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Gentrification in East Flatbush

Today I will give a tour of the neighborhood that I live in. The neighborhood that I am referring to is East Flatbush; this neighborhood is landlocked by the following neighborhoods, Crown Heights, Brownsville, Flatlands, and Canarsie. East Flatbush is known for its rich Afro-Caribbean diversity and Kings County Hospital. In this neighborhood, you will find almost every flag from the Caribbean represented here in this neighborhood. There are roti shops, patty shops, guyanese cuisine restaurants all over this neighborhood, if you were to walk deeper into the neighborhood you would see a community that is set apart from the rest of the neighborhood. This community is called Little Haiti because of the predominantly Haitian immigrants and people of Haitian descent. Overall, when you come to this neighborhood you will be greeted by the strong Caribbean roots and heritage that have been preserved by many of the families who resided here. I also mentioned that another notable feature of the neighborhood is Kings County Hospital. The hospital has been around since the mid 1830's and has made a name for itself for being known to treat trauma patients, patients that have been victims to violence, especially gun violence. It's been stated that NYPD officers prefer to get treated at the hospital due its reputation as a level 1 trauma center.

The neighborhood is a lowkey type of neighborhood, nothing much really goes on the block. At times, things do occur, it's usually once in a blue moon. There are two main parks that kids and adults can go to for recreational use. Utica Avenue is the busiest street in the area and that is where most of the different Caribbean food shops are located and fast food restaurants are

located as well. However, as the years go by I have noticed the rapid growth of construction of newer aesthetically pleasing buildings.

Gentrification in Brooklyn:

To understand what I am currently seeing in my neighborhood it's important to understand what's going on in the borough of Brooklyn then in general, New York City. In the scholarly book written by Lance Freeman, "There goes the 'hood views of gentrification from the ground up", he writes that, "Residents of the 'hood are sometimes more receptive because gentrification brings their neighborhoods into the mainstream of American commercial life with concomitant amenities and services that others might take for granted. It also represents the possibility of achieving upward mobility without having to escape to the suburbs or predominantly white neighborhoods" (pg 1). This statement rings true as multiple neighborhoods in Brooklyn are starting to change rapidly. For example, downtown Brooklyn has become completely gentrified, there are new buildings that are being constructed or have been constructed in the last couple of years. These luxury buildings come with gyms, rooftops, lounge areas, swimming pools, etc. Downtown Brooklyn is the hub of Brooklyn, its where all of the main attractions are at and the best place for outings. The quote above takes the perspective of the benefits of gentrification and how gentrification can make people of a lower socioeconomic standing feel pride for themselves in the sense that they live in a neighborhood that is cleaning up its act and becoming a hub for people to go to. "Hence, gentrification has been depicted as the manifestation of changing cultural, demographic, and economic circumstances among the new middle class, and elsewhere it has been described as representing the bourgeois' revenge on the

underclass of the inner city (Ley 1996; Smith 1996)” (Freeman, pg 3). This quote captures the essence of what gentrification is.

Gentrification not only talks about the changes in infrastructure but also the changes in people as well. East Flatbush is a part of multiple neighborhoods that make up Black Brooklyn. Brooklyn at one point in time was a predominantly black borough. The borough’s black population started to increase over the last couple of decades. According to “What’s happened to the people?” Gentrification and racial segregation in Brooklyn, the author Themis Chronopoulos, wrote that, “The Black population of New York City grew rapidly in the twentieth century and up until the 1950s, the majority of this population lived in Manhattan (Fig. 9). Harlem became the neighborhood where most Black New Yorkers lived and this is when Harlem was imagined as a symbol of Black life and the capital of Black America (Fearnley and Matlin 2019). Harold X. Connolly (1977) argues that by 1930 “although Brooklyn had no contiguous compacted ghetto such as existed in Harlem or South Side Chicago, the demographic distribution of blacks pointed toward the possible evolution of Central Brooklyn into the primary place for residence for that borough’s black population.”” He continues with saying that “...by 1945 most Black Brooklynites lived in Central Brooklyn and by 1953, a “vast black ghetto stretched across Brooklyn and was becoming the largest concentration of its kind.”” (Chronopoulos). East Flatbush is a neighborhood that is located in Central Brooklyn and the surrounding neighborhoods Brownsville, Flatlands, and Canarsie are east and/or south of East Flatbush are neighborhoods that are predominantly black. The quote above supports statistics that East Flatbush is a part of Black Brooklyn. According to the Furman Center, it states that, “In 2019, there were an estimated 136,009 people in East Flatbush, of which 2.3% of the population identified as Asian, 85.8% identified as Black, 7.6% identified as Hispanic, and 2.5% identified as white.”

Themis Chronopoulos goes on to explain the historical aspects to why there are huge concentrations of black people in certain parts of Brooklyn due to the legalized racial segregation that gave way to redlining.

High cost of living in NYC:

New York City over the years has become unaffordable for people, especially young people to find housing. Rent prices have gone up and minimum wage was increased to fifteen dollars an hour because of this the cost of living has gone up. “Affordable housing in New York: The people, places, and policies that transformed a city” written by Nicholas Dagen Bloom and Matthew Gordon Lasner, states that, “In 2015, 8 percent of the city’s rental apartments (178,000 units) were still in government owned and operated public housing developments. Some individual public housing complexes, such as Queensbridge Houses (1940) with 3,149 apartments were larger than the entire public housing stock of many US cities. Hundreds and thousands of more New Yorkers lived in privately owned below market buildings... The large scale and rich history of New York’s subsidized housing developments have no parallel in the United States.” This shows that there are very few affordable housing options left for New Yorkers. The scholarly book presides to describe the history of New York subsidized housing.

With gentrification increasing over the time in the city, this has led to racial demographics changing. According to “Gentrification and the increasing significance of racial transition in New York City 1970–2010,” written by Stacey Sutton she states that, “Interpretive accounts of gentrification suggest that, more recently, it has become synonymous with an influx of middle-class White residents and concomitant decline in Black and Latino residents (Hyra 2015; Sullivan and Shaw 2011). Yet recent quantitative studies find that the pace of gentrification

is inversely related to the share of Blacks and Latinos, and Whites tend to avoid areas of Black concentration, all else equal (Hwang and Sampson 2014; Timberlake and Johns-Wolfe 2017).” Sutton also wrote that, “Black and Latino inner-city neighborhoods were stereotyped as ghettos, marked by entrenched patterns of residential segregation (Massey and Denton 1993), White avoidance (Ellen 2000), and the ongoing legacy of urban renewal, redlining, racially restrictive covenants, blockbusting, and other racially discriminatory housing policies, practices, and social norms (Brooks and Rose 2013; Gotham 2000; Satter 2009).” As shown above, these quotes show that people no matter the background tend to avoid black and brown communities because of the stigma attached to them.

In conclusion, when it comes to gentrification there is no real solution but there could be steps that are in place to prevent displacement of the local inhabitants and a deeper understanding and appreciation of the newcomers.

Works Cited:

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