next commercial district in Manhattan, an extension of Midtown to the Hudson.

The plan for the Far West Side, announced in early 2004 at a cost then estimated at several billion dollars, bundled several projects that depended on one another. The 7 subway line, which then ended at Times Square, would be extended west and south to a new terminal at 34th Street and Eleventh Avenue, giving the district the transit access it lacked. A stadium for the New York Jets would be built on a platform over the Western Rail Yard, between Eleventh and Twelfth Avenues, to serve as the centerpiece of the city's bid for the 2012 Summer Olympics. And the surrounding blocks would be rezoned for offices, apartments, hotels, and stores.

The rezoning came first. The City Council passed it in January 2005. It changed some fifty blocks of the Far West Side, roughly west of Eighth Avenue between West 30th and West 43rd Streets, from manufacturing to commercial and residential use, and a follow-up action about a year later amended it. As rezoned, the district could hold about 25 million square feet of offices, 14 million square feet of housing (including more than 4,000 affordable units), more than a million square feet of retail, and over 2 million square feet of hotels. That was enough office space for several new Midtowns' worth of towers on blocks then mostly given over to parking.

The proportions of that capacity show what the district was for. Offices outweighed housing by a wide margin, and hotels and stores filled out the rest. The administration was planning a business district with apartments attached, sited where Midtown's office market could expand westward if the subway reached it. The 4,000 affordable units were real capacity on paper. As

in Williamsburg, whether they would be built depended on the pace of private construction.

The stadium did not survive. It required approval from the state Public Authorities Control Board, a little-known body on which the governor and the leaders of the two legislative houses each held a veto. Under that arrangement a single member could stop a project that the mayor and the City Council supported. In June 2005 the board did not approve the project, and it was withdrawn. Sheldon Silver, the Speaker of the Assembly, whose district was in Lower Manhattan, is widely credited with ending it. In the summer of 2005 the International Olympic Committee awarded the 2012 Games to London. With the stadium gone and the Olympics lost, the Western Rail Yard was left for later, and the administration turned the rest of the plan toward its original purpose: manufacturing office land.

The key to that land was the subway. To finance the 7 line extension, the city created the Hudson Yards Infrastructure Corporation, which in December 2006 sold the first portion of an authorized $3.5 billion borrowing. About $2.1 billion of it was for the subway extension. The city, not the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, paid for the tunnel, and the borrowing was to be repaid by revenue from the district's new development. The administration was betting that the land it had rezoned would eventually pay for the train that made the land usable. The structure put the risk on the city's own credit. If the towers came on schedule, the district would carry its own debt. If they came late, the city would carry it in the meantime.

Construction began in 2007. Opening was scheduled for December 2013, within Bloomberg's last term, and slipped several times. The 34th Street–Hudson Yards station opened in 2015, after he had left office. By the end of the decade, office and apartment towers stood on a platform over the Eastern Rail Yard. The bond financing relied on development that took longer to arrive than projected.

Hudson Yards was, in an older form, the practice that earlier chapters followed from the Interborough's first line to the Dual Contracts: public transit built ahead of demand to create land for private building, paid for with public credit. The difference was that in 1904 and 1913 the city extended lines to farms in the outer boroughs to house an expanding working class. In 2005 it extended

a line to Manhattan's western edge to make room for office towers and luxury apartments.

Atlantic and Flatbush

At the intersection of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, in Brooklyn, lay the Long Island Rail Road's Vanderbilt Yard and the blocks around it, a corner that Walter O'Malley had wanted for a new Dodgers ballpark in the 1950s and failed to get. In December 2003 the developer Forest City Ratner announced a project there called Atlantic Yards: a $2.5 billion development of office and apartment towers anchored by an arena, designed by Frank Gehry, for the New Jersey Nets basketball team, which would move to Brooklyn.

Atlantic Yards did not go through the city's land-use review. The project was approved under the state Urban Development Corporation Act, through the state economic development agency, Empire State Development. That route allowed the project to bypass ULURP and the City Council altogether, to override the city's zoning on the site, and to assemble property through the state's power of eminent domain. In practice this meant that the steps every rezoning in Williamsburg or on the Far West Side had passed through did not apply. The local community boards held no binding stage of review, the borough president issued no formal recommendation within ULURP, and the council members who represented Prospect Heights and Fort Greene cast no vote. The decision rested with a state agency answering to the governor.

The arrangement provided for condemning ninety-seven separate tax lots, taking the property, and leasing it back to the developer. The state would hold title, and the developer would build as its tenant. Among the properties were row houses, a converted warehouse with condominium lofts, and businesses on blocks of Prospect Heights next to the yard. The state approved the project in December 2006 and again in 2009, after a revision that reflected the collapsing financial market.

Residents and owners sued, challenging both the state's environmental review and its use of eminent domain to take private property for a private developer. Similar claims had been tested nationally the year before, when the Supreme Court upheld a Connecticut city's taking of homes for economic development. The suits were resolved in the state's favor in 2010. Daniel Gold-

stein, a resident of one of the condemned buildings and the most prominent opponent, settled in April 2010.

Ground was broken in March 2010 for the arena, by then called the Barclays Center, which cost about $1 billion and seated 18,000 for basketball. Gehry's design had been dropped in favor of a cheaper building by other architects. It opened in September 2012 with a series of concerts by Jay-Z, a Brooklyn native who had been a minority owner of the Nets. Nearly nine years had passed between the announcement and the opening night. The arena was finished. The rest of the project was not.

As approved, Atlantic Yards called for sixteen buildings with 6,430 apartments, 2,250 of them affordable, and eight acres of publicly accessible open space. By 2025, more than two decades after the announcement, eight towers and the arena stood. That year Empire State Development approved a new development team, Cirrus and LCOR, to build the second phase over the open rail yard, after years of delay and a dispute over penalties for the original developer's failure to deliver the affordable housing on schedule. When the remaining buildings would be completed, and how many of the promised affordable apartments would be built, remained open.

Atlantic Yards showed a different way of claiming land from the High Line or the waterfront rezonings. In Williamsburg and on the Far West Side the city changed the rules and let the market build. At Atlantic and Flatbush the state took property directly, cleared it for a single developer, and exempted the project from local review. That was the method of Title I in the 1950s, carried out by a state agency and justified by an arena and housing promises. The outcome was much the same as in many of the earlier clearance projects: the clearance happened quickly, while the housing promised in return was delayed for years. The legal steps that took the row houses and the loft building were complete by 2010. The affordable apartments that had been the project's main public justification were, more than fifteen years later, still partly a matter of approvals and schedules.

A Plan for a Million More

On Earth Day, April 22, 2007, at the American Museum of Natural History, Bloomberg presented PlaNYC, a long-range plan for the city through 2030. It contained 127 initiatives intended to accommodate about a million more

residents by that year while cutting the city's greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent. It included a target of planting a million trees, programs for parks, water, energy, and air quality, and a charge for driving into Manhattan's central business district. The mayor described it as "the broadest scale attack on the causes of global warming and environmental degradation that any city has ever undertaken." The plan was written by a team led by Daniel L. Doctoroff, the deputy mayor for economic development, who had overseen the Far West Side work. It was updated in 2011 to 132 initiatives.

PlaNYC tied the rezonings together in a single argument. Population growth was a given. The question was where to put a million more people, and the plan's answer was the one the planning department had already been applying: near transit, on underused land, at higher densities, and away from the low-rise neighborhoods. A plan for climate gave that land policy an environmental justification. Residents of dense neighborhoods near subway lines drove less and used less energy than residents of detached houses. The first progress report, in 2008, said the city had approved three transit-oriented rezonings and started construction on more than 13,000 affordable housing units in the plan's first year.

That the plan's author had also run the Far West Side effort was more than a coincidence of staffing. PlaNYC took a set of land-use decisions made one district at a time and presented them as a single program with a single purpose. Upzoning the waterfront and the transit hubs became climate policy as well as development policy. The downzonings, which had been concessions to homeowners, now also had a rationale: low-rise neighborhoods far from the subway were the wrong places for new density. The plan gave the administration's map a vocabulary that reached beyond real estate and drew in environmental groups, transit advocates, and others who had little stake in any particular rezoning.

The congestion charge was the most ambitious part of the plan and the first to fail. The proposal would have charged drivers to enter Manhattan's central business district. It required approval from the state legislature, and by the time it came to a vote the zone had been set at Manhattan below 60th Street. The City Council approved a version with an $8 fee by a vote of thirty to twenty on March 31, 2008. The federal government had offered $354 million in transit funds if the city enacted the charge, and the deadline for the application was April 7.

On April 7, after a closed meeting of the Assembly's Democratic members, Speaker Silver announced that the bill would not come to a vote. "The congestion pricing bill did not have anywhere near a majority of the Democratic conference," he said, "and will not be on the floor of the Assembly." The announcement came on the day of the federal deadline, and the money was lost. The opposition had come mostly from the outer reaches of Brooklyn and Queens, districts where many residents drove into Manhattan and few lived near a subway. Carl Kruger, a state senator from southern Brooklyn, said that calling the plan dead was a misnomer "because it shouldn't have been born in the first place."

The defeat followed the same geography as the downzonings. The homeowner neighborhoods the administration had protected from density were the neighborhoods whose representatives in Albany ended the congestion charge. They shared a view that the city's growth should be paid for and housed somewhere else. Albany had now stopped two of the administration's biggest projects in three years, the West Side stadium and the congestion charge, and Silver's Assembly had been decisive both times. The planning department could rewrite the city's zoning, but any measure that required state law or state money remained subject to a legislature in which the dense core was outnumbered. The City Council's thirty votes on March 31 had shown that a majority of the city's own legislators would accept the charge. A single closed meeting in Albany a week later made those votes irrelevant.

Bloomberg had been reelected in November 2005 by about 20 points over the former Bronx borough president Fernando Ferrer. Under the term-limits law, his second term would be his last. Voters had approved a limit of two consecutive terms by referendum in 1993 and rejected a proposal to extend it to three terms in 1996. On October 2, 2008, Bloomberg announced that he would seek to change the law, not by another referendum but by a vote of the City Council. The council held about twenty hours of hearings. On October 23, 2008, it voted twenty-nine to twenty-two to permit three consecutive four-year terms for the mayor and for its own members. Charles Barron, a councilman from East New York, urged his colleagues to say "no to bullying, no to billions of dollars and yes to the people." Bloomberg signed the bill on November 3, 2008.

The whole sequence took about a month. Three weeks separated the announcement from the vote, and less than two more separated the vote from the signature. Twice in fifteen years the electorate had spoken on term limits, and both times it had chosen two terms. The council reversed that result by a margin of seven votes, and the members who did so extended their own eligibility at the same stroke.

He ran again in 2009 against the city comptroller, Bill Thompson. He spent about $109 million of his own money, more than eleven times what Thompson spent, and won with about 51 percent of the vote to Thompson's 46. The margin was far narrower than four years earlier. A vote that close, after so much spending, showed that many New Yorkers resented the way the third term had been obtained, even if they did not reject the administration's record.

Shore and Ledger

The third term carried the rezoning program to the rest of the old industrial waterfront. Across the East River from Midtown, Long Island City in Queens had been a district of factories, warehouses, and rail yards. The planning department's upzonings there allowed residential towers. By the end of the Bloomberg years, apartment towers lined the Queens shore opposite the United Nations, and the district had become one of the fastest-growing residential areas in the city.

On the Brooklyn side, the old cargo piers below Brooklyn Heights, where ships had once loaded under the Promenade that Moses built over the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, became Brooklyn Bridge Park. Its first sections opened during Bloomberg's last term, with lawns, playing fields, and walkways on the piers that had once served the freight trade the container ports took away. Along with the Williamsburg esplanade, the Hudson River Park on the Manhattan side, and the new parks in Long Island City, it gave New Yorkers access to waterfront that had been fenced off for industrial use for more than a century.

The administration's record on land can be counted in several ways. The upzonings brought new towers, new parks, and a larger tax base to places where the city had been losing jobs and population a generation earlier. The downzonings kept the scale of homeowner neighborhoods that might otherwise have been rebuilt. The city's population grew through the decade, and its

tax revenues helped pay for services across the five boroughs. The waterfront, closed to the public for most of the city's history, had become largely accessible.

The same record also shows who paid. Growth was directed to waterfronts and transit hubs, where land values were low and many residents were renters with no stake in that value. In Greenpoint and Williamsburg the city's own impact statement predicted that thousands of residents would be pushed out by the rezoning, and the only protection it offered was a voluntary bonus that depended on developers' choices. The community board had asked for a fixed share of affordable housing and was given an incentive. Downzonings in neighborhoods with owner-occupied houses kept new housing out of the places best able to absorb it gradually, which concentrated pressure on the neighborhoods where rents were rising fastest. Where the state acted directly, as at Atlantic and Flatbush, it cleared the land first and left the housing unbuilt for years.

The pattern repeated an older one in the city's history. The ground that changed fastest was the ground whose occupants had the least power to hold it: the tenants of unregulated walk-ups on the South Side, the small businesses and loft owners in Prospect Heights, the garages and warehouses of the Far West Side. The ground that changed least belonged to people who owned their houses and voted in numbers that mattered in the City Council and in Albany. The new parks along the water were open to everyone. The apartments above them, outside the lottery units, went to those who could pay.

None of this was a single decision. It was the result of a planning department that controlled the city's most powerful land-use tool and an administration that used that tool to steer growth while leaving construction to private developers. That approach worked best when the real estate market was strong and failed when it was not, and it left the question of who would live in the new buildings to the market and the lottery.

Burden left the planning department at the end of 2013, when Bloomberg's third term ended. The rezonings remained on the map. The towers on the Williamsburg shore and along the High Line were standing, the Barclays Center was open, and Atlantic Yards' later towers were still years away. The 7 line extension, begun in 2007 to give the Far West Side its subway, opened in 2015 under the next mayor.

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CHAPTER 28

Crash, Foreclosure, and Zuccotti Park, 2006–2013

The Rest of America

On June 22, 2008, the New York Times ran an article about foreclosures on Staten Island. It quoted Jonathan R. Peters, a finance professor at the College of Staten Island: "If you're in New York City and you want to learn about the rest of America, you should come look at Staten Island." The comparison suited a borough that had grown more like a suburb than any other part of the city after the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge opened in 1964. Its housing was mostly owner-occupied houses on their own lots, bought with long mortgages. Peters's point was that the island's distress looked like the country's. It was a crisis of homeowners and their mortgages, in a city where most households rented. It also suited the moment. At the end of 2007, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York found that Staten Island had the highest share of subprime and Alt-A mortgages of any borough. Subprime loans went to borrowers with weaker credit at higher interest rates. Alt-A loans went to borrowers who documented little of their income. In the first three months of 2008, the island's North Shore, the older neighborhoods along the Kill Van Kull and the upper harbor, completed 113 foreclosure auctions. Among the fifty-six areas into which the

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city's housing data were divided, only Jamaica, Queens, had more. The two findings belong together. The borough whose borrowers had taken more of the riskiest loans than any other contained a district that, within months, was sending houses to auction faster than almost anywhere else in New York.

Staten Island was not alone in this. Across New York State, subprime mortgages grew by 83.8 percent between 2004 and 2006, and their share of all mortgages doubled to 28 percent. Many of these loans opened at low rates that reset higher after two or three years. They were written on the assumption that house prices would keep rising, so a borrower who could not afford the new payment could refinance or sell. The loans were then pooled and sold to investors who would never see the houses. The lender that wrote the loan had often collected its fees and passed the risk along before the first reset came due. The borrower kept the risk, and the house was the collateral for it. In New York City the lending did not fall evenly. It went heaviest into neighborhoods of modest one- and two-family houses in Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island, many of them owned by Black, Caribbean, and Latin American families.

Southeast Queens shows the pattern most sharply. In the area served by Queens Community Board 12, which covers Jamaica, Hollis, St. Albans, and South Jamaica, subprime loans made up 9.3 percent of home-purchase mortgages in 2003. By 2005 they made up 51.8 percent, the second-highest share in the city. In two years the district went from fewer than one buyer in ten taking a subprime loan to more than one in two. This was the district where, in Addisleigh Park, Black families had bought houses in the 1940s and 1950s against restrictive covenants. Southeast Queens had become one of the largest concentrations of Black homeowners in the country because generations of buyers had fought for the chance to own there. By the middle of the 2000s, these neighborhoods had no trouble getting mortgage credit. Their trouble was the price and terms of the credit they were offered. Half of the households buying homes in the district were taking loans designed to cost more and to fail more often. A neighborhood once kept out of the mortgage market by covenant and appraisal was now being sold the market's most expensive product, and the ground its families had won was pledged against it.

The failures came on schedule. The State Comptroller's office tracked the results through the decade's end. Between 2006 and 2009, foreclosure filings in New York City rose by 31.7 percent, to 22,886 in a single year. Queens led with

8,964 filings, followed by Brooklyn with 7,108, the Bronx with 3,000, Staten Island with 2,646, and Manhattan with 1,168. Queens alone accounted for nearly two of every five filings in the city, and Queens and Brooklyn together for about 70 percent. Staten Island, with less than a third of Manhattan's population, had more than twice its foreclosure filings. In 2009 Jamaica had the city's highest filing rate, 2,394 filings, or 29.9 for every 1,000 households, roughly one household in every thirty-three in a single year. The next five areas on the comptroller's list were Bellerose and Rosedale, Howard Beach and South Ozone Park, Kew Gardens and Woodhaven, Staten Island's North Shore with 1,347 filings, and East New York and Starrett City with 1,195. Four of the six worst areas lay in Queens, one on Staten Island, and the sixth, East New York, at the eastern edge of Brooklyn against the Queens line. No Manhattan neighborhood appeared among them. In the comptroller's 2010 ranking, East New York and Starrett City moved to the top at 16.8 filings per 1,000 households, ahead of Jamaica and the North Shore. The same few districts kept trading places at the head of the list. Over the three years from 2008 through 2010, Jamaica had more completed foreclosures than any other area in the city, 1,031 of them.

A foreclosure filing in New York starts a court case. It does not take the house at once. That is why filings far outnumbered completed sales. Because the state requires lenders to foreclose through the courts, a household could spend a year or more in default before an auction. During that time it faced bills, notices, and the visits of brokers who bought distressed property. In that interval the house remained the family's address while ceasing, in any secure sense, to be its property. Foreclosure-defense lawyers testifying to Congress around 2009 and 2010 said that in some Brooklyn and Queens communities one homeowner in three was in default. They named the worst-hit areas: Canarsie, East New York, Flatlands, Brownsville, Bushwick, Crown Heights, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Flatbush. Every one of them was a majority Black or Latino neighborhood. Several were the same districts that had lost population, buildings, and services in the 1970s and had been rebuilt in the 1980s and 1990s, partly through the city's Ten-Year Plan and church-led homeownership programs meant to give residents a lasting stake in their blocks. The stake had been real. The new loans, written against the value it had created, put it at risk again.

Albany responded before the worst of it. On August 4, 2008, at a bill signing in Queens, the borough that would file more foreclosures than any other, Governor David Paterson approved Chapter 472 of the Laws of 2008. The law required lenders to give ninety days' notice before beginning a foreclosure. Ninety days gave a household time to find a lawyer or a counselor and to ask for a modification before the case began. The law also created mandatory settlement conferences, in which a judge or referee would bring certain subprime borrowers and their lenders together to try to modify the loan before the case went forward. The law slowed the process and kept some families in their houses. It could not change the terms on which the houses had been bought. A household's claim to its ground is only as secure as the loan behind it, and in the outer boroughs that claim had been signed away a little at a time, at closing tables in 2004, 2005, and 2006.

Stuyvesant Town for Sale

Wealth was being built on borrowed money in Manhattan too, on the largest scale. In late 2006 the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company sold Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village to a partnership of the Manhattan developer Tishman Speyer and the investment manager BlackRock for $5.4 billion. At the time it was called the most expensive real estate deal in American history. The property was the complex MetLife had built after the Second World War on cleared Gas House District land between 14th and 23rd Streets east of First Avenue, under an agreement with the city reached in 1943, and opened in 1947. It had been built with city tax exemptions and the city's condemnation power, and for its first years MetLife had kept Black tenants out. It held roughly 11,200 apartments in some 110 buildings. For two generations it had housed police officers, teachers, nurses, and civil servants at regulated rents. By 2006 most of its apartments were rent-stabilized. Some sixty years after it opened, the insurer that had built it with public help sold it in the middle of the decade's credit boom.

The price depended on changing that. MetLife's offering memorandum, the document it circulated to bidders, projected that the complex would produce net operating income of $504 million a year by 2017. That was more than twice the $197.1 million the property would later net in a year. The buyers' plan, which they described openly, was to move apartments from

stabilized rents to market rents as tenants left. Each departure would let them renovate and re-rent at the going Manhattan price. Each apartment that turned over would raise the income stream that justified the purchase. Growth on that scale required far more than ordinary turnover. It required a large share of the complex's households to leave within about a decade. Every occupied apartment counted, in the memorandum's arithmetic, as revenue the owners had not yet collected. So the deal amounted to a forecast about how fast thousands of households would move out, priced and financed as though the forecast were certain.

The financing was layered in the way of the time. Of the money raised for the purchase, about $4.4 billion was debt, including a $3.0 billion senior loan, much of it pooled and sold to bond investors. BlackRock put in $112.5 million of equity in October 2006, about two cents for every dollar of the purchase price. Lenders and bondholders carried most of the rest. Reserve funds set up at the closing were meant to cover the gap between the rents the complex actually collected and the payments the debt required until turnover closed that gap. The reserves ran down quickly. By the fall of 2008, funds that had totaled several hundred million dollars at the closing had been drawn down to a fraction of that. Tenants did not leave as fast as the model required, and the rising rents the owners did charge drew challenges from tenants and their association. By March 31, 2009, BlackRock had written its remaining stake down to zero.

The default followed. On January 8, 2010, the owners missed a debt-service payment of roughly $16 million. The sum was small against the debt, well under 1 percent of what was owed, and it was enough. Later that month they agreed to hand the complex to their lenders. On February 16, 2010, the special servicer acting for the senior lenders began foreclosure. At the end of 2009, the $4.4 billion of acquisition debt had still been outstanding. About $5.4 billion of investors' and lenders' money had been staked on the expectation that tenants in a regulated complex would turn over, and the tenants had largely stayed. The foreclosure moved 11,200 apartments from one set of financial owners to another. The people living in them did not move at all.

The episode returned Stuyvesant Town to the question it had raised in the 1940s, when a private insurer used public powers to clear eighteen city blocks and then claimed the right to choose its tenants. In 2006 the question was whether the regulated status of the apartments was a public protection attached

to the buildings, or a temporary limit that a new owner could buy out by waiting. The buyers bet on the second answer, and they lost. Their loss came less from the tenants' legal victories than from the arithmetic of the purchase, which needed thousands of departures in a few years. The households that stayed in their apartments through 2008 and 2009 were, by doing so, defeating a business plan. The same events looked different from the homeowner's side of the crash. In Jamaica a family that could not pay lost its house. In Stuyvesant Town the owners could not pay, and the tenants kept their homes because the protection on their leases outlasted the loan.

Predatory Equity

The same bet was placed, at smaller scale and with fewer headlines, on tenement and walk-up buildings across the Bronx, Upper Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. In 2008 the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, a coalition of community housing groups, published two reports, a white paper in May and a longer study in October. They estimated that developers backed by private equity funds had bought about 90,000 rent-regulated apartments in the city in a few years, roughly eight times the number in Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village combined. The association's members were the nonprofit groups that built housing and organized tenants in those neighborhoods, and the purchases were taking place on their own blocks. The association called the strategy "predatory equity." Its point was that the deals required tenants to be displaced in order to pay.

The mechanism was simple. A building's value normally rests on the rent it collects. In these purchases, buyers paid prices based on the rents the building might collect once its apartments left regulation. Lenders financed those prices. The mortgage could be covered only if regulated tenants moved out and their apartments were re-rented at higher rents or removed from regulation altogether. The law of the time allowed that. Under the vacancy-decontrol provisions Albany had adopted in the 1990s, a vacant apartment could leave stabilization once its legal rent passed a set threshold. Landlords could reach the threshold through permitted increases on vacancy and for improvements. The threshold rose over time and stood at about $2,700 by the mid-2010s. Every long-term tenant paying a low regulated rent was therefore, on the buyer's spreadsheet, an obstacle to the building's projected income. A sitting tenant

who would not leave cost the owner money each month. The buildings at stake were in large part the old tenement and walk-up stock whose conditions the city had been regulating since the nineteenth century. Regulation had kept rents in them within reach of the people who lived there, and that same regulation was what the buyers had paid to escape.

The crash ended the wave and left its buildings stranded. Several of the firms most closely tied to the strategy failed or went bankrupt after 2008, among them Vantage, Ocelot, Pinnacle, and Dawnay Day. Their buildings went into foreclosures that ran for years. The owners could not pay their lenders, and the lenders did not want the buildings. During that time tenants lived with broken boilers, leaks, and unrepaired apartments, because no one with money had an incentive to fix them. A building in a long foreclosure had an owner on paper and no one responsible for it in practice. The condition resembled, on a smaller scale, the disinvestment of the 1970s, when buildings lost the attention of anyone with capital well before they lost their tenants. In the outer boroughs, owner-occupied houses fell into foreclosure when the borrower could not pay. In the walk-ups, the borrower was a fund, and the tenants who had never signed the loan bore much of the cost of its failure.

The rent laws came up for renewal in 2011, as they did every few years. Albany extended them with adjustments and kept vacancy decontrol in place. An apartment could still leave regulation once its rent crossed the line. That mechanism survived until 2019. Tenant organizers who had spent the downturn documenting failed predatory-equity buildings argued that the incentive behind those deals remained in the statute. As long as a vacant apartment could pass out of regulation, a buyer could still price a building on the assumption that its tenants would leave. The legislature did not change it.

September 15, 2008

Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy on September 15, 2008. It was the largest bankruptcy in American history. The same day, Merrill Lynch agreed to a sale to Bank of America that few had expected. Within days the federal government was lending to the insurer AIG and preparing to put hundreds of billions of dollars into the banks. The mortgages written in Jamaica and on the North Shore had been bundled into securities, and those securities had been bought, borrowed against, and insured by the firms whose collapse now threatened the

financial system. A homeowner in Rosedale and a trader in Midtown were linked by the same paper. The loans that had made the outer-borough house a risky asset had made the Manhattan balance sheet a risky one too, and the failure traveled back along the chain in both directions.

The city's budget was linked to that paper as well. In 2007 the average securities-industry salary in New York City, bonuses included, reached a record of nearly $400,000. That was about 6.8 times the average for jobs outside finance, which was $58,640. One securities worker, on average, earned what nearly seven other working New Yorkers earned together. The securities industry employed about 5 percent of the city's workers and paid close to a quarter of its wages. Income taxes, business taxes, and the spending of those salaries on apartments, restaurants, and services carried a share of the city's revenue far larger than the industry's headcount. A good bonus year swelled the city's receipts, and a bad one cut a hole in them that no other industry could fill. After the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, the city had spent three decades rebuilding its finances, and much of the rebuilding rested on the growth of Wall Street. That reliance now cut the other way.

In November 2008, the administration of Michael R. Bloomberg, mayor since 2002, published its forecast. City tax revenues would be $2.6 billion lower in fiscal 2009 than in the year before, and in fiscal 2010 they would be $3.1 billion below the fiscal 2008 level. The city's fiscal year begins on July 1, so the first of those years was already more than four months old when the forecast appeared. The city expected to lose 31,000 securities jobs and 147,000 private-sector jobs in all. The figures that followed confirmed the scale. Wall Street broker-dealers lost a record $54 billion across 2007 and 2008. In 2009, helped by federal rescue money and near-zero interest rates, they earned $61.4 billion. Their employees did not share that recovery evenly. Securities wages in the city fell 28.5 percent in 2009, and one of every six jobs the city lost in the recession was in the securities industry. Counts of the industry's job losses at their worst vary with the date of the report, from roughly 25,000 to 35,000. In August 2013, nearly five years after Lehman's failure, the city's securities industry employed 163,400 people. That was 25,600 fewer, or 13.5 percent fewer, than before the crisis. The firms had recovered their profits within a year. The jobs, and the payroll taxes that came with them, had not returned five years on.

The comparison with the 1970s is instructive because of how different the outcome was. In 1975 the city itself had been shut out of the credit markets, and its creditors had dictated its budget. The Daily News front page of October 30, 1975, had recorded Washington's refusal to help. In 2008 the institutions that failed were private. The federal government rescued them with a speed and scale never offered to the city thirty-three years earlier. The city's treasury took a large but survivable loss. The industry's profits returned within a year. The homeowners of southeast Queens and East New York, who had borrowed through the same system, received settlement conferences and some loan modifications, and many of them lost their houses. The order of rescue followed the order of importance the financial system assigned to its participants, and the borrowers at the bottom of the chain came last.

Zuccotti Park

On September 17, 2011, a few hundred people marched through the Financial District to protest the banks that had been rescued three years earlier. Unable to hold the streets around Wall Street itself, which the police had closed off, they settled in Zuccotti Park. The park is a granite plaza of about three-quarters of an acre on the block bounded by Broadway, Liberty Street, Trinity Place, and Cedar Street, a short walk from the Stock Exchange and across Church Street from the World Trade Center site, where the new towers were rising. The camp sat within sight of the firms it named and of the sixteen acres still being rebuilt after September 11. Some accounts place colonial New York's first coffeehouse, the King's Arms, on this block in 1696, when Liberty Street was Crown Street and Cedar was Little Queen. Within days the plaza held hundreds of sleepers and drew thousands of visitors. The encampment, which called itself Occupy Wall Street, became the first of what turned into a global Occupy movement, with camps in cities across the United States and abroad.

The site mattered legally. Zuccotti Park was a privately owned public space, a legal hybrid that zoning had produced across Manhattan since the 1960s. It was land owned by a private company and kept open to the public under terms set with the city. Its owner was Brookfield Office Properties. A public park in New York closes at night under Parks Department rules. This plaza, governed by a different set of terms, did not clearly close. For two months that ambiguity let a protest against private finance hold ground in the Financial

District on the strength of a public right attached to private land. For the owner, keeping the plaza open was an obligation that came with the property. For the protesters, the same openness was an entitlement they could exercise around the clock. The encampment built a kitchen, a medical tent, a sanitation system, and a lending library its members called the People's Library. It held general assemblies on the granite steps along Broadway. In its organization it behaved like a small settlement, with its own services and its own forum for decisions, set down on a few thousand square yards of someone else's property. It also generated complaints from neighbors and businesses about noise and sanitation, and pressure on the owner and the city to end it.

The end came at about 1 a.m. on November 15, 2011, hours before the Financial District's workday began. Police officers entered the park carrying notices from Brookfield and from the city. The notices declared that the park had become unsanitary and hazardous and that tents and structures had to be removed. The owner and the government acted together, each supplying the authority the other lacked: Brookfield as the holder of the land, the city as the holder of the police power. Officers and sanitation workers took down the encampment. The kitchen was dismantled and the People's Library was carted away. About seventy people were arrested. Protesters were told they could return without tents, tarps, or sleeping bags. Later that morning a judge issued a temporary restraining order allowing protesters back into the park pending a hearing. By then the plaza had been stripped of the structures that made it a camp. The encampment was never re-established, and camping and sleeping in the park remained barred.

The protesters had claimed that a space open to the public was open on the public's terms, including at night and including for people who slept there. The owner and the city answered that the openness was conditional and that the conditions were theirs to set. The second claim prevailed. The argument was an old one in the city's history of public ground. When Seneca Village was cleared for Central Park in 1857, the city had decided who counted as the public on a piece of land and who could be removed from it, and in 2011 the same decision was made on less than an acre in the Financial District. Occupy left behind no buildings and no legislation, though its language about the concentration of wealth outlasted the camp and entered the city's politics within two years. Its

two months in Zuccotti Park also clarified what a privately owned public space was. The public could use it. The public could not occupy it.

Stops

While Occupy argued over a single plaza, a much larger contest over public space was taking place on the sidewalks of the outer boroughs. Under Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly, who served through all twelve Bloomberg years, the police department sharply increased its use of a tactic it called stop, question, and frisk. An officer who reasonably suspected that a person had committed, was committing, or was about to commit a crime could stop that person, question them, and pat them down for weapons if the officer believed they were armed. Recorded stops rose from 97,296 in 2002 to a peak of 685,724 in 2011, then fell to 191,851 in 2013. The 2011 total was roughly seven times the 2002 figure, close to 1,900 stops for every day of the year. Across the twelve years of the Bloomberg administration, officers recorded 5,081,689 stops.

The New York Civil Liberties Union, which sued over the practice and analyzed the department's own records, published the patterns. About 87 percent of the people stopped in 2011 were Black or Latino. The stops clustered by precinct. The 75th Precinct, which covers East New York in Brooklyn, led the city in 2011 with 31,100 stops, an average of about eighty-five a day. The 94th Precinct, covering Greenpoint, recorded the fewest, 2,023. A person on the sidewalk in East New York that year lived in a precinct with about fifteen times as many recorded stops as one in Greenpoint. Officers frisked 55.7 percent of the people they stopped that year and found a weapon in 1.9 percent of frisks. Of every hundred people patted down, fewer than two were carrying a weapon of any kind. The 685,724 stops of 2011 turned up 780 guns, about one for every thousand stops. The department and the administration argued that the stops deterred people from carrying guns and that their concentration followed the concentration of violent crime. The city's homicide numbers had continued to fall through the 2000s. Critics answered that most of the people stopped were innocent of anything, that the stops fell on young Black and Latino men in their own neighborhoods, and that the yield of weapons was too small to justify the cost.

East New York's place at the top of the stop rankings should be read alongside its place at the top of the State Comptroller's foreclosure rankings a

year earlier. In the years after the crash, the same Brooklyn neighborhood led the city in mortgage failure and in police stops. Its residents were losing their claim to their houses through the courts while their claim to the sidewalk in front of those houses was being questioned hundreds of times a week. The housing market had treated these neighborhoods as places to sell expensive credit. The police department treated them as places where anyone on the street might be suspected. In both cases decisions made elsewhere determined the terms on which people could hold their ground at home. Neither decision was announced as a policy toward East New York. Each was the sum of thousands of transactions and encounters, recorded as data, and the data put the same neighborhood at the top of both lists.

The legal challenge came to judgment in the summer of 2013. The Center for Constitutional Rights had filed Floyd v. City of New York in federal court on behalf of men who had been stopped. After a nine-week bench trial, on August 12, 2013, Judge Shira A. Scheindlin of the Southern District of New York ruled that the city had violated the Fourth Amendment's protection against unreasonable searches and seizures and the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection. Her opinion ran 198 pages. "The City adopted a policy of indirect racial profiling by targeting racially defined groups for stops based on local crime suspect data," she wrote. The finding went to the heart of the department's defense. The administration had said the stops followed crime. The court held that steering stops toward groups defined by race, on the strength of descriptions of suspects, was itself a form of profiling. She stressed that she was ruling on whether the stops were constitutional, not on whether the tactic reduced crime. The ruling did not ban stops, which the Supreme Court had long permitted when based on reasonable suspicion.

In a separate remedial order issued the same day, Scheindlin appointed a federal monitor to oversee the department's reforms. She ordered changes to training, supervision, and the forms officers filled out after each stop, and she started a pilot program in which some officers would wear body cameras. The order placed an outside overseer between the department and the sidewalk, a check on how officers used the street that no city administration had volunteered. The Bloomberg administration appealed. By then the number of stops had already fallen by more than two-thirds from the 2011 peak, and the city's murder count kept declining as the stops fell. The appeal was still unresolved

when Bloomberg left office, and the decision whether to pursue it passed to his successor.

Two Cities

The 2013 mayoral campaign ran during the Floyd trial and the slow recovery from the crash. Bill de Blasio, the city's public advocate, built his candidacy on the argument that Bloomberg's twelve years had produced two New Yorks, which he called a "tale of two cities," borrowing the title of Dickens's novel. One was the city of rising towers, restored parks, and record real estate prices. The other was the city of stagnant wages, rising rents, and police stops. The phrase fit the evidence of the preceding five years: the bailed-out bank and the foreclosed house in Jamaica, the record securities salary and the stalled walk-up in the Bronx, the redeveloped waterfront and the sidewalk in East New York where stops ran to dozens a day. His opponent in the general election was Joe Lhota, a Republican who had served as chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

On November 5, 2013, de Blasio won with about 73 percent of the vote, 795,679 ballots, to Lhota's 24 percent, 264,420. He was the first Democrat elected mayor of New York since David Dinkins in 1989. In his concession, Lhota answered the theme of the campaign directly: "Despite what you might have heard, we are all one city." The two men had framed the election as a dispute over whether the city's division was real, and the voters who turned out answered by a margin of three to one. De Blasio spoke that night at the Park Slope Armory YMCA in Brooklyn. "I've spoken often about 'A Tale of Two Cities,'" he told the crowd. "Progressive changes won't happen overnight, but they will happen." About 26 percent of the city's registered voters had cast ballots. The landslide rested on roughly a quarter of the electorate.

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CHAPTER 29

Sandy and the Water's Return, 2012–2021

The Battery, 9:24 p.m.

At 9:24 p.m. on Monday, October 29, 2012, the tide gauge at the Battery recorded a water level of 13.88 feet. The station sits at the southern tip of Manhattan, where the Hudson meets the Upper Bay. Its previous record, 10.02 feet, had been set by Hurricane Donna in 1960, and it had stood for half a century. The new reading was measured above average low tide. A little over nine feet of it, 9.23 feet, was storm surge: seawater driven up the harbor by the wind and by the low pressure at the storm's center. The remaining four and a half feet or so was tide. Out on the North Shore of Long Island, at Kings Point in Nassau County, the gauge read 14.38 feet.

The margin mattered as much as the record. Donna's mark had stood for fifty-two years, and Sandy beat it by nearly four feet in a single evening. The timing mattered too. The surge reached its height close to the evening high tide, so that nine feet of wind-driven water rode on top of the four and a half feet the tide would have brought in anyway. The surge alone, arriving at low water, would have left a reading below Donna's. Coming when it did, it put the harbor higher against Lower Manhattan than any reading on record there.

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The storm that produced these numbers was Sandy, which had come north from the Caribbean as a hurricane and lost its tropical character off the mid-Atlantic coast. Just before it reached land, hurricane-hunter aircraft measured its central pressure at 940 millibars, the lowest ever recorded for an Atlantic storm making landfall north of Cape Hatteras. It came ashore on the evening of October 29 near Atlantic City, New Jersey, classified as post-tropical, and its tropical-storm-force winds reached nearly 1,000 miles from the center. At a buoy near the entrance to New York Harbor, instruments measured a wave of about thirty-two feet, the largest in the region since those records began in 1975. Newspapers and television had begun calling it Superstorm Sandy before it arrived, partly because the official categories no longer fit it. The name stuck, and it described something real. The storm was too large and too strange in its track to be measured by its wind alone, and the harm it did in New York came almost entirely from water.

The gauge at the Battery stands at the edge of a shoreline that New Yorkers had been moving outward since the seventeenth century. The streets nearest the East River in Lower Manhattan carry the names of a waterfront that had long since retreated from them: Pearl Street, then Water Street, then Front Street, then South Street, each laid on fill beyond the last. On the Hudson side, Battery Park City had been raised in the 1970s and 1980s on sand and excavated earth dumped behind a bulkhead in the river. The city's ground at its southern tip was largely made ground, and on the night of October 29 the harbor came over it.

Seawater poured into the low streets of the Financial District and down into the infrastructure beneath them. The harbor flooded, and so did the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, renamed for Governor Hugh L. Carey only a week earlier, which took in tens of millions of gallons of seawater until nearly two-thirds of each tube was under water. At Bellevue Hospital on First Avenue, the city's oldest public hospital, storm damage forced the evacuation of more than 725 patients. The flood had found the basements, the electrical vaults, and the pumps, the parts of the city that sit at or below the old waterline and keep everything above them running.

The reading at the Battery was the fact the city's engineers and insurers would return to for the next decade. It gave a number to the question every earlier chapter of this story had posed in a different form: how far out into the

water New York had claimed space, and who would bear the cost when the claim was tested. The storm answered that question with geography, and the answer was not evenly shared. Much of the worst harm came far from Lower Manhattan, on the city's outer shores, where the surge met neighborhoods of houses rather than office towers, and where people were at home.

Staten Island and Breezy Point

Sandy killed more than forty people in New York City, and roughly half of them died on Staten Island. Most of the Staten Island dead lived along the island's eastern shore, the low coastal strip that faces Lower New York Bay. Behind the beaches there, neighborhoods of single-family houses had been built on marshland and filled lots barely above the high-tide line. When the surge came over the beach, it entered those neighborhoods with nothing between them and the bay.

The city Health Department later studied the dead and found a pattern that had little to do with the storm's winds. Thirty-six people in the city drowned. Forty-eight percent of all who died were sixty-five or older. Most of the deaths from injury happened at home, in the places where people had chosen to wait out the storm or had been unable to leave. At least nine of those who drowned at home were found in a basement or had lived in a basement apartment. New York State as a whole counted forty-eight direct deaths, and the great majority of them were within city limits. New Jersey, where the storm made landfall and whose shore towns took the full force of its waves, counted twelve. The comparison says less about the storm than about the ground it crossed. The surge that came up Lower New York Bay was driven toward the shores of the largest city in the country, and in New York the low land along those shores was full of people.

The figures describe who was exposed. Older residents who had lived in their houses for decades, some of them alone, were less able to evacuate and less likely to get out once water entered the ground floor. The storm reached them in the lowest rooms of their own houses. Sandy did not kill randomly across the five boroughs. It killed in specific low places, among people who lived at street level or below it.

The common picture of a storm death is of someone swept off a road or struck by a falling tree. Sandy's toll in New York was mostly of another kind.

Most of the dead drowned, which is to say that the water itself did the killing, more than the wind or the debris it carried, and it did so in rooms the victims knew. The most dangerous place in the city that night was a ground floor or a basement on low land, and the people least able to leave such a place were the old.

At the western end of the Rockaway peninsula in Queens, in the community of Breezy Point, the flood set off a fire. It began around 8:30 p.m. on October 29, nearly an hour before the surge peaked at the Battery. Investigators later concluded that seawater had come into contact with electrical wiring at a house on Ocean Avenue and sparked the blaze. The fire spread from house to house through a neighborhood of closely built homes, driven by the storm's winds. It became a six-alarm fire.

The flood that started the fire also disabled the response. Breezy Point was served by volunteer fire companies, and their members found themselves trapped in their own station houses by floodwater roughly seven feet deep. City firefighters who reached the scene fought the flames standing in water up to their necks. Hydrants were useless or unreachable in the flooded streets, and the fire burned through the night. The first reports the next day said at least eighty homes had burned. The Fire Department's count settled at 122 destroyed, and later tallies ran a few higher; more than 120 houses were gone by morning. Photographs taken from the air on October 30 showed blocks reduced to foundations and chimneys, surrounded by the standing water that had made them impossible to save.

The two disasters at Breezy Point ran on the same clock. The fire was already burning while the surge was still rising toward its peak, so the water that had started it climbed around the houses as they burned, and the wind that drove the water also carried the flames from roof to roof. When the water fell back, it left the community with two kinds of ruin side by side: blocks burned to their foundations and blocks gutted by seawater. Each called for a different kind of rebuilding, and both fell on the same households in the same week.

Breezy Point and the east shore of Staten Island had a common feature that would shape what happened after the storm. Both were neighborhoods of owned homes on small lots near open water. Their residents held title to the land under them. They had mortgages, insurance policies, and property tax bills, and they had stakes in the land itself that tenants elsewhere in the city did

not. That ownership gave them choices in the recovery: to rebuild, to elevate, to sell. It also left them responsible for the cost of each choice, and dependent on how quickly the government programs written to pay for those choices could move.

Basements and Boilers

The Red Hook Houses sit on the Brooklyn waterfront south of the Gowanus Canal and west of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. They are the largest public housing complex in Brooklyn, twenty-eight buildings that were home to more than 8,000 people when Sandy arrived. The surge came across the low peninsula of Red Hook and into the development, and seawater filled its basements. The boilers that heated the buildings and the electrical systems that powered them were down there. The flood destroyed both. Putting the mechanical plant at the bottom of a building was standard practice. On a low peninsula at the edge of the harbor, it meant that a single flood could take out heat and power for an entire development at once.

For the tenants of Red Hook, the storm's damage was not an event of one night but a condition that lasted weeks. Without power, the elevators did not run, and older and disabled tenants on upper floors were stranded in their apartments. Without boilers, there was no heat and no hot water as November turned cold. On November 12, power came back to part of the complex, and the New York City Housing Authority brought in temporary equipment to supply heat while it worked to replace the boilers. Two weeks after the storm, the Authority confirmed that 3,600 residents of the Red Hook Houses still had no power and more than 4,000 had no heat or hot water. Nearly half the complex was still in the dark, and about half was without heat. For a household on an upper floor with a dead elevator, every trip for food, water, or medicine meant climbing and descending a dark stairwell. In some buildings hot water did not return for three weeks.

On November 15, tenants met and called for marches, rent strikes, and lawsuits against NYCHA. They were tenants of a public landlord, and the methods they reached for were the methods New York tenants had used against private owners for more than a century. A rent strike against NYCHA carried a particular edge. The Authority answered to the mayor and depended on federal

money, so withholding rent was as much a political demand on City Hall and Washington as it was pressure on a building manager.

Red Hook was the clearest case. Across the city's coastal edge, the systems that made tall buildings habitable had been placed at the bottom of them, and the bottom was where the water went. A private homeowner on Staten Island could at least decide whether to pump out a basement, hire an electrician, or leave. A NYCHA tenant could do none of those things. The tenant's heat, power, and water depended entirely on the Authority's capacity to replace equipment that had been sitting below sea level for decades, and on federal and city budgets that would pay for it.

The repair took years. Long after the storm, a truck-mounted temporary boiler was still parked behind one of the Red Hook buildings, connected by hose and cable to the apartments it heated. It had become a fixture of the grounds, the visible sign that an emergency arrangement of November 2012 had turned into a long-term one. NYCHA eventually committed federal recovery money to rebuild the development's systems above the flood line, with new boiler plants and raised electrical equipment. In October 2021, nine years after the surge, resiliency construction at the Red Hook Houses was still under way.

The public housing towers of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s had been built on the theory that the city could clear crowded ground and put its poorest residents in modern buildings with central heat, elevators, and plumbing that worked. That theory rested on the equipment in the basement. Sandy showed that for developments near the water, the equipment was the most exposed part of the building, and that the tenants who depended on it had the least power to protect it. The recovery of Red Hook was slow because NYCHA was already stretched before the storm, and because rebuilding a heating plant for twenty-eight buildings could not be done in a season. The tenants paid in cold apartments and stairwells, and they waited.

Rebuild or Retreat

For homeowners whose houses had been flooded or wrecked, the city's main answer was a program called Build It Back. It began in 2013 under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who served from 2002 through 2013, and was paid for with federal disaster recovery money passed through the city. Its purpose was to help owners repair their houses, rebuild them, or raise them above the new

flood elevations, and it drew more than 21,000 applicants from Staten Island, southern Brooklyn, the Rockaways, and other damaged neighborhoods.

The three options carried different consequences for the ground. Repair restored a house to what it had been before the storm. Rebuilding replaced a house too damaged to save. Elevation lifted a house so that its living space sat above the flood level the new rules required, which on a small lot could mean a bungalow set high on piles, with a long staircase where the front steps had been. All three kept the house on its lot.

The program moved with extraordinary slowness. Each applicant had to document ownership, damage, insurance payments, prior federal aid, and household income, and each house had to be inspected, assessed, and scoped before any work began. Federal rules against paying twice for the same damage required the city to reconcile every dollar an owner had already received. An owner waiting on that process could be paying a mortgage on a damaged house while living somewhere else, or living in a half-repaired house without knowing whether the program would eventually raise it. In February 2014, more than fifteen months after the storm, Build It Back had not rebuilt a single home with its federal funds.

Bill de Blasio took office as mayor in January 2014 and served through 2021. His administration overhauled the program, brought it under direct city management, and promised to finish the single-family work by the end of 2016. On March 31, 2015, the city Comptroller, Scott Stringer, published an audit of the program. It found that Build It Back had paid contractors $6.8 million for work that was incomplete or poorly documented, and that applicants had often been made to submit the same paperwork several times over. The audit described a program that was spending money without adequate controls while asking storm victims to prove their claims again and again. The end-of-2016 deadline passed with the work unfinished.

A later audit by the Comptroller's office measured the whole effort. It found that the Mayor's Office of Housing Recovery Operations, which ran Build It Back, had served only 36 percent of the original applicants. Many had dropped out, been found ineligible, or given up and made their own repairs. For those who stayed, projects took an average of three years from application to completion. At the end of 2016, the date by which the work was supposed to be done, nearly 1,600 homes, some 40 percent of the total, were still unfinished.

Put plainly, fewer than four in ten of the households that had asked the city for help received it through the program, and those who did waited, on average, three years from the day they applied. The delays grew out of the attempt to run a federal disaster grant, with its eligibility rules and its safeguards against duplicate payment, through city offices one house at a time, across thousands of lots in several boroughs. Every lot was its own case, with its own title, its own insurance history, and its own engineering problem, and the program treated each one that way.

Build It Back put people back where they had been. Its design assumed that the lots along the east shore of Staten Island, the bay side of the Rockaways, and the low streets of Gerritsen Beach and Sheepshead Bay would continue to hold houses, and that the houses could be made safer by raising them on piles or rebuilding them to stricter codes. That assumption was the default of four centuries of New York building, in which land claimed from the water was held and built on until something forced a change. A few hundred feet from some of the worst-hit blocks, a group of owners decided to break the pattern.

Oakwood Beach lies on Staten Island's east shore, behind a beach and a wetland that had been partly filled for housing in the twentieth century. It had flooded before, and in Sandy it flooded catastrophically. In 2013, Joseph Tirone, a real estate agent who owned a house in the neighborhood, led a committee of residents to ask whether the state would buy them out. When he put the question to his neighbors, he said later, "The entire place—200-plus people—all said yes."

The residents petitioned the state's Governor's Office of Storm Recovery to purchase their homes at their value before the storm, not at the depressed value of a flooded house in a flood zone. The pre-storm price was the heart of the bargain. A house that had been flooded to the ceiling, in a neighborhood that had just been through a catastrophe, was close to unsellable on the open market, and an owner who sold at its post-storm value would leave with too little to buy anywhere else. A buyout at the earlier value let a family pay off its mortgage and start over on higher ground. It also meant that the public, through the state, would pay the full former price of land that would never again hold a house.

The state agreed. Nearby Ocean Breeze joined the program, and the buyout became one of the first large managed retreats in the United States: the deliberate, publicly financed withdrawal of a residential neighborhood from a shore

that could no longer be defended at reasonable cost. The decision did not come from planners who had drawn a line on a map. It came from homeowners who had looked at their own lots and decided they did not want to rebuild there.

By 2016, New York State had bought about three hundred homes in Oakwood Beach for something over $120 million. City contractors demolished the houses, cleared the lots, and planted native marsh grasses in their place. Twelve owners refused to sell and stayed, their houses standing among the empty parcels. Each demolition removed a household that had paid property taxes and needed the city to plow and police its street. Each planted lot was also one less place the city would have to defend from the next storm. By 2022 the state had acquired 308 properties across its Staten Island buyout areas and demolished nearly all of them. Marsh plants spread into the open lots. Foxes and snapping turtles moved in, and deer and geese came to outnumber the people who remained.

The retreat raised questions its organizers had not fully anticipated about what the land would become. Residents who sold had been told the property would return to nature, to act as a buffer against future storms. In 2022, when part of the Oakwood Beach site was slated for a soccer complex, former residents objected. They had given up their homes on the understanding that no one would build on the land again, and a playing field, however modest, looked to them like a different bargain.

Oakwood Beach stands in the long history of New York's shoreline as an exception. For nearly four hundred years, from the first water-lot grants through the filling of the Hudson for Battery Park City, the city and its landowners had pushed land outward into the water and kept it. At Oakwood Beach, a few hundred households, paid at pre-storm value with public money, handed a piece of filled shoreline back. That it took a disaster, a residents' petition, and a state program to accomplish shows how strongly the city's habits ran the other way. Most flooded owners elsewhere chose to rebuild, and the city's own program was built to help them do it.

The Wall and the Map

In 2013 the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development launched a competition called Rebuild by Design. It invited teams of architects, engineers, and planners to propose ways of protecting the region's coastline from

the next storm. A team led by the Danish firm BIG, Bjarke Ingels Group, won with a plan called the BIG U. It proposed a continuous system of protection wrapping around Manhattan's lower half: down the West Side from West 57th Street, around the Battery, and up the East Side to East 42nd Street. The plan's designers presented its berms and walls as parkland, places for people to sit and walk that would also hold back water.

The full U was never funded. What the city built was a single segment of it on the East Side, called East Side Coastal Resiliency. Managed by the city's Department of Design and Construction at a cost of $1.45 billion, it runs about two and a half miles from Montgomery Street to East 25th Street, along a shore lined with public housing, cooperatives, and the FDR Drive. It is designed to protect more than 110,000 people from storm surge.

The project's central site was East River Park, a strip of lawns, ballfields, and a riverfront promenade between the FDR Drive and the river from Montgomery Street to East 12th Street. It had been built in the 1930s with the backing of Robert Moses, then the city's parks commissioner, as part of the wave of parks and highways that had given the Lower East Side its waterfront. The resiliency plan required closing the park, raising it on new fill, and rebuilding it on top of the flood barrier. The park closed for construction in the spring of 2020, and the project broke ground that fall. For years afterward, the Lower East Side's largest park was a construction zone.

The history gave the project its particular weight. The park along the river had been one of the public goods of the New Deal city, a stretch of waterfront handed to the tenements and housing projects behind it. The resiliency plan took that park out of use for years in order to protect the same neighborhood from the water. For the households behind it, the trade was a long absence of their park in exchange for a defense against the next surge.

The East Side work produced the city's first permanent flood defenses of any size in Manhattan. In July 2022, Mayor Eric Adams, who took office that January, opened the rebuilt Asser Levy Playground near East 25th Street. It included 320 feet of new floodwall and a seventy-nine-foot sliding floodgate, which could be rolled shut across an opening ahead of a storm. A gate of that kind sits open in ordinary weather and works only if someone decides, ahead of each storm, to close it, so the defense was a piece of public machinery as much as a wall. As of October 2026, major sections of East Side Coastal Resiliency

were finished and open to the public. Other parts of East River Park had yet to reopen, and the full project was expected to be completed in 2027.

The shrinking of the BIG U to a single East Side segment was itself a decision about which ground would be defended. A wall around all of Lower Manhattan would have protected the Financial District, Battery Park City, and the West Side, at a cost far beyond what the federal competition provided. A barrier on the East Side protected a dense residential shore, much of it public housing, where tens of thousands of tenants had gone without heat and elevators after Sandy. The rest of the U was left for future funding. The places that got a wall were the places the money reached, and everywhere else along the city's shoreline the defense was left to individual owners, to elevated houses, or to nothing.

A second sorting of the shore happened through insurance, and it was conducted on maps. The Federal Emergency Management Agency publishes Flood Insurance Rate Maps that divide the country into zones by flood risk. Owners of property inside the high-risk zone who hold federally backed mortgages must carry flood insurance, and the zone determines what they pay. New York City's maps had not been substantially revised since 1983. The version in force when Sandy struck had been issued in 2007, and it drew the floodplain using studies that predated the storm by decades.

In January 2015, FEMA released preliminary new maps for the city. They enlarged the floodplain by 42 percent over the 2007 maps. At 2010 population, the number of New Yorkers living inside it rose from about 218,000 to about 400,000, nearly double. For tens of thousands of homeowners in southern Brooklyn, southeast Queens, Staten Island, and the Rockaways, the new lines would have meant a mandatory insurance requirement for the first time, and for owners already inside the zone, higher premiums tied to a higher assessed risk.

The line mattered in both directions. An owner newly drawn inside it faced a new and recurring cost, and a house that would be harder to sell to a buyer who would inherit that cost. An owner left outside it faced no requirement at all, even if the water had reached the house in 2012, and was free to carry no coverage against the next flood.

The city did not accept the new maps. On June 26, 2015, it filed an appeal, arguing that errors in FEMA's models of storm surge and waves overstated

the flood risk across much of the city. On October 17, 2016, FEMA agreed to revise the maps. In announcing the agreement, the agency said that New Yorkers would "save tens of millions of dollars in flood insurance premiums" as a result of the appeal. Until the revised maps were finished, insurance rates and the requirement to buy coverage remained tied to the 2007 maps. Ten years after Sandy, those maps still determined which New Yorkers had to buy flood insurance.

The city's position held a tension it did not resolve. In one set of programs it was spending more than a billion dollars on floodwalls because the water had proved more dangerous than anyone had planned for. In another it was arguing that the federal government had drawn the danger too large. Both positions served real interests. The appeal protected working homeowners in modest neighborhoods from premiums that could have made their houses unaffordable to keep, and protected property values from the label of a flood zone. The effect was that the official boundary of risk, the line that told buyers, lenders, and owners where the water was likely to go, stayed where it had been drawn before Sandy proved it wrong.

September 1, 2021

On the night of September 1, 2021, the remnants of Hurricane Ida crossed the city. The storm had come ashore in Louisiana days earlier and weakened over land, but it still carried enormous moisture. In one hour at Central Park, 3.47 inches of rain fell, the most ever recorded there in that span of time. The National Weather Service issued its first flash flood emergency for New York City.

Ida's record was of a different kind from Sandy's. Sandy had been measured in feet of seawater at the shore; Ida was measured in inches of rain per hour, falling on the whole city at once. A sewer system can carry only so much water at a time, and what it could not take that night ran downhill and settled wherever the ground, or the building, was lowest.

Ida brought no surge. The danger came from rain falling faster than sewers, streets, and soil could carry it away, and it arrived inland, far from any shoreline. Water poured down subway stairways and flooded stations, and most of the transit system shut down. Highways became rivers, and drivers abandoned cars in rising water. The rain collected in the low places of neighborhoods that had

never been thought of as waterfront, and it found the lowest rooms in the houses there.

The day after the storm, officials counted twelve dead in the city. Eleven of them were in Queens, and ten had lived in basement apartments. The Health Department's later count reached fourteen deaths attributed to Ida, with ten or so drowned in unregulated basement apartments. In one case, the wall of a basement apartment in Queens gave way under several feet of water, and three people inside were killed. Others drowned as water rose through doors and windows at the front of their units faster than they could climb the stairs. Their apartments were unregulated, outside the city's housing and building codes.

The Health Department's analysis of the dead was precise about who they were. Seventy-one percent of those who died in Ida's basement flooding were Asian, and 71 percent had been born outside the United States. The department did not treat the deaths as accidents of weather. It tied them to a housing shortage that left people few choices other than illegal basement units. Families who could not afford a legal apartment rented space below grade in two-family houses across Queens, at rents they could manage, from owners who needed the income to carry their own mortgages. The arrangement had sheltered large numbers of New Yorkers in the decades since the immigration law of 1965 began refilling Queens. It had operated outside building codes because the city had not found a way to bring it inside them.

Sandy had killed at least nine people in basements, most of them near the water, and nearly half of all its dead were sixty-five or older. Ida killed more in basements, in neighborhoods miles from the shore, in apartments that the city's housing laws said did not exist, and its dead were mostly immigrants. The shift showed that the flood line in New York was no longer only the edge between the harbor and the land that had been filled into it. It ran also through the floor of every illegal basement apartment in the city, set by rainfall and by rent. The people who lived below it were the newest arrivals in the boroughs that had absorbed generations of newcomers, holding the lowest and cheapest space a crowded city offered. On September 1, 2021, water came into that space in the middle of the night, and about ten of the people living there did not get out.

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CHAPTER 30

Pre-K, Amazon, and the Pandemic, 2014–2021

Seats

In the summer of 2014, city outreach workers went to parades and parks looking for four-year-olds. They carried enrollment forms and the number of a new hotline. They stood at street fairs and playgrounds because the Department of Education had been given money for tens of thousands of full-day pre-kindergarten seats, and it was not yet clear that enough families knew the seats existed, or trusted that they would be good, to fill them by September.

The seats came from a campaign promise. Bill de Blasio, mayor from January 1, 2014, through the end of 2021, had run on a small income-tax increase for residents earning more than $500,000 a year, with the proceeds earmarked for universal pre-kindergarten. The city could not raise its own income tax without the state's consent, and Albany declined to grant it. Instead the state budget gave the city $300 million to add roughly 33,000 full-day seats. The money arrived without the tax, which removed the program's original argument about who should pay, and left the administration with a logistical problem of unusual size and speed.

The arithmetic of the first year was severe. The city had offered about 19,000 full-day seats in the 2013–14 school year, and the plan called for more than 53,000 by the following September, close to a tripling in a single summer. The state's $300 million came near the administration's own estimate of the annual cost, so money was not what limited the program in 2014. The limits were physical: rooms that could pass inspection, teachers certified to stand in them, and families who had already arranged care for the fall and had to be persuaded to change it.

The implementation plan the mayor released on January 27, 2014, put the cost at $340 million a year. It promised 53,600 children in full-day classes in the fall of 2014 and all 73,000 or so eligible four-year-olds in the 2015–16 school year. The seats had to exist somewhere physical. Some were in public school buildings, where principals found or freed rooms. Many more were in community-based organizations, the day-care centers, settlement houses, and church- and synagogue-affiliated programs that had long run part-day or subsidized care. Each needed a classroom that met code, a certified teacher, and a contract with the city, and much of the summer of 2014 was spent inspecting rooms and hiring.

The program's map was therefore the map of institutions that already held space. A neighborhood with a dense network of day-care centers and settlement houses, some of them descended from the Progressive Era movement that had planted settlements on the Lower East Side, could absorb new classrooms quickly. A neighborhood without them depended on whatever rooms its school buildings could spare. Pre-kindergarten required no new land, but it did require someone to have claimed and kept a room in a building long before 2014.

On November 12, 2014, de Blasio announced that 53,230 full-day seats were filled. The year before, the figure had been 19,163. Among the 52,741 children enrolled in the program in 2014–15, no racial or ethnic group was a majority: 37 percent were Hispanic, 30 percent Black, 17 percent white, and 13 percent Asian. By December 2015 the city reported more than 68,500 children enrolled, close to the full cohort.

The composition followed from the design. Earlier public pre-kindergarten had been limited and often targeted, and families who could pay had bought private programs. Pre-K for All was offered to every four-year-old regardless

of income, so it drew middle-class families who had previously paid tuition alongside families who had previously had nothing. For many households the saving was large, several thousand dollars a year or more, and it came without any test of eligibility. Hispanic and Black children together made up two-thirds of the first year's enrollment, yet the program was never defined as a measure for the poor, and that mattered politically. A service used across income lines acquires defenders across income lines, and pre-kindergarten became the one de Blasio initiative that later mayors had little reason to dismantle.

The program was the administration's clearest success, and the reasons it succeeded shaped what followed. It distributed a service rather than land. It asked nothing of property owners, required no change to what could be built on any lot, and displaced no one. The rooms were rented or reassigned, and the cost was a budget line. De Blasio had campaigned on the idea of two cities, one rich and one struggling, and in pre-kindergarten he found a measure that served both without forcing a choice between them. Housing, policing, and development would not allow that.

202 Bay Street

On the afternoon of July 17, 2014, police officers approached Eric Garner outside 202 Bay Street in Tompkinsville, on the North Shore of Staten Island, near the ferry terminal at St. George. Garner was forty-three and the father of six. The officers had stopped him on suspicion of selling loose cigarettes, single untaxed cigarettes sold on the sidewalk for less than the price of a pack. When he resisted being handcuffed, Officer Daniel Pantaleo put him in a chokehold and officers brought him down. Held face down on the sidewalk, Garner said repeatedly, "I can't breathe." He died that day. The city's medical examiner ruled the death a homicide.

The Police Department had banned the chokehold in 1993. A bystander's video of the encounter circulated within hours, and the phrase Garner repeated on the sidewalk became a slogan before the summer was out. On December 3, 2014, a Staten Island grand jury declined to indict Pantaleo. Demonstrations followed that night and for weeks after, in Manhattan and across the country, with marchers lying down in streets, train stations, and department stores.

The city had seen such protests before. The assault on Abner Louima in a Brooklyn station house in 1997 and the police shooting of Amadou Diallo

in 1999 had each drawn months of demonstrations against the department in the years when the policing of the 1990s was taking hold. What set Garner's case apart was the video. The encounter on Bay Street did not have to be reconstructed from conflicting testimony; anyone could watch it, and millions did, which is why a grand jury's decision in one borough could fill streets in cities that had never heard of Tompkinsville.

The episode's place in this book lies partly in the offense. A sidewalk sale of loose cigarettes was among the smallest commercial transactions in the city, a claim on a few square feet of pavement outside a beauty supply store. The trade existed because a single cigarette with no tax paid on it could be sold below the per-cigarette price of a legal pack, and it served customers who could not or would not buy a whole pack at once. Enforcing it belonged to the quality-of-life policing that had been built into the department since the 1990s, the theory that small disorders on the street invited larger ones. That theory had always been about who could occupy public space and on what terms, and on Bay Street its application to one man ended in his death.

De Blasio had campaigned against the department's stop-and-frisk practices, and at the end of January 2014 his administration moved to drop the city's appeal of the August 2013 federal ruling in Floyd v. City of New York, which had found the stops unconstitutional as the department carried them out, and to accept the court's remedies. Stops fell sharply. The Garner case showed that ending one practice had not settled the question of how the police would use the street. The mayor's public remarks after the grand jury's decision, in which he spoke of warning his own son, who is Black, about encounters with police, opened a breach with police unions that never fully closed during his two terms.

The case moved slowly afterward. In July 2015 the city settled with Garner's family for $5.9 million. Federal prosecutors announced in July 2019 that they would not bring civil rights charges. After a departmental trial, Police Commissioner James O'Neill fired Pantaleo on August 19, 2019, five years after the encounter on Bay Street. The money came from the city's treasury and the dismissal from its police commissioner. Neither a state nor a federal criminal charge was ever brought, and the only proceeding in which the officer's conduct was formally judged took place inside the department that employed him.

A New Contract

In May 2014 the administration published Housing New York, a ten-year plan to build or preserve about 200,000 affordable apartments. Most of the plan's units would come from preservation, the city using subsidies and regulatory agreements to keep existing buildings affordable, and from new construction financed through the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. The more consequential piece was a change in the rules for private building.

The Bloomberg administration had rezoned a large share of the city and offered developers extra floor area in exchange for affordable units, a bargain developers could take or leave. The 2005 rezoning of the Greenpoint and Williamsburg waterfront had worked that way, and the towers that rose along the East River showed both the incentive's reach and its limit: a developer who did not want the bonus could build without it. De Blasio's planners proposed to make the bargain compulsory wherever the city rezoned for substantially more housing. On March 22, 2016, the City Council approved modified versions of two proposals, Mandatory Inclusionary Housing and a companion text amendment called Zoning for Quality and Affordability, which loosened height and parking rules to make affordable and senior housing easier to build. The vote on Mandatory Inclusionary Housing was 42 to 5.

The law required a permanently affordable share of new housing in medium- and high-density areas rezoned for more residential development. It applied to developments of more than ten units or 12,500 zoning square feet, and buildings of ten to twenty-five units could pay into an affordable housing fund instead of building the units on site. The developer chose among several options that traded the share of affordable units against how deeply discounted they would be. The Council added a deep-affordability option aimed at households averaging 40 percent of Area Median Income.

The change was larger than its technical language suggested. Since the Zoning Resolution of 1916, the city's zoning code had told owners how tall and how bulky they could build and what uses they could put on a lot. Mandatory Inclusionary Housing extended the code to a question it had never answered directly: who would be able to afford to live in what was built. The permanence of the requirement mattered as much as the share. Earlier subsidy programs had often carried affordability terms that expired after a set number of years,

returning the units to the market. Under the new law, an affordable apartment created through a rezoning stayed affordable for the life of the building.

The deep-affordability figure carried the political argument. Area Median Income was set for a region that included the city's wealthier suburbs in the Hudson Valley, so the median ran well above the incomes in many of the neighborhoods the city proposed to rezone. An apartment affordable at 60 or 80 percent of that median could cost more than a typical household on the block could pay. Critics in several neighborhoods argued that the mandatory share would house newcomers while the market-rate towers it accompanied raised rents in the older buildings around them. Supporters answered that without rezoning there would be no affordable units at all, only the same rising rents and no new supply.

The first test came in East New York, in eastern Brooklyn, a neighborhood of row houses, walk-ups, public housing, and industrial lots along Atlantic Avenue and the Long Island Rail Road. On April 20, 2016, the Council approved the East New York rezoning 45 to 1, covering roughly two hundred blocks and creating the city's first Mandatory Inclusionary Housing area. The one vote against came from Inez Barron, whose district lies just south of the rezoning area. The local member, Council Member Rafael Espinal, had negotiated commitments for schools, parks, and anti-harassment protections, and de Blasio credited him in his statement. "The East New York neighborhood plan represents a new contract with our communities," the mayor said.

The administration planned similar rezonings for about fifteen neighborhoods, most of them lower-income areas in the outer boroughs and upper Manhattan where the land was cheap enough to make the mandatory share pay. That geography drew its own criticism: the policy produced affordable units mainly where rezoning would also bring the most change to existing residents, while higher-income neighborhoods with good transit were rarely proposed for upzoning. By 2019, according to the housing commissioner, Louise Carroll, the Council had approved projects under the program containing more than 6,000 permanently affordable homes. Against a citywide shortage measured in hundreds of thousands of apartments, the number was real and modest. The law had made the affordable share a condition of the right to build more on a lot. It had not made rezoning welcome on the blocks where it was proposed.

* * *

The other half of the housing program concerned tenants already in place. In his State of the City address in February 2017, de Blasio told New Yorkers earning up to $50,000 a year for a family of four that "you will now be guaranteed a lawyer to go with you into housing court."

Housing court was where tenure in the city was decided, case by case, in crowded courtrooms in each borough. Landlords nearly always appeared through counsel. Most tenants had gone in alone, and a tenant facing a nonpayment or holdover petition without a lawyer was at a large disadvantage in a proceeding governed by technical rules about notices, repairs, and rent histories. The Right to Counsel NYC Coalition, an alliance of tenant organizers and legal services groups, had campaigned for three years to make representation a guarantee. The campaign belonged to a line of tenant organizing that ran back through the rent strikes of the early twentieth century, and it rested on the same observation those strikes had made: a lease meant only as much as a tenant's ability to enforce it, and the forum for enforcement had been built around the party that could afford to hire help.

The Council passed Intro 214-b on July 20, 2017, and de Blasio signed it on August 11, 2017, as Local Law 136. New York became the first city in the country to commit to providing lawyers to all tenants facing eviction in housing court who met the income test, set at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The guarantee was phased in by zip code, beginning with neighborhoods that had high eviction rates, and reached full citywide coverage by July 2022. For five years, then, whether a tenant facing eviction had a guaranteed lawyer depended on the zip code of the apartment, a geography that tracked the city's eviction map because the program was designed to reach the hardest-hit blocks first. The city's Office of Civil Justice reported annually on representation rates and case outcomes. Tenant organizers treated the law as a tool as well as a protection: a tenant with a lawyer could raise repair claims, challenge illegal rent increases, and drag out cases that landlords had counted on winning by default.

Second Avenue

On January 1, 2017, the first passengers rode the Q train north from 63rd Street onto the Second Avenue Subway. The line added new stations at 72nd, 86th,

and 96th Streets and an expanded station at Lexington Avenue and 63rd Street, at a cost of about $4.5 billion. For roughly two miles of tunnel and three new stations, it was among the most expensive subway construction in the world.

The line had been promised for nearly ninety years. It was proposed in 1929 as part of the expansion that produced the Independent system and shelved after the crash. The Second Avenue elevated was torn down in the early 1940s on the understanding that a subway would replace it. Ground was broken again in 1972, under the program of the newly consolidated Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and work stopped in 1975 when the money ran out in the fiscal crisis. Sections of tunnel built then sat sealed under the avenue for decades. Tunneling resumed in earnest in 2007. The line's history is a record of the city's credit: each time public money ran short, in 1929 and in 1975, the Second Avenue subway was among the first commitments dropped, and its revival in the 2000s came only after the city's finances had recovered from the last of those collapses.

The MTA had projected 200,000 weekday riders on the first phase. A traffic analysis in early 2018 put average daily ridership at about 190,000, and in May the authority added an extra Q train in each direction. Much of that ridership came off the Lexington Avenue line, three blocks west, which had carried the East Side's crowds in a single trunk since the original subway opened in 1904. Residents east of Third Avenue, who had walked several long blocks to reach the Lexington trains, now had stations on their own avenue, and within a year the new line was carrying nearly the number of riders its planners had forecast.

The contrast with the city's earlier transit building is the measure of what had changed. The first subway, opened on October 27, 1904, and the Dual Contracts lines of 1913 had been built into open land or thinly settled districts, and the new stations had created neighborhoods where farms had been. The Second Avenue line ran under one of the densest residential districts in the country, among apartment towers that already stood, and it relieved crowding rather than opening ground. A century earlier, the city had built a line from City Hall to 145th Street in four years. In 2017 it took a decade of construction, years of disruption to businesses on Second Avenue, and roughly a billion and a half dollars per station to extend service thirty blocks along a corridor that had been planned since the Hoover administration. The later phases, north to

125th Street and south toward Lower Manhattan, remained in planning and funding negotiation when the first phase opened.

Long Island City

In November 2018, after a year-long contest in which more than 200 metropolitan areas had bid, Amazon announced that it would split its second headquarters between Long Island City, Queens, and Northern Virginia. Each site was expected to employ more than 25,000 people.

The Queens site lay along the East River waterfront that the city had rezoned in 2001 and had watched fill with residential towers through the following decade. Long Island City had been factory and warehouse ground for much of the twentieth century, and its conversion to apartment towers was one of the plainest examples of industrial land changing hands after the working waterfront emptied. Governor Andrew Cuomo had pursued the company openly. Before the selection he joked, "I'll change my name to Amazon Cuomo if that's what it takes." The package offered to the company came to nearly $3 billion in state and city incentives, of which $1.525 billion was offered by New York State in grants and tax credits, with the rest in city and state tax benefits available under existing programs.

The opposition formed quickly and drew on arguments this book has traced for a century. Local officials, tenant organizers, unions, and residents objected to public money going to one of the richest companies in the world. They warned that 25,000 jobs at high salaries would drive up rents in western Queens, where the Queensboro Corporation's garden apartments and the Queensbridge Houses, the country's largest public housing development, stood within reach of the site. They objected to the terms of the deal, which had been negotiated privately and structured to use a state process that would bypass the city's land-use review, in which the Council would have had a vote. Supporters pointed to the tax revenue and jobs the company projected.

The objection to the procedure had deep roots. Robert Moses had built his bridges and highways through public authorities whose decisions did not pass through the city's ordinary channels of approval, and the reaction against that model had produced, over the following decades, a land-use review in which community boards, borough presidents, and the Council each had a formal say. A state process that removed the Council from a decision about

one of the largest development projects in the city's recent history looked, to its opponents, like a return to the arrangement the city had spent half a century undoing.

On February 14, 2019, Amazon withdrew. Its statement said that a number of state and local politicians "have made it clear that they oppose our presence and will not work with us." The company would expand its presence in the city in later years through ordinary office leases, without a subsidy package. The withdrawal turned a waterfront parcel and a subsidy figure into a referendum on who development in New York was for. The question had been asked about Title I, about Atlantic Yards, about Hudson Yards. The difference in 2019 was that the opponents won, and won before any ground was broken, which made Long Island City a point of reference for every large development proposal that followed.

Albany, 2019

The year of the Amazon withdrawal was also the year tenant organizers won the largest change in state rent law in a generation. The opening came from the November 2018 elections, which gave Democrats firm control of the State Senate. For decades the Senate's Republican majority, with members from upstate and the suburbs, had been the chamber where the real estate industry's interests in rent regulation were protected and where renewals were negotiated down. Under the arrangement that dated to the emergency laws of 1920, rent regulation had always lapsed unless renewed for a fixed term, and each expiration date became a point of leverage.

In mid-June 2019, Cuomo signed the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act. Among other changes, the law made rent regulation permanent and ended vacancy decontrol, the provision, in force since the 1990s, that let landlords remove apartments from stabilization once rents passed a threshold. It also tightened the rules under which landlords could raise regulated rents. Those mechanisms had driven the loss of stabilized apartments for a quarter century and had underwritten the speculative purchases of rent-regulated buildings before 2008, when investors bought on the expectation of converting apartments to market rates. The 2006 sale of Stuyvesant Town, the Metropolitan Life complex built under the 1943 agreement with the city, had been the largest of those bets.

The law changed the economics of roughly a million stabilized apartments. Tenant groups called it the strongest set of protections since rent regulation began. Landlords, particularly owners of older buildings with many stabilized units, argued that the restrictions on rent increases left them unable to pay for repairs and capital improvements, and that apartments would sit vacant rather than be renovated at a loss. Owners' groups challenged the law in federal court. The arrangement New York had lived with since 1920, regulation justified as a response to emergency and therefore always temporary, had ended. Rent stabilization was now a permanent feature of property in the city.

The state law and the city's programs fit together. A stabilized tenant facing eviction could now go into housing court with a lawyer, in the zip codes the guarantee had reached, and argue under a statute that had closed the main routes by which rents were pushed out of regulation. Mandatory Inclusionary Housing addressed apartments that did not yet exist. The 2019 law addressed the ones that did, and its effect on the housing stock was far larger, because the city's regulated apartments numbered in the hundreds of thousands while its mandatory affordable units numbered in the thousands.

Off the Island

On October 17, 2019, the City Council approved by a wide margin an $8.7 billion plan, backed by de Blasio and the Council Speaker, Corey Johnson, to close the jails on Rikers Island by 2026 and replace them with four borough jails near the courthouses in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. Staten Island got none.

Rikers was a 400-acre complex of ten jails in the East River, much of it on landfill. Legally the island was part of the Bronx, but it was reached only by a bridge from Queens, near the runways of LaGuardia Airport. The city had long used its smaller islands for institutions it preferred to keep out of sight, and Rikers was the largest and most durable of those arrangements. Its isolation had made it convenient for the city and hard on everyone it held, who were mostly people awaiting trial rather than serving sentences. Visitors, lawyers, and court transports all passed through a single bridge, and the time and distance between a detainee and a courtroom had become part of the argument for closing it. Reports on violence and conditions in the jails had accumulated for years.

The plan was possible because the jail population had fallen. It had peaked at nearly 22,000 in 1991, at the height of the crime wave and the drug arrests that accompanied it. It stood at about 11,000 in 2014 and about 7,000 in 2019. The borough jails were planned for about 3,300 beds in all, fewer than half the number of people held in 2019, so the plan was a bet on continued decline as much as a construction program. Three of the four sites, in downtown Brooklyn, in Kew Gardens in Queens, and in lower Manhattan near Chinatown, were existing jails to be heavily rebuilt. The Bronx facility would be new.

The decision moved the city's jail system off an island and into neighborhoods, and residents near several of the sites objected to the height and bulk of the buildings proposed. The question of where to put a jail was a land-use question like any other, settled through the same review procedure that governed rezonings, and it produced the same contest between a citywide goal and the blocks that would bear it. The placement near the courthouses was the point of the design: detainees would be held a short walk or elevator ride from the rooms where their cases were heard. It also meant that the buildings would rise in the civic centers of their boroughs, among offices, shops, and apartments, where the city's decision about what to do with the people it detained would be visible every day.

Corona

On Sunday, March 1, 2020, Cuomo announced New York's first confirmed case of COVID-19, a thirty-nine-year-old health care worker in Manhattan who had returned from Iran on February 25. Genomic studies later showed that the virus had already been circulating in the city since at least January, introduced mostly from Europe, unseen because testing was scarce. By the time the first case was confirmed, community spread was underway.

The city moved through March in stages. Schools closed in mid-month, and the pre-kindergarten classrooms assembled so quickly in 2014 emptied along with the rest. On March 20, de Blasio called New York the nation's "epicenter." When the state's PAUSE order, which closed nonessential businesses and directed residents to stay home, took effect on March 22, the city counted about 24,000 positive cases and more than 200 deaths. Three weeks had separated the first confirmed case from the order, and the count of 24,000 reflected the tests available more than the extent of infection. On March 25, officials said

thirteen COVID-19 patients had died at Elmhurst Hospital in Queens in a single twenty-four-hour period.

When the city first released case data by neighborhood on April 1, the worst-hit neighborhood was Corona, Queens, a few stops from Elmhurst on the 7 line. The Flushing line had been one of the Dual Contracts routes that turned Queens farmland into neighborhoods for the working class a century earlier, and in 2020 it ran through the center of the epidemic. The first case had been a Manhattan health worker. The worst of the outbreak was in western and central Queens and in the Bronx, which by most measures suffered the worst death rates of any borough. Deaths passed 2,000 in the first week of April, and by late summer the city's toll was somewhere above 20,000.

The geography of the dead followed the geography of housing and work. Corona, Elmhurst, and Jackson Heights were among the neighborhoods that post-1965 immigration had refilled, with households from Latin America and South Asia living several to an apartment, families sharing rooms, and tenants renting unregistered basement and cellar units. Many residents worked jobs that could not be done from home: in restaurant kitchens, in grocery stores, on construction sites, in hospitals and nursing homes, driving deliveries and livery cars, cleaning offices that stayed open. When the PAUSE order sent office workers home, the people who kept the city fed and supplied went to work on buses and subways and came home to crowded apartments. The Bronx had the city's lowest incomes and among its highest rates of the chronic illnesses that made the virus deadlier. Space determined exposure. An apartment with a room for each person allowed a sick resident to isolate. An apartment with six adults in two bedrooms did not.

The basement and cellar units were the oldest problem in this picture. The tenement laws of the nineteenth century and the Tenement House Act of 1901 had been written largely to regulate air, light, and the number of people in a room, and the unregistered apartments of Queens were the twenty-first-century form of the dwellings those laws had tried to abolish. A housing market that produced too few legal apartments for the people who needed them had produced illegal ones instead, and in the spring of 2020 the crowding inside them became a measure of who would live.

The other side of the ledger was departure. Residents with second homes or the means to rent one left Manhattan for the Hudson Valley, Long Island,

and New England in the spring of 2020, and the emptying of the wealthier blocks of the Upper East and Upper West Sides, visible in shuttered windows and in mail-forwarding requests, became a story in its own right. Leaving was a privilege of property and of work that could be done anywhere. Those who stayed by necessity were disproportionately the people the virus killed.

* * *

The pandemic froze the city's housing courts. In March 2020 the state halted residential evictions, and through a sequence of executive orders and state laws most eviction cases remained on hold well into 2021. Tenants who lost work stopped paying rent in large numbers, and arrears accumulated to sums that small landlords in particular could not carry. The right to counsel, then still being phased in by zip code, had been designed for a court that was operating; for more than a year it stood mostly idle alongside it. The moratorium kept hundreds of thousands of households in their apartments during the worst of the crisis. It did not cancel the rent they owed, and the question of who would absorb the debt, tenants, landlords, or the public through relief funds, was left for after the emergency.

June

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis by a police officer who knelt on his neck while he said that he could not breathe. Within days, protests reached New York, in the middle of a city still largely shut down. Crowds gathered on the plaza outside Barclays Center at Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, at Foley Square, and in Union Square, and marched across the bridges and up the avenues. Some nights brought clashes with police, burned police vehicles, and looting in Midtown and in the Bronx. For about a week in early June, de Blasio imposed a nighttime curfew. Police tactics against protesters, including the encirclement of marchers, drew complaints and lawsuits.

The gathering places carried their own histories. The Barclays Center plaza stood on the Atlantic Yards site, assembled by the state through eminent domain over neighborhood opposition, and a space designed as the forecourt of an arena became, for those weeks, the main assembly point for protest in Brooklyn. Foley Square lay among the courthouses and city offices of lower Manhattan. Union Square had served as a rallying ground for labor and polit-

ical demonstrations for well over a century. Protesters chose ground where they could be seen by the institutions they were addressing.

Eric Garner's words on Bay Street six years earlier returned as the movement's slogan, and in June the state legislature passed a statewide ban on police chokeholds named for him. It also repealed a provision of state law that had kept police disciplinary records confidential. Protesters camped near City Hall through the end of June, demanding cuts to the Police Department's budget during the city's budget negotiations. The budget adopted that summer shifted some functions and spending out of the department, though by how much remained in dispute.

The protests took place on streets that the pandemic had emptied of their ordinary traffic. Their intensity drew partly on the same facts the epidemic had exposed: Black and Latino New Yorkers had died of the virus at higher rates, had lost work in larger numbers, and lived in the neighborhoods where police stops had been concentrated for decades. The movement made the street itself the object of dispute once again, who could gather on it, who was policed on it, and how the city should spend its money there.

* * *

The election to choose de Blasio's successor was held under rules New Yorkers had never used. In November 2019 the city's voters had approved a charter amendment establishing ranked-choice voting in primaries and special elections. On June 22, 2021, in the first citywide use of the system, Democratic primary voters could rank up to five candidates for mayor. If no candidate won a majority of first choices, the last-place candidate was eliminated and those ballots were redistributed to their next choices, round by round, until someone had a majority. Under those rules a voter's second and third choices could decide the outcome, and candidates had reason to court the supporters of their rivals rather than simply defeat them.

The field was large. Eric Adams, the Brooklyn borough president and a former police captain, campaigned on public safety at a moment when shootings had risen from their historic lows, and he drew his strongest support from Black and Latino voters in the outer boroughs, particularly in southeast Queens, central Brooklyn, and the Bronx. Kathryn Garcia, a former sanitation commissioner, ran as a manager who knew how city agencies worked. Maya

Wiley, a civil rights lawyer and former counsel to de Blasio, consolidated much of the progressive vote late in the race. Others, including the former presidential candidate Andrew Yang, faded in the final weeks.

The count took weeks, because absentee ballots had to arrive and be verified before the ranked rounds could be run, and an early preliminary tabulation released by the Board of Elections had to be withdrawn and redone. When the final rounds were completed in July, Adams led Garcia by a narrow margin, after Wiley's ballots had been redistributed. He won the general election that November against the Republican nominee, Curtis Sliwa, by a wide margin, and prepared to take office on January 1, 2022.

The results mapped onto the city that this chapter has described. Adams ran strongest in the neighborhoods where homeowners and renters of modest means lived far from Manhattan, many of them where the virus had hit hardest and where shootings had risen most. Garcia and Wiley ran strongest in Manhattan and in the gentrified neighborhoods of brownstone Brooklyn and western Queens. The divide followed lines of income, race, and distance from the center that had been drawn by the subway, the mortgage underwriter, and the rent law over the course of a century.

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CHAPTER 31

Who Gets to Stay, 2022–2026

The Tents on the Airfield

In early January 2024, ahead of a heavy storm, the city moved nearly 500 families, about 2,000 people, out of a tent shelter at Floyd Bennett Field and into a high school for the night. Floyd Bennett Field had opened in 1931 as the city's first municipal airport, on the edge of Jamaica Bay in southeastern Brooklyn. It had not handled commercial traffic in generations. By the winter of 2023–24 its open ground held large shelters for families who had crossed the southern border, made their way to New York, and asked the city for a bed. When a storm approached, the families were bused inland overnight and then returned.

The same week, on January 9, 2024, the first families affected by a new rule reached the end of their shelter stays and had to apply again. The rule, announced three months earlier, limited migrant families with children to sixty days in a given placement. Once the sixty days ran out, a family had to leave and reapply. A second placement might be in another borough, which could mean a different school for the children. The tents on the airfield and the queues of reapplying families were the visible end of a policy the city had been building since the spring of 2022, when asylum seekers began arriving in numbers no one in City Hall had planned for.

The mayor presiding over this was Eric Adams, a former police captain and Brooklyn borough president, who took office on January 1, 2022. He had campaigned on public safety. He inherited a city with rent arrears unpaid from the pandemic, office towers that workers had not fully returned to, and a shelter system already carrying tens of thousands of homeless New Yorkers. Within months the arrivals had become the defining problem of his administration. More than 100,000 asylum seekers reached the city between April 2022 and August 2023. By mid-March 2024 city officials put the total since the spring of 2022 at more than 183,000. Many of them moved on to other cities or found their own lodging. The rest entered the shelter system. At one point in 2023 the city was sheltering about 65,000 migrants, 15,000 of them single men.

The asylum seekers were not the first large wave of newcomers to arrive in the harbor with nothing, but they arrived into a different legal arrangement. In 1855 the state's emigration commissioners had opened Castle Garden, and in 1892 the federal government had opened Ellis Island. Both were depots built to receive arrivals, process them, and send them into the city or onward. Neither exercised any lasting claim on the city's housing. There was no Castle Garden in 2022. The nearest thing New York had to a reception depot was the municipal shelter system, created under the Callahan consent decree for homeless New Yorkers, which obliged the city to provide a bed to anyone who asked for one. The decree made no distinction between a person evicted from a Bronx apartment and a family that had arrived the night before at the Port Authority Bus Terminal. In practice, the arrivals of 2022 through 2024 turned a guarantee written for the city's own poor into the country's largest reception program for asylum seekers.

The city met the demand through the emergency procurement of space. It leased hotel rooms in Midtown and the outer boroughs, raised large tent structures, and converted public buildings. The hotels were partly a product of the pandemic, which had emptied them of tourists. The tents were a sign that hotel space alone could not keep up. Each site was a local fight over a particular piece of ground. Residents objected to shelters near their schools and parks. Shelter operators competed for contracts. Asylum seekers themselves were moved from one site to another according to capacity. The airfield on Jamaica Bay, beside water that had flooded Brooklyn's southern shore little more than a decade before, was where those pressures came to rest.

By the second half of 2023 Adams had begun to limit the guarantee. In September 2023 the city cut shelter stays for single adult migrants to thirty days, after which they had to reapply. On October 16, 2023 he announced the sixty-day limit for families with children. The stated purpose was to push people toward leaving the system, either for housing of their own or for other cities, and to open beds for new arrivals. The cost of the rule fell on the people it moved. Advocates argued that sixty days was too short a time to find an apartment in a city with low vacancy rates, especially for people who in most cases could not yet work legally.

The arrivals also changed the city in ways that had nothing to do with shelter beds. In November 2023, migrant children raised public-school enrollment for the first time in eight years. The school system had been losing students since before the pandemic, as families left for the suburbs or other states and birth rates fell. Classrooms that had been emptying in neighborhoods with large shelter populations began to fill again. Language support had to be found mid-year. The rise in enrollment was small against a system of nearly a million children, but it reversed a trend that had been central to planning arguments about school budgets, building closures, and class size.

Rewriting the Guarantee

On March 15, 2024 the city and the Legal Aid Society, which represented homeless New Yorkers under the decree, announced a settlement in the right-to-shelter case. The settlement left the general shelter mandate in place for the city's homeless. It allowed the city, however, to limit newly arrived adult asylum seekers to thirty-day stays, or sixty days for younger adults, after which they would have to show extenuating circumstances to remain. Families with children were not covered by the new limits, though the separate sixty-day rule continued to apply to them.

City Hall's chief counsel, Lisa Zornberg, presented the change as a response to circumstances no one had foreseen. "When the original Callahan settlement was reached," she said, "no one could have foreseen the migrant crisis New York City has faced for the past two years." Adams was more direct. "We have been clear since day one," he said, "that the right to shelter was never intended to apply to large-scale migrant populations arriving without housing or legal work status."

The settlement was a significant event in the history of the city's obligations to its homeless. Since 1981, the city had operated on the premise that shelter was a claim any person could make simply by being homeless in New York. Mayors had disputed the cost and the conditions. Some had tried to tighten eligibility. None had succeeded in narrowing the basic guarantee by court-approved agreement. The 2024 settlement sorted claimants by arrival date and immigration status. A homeless man evicted in the Bronx kept his claim on a bed for as long as he needed it. A single adult asylum seeker who arrived in the same month could hold a bed for thirty days, and then had to make his case again.

The Legal Aid Society agreed to the change because the alternative was a court fight that the city might win outright, removing the guarantee altogether. The settlement preserved the core of Callahan by conceding its edges. It also showed how much the guarantee had always depended on its numbers. A shelter right designed for tens of thousands of homeless New Yorkers had held through the crises of the 1980s and the long rise in family homelessness after 2000. It had not been designed to receive a flow of arrivals that, at its peak, added thousands of people a week.

The fights over particular sites continued after the settlement. How the city wound down its emergency shelters, and how the remaining shelter population was housed or moved, belongs to the history still being written in 2026. What the settlement had already done was write a new distinction into the oldest guarantee the city made to people without a home: that the length of a claim could depend on when and how the claimant had reached New York.

The Big Bang

Five weeks after the shelter settlement, on April 20, 2024, the state legislature passed a $237 billion budget. Most of it concerned the ordinary business of a state government: school aid, Medicaid, the public payroll. Embedded in it was the most consequential package of housing law Albany had passed in years. Its main provisions were a new form of tenant protection called Good Cause Eviction, a tax exemption for rental construction called 485-x, incentives to convert office buildings into apartments, and authority for New York City to lift the state's cap on residential floor area ratio. Daniel Bernstein, a real estate

attorney with the firm Rosenberg & Estis, called it "the Big Bang of housing legislation — both for development and for the regulation of housing."

Good Cause took effect in New York City immediately; other cities and towns in the state could choose to opt in. It reached apartments that had never been rent-regulated, the large stock of market-rate units outside the stabilization system. For those apartments, a landlord now needed a reason, such as nonpayment or a lease violation, to refuse to renew a tenant's lease. A rent increase was presumed unreasonable if it exceeded what the law called the Local Rent Standard: the lesser of 10 percent, or 5 percent plus the regional rate of inflation. A landlord could still raise the rent by more, but a tenant could contest the increase in court, where the landlord would have to justify it.

The law was full of exemptions. New buildings were exempt for thirty years after completion. Small landlords, high-rent apartments, and several other categories were excluded. Tenant advocates who had campaigned for years for a stronger version called the final law Swiss cheese and estimated that it would cover only about a third of the city's tenants. Landlord groups argued that even the weaker law would discourage investment in existing buildings. Both sides understood its significance. The apartments outside the stabilization system had no protection beyond the terms of a lease. Good Cause put a limited version of the old idea behind rent regulation, that a tenant had a claim on the apartment beyond the lease, onto apartments that had never been regulated.

The exemption that replaced 421-a was the other half of the bargain. For half a century, 421-a had underwritten much of the city's rental construction by forgiving property taxes on new buildings, in later versions in exchange for a share of affordable units. It had expired in 2022, and developers had warned that rental construction would stall without it. The 485-x program required large new buildings to set aside a quarter of their units for renters whose incomes averaged 80 percent or 60 percent of the area median, depending on the option chosen, or, in another option, 20 percent at 80 percent of median. It also carried wage requirements for construction workers on larger projects, a demand of the building trades unions that had stalled earlier attempts to replace 421-a.

The pairing was deliberate. Tenant advocates got eviction protection in exchange for a tax break that developers and unions wanted. Both programs were written to expire in 2034, which meant that the next decade's governors and

legislatures would have to reopen the bargain. The office conversion incentive and the density cap provision were less contested in Albany but would matter more in the city, because they gave City Hall powers it had sought for years to change what could be built on its own lots.

City of Yes

The power to lift the density cap returned to the city in a zoning amendment that was already moving through review. The City Planning Commission approved City of Yes for Housing Opportunity on September 25, 2024. The City Council approved it, with modifications, on December 5, 2024, by a vote of 31 to 20. It was described at the time as the largest overhaul of the city's zoning since 1961.

The amendment was a collection of rules. It eased or eliminated parking requirements for new housing, which in much of Queens, Staten Island, and the outer Bronx had made small apartment buildings uneconomic by requiring a parking space for each unit or nearly so. It allowed accessory dwelling units, the backyard cottages and basement and garage apartments that homeowners could rent out, under rules intended to bring some of them into the legal market. It expanded the range of office buildings that could be converted to housing. It created two new high-density residential districts, R11 and R12, with permitted floor area ratios of 15 and 18. Those figures had been impossible before Albany lifted its cap. The new districts were not mapped anywhere when the amendment passed; the first proposal for them was Midtown South, the area of loft and office buildings between Midtown and Greenwich Village. The city projected that the changes would produce about 80,000 more housing units over fifteen years than would otherwise be built, and the Council's approval came with a commitment of roughly $5 billion in city and state money for housing and infrastructure.

City of Yes reversed the direction of the 1961 code on its most consequential point. The 1961 resolution had introduced floor area ratio as the measure of what an owner could build and had cut the permitted density in much of the outer boroughs, on the theory that the city's population would stabilize and that low-rise neighborhoods should remain low-rise. In the decades that followed, the population had grown past eight million, and much of the growth had been housed in the existing stock, through basement apartments, divided

houses, and overcrowding, rather than in new buildings. City of Yes tried to open some of that ground to new construction legally, a small amount at a time across many neighborhoods, rather than concentrating it in the waterfront and transit districts that the Bloomberg rezonings had targeted.

The twenty votes against it showed how contentious that remained. The modifications the Council made before approval trimmed the amendment in the low-density districts, especially in the areas around transit stations that the original plan would have opened to small apartment buildings. Homeowners' associations in eastern Queens and on Staten Island had testified that apartment buildings would change the character of streets of detached houses. Supporters answered that the character in question had been protected by the 1961 code for sixty years while the city's housing shortage grew. The vote was the latest round of an argument as old as the 1916 resolution, which had been sold partly as a means of keeping lofts and factories away from the Fifth Avenue shopping district. Each comprehensive zoning law since then had decided whose neighborhood would absorb change and whose would be protected from it.

The office conversion provisions answered a problem left by the pandemic. Workers who had gone home in March 2020 returned to Manhattan's offices slowly and incompletely, and the return favored newer buildings over older ones. Owners of older office towers in Midtown and Lower Manhattan faced vacant floors, falling values, and loans that had been written on the assumption of full occupancy. Before 2024, the zoning and tax rules made it difficult to turn most of those buildings into housing: the older conversion rules applied only to buildings constructed before certain dates and in certain districts, and the economics rarely worked without a tax break. The state incentive and the expanded rules in City of Yes made conversion possible across much more of the office stock. They offered a solution to two problems at once, the empty office floor and the shortage of apartments, and in doing so revived one of the oldest patterns in the city's land use: a building designed for one purpose, left behind by the economy that produced it, refitted for living.

South of Sixtieth Street

In January 2025, after nearly two decades of argument, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority began charging a toll on vehicles entering Manhattan south of 60th Street. The peak daily charge for a car was $9. The money

was pledged to the MTA's capital program, to be borrowed against for repairs to signals, stations, and rolling stock in a system that carried millions of riders a day.

The charge had a long history. Bloomberg's version had died in Albany in 2008 without a vote in the Assembly. The state legislature authorized a new version in 2019, but federal environmental review, lawsuits from New Jersey and from residents and businesses in the zone, and the governor's decision in 2024 to postpone the start delayed it for years. When the toll finally began, the price had been cut from the figure originally approved. The agency that collected it was the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, the body Robert Moses had used as the basis of his power and that the MTA had absorbed in 1968. The authority that had financed the bridges and expressways bringing cars into Manhattan was now charging them to enter its busiest part.

The federal government moved against the toll almost at once. The second Trump administration took office in January 2025, and the new transportation secretary, Sean Duffy, moved to revoke the federal approval on which the toll depended. On February 19, 2025, the MTA and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority sued. The secretary then threatened to withhold federal transportation funds from the state if tolling continued. In May 2025, Judge Lewis Liman of the federal district court in Manhattan blocked enforcement of those threats while the case proceeded, and the toll kept running.

On March 3, 2026, Liman ruled for the MTA. He held that Duffy lacked the authority to end the program and that his actions had been arbitrary and capricious under federal administrative law. The federal power to approve a tolling program, he wrote, "does not carry with it the inherent unilateral ability of whoever holds the office of Secretary of the Transportation at any particular moment to terminate a project." He declined to issue a permanent injunction, which left the federal government free to appeal. As of October 2026 the toll was still being collected, and whether the ruling would stand was unresolved.

The congestion charge turned on the question of what a driver owed for using the city's most valuable ground. The streets of Lower and Midtown Manhattan had always been public, and since the automobile they had been open to anyone who could find a place to drive and park. The toll put a price on that use. Its defenders argued that the street was a scarce public resource that had been given away for free to the minority of commuters who drove. Its

opponents, including commuters from New Jersey, Staten Island, and the parts of Queens and Brooklyn poorly served by transit, argued that it taxed people who had no other practical way into the city. The federal intervention made the dispute part of a larger quarrel between the city and Washington. The district court's ruling decided, for the moment, that the quarrel would be settled by law rather than by the secretary's preference.

The Case and the Jail

In the fall of 2024 Eric Adams became the first sitting mayor of New York to be indicted on federal criminal charges. The indictment, brought by the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, charged him with five counts, including conspiracy, bribery, wire fraud, and campaign-finance violations. Prosecutors alleged that he had accepted travel benefits and illegal campaign contributions from foreign sources, including people connected to the Turkish government, in exchange for official favors. Adams pleaded not guilty and said the charges were false. A trial was set for April 2025.

The trial did not take place. In February 2025, Justice Department leadership in the new administration ordered the case dropped. The order came from the acting deputy attorney general, Emil Bove. Seven federal prosecutors, among them the acting United States Attorney in Manhattan, resigned rather than file the dismissal motion. The motion was eventually filed by officials in Washington. Because the department sought to dismiss the case without prejudice, which would have left open the possibility of reviving it, critics argued that the arrangement left the mayor dependent on the federal government's continued goodwill, at a time when the administration was demanding cooperation from cities on immigration enforcement.

On April 2, 2025, Judge Dale Ho dismissed the case with prejudice, meaning it could not be brought again. His opinion rejected the department's reasons for dismissal while granting the outcome. "Everything here smacks of a bargain," he wrote, "dismissal of the Indictment in exchange for immigration policy concessions." He also wrote: "It is important to clarify that the Court's decision today is not about whether Mayor Adams is innocent or guilty." The allegations were never tried. The dismissal ended the criminal case and left the questions it had raised to the voters, who would decide the mayoralty that November.

The asylum-seeker emergency had begun as a question of beds and city budgets. By 2025 it had become part of a negotiation between City Hall and a federal administration over the city's cooperation with immigration enforcement, and a federal judge had put the word bargain into the record of a case against the mayor. Whatever the private facts, the episode showed the federal government's leverage over the city at a point of weakness, in a dispute over people whose presence in New York depended on federal immigration law.

Rikers Island, meanwhile, was passing partly out of the city's hands. The jail complex on the island in the East River, whose closure the city had pledged in 2019 for 2026, a deadline later moved in law to 2027, was still holding thousands of detainees. Through the 2020s the deadline remained on the books while the borough jails meant to replace it were still under construction and the detainee population stayed well above the planned capacity of the new buildings. Detainees continued to die in custody, and the federal monitor who had overseen the jails since a 2015 consent judgment in Nunez v. City of New York reported year after year that conditions had not improved.

In November 2024, Judge Laura Taylor Swain of the federal district court found the city in contempt of the Nunez orders, holding that it had violated detainees' constitutional rights. In a May 2025 order she created the post of remediation manager, to be paid by the city, with powers over the Department of Correction that no outside official had held before. The manager could hire, discipline, and fire any employee of the department except the commissioner, and answered only to the court. On January 27, 2026, Swain named Nicholas Deml, a former Vermont corrections commissioner and onetime CIA officer, to the post. He asked for $4.3 million for the current fiscal year and $9.8 million for fiscal 2027 to staff his office. In his first report he wrote that the city still confined pretrial detainees in conditions that "manifestly violate the Constitution."

The complex was not expected to close until the early 2030s. The 2027 date remained the law, but the borough jails were not ready, and the population held on the island exceeded what they would hold. The island had been a site of incarceration for most of a century, built on landfill and on ground the city had bought in the 1880s. In 2026 its future belonged to three authorities that did not always agree: the federal court that now partly ran the jail, the City Hall that paid for it, and the City Council that had fixed the closing date in law.

The Freeze

On the night of November 4, 2025, Zohran Mamdani held his election-night event at the Brooklyn Paramount theater on Flatbush Avenue Extension. He had won the mayoralty with about 1.11 million votes, or 50.8 percent. Andrew Cuomo, the former governor running as an independent, had about 907,000 votes, or 41.3 percent, and Curtis Sliwa, the Republican, about 154,000, or 7 percent. About 2.2 million New Yorkers voted, roughly 43 percent of those registered. Mamdani became the city's first Muslim mayor.

His rise had been rapid. Mamdani was a state assemblyman from Queens and a democratic socialist who had begun the 2025 primary campaign as a minor candidate. On June 24, 2025, he defeated Cuomo in the Democratic primary, 56.4 to 43.6 percent in the final ranked-choice round. Cuomo had been the presumed favorite, with the support of much of the party's leadership and its large donors. Mamdani had run on a short list of specific promises about the cost of living in the city: a freeze on rents in stabilized apartments, fare-free city buses, universal child care, city-owned grocery stores, and a $30 minimum wage by 2030. The campaign concentrated on what New Yorkers paid for housing, transit, and food, and on whether they could afford to stay. Its geography of support, like that of earlier insurgent campaigns, ran heavily through younger renters in neighborhoods that had been rezoned or remade in the previous two decades.

At thirty-four, Mamdani became the city's 112th mayor on January 1, 2026. Attorney General Letitia James swore him in at midnight. At the public ceremony on the City Hall steps later that day, Senator Bernie Sanders administered the oath.

Most of what he had promised required someone else's agreement. The rent freeze did not. The rents of the city's roughly one million stabilized apartments were set each year by the Rent Guidelines Board, a nine-member body appointed by the mayor. In February 2026 Mamdani appointed six of the nine members. On June 25, 2026, at a hearing at El Museo del Barrio on Fifth Avenue in East Harlem, the board voted 7 to 1 to freeze rents on both one-year and two-year leases. It had never before frozen both. The freeze applied to stabilized leases beginning between October 1, 2026 and September 30, 2027. A tenant who signed a two-year renewal within that window would pay the same rent until 2028 or 2029.

The freeze made rent stabilization the instrument of the new administration's housing policy, and it reopened the old argument over who benefited from it. Stabilized apartments made up about 27 percent of the city's housing stock. They were not allocated by income. About 30 percent of them were held by households earning more than $100,000 a year, and about 26 percent by households earning less than $25,000. The freeze went to both. Supporters argued that rent was the largest single cost in most tenants' budgets, that stabilized tenants as a group had lower incomes than other renters, and that a freeze would keep households in the city who would otherwise be pushed out. Owners of older stabilized buildings, especially small landlords in the outer boroughs, argued that their costs for fuel, insurance, taxes, and repairs were rising, that the 2019 rent law had already limited their ability to recover the cost of improvements, and that a freeze would push more buildings toward disrepair or foreclosure. The question was the one the Emergency Rent Laws of 1920 had first put to the city: whether the public could set the price of private housing without draining the money that kept it standing.

The bus promise depended on Albany. The MTA was a state authority, and the city could not make its buses free by itself. City buses brought in about $600 million a year in fares. Advocates pointed to a state-funded pilot that made five bus routes fare-free from September 2023 to August 2024, which had raised ridership, as evidence that fare-free buses could work. The money would have to come from the state or the city, and neither had agreed on a source. As of late August 2026 the policy had not been enacted or funded. The proposals for child care, city-run groceries, and a higher minimum wage depended in varying measure on state law, state money, or both. A mayor elected with a mandate on the cost of living found, as La Guardia had found with the subway and Lindsay with the city's finances, that the levers over most of it lay in Albany.

On October 1, 2026, the first leases under the freeze took effect. Four weeks later, the toll south of 60th Street was still being collected while the federal government decided whether to appeal. The remediation manager was preparing his budget for a jail that was legally scheduled to close in a year and was expected to remain open into the next decade. Good Cause and 485-x had seven and a half years left before they expired. The R11 and R12 districts, approved nearly two years earlier, were waiting to be mapped onto actual blocks in Midtown South. The families who had slept in the tents on Floyd Bennett Field were

dispersed across the city and beyond it, in apartments, in shelters, or in other states, and the municipal guarantee that had received them now applied to newcomers only for a limited time.

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