The Urban Frontier

Relations Between Neighborhood Change in Brooklyn, New York and Western Film Genre Mythology

by

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Brooklyn As It Has “Always” Been
The Causes and Effects of Neighborhood Change in Brooklyn, New York
Introduction

The image and representation of Brooklyn has been for generations a mainstay of popular culture. From the mafia gangster to the bohemian writer, the borough has maintained an appeal across the greater American imagination. It has been so meticulously examined that even the neighborhoods have developed their own national character, so that saying “Bay Ridge” connotes something entirely different than “Williamsburg.” However, the question then arises; what exactly are those two terms connoting? Brooklyn may have the benefit of scrutiny and being a haven for cultural phenomena, but the traditions have been shifting and swaying within the reality, romance, and nostalgia of any given neighborhood. The neighborhoods may be quick to develop characters and traditions, but those traditions are usually threatened or marginalized shortly after they are established by external forces, oftentimes the interests of the government or private enterprise, changing the shape and form of an area to something remarkably different. Actors who gave the neighborhood its character, in the face of the inevitable imminent change, take some sort of social or political stand against a threat to their identities and livelihoods. These uprisings usually evoke the idea of the “always” in that the neighborhood has always been this one way. In truth, Brooklyn has been the victim and agent in a list of character changes that have happened in rapid succession from its very founding. Most of those changes can be linked to economic changes meeting social resistance, and from that a conflict of popular memory and nostalgia contends with the inevitable social change.
This paper will follow the trajectories of three tenets of the neighborhood change conflict: economics, territorial romance, and nostalgia. The first tenet comes from the larger workings of America or even New York City and usually finds conflict in that the power of money to change threatens those without capital. This money can come from either direct civil investment, like that of building a housing project or park, or from the city encouraging the mobility of a class of people, like the middle class or recent immigrants. Financial gain has governed most major decisions and private interest has helped shape real estate and the naming of areas. It was because of industrial profits and a desire for more hard-lined taxation that consolidation for Greater New York arose, the movement being led by politicians and private developers. Generations later Brooklyn neighborhoods are named, divided, and renamed in favor of attracting wealthy renters and buyers. Money and private interest in land can shape a neighborhood in a matter of a few years, a rather quick transition for those who have been living in one for decades.

Those multiple-decade denizens of a neighborhood and their families usually form a certain identity focused on the happenings within the boundaries of their neighborhood, lending a unique character to a certain, relatively small area of city blocks. For instance, the Bedford-Stuyvesant area gained an unofficial slogan like "Bed-Stuy: Do or Die," or a certain ethnicity claims the area as something like "Irish" or "Hispanic." Any threat to the boundaries of the neighborhood will be met with resistance and an evocation of the right of the neighborhood to remain as it has been. The threats usually come from real estate
or business as homes and industry are often threatened by capital shifts in a neighborhood. A lot of the monetary changes can be attributed to the forces of New York government, most of which is situated in Manhattan, creating a certain resentment of Brooklyniotes to the workings across the river. The agency with which those neighborhoods fight back varies from unified political resistance to informal exclusionary tactics such as keeping real estate off of the market and vigilante gangs.

Redevelopment in these neighborhoods has usually been phrased as a repurposing of unused land when there are already well-established communities. The movements of neighborhood change are designed by the dollar, so therefore a neighborhood could be developed around an economic niche, like shipping. As soon as that niche becomes unprofitable the neighborhood follows suit, which opens it up to new investors looking to repurpose it for a new kind of profitability. Reasons like this are why, for instance, ethnic white neighborhoods were then populated with low-income housing projects designed for the large influx of blacks and Hispanics. They were designed to help alleviate poverty when the city was in an economic slump, but the ethnic white neighborhoods were still populated with ethnic whites. Projects changed the face of that neighborhood such that in thirty years a neighborhood like Bushwick would not be known as an Italian or German neighborhood but as one of poor blacks and Hispanics. Neighborhoods follow a profitability trend that does not always account for the previous residents, as some residents hold on to an image of a neighborhood that has stopped being as valuable.
Change, though, eventually sets in followed by a sense of nostalgia for days gone. The neighborhood history is created as a testament to what once was as the “old-timers” eventually lose their agency. This process continues on and repeats itself with every few generations. Each time a neighborhood is encroached upon the residents feel that they have the right to stay and have a say in how their neighborhood is formed as they evoke the “always” factor. By claiming the characteristics, as mentioned, the neighborhood becomes a shrine or testament to a certain population. The identity usually constructed in nostalgia is fueled by a need to resist an “other” threatening an identity, defining a population through negation. Old residents are not the new ones and an entire history is built to justify that claim. Constructing nostalgia and history help in the desire to keep a neighborhood from changing at the whims of outsiders.

The problem with the neighborhood as a static thing, though, is that any New York neighborhood has only retained its character for so long and most of those characteristics can be attributed to a previous economically governed redesign. Villages of Kings County annexed each other to become a city, giving Brooklyn its status as a powerful urban area. New York took in Brooklyn as a borough, giving it an underdog and more residential image in contrast to the wealthier and brighter-burning metropolis across the river. When immigration opened up to allow large influxes of them, ethnic whites began to live in Brooklyn, following the lucrative shipping industry. White flight and urban poverty alleviation methods led to Brooklyn’s black and Hispanic neighborhoods. A rebirth of an urban middle class has made areas of Brooklyn into family-
friendly proto-suburban communities or artist colonies. All of these changes have been met with resistance and grudges, but all of them transpose the name of the neighborhood for the current residents’ purposes. Park Slope may have been called Park Slope for a hundred years, but what those two words connote has changed a handful of times. Each time, though, it has “always been that way.” The Brooklyn neighborhood is not marked so much as an urban village free from the outside world’s influence but rather it is both a victim and aid in a perpetual cycle of change.

All of these changes and effects are deeply interconnected and play off one another. Without the threat of change brought on by economics, the neighborhoods’ identities would never form as strongly as they do in their threatened days. Many neighborhoods today that are being changed by gentrification have developed a stronger sense of ethnic or regional pride when beforehand it was less defined. A neighborhood like Boerum Hill was never strongly known as a Hispanic neighborhood, or at least the Hispanic population in it never made any particular claim to Boerum Hill, but once middle-class whites moved in the neighborhood became rich with Hispanic identity. The recent gentrification trend has also been marked by people looking for neighborhood nostalgia for the most desired neighborhood to move to. Knowing that a factory or building has a history, a history created likely when the last threat came and went, increases its profitability for buyers, thereby encouraging gentrification. That gentrification of a neighborhood, in turn, will encourage further city involvement in extracting profit from that neighborhood, thereby
even angering the gentrifiers, who at this point have started to evoke the “always” to justify their claim. The process of neighborhood change is inescapable under this capitalistic economic system and every movement towards either encouraging it or prohibiting it usually furthers if not a current development then one in the near future.

*How Money Makes Over a Neighborhood*

The means change generation to generation, however the ends to making a profit in a place like New York City often require a repurposing of the limited urban land space. Kings County began to form into one cohesive city as opposed to a collection of smaller townships due to urban rivalry and conflicts over the lucrative waterfront. New York sought to control the waterfront in much the same way. Since those days New York and Brooklyn have been at odds, as Brooklyn seemed ripe for investments from across the river that it had little control over.

Crafting Kings County from just a Dutch settlement with many farming grounds to a major city took some encouragement and fiscal preference from New York. The area was comprised of multiple small townships whose Dutch names, despite Anglicization, still remain in the city, such as Utrecht and Flatbush. These villages were outside each other’s governance and therefore grew independent of one another, but as new people moved to the new land these villages started to form into larger townships. During the nineteenth century, it was commonplace for communities to incorporate adjacent areas as population
growth blurred the boundary between one and another. After a short while, though, economic opportunities started to emerge in the nineteenth century as shipping became a profitable enterprise. As the Brooklyn waterfront grew to accommodate so much passenger and cargo traffic, so did industry and new neighborhoods as they would come to house the traditionally immigrant working class who made a living because of the docks. The two major townships along the waterfront were Breukelen and Williamsburgh, the latter just north of the former. Both had formed out of annexing smaller townships and the two were rivals for valuable dock space. Each of those two cities had started to expand and annex smaller towns into their larger municipalities to accommodate an influx of people and also because they now had the buying power to do so. Breukelen was the preferred city for New York, as many people who worked in New York sought bedroom communities across the river. Many of those who worked in the city but sought respite from the hustle and bustle took up residence in the Heights, which was built to be, and has remained, a neighborhood for the Brooklyn aristocracy. Because Breukelen had the additional factor of New York banker and merchant elites, it ultimately was able to annex the city of Williamsburgh in 1855, making Kings County synonymous with Brooklyn, Breukelen's anglicized form. The tradition of annexation was designed to accrue more wealth and reduce competition between the two townships for shipping profits, but this narrative would play out again similarly with the newly-formed Brooklyn and its rival neighbor, New York.
Brooklyn as a city did not last long as the interest of a consolidated city grew and was backed by several powerful elites of New York. The initiative for Greater New York, as the consolidation of New York, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx would be called, had a “grandfather” in Andrew Green, a lawyer and civic planner who was pushing for formal consolidation so much it came to be called “Green’s hobby.” His plan was rebuked several times as the consolidation proponents were mostly found in New York City and were lacking overriding strength in both Brooklyn and Albany. However, in 1898 he finally got his way, preaching that Greater New York would be “more wisely promoted by its improvement upon a well-prepared plan than by the disjointed, non-fitting operations of various petty jurisdictions.”

The act came under a public proposition which won by landslide in New York but famously won by only two-hundred and seventy-seven votes in Brooklyn. The issue was hotly contested among many different influential groups from New York, Brooklyn, and Albany, but ultimately the desire for a unified tax base, evenly distributed wealth between the two cities, and easing of shipping complications won over Brooklyn by a slim majority. Consolidation threatened Brooklyn as a municipality as now its jurisdiction was given to New York, and, in fact, it became New York.

The first symbolic and practical step towards a union of the two cities came with the Brooklyn Bridge. While two very separate cities in terms of demographic and structure, Brooklyn and New York were also inescapably co-dependent on one another. Brooklyn required New York’s merchant class for its goods as well as its utility structures for water and fuel, while New York relied
upon Brooklyn’s heavy shipping and manufacturing for its goods and products. All of these codependences led Brooklyn and New York to seek solidified means to link the two cities (the Fulton ferry was too unreliable due to weather and ship traffic), and the first and most symbolic of the efforts was the Brooklyn Bridge. A revolution in suspension engineering, it allowed a large bridge to link the two cities that was strong enough to support traffic and tall enough to allow shipping. The flux of New Yorkers and Brooklynites between the two cities now created a more unified effort for communication and business. The amount of goods was so great and people crossing the span that, within a short while, two additional East River bridges were completed. Consolidation became a more feasible plan since a permanent solid object that was monumental and highly trafficked now linked the two cities.

The incentives for aligning Brooklyn with Manhattan were drummed up with civic propaganda that subtly pushed forward the existing economic agenda of consolidation. Nearing the turn of the twentieth century the American urban landscape had three major business points: Brooklyn, New York, and Chicago. All of these cities were growing fast with New York leading the pace, but Chicago in the 1890s was coming close to eclipsing New York’s population and status as the preeminent American city, especially with the added publicity of the World’s Fair. That fact was told the general public in countless letters and articles by Andrew Green and his co-planners, but Chicago was also surpassing New York in buying power and economic importance in the fields of mercantilism, manufacturing, and banking. Brooklyn remained beneath New York and
Chicago at this time and was not particularly undermined by Chicago’s importance. Its profits came from massive shipping and manufacturing, something Chicago could not counter without a natural harbor. The threat was much more palpable to the white-collar businesses in New York, though the boosterist mindset was that Brooklyn would diminish accordingly if New York were to fall. Proponents of Greater New York used a constructed rivalry for American urban superiority to bolster public opinion to their side.

Chicago was growing rapidly and could eclipse either Brooklyn or New York as the most economic important city of the United States. But Chicago is landlocked and was basically the only major urban area of its size within any of its neighboring states. Brooklyn and New York, however, are part of an incredible urban harbor, one that could not have been threatened by one city. Chicago could eclipse New York or Brooklyn, but it would have been unlikely to take over the importance of going to the Brooklyn and New York region. Therefore, much like a business merger between two companies, the harbor cities were brought together into a “Greater City” that would at once eliminate competition and, at the same time, eclipse any other metropolitan area for the title of the nation’s greatest city. The economic undertones were melded with civic pride at being a part of the preeminent American city, crafting a popular narrative to help push forward the already existing plan of consolidation in favor of New York’s economic superiority.

Overall, though, the main focus of consolidation was to finally put to rest petty fiscal grievances and bureaucratic loopholes that made progress more
difficult between the two cities while giving majority control to New York.

Andrew Green’s proposal included the conduits to a base level of taxation for the
two cities and a distribution of funds between the two to make the inevitable
linkages of Brooklyn and New York more viable. Brooklyn was dependent upon
New York for water, for instance, and consolidation would allow the city access
to water without buying it, and New York could assist in giving funds to repair
things like roads and public buildings in Brooklyn. New York in turn needed to
spread out its population due to overcrowding and Brooklyn was a less inhabited,
larger expanse. The Brooklyn Bridge, a predominantly Brooklyn-funded
enterprise, was already at traffic capacity almost as soon as it was built and
Brooklyn did not have the money to construct another bridge. New York would
handle the payment for any future bridges constructed. The harbor, of course,
was the main point of interest for all of the constituents of Brooklyn and New
York, and with one united city there would be no squabbles of territory or
shipping routes.

After consolidation Brooklyn was no longer in control of its own urban
destiny. It was a major city that had a narrative not unlike any other major city,
however it grew in the shadow of a looming metropolis across the river to which
it was inescapably tied. Brooklyn found use in its utilities, in its services like
banking and merchandising, and in its buying power for all of the incoming
shipments off of which Brooklyn made its livelihood. However it grew Brooklyn
was always a step or two behind New York, as it never quite shone as bright or
made quite as strong of an impression as its glitzier sister city. Still, it carved out
an existence of houses and churches and heavy industry. New York, though, needed stronger ties to make shipments come in even easier and to alleviate overcrowding. From two of the largest cities in the world came one even larger city that would be the economic and cultural capital of America. The shrewd business move did drive out the rival company, in this case Chicago. New York dictated most of the rules as it had the economic ability to sway decisions and change the Brooklyn landscape. This started a history of Brooklyn’s dependence upon New York, or Manhattan as it came to known as a borough, not so much for utilities or as business partners but as a political and economic entity presiding over it that dictated neighborhood change and development for the next hundred and more years.

Consolidation proved fruitful enough during the first half of the twentieth century as shipping and industry still boomed in Brooklyn and the former city put forth more cultural initiatives to combat being completely overshadowed by the other borough. New York had completed two more bridges, the Manhattan and the Williamsburg, and successfully encouraged more trade, commerce, and eventual profits between Manhattan and Brooklyn (this, of course, allows for adjustment of the Great Depression and other national economic trends of the early twentieth century). Brooklyn was growing even more due to the increased flood of immigrants who worked in the shipyards. Their added presence allowed industry to grow and they converted old settlement villages into more modern, ethnic enclaves. The aristocracy of Brooklyn and the local government also put forth multiple new institutions like the Brooklyn Museum and the Brooklyn
Academy of Music to rival Manhattan counterparts and make Brooklyn a culture capital in its own right without having to appeal to Manhattan. For a brief period Manhattan tried to refashion Brooklyn in its own image with the Williamsburg Bank Building, currently the tallest building in Brooklyn, as part of a proposed downtown. National economic trends, though, halted building of any more skyscrapers and now the bank building stands alone among much smaller buildings to this day. Brooklyn’s most successful programs and efforts came from within its own initiative rather than Manhattan-designed plans. The culmination of Brooklyn’s prosperity came with the Brooklyn Navy Yard, which employed 70,000 people for construction and maintenance of naval ships during World War II, and up to 40,000 into the fifties. Generally speaking, Brooklyn industry and culture was working more or less unabated by Manhattan intrusions and mostly Manhattan got the profits from taxes and was the governmental body that oversaw it. Brooklyn was moving forward and changing itself to accommodate increased industry and a new ethnic population, creating an even more modernized urban area.

The beginning of Brooklyn’s fall came after World War II when most of the profitable industrial sources of capital and urban populations moved from cities to cheaper, suburban or rural locales. After the wartime economic boom cities were usually hit rather hard as they had started to lose their primacy among the population. Taxes were getting high for industries to keep residency, so many Brooklyn manufacturers moved further south or out to New Jersey. Shipping itself had become a less dominant mode of moving materials around and harbors
were not the economic hub they once were. Veterans decided to take up the benefits given to them by the GI Bill and started the trend of “white flight,” meaning whites moving to the suburbs to the house with the yard and white picket fence. As European-Americans deserted the city, over 500,000 manufacturing jobs also fled the city.\(^6\) This exodus of European-Americans and industry was happening in tandem with a rise in the populations of blacks and Hispanics, the former coming from WWII manufacturing jobs and the latter from newly relaxed immigration laws. The factories and the shipyards that used to supply work and wealth to ethnic white neighborhoods had shut down primary operations. New York City now had a poor class without the mobility of blue-collar work. Because of the changing atmosphere of population and business (as well as the recession era in and around the 1970s to follow) New York had to convert Brooklyn’s abandoned neighborhoods into public projects to alleviate poverty.

To accommodate the low-income population the city implemented public change in previously ethnic white neighborhoods by means of eminent domain. Eminent domain laws allow governmental entities to buy up land from private residents for what is deemed public good. Commonly this law is for the new construction of something like a highway, however it also allows for land to be bought up for public housing. New York was hemorrhaging money and could not keep up with the demands of its failing infrastructure, so it created, following the Keynesian economic model, a series of housing projects to give people an affordable place to live so that they might start putting money back into the city.
New York sought to convert now commercially defunct neighborhoods like Red Hook and Bushwick into refuges for urban poor. The housing projects that were built in these areas changed the faces of the neighborhoods and created the image of Brooklyn as a gang and drug area among poor blacks and Hispanics.

By the 1970s many areas of Brooklyn had become havens for crime and drugs as well as real estate fraud and scandal. To illustrate this change here I will isolate a few generations in the development of the neighborhood Bushwick. The neighborhood started as a German and then Italian enclave with some localized heavy industry such as chemical manufacturing and boasting one of the largest concentrations of breweries in America. After industry left Brooklyn the black and Hispanic populations became predominant. In 1950 the neighborhood was entirely ethnic white, by 1970 it was down to 38% to later be 15% by 1980. When the poorer blacks and Hispanics moved in and the buying power of the neighborhood residents subsequently diminished, landlords realized they could not rely on the same level of profits from the previous blue-collar population. To find some quick money landlords sold homes to inexperienced renters at inflated prices or, in a more desperate move, burned down old buildings and sold the land underneath for more than they could have gained from renting the place. The arson came at a time when the city was going through prevalent budgetary shrinkages due to recession, so the deficiency of adequate firefighting and reconstruction materials led to deserted lots and debris.

Because of the lack of affordable housing, attentive services, and steady work, gangs and drugs seized power in the area. Bushwick became a haven for
crack and heroin over the 1980s and there was little relief to be found from the city and no private enterprise to alleviate the neighborhood’s poverty. Violence linked to territory wars surrounded the drug trade in the area, making the neighborhood dangerous and undesirable for any sort of urban renewal. The trend towards neighborhood decline began with the loss of manufacturing in urban areas and white flight, two very important economic watershed moments, and was encouraged by the only body to have a decent amount of capital at the time: the city. Economic motives such as alleviating poverty through projects and budgetary shrinkages changed neighborhoods like Bushwick from its previous identity as a mixed-use ethnic white area.

During the 1980s, though, another cultural force was gaining ground in the city focused on “pioneering” in Brooklyn. The art world was booming in downtown Manhattan during the 1980s as pop artists like Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Frank Stella brought back some cultural centrality to finer New York arts institutions. Moreover, pop music starting to find a New York niche again in the Punk and New Wave scene with bands like The Talking Heads, Blondie, and Sonic Youth. This brought a large amount of cultural capital as well as people who immigrated to the city from around the country to be a part of the scene. Arriving artists were generally not very wealthy (though generally above the poverty line) and in need of large studio space for their work, so they moved to cheap areas that had ample square footage. The abandoned factories and large houses of Brooklyn were not kept secret for long, and soon these
young, traditionally white artists started an exodus across the river for undiscovered treasures of the mainstream real estate market.

Retroactively they came to be known as “urban pioneers,” a class of people normally not in the white mainstream but a part of the counter-culture. They were moving into “unknown” areas, which is to say not pursued or capitalized upon by the white middle class, where, for most intents and purposes, “no one” was living. Pioneering in a developed urban area would connote a discovery of previously used land that is easily attainable. The rents are low, the area undesirable, and landlords easy to buy off of (at this point illegally renting loft space for residential use rather than industrial use was much more profitable for the landlords). Being a pioneer was desirable as they were often considered more romantic figures despite the name’s arrogant postulation of “untamed” urban areas. These pioneers were usually not alone, and their presence in a neighborhood was usually coupled with the beginning of an influx of like-minded individuals. When a large enough population came to dramatically change the demographic of an area, usually with more bourgeois establishments like cafes or boutique clothing stores, more middle-class renters would feel comfortable investing in the still-cheap area. The beginning of the artist community in Brooklyn led to the most current wave of neighborhood change in the borough, known as gentrification.

Gentrification is a different sort of neighborhood change from the others described, as it is a driven and funded by private homeowners rather than relying on governmental intervention. It is “the conversion of socially marginal and
working-class areas of the central city to middle-class residential use.” The presence of the “urban pioneers,” a safer and less hostile population, was a necessary bridge before the regular middle class would invest heavily in a potentially dangerous real estate zone. At the time, the younger generation was becoming wealthy in a lucrative job market and rebelling against their parents’ notion of suburban “white flight” living, so the trend of middle-class urban living was seeing a resurgence from its relative abandon of whites in the 1950s through to the 1970s. After a certain period of middle-class influx, the overpricing of Manhattan began the process of young whites moving to Brooklyn; gentrification had already modified that borough’s more marginal areas such as SoHo, the Lower East Side, and Tribeca from affordable apartments to luxury condos by the 1990s. The “pioneers” had “tamed” some of the unknown urban jungle of Brooklyn, carving out small niches for themselves that the middle class took advantage of soon after.

Moving to Brooklyn may have started because it was cheaper, but it quickly became part of a fashion. The seductive nature of the “pioneers’” activities lured in wealthier investors who were eager to move to where the hip, artistic youth was taking residence as well as feeling as if they were somehow finding a diamond-in-the-rough that would be a mark of achievement for them to discover. Rising arts scenes led to a new swath of Brooklyn neighborhoods being dubbed the next “it” area, resulting in a large influx of investors and upwardly mobile renters. The neighborhoods they sought were traditionally more industrial with large, easily converted space, leading to the redevelopment of DUMBO and
Williamsburg. More professional middle-class members sought out traditionally residential neighborhoods like Park Slope and Cobble Hill where old buildings that were nice or picturesque at some point, from lofts to brownstones, were being sold at under-market value so they could easily be picked up and refurbished. Renovation garnered a cult following as old homes, especially brownstones, became a favorite endeavor of young, wealthy whites and marked a certain status among them. The process led to a neighborhood-as-villages mentality much like the old ethnic white enclaves that these neighborhoods were a couple of generations earlier, only now instead of the village being Irish or German it was mostly young families who sought to create a haven for their children away from the bustle of Manhattan. Once a certain number of gentrifiers moves to a new neighborhood more tend to follow, spreading the shift from lower-class to middle-class in an ever-growing community. After a very short period of time moving to Brooklyn was not just to avoid price-gauging apartments in Manhattan but also to be a part of a cult of fashion.

The neighborhoods that gentrifiers were moving into were seeing an increase in upscale private industry and a bolstering of capital, but the original residents were quickly becoming priced out and moving to different locations. Gentrification movements are, in a way, fragile. Unless a neighborhood can prove suitable for investment then the area will never quite take off and evolve as an epicenter of middle-class commerce and social life. Certain initiatives are put forth by the first wave of post-“pioneer” middle class (though in most instances they still refer to themselves as pioneers) to help encourage the flow of capital
into their neighborhood. One of the most jarring is neighborhood name change. Some neighborhood names could summon up images of the more crime-ridden or intimidating “old Brooklyn,” so wealthy homeowners would create a name out of thin air to apply to their desired area. For instance, Boerum Hill did not exist fifty years ago. It is a section of brownstones carved out from the crime-ridden area of Gowanus and renamed for real estate purposes. The gentrifiers sought to separate ties with an old narrative of Brooklyn as a haven for drugs and gang violence among its poor by creating a new neighborhood from old buildings.

Gentrification removes previous residents from their old neighborhood by dictating a new, imaginary set of boundaries. A popular way to create an imaginary delineation is qualifying for the “historical district” title. This title, which entitles the area to be specifically maintained and restricted to rezoning and reconstruction, is not usually governmentally initiated; rather, it is a constituent group who file for a permit of designation. It would only be brought up by people with enough wealth to renovate their homes to a historically accurate (and expensive) aesthetic. Lower income families could not afford to maintain the property, so they often lost their homes. It also encourages the neighborhood to retain its desired antique charm rather than suffer new or cheap developments, encouraging the gentrifiers’ aesthetic wish. Once these sorts of measures have taken place it is only a matter of time before landlords are offered higher prices by potential buyers than the previous lower-income residents,
displacing them and creating a new neighborhood with a distinctly different character.

The government’s attitudes toward gentrification marked a departure from city initiatives to alleviate poverty to a laissez-faire approach. Although the city was seeing a decrease in crime and an increase in private investment in Manhattan due to Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s administration, there were few direct initiatives to refurbish private or public areas to attract middle-class buyers. The changes from the crackdown on “quality of life” crimes (i.e. noise, graffiti, and petty offences) indirectly led to a more secure real estate market for the middle class, but where and how gentrification took place was up to the citizens' own initiative. When the trend towards reurbanization started to come about, suburbanites were coming to New York and occupying most of the cheap real estate. When the poorer neighborhoods of Manhattan had already gentrified Brooklyn received an influx of private capital and initiatives to convert many poorer neighborhoods into wealthier, middle class havens. New York’s government was basically getting poverty alleviation for free in the sense that a lucrative middle-class was replacing the poor. The government encouraged the gentrifiers through smaller measures, such as the historical district classification. Once the neighborhood was adequately gentrified it would try to encourage further investors through some public works, like the refurbishing of Williamsburg’s McCarren Park. Generally, though, the gentrifiers made the neighborhoods as they saw fit without direct governmental intrusion. It is a big departure from the last wave of neighborhood change when most of it occurred.
because of public housing and civic budgetary constraints. Gentrification has developed not from a high-capital city government but a high-capital public body which the city reaps the benefits from without as much direct involvement.

Capital and economics have governed neighborhood change over the course of Brooklyn’s history since it was first established as Dutch townships and has continued to change it to this day. The tendency by those with the capital to initiate a change tends to be phrased in terms of benevolence or better business, from New York’s desire to be equal partners with the poorer Brooklyn to middle-class whites trying to refurbish a failing but lovely neighborhood. No matter what benevolent cause may be used to justify altering the area, the process of change stays remarkably the same. Brooklyn has been seen as a perennially underdeveloped area that has the potential for high yield investments. While this does not always prove to be the case and Brooklyn has been the site of many failed capitalist enterprises, generally the area has been desirable for a myriad of economic reasons. The wealthy that chose to capitalize on Brooklyn’s potential came into the borough and create new narratives, drastically transforming the face of a neighborhood or the city-cum-borough. However, some residents do not take well to the change. This instigates various countermeasures and methods of resistance against intimidating forces such as capital.

*Territorial Romance, the “Always,” and Fighting Against Capital*

Challenging a well-funded initiative is usually difficult; however Brooklyn has habitually stood against the tide of money in some way or another. When a
perceived threat to the residents of the borough, such as a stripping of local power or the possibility of losing homes, appears there is usually a stance against it, both formally and informally. The rallying feature is territorial romance, a romanticization of a neighborhood or area into a symbol for some sort of cultural institution. Often this comes with the most popular argument to justify the romance, which is the use of the “always.” The “always” is harking upon an established historical narrative to prevent a change from occurring, such as “this has always been a Irish area” or “this has always been a dockworker neighborhood.” Territorial romance becomes the main weapon for those facing strong economic forces.

The first major defiant force to arise was the Brooklyn Protestant elite fighting against the proposed Greater New York. Brooklyn was commercially dependent on New York and was linked through public affairs and later a bridge, but it had developed under its own jurisdiction and formed a character and infrastructure decidedly different from its sister city, at least according to its proud residents. The city had developed with its heavy industrial shoreline but the remainder of it, even some of the southern shoreline, consisted of bedroom communities and farmlands with a high concentration of churches giving it a more domestic air than the high-rise and congested New York. Consolidating with New York would allow it jurisdiction over the further development of Brooklyn. The popular narrative that focused on beating Chicago for urban dominance led to a fear of Brooklyn being commercially overrun and just as overstuffed as Manhattan. In response the League of Loyal Citizens was formed,
comprised of Brooklyn’s elite (millionaires with clout in their own right, but still not quite as politically strong or well-financed as their New York counterparts). The Loyal League’s tactics were much more grassroots than Andrew Green’s approach. While Green tried to galvanize City Hall and Albany about forming Greater New York, the League issued pamphlets, made speeches, and even held contests for anti-consolidation essays and songs. By appealing to a Protestant ideal the Loyal League used Protestant institutions to supply eloquence, organizational ability, and other cultural resources. The League’s tactics were designed to seem more homegrown and localized than those of the consolidationists, whose narrative for the city and approach to its governance reflected a more metropolitan and large-scale ambition.

The narrative the League constructed was designed to go against the more urban designs of Manhattan and appeal to a middle-and upper-middle-class image of Brooklyn as residential and morally upright. Aside from the desire to have control over Brooklyn’s harbor, one of the main reasons for Manhattan’s desire to consolidate was to alleviate the city’s overcrowding. The tenements were running out of room and the city needed a place to relocate its lower class, so the more suburban Brooklyn seemed to be a way to spread the overcrowded slums. William C. Redfield, a Loyal Leaguer who wrote a pamphlet Taxes and Tenements, spoke of how an impoverished, tenement-house population posed a threat to his idea of the Brooklyn way of life and that suburbanization was not an antidote to slums. Instead, the slums would overrun the suburbs. Citing Jacob Riis’ recent studies into slums of New York, he also said that their presence in
Brooklyn would weaken the Protestant moral fiber of the community. The most prolific and enthused anti-consolidationalist, though, would have to be St. Clair McKelway, the editor and owner of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Brooklyn’s esteemed local newspaper. McKelway made his speeches on his vision of a prosperous and respectable Protestant Brooklyn at least six times every season between 1891 and 1896.\(^1\) He championed Brooklyn as a moderate area where extremes of wealth and poverty did not exist, for as he said, “we have no streets analogous to your Fifth Avenue, but neither have we any resembling those of your tenderloin district.” It helped that Brooklyn had and still has one of the highest concentrations of churches in the entire world. For the Leaguers, Brooklyn was a haven for Protestant morality and comfortable wealth and they appealed to all of its natives to keep it that way.

By creating a more defined line between the two cities, the Loyal League made Brooklyn more threatened by Manhattan’s influence and image. Manhattan was much more ethnically diverse by this time, hosting larger populations of many different European populations. Brooklyn had a longer native-born ancestry and a history of immigrants of Dutch, Anglo, and Scandinavian descent. The Loyal League used this population to appeal to a Protestant ideal, but in actuality half of Brooklyn was already from other regions of Europe, such as Ireland, Germany, and Hungary. These immigrants were usually Roman Catholic and were not so wealthy, and in effect were marginalized from the Loyal League’s vision and conduct. The Brooklyn they
had imagined was one of Protestant ethics and middle-class manners, a romantic notion that more sharply differentiated the city from New York.

To better align the population to their cause, the Loyal League created a romantic, historical narrative about how Brooklyn had “always” been the way they imagined it was. A romanticization of territory like this allows a small, organized group to create an image or narrative around a neighborhood or other area and galvanize public support around that ideal, even if the public beforehand had been rather ambivalent to the territory. Whether or not the history the “always” creates is entirely true is negligible as the romantic notions are designed to be simpler and stronger than a nuanced depiction. Romanticizing Brooklyn would give it an image worth fighting for and one that would be threatened by the proposed change of New York.

Consolidation, though, won over in Brooklyn by its two hundred and seventy-seven vote margin, sealing Brooklyn’s future as a borough and junior partner with Manhattan. The Republican party of New York, then holding majority power in the state and New York, redrafted Green’s proposal to appeal to most interested parties and it was greeted with sweeping support. Members of the Loyal League were rallying against it when the vote took place, but in the end consolidation won out. When the Greater New York charter was pushed through, McKelway described the act in the *Eagle* as “The Great Mistake of 1898.” Though the Loyal League’s mission failed, its narrative of Brooklyn as a residential and self-contained community, or group of communities, continued to be a major thread throughout the future efforts to defend the borough.
Brooklyn changed demographics dramatically in the beginning of the twentieth century due to new European immigration, and the neighborhoods gradually took different shapes. The new wave of immigrants came mostly to work at the docks, so the shore of Brooklyn became pocketed with ethnic enclaves for Russians, Italians, and Poles. As the shores could only stand to house so many newcomers, industrial zones became mixed-use (industrial and residential) and immigrant groups formed ethnic pockets more inland. Farmlands in Brooklyn and beyond had become denser residential areas, so the move to Brooklyn then was about converting open space into urban space rather than redefining existing urban areas. These ethnic white neighborhoods continued relatively undisturbed up until World War II when, after the Navy Yard closed and industry left, many of them took the path of “white flight” to the suburbs or followed the industry to New Jersey or elsewhere. Fights over neighborhood change started up again in the latter half of the twentieth century when the ethnic whites took stances against blacks and Hispanics.

The issue of ethnic whites going against poor blacks and Hispanics reaffirmed identities and created new narratives for an even more diversified and territorialized Brooklyn. When the ethnic whites moved to Brooklyn they usually formed an enclave unique to their ethnicity. This led to Brighton Beach becoming Russian, Carroll Gardens Italian, and so on. Their ethnicity was then constantly reaffirmed in the concentrated locality of like descendents and there were few newcomers that were outside of the designated ethnic group. When industry left the borough the ethnic whites, traditionally blue collar, were left with fewer job
opportunities and became more scattered in their professions. The capital of a neighborhood was being depleted as budget cuts and urban planning and renewal had shut down trolleys and other Brooklyn-centric modes of commerce, creating poorer and less localized ethnic white areas.

As blacks and Hispanics moved into these neighborhoods, the old residents clung to their ethnicity and history in order to differentiate themselves from the newcomers, but did not have the capital to fight back. The areas that blacks and Hispanics moved into more easily were those with residents of higher mobility, whereas the residents who could not leave the land they occupied so easily formed resistance movements. This is why blacks and Hispanics could move into an area like Brownsville, a neighborhood of more upwardly mobile Jews, without much trouble while poorer ethnic white areas like Bedford Stuyvesant saw more trouble. The blacks and Hispanics were being placed there by slumlords and public initiatives like housing projects, so the ethnic whites did not stand much of a chance against the influx. The ethnic white neighborhood was facing the threat of people being forced out of their homes and also by what the residents perceived to be bad elements, such as black and Hispanic youths, which would reduce property values as well as drive up crime. Ethnic whites perceived the influx of blacks and Hispanics not only as threatening to their isolated pocket of a neighborhood but also to their livelihood, calling for a strong, informal resistance that galvanized the locals.

When the poorer blacks and Hispanics moved into ethnic white neighborhoods, the previous residents resisted the newcomers by informal means
since they were not powerful enough to prevent the change. These neighborhoods grew in response to local industry, becoming mixed-use areas where residents could walk to work. But when industry left Brooklyn the ethnic white enclaves had less reliable income and the neighborhoods lost important facets of their identity. Since the city was handling sweeping urban failure during the 1960s and 1970s, the poorer classes tended to be marginalized. When the poorer blacks and Hispanics started moving in the old residents formed informal community alliances to prevent the proliferation of new residents. The old residents often created “defended neighborhoods,” or an area where the residents would try to manage the influx of new people through citizen rather than governmental involvement. “Defended neighborhoods” created a sense of exclusion to new people but also constructed a narrative of neighborhood as a small isolated state. The defended neighborhood is an attempt at maintaining ethnic, racial, and/or economic integrity with expanding or contracting boundaries. Some exclusionary tactics were more focused on capital, such as old residents preventing their homes from being purchased by new owners by selling it to friends. At times, the “defended neighborhoods” would include vigilante gangs who would enforce the area’s borders with violence. The racial implications were obvious, and these violent scenarios led to race riots in Brooklyn in places such as Bedford-Stuyvesant and Crown Heights. The city’s cutbacks on public services due to budgetary restrictions led to communities creating these “defended neighborhoods.”
Keeping in step with the example set by the Loyal League, the neighborhoods constructed a romantic identity evoking the “always” and having their part of Brooklyn seem as if it is a small community with good values. However, the added “defended neighborhood” narrative gave the enclave a position of both threatened and intimidating. While this did not necessarily lend itself to the idea that the neighborhood had “always” been Russian or the like, once a perceived threat to the neighborhood’s ethnic homogeneity arose the “always” was used to illustrate how cultural customs were being threatened. This process would utilize ethnic foods and traditions and integrate them into the neighborhood’s culture, creating a definitive “other” in relation to the old residents. By illustrating these ethnic enclaves as “always” having been this way the neighborhoods create a romantic, threatened identity in need of preservation and take a defensive stand against any newcomers. However a “defended neighborhood” narrative creates connotations of violence and intimidation. When the only perceived means was violence and there had been a history of ethnicized organized crime in an area (most popular in Italian and Russian neighborhoods) the “defended neighborhood” would capitalize upon this and create a tougher, more foreboding area that newcomers would enter at their own risk. By combining the “always” with a “defended neighborhood” mentality, the ethnic whites constructed a threatened existence that was doing its best with little resources to keep people out, even if it resorted to intimidation.

While some stood successfully against major neighborhood change, many of the ethnic white neighborhoods gradually ceded more and more territory to
blacks and Hispanics, drastically altering the perception and narrative of Brooklyn. Because of the notorious violence attributed to the ethnic white, black, and Hispanic neighborhoods, Brooklyn had become a rougher and more threatening area where private enterprise was reluctant to move. While it remained close to Manhattan, there were not many incentives for people or commerce to move there until gentrification started to pick up speed. When the new white middle class started moving in and purchasing areas that had fallen into disrepair or disuse in the wake of the violence and urban squalor, these areas constructed new narratives to help protect them from a less violent but financially stronger new threat.

Combating gentrification has proven more difficult and subtler than the previous defenses against change because gentrifiers come equipped with a cooperative government and private capital. The ethnic whites were generally a marginalized or lower income population in Brooklyn at the time so they were not well represented governmentally or financially, but they were going against groups who were equally if not less represented. The middle-class presence was viewed generally favorably in these neighborhoods by the city. In order to retain the fiscal viability necessary for large federal loans, many cities, more unabashedly than in the past, turned to the attraction and retention of middle-class tax revenue.¹⁴ Gentrification started its existence as “renovation” because it was predominantly focused on renovating dilapidated buildings and economically revitalizing poorer neighborhoods. The more deriding name of “gentrification” counteracts the perceived benevolence of “renovation.” It is also
the extension of the “pioneer” mentality of “taming” a new neighborhood, signifying that wherever gentrifiers move into is open space that can be cultivated. The narrative constructed by gentrifiers is harder to refute as destructive because the results of a gentrified neighborhood are greater commerce, higher property values, and safer streets. Previous residents are usually successfully marginalized and lack the capital to combat the gentrifiers’ plans.

As opposed to previous uses of the “always” to keep a kind of cultural homogeneity, the “always” emerged in the gentrification debate to combat the more pragmatic threat of old residents losing their homes despite the brief period of time blacks and Hispanics were in these neighborhoods. The blacks and Hispanics were not as threatened by middle-class whites moving in because they did not seem to represent a “bad character” and were not trying to undercut any of their power. Inadvertent effects of a popular gentrification site, though, soon were felt in the poorer areas, mostly through the negligence and coercion of landlords. They would commonly turn off heat, refuse utility service, or try to find miniscule conduct infractions to kick people out of the building to sell at higher prices to gentrifiers, which left the old residents without basic tenant rights. During the rise of gentrification courts would place many buildings under receivership in response to landlords’ abuse and violence towards tenants. Taking this actualized threat of their homes, the blacks and Hispanics started romanticizing the neighborhood and created an “always” out of their roughly twenty to thirty years of occupancy. The racial divide between gentrifiers and the
blacks and Hispanics was easily discernible so the old residents were united by ethnicity and formed groups such as Acción Latina, a group that fought against gentrification in the Boerum Hill area. In direct opposition to the gentrifiers’ desire to make Boerum Hill a historic neighborhood worthy of architectural protection, Acción Latina claimed the neighborhood as ethnic and that its residents, who are ethnic villagers, deserve to maintain their community. Any semblance of an idea of an ethnic community emerged from the threat of losing homes; it was barely visible beforehand.

The resistances mentioned here have all had their various modicums of success, allowing for some cultural institutions to remain or pockets to stay a strong community, but more of them have been lost than won. Romanticized neighborhoods eventually give way to the image the old residents were fighting against, changing the narrative and population of a given area. The old community is then left with only their remnants of the “always,” the idea of what they think their neighborhood ought to be even if it is no longer that. The division grows between “good old days” and “bad new days,” accounting for the prevalence of nostalgia in Brooklyn today.

After the Battle: Brooklyn’s Nostalgic Tendencies

Some neighborhoods have had the benefit of staving off some degree of change, but for the most part when a neighborhood is threatened by large movements of capital or commerce it will go through a series of mutations to the previous residents’ chagrin. For all of the efforts to fight the economic pushes
towards neighborhood change, the countermeasures usually fail to fully realize their goals. The loss of the battle leaves the losing side in a peculiar situation, as they started the machine of neighborhood romance and the “always” and cannot necessarily shut it off. A neighborhood, when it becomes defended and romanticized, takes on an image constructed by its residents, but when that image is tarnished by having the influx of outsiders, what is left of the old neighborhood? The answer, usually, for the old residents who remain or even the ones who become displaced is that the neighborhood can only be found in memories. When a neighborhood fails to live up to its idealized image and transforms into something new, a deep sense of nostalgia for times past sets in among the old residents. Their homes and livelihoods have become part of a civic framework that has moved on and allocated them to history books. Greenpoint is no longer a Polish neighborhood, but now a “historically” Polish neighborhood. To put things in a nostalgic vocabulary, though, is the last stand that old residents can make to keep their neighborhood from being lost totally to time’s passing, writing some history so that whatever change occurs they can still have a chapter in the area’s larger narrative. Nostalgia is the product of the neighborhood romantics’ losing the battle against change with economic forces, where the ideal and the “always” mutate into a sense of loss, marginalization, and alienation.

It is important to identify that what old residents experience is not memory but nostalgia, which is the product of a larger, common historical narrative and the melancholy surrounding it. It is a condition that in previous centuries was considered a near-fatal disease of the mind. So why is nostalgia so
destructive? Peter Fritzsche defines nostalgia as “a product of a shared historical consciousness of general displacement that is able to make parochial fortunes and individual losses socially meaningful.”

Neighborhood romance emerges from threat of displacement, both physical and social, and when the romantics lose their battle for control of a neighborhood’s narrative they are marginalized from its identity. Nostalgia summons up the old narrative, a story of an era that has since passed, in effect to prevent it from being forgotten. The history that the neighborhood created to construct their meaningfulness, the reason why that population had the right to stay put in their self-claimed area, was dismantled and deemed irrelevant in the vague face of economics. Old residents found the only way they could reconcile their newfound marginalization with the sense of localized pride so fiercely constructed before was to disown the old neighborhood as it was. Nostalgia connotes a certain obsession with a past that cannot be relived, hence the melancholy found in those who suffer from it.

To create the historical narrative, the old residents’ personal stories of days past coalesce into common ground and create an individualized image of a neighborhood. This narrative, though, is different from the one created for defense in that the threat is gone and the story has a conclusion. The strength of a neighborhood lies within the personal narratives that are constructed by a common identity. When people take pride or like living in a neighborhood they usually start to fashion themselves as a participant in it, identifying as things like a “Park Sloper” or “Bushwickian.” Their stories and personal narratives, therefore, become intrinsically linked to the location in which they find...
themselves. Neighborhood character is, therefore, defined by people’s narratives and anecdotes, creating an image that is highly personalized and designed to be unique to happenings in a specified location. The small space of a neighborhood is elevated beyond its physical geography and becomes defined not in hard, spatial terms but in the stories that old residents have of it. Their stories construct how the neighborhood was in its heyday and will be remembered, protecting it from outside influences. Old residents claim their authenticity based not in the present but in the old days, emphasizing a “real” version of the neighborhood to keep perceptions of their home and their community from being altered with the changing demographics. The “old neighborhood” is empowered by a sense of “realness” that comes from the anecdotal evidence of what life was like before something changed. Anything that seems “real” comes from the formations of multiple anecdotes and personal histories.

The romantic notions of old neighborhoods can often belie the actual need for change which occurred in them, and nostalgia has the tendency to cover up the occasionally unfortunate or dismal aspects of a neighborhood. Brooklyn has had many different connotations and representations throughout its long history, many of them very ugly. Images of mob control or street gangs, for instance, have, at different times, flooded all forms of media and given an occasionally romantic and often grisly appearance of Brooklyn. “Defended neighborhoods” would often propagate these stereotypes, trying to elicit fear or respect from those who were encroaching upon the area’s boundaries. However truthful those reputations may have been, there were more violent and depressed sides to
neighborhoods that did make Brooklyn a dangerous and impoverished place in certain areas. Neighborhood change may displace peoples’ homes, but it also has a usually diminishing effect on crime or poverty in a certain area which old residents are quick to forgo when constructing the “old neighborhood” narrative. Red Hook, after shipping had left Brooklyn, had become known as “Bloody Red Hook” due to its slum-like conditions and ties to organized crime. The “old neighborhood” tale for Red Hook asserts that the area, long seen as a slum by most outsiders, is (or was), in fact, a community worthy of preservation and that its inhabitants are hardworking, self-reliant, and generally decent if somewhat pugnacious.19 Red Hook was financially depressed as there was no more waterfront market and there were housing projects and the Gowanus Expressway cutting off the ethnic white area from the rest of Brooklyn, but that matter was deferred in favor of making a narrative to enforce staying put. Nostalgia is usually an uncritical remembrance of the past, so it can cover up more unattractive aspects of a neighborhood in favor of reinforcing the old residents’ right to keep the neighborhood a pristine memory that was better than the current days.

Effects of post-conflict nostalgia are neither to relive the past nor to recreate it, but to place it in an abstract space where the narrative is immutable. The historical narrative exists independently from the current narrative of the neighborhood, according to the residents, as the nostalgic tendency is to separate the “bad new days” from the “good old days.” By establishing the unwelcome newcomers firmly as the “other” and ceding the neighborhood to them as opposed to clinging to a past image, the old residents can maintain an era that
remains untarnished in history. For them, Williamsburg is not Williamsburg anymore, despite what maps say, as it has become a different area with a different identity from the narrative they constructed. The neighborhood, then, becomes not a locational thing with territorial boundaries but an abstract ideal. Nostalgia becomes the last line of defense in Brooklyn when a neighborhood changes its identity. Historical consciousness is more immune to economic shifts, so it can allow a common group to maintain romanticized images that the neighborhood does not need to live up to. In fact, the neighborhood does not live up to them at all, as the neighborhood they have created is deliberately non-existent. The neighborhood is then defended as resiliently as it can be, as it is no longer under physical threat and remains abstracted.

Nostalgia is a method of defense for the old residents, however it is a concession of defeat. When the neighborhood is ceded to newcomers the old residents define the area through negation, mostly about how it is “not what it used to be.” Their preferred image is deliberately past and completed, as what it is disharmonious to what it was. The “old neighborhood” is does not connote old as in long standing, but rather old as in replaced. When the old residents lose the battle for a neighborhood’s identity the old image of it is wiped away in favor of a new one. The only way for the old residents to reconcile this retooling of their home is to finalize that chapter of the neighborhood’s history. Creating “good old days” means that they are over, and the nostalgic tendencies reveal the situation as finite and how the present is not necessarily a hopeful state for that past but is necessarily a state of loss. Old residents are not fighting for the identity of their
neighborhood anymore when they are being nostalgic. Rather, they are trying to keep an image alive through repeated story telling and historical reputation, empowering a different kind of resistance, keeping any change occurring in the neighborhood from affecting their image of it. When a neighborhood changes against the will of the old residents they isolate its character away from reinterpretation.

Conclusion

The narrative of enterprises with big capital going against communities without has been a recurring American narrative, and Brooklyn has functioned as a microcosm of the conflict. Popular narratives of land seizing, annexation, and manifest destiny have traditionally been expressed in tales of the Old West or colonial projects. Those narratives, though, are part of the American tradition and can work on as small a scale as a neighborhood. The larger forces at work, from national economics to state legislature, are reflected in neighborhoods’ fluctuations in character and population.

Recently, Brooklyn has been mired in multiple real estate disputes. The most controversial of them has been the proposed development known as the Atlantic Yards, a project designed to include a basketball stadium and multiple high rise business and residential buildings that would rival and surpass the Williamsburg Bank Building. Atlantic Yards, however, is located adjacent to Park Slope, Prospect Heights, and Fort Greene, three neighborhoods that have been hallmarks and pacesetters for the wave of middle-class gentrification. Now
that they have made the area safe for development, the city and real estate
moguls saw an opportunity for large-scale developments, turning the Yards
section of Brooklyn into a haven for business and profit at the sacrifice of the
previous residents. The twenty-first-century conflict has been unlike most of
conflicts of the twentieth century and more like the one of the nineteenth.
Wealthy landowning gentrifiers are fighting against even wealthier moguls and
the city, forming their own versions of the Loyal League. Now they are evoking
how the neighborhoods have “always” been family-centered, claiming they are
an extension of Brooklyn's residential history. No matter what trajectory
Brooklyn seems to be going, whether from poor to rich or back again, there is the
recurring theme of those who have more wanting to make and take more and
those who lay claim to their land because, naturally, it has “always” been like
how it is now.

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An elaboration on themes, tropes, and allegories in *K Train* and how it is informed by Brooklyn neighborhood change as well as the Western film genre.

Note:
This section contains spoilers of the screenplay. If you wish to read the script without knowing the outcome please skip this section and refer back to it after you have completed the screenplay. If you wish to have insight to my creative intent and intentions in regards to genre and have the choice of making a Western-influenced narrative about Brooklyn inform your reading, please read this section first.
Narratives about New York City, whether fictive, academic, or personal, appear to have what might be termed a New York *exceptionalism*. If something occurred in New York, it somehow seems more potent, of higher stakes, or just somehow unique to its surroundings, making any narrative seem particular and incapable of being replicated in other surroundings. Yet some narratives about the five boroughs are actually steeped in deeper American traditions and stories, played out and replayed out over the course of history. The tropes of change and progress through manifest destiny, evident in discussions of Brooklyn neighborhood change, have been foundations of American expansionist tendencies that have helped define this country’s history and present. Bearing in mind examples such as the westward expansion or even America’s imperial incursion in South America and southeastern Asia, my screenplay focuses on how expansionism can occur and reoccur where people have always lived within the same country and even city. My screenplay explores the seemingly exceptional stories of Brooklyn neighborhood change, where everyone claims more authenticity than everyone else, with filmic, generic tropes and characters.

The Western is the most potent allegorical genre that represents expansion and the gears that grind when moneyed forces enter into territory in which they are not welcomed. From trains bringing new money and progress to the frontier to pioneers claiming legitimacy to the land that they themselves took from Native Americans, I found that many of the Western films I had seen relate to Brooklyn’s real estate development history, especially during the more-current gentrification. By translating “locomotive” to “subway” and “Native Americans”
to “Poles/Hispanics/blacks/Russians, etc.” the Western movie started applying more and more to New York City. Instead of people moving west to great expansive plains to homestead, people were coming from the west (Manhattan) to expansive brownstones to homestead. Through research on Brooklyn’s history, I found more and more parables between Westerns film mythology and Brooklyn’s repeating cycle of transformation.

When writing a genre film, familiar figures and tropes are repeated and augmented. Through repetition and subversion of archetypes, a generic film can both familiarize and challenge a viewer. Taking a story about a contemporary issue outside the realm of realism and into generic tropes and non-realistic occurrences, such as chase scenes and explosions, the film can serve as a more direct call to reflection on allegories. A film that attempts realism would call to attention to the exceptionalism of the story being told rather than its larger implications, but a generic film with more fantastical elements makes viewers consider what something like a Western motif can say about real world matters. Placing *K Train* in Brooklyn, though, meets halfway between genre and realism, not totally removing the real world matters from their surroundings and heightening the reality of Brooklyn. The Western film, in the case of *K Train*, enlightens the situation in Brooklyn by placing it in generic terms and giving the viewer a point of reference that can then be elaborated upon with subversions of familiar figures.

The main characters in the screenplay-- Josef “Yo” Sheropski, John Auger, and Benton-- all do their part to help illustrate the three parts of
neighborhood change mentioned in my academic essay: territorial romance, nostalgia, and economics. They are also based on archetypes and characters evident in generic traditions. By making them exhibit generic tropes adapted to modern-day Brooklyn, I draw attention to Brooklyn as a setting for a traditional Western narrative.

Territorial romance throughout the history of Brooklyn has been a potent force, one that has usually been created with a populist mentality. Movements are usually grassroots, organized by the people to stop the few from altering the destinies of the many. Homeowners, renters, or anyone else with a stake in the neighborhood fight against those who have more imposing capital and who see opportunities in new frontiers. They are the Davids fighting against the Goliaths, without the political or fiscal capital to fight on equal terms with the forces going against them, and must rely on louder or more invasive means of protest. In recent decades, ethnic whites have fought against the new black and Hispanic populations by launching local cultural campaigns. Hispanics and blacks have also united into political entities like Accion Latina to fight against gentrifiers and keep their homes for themselves. Even the well moneyed Loyal League had to be louder and brasher than the interest groups proposing consolidation, making speeches and trumpeting editorials in the Daily Eagle. Josef is an extension of this tradition taken to a violent extreme. His plan is one of theatrics. He does not play anything subtly. Josef sees himself as personifying a Greenpoint that is threatened but not afraid to fight back.
Josef's ideas are emphatically protectionist. He paints the conflict in black and white terms with new people excluded and old residents preferred. Josef, when faced with predators who thwart his resistance, is at a loss to develop a feasible plan.

In American Western mythology, he is the homesteader who has to fight against eastern corruption. The K train construction compels Josef to take up arms against it, perceiving a threat against his home. His resistance makes him famous, and he encourages his mythic stature. In some ways he is akin to Jesse James, though not a robber. In the film *Jesse James* (1939), Jesse James was forced to fight the railroad after the invading forces killed his mother. Josef takes direct action before something very similar happens to him, and often in Westerns the most direct actions are violent ones. He uses his skills as a gunman and motorcyclist to help create his imposing myth, and trumpets it with a hyperbolic letter to the city. As an outlaw with a not-for-profit mission as well as a self-fashioned populist hero, Josef paints himself as dangerous and mythic, mixing celebrity and violence in a way to deflect any perceived threats. Much like Jesse James, his reputation and trouble-making trigger a backlash that his previous plan cannot handle. My characterization of Josef summons the tropes of the ideological outlaw who loses control of his own situation.

However, in the Brooklyn of the real world, many of these grassroots, romantic movements fail to make their voices heard and really halt the progression of neighborhood change. They put up a fight and they go down kicking and screaming, but oftentimes their homes cede to the economic
powerhouses they oppose. It happens in the larger American narratives as well. If the homesteaders had fought back successfully then there would not be any trains traveling any further west than Kansas. When faced with losing propositions and a growing, less stoppable threat, the romantic fighters have to reconcile motivations and sometimes compromise their seeming benevolence. It is at times like these that race riots occur or landlords burn down apartment complexes to sell the lot. Also, it is when the cowboy must decide if it’s time to fight or run. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid decide to fight the Bolivian army head on, Will Kane in *High Noon* (1952) decides to stay and fight, and Josef, his hand forced by the powers around him, takes a stand against Benton. Josef does not fight Benton at the onset because he is overwhelmed by the complications. Opposing him is not as easy as blowing up a train. Benton would only stop when he was dead, and Josef cannot make Yo a killer. He cannot figure out how to deal with Benton any other way. Consequently, he loses some of the agency he exhibited earlier in the film. Much like the resistance movements and Jesse James, Josef dies at the end, getting mixed up in a problem that is strong enough to outlast him and any of the other players.

The only of the three principles that survives the ordeal to survive this entire conflict is John Auger, who, nevertheless, does not have much to show for his time. At the end of neighborhood conflicts the outcome for all those who entered into fights against capital turn to nostalgia to try to keep some semblance of what they lost in the battle. Romantic tendencies are hard to get rid of once they are created, so by focusing on the “old days” rather than the present, old
residents are allowed to keep their romantic notions of a neighborhood that they have conceded is not theirs anymore. John is the out-of-place New Yorker, the one who prefers how things used to be and does not fit in the current mold of the city. He clashes with wealthy youth and is embittered about his situation. Much like the nostalgic old residents, they are relics of times passed, recounting old, better times, even if those times were not necessarily better. John’s relation to his past is one with grit. His profession and his character are linked to a romantically tough New York that just does not exist anymore.

When John starts to reflect and take a critical standpoint on his own perception of New York past he finds that the city has always been something to hate and love during any time period. Nostalgia belies any sort of critical remembrance, opting instead to smooth over the rough patches and fabricate a positive, relevant image. John is attracted to anything that seems more like his righteous, youthful days, but the situation in Greenpoint sobers him up and reflects his outlier status. It takes Josef’s misplaced romanticism to enable John to reflect on his own nostalgic tendencies and realize things do change and all we can do is hold onto the memories. The process of change is violent but one that must be reconciled, so John concedes his New York to memory and gives Josef the nostalgic perspective at the end of the film.

John has a relation to film genre not only linked to Western films but also to the hard-boiled and nihilistic detectives of seventies crime films. Many of these films, in turn influenced by Westerns, take place in New York. In films such as *The French Connection* (1971) or *Dirty Harry* (1971), the lead detective acts in
aggressive and frustrated ways, some even going so far as to become urban vigilantes. Those days of New York are gone along with the coupling popular images of vigilante police work, so John’s archetype shows not only an outmoded character of New York, but also what has become of the hard-boiled lawman. In Western films, when a town is considered “cleaned-up” the hero sheriff usually rides off, bored by the safety and lack of action created from his journey. This is seen in such films as *My Darling Clementine* (1946) when Wyatt Earp moved on from Tombstone or when Wade Hatton went out west from Dodge City in *Dodge City* (1939). John, well past his moment, chooses to stay and is left with nothing to do. Cowboys and detectives are meant to be men of action. His character is one of atrophy, rooted in a past that no longer exists. Now he just lives his days in a bar, naturally getting excited when someone gives him a purpose that reminds him of the old times. John’s narrative ends with the sobering realization that death and money make situations get ugly and nothing was ever that good. Much like Clint Eastwood’s role in *Unforgiven* (1992), violence may be within the old timer’s capabilities, but his relation to it is complicated by his memories of it and a desire to be relevant within the ever-changing New York environment.

Over the course of his narrative John sees violence and his nostalgia for his glory days through a different perspective.

Benton serves as a reflection of economic tendencies, coming in quickly and rapidly transforming a neighborhood. Change has been frequent over the past fifty years of Brooklyn’s history as there have been neighborhood transitions involving varied populations of working-class ethnic whites, low-income blacks
and Hispanics, and middle-class gentrifiers. Most of Brooklyn’s changes are symptomatic of larger forces that have been building over time, such as white flight or countrywide recessions, but on the ground and in the homes of residents they are felt quickly and gratingly. Benton serves as a catalyst of the economic change. Vanderbilt is the larger force behind the change, the reflection of economic prosperity and a desire for expansion, but Benton is who brings it to the people. His presence encroaches on all the previous residents of Greenpoint but he tries to build up the pristine nature of the neighborhood. By promising success to business owners, buying up unprofitable land, and seeming nice to more moneyed figures he uses a phony benevolence to encourage his own profits and remakes the neighborhood so that it will generate the most wealth for the wealthy. By being relentless in his pursuit of Yo and flushing him out by changing Greenpoint, he is excising territorial romance and undercutting Yo’s home just as real estate economics have changed people’s lives. Much like real estate developers and slumlords, he sees a neighborhood’s population in terms of dollars and cents, not as a community or identity.

The figure of Benton is derived from the tradition of the villainous gunfighter usually called in to dispatch the heroes at the behest of capitalists, a stranger to the setting who makes his presence known through violence. Within the confines of New York he seems unnatural and out of place, as derived from his tattoos for example, yet his job is one that is not particular to New York. He suggests that economic motives for frontier expansion are American and that those tendencies work just as well in New York as elsewhere. Benton is there to
eliminate any economic impediment. Much of his character is derived from the
villains Jack Palance played—especially in *Shane* (1953)—during his career. In
*Shane*, the main antagonist was the landowner of a prairie who hires a bounty
hunter to kill Shane so that he can drive tenants off the land and repossess it.
Benton plays a similar role. He is symptomatic of American capitalistic
tendencies and gets rich by taking care of the nastier parts of the process.

Overall, the screenplay draws attention to the case of Brooklyn
neighborhood change as symptomatic of American traditions normally
elaborated upon, through allegory, in Western films. The cowboys and outlaws
of the Old West still have a place in current American narratives, even if their
horses are gone and their guns have more than six bullets per round. Rhetoric
surrounding neighborhood change already draws from the western spirit, from
“urban pioneer” to eminent domain being used similarly to manifest destiny. By
using genre tropes I show how the cycle of economics, territorial romance, and
nostalgia may be typical of Brooklyn, but that each part has corollary in
American narratives and traditions that can influence and inform current
situations.
K TRAIN

by
Daniel Cerruti

Current Revisions by
Daniel Cerruti, 4/14/2009
EXT. K TRAIN CEREMONY  - DAY

A huge ceremony is underway on the waterfront of Greenpoint. There is a large construction zone replete with girders, construction equipment, and general building detritus.

A few hundred feet in front of a fence to the zone is a stage with reporters in front of it, milling about and taking photos. Broadcast cameras line the perimeter.

An MTA REPRESENTATIVE takes the stage.

MTA REP
Ladies and gentlemen of the press, of the city, I’m proud to present the president of the Metropolitan Transit Authority, Mr. Andrew Vanderbilt.

There is a polite APPLAUSE.

ANDREW VANDERBILT takes the podium, waving to the crowd with a smile. He carries himself tall and big despite his average build. Vanderbilt’s suit and teeth are flashy. He takes a moment, soaking in the publicity of his pet project.

VANDERBILT
Thank you all so much for coming to this momentous occasion. Ladies and gentlemen, for as long as there have been people inhabiting this area of the world, these former farms and villages that became cities were inescapably divided by the wedge of the East River, the river I stand in front of right now. This wedge led to the creation of two cities which grew like two trees close enough to each other to scrape branches, but never joining. Brooklyn and Manhattan, though, despite the river, despite different governments, despite rivalries, did all possible to join together.

While Vanderbilt is giving his speech, some construction workers keep a look out while some others start wheeling in some explosives. JOSEF, his face hidden behind a black bandanna and goggles, his full form never fully revealed, starts collecting the supplies and directing people like a commanding officer.
VANDERBILT (CONT’D)
More than a hundred years ago a bridge was built to connect the two by foot and carriage. It would become one of the most iconic structures in American history and served not only the people but the city as a symbol of unity between Brooklyn and Manhattan.

INT. THE BIG DANG SALOON - DAY

The TV is on in an old-fashioned, Spartan dive bar, broadcasting the speech. It’s the kind of place someone forgot to refurbish, seats with foam coming out of the fake leather and the floors are pockmarked. It’s happy hour, but in name only. ROCKABILLY MUSIC is on in the background. Everyone (and that’s not too many people) in the Big Dang is looking pretty glum, some are playing pool quietly, and everyone’s smoking.

The BARTENDER is pretty apathetic to it, preferring to wash some glasses, but JOHN AUGER is watching it with a grimace. John is an old guy with hair speckled with browns, greys, and whites, but his eyes are still fiery. The broadcast makes him grimace.

JOHN
Tellin’ you, this city makes no damn sense. Why the fuck they need a new train? Just somebody makin’ money.
(takes a sip of whiskey)
Top me off. Just makes fares go up, rents go up, shit goes up.

BARTENDER
(fills up John’s glass)
Yeah.

JOHN
People don’t give a shit about justice anymore.

A YUPPIE GIRL and YUPPIE GUY walk into the bar. They’re both in nice clothing, business casual, and stand out. The guy looks enthused, but the girl just COUGHS upon entering.

YUPPIE GIRL
I thought you couldn’t smoke in bars anymore?
YUPPIE GUY
Yeah, well...

He brings her over to bar. The bartender gives them a once over.

BARTENDER
Yeah?

YUPPIE GUY
You guys have the shot and a brew happy hour special, right?

BARTENDER
Yeah. Abilene special.

YUPPIE GUY
Gimme one of those.
(to the girl)
Time Out said this is one of the best deals in the city!

YUPPIE GIRL
Do you have a drink list?

BARTENDER
Yep.

He moves out of the way and mockingly displays the back shelf filled with bottles.

YUPPIE GIRL
Right. I’m all right.

The bartender pulls out a shot glass and a can of crappy beer. He fills the shot glass with some suspect whiskey. The yuppie guy is uncomfortably enthused.

BARTENDER
That’ll be 7.50.

YUPPIE GUY
So cheap!

He takes out a ten and slams it on the table. He pounds the shot back.

YUPPIE GUY (CONT’D)
(shakes his head with vigor)
Woo!

The bartender takes the cash and the shot glass. The guy opens the can and takes a gulp.
YUPPIE GIRL
What’s so great about this place?
(with incredulity)
A can of beer?

YUPPIE GUY
C’mon, look around, this place is so cool, authentic!

YUPPIE GIRL
Authentically rank. Smells like cancer died here.

YUPPIE GUY
A couple of my amigos say this place is dope. Coolest bar on the Lower East Side!

The music stops playing. Everyone else in the bar looks at them, and then at John. He slowly turns towards the couple. They look back at him nervous.

JOHN
You know, bad enough I have to listen to you shitheads screaming about fuck knows...

He gets up and sits down next to them.

BARTENDER
John...

John puts a dismissive hand up to the bartender.

JOHN
(to the yuppies)
Tell me, do I look like a drag queen with the clap?

YUPPIE GUY
Um, wha?

JOHN
Answer the damn question.

YUPPIE GUY
No.

JOHN
Do I look like I have a black robe and curly cues on the sides of my head?
YUPPIE GUY

No.

JOHN

Do I look like some punk shithead from Indiana with a pink mohawk?

YUPPIE GUY

No. Look...

JOHN

You’re damn right I don’t. You know why? Downtown ain’t some fuckin’ playground for shitheads like you. This is Alphabet City! Because of you I can’t smoke anywhere. Can’t afford anything. Can’t have peace. Downtown ain’t all the same, we’re different; but you ass holes are all the fuckin’ same. Get that right, and get the fuck out.

The couple are really taken aback. They stand up cautiously and back out the door. John smirks and laughs, the rest of the bar joins him, and he walks back to his stool and takes back another gulp of whiskey.

BARTENDER

Y’know, I could’a gotten some decent cash from them two.

JOHN

Gotta have some fun somehow.

BARTENDER

(as if this happened yesterday)

Fuck you, John.

JOHN

.puts up his arms

Fine. See you tomorrow.

BARTENDER

Yeah, see you tomorrow.

John pushes out the front door.

EXT. STREETS OF ALPHABET CITY - MOMENTS LATER

John steps into the sunlight, which hurts his eyes. He looks around his neighborhood and sees a lot of yuppie effects like chic cafes and fancy restaurants. He grimaces and GROWLS.
A '77 Buick Skylark, brown and dilapidated, is parked in front of the bar. Some young kids are leaning against it.

JOHN
Off the Skylark.

The kids look at John, whose got a mean look in his eye. They get off the car quickly.

John steps into the driver’s seat and tries to turn the car on. It’s just a bunch of whirs. He keeps turning the key over and over, but nothing is happening.

JOHN (CONT’D)
(slams on the steering wheel)
God damn it!

THE CAMERA FREEZE FRAMES ON JOHN. SUBTITLE: JOHN AUGER.

EXT. K TRAIN GROUNDBREAKING

VANDERBILT
The bridge quickly filled to capacity, and led to the consolidation of two great cities into a single, greater one. New York was and remains the unquestioned epitome of the metropolis, the dominant, unified city dreams that never sleeps.

Josef starts planting some explosives and wiring timers on several beams and stress points. With a click he arms them and they starts BEEPING.

VANDERBILT (CONT’D)
Today, we continue that tradition of unity. The MTA has been building bridges between the boroughs as it builds them into the future as well. New York extends its hand to Brooklyn again and asks her to join in a more perfect union of boroughs. The new K train, which will run across Manhattan’s 23rd street and into this beautiful garden capital of the world, Greenpoint, will be the next step in solidifying New York as not five, not two, but one magnificent city.
INT. CEO OFFICE - DAY

A CEO is watching the broadcast on TV. His office is filled with southern and western accoutrement, like Indian pattern rugs and desert vista paintings. He’s wearing a bolo tie—this clearly is not New York.

CEO
(southern accent)
Ya see that? I’m about to make profit from that stinkin’ city. I got me a 64 mil development contract comin’ outta that train.

BENTON, a big, big guy of considerable build, sits across from him in the office overly reclined. He’s dressed in an assortment of cowboy, military, and biker gear including a big cowboy hat and snakeskin boots. His hair is long in the back with a few Native American-ish braids running through it, and his arms are exposed showing off his tribal and Chinese character tattoos. All in all, he’s got a whole lot of stuff on him that seems to mean something but it might just all contradict itself.

CEO (CONT’D)
And it’s thanks to you for gettin’ Filmore off that job.

Benton shoots him a “yeah, that happened” look, implying that it was hardly a big deal.

CEO (CONT’D)
Tell ya what, that sum-bitch had it comin.’ He give you trouble?

Benton is silent.

CEO (CONT’D)
(laughs)
Well then guess he didn’t. You strike me as the kinda guy likes results, don’t take no for an answer. I fashion myself much the same.

Benton sits up.

BENTON
Martinbluff Towers.

CEO
What about ‘em?
BENTON
They failed. Lost your partners millions.

CEO
Yeah, but I’m still rich, and I’m the guy that matters cause I write your checks.

BENTON
No. You only matter as much as your checks are worth.

CEO
(nervous)
I got an appointment comin’ in, I’ll have security show you out.

As he reaches for an intercom on his desk Benton pulls out a gun. He waves his hand away with the gun.

CEO (CONT’D)
(sweating bullets)
Look, I’ll give you what you want.

BENTON
I know. Mr. Vanderbilt writes bigger checks and doesn’t like you.

Benton shoots the CEO. He stands to go around to his desk. Security comes in from behind, and Benton quickly shoots them.

FREEZE FROM ON BENTON WITH HIS GUN. SUBTITLE: BENTON.

EXT. K TRAIN GROUNDBREAKING

VANDERBILT
Soon, Brooklyn and Manhattan can be one, where both boroughs can say, proudly, they are from “New York.” With this commencement ceremony, let the construction of the K train begin. Let the consolidation complete itself. Let the spirit of unity begin again in the ever-greater New York City!

As Vanderbilt says this, Josef revs his motorcycle, a 60s Triumph Thruxton, pulls out a remote trigger and presses the big red button.
As the crowd APPLAUDS and Vanderbilt laps up the attention the construction site EXPLODES.

The site itself is not that big—only a couple hundred feet around. When it explodes it becomes a big cloud of ash but nothing major, and the press and Vanderbilt are far from it. It’s showy without annihilating the area. The TV cameras are fast to record it.

EXT. STREETS OF ALPHABET CITY – CONTINUOUS

John has the hood of his car open, trying to tinker with it, when he hears an EXPLOSION. He turns around and sees a cloud of black smoke rising from across the river. He’s perplexed. Everyone around him screams or is flummoxed.

INT. CEO OFFICE – CONTINUOUS

The TV broadcasts the explosion. Benton, going through the CEO’s files and picking and choosing a few of them, looks at the TV. His interest seems piqued.

EXT. K TRAIN GROUNDBREAKING

From the smoke Josef blasts out on his motorcycle, jumping from the pit of the site to the street. He stops for a moment, looking at the crowd of reporters taking photos and filming it. One reporter looks over and takes his photo. He seems fine with that.

The police seem him, too, as they all point towards the mysterious guy on the motorcycle. He guns the bike.

EXT. STREETS OF GREENPOINT – CONTINUOUS

The police start chasing after him. Josef dodges and weaves between cars and people as he speeds through the streets of Greenpoint. Police cars emerge from various intersections in full speed as the police scanner BUZZES with all of Josef’s flashy movements.

As Josef is being closely tailed by a car he sees another coming from around the corner. He makes a sharp turn into an alley in time for the two to collide with each other, but another one gets into the alley through the fray.

Josef cruises down the alley while a car pulls up close to him. Josef revs his bike to go faster. As he reaches the exit he sees a large semi driven by MIGUEL coming up. He gets in front of the semi before it plows over him.
The cop car slams on the brakes as the semi comes to a stop in front of the alley.

POLICEMAN
(gets out of car, to
Miguel)
What the hell do you think you’re doing?

MIGUEL
Lo siento, pero no habla ingles.

POLICEMAN
(to himself)
Damn damn damn! Who was that guy?

MIGUEL
(to himself)
Too fast for you.

Josef drives faster down the streets of Greenpoint. Upcoming are TWO POLICE OFFICERS about to lay down tire spikes across the street. Josef pulls out one of his guns and fires a few shots at a fire hydrant near the cops. It sprays them in the face as Josef drives past.

POLICEMAN 2
Who is this guy?

Josef starts to get sandwiched by police cars and gets pushed to the side of the street with oncoming traffic, including, naturally, more police cars. He swerves and weaves between all of them, pulling the brake and gunning it acrobatically. A POLICEMAN watches him go by his car with a giant swerve.

POLICEMAN 3
Who is this guy?

The police are setting up a barricade at an intersection. There are cars pointing towards each other preventing any sort of pass.

POLICEMAN 4
(into a walkie talkie)
Cars form a blockade.

Josef comes zooming around the corner, his bike pointing forward even though its going sideways. He sees the barricade coming up.
POLICEMAN 4 (CONT’D)
(into megaphone)
Stop your vehicle or we will be
forced to open f--

During the warning Josef banks a hard right and goes through a glass storefront of a garage. The glass shatters around him dramatically and he rides through to a back exit.

POLICEMAN 4 (CONT’D)
Who is this guy?

Josef swerves around some more back alleys until the sounds of POLICE SIRENS are getting ever more distant. He pulls up in front of a large metal gate at the end of an alley. It slowly rises, revealing a bunch of accomplices, including ROBERTO, waiting around. Josef wheels his bike inside and the gate starts closing.

ROBERTO
Well that was something.

Josef pulls down the bandanna around his mouth, his face finally revealed.

JOSEF
I think I got attention.

FREEZE FRAME. SUBTITLE: YO

INT. POLICE STATION MAIN ROOM - DAY

The entire police station is going nuts. Phones are ringing off the hook, paper is flying everywhere, ties are loosened. Everyone is talking in questions and no one is giving answers. LIEUTENANT BREWSTER, a youngish guy, prematurely balding, is making his way around the floor, harried, trying to pick up any piece of information he can, being stopped, pulled away, and shouted at from all sides.

In an office at the fair side of the room CAPTAIN MCALLISTER emerges from his office. He’s an older man with silver streaks in his hair and a gut formed from worry and stress. His sleeves are rolled up and his collar is unbuttoned.

MCALLISTER
Brewster! In here! Now!

Brewster heads into the office quickly, slamming the door after him.
INT. MCCALLISTER’S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The HUM of the rest of the station can be heard in the background. Brewster wipes his brow as he closes the door.

    MCALLISTER
    Sit.

Brewster does so across the desk from McAllister

    MCALLISTER (CONT’D)
    Anything? Anything at all?

    BREWSTER
    Um, well, you see, sir...

    MCALLISTER
    Say nothing it’s nothing.

    BREWSTER
    Nothing, sir. We know nothing.

    MCALLISTER
    (leans back in his chair)
    Unbelievable. The NYPD can’t figure out a single scrap of information about who could’ve blown up an entire construction yard ON FUCKING TV! Un-God-damn-believable. Why couldn’t you surprise me, Brewster? A trace of a hair of a fiber of something.

    BREWSTER
    Well, sir, we’ve been profiling the suspect based on his rather, um, unconventional approach to this attack.

    MCALLISTER
    There’s a conventional way to blow up a train site?

Brewster is dumb at this.

    MCALLISTER (CONT’D)
    (sighs)
    Okay, gimme what you got.

    BREWSTER
    He fired several shots in pursuit, but hit only targets despite showing enough marksmanship to have hit an officer.
MCALLISTER
So either smart enough to not kill a cop or just generally bloodless. What else?

BREWSTER
And, well, that’s about it. We couldn’t get a positive ID on the bike, but we think it’s a mid-60s Triumph. The explosives were all common. And we pulled out a slug from his shots but they were unmarked and from some old revolver.

MCALLISTER
Well, Brewster, this tells me just about nothing. But maybe it’s something.

BREWSTER
Um, yessir...

MCALLISTER
(takes a moment in thought)
So we have someone with no blood on his hands, but a lot of explosives. He rides a bike real well and he’s a crack shot. He seems to like old stuff.

(he cracks his neck)
I want every classic auto body shop looked into for old Triumphs. Any permits for antique revolvers--

RITZIK, a haggard looking detective, walks into the room in a huff. He’s breathing hard.

MCALLISTER (CONT’D)
Ritzik, better be damn important. What’s happening?

RITZIK
Sir, we just got this from the Times. They said it was anonymously delivered. The Post and the Daily News all got the same.

MCALLISTER
What is it?
RITZIK
(reading from a piece of paper)
An open letter to the city of New York...

EXT. CITY MONTAGE - DAY
Panorama of the skyline.

RITZIK (V.O.)
I am sure you are all aware yesterday that Brooklyn was interrupted by the ground shaking with destruction.

EXT. WALL STREET - DAY
A businessman reading the paper while eating lunch.

BUSINESSMAN (V.O.)
I realize it may have seemed severe, however the destruction of the building site is nothing compared to the destruction that the completed train would bring. I’m taking sole responsibility for this display of brute force.

EXT. STOOP IN GREENPOINT - DAY
A Latino guy is sitting outside on his stoop reading the paper.

LATINO GUY (V.O.)
Such unbridled force is the only thing that my enemies will listen to,

EXT. MARCY PROJECTS - DAY
A gangsta-type in baggy clothes sits on a railing reading the paper.

GANGSTA (V.O.)
for their ears are deaf to the voices of the people, whether one or one million. Who am I, you may ask?
INT. ITALIAN DELI - DAY

Two thirtysomething Italian guys, one behind the deli counter and the other leaning against it, each read a paper.

ITALIANS (V.O.)
I am the guardian of Greenpoint, the stalwart last stand against the forces of unchecked power.

EXT. WILLIAMSBURG CAFE - DAY

A hipster girl with big sunglasses and strange hair is drinking coffee, reading the paper.

HIPSTER GIRL (V.O.)
Who are my enemies? The people who wish to destroy all that Greenpoint’s residents hold dear in favor of condos and get-rich-quick developments.

EXT. BRIGHTON BEACH BOARDWALK - DAY

A Russian guy is leaning over the railing on the beach reading the paper.

RUSSIAN GUY (V.O.)
You have all known a neighborhood to be changed by forces larger than itself, against the wills of the residents, for the sake of profit for the city and private investors,

INT. HAIRDRESSER’S - DAY

An old Jewish woman is getting her hair done while reading the paper.

OLD JEWISH WOMAN (V.O.)
and you are all at risk of it happening to you unless someone takes a stand.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - DAY

A tourist with a fannypack and big camera is reading the paper while walking through the busy streets.
TOURIST GUY (V.O.)
If the K train were to run, there would be nothing left of Brooklyn that wasn’t crafted in New York’s cold, high-rise image.

ALL THE IMAGES ARE PASTED INTO A BIG MOSAIC AND RUN CONCURRENTLY.

ALL (V.O.)
I will confront any threat to Greenpoint. I am vigilant, and I will not surrender. You have my word.

INT. MCCALLISTER’S OFFICE - DAY

RITZIK
Very sincerely, Yo.

MCCALLISTER
Yo?

RITZIK
Yo.

McAllister is uncommonly calm. He opens his drawer and pulls out a beat up box of cigarettes. The detective and Brewster watch him with baited breath. McAllister puts a cigarette in his mouth, lights it and breathes deep making a huge burst of smoke.

MCCALLISTER
I haven’t had one of these damn things in seven years. (takes a drag) I want everyone, and I mean everyone, going to Greenpoint. NOW!

EXT. WILLIAMSBURG BRIDGE - DAY

A seemingly unlimited amount of police cars start driving from Manhattan to Brooklyn.

EXT. STREETS OF GREENPOINT - DAY

Police cars are cruising around the neighborhood to the point where it seems like they’re the only traffic. Cops start knocking on people’s doors in random questioning.
Two policemen come up a stoop to a front door and ring the bell. A RESIDENT, a middle-aged woman, answers the door.

POLICE OFFICER
Excuse us, ma’am, but we’re wondering if you knew anything about the K train bombi--

RESIDENT 1
I didn’t see nothing, I don’t know nothing. Good day.

She SLAMS the door. The officers are stunned.

STREETS OF GREENPOINT - MONTAGE

RESIDENT 2
Nope, nothing, no way, bye

Door SLAM.

RESIDENT 3
Nothing from here.

Door SLAM.

RESIDENT 4
No habla English.

Door SLAM.

EXT. OUTSIDE JOSEF’S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

The police come to another house and knock on the door. MARIA, a young Latina woman with long hair and stern eyes, opens the door.

MARIA
May I help you?

POLICE OFFICER
Yes, ma’am, we’re inquiring about the K train bombing yesterday. Did you happen to see or know of anything suspicious regarding that day?

MARIA
No, I’m sorry, I don’t know anything. Do you have any leads on who it may have been?
POLICE OFFICER
We’re still working on it, ma’am.

MARIA
Thank you. Good day.

INT. JOSEF’S HOUSE – CONTINUOUS

Maria closes the door. She peers out the window of the door and sees the police knocking next door. She gives a big HUFF and marches back inside to the living room.

Josef is sitting in a recliner cleaning his guns. Maria stands over him for a moment, arms crossed. Josef doesn’t seem to notice.

MARIA
(much less polite than when she was speaking with the police)
Well, isn’t this fantastic? You realize the entire neighborhood is filled with police now? Harassing everyone? You wanted this?

JOSEF
I didn’t want this, no, but some sacrifices have to be made in a fight.

MARIA
What did you think was going to happen? This?

Maria grabs a newspaper off of a nearby table and throws it on a coffee table in front of Josef. It has a picture of him on his motorcycle, looking slightly to the right of the camera, as he just pulled out of the construction site. The photo takes up half of the page, the other half is all black with big white letters reading “WHO IS THIS MAN?” and in smaller letters “A letter from the ‘Greenpoint Guardian’ inside on pg. 3!” Josef smiles seeing it.

JOSEF
I had to be dramatic. People respond to flash and bang.

MARIA
But you didn’t have to be stupid. The whole list of stunts you pulled on the streets is one thing, but your bike’s in the photo. How long will it take to find it? They can pull slugs out of where you shot.

(MORE)
They can profile you to find you here. And that letter, Jesus...

My bike and my gun are unregistered and unknown. They can get model, maybe, but no way to trace them. And if I didn’t write the letter I would just be an arsonist.

But no, you’re, what, the guardian of Greenpoint?

And everyone in it. I love this place.

He gets up and walks over to her. She’s suspicious, but then he puts a hand to her face.

But it’s nothing like how I love you. I’m your man first.

She clearly appreciates the comment. Josef is pretty smooth. But she regains her composure and slaps his hand away.

If you gonna be my guardian try harder to avoid getting killed.

She pushes him aside and walks past towards Valencia’s room. Josef cracks a smile.

Maria goes into VALENCIA’S room, Josef’s mother. She is in her 60s and in poor shape. She lies on the bed with various trays of easy-to-swallow food and medicine around her. As Maria walks in Valencia is looking up at the ceiling expectantly.

Valencia, how’re you feeling?

(keeping her focus skyward)

Oh, I suppose I’m feeling. How’re you?
MARIA
There’re problems in the neighborhood, just hoping it’ll pass fast.

VALENCIA
Oh problems are nothin’ new. I remember, must’ve been thirty years ago now, you couldn’t go outside without someone hustlin’ you for money or trying to sell you drugs.

MARIA
These problems are a little different.

VALENCIA
Young ones always say their problems are different. But they’re all the same. The old ones still don’t know how to fix them.

Have you seen the angel?

MARIA
Um, he’s in the-

Josef is standing in the threshold.

JOSEF
I’m here, don’t worry.

VALENCIA
Ah, my angel. Thank heaven they’ve let you come by again.

JOSEF
They owe me favors upstairs.

Valencia smiles.

VALENCIA
I’m glad they sent a funny one.

Josef comes over and sits at her side, taking her hand.

JOSEF
You’d be surprised how funny we can be.
VALENCIA
Good. I hate things too serious.
And there’s so much of it now.
Cancer’s such a serious word...

JOSEF
Hey, that’s an ugly word we don’t say.

Valencia acknowledges.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
Taking your meds?

VALENCIA
Of course. But they always feel like they’re doing less...

JOSEF
We’ll work on that. See you soon.

VALENCIA
Say hello to all the important people for me.

JOSEF
Can do.

Valencia lies back. Josef walks out the door and stops next to Maria. She doesn’t say anything but looks like she should. Josef leaves.

EXT. K TRAIN CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

John is riding shotgun in a tow truck past the construction site, his Buick in tow. Out of the window he sees some police cars all convened, investigating the zone. He looks on with interest that borders on disgust.

Through the crowd he sees McAllister milling about with everyone. He hits the driver to stop the truck. John pops out, signalling to the guy it’ll only be a minute.

McAllister is looking haggard. A cop hands him a cup of coffee and he takes a sip. He grimaces and pours it out.

John walks over to the police line tape, and as he’s about to lean over to call out to McAllister a cop puts up a hand. John looks at the hand, then at the cop with a GROWL. The cop puts his hand down.
JOHN
MCALLISTER! CAPTAIN MIKEY BOY
MCALLISTER!

McAllister turns around. John waves coyly to him. McAllister can’t believe who is there, and walks over quickly and annoyed.

MCALLISTER
Auger? The hell you doin’ here?

JOHN
(he leans back to the tow truck)
Car broke down. Only place in town that can fix it up right is a few blocks away.

MCALLISTER
(he looks John over)
You look like shit. Retirement ain’t been kind.

JOHN
Well, I was real torn up about our divorce.
(he looks past McAllister’s shoulder)
How’s the case?

MCALLISTER
Can’t talk about it.

John looks smug. He knows there are no leads.

MCALLISTER (CONT’D)
(to anyone else who’ll listen)
Can someone get me a cup of coffee worth a damn!

JOHN
(same tone)
Make that two!

MCALLISTER
Haven’t seen you since we did Times Square back in the 80s.

JOHN
Good ole days.

MCALLISTER
Bad ole days.
A cop comes with two cups of coffee. McAllister and John each take one. They sip in silence for a moment.

MCALLISTER (CONT’D)
(to cop who brought it)
Now this is good. Where’d this come from?

POLICEMAN
Place called...Kowalski’s.

MCALLISTER
Remember that.

John looks around the destruction.

JOHN
Looks tough. Up to it?

McAllister tries to look sure, nodding confidently. John gives him a “bullshit” look.

MCALLISTER
Yeah, we got it. I got it.

John leans back and takes another sip of coffee and it looks like wheels are turning in his head. McAllister gets stern.

MCALLISTER (CONT’D)
No.

JOHN
Think I’ll take a walk ‘round the neighborhood.
    (he takes another sip of coffee)
    Kowalski’s?

He walks away back to the truck.

MCALLISTER
(calling after him)
Auger, stay clean!

McAllister turns around and sees some cops fumble with some evidence, others just standing around talking and eating bagels.

MCALLISTER (CONT’D)
(calling after John)
And stay in touch!

John turns and gives McAllister a smile, then gets back to the truck and talks to the driver.
JOHN
Garage is Huron and West?

TRUCK DRIVER
Yeah.

JOHN
Meet you there. I’ll walk.

The driver shrugs and shifts gears.

EXT. STREETS OF GREENPOINT - CONTINUOUS

John walks through the streets, crawling with cops and on-edge residents. The walls are tagged up with “Yo” and “Gentrifighter” and a few other words showing support. Newspapers are all over the street with headlines like “What’s the deal, Yo?”

Some young guys are walking in a group, one drinking a can of soda. He throws the can to his side, hitting a cop car’s wheel. The SIREN WHOOPS once and two cops come out of the car and start interrogating the stressed young guys.

A policeman shoves one of the guys who seems to be mouthing off a bit, and he shoves right back. The guy quickly gets subdued, cuffed, and put in the back of the car. John shakes his head in disbelief.

INT. SHEROFSKI AND SONS GARAGE - LATER

John comes to the front of a relatively bare-bones garage with a faded sign out front saying “Sheropski and Sons.” He steps inside the garage door and sees a cavalcade of classic, beautiful cars. It’s pretty cool and John is wide-eyed.

JOHN
Hello?

No one seems to be around. Somewhere in the thick of cars is some ELECTRIC BLUES MUSIC playing. John follows the sound to its source, and sure enough under a car are a pair of legs sticking out. The radio is next to them.

JOHN (CONT’D)
Yo.

Josef clamors out from beneath the car with a shocked expression on his face. He gets up quick. John is perplexed and takes a step back. When Josef sees he’s not a threat he exhales. He turns off the music.
JOSEF
What can I do ya for?

JOHN
(signaling to the stereo)
Howlin’ Wolf?

JOSEF
Yeah.

JOHN
Turn it back on.

Josef gives a smile, then turns it back on but more softly.

JOHN (CONT’D)
I’m the ‘77 Skylark.

JOSEF
Skylark?

JOHN
Lemme guess. No parts? Piece of junk?

JOSEF
No no no, just don’t see many o’ those anymore. Great American car, love workin’ with ‘em.

JOHN
Fifty mechanics all look like they never seen a real car before...
(looks around garage)
Finally found a guy worth keepin’ round.

JOSEF
(puts out his hand)
Josef Sheropski.

JOHN
(shakes his hand, scans him up and down)
Sheropski?

JOSEF
Dad Russian, mom Dominican.

JOHN
Interesting.

JOSEF
Very Brooklyn.
JOHN
John Auger.

JOSEF
Let’s check your car.

John and Josef walk over to the Skylark and Josef pops the hood. He starts rummaging around for a little while.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
Your pressure plates outta whack...need a new flywheel.
That’ll take a bit to fix.

JOHN
Shit. How long?

JOSEF
Hmm, maybe a week. Come back around then, I’ll see what I can do.

JOHN
Damn. Takes forever to get from here to Manhattan...

JOSEF
(suspicious)
Manhattan? You one of those cops?

JOHN
Nah, just heard this is the best place for real cars.

Josef smiles appreciatively.

JOHN (CONT’D)
Saw that GTO walkin’ in. What year?

JOSEF
‘72. Souped it up myself. Found it looked like it was built with rust.

JOHN
Now that’s what I’m talkin’ about. Tell ya, real cars died when they got all “economy.”

JOSEF
(laughs)
Car should have personality.
Everything nowadays is all clean and safe and boring. ‘Cept here.
JOHN
(a bit goading)
Talkin’ ‘bout the bad ass on the motorcycle?

Josef smiles a bit. He doesn’t notice any underlying tones.

JOSEF
Come back in a week, should be all good.

John walks out of the garage while Josef gets back to tinkering.

EXT. OUTSIDE GARCIA’S HOUSE – AFTERNOON

Sitting the stoop to Garcia’s house are a bunch of people of various ages, from children to seniors. They’re all having a barbecue party, the older people talking and the kids playing.

John is across the street when a ball comes bouncing to his feet. He stoops to pick it up and a little girl comes running over to him.

JOHN
This your ball?

The girl nods.

JOHN (CONT’D)
Does Carlos Garcia live here?

She doesn’t respond.

JOHN (CONT’D)
Right.

He hands her back the ball and she runs back to the party. John walks up the stoop in between all the people. They all stop talking to look at him. He reaches the top and buzzes.

GARCIA (O.S.)
What you want?

JOHN
Garcia, it’s John.

GARCIA (O.S.)
I don’t know no John.

The people on the stoop are still watching.
JOHN
You know, John Auger. From the old days.

No response.

JOHN (CONT’D)
(annoyed, whispering into the intercom)
The Deuce.

Garcia answers loudly, making John step back from the tinny intercom.

GARCIA (O.S.)
Holy shit! Get your ass up here.

The door BUZZES open. John tilts his hat to the party. They all go back to their business.

INT. STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

John enters the building and starts climbing the stairs. GARCIA, an old Hispanic man with a lively step, starts descending at the same time, leaning over the center gap of the stairs smiling.

The two reach the same landing where Garcia gives John a hug. Still holding his arms, he steps back to scan John up and down. Jerkingly, he let’s go.

GARCIA
You never called, you never wrote...
(pause)
Damn, you look like shit.

JOHN
Nice to see you, too, Garcia.

GARCIA
How’re you doing, my friend?

JOHN
Bored as hell.

GARCIA
Ya just need too much action. See that outside? That’s family. Makes days worth it. What’re you doin’ in Brooklyn anyway? Thought you stuck to the city.
JOHN
Had to get my car fixed.
Interestin’ things goin’ down here.
Reminds me of the old days.

Garcia gives him a suspicious look and seems more guarded.

JOHN (CONT’D)
Kinda wonderin’ what a man of Greenpoint like yourself knows about its guardian.

GARCIA
Ain’t been listenin’ to the streets. I’m retired from that life. This ain’t the old days.

John gives him a “bullshit” look.

GARCIA (CONT’D)
None of that.

JOHN
I’ll be seein’ you around.

John walks downstairs and out the front door.

INT. SECRET MEETING PLACE - NIGHT

All of the accomplices are celebrating in a secret basement room. There’s a lot of booze and general REVELRY. Miguel is in the thick of the party, enjoying the center of a group of people as he tells a story. Roberto is off to the side, drinking, but not enjoying himself.

MIGUEL
And then he peeled back on those cops, man! Just like (mimes riding a motorcycle) whhhrrrrrrr eyerrrrrrhhhh and I was like, damn! Cops were just like (stands mouth agape) I mean, damn!

People LAUGH. Josef walks into the room to see everyone partying.

MIGUEL (CONT’D)
(shouting)
The man himself!
Everyone raises their drinks LAUGHING and WHOOPING. Josef smiles sheepishly, but gets over it fast and starts mingling. Everyone is patting him on the shoulder as he makes his way to Miguel.

JOSEF
Your idea?

MIGUEL
(hands him a drink)
One week anniversary.

ACCOMPLICE 1
Josef, you were amazing. All the cops are blind, deaf, n’ dumb.

ACCOMPLICE 2
Cameras loved you, man. K train’s done!

ACCOMPLICE 1
Where’d you learn to do all that?

MIGUEL
Do the cowboy trick!

Everyone AGREES and CHEERS for it. Josef laps up the attention.

JOSEF
Okay, okay, pass me my guns.

Josef’s revolvers and belt are on a nearby table. An accomplice throws them over to him and Josef straps them on.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
When you guys gonna get tired of this?

MIGUEL
When one of us could do it, too.

Josef pulls out his guns quick-draw style. His face becomes stern, focused. He starts twirling and whirling the guns around in the trigger loop like a fancy cowboy. They keep spinning as he moves his arms into more and more complicated angles. The accomplices all watch with awe. After a while, he holsters them again, freezes dramatically. Everyone is entranced. Josef then puts his arms up in triumph. They CHEER.

MIGUEL (CONT’D)
Gotta teach me that sometime.
Josef laughs and everyone goes back to partying, living it up. Roberto slugs back a huge gulp of his drink and comes up to Josef from behind. He’s drunk and angry.

ROBERTO
Good trick. Know any others?

Josef turns around.

JOSEF
Roberto! What’s happenin’?

ROBERTO
My cousin’s in custody.

JOSEF
What happened?

ROBERTO
Police got him on a stop n’ frisk. Maybe, “guardian of Greenpoint,” takes more than blowin’ up a train.

Josef is a little discomforted by this. Roberto takes another swig.

JOSEF
We can get your cousin free.

ROBERTO
Cops are everywhere, arresting everyone, all you can do is twirl your guns. I see you can impress these guys, I don’t see you lead ‘em.

This rubs Josef the wrong way, who gets steely eyed. Roberto’s nonplussed. Josef whistles, getting everyone’s attention.

JOSEF
I want to thank you all for your great work on the K train. We made one helluva show.

Everyone CHEERS.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
But our jobs ain’t done. We’ve gotta keep pushin, make Greenpoint a danger zone for developers, make ‘em scared. We’re startin’ something big.
The accomplices are nodding along.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
MacNichol Park. We all know it, we all love it, and they’ve been threatening to shut it down for ages now. We won’t let them. Let’s take it back!

Everyone agrees.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
Get some more explosives ready. Get the word out to the neighborhood.

All the accomplices are excited, and Josef surveys them happily. His eyes fall on Roberto, who seems unimpressed and takes another drink. Josef’s smile fades.

EXT. STREETS OF GREENPOINT - NIGHT

Two young guys are leaving a bar, drunk. They’re all being generally rowdy. One of them is still holding a bottle. A police car rolls by them slowly, watching them, and then keeps moving.

DRUNK GUY 1
Mutha fuckin’ cops. Can’t take a shit in the neighborhood no more.

DRUNK GUY 2
Fuck ‘em. Yo’ll fuck ‘em up.

DRUNK GUY 1
Well, then I’m Yo.
(shouting to the cops)
Fuck you!

He throws the bottle at the cop car. It shatters on the back window. The car abruptly stops and two officers emerge.

POLICEMAN 1
Who the fuck threw that?

No one responds. The officers march towards them.

POLICEMAN 1 (CONT’D)
You hear me, ass holes. Who threw that?

DRUNK GUY 2
Must’a been Yo.
POLICEMAN 1
Funny guy. What’s your name?

DRUNK GUY 1
Yo.

POLICEMAN 1
Really?

The officer takes out a nightstick and strikes the drunk guy, subduing him. He takes another few cracks at him while he’s on the ground.

DRUNK GUY 2
(yelling nervously)
Wait wait wait! He’s not Yo, we’re not Yo! Here, I got ID.

He reaches into his jacket pocket for his wallet. The second officer, who was watching the beating, sees him reaching and draws his gun.

POLICEMAN 2
Gun!

He FIRES, hitting the guy in the leg. He drops his wallet.

DRUNK GUY 2
AHHAAAAHH! FUUUUCK!

POLICEMAN 1
Shit!
(into a walkie talkie)
We need an ambulance on the corner of Manhattan and Java, now!

The guy keeps writhing in pain.

BROADCAST

NEWSCASTER
Last night, the situation in Greenpoint took a more grisly turn as an unarmed man was shot in the leg by police. According to police testimony, the man and his friend were threatening the officers with violence and throwing bottles at them.

MCALLISTER
(with subtitle of “Captain Michael McAllister”)
(MORE)
We deeply regret this use of force. Our first duties are to protect and serve, and we will treat the community accordingly.

NEWSCASTER
No noted progress has been made on the Yo case, seen here in the only known photograph of him.

The photo from the K train site is shown on screen.

NEWSCASTER (CONT’D)
Head of the MTA Andrew Vanderbilt was interviewed earlier today in regard to the plans to continue the construction of the K train.

The photo from the K train site is shown on screen.

A press conference with Vanderbilt and a few reporters in front of him.

VANDERBILT
Right now, regrettably, the K train plan is suspended until further notice, however it is far from cancelled.

REPORTER 1 (O.S.)
What about Yo’s claim that the train will ruin the neighborhood?

VANDERBILT
Preposterous. The K train will bring new prosperity to the neighborhood. When the train is running several major developments will follow, including new housing, park renovation, and an initiative to clean up the long-simmering toxic oil spill runoff from ‘78. Is Yo trying to guard the cancer rate?

Vanderbilt smiles wryly. The reporters laugh.

REPORTER 2
What about the NYPD’s investigation and the accusations of brutality?
VANDERBILT
The NYPD is a fine institution and
I have faith that their
investigation will continue
promisingly. The terrorist known as
Yo will be delivered to justice.

INT. MTA HEADQUARTERS HALLWAY - LATER

Vanderbilt is marching down the hallway discernibly pissed off. The MTA rep is following close behind.

VANDERBILT
Stupid questions. No one’s stoppin’
my fuckin’ train. It’ll take more
than some outlaw fuckhead to stop
me from makin’ money.

MTA REP
Yes, sir.

VANDERBILT
Fuckin’ NYPD. Bunch of dickless
wonders.

MTA REP
Yes, sir.

Vanderbilt takes out a cigarette and lights it.

MTA REP (CONT’D)
Sir, there’s no smo-

Vanderbilt looks at him from the corner of his eye.

MTA REP (CONT’D)
Yes, sir.

VANDERBILT
Are the investors in?

MTA REP
Yes, sir.

Vanderbilt takes one last long drag of his cigarette and then throws it at the rep, who moves out of the way. They’ve done this before. He smooths down his face, composes himself, and opens a large door.
INT. MTA HEADQUARTERS CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Many investors, basically all rich, old, white men in fancy suits, are all sitting around a large table talking nervously. They all turn to see Vanderbilt walk in.

VANDERBILT
Gentlemen, I trust you’re well.

INVESTOR 1
You’re running a damn circus here, Vanderbilt!

INVESTOR 2
When is this train of yours supposed to get off the ground?

INVESTOR 3
You told me a year ago land value would triple. It’s only plummeting and fast. I’m buying out before it bankrupts me!

Everyone rabbles in agreement. It looks like Vanderbilt has a headache, but he remains calm.

VANDERBILT
Everyone, please. With all due respect, you have no idea how to conduct business in this city.

They are all expectantly silent.

VANDERBILT (CONT’D)
You all know how to work each other for money, screwing other companies out of contracts, but here you have millions of people that hate to see any change who all make terrible mistakes. You have to work with what you’re dealt.

INVESTOR 1
Meaning?

Vanderbilt gets up and looks out a large window. The skyline is massive and looks all the way to Greenpoint.

VANDERBILT
This vigilante fashions himself a freedom fighter, defending his neighborhood through cheap means and showmanship.

(MORE)
I gave the police the benefit of the doubt, but they have proven themselves worthless, costing me money, and that is inexcusable. The law is too slow, gentlemen, so I will seek to ruin this terrorist.

He smiles towards Greenpoint.

INT. KOWALSKI’S COFFEE SHOP - DAY

John comes into the coffee shop where there are a few cops. There are a couple residents, but they’re all nervously eating. He spots McAllister at the counter sitting hunched over a coffee, looking glum. John works his way through the tables and sits down next to him, looking up at KOWALSKI behind the counter.

JOHN
Lemme get a coffee and a waffle.

Kowalski writes it down and heads to the kitchen.

JOHN (CONT’D)
(joking)
At least you look good on TV.

MCALLISTER
(sighs)
Why me? Why do I get nothin’ but shit all the time?

JOHN
Cops always get shit.

Kowalski sets the coffee down in front of John. He takes a sip.

JOHN (CONT’D)
(to himself)
Man, this is good coffee.

MCALLISTER
City’s on my ass, DA’s on my ass, Vanderbilt’s on my ass. It’s open season.

JOHN
Everyone’s huntin’ for scapegoats.

Pierogis are up. John starts eating them.
Okay, Auger, I’m gonna start talkin’ and you’re just gonna listen, got me?

He nods with his mouth filled with pierogi.

This got screwed up. The neighborhood was tough before, but with this the press is on my back to ease off police presence. Thank God that guy wasn’t killed. I dunno if it’s a sign or somethin’ but you’re here, for better or worse, and still that same ass hole you were back cleanin’ up Times Square. I want this Yo bastard real bad. Here’s deal. You’re gonna work for me. You won’t be a cop, no shield, no jurisdiction, no commanding officers, just report to me. If you mess up I ain’t helpin’ you. But if you get results you get a year’s salary. Deal?

I know what cop’s get paid.

Fine, two years...Only with results. Deal?

John swallows his bite and takes a sip of coffee. He doesn’t seem to be thinking, but rather just trying to make McAllister sweat.

John finishes his last pierogi, takes the last gulp of his coffee and walks out of Kowalski’s. McAllister throws some money on the table.
INT. OUTSIDE VANDERBILT’S OFFICE - DAY

Vanderbilt comes to his secretary.

VANDERBILT
My two o’clock here?

SECRETARY
Yes, sir, he’s inside, but-

VANDERBILT
But?

SECRETARY
He’s a little, well...

VANDERBILT
I know.

Vanderbilt enters his office.

INT. VANDERBILT’S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Sitting in front of Vanderbilt’s desk is Benton, his feet extended out all the way.

VANDERBILT
Hello, Mr. Benton. Welcome to New York. First time?

BENTON
Yep. Smells.

VANDERBILT
My problem is some terrorist goes by Yo. Stopping me from making money.

BENTON
Inexcusable.

VANDERBILT
(smiles)
Yes, it is.

BENTON
25 million.

VANDERBILT
(laughs)
I think not.

Benton’s not amused.
BOOK II (CONT’D)
I hold my money very close, Benton.

Benton leans forward, not breaking eye contact with Vanderbilt.

BENTON
25 million.

Vanderbilt notices Benton’s huge frame and realizes how small he compares. After seeming nervous, he suddenly laughs to himself.

VANDERBILT
I can tell I’ll like working with you.

They shake hands.

BENTON
I need you to set the plan in motion.

EXT. OUTSIDE GARCIA’S HOUSE – LATER

Greenpoint seems particularly quiet today, barely any cars, cop or otherwise. Some kids are out, looking mischievous, taking advantage of the cop downturn. “For Sale” signs adorn a lot of the buildings. Garcia is sitting on a lawn chair on his stoop, drinking a beer with a cooler next to him. John comes up and sits down on the adjacent ledge.

GARCIA
Quiet.

JOHN
Someone die?

GARCIA
Not yet. Wanna beer?

John nods. Garcia reaches into his cooler and throws John a can.

GARCIA (CONT’D)
Can drink a beer in public now at least.
(takes a drink)
Everyone’s just scared of what’s happenin. Too much craziness.

JOHN
Yo?
Garcia just sips his beer.

JOHN (CONT’D)
How much he do here?

GARCIA
Who knows? He could be doin’ anythin’ I guess.

JOHN
You got anything for me?

GARCIA
Yeah, somethin’ about MacNichol Park. Don’t know when, where, or why.

JOHN
MacNichol...used to be a junky spot in the eighties, right?

Garcia shrugs.

JOHN (CONT’D)
You moving?

GARCIA
Hell no.
   (pounds his chest)
   Old timer.

They each take a sip of beer. A garbage truck drives by, the only sign of life.

EXT. MACNICHOL PARK - NIGHT

Josef, black bandanna on his face, and several accomplices are all carrying some explosives. MacNichol Park is fenced in with signs saying “Do Not Enter” and “Under Construction.” Large parts of it are razed, concrete everywhere. There is a foreman’s trailer inside next to some construction vehicles.

They all hop the fence and start taking out the explosives, trying to wire a few things.

JOSEF
You call the papers?

MIGUEL
Yep, anonymous tip there’d be trouble tonight around one. They’ll take the bait.
John walks by outside the fence and sees some figures moving about inside the park. He jimmies open one of the locks on the fence and starts sneaking in. He comes to around a corner from where they’re wiring the trailer. Surmising the situation, he steps out from behind his cover with his gun drawn.

JOHN
No show tonight, boys.

They all look up to see him. One of the accomplices pulls out a gun. Josef sees this and pushes it away but not before it FIRES. John ducks behind cover again.

JOSEF
No blood.
(to everyone)
Get outta here!

All the accomplices take off on one direction or the other. John comes from behind his cover, gun drawn, looking for which person is most promising. He finally settles on straight ahead, which just so happens to be Josef.

John FIRES a few times in his direction but it’s too dark to see too clearly—no street lights are in MacNichol. Josef takes cover behind some structures and tries to sneak away quietly. John lets his hearing become more acute and SHOOTS to where Josef is hiding.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
(to himself)
Good shot...

Josef ducks behind a stone structure, one of those public parks utility sheds, in a corner of the fence. John comes to the other side.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
(voice disguised)
Who are you? You ain’t no cop.

JOHN
(imitates the disguised voice)
I ain’t no cop.

JOSEF
Whaddya want?

JOHN
The guardian of Greenpoint.
JOSEF

Why?

JOHN

You're crazy enough to be interesting.

JOSEF

Don't bullshit me. This is bigger than bullshit. Greenpoint is for the people of Greenpoint, people like you tryin' to get us out. It's always been ours, and we ain't budging. I got a fuckin' say in what happens here.

John takes a moment to consider this. Josef pulls out a gun and fires it so it ricochets off a nearby structure. This snaps John out of it and he rounds the corner. No Yo. John goes around the structure to see Josef bounding up a steel cargo crate and over the fence to where his motorcycle is. He peels off.

John watches him go. He sees a news van drive down the street. He runs back out the way he came in, avoiding the news van and making it out in secret. A reporter and a cameraman pop out of the van and look around-- nothing is happening.

REPORTER

Damn third fake tip this week.

They get back in the van and drive off.

BROADCAST

“What’s up, Yo?: The K Train Case” graphic goes across the screen.

NEWSCASTER

The MTA has decided to push forward the construction of the K line into Greenpoint. MTA president Andrew Vanderbilt held a press conference this morning to make the announcement.

VANDERBILT

After deliberation with my board of trustees, we have decided to push forward on construction and not be intimidated by terrorists.

(MORE)
VANDERBILT (CONT'D)
No show this time, just work beginning again.

REPORTER 1
Are you worried about Yo?

VANDERBILT
Operations will be more secure now, but he cannot slow down progress.

NEWSCASTER
This announcement is coming in with new police data that street crime has been on the rise in Greenpoint-

The TV is turned off.

INT. SECRET MEETING PLACE - DAY
Josef has just shut off the TV. The accomplices have all been watching as well. Josef’s not amused, but calm.

JOSEF
Well, fair enough. He builds again, we blow it up again.

ROBERTO
Something’s not right. First that guy in MacNichol, now this?

JOSEF
If that guy from MacNichol shows up again, we’ll take care of him. We’re ready for trouble now. We do this tomorrow. Get some bombs.

The accomplices nod and run off. Roberto is still not convinced.

INT. SHEROPSKI AND SONS GARAGE - EVENING
John comes knocking at the garage door. The lights are still on inside, but the place seems like it might be closed. As he’s about to step away Josef answers the door. He smiles upon seeing John.

JOSEF
John! Good to see you. Come on in.

JOHN
Glad you’re still open.
John walks in and the two head over to the Skylark.

JOSEF
I’ve been tweakin’, hopefully it works. Try startin’ it.

John gets into the driver’s seat and turns the car on. It goes. The two smile at each other, but then the car abruptly sputters and shuts off.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
Sonuvabitch.

He pops the hood to examine.

JOHN
What’s the deal?

JOSEF
Crap. Flywheel’s defective. Sorry, John, but I’ll get back to this first thing tomorrow morning, probably another couple days to fix.

JOHN
Do what you gotta do.

John gets out of the car.

JOHN (CONT’D)
Neighborhood’s gettin’ rough, huh?

JOSEF
Too much for you, city boy? It’s Brooklyn. We tough.

JOHN
Whatever you say, kid. Just that Yo guy seems to have his work cut out for him.

JOSEF
What do ya mean?

JOHN
For a guardian he ain’t savin’ much. Hell, people movin’ out to avoid bein’ saved. See ya in a couple days.

John steps out of the garage. Josef is a little stupefied by this.
EXT. STREETS OF GREENPOINT - CONTINUOUS

John is walking down the street away from Sheropski and Sons when three guys hanging out on a stoop spot him. One of them gives a nod, and they all get up and start following John. He’s no idiot and realizes this is happening. He turns around to face them.

JOHN
Lookin’ for something?

GANG MEMBER 1
(pulls out a knife)
Run ‘em.

JOHN
Okay, okay.

John opens his jacket to reach into his pocket, the gang member watching his hand. As he slowly moves his hand, he suddenly side steps out of the way of the knife, grabbing the thug’s arm with the arm he was reaching in with, disarming him, and hooking the thug in the face with the other. The thug goes down hard.

The other gang members start fighting John, and he holds them back but two against one isn’t fair. Josef is closing the gate to his garage when he hears the tussle. He runs around the corner and sees John mid-fight. He’s about to step in when John takes down the other two guys, one with a headbutt and the other with a punch to the face. Josef’s clearly impressed.

The first gang member slowly rises from behind John, whose adrenaline is still kicking from the other two and is focused on them. He’s got a little blood coming from his nose. As the gang member tries to sneak up on John from behind, Josef comes in a knocks him in the back of the head. The two acknowledge each other.

JOHN (CONT’D)
Told ya.

JOSEF
When you’re right...you wanna clean off some o’ that blood? Got some stuff in the garage.

JOHN
Right.

The two walk off.
INT. OFFICE OF SHEROPSKI AND SONS GARAGE - LATER

John is sitting in a chair, feeling his jaw around. Josef brings him a paper towel, which he uses to dab his face.

JOHN
Thanks.
(pause)
That usually happen?

JOSEF
Nobody likes Brooklyn cause it’s safe.

JOHN
(wincing a bit from pain)
I could use a drink.

Josef chuckles, then goes to his desk drawer and pulls out a bottle of bourbon and two glasses, which he fills and hands to John. They cheers.

JOSEF
Way to handle yourself, old man. Where’d you learn to fight like that?

JOHN
(taking a swig)
Manhattan wasn’t always a playground, kid. Streets teach ya. Times square.

JOSEF
Back when it was all porno shops and coke dealers?

JOHN
Yep. All you were back then was your rep. Even when it looked like you were gonna lose a fight back then you still put up a good one. You leave scars on bigger guys than you if you can’t beat ‘em down. How you get respect.

JOSEF
Think that stuff’s still ‘round at all?

JOHN
Different place now. Hell, barely recognize this place.

(MORE)
JOHN (CONT'D)
(notices his drink is near empty)
Think I could get another one?

Josef does so.

CUT TO:

SHEROPSKI AND SONS GARAGE - LATER

John and Josef are clearly drunk. They’re singing along to SMOKESTACK LIGHTNIN’ BY HOWLIN’ WOLF, playing on Josef’s stereo, with varying degrees of accuracy but a lot of enthusiasm.

JOHN AND JOSEF
Whoa-ooooooh! Stop your train, let her go for a ride! Why don’t you hear me cryin? Woo-hoo! Woo-hoo! Woo-hoo! Woo-hoo!

JOSEF
Woo!

The song doesn’t have another “woo.”

JOSEF (CONT’D)
Ha, not that many!

John laughs. He looks around the office and sees a photo on Josef’s desk. It’s him holding Maria in MacNichol Park.

JOHN
Who’s the babe?

JOSEF
(looks to the photo)
My wife. So stop thinkin’ what you’re thinkin.

John laughs. Josef takes the photo in his hands to show John.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
That’s the spot I proposed to her. MacNichol Park. Was my favorite place in the world, played handball and ran in the fountains there as a kid. Cracked concrete and grime didn’t matter. Took her on a stroll through it, she said “beautiful day,” I said “beautiful girl,” and got down on my knee.
JOHN
Smooth piece a shit.

JOSEF
Now they gonna turn it into condos or some shit.

Josef takes a long drink.

JOHN
She all the family you got?

JOSEF
Maybe soon. Got a mom. She’s in a bad way. Cancer.

JOHN
Sorry to hear that. I heard Greenpoint’s got a pretty high rate. Happens a lot to people who live round here too long.

Josef doesn’t like this subject.

JOSEF
Times Square ain’t the place to be tough no more, huh.

JOHN
Went there recently, first time since Giuliani turned it into Disneyland. Fat tourists, hustlers, smelled like cheap fish and plastic. Disgusting. (takes a drink) But, y’know, always has been. It ain’t better now but it wasn’t better then. Of all people, who’d a thought Mickey Mouse would be the guy to make it happen?

Josef laughs.

JOSEF
Ever make it to Greenpoint back then?

JOHN
Yeah, once or twice. Drugs, muggers, walkin’ down the street was a crap shoot. Had to stay on your toes.
JOSEF
Sounds great.

John notices the incongruity between what he said and Josef’s reaction when his phone starts buzzing. It’s McAllister.

JOHN
Hold on for a sec, old lady’s callin.’

John gets up and out of the room. Josef watches him go, his drunkenness seemingly dissipating as his look becomes sharper and more serious.

JOHN (CONT’D)
‘Lo?

INTERCUT phone conversation.

MCALLISTER
You missed your check-in. What’s been happenin?

JOHN
Don’t worry, dear, I didn’t forget about you.

MCALLISTER
Christ, Auger, you drunk?

JOHN
I don’t get drunk.

MCALLISTER
What the fuck are you doing? Is it anything close to your job?

JOHN
Don’t worry, sweet heart. I’ll tell you everything tomorrow. Get some sleep.

He hangs up. He comes back inside to find Josef tapping his foot along to the music, his drunk having come back.

JOSEF
Your old lady, huh?

JOHN
Yep, checkin’ in on me. Better hit the road.
JOSEF
Think you can avoid trouble this time?

JOHN
Trouble should be avoiding me. Get some Keb Mo for when I come back. Take care.

JOSEF
Peace.

John walks out. Josef watches him go, taking another sip of whiskey.

EXT. K TRAIN CONSTRUCTION SITE - THE NEXT DAY

The site seems strangely unguarded considering Vanderbilt’s promises, but this does not deter the crew. There are a few security guards here and there, but that’s all. Josef, in his bandanna and goggles again wheeling in his motorcycle, leads people stealthily through the back way they used last time. He looks around for any members of the press, and is dismayed not to see any.

JOSEF
(to Miguel)
We’ll have to make this big to be seen. No reporters around.

The accomplices all start unloading their bags full of explosives and start setting up the detonators.

On a building across the way Benton is setting up a long-range sniper rifle. There are a bunch of other men with him, all dressed similarly, but not as ludicrously, to Benton with cowboy and military gear. They’re at the ready with rifles of their own. As they seem ready to pop up, Benton gives them a “hold” sign. He leans into the scope and takes aim.

POV OF SCOPE, WITH HAIRLINES. IT SCANS, LOOKING FOR YO, AND FINDS JOHN, BUT MOVES ON.

John is walking along the perimeter of the construction site, drinking a cup of coffee. He’s peering into the site where he can, through small gaps in the blue wooden walls, but can’t see much of anything. Finally he notices some activity. He throws the coffee down and pulls out his gun.

The accomplices are all working diligently. Miguel comes over to Josef and pats him on the shoulder.
Josef, whose focus has been on surveying the work, jumps a bit but then looks towards Miguel. He smiles and gives a thumbs up. Josef gives a small smile back. The camera lingers on Miguel for a moment as he watches Josef watching the work.

POV OF SCOPE. IT PASSES MIGUEL AND FOCUSES ON THE BACK OF JOSEF’S HEAD.

A light flickers in Miguel’s face. He looks up to the building and sees the reflection of the scope, flickering. In an instant, his face changes.

MIGUEL
Yo!

He shoves Josef out of the way. A bullet goes through Miguel’s head, which just took the place of Josef’s. Everyone stops and turns to see his body fall.

Benton looks up from his scope.

BENTON
Shit.

One of the accomplices looks up to the roof of the building.

ACCOMPLICE 1
Snipers on the roof!

All the accomplices take out the guns they have on them and start firing skyward. Benton takes cover under the ridge of the roof.

BENTON
Occupy them. I got business.

He crouch-runs over to the roof access. All of the men start firing downward.

The accomplices are all firing, taking cover, and occasionally getting hit. Josef is still flabbergasted at Miguel’s dead body. An accomplice sees him.

ACCOMPLICE 2
Get the hell outta here!

Josef snaps to and puts on his goggles and bandanna. He runs to his bike and drives off. As he’s exiting the yard he goes along one side of the building where Benton’s men are firing from. As Josef passes a PARKING GATE STARTS RISING THUNDEROUSLY. He pauses.
Benton is inside, straddling a super-charged behemoth of a motorcycle. It’s a composite of all sorts of parts from choppers, crotch-rockets, etc. It REVS LOUDLY. Benton, now in leather biker’s cap and big sunglasses, sees Josef as Josef sees him. They both gun it and take off, Benton in pursuit.

John watches this go down like a deer in headlights.

EXT. STREETS OF GREENPOINT – CONTINUOUS

The two are gunning it through the streets. They’re swerving between pedestrians, cars, and every other conceivable road block. Josef keeps rounding corners trying to lose Benton, but he’s just as good as Josef if not better as he shortens Josef’s lead.

Josef guns it through a closing chain-link fence to an industrial parking lot. He gets through just as it closes. Benton just drives right through it, taking down the fence without losing speed.

They swerve through a bunch of large trucks, vans, and forklifts. It’s an active industrial obstacle course. Josef drives under a trucks descending lift gate, barely avoiding hitting his head. The gate hits the ground as Benton reaches it, but just drives right over it and through the cargo of cardboard boxes.

Josef sees a ramp by the other side of the lot near the fence and jumps off it to the streets again. Benton follows suit.

Looking around to see if there’s anything he can do to lose Benton, Josef sees a sign for the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway coming up. He revs his bike drives up the on-ramp while Benton stays close behind.

EXT. THE BROOKLYN–QUEENS EXPRESSWAY – CONTINUOUS

Josef leads Benton onto the highway. As usual, the BQE is filled with cars and construction, but traffic is gradually flowing. Josef and Benton are, naturally, going much faster.

They’re swerving even more with a chorus of HONKS following them. Josef turns around to see Benton pull out a large handgun and starts FIRING.

Josef quickly shifts lanes to see a bullet break the back window of a car. The two keep shifting lanes with Benton firing intermittently. Every one of his bullets hits something, including one which takes out a tire of a car in front of Josef. It spins out and, while Josef and Benton swerve out of the way, it hits the traffic behind it.
Josef gains speed and rides up on the barrier between the directions of traffic. Benton rides next to him on the side, still trying to get a clear shot. He seems to have a bead on Josef, but as he fires another car comes between him and Josef, taking the bullet. When Benton tries to get out another shot his clip is empty, so he throws the gun to his side, reaches into his boot, and pulls out a bowie knife. Knife in hand, he gains speed and jumps the barrier.

They’re both going against traffic now, more and more cars whooshing past them while Benton tries to get at Josef with his knife. It’s a mix of them veering towards and away from each other as dictated by oncoming traffic. Josef pulls out one of his guns and tries to shoot out one of Benton’s tires, but Benton is good enough to avoid it.

Josef quickly runs out of bullets-- it is only a six-shooter. Benton sees his opening and veers in. Josef holsters the gun and tries to get out of the way but Benton stays on him. When Benton tries to take another swipe Josef, instead of getting out of the way, veers into Benton, catching his arm that’s swinging the knife. The two struggle.

A truck with a tractor-trailer is driving towards the two. The driver sees the two bikes coming right at him and tries to avoid them, but as he slams the brakes and turns the truck skids out and starts sliding. Josef and Benton see it oncoming. They lock eyes for a minute, playing chicken.

Josef breaks the stalemate by kicking off of Benton’s bike and drives to the side of the highway, disappearing off a jump. Benton swerves the other way, jumping the barrier to the other side of the highway he was on before.

The truck slides past him and collides with the outer barrier, breaking through it. The trailer starts hanging off the side of the highway, suspended over the street below, until it finally snaps and falls. Traffic everywhere slams to a stop.

Benton drives over to where Josef jumped off. He looks over to see him on top of a roof under the highway, surveying the damage.

Josef turns and sees Benton looking at him. He turns around and drives, jumping off the roof to a shorter one nearby and then to the street, taking off like the devil’s on his tail. Driving into Greenpoint he blends in to the scenery.

Benton watches him go, putting his fingers up like a gun, closing one eye, and points at the neighborhood.

BENTON

Bang.
INT. SECRET MEETING PLACE - LATER

The accomplices are all gathered, licking and bandaging their wounds, talking nervously about what transpired. When the garage door opens they all draw their guns. It’s Josef, who wheels his bike in exhausted and dirty. They all slowly drop their guns as Josef drops his bike and sits down hard.

ACCOMPlice 1
What the hell was that?

ACCOMPlice 2
Police?

ACCOMPlice 1
No, they wouldn’t just start a fire fight. Would they?

ACCOMPlice 2
Then the guy from MacNichol?

JOSEF
No, wasn’t either. Whoever they were, I was dealing with their boss.

ACCOMPlice 2
Yeah, we know.

He points to the TV. There’s an aerial view of the destruction on the BQE. The trailer crash site is the highlight.

ACCOMPlice 1
No footage of you, but headlines are nuts. Yo goes crazy, rogue, destroying everything.

Josef watches the TV in horror. It suddenly is replaced by another kind of horror.

JOSEF
Miguel...

Everyone’s uncomfortable, except Roberto.

ROBERTO
He died.

Josef puts his down on a table. The TV is still on and a report comes on.
NEWSCASTER
There has been no official word yet on the matter, but authorities are speculating that the terrorist Yo has made violent protest at the recommencement of the K train construction. He was reported as having an unknown accomplice riding a motorcycle with him while both fired wildly into traffic. No positive IDs were possible. The number of casualties is still being tallied. Andrew Vanderbilt has come out with a statement on the matter.

VANDERBILT
This shouldn’t come as a surprise to anyone. We’re dealing with a terrorist. Now he’s just gotten more violent, more desperate. I assure you, though, we will not be intimida-

The TV breaks. Josef just shot it. He holsters his gun and leaves as everyone watches.

INT. JOSEF’S HOUSE – LATER

Maria is watching the news nervously. She taps her foot nervously as the camera scans the destruction of the BQE. Josef walks in the door. Upon hearing him, Maria runs to him and gives him a long hug. He doesn’t respond.

MARIA
Oh my God, what happened? Are you all right?

JOSEF
Fine.

He goes to a chair and sits down.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
We went to the site today, but someone was waiting for us with a lot of guns.

(pause)

He killed Miguel.

MARIA
Oh no...Miguel...who was it?
JOSEF
I don’t know anything right now, except that he rides, shoots, and isn’t afraid of me or doing anything to get to me.

MARIA
(looking at the TV)
News says you’re crazy...

JOSEF
I’m not crazy! I was set up! I don’t know who or why, but all I did was stick to the plan, to help the neighborhood...

She’s looking at him cautiously. He rises up and grabs her by the arms.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
Maria, you know I’d never hurt anyone. You believe me, don’t you?

She looks a little scared, but sees that he’s earnest.

MARIA
Of course, Josef. You may do dumb shit, but not like that.

He looks relieved, but has riled himself up a bit.

MARIA (CONT’D)
Sit down, I’ll make you tea. Calm your nerves.

She walks into the kitchen and turns the kettle on. She looks back into the living room, and when she sees Josef isn’t looking in her direction she takes out a kitchen knife she had put in her sweatshirt pocket and places it in a drawer.

INT. VANDERBILT’S OFFICE - DAY

Vanderbilt is pissed off when Benton walks in.

BENTON
Speak.

VANDERBILT
What the fuck are you doing? Wreckin’ a highway?

BENTON
I need half up front.
VANDERBILT
Excuse me?

BENTON
Half of the 25. I need it now.

VANDERBILT
Why the hell should I even give you a dime? You gonna nuke the FDR?

BENTON
Trust I know how to make a situation work for me.

Vanderbilt leans back in his chair, arms crossed. He stares Benton down, this time not willing to give in so easily. Benton is nonplussed.

BENTON (CONT’D)
You only matter as much as the checks you write.

Vanderbilt takes this to heart.

EXT. STREETS OF GREENPOINT - DAY

Benton and several of his men are walking through the streets of Greenpoint, intimidating and purposeful.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Benton walks inside- the place is kind of a dump. Peeling paint, loose stairs, etc. He surveys it with disgust. They all walk down the hall and knock on apartment 1A, where the SUPERINTENDENT answers.

BENTON
You the super?

SUPERINTENDENT
Yep, you Mr. Benton?

BENTON
Benton.

He looks around the apartment building again. There are some SOUNDS OF LIFE from upstairs.

BENTON (CONT’D)
How many people are living here now?
SUPERINTENDENT
Three units are occupied.

BENTON
That’ll be fine.
(to his men)
Contract.

One of his men presents a piece of paper to the super. He reads it over.

BENTON (CONT’D)
You should find everything in order. Marcus there is a notary public.

One of Benton’s men nods. The super signs it and hands it back.

SUPERINTENDENT
Y’know, now that it’s outta my hands, I gotta say thank God you showed up. This buildin’ was bankruptin’ me. Can’t get profit in this neighborhood no more.

BENTON
Oh, that’s not how I see it. Lot of potential here, plan on fixing it up. You said three units?

The super nods. Benton looks to three of his men and they start climbing the stairs. The super is confused, but when he looks to Benton he’s already on the way out.

SUPERINTENDENT
Hey, wait, what-

BENTON
By the way, do me a favor. I don’t like my neighborhoods so dangerous, makes me nervous. Spread word around that there’s a 5 million reward for Yo.

Benton leaves, while sounds of struggle emanate from upstairs.

MONTAGE

Many of the “for sale” signs and realty posters get adorned with “sold” stickers or get taken down.
INT. BUILDING - DAY

In another really run down building, Benton is talking to an owner.

OWNER
Look, you gotta buy this. Yo scared everyone off, can’t pay the mortgage!

BENTON
Not much I can do with the building. Half a step to condemned.
(pause)
Could use the land, though.
(pause)
Figure that out, we’ll talk.

INT. BUILDING - NIGHT

The owner is manipulating some wires until they catch fire. He quickly runs out.

EXT. BURNED LOT - DAY

Benton looks over the burnt down building lot with the owner, then shakes his hand.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

A drug dealer is leaning against a wall. Some young guy comes up and surreptitiously buys some drugs from him. Two of Benton’s men come up to him. The dealer looks up to them.

DEALER
Whachu lookin’ for?

COWBOY 1
A safer neighborhood.

The dealer starts running away, but before he can take two steps one of the cowboys grabs him by the collar and throws him against the wall. The cowboys start beating him down. It’s pretty brutal- boot heels, fists, and trash from the alley are all used. Finally, they stop.

COWBOY 1 (CONT’D)
If we see you again, you won’t walk away.

They leave him there, beaten.
EXT. OUTSIDE A BUILDING - DAY

Benton is leaving another building, putting a contract in his bag. One of his cowboys comes up to him, holding a green T-shirt.

COWBOY 1
Sir, the designer sent this.

He hands the shirt to Benton, who holds it up and examines the front. He nods in approval. The camera reveals the design— it’s a stencil adaptation of the photograph of Yo.

MONTAGE

Multiple street vendors and alternative clothing outlets are shown with the Yo shirt in stock.

INT. KOWALSKI’S COFFEE SHOP - DAY

The diner is relatively empty. Kowalski is scrubbing down the counter. Benton, with a few men, walks in. He takes a whiff of the place, looks around, and gives a satisfied smile. Kowalski looks nervous as Benton comes over to the counter.

BENTON
From the sign, I’m guessing you’re Kowalski.

Kowalski nods. Benton notices the emptiness.

BENTON (CONT’D)
Place doesn’t look like it’s doin’ so hot. Hope it’s not the food.

He scans the menu, located on a board behind the counter.

BENTON (CONT’D)
What’s a pee-or-gee?

KOWALSKI
That’s a pierogi. Like a Polish dumpling.

BENTON
Sure. Take a plate a those, cup a coffee, and, Poles are supposed to be good at sausage, right? Gimme some a that, too.

Kowalski writes it all down and goes into the back to prepare it. Benton turns around and see that people are watching him.
BENTON (CONT’D)
You guys all heard about the reward, right? Five mil’s a lot of money, y’know.

They keep eating.

BENTON (CONT’D)
It’s for the best. Get crazy vigilantes off the street, get some money rollin’ in, have a safe, clean neighborhood.

Kowalski emerges from the back with the plates of food.

BENTON (CONT’D)
Fast. That’s good work ethic.

He starts eating, and audibly enjoys it.

BENTON (CONT’D)
Wow, these pierogi’s are good. And they weren’t lyin’ ’bout Polish sausage. And that cuppa coffee. You can really judge a place by its coffee.

He offers his men a few bites of stuff. They try some things here and there, and they all approve. As Benton munches he looks around the cafe again.

BENTON (CONT’D)
Shouldn’t be this empty.
(pause)
Tell ya what, Kowalski, how ‘bout I renovate this place?

KOWALSKI
‘Scuse me?

BENTON
The establishment. Make you some profit. Whaddya say?

KOWALSKI
Sir, I’m sorry, but this place isn’t for sale.

BENTON
Everything’s for sale, Kowalski.
KOWALSKI
This restaurant has been in my family three generations. It’s always been Kowalski’s.

BENTON
Still will be. Don’t want to change your menu, I’m just gonna attract more kinds. I’ll just be a silent partner.

Kowalski looks down into Benton’s jacket and sees a gun holstered. He looks back up at Benton, nervous.

BENTON (CONT’D)
You wanna be successful, don’cha? I’m bein’ nice.

Kowalski is visibly shaking and sweating. He gives a jerky, nervous nod. Benton smiles and hits Kowalski affectionately on the arm.

BENTON (CONT’D)
Well now all right. I’ll come back tomorrow mornin’ with a contract.
(he wolfs in a pierogi and drinks it down with coffee)
Damn, that is good stuff.

He gets up and leaves, all his men in tow.

BENTON (CONT’D)
(as he’s leaving)
Y’all enjoy your meals now. Remember what I said.

EXT. OUTSIDE KOWALSKI’S – CONTINUOUS

Benton walks out and bumps into John, on his way inside. They stare at each other for a second, sizing each other up.

BENTON
You from ‘round here?

JOHN
No, Alphabet City. New to town?

BENTON
Makin’ it my home.
JOHN
Be careful, New York has a way of pushin’ the eject button on people.

BENTON
(sizing him up)
Some just get stuck.

John grumbles and squints up at Benton.

BENTON (CONT’D)
Gotta get the coffee from in there.
Fantastic.

JOHN
I know.

BENTON
Everybody else’s about to as well.

Benton waves to his men and walks off. John watches him go. As Benton rounds a corner he’s obscured by a moving truck. By the time it passes he’s gone. John enters the diner.

INT. SECRET MEETING PLACE – NIGHT

The accomplices are all gathered around the table, Josef sitting at the head.

ACCOMPlice 1
Why is this Benton guy buyin’ land?
Just a bunch of crappy old buildings.

ACCOMPlice 2
I live in one of those crappy buildings. Bounty bothers me more.

JOSEF
He killed Miguel.

Everyone’s taken aback.

ACCOMPlice 1
You sure?

JOSEF
Positive. I can tell who’s tried to kill me.

ACCOMPlice 1
He the same guy from MacNichol Park?
JOSEF
No, that’s someone else. Dunno who yet, but-

ACCOMPILCE 2
What’re we gonna do about him? He’s got 5 mil for your head out on the street. Cops ain’t on him, buyin’ up the cheap lots, what’s his deal?

JOSEF
(matter-of-factly)
People, I don’t know. He clearly wants me dead, but I don’t know why he’s buyin’ stuff. I dunno what to do with him.

He rests his forehead in his hand. When he looks up everyone is looking straight at him, expectantly.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
Yes?

ACCOMPILCE 1
It’s just, Yo, Josef, we may not be able to do much, what with his goon squad he keeps round, but, you know, you could. You can, like, twirl guns and quick draw and all that cowboy stuff. Hell, you even faced this guy down once before. You’re like, I dunno, a commando. We were talkin’ and, you know, maybe you could deal with this guy...directly.

JOSEF
You’re askin’ me to kill Benton.

The accomplices all sink into themselves.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
I told you all the rules before. We would not become a gang of thugs, we’d be fighters for a cause. No one would get hurt.

ROBERTO
It’s a little late for that.

Josef gets up into Roberto’s face.

JOSEF
‘Scuse me, Roberto?
ROBERTO
We already have blood on our hands.
Don’t pretend we don’t.

JOSEF
If you don’t wanna help, then get the hell out.

ROBERTO
Of course, I shouldn’t threaten your leadership. It’s been workin’ so well.
(to everyone else)
I hope maybe y’all can fight a better fight. You don’t need to twirl your guns, you have to make ‘em mean something.

Josef is silent.

ROBERTO (CONT’D)
‘Scuse me, I have to go pay respect to Miguel’s family.

Roberto leaves. Everyone is quiet and doesn’t know what to say.

JOSEF
It’s okay, we’ll stand strong. We’ll take out one of his buildings.

ACCOMPLICE 1
But what about the people livin’ there?

JOSEF
All right, we’ll blow up his office.

ACCOMPLICE 2
I don’t think he has one. Or, least, it ain’t here.

JOSEF
You know what? We’ll think on it. Meeting adjourned.

Everyone leaves silently. Josef takes a seat and thinks for a minute. He bursts up, kicks his chair over, then the table, then just about anything else in the room. Once just about everything is knocked over, he takes a moment to catch his breath and look over what he did. He puts his chair back up, and then leaves.
EXT. OUTSIDE GARCIA’S HOUSE - DAY

John walks through the streets, looking at the large amounts of scaffolding gone up. Some burned down lots have advertisements of new buildings to come. A crowded number of moving trucks are moving through the streets. Benton’s gang walk the streets, scanning him, and then letting him move on.

There’s a moving truck in front of Garcia’s house. A few family members from the barbecue are bringing out some boxes. Garcia steps outside holding a lamp.

    JOHNS
    Garcia? What the hell?

    GARCIA
    Movin’ day.

    JOHN
    But thought you liked it here.

    GARCIA
    Not my Greenpoint no more.

    JOHN
    (looking around the neighborhood)
    Yeah...where you headin?

    GARCIA
    Found a nice place on Long Island. Family might like a yard. Might not get priced out there.

    JOHN
    Priced out?

A young, hip couple, DAVID and SONIA, rounds the corner. They’re both done to the nines in skinny jeans and tattoos. Sonia has on one of the Yo T-shirts.

    GARCIA
    Hey Sonia, David. Can I do you somethin’?

    DAVID
    Nah, just takin’ a walk round.

    GARCIA
    (to John)
    This is David n’ Sonia. New tenants.
SONIA
Nice to meet you.
(shakes John’s hand, mostly on her will)
You live round here, too?

JOHN
No, Alphabet City.

DAVID
Sweet.

SONIA
Would’ve been pretty cool to see that place in its heyday, y’know, the punk rock and shit.

JOHN
(looking at her shirt)
Interesting shirt you got on.

DAVID
(to Garcia)
Mr. Garcia, question. Is the wall between the bedroom and the living room load-baring? Was thinkin’ of turnin’ it into a studio.

GARCIA
I’m just a renter. You’d have to ask the landlord.

DAVID
Right.

They go into the building. John’s stupefied.

JOHN
No fuckin’ way.

GARCIA
They’re payin’ way more than I ever did for that shitty apartment. “Urban pioneers,” what they call them.

JOHN
Didn’t think you were livin’ on the frontier.

GARCIA
(to little girl)
Sweetheart, be careful with that lamp, it’s expensive!
(MORE)
(to John)
Catch ya later, John. Visit me sometime out in the burbs. Take it slow sometime.

JOHN
Yeah...catch ya later, Garcia. Thanks.

They shake hands and nod to each other, neither of them happy. Garcia goes back to moving.

INT. SHEROPSKI AND SONS GARAGE - EVENING

Josef is working on a car raised up on the a lift. His face is glum and distant. John walks in.

JOHN
Hey, Josef.

No response. Josef is off in his own world.

JOHN (CONT’D)
Josef? Josef!? Yo!

Josef turns nervously. He shakes himself out of his funk.

JOSEF
Sorry, John. Just a little...focused...in my work.

JOHN
All right.
   (looks outside)
Your neighborhood’s sure changed.

JOSEF
(sighs, shakes his head)
It’s all a blur. What is this place now?

John shrugs. Josef gets lost in his own world for another instant, but snaps back out again.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
Right, your car.

Josef leads John over to the Skylark and opens the front door.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
Give it a start.
John goes into the driver’s seat and turns the key. The car REVS TO LIFE. John smiles.

JOHN
Holy shit. She lives.

JOSEF
If I can’t do anythin’ else, I can fix up a car.

John turns off the car and steps out of it.

JOHN
So, how much I owe ya?

JOSEF
Oh, we can talk about that later.

John looks at him quizzically.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
You know, next time we hang out.

John laughs and nods to himself. He scans his new friend.

JOHN
It’s been good meetin’ ya, Josef.

Josef smiles. John goes out for a hand shake, but Josef shakes his head no. He puts up his fist. John doesn’t quite get it, but Josef beckons his fist up. John does so, and Josef gives it a pound.

BENTON (O.S.)
Whoa, old rides in here.

John and Josef turn to see Benton and a few of his men standing in the doorway of the garage. Benton is scanning the cars over, running his hands on them. John doesn’t know his full deal, but this is the first time Josef has seen him since the BQE-- he’s fuming.

BENTON (CONT’D)
Wow, ‘85 El Dorado. Class meets crap.

JOSEF
(through his teeth)
Can I help you?

BENTON
(coming over to Josef)
Yes, I’m Ben-
JOSEF
I know who you are.

BENTON
Oh, good. Then we can get right to busi-

JOSEF
Not for sale.

BENTON
(pause)
Everything’s for sale.

JOSEF
You see the sign out front?

BENTON
Yeah, you Sheropski or the son?

JOSEF
The son. And you need to be a Sheropski to own this place.

Benton laughs to himself and scratches his head, like he’s talking to a kid who just said the darnedest thing.

BENTON
Why do people here think they’ve “always” owned something? This place hasn’t always been like this, son, and it won’t always be like this. You’re just a moment and moment’s over.

JOSEF
No, I’m here to last. Get out.

BENTON
Son, you’re-

JOHN
You heard the man. Place ain’t up for sale.

Benton looks towards John, acknowledging his presence for the first time. He then turns towards his Skylark.

BENTON
That your ‘79 Skylark?

JOHN
‘77.
Benton gives a motion to his men. They all pull out their guns and start SHOOTING up the car. John and Josef dive out of the way. The cowboys empty round after round into the car until it’s Swiss cheese of a Buick. Benton motions for them to stop.

BENTON
You needed a new car, anyway.
Right, so as I was sayin, don’t fight what’s inevitable, son.
(signaling to the Skylark)
Because it doesn’t stop there.

Josef stands up from his dive. John’s stunned and struck dumb. The car is smoldering and Josef is sizing up his situation. Slowly, resolve resurfaces on his face. He gets right up in front of Benton.

JOSEF
This place is not, has not, and will not be for sale. You can’t buy me. I’m not afraid of you. Now why don’t you and your boys back the fuck out of my garage and go fuck yourselves.

Benton is taken aback at first, but then starts laughing. Josef is trying to hold his ground while being laughed at.

Benton, turning serious, punches Josef in the stomach and then uppercuts him. Josef goes down hard. While down, Benton starts kicking him in the ribs over and over. John, coming back from mourning his car, gets up and tries to rush Benton. Almost instinctively, Benton punches John as he approaches and throws him to the ground. Benton bends down to talk with Josef, who is wincing with pain.

BENTON
Like I said, don’t fight the inevitable.

Benton walks over to his men and nods to one. A cowboy produces a Molotov cocktail. Benton pulls out a butane lighter and lights the rag in the bottle.

BENTON (CONT’D)
I’ll still be interested in buying the lot. Talk to me then.

He throws it at one of the cars nearby, exploding into flames. One of the cowboys slams the garage gate closed.
John climbs to his feet and sees the fire spreading from car to car, moving towards the gasoline canisters he keeps around. Panicking, he runs to the garage door and tries to open it. No good, it’s locked. He slams it a few times to no avail. He runs back to Josef, hoisting him up on his shoulder.

JOHN
(yelling)
How do we get out?

Josef nods to his office. They go out to the back way, through Josef’s office. Fire has crept in and set his furnishings on fire. The picture on the wall of him and Maria is burning at the edges. John kicks through the back door and they escape.

EXT. OUTSIDE SHEROPSKI AND SON’S - CONTINUOUS

John hobbles with Josef on his shoulder across the street. They get across the street to some safety, where John puts Josef down. Flames are coming through the windows, and an explosion goes off, breaking down the locked gate. The interior is engulfed in flames, though the concrete structure stands.

Josef watches in defeat. John, still in pain, winces and watches it all go. It’s silent except for the flames’ crackle.

INT. JOSEF’S HOUSE - LATER

Maria is cooking something when Josef walks in. He still has some ash and dust on him. He walks straight into the kitchen and hugs Maria from behind. She’s surprised, smells the air puzzled, and turns around to be surprised all over again.

MARIA
What the hell?

JOSEF
Benton came to the garage.

MARIA
Holy shit, he knows it’s you!?

JOSEF
No, he just wanted to buy the place. I said no. He blew it up.
MARIA
(taking it in)
The garage...destroyed?

JOSEF
Yeah.

MARIA
Josef, this’s getting out of hand. This can’t keep going on. Can’t you confront Benton?

JOSEF
(defeated)
I just did. Didn’t work out.

MARIA
Not you Josef, you Yo.

JOSEF
(indignant)
No...no! I am not going to give him what he wants. I’m no killer.

MARIA
Damn it, Josef! That doesn’t work anymore. Things are different, you can’t keep hiding. You want to defend Greenpoint? Guess what, no time like the present. This is survival! Start gettin’ real. Yo has gotten bigger than you, Josef.

Josef is angry but can’t respond. He brushes past Maria and goes to Valencia’s room.

INT. VALENCIA’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Josef enters his mother’s room. She’s sitting up on her bed but seems a little dazed.

VALENCIA
Tried everything, but just couldn’t fall asleep.

JOSEF
Hard times to sleep through.

VALENCIA
How’re you, angel?
JOSEF
All honesty, not good. Things’ve been a bit hard to understand lately.

VALENCE
Things aren’t easier in heaven?

Josef just looks down.

VALENCE (CONT’D)
Well I hope you feel better soon. You’re a sweet soul, you don’t deserve bad days.

He sits down on the bed and then puts his head in her lap. She rests a hand on his head. He’s still kind of ashy, but she doesn’t seem to notice or mind.

JOSEF
A lot of things have gone wrong. I thought I was doin’ something good for people, but it’s a hurt a lot of people. Me, too.

VALENCE
I’m sorry to hear that. But good deeds sometimes get punished. You just have to remember why you did it in the first place.

JOSEF
I do, but I think doing it made it all worse.

VALENCE
Hmm, problem. Y’know, though, sometimes we just do what we think is right even if it won’t matter later. Making sure you know what you believe in, even if it doesn’t change anything. Maybe people could learn something from you.

JOSEF
God I hope so.

VALENCE
Well, ask Him.

Josef looks up at his mother. She’s smiling sweetly. He doesn’t quite know what to with her advice. However, he resigns himself as she pats his head.
INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

Benton is holding a contract up to a young, hip couple to sign. The two sign it, and Benton smiles.

BENTON
If there’s anythin’ else ya need for the place, just lemme know. I love goin’ the extra mile.

YOUNG GUY
Actually, we have a couple friends looking for places. Can we refer them to you?

BENTON
Love ya to.

He gives them a small salute with two of his fingers and walks downstairs. Coming up the stairs is an older Hispanic woman with a young son. She’s carrying a too-large bag of groceries and trips onto the landing, some fruit spilling out. An apple rolls over to Benton’s foot. She looks up afraid as he’s looming over her.

He stares her down and waits for her to pick up everything. Once she does he walks past, looking down at her then up at the apartment number and back to her, then walking down the stairs where a few of his men are. They head outside.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF AN APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Several of Josef’s accomplices are hanging out around the corner from an apartment building. Benton and a few of his men emerge from the building. One of the accomplices signals to the rest, and they all pull out guns.

They burst from around the corner, opening fire on Benton and his men. Benton and his men get back inside the building, his men opening fire. He’s about to take out his gun when he looks up and sees that the young couple has come to see the hubub. He looks to them and then to the woman and her son, who are also looking afraid.

Benton signals to his men to cease fire. When they do, the accomplices notice they aren’t being shot at and stop.

BENTON
(from behind cover)
He make you do this?

The accomplices are silent.
BENTON (CONT’D)
(from behind cover)
No. You’re just stupid. You’re shootin’ up this nice neighborhood, there’re damn families in here!

The accomplices are surprised by Benton’s frankness. They look and see that they did shoot up a fair deal of the apartment building he’s in front of, and there are families living upstairs, looking out the windows afraid.

BENTON (CONT’D)
You gonna make it worse, or let me make it better?

The accomplices all look at each other and run off. Benton emerges from his cover and sees them move.

BENTON (CONT’D)
(to one of his men)
Follow them. Go quiet.

Several of his men run off after them.

INT. McALLISTER’S OFFICE - DAY

John bursts into McAllister’s office while he’s doing some paperwork.

JOHN
Where the fuck are you?

MCALLISTER
Right here, Auger.

JOHN
Yeah, not in fuckin’ Greenpoint. You know there’s a psychopath on the loose there?

McAllister sighs. He takes out a pack of cigarettes and lights one up. He offers one hopefully to John, but John just stands resolute, unmoving.

MCALLISTER
I’m guessin’ you’re talkin’ about Benton.

JOHN
No, the weather.
MCALLISTER
Tried doin’ some research on him.
No records ‘cept his work. Bounty
hunter, mercenary, been everywhere
profiting from mayhem. M.O. always
changes, but he’s high price and
has a fuckin’ immaculate track
record.

JOHN
What the hell are you doin’ then?
Just lettin’ him run wild? He’s
burnin’ buildings, got a gang of
thugs...

(John starts boiling over)
AND HE BLEW UP MY FUCKIN’ CAR!

MCALLISTER
That Buick? Man, you loved that
car...

John gives him a “thank you, captain obvious” look.

MCALLISTER (CONT’D)
Look, John, I’m sorry to hear ‘bout
your car, but this guy Benton has
his ass covered. He keeps pretty
clean.

JOHN
Bribes?

MCALLISTER
That’s not important. Shouldn’t
come as a surprise there’s a price
on Yo’s head. Vanderbilt’s such an
ass hole...

JOHN
Can’t believe what I’m hearin,
Michael. So a guy throws some money
around, washes his hands, and you
act like he’s untouchable. You
don’t even care ‘bout stoppin’ him,
do ya?

MCALLISTER
Fuck you, John. This ain’t new.
Benton’s just another piece of shit
who ain’t in our best interest to
arrest. You know how many people
been on my back since he showed up?
Zero. He’s makin’ money, turnin’
Greenpoint profits up.

(MORE)
HELL, there even less drugs on those streets. Investors are makin’ money, city’s makin’ money, so who wants to stop that?

John resigns to silence.

MCALLISTER (CONT’D)

Have a smoke, it’ll calm you down.

John takes one and lights up. He inhales deeply and lets out a big smoke cloud.

JOHN

Thanks.

MCALLISTER

You’re an honest guy, Auger, an ass hole, but an honest guy. You did good, look at Times Square now.

(takes a drag)

But city’s different, not a cesspool no more. Things got nice, money came in, priorities changed. It ain’t like what it was, even if it wasn’t so long ago.

(pause)

Sorry I brought you into this, John. You didn’t need the trouble.

John just sits, smoking, barely acknowledging the conversation.

MCALLISTER (CONT’D)

I’ll be glad to pay you for your time.

JOHN

Damn right you will. Just doesn’t sit right with me.

MCALLISTER

Honestly, John, considering all that’s involved, one guy matters very little.

John puts the cigarette out in a mug on McAllister’s desk. He looks indignant about what McAllister last said. He exits.
INT. SECRET MEETING PLACE - NIGHT

The accomplices are all gathered around the meeting table, but Josef is notably absent. Roberto is sitting where he usually is.

ACCOMPlice 1
Okay, Roberto, what’s the deal? When’s Josef comin’?

ROBERTO
He’s not. This is about us.

They all murmur.

ROBERTO (CONT’D)
I have to ask you guys, cause I sure as hell don’t know, what exactly are we fightin’ for now?

They’re quiet.

ROBERTO (CONT’D)
Exactly. We got a neighborhood flippin’ around, and what’re we gonna do? Josef’s too chicken shit to do something about it.

ACCOMPlice 2
You know his stand.

ROBERTO
Then let’s deal with Benton in more profitable ways.

Everyone’s uncomfortable with where this is going.

ROBERTO (CONT’D)
Greenpoint’s been changin’, guys, with or without us. Our fearless leader is a flash in the pan. That reward money still stands. I say we use it and try to save ourselves.

They’re starting to see his point of view.

ROBERTO (CONT’D)
We got into this to protect our homes and families. I say it’s time we started doin’ it. We know how to end this. Who’s with me?

The accomplices all stare at each other.
EXT. STREETS OF GREENPOINT - NIGHT

Josef is walking the streets, seeing what Greenpoint has become. Construction sites are everywhere as are signs of gentrification. Signs advertising soon-to-be-open fancy bakeries and cafes are on recently vacated lots of hardware stores and some other blue collar small businesses.

The streets have a hip, lively feel to them, young arty kids out for the night. Neighborhood bars are overflowing with them. A drunk girl walking with her boyfriend bumps into Josef.

DRUNK GIRL
Why so glum? Ain’t this place sweet? We’re gettin’ knishes!

Josef props her up and she walks over to her boyfriend. They enter Kowalski’s, which is newly refurbished and claiming that it’s “authentic Polish food” very obviously in its new display window.

A drunk guy leaves Kowalski’s with a cup of coffee in his hand.

DRUNK GUY
Man, this is a really good cup of coffee.

Josef walks to MacNichol Park, still under construction, but now advertising for a new condo tower to be built where it is. It’s a particular shot at Josef, and he goes over to the gate and starts rattling it, kicking it. There isn’t anything he can do.

EXT. OUTSIDE SHEROPSKI AND SON’S - LATER

The wreckage that was once Josef’s garage still stands, but it’s a lot of debris inside. He goes inside and to his office where everything is burned. Behind a locker in a secret compartment is a small rucksack. He opens it up to see his goggles, guns, mask, etc. The objects do little to console him. He just sits in the rubble of his old business, indecisive. Breaking the silence, his cell phone RINGS. He checks it- an unknown number. Suspicious, he answers it.

JOSEF
‘Lo?

BENTON (O.S.)
Last time we met I thought I’d killed you. Glad I didn’t.

(MORE)
BENTON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Would’a made collectin’ the contract so messy.

JOSEF
Who is this?

BENTON (O.S.)
You know damn well who this is, “Yo.”

JOSEF
(nervous)
I don’t know what you’re-

BENTON (O.S.)
Don’t play dumb, Sheropski. Only a matter of time before temptation of 5 mil won over some a your people. Here’s the deal. Be home within the hour and you’ll find a few of my men there. They’ll escort you to me.

JOSEF
(trying to be tough)
If I don’t?

BENTON (O.S.)
They’re at your home, son! Think about who else might be there. One hour. Benton out.

The phone goes dead. Josef is scared and confused. He doesn’t know what to do with his hands. Something dawns on him, though, and he dials a number.

JOSEF
Roberto! Why is Benton holding my family hostage? How does he know I’m Yo? Where the hell are you?

INTERCUT phone conversation

Roberto is an alleyway.

ROBERTO
Josef, I’m sorry, but it was the only way to save ourselves.

JOSEF
What are you talking about!? What were we working for!?
ROBERTO
No, Josef, it was all you. You took
our cause and made it your moment
in the sun. It’s over, we’re
getting out of this. It’s not worth
it. Save us, save yourself, turn
yourself in.

JOSEF
My family’s at gunpoint!

ROBERTO
(not happy hearing that)
Then it should be an easy decision.
The phone goes dead. Josef is fuming, shaking, stomping around.

JOSEF
FUUUUUUUCK!

EXT. ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Roberto pockets his phone. Two cowboys approach at the other end of the alley.

ROBERTO
Finally. Now, about the money...

COWBOY 1
Yeah, about that.

The each draw and SHOOT Roberto. He dies.

INT. BIG DANG SALOON - NIGHT

John is sitting at the bar, drinking a whiskey, but not with his usual zeal. Something doesn’t taste right. His glass remains uncommonly full, and the bartender notices it.

BARTENDER
What’s doin’, John?

JOHN
You ever wonder if you think things were better when they weren’t?

BARTENDER
If things were ever that good, bars wouldn’t exist.
John sees the truth in that. His phone starts ringing and he answers.

JOHN
‘Lo?
INTERCUT phone conversation.

JOSEF
John Auger, this is Josef Sheropski. I’m Yo.

JOHN
(takes a moment)
Yeah.

JOSEF
We talked before, in MacNichol Park.

JOHN
Yeah.

JOSEF
Whatever happened then doesn’t matter now. I need your help.

JOHN
What’s goin’ on?

JOSEF
I was sold out. Benton’s holdin’ my family hostage, given me an hour to turn myself in. I need your help to save them and me.

JOHN
(takes a moment)
Mother fucker did kill my car...

JOSEF
Meet me at Noble and Manhattan Ave, ASAP.

EXT. OUTSIDE JOSEF’S HOUSE - LATER

John and Josef are surveying Maria’s home from around the corner. There’s no one outside, but some silhouettes can be seen in the windows. Valencia’s room has several people in it. Josef points it out and John acknowledges.

JOSEF
You take front, I’ll take back.
John nods. Josef takes off to the side of the building and quietly scales the fire escape. John walks to the front door.

INT. VALENCIA’S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maria and Valencia are in a room with two cowboys (1 and 2) conversing. They’re both tied up—Maria bound and gagged to a chair, Valencia fastened to her bed. Maria is frantically trying to figure out a way to escape, shifting her chair this way and that. A cowboy notices.

COWBOY 1
Hey! Don’t do anything stupid.
Never had a problem killing a woman before.

Maria stops. The cowboys keep talking.

Josef comes up to a window from outside very slowly. He tries to open it but it won’t budge.

JOSEF’S HOUSE

Two other cowboys (3 and 4) are sitting on the couch, watching TV. There’s a KNOCK at the door. They seem puzzled, but Cowboy 3 hops up to answer it.

John is at the door, smiling dumbly.

JOHN
Excuse me, sir, but do you have a moment for the lord?

I/E. VALENCIA’S ROOM

Josef is trying to figure out a way to work with the window. The vantage isn’t right to get a shot on the cowboys. He gives the window a small tap. Maria notices him. He motions to her to make some commotion. She starts wiggling around a bit, making muffled noises.

COWBOY 1
What’d I say?

She keeps wiggling about.

JOSEF’S HOUSE

John and the cowboy are still at the door.
COWBOY 3
I don’t got time for any God shit right now.

He tries to shut the door, but John blocks it.

JOHN
But sir, how can you hope to join God, whose kingdom art in heaven, if you do not heed the word?

COWBOY 3
If you don’t get the fuck out I’m gonna rearrange your limbs.

I/E. VALENCIA’S ROOM

Maria is still wiggling about and making noise.

COWBOY 1
What the hell you want, woman?

He goes over to her and into Josef’s line of sight. It looks like he’s about to slap her when he FIRES and kills him. He puts his arm through the glass and shoots Cowboy 4.

JOSEF’S HOUSE

The cowboy turns around to see where the commotion came from at the sound of GUNSHOTS. John pulls out his gun and SHOOTS Cowboy 3. He dies.

JOHN
Weren’t goin’ to heaven anyway.

Cowboy 4 flips over a couch for cover and starts firing at John. He hides behind the threshold for cover, firing the occasional shots.

Josef emerges from Valencia’s room and sees the fire fight. Cowboy 4 is currently firing away at John, and when he ducks down his gaze is still focused towards the threshold.

JOSEF
Hey.

Cowboy 4 turns his attention just as Josef SHOOTS him. John peers from behind cover and sees Josef wave him in.

JOHN
Haven’t had to kill anyone since ’92.
Josef rushes back into Valencia’s room.

VALENCIA’S ROOM

Josef comes in, John behind him, and unties Maria. Once her hands are free she takes the gag off her mouth.

    MARIA
    What the hell is this? Who are they?
    (seeing John)
    Who are you? Josef!

    JOSEF
    I was sold out. That’s John, a friend.

    JOHN
    (to Maria)
    Pleasure.

Josef goes over to his mother’s side. He unties and tries to rouse her. Finally, she comes to.

    VALENCIA
    Here to save me?

    JOSEF
    Yes.

    VALENCIA
    It feels good.

Cowboy 2 is still alive and squirming on the floor. He tries to crawl over to his gun. John sees this and steps on his hand, waving his finger at the cowboy. He waves Josef over, and Josef grabs the cowboy by the lapels and shakes him.

    JOSEF
    Where is he?

    COWBOY 2
    (through blood)
    McElway and Co. factory. He’ll kill you.

Josef throws him down. He gets up, reloads his gun, and starts to head out.

    MARIA
    Where the hell are you going?
JOSEF
Business.

MARIA
Oh hell no. We’re safe now, let’s get the hell out of here!

JOSEF
You were the one sayin’ I should kill this bastard not long ago.

MARIA
(looking around)
Well, things change. Let’s leave, go to where we don’t matter, and you don’t have to go die! What’s the point?

JOSEF
No one threatens my neighborhood, my family, or me, and gets away with it.

He leaves the room. Maria looks after him forlorn. John puts his hand on her shoulder. He gives her an attempt at a comforting smile, but she doesn’t believe it for a second. Seeing his efforts aren’t working, John follows behind Yo.

MARIA
Dumb bastard.

VALENCIA
Angel.

INT. MCCLEWAY AND CO. FACTORY – LATER

The factory, an old paper printing press filled with old crates, is populated with a bunch of a Benton’s gang. There is an entrance to the main room surrounded by a mezzanine catwalk where Benton is cleaning his gun. He’s eyeing the front way sporadically.

The door opens. Every cowboy turns and gets their gun ready. Josef talks a long walk in escorted by John disguised as a cowboy, hat covering his face, holding a pistol on Josef. He’s got Josef’s gun belt strapped around his shoulder. Their footsteps ECHO in the factory. They stop in the middle of the room where John throws Josef by the arm. Benton looks down to them.

BENTON
Glad you made it.
(checks his watch)
Seven minutes to spare.
JOSEF
I’m willing to go quietly. Just I
need to know why all this? The
buying, the burning, the gang, why?

BENTON
(smiling)
To make money. Couldn’t do it
without ya. I’m a businessman- I
diversify my investments.
Neighborhood’s prices were
freefallin’ by the time I got here.
You seemin’ like a crazy man on the
highway was the tippin’ point.
Hell, I coulda bought land here
with loose change. You know how
many hip young things with mommy
and daddy’s money want to live
somewhere dangerous but not? Make
you cool, clean up the
neighborhood, they all want my
Greenpoint, and I’m there to give
it. You think money follows the
rails? Naive, son. Money goes where
it wants.

JOSEF
That’s all you care about? Money?

BENTON
(taken aback by the
simplicity of the
question)
Yes, yes it is. If I’m not makin’
money I’m wastin’ time. So I flush
you out like a rat in the walls and
I turn profit the entire way. With
your carcass I’m about to make a
few million more. Fightin’ the
inevitable just makes you suffer
more, son.

JOSEF
I won’t argue with you, but there’s
one thing you didn’t count on.

Benton looks at him curiously.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
Some people still care.

John throws aside the cowboy hat, throws Josef his guns, and
starts FIRING up at the cowboys.
Josef takes his gun out and does the same. Benton has ducked out of the way and into a passageway.

John and Josef keep firing and moving on the bottom floor of the factory, trying to get best vantage on the cowboys. They end up together behind some machinery, bullets clanging by their heads.

JOHN
God damn...

JOSEF
I gotta go after Benton. You gonna be okay?

JOHN
Get 'em.

Josef runs off, takin a few shots from behind cover. John remains, firing behind him.

JOHN (CONT’D)
What the hell am I doing?

INSIDE THE FACTORY

Josef reloads his revolvers. The inside of the factory is more crowded with even more machinery littering the hallways and rooms. The FAINT SOUND OF GUNSHOTS can be heard from the other room.

Across the room from Josef Benton takes a SHOT. Josef reacts just in time to get out of the way, and FIRES back to where Benton just was. He’s already moved.

The factory is dark and everything ECHOES, footsteps, gun shots, so it’s hard to tell where anything is coming from. It’s a cacophony of FOOTSTEPS on metal as the two run around each other, trying to find one another.

Josef takes refuge under a catwalk and waits.

BENTON (O.S.)
(echoes)
Tough guy ain’t gonna win by hidin’!

Benton keeps walking around. A water pipe makes a clang, and Benton SHOOTS it.

Josef sees where the shot came from and emerges from his hiding spot in a rush to make a clear path to Benton. His FOOTSTEPS give him away and Benton sees him moving.
They each take cover and start FIRING, and when that doesn’t work they keep moving, taking cover, and FIRING some more. Benton’s using a rather high-caliber gun— it leaves big holes in Josef’s cover. Josef tries to move to another cover spot, FIRING while crouch-running, but gets shot in the stomach in the dash.

Josef, behind cover, looks at his stomach— blood. He checks his gun— low on ammo. As he’s reloading he takes a peak around the corner only to be kicked in the face by Benton. Josef tries to take aim but Benton smacks the gun out of his hand. He grabs Josef and picks him up by the collar.

BENTON (CONT’D)

You see this?

He signals to his arm where a tattoo had been. Now there’s just a big gash, some of the ink still visible on either side of it.

BENTON (CONT’D)

I liked that tattoo and I don’t like to bleed.

He head butts Josef and lets him fall to the ground. As he’s about to get stomped Josef rolls out of the way, gets up, and shoves Benton off balance enough to hit him in the face. Benton takes the hit but comes back swinging.

John is still fighting off some of Benton’s men. He’s doing remarkably well. He shoots one guy who tries to sneak up on him and watches him go down. The sight of the dead body so close to him jars him for a second. He’s reminded of the fight by a few more bullets hitting his cover.

The two slug it out for a while, Josef clearly outclassed but determined. Benton throws Josef a big distance and Josef lands hard. He gets up, though, to see Benton look like he’s about to charge right at him.

Benton runs straight at Josef. Josef, though, sees his discarded gun off to the side of Benton’s path. Josef holds his ground as Benton charges forward.

John comes into the room, some blood on his clothes, and finds a light switch. He flips it on.

As Benton swings his fist, the light blinds Benton for a second. Josef dives out of the way onto his gun, picks it up, and FIRES.

Benton stops. He puts his fingers to his chest and lifts them up to his face. Blood.
He turns around, shocked, and Josef shoots him two more times in the chest. He goes down to his knees.

BENTON (CONT’D)
But...no...

He falls and dies. Josef drops his pistol and clenches his stomach. John comes running over to him.

JOSEF
So, how’s it look?

John looks down at Josef’s stomach. He grimaces.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
Oof, not a good face.

John looks him in the eyes.

JOSEF (CONT’D)
I killed Benton, but not before he killed me. Lost my fight.

JOHN
Nothin’ left fightin’ for. Ain’t no happy endings in New York. But we make memories, and they get better the more we think of ‘em, and the bad stuff falls away, even when it was all bad stuff. You got Benton, but he ain’t all the problem. What you did, though, it’ll stick around. Somethin’ about Yo, somethin’ about Greenpoint, it won’t go away. It’s how it’s gonna be.

The camera tracks out on them, showing John, Josef, and Benton all on the floor together.

MONTAGE
The newspaper has a headline reading “Yo Revealed!”
A news broadcast features John Auger being interviewed.
A demonstration is happening outside MTA headquarters. Vanderbilt looks down on it from his window, unamused.
Valencia is lying in her bed, seemingly sleeping.
Some of the accomplices are eating at Kowalski’s. They’re laughing and miming Josef’s gun twirling.
David and Sonia sit next to them. They’re drunk and strike up a conversation with the accomplices. The accomplices talk cautiously with them.

The K Train is up and running. Maria steps off of it and looks up at a mural painted right across from the exit. It depicts Yo, taken from his snapshot, eyes looking at the exit, reading "'I am vigilant, and I will not surrender. You have my word’—Josef ‘Yo’ Sheropski." It’s not a worthy substitute-- she puts her head down and walks away.

FADE OUT.