Public Space: Culture of Exclusion, Exclusion of Culture

By

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ABSTRACT

Harlem, New York’s first major black residential and business center and birthplace of the Harlem Renaissance, finds itself an increasingly polarized environment in the midst of its most recent wave of disruption. Once recognized as the bastion of black American culture, the artistry produced in the crucible of struggle can be understood as a form of resistance and demonstrates the potential for excellence when cultural expression is given space to manifest. The artistry of the Harlem Renaissance was grown and nurtured in spaces where kinship bonds were formed, from shared experience, and the tenuous safety of a shared community.

Over the course of a century, systemic political, economic, and educational inequities, engendered by pathologies of neoliberal proscription, have converged to create a new era in Harlem, one that is marked by spatial exclusions, cultural erasure, disenfranchisement, and relegation of a storied history to artifacts for consumption. Referencing concepts of kinship and reflecting on forums for communitas—spaces where people can exist together without strong hierarchy—this paper considers Harlem’s use of public space as an incubator for action and creation in the pursuit of happiness and freedom.

Drawing upon the works of Michel de Certeau, bell hooks, Hannah Arendt, and Jane Jacobs, this thesis traces the changing character of Harlem’s polis, locating and examining public spaces of social interaction and creativity. It traces the sites of strengthening and nurture in Harlem, relying on bell hooks’s conception of “homeplace.”

Employing a genealogical historical approach, this research revisits Renaissance Harlem’s public arts and art practices located within the historically black community. It considers performance and social practices in public space, such as street performance and
street play, and examines spatial configurations such as open-air markets and other forms of public assembly. The research explores the significance of these sites and their functions in enriching the community as opportunities for performance and expression of culture.

This thesis reflects on what we might learn from a historic view and also examines the current production of Harlem’s public spaces, their cultural development, and the capacity of these spaces to foster communitas. It considers the contemporary state of cultural policy at the local level and power strategies that manifest in the form of spatial exclusion, obstacles to access, privatization, and the normalization of military-style security measures, which seek to maintain order in public spaces through spatial encroachments that negatively impact the civic, social, and cultural rights of all the inhabitants of Harlem.

The work considers space as operative: not simply there but fully bound up with power, something that not only contains but has productive power. For instance, the power of a street reserved for children’s play lies not in the sum of its area or its ability to banish vehicular traffic, but in the wide-reaching learning and creative production that reserving such space enables.

Finally, the research asks what possibilities exist for participation in these spaces, how participation is shaped by particular values, and how these values are made actionable through tactical and strategic efforts. The need for democratic spaces, practices, and unifying projects in Harlem is clear. Spaces for the public must be maintained and made available for action and creation. The need to create and produce does not dissipate as a result of having been regulated; it, in fact, responds, reproduces, and manifests itself elsewhere, as artistry without space for release is wont to do.
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INTRODUCTION

Under the seeming disorder of the old city, wherever the old city is working
successfully, is a marvelous order for maintaining the safety of the streets and the
freedom of the city. It is a complex order . . . The order is all composed of movement
and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of
the city and liken it to the dance . . . an intricate ballet in which the individual
dancers and ensembles all have distinctive parts which miraculously reinforce each
other and compose an orderly whole.

—Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*

Access to physical space is a salient problem in marginalized communities. Black and
brown citizens who have never had the opportunity of home ownership or wealth aggregation
continue to lose access to territorial space while struggling to maintain social and cultural
connections. This struggle is compounded by ever-increasing legislation around assembly in
public space that determines who can use public spaces and what activities are permitted.

The research presented here examines Harlem’s public spaces—its parks and streets,
public squares and plazas—as forums that are strategic elements of the built environment and
that also invite performative tactical responses: street corners that double as pulpits for public
speakers, outdoor markets as democracies and cultural canopies, ¹ and playstreets that serve
as sites for action and nurture. The discussion presented here is conversant with Jane
Jacobs’s notion of the myriad uses of urban public space as akin to a dance and of the “public
character” ² as central to the life of sidewalks (i.e., a form of public space).

¹ Anderson 30.
² Jacobs observes that the social structure “hangs partly” on these public characters, and that the social context
of these spaces is patterned in a particular way because of the presence of the public and these characters. The
actions of these characters have the effect of making street life, ergo community life, “safer, more stable, and
more predictable” (The Death and Life of Great American Cities 63).
More specifically, this research looks at the development of Harlem’s public spaces, their governance, the artistry and capacity for action on the part of private citizens and artist practitioners, and the stakeholders who are active in the production of space. The inquiry considers the possibilities that exist for participation, how this potential is shaped by particular values, and how these values are made actionable through tactical and strategic efforts.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau describes ordinary people not as merely passive and submissive consumers but active users able to manipulate the environments around them through everyday actions. De Certeau divides society into two groups: producers of culture (the ruling class) and users of culture (ordinary citizens). He maintains that culture is made up not only of products and systems but also of the ways users interact with and appropriate these systems and how people individualize culture by altering its aspects—utilitarian objects, street plans, rituals, laws, and language—in order to make them their own. De Certeau identifies “production” as both a means of exercising power and a mechanism of discipline that users can manipulate and respond to in ways that are creative and improvisational. He also notes that power relations are enacted through an unfolding performance between “strategies”—enacted by people, institutions, and things that draw boundaries around place and declare ownership—and “tactics,” which de Certeau suggests are the practices of the marginal that transcend the spatial limits imposed by the powerful. In the case of the Renaissance, the tactical response of Harlem’s marginalized citizens (users) to strategies of power was a production and output of culture that resisted and far exceeded the boundaries and containment that the ruling class (producers) would have imposed. The
legacy of this resistance can be traced by revisiting the homeplace sites that remain in Harlem one century later.

This study builds on the concept of the “user” as an actor in the everyday practice of life who tactically navigates spatial limits imposed by the dominant class, an actor who considers public space and social interaction critical to the success of the production. De Certeau’s theory posits tactics not as subordinate to the strategy but rather opposed or in dialogue with the strategy (tactics are typically a response to strategies). Although derived from a military context, de Certeau’s theory applies the power struggle between tactics and strategies to the actions of users participating in the practices of everyday life. This research examines strategies in the form of public policies, laws, and norms that shape the use and accession of Harlem’s public spaces. It finds that over time, the spaces of nurture—homeplace sites that support creative and cultural expression for Harlem’s minority populace—have been diminished. These diminutions have occurred incrementally via strategies of municipal interventions, urban renewal and revitalization, or ostensible securitization of space. These incremental erasures have further marginalized culturally specific practices.

The research presented here establishes how state and municipal governing bodies have implemented policies around public spaces that neither support nor prioritize the anthropological norms of its majority populace or its prevailing community interests. This work asserts that these encroachments on public space and diminutions of cultural expression for the already marginalized populations of Harlem can be rectified only when the

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3 The mix of private-public decision making outside an overarching public policy and absent public-private collaboration and formal threat assessment may be termed the “securitization” of the city (Lippert and Walby, 264).
stakeholders (city planners, state agencies, and other stewards of public commons) who determine strategy fully acknowledge and commit toremedying the current inequities. This remedy requires prioritizing and protecting the public’s right to the city,4 engaging diverse community representation and intercultural knowledge in urban planning, and advancing a process of truth and reconciliation that prioritizes community wants and needs over aesthetic order. Jane Jacobs captured the essence of this when she wrote, “There is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder, and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretended order, achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and to be served.”5

Though the creative expression of Renaissance Harlem’s inhabitants was powerful enough to establish a legacy that, a century later, continues to resonate globally and bind community, that legacy has been co-opted for commercial interest, commodified, and controlled. Artistic output without autonomy and advocacy in a rapidly evolving polis is incapable of resisting erasure and control. In order for there to be opportunities for performance and creative local expression that facilitate vibrant place making and resist cultural erasure, there must also be independent advocacy for democratic spaces and practices as well as unifying projects that support contemporary artistic production in Harlem’s public spaces.

4 As per Harvey’s “Right to the City,” Jacobs’s The Death and Life of Great American Cities, and Lefebvre’s The Production of Space.
5 Jacobs 15.
PROBLEM STATEMENT

A century ago, Harlem, New York was a segregated redlined\(^6\) ghetto: a polarized but thriving arts hub, a nexus of black creativity. Art and performance not only emerged from galleries and theaters but bubbled forth from salons, rent parties, plazas, street corners, nightclubs, churches, and ballrooms. Artists of all performance genres made their names and built their legacies: Duke Ellington, Jacob Lawrence, Langston Hughes, Marcus Garvey, Josephine Baker, and Billie Holiday, to name a few. Not without challenges, this unprecedented outpouring of artistic expression made its way into mainstream society.

Today, Harlem is no longer a ghetto but finds itself increasingly stratified.\(^7\) Minority cultural expression in Harlem continues to lose ground, and specific communities struggle to find confidence in the spaces they can inhabit or to attain affirmation of cultural citizenship in a village governed according to predominantly white, colonial societal\(^8\) norms. This struggle stretches beyond inequitable housing, education, and employment practices, and extends to resisting the erasure of spaces that historically have been held for cultural expression and artistic freedoms.

Over the span of the last century, extreme regulation of the utilization of public space and changes brought about by gentrification and by increased corporate privatization of commercial and residential land have stymied Harlem’s artistic output. This regulation has all but eradicated certain arts practices and dramatically reduced the instances of and opportunities for public performance. Performance and arts have largely been relegated to

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\(^6\) Definition of “redline” – intransitive verb: to withhold home-loan funds or insurance from neighborhoods considered poor economic risks, transitive verb : to discriminate against in housing or insurance (“Redline,” Merriam-Webster.com).

\(^7\) Patton et al. 1.

\(^8\) See, for example, Tyson E. Lewis’s “Walter Benjamin’s Radio Pedagogy,” 18–33.
museum, gallery, restaurant, educational, and theater settings, typically attended by a demographic with the social and economic resources necessary to access these spaces. This has decreased opportunities for artists to perform publicly, especially for low-income patrons. Presentation venues are limited, and access to them is not easy for the majority of neighborhood residents. The arts in Harlem have effectively been archived, enshrined, and commodified to fit an essentialist mold that supports commercial enterprise and presents limited perspectives.

These incursions on public spaces must also be considered as incursions on public speech and freedom of expression. Movements that shaped political resistance during the Renaissance and the civil rights era, such as Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the Nation of Islam (which fostered Malcolm X), the Young Lords, and the Black Panthers all grew from and expanded in public spaces. Today, public spaces restrict such assembly and do not readily support community organizing, effectively muting the voices of those who do not conform to dominant narratives. Today, gaining access to public space in Harlem involves a prohibitive process that requires substantial resources and bureaucratic fluency.

Despite significant advances in civil rights since the Jim Crow era,9 the legacy of colonialism, racial subordination, and segregation in the United States continues to create challenges for marginalized people. Ingrained policy inequalities negatively impact the civic, social, cultural, and political rights of the black, brown, and poor. This is evidenced by Harlem’s current polarity; gentrification, which is displacing long-time residents; and by

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9 Jim Crow was the name of the racial caste system that operated primarily, but not exclusively, in southern and border states, between 1877 and the mid-1960s. Jim Crow was more than a series of rigid anti-black laws. It was a way of life. Under Jim Crow, African Americans were relegated to the status of second-class citizens. Jim Crow represented the legitimization of anti-black racism (Jarrett 388–390).
relegation of its storied history to artifacts for consumption. Cultivation of the arts has fallen by the wayside, as precedent is given to arts preservation. Museums, galleries, and heritage tours prevail, spurred by the successful touting of Harlem as a cultural destination by tourism boards. “Harlem, a world unto itself the last 60 years, is being rewoven into the urban fabric with a capitalist agenda,” writes Lily Hoffman, professor of sociology at Columbia; unchecked, this process “is experienced by some longtime residents as “racial voyeurism—whites on safari.”

While there is a wealth of information exploring Harlem’s Renaissance period—on the neighborhood as New York’s first major black residential and business center and the birthplace of an unprecedented artistic outpouring in America’s black community—there has been little academic focus on public arts and community arts practices of this same era.

The significance of Harlem’s public spaces as sites for communitas—equitable sites that enable social interaction and nurture creativity—and the function of these spaces to empower community enrichment through performance and expression of culture has not been fully explored in the existing literature.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The research presented here was guided by the following questions:

How is participation in Harlem’s public spaces shaped by strategies of power, subjective agency, and community need?

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10 Hoffman 286–299.
How do official policies, as strategic powers and the everyday practices of private citizens, as tactical response to policy, play a role in ownership and use of space?

In order to address these questions, this thesis traces a genealogy of Harlem’s public spaces as they have been used for social and civic engagement. The qualitative methodology chosen for the current study examines these spaces in which performance art and social and civic engagement occurred during the height of the Harlem Renaissance, with an emphasis on how these sites are used today. This thesis reviews the rise and demise of specific arts disciplines by employing a case study methodology. It explores challenges to negotiating participation and representation for black and brown communities with culturally specific customs, while suggesting measures that might alleviate some of these issues.

CASE STUDY METHOD

Case studies are widely used in social science research and have gained traction as a rigorous research strategy. According to Robert Yin, “the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events,” an approach of crucial importance to the research presented in this thesis. Case study research enables the current study to utilize scenarios bounded by certain parameters, including place; this is significant for this study’s attention to the Harlem neighborhood: its markets, parks, sidewalks, and public squares.

As explained by Yin, there are six possible sources of evidence for case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and

11 Kohlbacher, “The Use of Qualitative Content Analysis.”
12 Yin 4.
physical artifacts. The case study’s strength is its ability to provide a full variety of evidence, such as archives, informal interviews, and oral histories, with content analysis serving as an interpretive tool. Bill Gillham notes that relying on multiple sources of evidence is a key characteristic of case study research, beneficial because “all evidence is of some use to the case study researcher: nothing is turned away.” The case study ultimately provides a multidimensional perspective that may be used to create a shared view of the situation under consideration. This is especially valuable for this study, as the research requires both multidimensional perspective and intercultural knowledge.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data collected through the research and participation in community cultural activities, determined the material and focus of analysis, with particular attention given to specific locations of homeplace identified in archival records of the Harlem Renaissance. These records included municipal archives, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture’s research archive, *New York Age* and *New York Amsterdam News* archives, Harlem oral histories and historic interviews, programming calendars, board meeting minutes of city agencies, New York State Departments of Parks of Transportation (DOT) permit records, walking tours, and informal interviews of artists and Harlem residents. Review of the aforementioned informed both the characterization of the material and the differentiation of questions to be answered. Additionally, mapping technologies developed by Digital Harlem, a research collaboration centering on everyday life in the

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13 Yin 85–96.
14 Graham 20.
15 Kohlbacher, “The Use of Qualitative Content Analysis.”
neighborhood between 1915 and 1930, were consulted. Analysis and interpretations of the inquiry, along with information from specific state and local managers, structured the argument. Responses to direct requests for information from city agencies as well as applications to use public space and agency information (shared in accordance with the New York State Freedom of Information Law) were reviewed.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the instrument of data collection as well as interpreter of the phenomenon under study. In the course of the current study, the researcher also served as an insider working as the executive director of a nonprofit cultural equity initiative that conceives and executes free arts and music programs in collaboration with the New York City (NYC) Department of Parks and Recreation, as well as other cultural institutions and organizations. The researcher does not work for, consult, own shares in, or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this work and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond her academic appointment. In accordance with my ethical obligation as a researcher, I am reporting that I receive funding from an agency that will not be affected by the research but is explicitly named. I disclose these interests fully and assert that my positionality gives access to data and insights while posing no obstacles to objectivity. A twenty-year resident of Harlem, I strive for objectivity and embrace my subjectivity as a common citizen and user of public space.

16 Per New York Department of State’s Committee on Open Government, under the Freedom of Information Law: “The people’s right to know the process of governmental decision-making and to review the documents and statistics leading to determinations is basic to our society. Access to such information should not be thwarted by shrouding it with the cloak of secrecy or confidentiality. The legislature therefore declares that government is the public's business and that the public, individually and collectively and represented by a free press, should have access to the records of government in accordance with the provisions of this article. §85. Short title. This article shall be known and may be cited as the ‘Freedom of Information Law.’”
NEED FOR THE STUDY

This work includes research and assessment of the spaces in which performance art and social and civic engagement occurred over the span of the Renaissance years in Harlem. The work of comparing the development and utilization of these sites over a century is worthy of examination, because by understanding the historical ways that the community claimed and utilized space in Renaissance-era Harlem, we might realize the contemporary potential of these same public spaces for creative local expression, their opportunities for performance, and their benefits. The research also considers municipal involvement in and support of culturally specific programs, the challenges to negotiating access to public space, and obstacles to participation and representation in these spaces. It considers how Harlem’s contemporary civic public engagement practices might better serve its constituents.

The findings presented here affirm that the unrealized potential for *communitas* and vitality\(^{17}\) of contemporary Harlem’s polis can be fulfilled only when applied as a core competency of an effectively run, holistic, and inclusive government, which manages multiple registers of cultural practice. There is a need for policy making that considers the phenomenological, social, and institutional as overlapping and operating simultaneously for effective civic public engagement. Engagement is understood to be effective when it strives for inclusivity and is grounded in the desire to work for the *majority* and not a *privileged minority* of the community, and the aim to understand the needs and wants of the participating municipality’s constituents.

This project engages research and literature on historical injustices, kinship, and sociological theories on strategies of power as they apply to access to space, in order to

\(^{17}\) The Urban Institute defines cultural vitality as evidence of creating, disseminating, validating, and supporting arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life in communities (Jackson et al.).
understand how the case of Harlem relates to the existing body of knowledge. This thesis mines the role of public space as one important fixative to creating and maintaining social cohesion, in keeping with political theorist Hannah Arendt’s philosophy of the public realm as constituent of spaces of appearance where people can peaceably form a lively and diverse collective. More specifically, this paper examines Harlem’s current arts landscape and revisits its public spaces as potential sites where a contemporary developed, multicultural society might foster communitas. It posits that today’s Harlem comprises multiple publics, each, as is typically understood in modern democratic systems, deserving of representation, access to the arts, freedom of expression, and safe public spaces. Furthermore, this thesis argues that culturally specific arts and folk traditions are a source of vitality to be nurtured, not to be rejected and wiped away nor to serve as token curiosities to be codified and preserved in institutions or for commercial interests.

A review of contemporary Harlem finds repeating patterns of negative engagement, disruption, and disappointment that have steadily eroded social and civic bands of trust, thus weakening previously held community ties. As state and municipal governments

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18 Arendt 198.
19 According to the second paragraph of the first article of the Declaration of Independence, all citizens are given the right of expression and representation: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (Jefferson et al., The Declaration of Independence). “Happiness” is a debatable term; it may have meant “prosperity, thriving, wellbeing” in 1776. (Current usage focuses on “freedom” to participate, create, and resist.)
20 See Cary Hollinshead-Strick’s essay “The Emancipated Spectator and Modernism,” the introduction to Jan Luiten van Zanden’s The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution, and Chantal Mouffe’s “Deconstruction, Pragmatism and the Politics of Democracy” for examples of theory that affirms vibrant public sphere as essential to a modern democratic society. These works understand cultural sites as important places where a society negotiates difference while also creating a shared world.
21 A national survey by the Pew Research Center, conducted April 5–11, 2017 among 1,501 adults, found that the overall level of trust in government remains near historic lows: only 20% say they trust the government to do what is right always or most of the time. A far greater number say they trust the government only some of the time (68%); 11% volunteer that they never trust the government to do what is right (“Public Trust in Government Remains Near Historic Lows as Partisan Attitudes Shift”).
incrementally cede to commercial and financial interests and regulate usage of formerly territorial public space, community access to the public sphere is lost. The unspoken and unmeasured consequence is a struggle to retain and maintain social and cultural connections. The question of who decides which parts of heritage are worthy of preservation remains an ongoing conversation. City agencies entrusted with governance of these public spaces are not specifically charged with deciding how equitable community places are, and as established in Chapter 4, often directly impede the creation of successful public spaces. Even when all agencies are operating masterfully, fostering a “successful place” generally falls outside of the institution’s mission and goals. Governance, formal or informal, has great potential to redefine and refocus itself on successful community sites. While inherently bound by and tied to their success, government is still largely missing a coherent focus on enhancing its public places. Policy shapes the neighborhoods in which we live: housing, streets, amenities, and the spaces and places in which citizens can practice everyday life. Policy also directs who might access and participate in a space.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The concept of cultural equality is founded on the ancient Greek notion of the public realm that, in contrast with the modern concept of the public, aligns more closely with the principle of justice. In The Human Condition, Arendt interprets freedom, and by association cultural equality, as the capacity of people to gather and speak freely. This assertion of

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22 “Success” in the context of space is defined here as accessible and sociable places where people can convene, creatively express themselves, and engage with others.
23 Ethan Kent argues this point persuasively in his 2013 Project for Public Spaces article “Toward Place Governance: What if We Reinvented Civic Infrastructure Around Placemaking?”
24 Arendt 31.
“sphere” identifies public space as imperative to truly being in touch with one’s own identity while existing in a collective. Arendt theorizes that the private realm is where people are preoccupied with basic survival and being “animal laborans,” while the public sphere is where they can be more expressive and free to be themselves. According to Arendt, the public realm is essential to collectively negotiating the kind of world in which we hope to live. Therefore, public spaces are essential components of a democratic society. Research for this thesis shows that the current governance of Harlem’s public spaces has led to silos, segregation, and gross inequities in resource allocation and access. Specifically, Harlem’s municipal organization, with its myriad departments and bureaucratic processes, poses major obstacles (money, ideas, and talent notwithstanding) to civilian access; these hurdles curtail the potential of these civic spaces to serve as “spaces of appearance” where people can convene and creatively express themselves and engage with others. This thesis explores how the convergence of community and institutions along with the retooling of the current stewardship of the public to include intercultural knowledge at the hyperlocal level might contribute to more democratic spaces, practices, and unifying projects in Harlem.

EXPLANATION OF VARIABLES AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT

This study examines the public sphere in relation to population, marginalization, and policy, understanding that local arts organizations that provide services to the public(s) are heavily reliant upon governmental bodies, foundations, and non-profit organizations that remain bound to territorially enforced rules, policies, and regulations. It is important to understand that while policy itself can neither fully control nor produce culture or art, it

25 Arendt 31.
nonetheless impacts the momentum and breadth of cultural production in communities because of its potential to enhance local resources and lend additional attention and assistance to artists and communities. Policy, a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government to guide decisions and outcomes, often lacks in power sharing, excluding local knowledge in decision making.\textsuperscript{26} When this happens, policy can fail to achieve its intended goal.\textsuperscript{27}

The challenge is to hold states and municipalities accountable\textsuperscript{28} to their constituents by advocating and implementing programs to disrupt distributive inequalities. This is not a small endeavor when so much public art programming is supported by philanthropic and private support, which be achieved only with time, education, administrative skills, and connections. Indeed, the intricacies of navigation can be considered to represent a new gilded age for the educated and connected in this arena. This, too, is a practice of power and control.

While the creative inspiration comes from individuals and communities themselves, it is the work of cultural activists to hold the state accountable to these multiple publics. This requires a review of systemic and (often ignored) entrenched racist public policies, such as redlining, restricted access to resources, policing, and poor schooling and housing. Included in this review must be the outdated models of governance that are characterized by ill-conceived policy executed by stewards not specifically trained to manage the complexities of multiple publics.

\textsuperscript{26} Pandeya et al. 276–304.
\textsuperscript{27} This assumes that the “intended goal” is equitable public spaces.
\textsuperscript{28} Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs receiving federal financial assistance.
EXPLANATION OF TERMS

The following terms are defined to provide the necessary scaffold for evaluating the research presented hereafter.

**Space.** The term “space” is used in this study to connote an expansive sense of the term “place” that includes the significance of the location not just as property but as a physical arena where various cultural, economic, and historical issues engage with each other.

**Public Space.** A socially configured territory that is generally open and accessible, such as parks, streets, plazas, and outdoor marketplaces. These spaces are our social commons. To a limited extent, government buildings that are open to the public, such as libraries and schools, are also public spaces, although they tend to have greater limits on public use. Public space is not to be confused with a gathering place, though it can function as one. Moreover, a public space should not be confused with German philosopher Jürgen Habermas’s idea of the public sphere. Mary Dellenbaugh-Losse and Martin Schwegmann argue that urban commons present the opportunity for citizens to gain power vis-à-vis the management of the urban resources and to reframe city-life costs based on their use value and maintenance costs, rather than their market-driven value.

**Community Art.** In this research, community art encompasses the opportunity for creative expression through play, speech, assembly or specific arts discipline, for example, dance, murals, public art, graffiti, drum circles, and street dance. Community arts—also

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29 The public sphere (German Öffentlichkeit) is an area in social life where individuals can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. The term was originally coined by Habermas, who defined “the public sphere as a virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space” (Soules, “Jürgen Habermas and the Public Sphere”).

30 Dellenbaugh and Schwegmann, “Actors of Urban Change from an Urban Commons Perspective.”
known as “dialogical art,” “community-engaged art,” or “community-based art”—refers to artistic activities based in a community setting. Works from this genre can be of any media and are characterized by interaction or dialogue with the community. Often, they are characterized by collaborations between professional artists and people who may not normally engage in the arts.

**Cultural citizenship.** This conception of citizenship as a lived practice differs in its conceptual and empirical emphasis when compared to notions of citizenship that focus on rights and duties. The practice of citizenship suggests a dynamic experience of belonging to a political and social community rather than a political status. This entails the simultaneous claim of cultural difference and the right to be a first-class citizen, rather than accepting the dominant ideology that posits difference as a stigma or sign of inferiority. Cultural citizenship asserts that even in contexts of inequality, people are entitled to their distinctive heritage.

**Public Participation.** This form of participation allows and facilitates the involvement of interested parties and communities. This can be in relation to individuals, governments, institutions, companies, or any other entities that affect public interests. The principle of public participation holds that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process. Public participation implies that the public’s contribution will influence the decision.31

**Public(s).** This term refers to groups of individual people (i.e., the general public). The public is a kind of social totality. A public can also be understood as a physical audience,

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31 These principles are drawn from the Co-Intelligence Institute’s 2008 guidelines “Principles of Public Participation.”
a crowd witnessing itself in a visible space (as with a theatrical public), or a cultural enclave within a larger populace.32

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The scope of analysis in this thesis was limited by the lack of available data, as the municipal agency charged with governance of Harlem’s town square has not made historical records of use available to the public. This lack of municipal data on what is ostensibly Harlem’s chief polis required the researcher to limit the scope of analysis to polis with a locus outside of the town square. Future research would benefit from a site study of this location.

The technology used to recreate everyday life in Harlem is reliant on public record and as such is subject to human error.

The knowledge presented herein is not assumed to be neutral: knowledge is not monolithic or concrete but rather located and partial. This research is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of the failings of government for persons of color, a litany of their disadvantages, or a criticism of the effects of gentrification. It is instead an entry point to a dialogue between top-down directives established and implemented by state and local governance in Harlem (directives that determine the cultural climate), on one hand, and on the other, grassroots, community-oriented development programs initiated by or for individuals and communities outside of the traditional mainstream of power. The current review identifies obstacles and policies that obstruct full citizenship for certain communities and suggests measures that might remedy such exclusion. Suggested remedies take into

32 Warner 413–415.
consideration the value of native or indigenous contributions to the ongoing reconceptualization of space and sharing of resources, with the intention of revising existing policies instead of imposing arbitrary solutions in Harlem.

OVERVIEW

The introductory chapter of the paper explores operations of power utilized to create the urban metropolis that came to define Harlem as a black cultural hub. It considers the conditions without that created the period of artistic output coined “The Renaissance” and the conditions within that cemented the community.

Chapter 2 draws on historical newspaper records, city agency archives, and legal records to map, visualize, and provide evidence of the instances of homeplace as conceived by bell hooks. By charting the incremental diminutions of public space, the thesis reveals a picture of Harlem as a place of contestation, vulnerability, determination, and resistance. The research considers that Harlem’s homeplaces, as Hannah Arendt’s theory postulates, are places that exist and cease to exist only through the action and deeds of its citizens.33

Employing three iterations of a quintessential polis—the outdoor market place—Chapter 3 presents case studies that demonstrate the utilization of the political strategies of exclusion, destruction, and erasure. The chapter explores explicit and implicit motivations for municipal intervention and the consequences for individual and community.

Chapter 4 considers more deeply the operations of power utilized to create the current condition of public space in Harlem: multilayered tools of forbiddance and preclusion that

33 Arendt 198.
reinforce dominant narratives of order and security. The chapter examines specific instances
in which pejorative and abject narratives have been used as a political tool to spatially target
and, in some instances, exclude certain individuals and communities. Finally, it touches on
the current development of Harlem’s polis and considers the restoration, creation, and
nurturing of homeplace in service of community, a higher priority than aesthetic order.

Through these four chapters, this thesis explores the need and demand for public
spaces that support and build community, preserve history, and nurture new creation and
production. It considers city planners’ historic lack of attention to the anthropological
traditions and cultures of the locale, and maps the maintenance of the sites that have
traditionally supported cultural creative expression. Finally, it considers the intercultural
knowledge and community advocacy necessary to resist cultural erasure.
CHAPTER 1
HARLEM

It was sundown. The Sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky. It was the time for sitting on porches beside the road. It was time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so their skins felt powerful and human.

—Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God

This introductory chapter explicates historical strategies of power that converged to create the urban metropolis that came to define Harlem as a black cultural hub. It considers the conditions without that converged to create the critical mass responsible for the production of artistic output known as “The Renaissance” and the conditions within that cemented the community and established homeplace, sites of nurture within the borders of Harlem that fed and restored the body.

The research throughout challenges the idea of space as an inconsequential backdrop and takes the widely adopted position that space—and access to it—is not only key to social organization but also socially produced. The thesis is informed specifically by Henri Lefebvre’s work addressing the ways that space signifies logics of prohibition and control. Space is not a vessel filled with the social, political, cultural, etc. nor a stage that social actors merely occupy, but is constituent of actions and activities.

34 Per Lefebvre’s The Production of Space, Harvey’s “The Political Economy of Public Space,” and de Certeau’s The Practice of Everyday Life.

35 Lefebvre I.
For example, in 1919 when the United States Constitution banned the manufacture, transportation, and sale of intoxicating liquors, it ushered in a period in American history known as Prohibition. Prohibition drove consumption of alcohol underground and is cited as the impetus for over 500 speakeasies that operated in Harlem and were frequented by all of New York, not only Harlem residents. This illegal activity that found locus in Harlem was propelled by government action.

Lefebvre’s thesis refocused the understanding of space from abstract measurements and distances to its social and qualitative diversity. For the purpose of this study, historical context is essential and is the focus of this opening chapter. Without context, the stories and actions of the actors have less meaning. Understanding the social and political conditions that existed during the period of the Renaissance enables us to interpret and analyze Harlem’s past relationship with space and utilization of space, rather than merely to judge these relationships by contemporary standards.

HARLEM

Founded in the seventeenth century as a Dutch outpost, Harlem evolved from farming village to revolutionary battlefield, resort town, commuter town, ethnic enclave, and most recently, a predominantly black ghetto and center of black culture. Thus, its history has

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36 Speakeasies (illegal bars) were given their unique name because of the need to whisper, or “speak easy” (Columbia/Legacy). Speakeasies were mainly hidden sections of an establishment that were used to illegally sell alcoholic beverages during Prohibition.

37 Ullah, “Prohibition, Harlem Renaissance and Speakeasies.”

38 The concept of “ghetto” contracted after World War II, under the press of the Civil Rights Movement, to signify mainly the compact and congested enclaves to which black Americans were forcibly relegated as they migrated into the industrial centers of the North. This led to a “Black Metropolis [that] was growing in the womb of the white,” wherein Negroes evolved distinct and parallel institutions to compensate for and shield themselves from unflinching exclusion by whites (Drake and Cayton, 80).
been defined by a series of boom-and-bust cycles, with significant ethnic shifts accompanying each bust as waves of migrants moved through the city. The difference between an ethnic enclave and a ghetto is significant. An ethnic enclave is a configuration that remains “ethnic” while the ethnicities change through time. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the term designated residential concentrations of European Jews in Atlantic seaports and was clearly distinguished from the “slum” as an area of housing blight and social pathology. The term spread during the Progressive era to encompass all inner-city districts where “exotic” newcomers gathered, namely lower-class immigrants from the Southeastern regions of Europe.39

Figure 1

Ghetto vs. Ethnic Enclave

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ghetto</th>
<th>Neighborhood/Ethnic Enclave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enclosure</strong></td>
<td>Imposed</td>
<td>Elective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Determinant</strong></td>
<td>Out-group hostility</td>
<td>In-group affinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Spatial void (lacks material or symbolic value)</td>
<td>Occupational site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic Make-up</strong></td>
<td>Homogenous</td>
<td>Mixed, heterogeneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope (ethnicity)</strong></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spaa (temporal)</strong></td>
<td>Permanent, durable</td>
<td>Temporary (migrate over time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boundaries</strong></td>
<td>Sharp, impassable, clearly marked</td>
<td>Diffuse, porous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Function</strong></td>
<td>To exploit, ostracize, dissimilation, is like a wall</td>
<td>Assimilation, stepping board into larger society, is like a bridge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from L.J. Wacquant’s “Three Pernicious Premises in the Study of the American Ghetto.”*

The ghetto,⁴⁰ in the case of Harlem, denotes “a Janus-faced instrument of ethnoracial closure and control” experienced by black Americans fleeing subjugation in the Jim Crow South.⁴¹

In United States history, the Great Migration refers to the widespread migration of African Americans in the twentieth century from rural communities in the South to large cities in the North and West. At the turn of the twentieth century, the vast majority of black Americans lived in the Southern states. It is estimated that from 1916 to 1970, six million black Southerners relocated to urban areas outside of the South.⁴² The Great Migration and its resonance can be felt in urban settings where formal and informal spatial policies and rules relegated populations to particular areas—historical processes rooted in racial discrimination, spatial segregation, and political powerlessness.

Those blacks who remained in New York were contained in the tract of Harlem. The term “ghetto” deserves to be clarified further, as discussions of race and poverty in the American “inner city” tend to equate the ghetto with any perimeter of high poverty, irrespective of population and organizational makeup. The migrating blacks did not make the ghetto: not all majority black tracts are ghettos, nor are all ghettos black. To say that these areas are ghettos because they are poor is to reverse social and historical causation.⁴³ Sociologist Loic Wacquant clarifies this further in “Three Pernicious Premises in the Study of the American Ghetto”:

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⁴⁰ Ghetto as a social-organizational device composed of four elements (stigma, constraint, spatial confinement, and institutional compartmentalization) that employs space to reconcile the two antinomic purposes of economic exploitation and social ostracization (Wacquant 4).
⁴² “Great Migration.”
⁴³ The unique intensity and persistence of black segregation and institutional exclusion over the century of the ghetto’s life course is amply documented in the works of Spear, Farley and Allen, Jaynes and Williams, Von Hirsch and Greene, and Massey and Denton.
To call any area exhibiting a high rate or concentration of poverty a ghetto is not only arbitrary and empirically problematic . . . . It obscures the fact that blacks are the only group ever to have experienced ghettoization in American society, i.e., involuntary, permanent and total residential separation premised on caste as basis for the development of a parallel (and inferior) social structure. 

To understand better how an ethnic enclave became a ghetto, and to contextualize the ensuing discussion of public space, it is helpful to understand the topography of Manhattan and the sociospatial strategies that shaped Harlem. The Commissioners’ Plan of 1811 was the original design for the streets of Manhattan above Houston Street and below 155th Street. The tract of land that became what we know as Harlem today stretched from the East River westward to the Hudson River, and between 155th Street in the north, where it meets Washington Heights, and an uneven southern boundary along that runs along 96th Street east of Fifth Avenue or 110th Street west of Fifth Avenue.

A close look at the grid depicted in figure 2 shows a conspicuous absence of amenities for the city’s population, including parks and plazas. The legislature, which had created the commission, called for the inclusion of public areas, but—perhaps because they underestimated the city’s growth potential—laid out very few of these. The primary public sphere was the Grand Parade of 275 acres. Central Park was an afterthought to the 1811 grid plan; the concept of the park first came up for public discussion around 1850. The park’s advocates were wealthy landowners and merchants who argued that New York lacked the kind of parks that graced cities such as London and Paris, and that the creation of such a park would enhance New York’s reputation as an international city.

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44 Wacquant 343.
Figure 2

Modern redrawing of the 1807 version of the Commissioners’ grid plan for Manhattan.

With the population of the city growing, there was an intense need for public spaces, which the Commissioners’ plan had failed to provide. In 1853, the state legislature authorized the city to use eminent domain to acquire the necessary land and in 1857 appointed the Central Park Commission, led by Andrew Haswell Green to build the park.\textsuperscript{45} When presented with the city’s design for the Commissioner’s statement (figure 2), Governor Morris Simeon DeWitt and John Rutherford remarked:

> It may to many be a matter of surprise that so few vacant spaces have been left, and those so small, for the benefit of fresh air and consequent preservation of health. Certainly, if the city of New York was destined to stand on the side of a small stream such as the Seine or the Thames, a great number of ample places might be needful. But those large arms of the sea which embrace Manhattan island render its situation, in regard to health and pleasure as well as to the convenience of commerce, peculiarly felicitous.\textsuperscript{46}

The active and passive carving of public spaces into Manhattan’s topography has been an ongoing project ever since.

After 1917, with their numbers fed by the Great Migration, black residents arrived in Harlem en masse in the search for better conditions. They moved into a village that was increasingly rundown and left for ruin. The massive influx of blacks fundamentally altered Harlem’s residential and racial balances: most Jewish families moved away from Harlem, and the tract became home to the majority of New York City’s black population.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} Blackman 222–224.
\textsuperscript{46} Reps, “Remarks of Commissioners.”
\textsuperscript{47} Gurock, The Jews of Harlem 171.
mid-1920s, what had once been an affluent, white, albeit immigrant, suburb had become an impoverished, racialized ghetto.

THE MAKING OF A GHETTO

Moving forward, the term “ghetto” will be used to refer to the manipulation of black bodies through the use of strategies that create spatial isolation, set up a system of parallel and inferior services, and maintain social separation. It references, in particular, the compact and congested enclaves to which blacks were forcibly herded and contained. Harlem’s ghetto was formed systematically and deliberately through what French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault might call technologies of power or “governmentality.” For Foucault, power is never conceived as monolithic or autonomous, but rather as a structure produced by ever-changing relationships provoked by an endless struggle among men. Foucault defines governmentality in *Security, Territory, Population* as allowing for a complex form of “power which has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument.”

GOVERNMENTALITY

The gateway to black disenfranchisement was exclusion—both social and spatial—along with the removal of opportunities to mobilize out of slum conditions to safe spaces. A look at 1930s housing policy in the following section exemplifies Foucault’s theory of

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48 Haynes 4.
49 Foucault 78.
50 Foucault 107–108.
technologies and apparatuses of power, and reveals specific strategies that lead to isolation on both spatial and social registers.

The 13th Amendment abolished slavery in 1865 “except as a punishment for a crime.” Four million enslaved people, representing 90 percent of the black population, became “freemen” with the amendment’s ratification.\(^{51}\) In an instant, $3 billion in human property, a value three times greater than all American manufacturing and seven times greater than all banks, transferred hands.\(^{52}\) Ostensibly, black people took immediate control of their own labor and political power. But while the 13th Amendment abolished slavery, it did not protect the rights of the newly freed blacks. The economic motivations for migration combined the desire to escape oppressive economic conditions in the South and the promise of greater prosperity in the North. However, in response to the loss of their labor force, legislators turned to the newly constitutionally protected power of the state to criminalize nearly every aspect of black freedom, from employment and land ownership to voting and everyday forms of self-defense and self-pride.\(^{53}\)

The legal justification was established in the “Black Codes”: loitering and vagrancy laws passed after the Civil War and Reconstruction\(^{54}\) to restrict freedom. One of the defining features of the Black Codes was a broad vagrancy law, which allowed local authorities to arrest freed people for minor infractions and commit them to involuntary labor. This period was the start of the convict lease system, also described as “slavery by another name” by Douglas Blackmon in his book of the same title.

\(^{51}\) Vorenberg 60.
\(^{52}\) Williamson and Cain, “Measuring Slavery in 2016 Dollars.”
\(^{53}\) Muhammad, “Ava DuVernay Reminds Us: The Past Must Be Present in Criminal-Justice Reform.”
\(^{54}\) The period after the Civil War, 1865–1877, was called the Reconstruction period.
After the Civil War, black Americans were arrested en masse, and almost immediately from the time of emancipation, black citizens were systematically excluded from government programs that would allow them to build any wealth or afford civic promotion. Black Americans were barred from home ownership, meaningful employment, and education (at any level) for decades, the effects of which are felt acutely today.\(^{55}\)

SEGREATION

Although the racial segregation of the United States is commonly viewed as a manifestation of personal bias—of unscrupulous individual real estate agents, unethical mortgage lenders, and exclusionary covenants working outside the law—segregation was not extra-judicial, but rather a legally created, documented, and enforced system. America’s segregation is actually the byproduct of explicit government policy at the local, state, and federal levels. Segregation that imposes separation by race or creed is \textit{de jure} segregation,\(^{56}\) separation enforced by law.\(^{57}\) The segregation processes described above persist in the United States and continue to plague Harlem and its minority residents.

The redlining and herding practices of the 1930s (the effects of which have lasted for decades) established Harlem as a ghetto. A government-backed entity called the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) created color-coded maps of residential neighborhoods that assessed each neighborhood’s real estate risk. HOLC cards rated neighborhood loan risk

\(^{55}\) Middleton 74
\(^{56}\) Under \textit{de jure} segregation, the government established separate drinking fountains, waiting areas, and public schools. This system also created slums and ghettos, invested nothing, maintained rudimentary inferior services, and withheld means to access valuable resources. Though this segregation was ultimately ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, its effect was already entrenched, and once established, segregation is difficult to reverse.
\(^{57}\) Rothstein xii.
on a scale from “dangerous” to “better.” If a potential homeowner lived in a neighborhood considered “dangerous” by lenders, the individual did not have access to low-cost mortgages that helped create the middle class in the twentieth century.

Figure 3

Mapping Inequality: Home Owners Loan Corporation Redline Map.


These practices were not specific to Harlem; they were carried out by decree of state and local governments anywhere in the United States that black Americans settled, from Detroit to Atlanta, Newark to Cambridge, MA.  

58 Botein 714–737.
Today, many black children in the United States still attend schools in racially and economically isolated neighborhoods. According to the 2012 United Stated Census report, 39 percent of black children are from families with incomes below the poverty line, compared with 12 percent of white children; moreover, 28 percent of black children live in high-poverty neighborhoods, compared with 4 percent of white children. The Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP) attributes the United States’ racial wealth gap to these federal, state, and locally endorsed residential segregation practices, which support racially segregated public housing over integrated communities. New York City has one of the most deeply segregated school systems in the nation.

EXCLUSION

The Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the Government Issue Bill (GI Bill), was a law that provided a range of benefits for returning World War II veterans (commonly referred to as GIs) and is widely credited with creating middle-class wealth in America. Benefits included dedicated payments of tuition and living expenses to attend high school, college, or vocational/technical school, low-cost mortgages, low-interest loans to start a business, as well as one year of unemployment compensation. By the time the

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60 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013 Kids Count Data Book.
61 The Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP) is a research institute that advances economic opportunity and equity for individuals and families, particularly households of color and those kept out of the economic mainstream.
62 Maxwell 5.
original GI Bill ended on July 25, 1956, 7.8 million of 16 million World War II veterans had participated in an education or training program.\textsuperscript{64}

White veterans were able to use the government guaranteed housing loans that were a pillar of the bill to buy homes in the fast-growing suburbs. Those homes subsequently rose greatly in value in the following decades, creating vast new household wealth for whites during the postwar era. Although 1.2 million black men and women served in the military during the war, black veterans were, for the most part, unable to make use of the housing provisions of the GI Bill. Banks generally would not make loans for mortgages in black neighborhoods, and blacks were excluded from the suburbs by a combination of deed covenants and informal racism.\textsuperscript{65} In short, the GI Bill helped fostered a long-term boom in white wealth but did almost nothing to help blacks to build wealth. The programs were directed by local white officials; the majority of black veterans did not benefit. Historian Ira Katznelson argues that “the law was deliberately designed to accommodate Jim Crow,” and black Americans are still living with the effects of that exclusion today.\textsuperscript{66}

Redlining practices that determined residency and discriminatory policies (such as exclusion from the GI Bill), which limited earnings and, in turn, prevented mobility and civic promotion, confined most black Americans to a specific concentrated area within the city; thus, the declining property values could be kept in a contained area.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64} “About GI Bill, US Department of Veteran Affairs.”
\item \textsuperscript{65} Herbold 104–108.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Katznelson 140.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
DISINVESTMENT

The redline maps became self-fulfilling prophecies, as “hazardous” neighborhoods — “redlined” ones — were starved of investment and deteriorated further in ways that most likely also fed white flight and rising racial segregation.\(^6^7\) This lack of aid or support is commonly referred to as disinvestment. Neighborhood disinvestment is a systematic withdrawal of capital and neglect of public services by the city. Public services may include schools, maintenance of buildings, streets and parks, garbage collection, and transportation. Absentee landlordism and redlining also characterize disinvestment. As redlining prevents households from owning, they have no choice but to rent from landlords who neglect property and charge high rent.\(^6^8\) Further, capital (of various forms) is effectively removed from the neighborhood because landowners live outside the area and invest in other neighborhoods with their profits. The relegation of black Americans to specific neighborhoods continues today. The neighborhood disinvestment cycle, followed by revitalization, gentrification, and dislocation of minorities, makes it difficult for blacks to settle and develop equity.\(^6^9\)

The list above is in no way exhaustive but touches on many of the ways that regulation and policy have historically been utilized as an apparatus of power to control housing and land ownership and the permission to exist, live, and make a living. Historically, this government regulation was supported by extrajudicial enforcement, carried out by formal white supremacist institutions such as White Citizens Councils, the Ku Klux Klan, and by

\(^{6^7}\) Keating 143–154.

\(^{6^8}\) K. Gibson 3–25.

\(^{6^9}\) For a contemporary discussion of this, see Matthew Desmond’s *Evicted.*
local police.\textsuperscript{70} These exclusions and policies around space converge to create the conditions that are the context for this research; and the effects of this historical bias continue to shape the lives of Harlem’s inhabitants.

HARLEM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Redlining and herding created these segregated neighborhoods of black and brown people. Decades of disinvestment depressed home values in these neighborhoods, which in turn resulted in schools receiving less money from lower property taxes. The historic underpinnings of these toxic inequalities are well documented; however, they are perpetuated in twenty-first century Harlem by policies and tax preferences that continue to favor the affluent.\textsuperscript{71} The Home Owners Loan Corporation districts once deemed high risk because of “undesirable inhabitant types” are now rapidly gentrifying, with soaring real estate prices. Without fair housing protections in place for low-income citizens, the result is a city with one of the largest gaps between the rich and poor, which also intersects overtly with race. In 2009, a representative survey of American households revealed that the median wealth of white families was $113,149 compared with $6,325 for Latino families and $5,677 for black families.\textsuperscript{72}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{70} Dittmer 46–48.
\textsuperscript{71} Gilens and Page 564–581.
\textsuperscript{72} Shapiro et al.; Rakesh et al.
\end{flushleft}
COLLECTIVE IDENTITY (KINSHIP)

As African Americans, we all bear the burdens of our ancestry, to some degree. And make no mistake: though some of us bear them more than others, all of us have been affected. Three hundred plus years of slavery and oppression certainly have had their impact. A portion of the impact has given rise to weaknesses that we have to understand, confront and deal with if we are to thrive. Another portion has provided us with great strengths upon which to build. In both regards we are slavery’s children.

—Joy Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*

While Harlem can be understood as a ghetto, it can also be understood as the site of an unprecedented and never-repeated arts phenomenon. The span of years that has become world renowned as the Renaissance produced, in the words of acclaimed biographer Arnold Rampersad, “one of the most provocative episodes in African-American and American history.”\(^\text{73}\) The creative explosion in Harlem during these pivotal years blended the fields of history, literature, music, psychology, and folklore; it brought together the thought and writing of such key figures as Alain Locke, Zora Neale Hurston, Bessie Smith, James Weldon Johnson, and W.E.B. DuBois and the poetry of Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes. Various theories explain and interpret the factors and conditions that coalesced, resulting in an artistic outpouring not seen since. As Henry Rhodes notes, most attribute the upwell of literary and cultural expression among African Americans to a combination of black migration to the North during and after World War I and the economic and social boom times of the roaring 1920s.\(^\text{74}\)

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\(^{73}\) Huggins xxxiii.

\(^{74}\) “The Social Contributions of The Harlem Renaissance.”
The era exemplifies what we now commonly understand: grassroots creative expression can make a significant difference in the social conditions of disenfranchised communities. Caron Atlas writes that arts and culture engage our humanity, helping us to create the character and climate of the city in which we live. They are sources of empathy and connection, allowing us to see ourselves as part of a shared experience. Poetry, music, images, and stories speak to our deepest values, strengthen community identity, and support critical thinking and problem solving. We become the authors of our histories, unlocking civic energy. This is critically important during hard times when people can become isolated and disenfranchised. Alice Walker writes in *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*, “It is not so much what you sang, as that you kept alive, in so many of our ancestors, the notion of song.” Creation is inherently liberating. It posits that something else is possible.

Basic creative expression can make a significant difference in the social conditions of communities deprived of their rights. Reviewing the Renaissance period through this lens, it is possible to explore several lines of inquiry beyond the socio economic: kinship bonds, proximity, shared trauma, and creation of spaces of nurture and production as a form of resistance.

In 1920, New York’s Harlem “contained approximately 73,000 Blacks, 66.9 % of the total number of blacks in Manhattan. By 1930 Black Harlem had expanded . . . and housed approximately 164,000 blacks, 73 percent,” each connected by a shared cultural heritage, generations of trauma, slavery, emancipation, and migration. In her 2005 book *Post*

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75 See for example Norma Gray’s “Integration of Creative Expression into Community Based Participatory Research and Health Promotion with Native Americans” and Heather Stuckey and Jeremy Nobel’s “The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health.”

76 “How Arts and Culture Can Advance a Neighborhood Agenda.”

77 Walker 237.

78 Wintz 20.
Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing, Joy DeGruy, a sociopsychologist, developed the theory of post-traumatic slave syndrome, and explains the etiology of many of the adaptive survival behaviors in black communities throughout the United States. She operationalizes a condition that exists as a consequence of multigenerational oppression of Africans and their descendants resulting from centuries of chattel slavery.

Similar evolutionary views on shared trauma were expressed years earlier in a retrospective analysis of black creativity by Alain Locke, the most influential critic of the Renaissance period:

Anti-slavery controversy and the hope of freedom brought poetry and fire to the Negro tongue and pen; whereas the setbacks and strained ambitions of Reconstruction brought forth . . . leaden rhetoric and alloyed pedantry. Thus the [Seventies] and the [Eighties] were the awkward age in our artistic development. They were the period of prosaic self-justification and painful apprenticeship to formal culture. Yet these years saw the creditable beginnings of Negro historical and sociological scholarship . . . and saw also an adolescent attack on the more formal arts of the novel, the drama, formal music, painting and sculpture. Before this almost all of our artistic expression had flowed in the narrow channels of the sermon, the oration, the slave narrative and didactic poetry . . . [then, in the 1890s] there was a sudden change of trend as [a] blaze of talent ushered in a new era of racial expression. It was more than a mere accession of new talent; it was the discovery of a new racial attitude . . . the leading motive of the new era (1895–1910) seems to have been radicalism and its new dynamic self-help and self-assertion . . . the formula of special gifts and particular
paths had been discovered, and became the dominant rationalization of the period . . .

the leading conception of the freedom was the right to be oneself and different.\textsuperscript{79}

These shared cultural traumas were respectively central to the group identity, collective memory, and consequential response to them.

Kinship and religious affiliations are useful categories to deepen our understanding of what held these urban communities together beyond legal sequestering. Historically, African societies were arranged and based upon kinship relationships. The extended family was the foundation of social organization and was part of a survival strategy, as an interdependent unit that provided for the care of children, the sick and elderly.\textsuperscript{80} Kinship is the central organizational principle of many traditional societies: it is through the kinship structure that social placement, cultural transmission, and many functional necessities for life are met.

These systems also form the foundation for basic social institutions and play a vital role in social control and cohesion. Kinship, as the foundation of many social institutions, acts as a shared event that binds people together or a dynamic relation.\textsuperscript{81} Out of collective kinship, informal networks for communication and aid emerge, functioning in a tactical manner by passing on information about jobs, housing, welfare, and the like. These networks may provide an organized context in which many, if not most, ghetto dwellers are able to cope with an essentially inhospitable societal environment. Here, I expand the term “kinship” in a general sense, referring to affinity between entities based on a shared historical and cultural connection, shared fear, and the shared experience of resisting. The role of the church cannot be overstated here; as Locke affirmed, almost all black artistic expression

\textsuperscript{79} Spencer 114–115.
\textsuperscript{80} DeGruy 19.
\textsuperscript{81} Radcliffe-Brown 1–18.
flowed in the narrow channels of the sermon, the oration, the slave narrative, and didactic poetry.\textsuperscript{82}

In his study “Notes on Trauma and Community,” Kai Erikson points to the possibility of turning tragedy into triumph using the emotional bonds that result from shared trauma. An ascribed community can become a real community as survivors pull together, using the past to face the future:

Persons who survive severe disasters, as I noted a moment ago often come to feel estranged from the rest of humanity and gather in to groups with others of like mind. They are not drawn together by any feelings of affection (in the usual meaning of the term anyway) but by a shared set of perspectives and rhythms and moods that derive from the sense of being apart.\textsuperscript{83}

Erikson notes that traumatized people calculate life’s chances differently. They look out at the world through a different lens. And in that sense they can be said to have experienced not only a changed sense of self and way of relating to others, but a changed worldview.\textsuperscript{84} Erikson’s observation of trauma, however, arises from a place of privilege; it assumes conferred basic human rights and equity and does not address ongoing trauma, which we now know is embodied and passed from generation to generation.\textsuperscript{85} White-authored national narratives often deliberately contradict the histories that black American

\textsuperscript{82} Spencer 114.
\textsuperscript{83} Erikson 183.
\textsuperscript{84} Erikson 455.
bodies know. As Elizabeth Alexander notes in her 1994 essay “Can You Be Black and Look at This? Reading the Rodney King Video(s),” “There have always been narratives to justify barbaric practices.”

In her exploration of post-traumatic slave syndrome, DeGruy theorizes that chattel slavery, a form of slavery predicated on the belief that blacks were genetically inferior to whites, followed by decades of institutionalized racism which continues to perpetuate injury, results in MAP:

M: Multigenerational trauma together with continued oppression;

A: Absence of opportunity to heal or access the benefits available in the society; leads to

P: Post-traumatic slave syndrome.

From this shared trauma emerged collective kinship, informal networks, and artists’ performative spatial practices as vehicles for transcending the boundaries defined by land ownership, wealth, and power. As de Certeau argues, power relations are enacted through an unfolding performance between “strategies”—those people, institutions, and things that draw boundaries around place and declare ownership—and “tactics”—that use timing to usurp, momentarily, the place of another. Strategies can be understood as the ways those with legitimate power organize the spatial and the social to limit participation. Although strategic forces shape our world, people respond to strategies in ways that are creative and improvisational, adding to this construction. Tactical forms of resistance often call forth new strategies, creating an ongoing power dynamic. De Certeau theorized the responses

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86 Alexander 84.
previously described as informal kinship network as “coping tactics.” The role of art and music during the Harlem Renaissance, including an outpouring of blues, gospel, and jazz, was tactical, in that it was an improvisational response and resistance to power.

De Certeau understands tactics not as a subset of the strategy but as an adaptation to the environment, which was created by the strategies of the powerful. The planning commission can determine which streets will be built, but the local taxi driver will find the best way to navigate the reality of these streets. This art of doing is what de Certeau calls “DIY,” a process that often involves cooperation as much as competition. This “cooperation” is evident in the kinship ties of Harlem’s black urbanites.

In her essay on Rodney King, Elizabeth Alexander considers the inchoate ways that black people might understand themselves to be part of a larger group, larger than political, ethnic, subcultural, or diasporic:

No satisfactory terminology in current use adequately represents how I am describing a knowledge and sense of African American group identification which is more expansive than the inevitable biological reductions of race and the artifactual constraints of culture. What do black people say to each other to describe the relationship to their racial group, when that relationship is crucially forged by incidents of physical and psychic violence which boil down to the fact of abject blackness? Put another way, how does an incident like King’s beating consolidate group affiliations by making blackness an unavoidable, irreducible sign which

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87 De Certeau 23.
despite its abjection leaves creative space for group self-definition and self-knowledge?88

This abjection was a shared cultural trauma. Out of this trauma—within Alexander’s framing of creative space for group self-definition and self-knowledge—arose a distinctive black American identity that expanded beyond community and collective identity.

Kinship contributed to the bubble that was the Harlem Renaissance, but another key factor was social and spatial segregation: the spaces to which these black bodies were confined and from which they were excluded. The condition of environment existed because of policy, along with the city’s and state’s abhorrent segregation practices. The ghettoization of Harlem was an attempt to repress and contain the marginalized. “Contain” is not used here in the sense of “refuge or haven” from discrimination or labor, as Drake and Cayton put it in their classic study of Chicago blacks,89 because black Harlem was not absent of whites. Instead, I am suggesting that this containment also served as an incubator in which the culture thrived and (re)produced space as a response to repression. At this point, the borders of the ghetto ceased to be a container, and the urban social space and concentration of bodies gave rise to the artistic outpouring of the Harlem Renaissance.

RENAISSANCE ARTS PRACTICE

Harlem and its black inhabitants were the last group to define the locales artistic riches. In spite of external conditions, this relatively short period of time (1917–1931) witnessed an unprecedented output of literature, music, art, and theater from the black

88 Alexander 77–94.
89 Drake and Clayton 387.
community. The Harlem Renaissance was a movement generated through black initiative. In the context of the racism, violence, and institutional inequities during this period, this genesis is important because this body of excellence provides empirical evidence that grassroots creative expression can make a significant difference in the social conditions of disenfranchised communities. This community with no liberties, negative or positive, no “freedom from,” or “capacity to”90 was able to carve a place in history and a legacy in the future. Regardless of the boundaries set in place by ruling class “producers,” resistance through social performance established that art was created and performed in ways that refused and resisted the strategies of control.

Alain Locke once observed: “The importance of this . . . movement is not to be underestimated; for, apart from its own creative impulse, it has effected a transformation of race spirit and group attitude, and acted like the creation of a national literature in the vernacular reacted upon the educated classes of other peoples, who, also, at one stage of their cultural history, were not integrated with their own particular tradition and folk-background.”91

Locke’s “race spirit and group attitude” are exemplified by the period in Harlem when it was a hotbed of poetry and theater. Figures like Langston Hughes and Paul Robeson and production companies like the National Black Theater, the Harlem Suitcase Theater, and the American Negro Theater staged acclaimed productions and spawned the careers—both

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90 See Amartya Sen’s 1999 book, Development as Freedom. Substantial freedom is somewhere between negative liberty and well-being or happiness. Sen appears to believe that the more substantial freedom one has, the happier one is likely to be.
91 Locke 244.
artistic and political—of Harry Belafonte, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, Sidney Poitier, and others.92

Production and re-production of space was a key factor: external conditions, strategies of power, and confinement by way of exclusion led to the establishment of homeplaces, albeit tenuous ones. These sites of nurture, in turn, resulted in an unrepeated epoch of social organization and production in Harlem. Amidst this abundance of artistry, the venues that provided an opportunity for performance (in its broadest sense) ranged from sidewalk to ballroom to backroom rent party. It is Harlem’s sidewalk and community arts locations with which this research is concerned.

92 Shandell 5.
CHAPTER 2
HOMEPAGE

One’s home place was the one site where one could freely confront the issues of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world.
—bell hooks, *Yearning Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*

In her 1990 book *Yearning Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, bell hooks introduces the concept of “homeplace.” Drawing from her own recollections of the Jim Crow era as a child growing up in the segregated South, she details how the women in her community created and maintained spaces to nurture black subjectivities that had been stripped away or denied by daily institutionalized racism. Arriving to the safe comfort of her grandmother’s home after tense walks through majority white neighborhoods, she recounts how this safe space and the continual labor to maintain it were acts of resistance by her community against the dehumanizing processes of segregation. Hooks argues that it was this maternal providing of the homeplace that enabled more people to have the courage to participate in public, vocal acts of civil disobedience, giving momentum to the Civil Rights Movement. Although gendered, hooks’s nuanced notion of “homeplace” provides insight into the action and production that occurred in specific sites within Harlem during the Renaissance. As it applies to Harlem, the spaces (homeplaces) that served to educate and strengthen—the play street, the speaker’s corner, the parade route—provided a precarious safety and doubled as the crucible in which resistance movements were fomented.

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93 Hooks 72.
To better understand Harlem’s multiple polis—these “homeplaces” that nurtured and infused everyday life—we look at the historical action (arts) produced in them. In this case, the arts refer to the theory and physical expression of creativity found in societies and cultures; to grassroots rituals, and specifically art and public community art practices located in community spaces during the Harlem Renaissance. These include social spaces generally open and accessible to the common person, such as parks, streets, public squares, and marketplaces, as well as Harlem’s social commons and expressions within these structures. The findings presented here focus on the practices of everyday life in spaces that nurtured and supported freedom of expression, artistic output, and individuality counter to the lived experience outside of these pockets of community.

A historical inquiry into Harlem’s homeplaces finds that their very existence is dependent on a variety of power structures that enable or inhibit livability. Homeplace was established when users appropriated public spaces for creative and political action; in each instance, acts of resistance were performed. Performance here can be best aligned with Judith Butler’s theory of performative assembly, in which she analyzes and advances Hannah Arendt’s notions of the body, assembly, action, and the public sphere, and introduces the idea of precarity and vulnerability, conditions in which Harlem’s polis are rooted. As a result, the emotional sustenance of the body, which occurs privately and within homeplace, provides the resources needed for the actor to perform publicly and through verbal speech (Arendt’s notion of action), to show in deed and word the individual’s unique distinctness.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{94} Arendt197–199.
These Harlem homeplaces provided forums where black subjectivities could be explored and expanded. For Butler, the “well-fed body speaks openly and publicly,” and in her view, “the concerted action that characterizes resistance is sometimes found in the verbal speech act or the heroic fight, but it is also found in those bodily gestures of refusal, silence, movement, and refusal to move.” This idea aligns with hooks’s assertion of creating and nurturing homeplace in a hostile environment as an act of resistance.

Butler emphatically attributes a large degree of agency to individuals, expressed through the body and assembly, while never forgetting the critical role that power strategies play in society and the limiting force they have on agency. Her notion of agency comes through performance and involves a creative dimension. Social subjectivity, in her terms, is oftentimes the result of negotiations that take place at the limit of what the social allows (i.e., the normative.)

**MAPPING HOMEPAGE**

In *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, an anthropological and sociological study of the black urban experience in the first half of the twentieth century, St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, Jr. describe conditions (and the tactical response to conditions) of ongoing structural racism and systemic and spatial inequalities as “the growth of the black metropolis in the womb of the white” wherein blacks evolved distinct and parallel institutions to compensate for and shield themselves from unflinching exclusion—a type of plural existence. Though not explicitly detailed, the growth of the black metropolis

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95 Butler 206.
96 Butler 218.
97 Drake and Cayton 80.
was driven by the arts. Excluded from financial gain and social promotion, artistic output and creation inside this unintended sanctum created a resistance that could not be quelled. Art as a resistance movement could not have been anticipated and had yet to be regulated.

W.E.B. DuBois, a leading American philosopher, affirmed this kind of cultural pluralism, as he described black Americans struggling with a sense of “ twoness” because white America did not accept black American culture. He wrote, in The Souls of Black Folk, “One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

This twoness is explored in this chapter, which reviews systemic access and spatial inequalities in Harlem. Building on the concept of twoness and employing mapping technologies developed by Digital Harlem, the following research presents Renaissance-era Harlem as its own metropolis within Manhattan. The technology permits a focus on community activity and homeplace, locating and visualizing their presences within the neighborhood. Displaying information on a map generates relevant and important questions regarding how to understand the progressive erasure of many of Harlem’s homeplaces. By combining material from a wide range of municipal and public historical archive sources, overlaid across a single geographical location, the mapping system also provides a means of visualizing that material, making it possible to see spatial relationships and patterns and the complexity of past configurations. This approach allows the user to analyze fragmentary qualitative evidence and reveals patterns of daily life in what other studies of Harlem have

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98 DuBois 5.
99 Robertson 1.
treated as ephemera: businesses, sporting events and performances, dances, robberies, parades, and traffic accidents. Active, performative spaces are identified within the established village boundaries of 1925 Harlem as well as within the decade spanning 1925–1935. Each site is discussed and understood through the ways that artists and other creative practitioners activated that site. It must be noted that while these maps demonstrate the rich fabric of groups, institutions, and voluntary organizations that supported homeplace, documents available through the public record are not exhaustive; thus, this study is somewhat limited in scope. Despite this, these maps not only aid understanding the cultural life in Harlem but also speak to the community’s social psychology. For example, Renaissance-era parades represented moments when blacks claimed the streets of the neighborhood, displacing buses, trams, and taxis that ran through the streets of Harlem as well as most private cars. Parades permitted a sense of agency in an environment where there were few places to feel autonomous. Black Americans developed a symbolic language of political expression. Overall, this research points to a strategic identity dimension to these large and small-scale events, and the importance of performance and celebratory events in the strategic representation of everyday social identities.

PLAYGROUNDS / PLAY STREETS

In the early part of the twentieth century, great emphasis was placed on the need for children to have space to run and play. In 1914, there were over 30 parks in Manhattan, yet few served low-income neighborhoods. Police Commissioner Arthur Woods spearheaded the “play street” experiment. In 1914, in an effort to provide children in poorer

100 “PAL Playstreets.”
neighborhoods with access to outdoor space, Woods closed off 29 New York City streets, designated them as “playground blocks,” and opened them to the children who lived in the city’s congested tenements. These streets were opened for children on dozens of blocks around the city every afternoon except Sundays. Public record indicates that in 1925, there were four official play streets in Harlem and multiple playgrounds (see figure 4).

Figure 4
Digital Harlem mapping of 1925 play streets and playgrounds.

Today, a wealth of scholarship exists on the many ways that outdoor play affects our minds and bodies.\textsuperscript{101} Playgrounds and spaces held for child’s play are sites of creation and imaginative exchange—they support social exchange and introduce the idea of cooperation. In addition to physical benefits, opportunities for the development and refinement of locomotive skills\textsuperscript{102} and fine motor skills,\textsuperscript{103} outdoor play also has the potential to improve communication and social development, self-regulation, attention, and cognitive development.\textsuperscript{104} In addition, outdoor play provides opportunity for learning and creative production. Tennis star Althea Gibson is an example of this opportunity: Gibson grew up in Harlem on a stretch of block designated a “play street.” It was on this street that Gibson took up paddle tennis, her first exposure to the game that she would master later in life.\textsuperscript{105}

\begin{footnotes}
102 Little and Wyver 33–40.
103 Thomas and Harding 12–22.
104 Little and Wyver 33–40.
105 “Althea Gibson,” International Tennis Hall of Fame.
\end{footnotes}
At left, play time on West 123rd Street between Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Frederick Douglass Boulevards in 1997. At right, Officer Russell Blair of Brooklyn’s 73rd Precinct with children at the Sterling Place play street in 1962


In 1965, under Mayor Lindsey, the city assumed management of the play street initiative, which had been privately funded until that time. The city also took control of funding. Since that time, over a span of several mayoral terms, the city has steadily reduced support and funding for the play street program. As of 2017, there are 15 play street locations across all of Manhattan, reduced from over 100. None of the remaining play streets are located in Harlem, and those that remain are nearly all in city parks or on the grounds of housing projects.  

106 “PAL Play Streets.”
In explaining the decision to phase out the program, Frederick J. Watts, the Police Athletic League’s executive director, said: “The funder—the city—wanted to see that we had more active, engaged programs, rather than have a broader, more passive program.”\textsuperscript{107} It is unclear whether community was consulted in this decision.

\textsuperscript{107} Dwyer, “Heard on the Stoops.”
PARADES

The most prevalent of all Harlem public arts practices was the parade. James Weldon Johnson, African American polymath and leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, wrote in *Black Manhattan* that 1920s Harlem was also a parade ground:

During the warmer months of the year, no Sunday passed without several parades. There were brass bands, marchers in resplendent regalia, and high dignitaries with gorgeous insignia riding in automobiles. Almost any occasion for parading was sufficient—the funeral of a member of the lodge, the laying of a corner stone, the annual sermon to the order, or just a general desire to “turn out . . . [G]enerally these parades are lively and add greatly to the movement, colour and gaiety of Harlem.”

Figure 7 demonstrates the extent to which Harlem’s streets were utilized for these expressions of affiliation, community, and cultural celebration. Fraternal lodges organized smaller parades for marking anniversaries, the inauguration of churches, and celebrations such as the Fourth of July. In 1929, parades consisted of marches of soldiers but also funeral processions, which followed shorter routes, carrying the casket to the funeral site, and then outside Harlem for burial, usually at the Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. Singer Florence Mills’s funeral procession in 1927 was one of the largest recorded in Harlem, with more than 150,000 attendees packing the streets. Although the size of the crowds may have differed, funeral parades took essentially the same form as celebratory parades, except with pallbearers in the lead.

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108 Johnson 168.
Parades and the act of public assembly permitted a sense of agency in an environment where there were few places to feel autonomous. The preparation for pageantry that precedes the parade is as important as the parade itself. The costuming and puffery required for the parade provided moments for empowerment.\footnote{Boon and Plastow 156.} Butler describes this autonomy as “not
exactly at a single instance, but instead in a series of speech acts or what [she] would suggest are performative enactments that are not restrictively verbal.\textsuperscript{110}

In these moments, black people developed a symbolic language of political expression and acted out their capacity to affect the surroundings and be affective and effective in the surroundings. In consideration of Butler’s view of the body as an impetus for performance, it is essential to understand that all participants here were reliant on both built and natural spaces and social peers to flourish. Butler acknowledges that “no one popular assembly comes to represent the entirety of the people, but each positing of the people through assembly risks or invites a set of conflicts that, in turn, prompt a growing set of doubts about who the people really are . . . [The] assembly is already speaking before it utters any words . . . by coming together it is already an enactment of a popular will.”\textsuperscript{111} These parades were not simply spectacle but were meaningful as controversial displays of neighborhood and ethnic pride.

Today, one parade remains in Harlem: the annual African American Day Parade runs up Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard between 110th and 136th Streets. Originated during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, black Americans gather to promote black pride in the United States. This single remaining permitted display of culture is heavily policed and sparsely attended. As longtime Harlem resident Sheena Smith told the \textit{Columbia Daily Spectator}, “[The parade] used to be much larger and more people . . . . Over the years, since Harlem started changing, the parade has decreased.”\textsuperscript{112}

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{110}] Butler 176.
\item[\textsuperscript{111}] Butler 156.
\item[\textsuperscript{112}] Zhang and Kalikoff, “45th Annual African American Day Parade.”
\end{itemize}
Soapbox or street corner speakers were another feature of everyday life in Harlem from World War I to the 1960s. Black Americans have a long oral tradition of social communications and historical storytelling that predates enslavement and colonization, a tradition that has helped the black culture to survive. When enslaved Africans arrived in the New World in the 17th through 19th centuries, they brought with them this vast oral tradition. Understanding the power inherent in narrative and communication, slaveholders forcibly suppressed the languages, customs, and cultures of the individuals they enslaved and did not permit reading comprehension beyond a level required to carry out work. Additionally and specifically, under the laws of slavery, it was illegal in many Southern jurisdictions for enslaved Africans to play the drum and to dance. As a result, black slaves often turned to singing and storytelling as a means of expression and covert information exchange.

In Harlem, this tradition of oral information exchange—the passing down of history and the exchange of news, culture, educating, and proselytizing—all evolved and manifested on the streets and sidewalks that permitted such expressions or performances of self. Each year, the appearance of speakers was heralded as a sign of spring, and they were particularly prevalent through the summer months, when the heat led residents of Harlem outdoors for leisure.

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113 Scheub 1.
114 Chernoff 1–20.
Stephen Robertson writes that “the first speakers were political orators, with West Indian members of the Socialist Party such as A. Philip Randolph and Richard Moore most prominent.” Robertson continues, “Speakers often set up at 135th Street and Lenox Avenue, which offered a wide sidewalk and a steady stream of passers-by shopping the surrounding stores or entering and exiting the subway station. Hundreds stopped to listen. Marcus Garvey
made his debut in Harlem at that corner in 1916. Malcolm X often took to this intersection to
deliver speeches to local passersby.”

Figure 9
Digital Harlem mapping of speakers corners.


While plaques exist that mark the most famous of them, there are no active speakers’
corners in Harlem today. While the right to free speech is upheld, in New York City, the New

115 “Harlem’s Soapbox Speakers.”
York City Civil Liberties Union advises that permits for amplified voice and large public assembly must be procured by any person wishing that their free speech be heard\textsuperscript{116}.

### STREET VENDORS

Neighborhood markets and street vendor locations (figure 10) also served as key sites for the development of *communitas*. These sites are detailed in future chapters.

**Figure 10**

Digital Harlem mapping of street vendors and open air markets, 1925.

\[\text{Source: Digital Harlem. http://digitalharlem.org/}\]

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\textsuperscript{116} “Know Your Rights: Demonstrating in New York City.”
CONCLUSION

When Harlem is examined as a collective polis, the story of a bustling, careful, caring community unfolds. The inhabitants of the ghetto commandeered street corners that could accommodate large numbers: public space doubled as gathering space and also served as a platform for an emerging public sphere.

Figure 11

Digital Harlem mapping of 1925 homeplaces gives a sense of the potential for Harlem’s existing public spaces.


Harlem’s public sphere can be seen, in the words of Habermas, as “a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk” and “a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed.”\(^\text{117}\) Although Habermas’s

\(^{117}\) Habermas 49–55.
notion of the public sphere is bourgeois in nature and excludes many who might participate in the dialogue and negotiation he lauds, this example of a black public sphere was built despite exclusions of class and race. The people themselves were empowered by, and came to use, these parades, soapbox platforms, and free speech as a regulatory institution against the authority of the state. The sustenance of the body (in these homeplaces) allows the actor to act publicly and through verbal speech (Arendt’s notion of action). Butler’s assertion that the “well-fed body speaks openly and publicly” is confirmed.\textsuperscript{118}

Noting the tenuous presence of these spaces, hooks writes: “It is no accident that this homeplace, as fragile and as transitional as it may be, a makeshift shed, a small bit of earth where one rests, is always subject to violation and destruction. For when a people can no longer have the space to construct homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance.”\textsuperscript{119} In the case of Harlem, this “community of resistance” also refers to the wider network of associations and support spaces that provide places of respite, from a more individual form of agency or action, to a pluralist account of agency among individuals who might not normally see themselves as resisting in any way.\textsuperscript{120}

Today, Harlem is safer, more prosperous (for some) and more populated than ever before. But the mapping reveals that many of the vital attributes of street life and life in Harlem’s public spaces have declined (figure 12).

\textsuperscript{118} Butler 206.
\textsuperscript{119} Hooks 47.
\textsuperscript{120} Chiara et al. 37.
Figure 12

Harlem’s remaining homeplaces in 2018 (one parade; no speakers’ corners, play streets, or outdoor culture-specific street markets).


Sennett’s and Jacobs’s concept of “good city life” entails the nurturing and flourishing of its public spaces.¹²¹ We can see, however, that the Harlem trajectory of street as performance space has been in the direction of increased regulation around use and decreased support of programs that promote expression. Much of the work of revitalization brought street activity indoors and increasingly public space is shrinking, morphing into “public-use” or “public-access” space.

¹²¹ Sennett, The Uses of Disorder; Jacobs 9.
To dissuade use of the street is to reject the diversity and density of use in the service of a “lively urbanity,” as argued by Jane Jacobs.\textsuperscript{122} While the “lively urbanity” that Jacobs referenced was situated in Greenwich Village, the premise of diversity and density applies, albeit in a very different cultural forum. In Harlem, urbanity was evidenced by parades, which utilized space as a forum for peacocking and pageantry and provided a release for artistry; play streets as safe containers for creative play; community art spaces as sites to

\textsuperscript{122} Jacobs 26.
educate and nourish the body to prepare for political action; and speakers’ corners as public spheres spaces serving as incubators for nascent resistance movements which ultimately advanced civil rights.
CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDIES

The following is an analysis of three iterations of public outdoor markets serving the immediate Harlem community. The market represents a perfect example of polis as theater: a theater defined in terms of people and places, grown out of the experience of everyday life. The examples of markets considered in this study exemplify the contemporary fact of city policies and regulatory practices by successive officials that have been responsible for the exclusion and displacement of local communities through decades of redlining, blockbusting, over-policing, and rezoning.

The study permits analyses of user performance (spontaneity and tactics) and the politics of place in the urban environment. The three case studies—La Marqueta Park Avenue Open Air Market, 116th Street African Market, and Greenmarket—are each considered in terms of need and benefits, the service provided to their community, the opportunity for *communitas* at varying degrees, and finally by the deficit of intercultural understanding found in development and implementation of policy in each of the three iterations. These analyses situate localized instances of urban transformation within broader patterns of purification, revitalization, gentrification, inclusion, and exclusion.

MARKETPLACE

According to the Ford Foundation, three characteristics distinguish public markets from other types of related retail activity. Public markets:
1. Have public goals, a defined civic purpose. Typically, these goals include: attracting shoppers to a central business district, providing affordable retailing opportunities to small businesses, preserving farming in the region, and activating or repurposing public space.

2. Are located in and/or create a public space in the community, where a wide range of people mix, and are, or aim to be, a heart of the community.

3. Are made up of locally owned, independent businesses operated by their owners, not franchises. This gives public markets a local flavor and unique experience.\textsuperscript{123}

The public markets examined here are not simply instrumental sites for (capitalist) exchange but are also cultural sites that can function as spaces of appearance. The market represents Arendt’s ideal ethical political framework: participatory democracy wherein a community of citizens are bound together by mutual recognition in a space of significant appearance. The significance of these poleis for Harlem’s majority minority populace is that they permit expression of culture and provide opportunity to partake in and pass on cultural, domestic, and artistic traditions. Those opportunities are not readily available outside of this arena. Markets as homeplace serve as incubators for socioeconomic liberty. These self-ordered poleis, dependent on goodwill, good product, and good business, are the cornerstones of community and have been so globally for thousands of years.

\textsuperscript{123} Public Markets as a Vehicle 7.
STUDY 1: LA MARQUETA PARK AVENUE RETAIL MARKET

La Marqueta Park Avenue Retail Market was a thriving marketplace located under the elevated Metro North railway tracks between 111th Street and 116th Street on Park Avenue in East Harlem.\textsuperscript{124}

NEED AND BENEFIT

The original 1930s market was located on First Avenue and began as an informal gathering place for pushcart vendors and other merchants, who were mostly Italian, Latino, or Jewish residents.\textsuperscript{125} It was an important social and economic venue for Latino New York,\textsuperscript{126} and one of the best places in the city to shop for vegetables, fish, meat, oil, wine, and cheese. In service to the large Puerto Rican migrant community, the market also sold tamarind, guava, avocado, and plantains as well as hog maws, pig ears, and tripe. In a 2008 New York Times article, Alex Mindlin wrote, “In addition, the ailing or luckless could buy medicinal herbs, religious icons, vials of what was described as ‘bat’s blood’ and black candles to drive away enemies” and referred to La Marqueta as “the most recognizable symbol of [the] neighborhood.”\textsuperscript{127}

The market served as a de facto meeting place after urban renewal displaced numerous small businesses with large-scale housing projects. The market became more than an economic opportunity. For the minorities frequenting this space, it served as a safe haven as well as social meeting place, a center of neighborhood life, a place to exchange news and

\textsuperscript{124} Scattergood 4.
\textsuperscript{125} Public Markets as a Vehicle 27.
\textsuperscript{126} Scattergood 8.
\textsuperscript{127} Mindlin, “Hope Amid the Plantains.”
gossip, and a place obtain job leads. In an interview with Laura Hansen for *Place Matters*, longtime East Harlem resident Felipe Colon said, “Maybe culturally that is something we carried from the old country to the new country . . . There were hardly any Puerto Rican merchants, but yet that used to be a social meeting place, especially Saturdays. We used to go there, see people from the hometown and . . . find out who would be coming over from Puerto Rico, who got married, who gave birth, who was baptized, everything—our social life.”

In essence, La Marqueta at its zenith was a thriving public realm. When Morales defines markets as encompassing elements of the political, economic, social, and health spheres—as tools for integrating activities and encouraging acceptance of the stranger and immigrant into society—a he essentially describes the freedom articulated by Arendt in her discussion of the polis. Markets benefit from the public life of those who frequent them; they are governed by organizational or city laws while also being influenced by the hyperlocal intercultural knowledge of merchants and customers.

**MUNICIPAL INTERVENTION**

During the late 1930s, mayor-elect Lynn L. Barrio LaGuardia relocated the hundreds of unlicensed pushcart vendors at La Marqueta Park Avenue to a space beneath the viaduct of the Central New York Railroad. Relocation was presented as a solution to the ongoing “problem” of thousands of unlicensed pushcart vendors working the streets who were

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128 “.La Marqueta.”
129 Morales, 3–7.
130 Arendt, 33.
131 Morales 5.
effectively turning the avenue into an open-air market. In a 1936 article headlined “Market in Harlem Opened by Mayor; Five Upper Park Av. Buildings Replace Pushcart Center of Small Tradesmen,” The New York Times reported:

Five newly completed buildings that will house a modern, sanitary market where formerly a maze of pushcarts cluttered Park Avenue, from 111th to 116th Street, were opened yesterday morning by Mayor La Guardia. The Mayor said that as long as he held office only the “small merchant doing business at his own stand” would be tolerated there and “politicians and speculators in rotten food” would be barred.

In justifying the action to relocate the vendors, the account overlooked their value as a much-needed community service and integrator in favor of an abject narrative that maligned and stratified. The headline suggests that the new buildings provided a community benefit that did not formerly exist, conveying a paternal attitude that officials must take control in fostering activities in public space. The description of the street vendors as disorganized and chaotic reveals this view. Descriptions of the pushcarts as a “maze” where vendors offer “rotten food” indicates how a rhetoric of uncleanliness and disorganization is used to legitimize interventions and social control.

The mandated move relocated the majority immigrant population and erased their visibility in the public realm. Compliant and eligible vendors were licensed, taxed, and moved inside.\textsuperscript{132} The market was rechristened “La Marqueta” and for a period continued to

\textsuperscript{132} Scattergood 10.
thrive. A long decline began in the 1970s, and despite repeated efforts at revitalization, today in the single remaining building, only four stalls remain open.\footnote{Mindlin, “Hope Amid the Plantains.”}

**COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

The City of New York has repeatedly attempted to revive La Marqueta but has failed to find a viable business model that also satisfies politicians and residents, in part due to the migrant population’s fear of gentrification in their neighborhood. This fear is not unwarranted, as urban revitalization initiatives often ignore the benefits of markets to local communities. Studying retail spaces in the San Francisco Bay Area, Chapple and Jacobus found that revitalization in the form of retail development disproportionately increases sales and employment in middle- to upper-income neighborhoods rather than lower economical areas.\footnote{Chapple and Jacobus 22.} In addition, there exists a valid fear of the accompanying effects of revitalization: displacement, higher rents, homogenous and expensive food and culture, and the price tag for politicians. This inability to find a middle ground highlights the difficulties involved in simultaneously protecting the interests and values of original residents while also improving the quality of housing and retail.

Prior to being regulated out of existence, La Marqueta served as a gathering space for community for multiple generations of Latino and Puerto Rican immigrants. It was a meeting place that celebrated their culture, food, music, and spirit. It supported the melding of divergent people into one shared community: a space of appearance continually recreated by action. Currently, a proposal to bring the vibrant retail strip to a stretch of East Harlem is
gaining momentum. The Harlem Community Development Corporation has shared plans to transform the now-gritty strip beneath the Metro North tracks on Upper Park Avenue into a marketplace, rebranded as La Marqueta Mile. The proposal calls for a 22-block open-air market along Park Avenue from 111th to 133rd Streets, marking a return to the footprint of the original 1930 outdoor market.

STUDY 2: AFRICAN MARKET

The 125th Street African market was, at its inception, the definition of an informal economic enterprise: “a diversified set of economic activities, enterprises, jobs, and workers that are not regulated or protected by the state.” The 1990s saw more emigrants streaming into the United States than any other decade in American history. Most of these newcomers were people of color from developing nations. The devaluation of the West African franc in 1994 reduced the standard of living in Francophone nations by 50 percent almost overnight, forcing professional traders to liquidate inventory and set off for more lucrative markets. As a result, the West African population in New York doubled between 1990 and 1996, and though they are still far fewer in number than other immigrant groups, West Africans have become a visible presence as vendors on the streets of the city. These culturally distinct immigrants took root in urban-suburban areas of the United States. Harlem was, at this time, still an un-gentrified ghetto, and in the absence of obstacles, many of these immigrants set up shop along Harlem’s central thoroughfare on 125th Street.

135 Feiden, “An Inverted High Line Envisioned for Harlem.”
136 “About the Informal Economy.”
137 Passel and Suro, “Rise, Peak, and Decline.”
138 Gurock 145–146.
139 Campbell, “Where African Immigrants Live in New York City.”
West Africans from Naija Mali, Senegal, and Gambia showed up everyday to 125th Street to arrange the product displays and pray for business. In this respect, the market operations replicated self-regulated markets in West Africa; there were no formally assigned market stalls, and no one paid a fee for space. One space was usually occupied early in the morning and kept until sunset; and this informal rule was rarely contested. This self-order runs contrary to the narrative of disorganized chaos in need of imposed order: food, cloth, spices, media, masks, and statues embodying multiple narratives of primitivism and modernity, objects d’art and commodity tourism all in the space of a few yards of sidewalk. The confluence was a reminder of the flow of money, goods, and people across increasingly international spaces, transforming the social landscape: orderly but untidy worlds brought about by globalization.

NEED AND BENEFIT

Before its “revitalization,” the 125th Street corridor had been overtaken and transformed into an African market with up to one thousand vendors on a good-weather weekend. Informality gave this open-air market space an easy festive air. Apple Tours’ double-decker buses brought camera-wielding Europeans to “snap” the African market from a safe distance. Swarms of buyers moved freely up and down sidewalks looking at bags, touching printed fabrics, and trying on straw hats or jewels. They moved through an eccentric space in the presence of other buyers and Senegalese women selling African food from carts.

140 Stoller 776–788.
141 Stoller 776.
Elijah Anderson’s writing on the “cosmopolitan canopy” captures the often intangible and unquantifiable benefit of such a space:

The public spaces of the city are more racially, ethnically, and socially diverse than ever. Social distance and tension as expressed by wariness of strangers appear to be the order of the day. But the “cosmopolitan canopy” offers a respite and an opportunity for diverse peoples to come together to do their business and also to engage in “folk ethnography” that serves as a cognitive and cultural base on which people construct behavior in public.\textsuperscript{142}

The existence of the figurative canopy described by Anderson allows the public, whose reference point often remains their own social class or ethnic group, a chance to encounter others and work toward a more cosmopolitan appreciation of difference. This market (polis) as theater provided an opportunity for diverse strangers to come together and be exposed to one another. The canopy can thus be a profoundly humanizing experience.

Although the vibrant atmosphere attracted thousands weekly to Harlem, there was a great divide within Harlem about the expanding presence of mostly West African street vendors along the sidewalks of 125th Street. The unchecked growth of these informal markets led to a bevy of municipal, merchant, and, in turn, political problems.

MUNICIPAL INTERVENTION

In 1993, Rudolph Giuliani ran for mayor with a pledge to make New York City more “livable” and was elected on a platform that focused largely on crime, disorder, and quality-

\textsuperscript{142} Anderson 1.
of-life issues. The quality-of-life initiative was materially a declaration of war against the informal economies of New York and the exchange of goods and services unregulated by the state, including most forms of street vending. Officials estimated that these unlicensed vendors represented at least $300 million in uncollected sales taxes each year; licensed vendors pay sales tax. Giuliani announced that illegal vendors would be dispersed from Harlem’s major commercial thoroughfare and, with the promise of more than a dozen alternate locations in the works, mandated the unregulated 125th Street market vendors illegal.

Stoller reports that the negotiations became an “arena of confrontation.” The African vendors formed a loosely organized union known as the 125th Street Vendors Association and rebuked then-Mayor Giuliani’s campaign promise to dismantle the market. Negotiations were introduced, but most of the West African traders who held that their market reinvigorated the economy were powerless in the political and cultural discourse that ensued. After an exhaustive struggle, Mayor Giuliani outlawed street vending on 125th Street on October 17, 1994, offering relocation for the compliant to dilapidated 116th and 117th Streets and Lenox Avenue. This site was large enough to hold only 25 vendors and was located far from the shopping district in a commercially depressed location and space. Following the news, one vendor told Stoller: “It’s too far away [from the shopping district],

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143 Giuliani, “Vendor Policy.”
144 Hicks, “Giuliani Broadens Crackdown to Banish All Illegal Vendors.”
145 Maurasse 3.
146 Stoller 126.
147 Stoller 776.
148 Stoller 782.
149 Stoller 54.
and there is nothing there except crack houses and thieves. I will never go there.” Many vendors believed it was a move to take them out of sight and thus out of mind.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Black and Spanish Harlem, which were not yet gentrified and in the nascent stages of revitalization, were both under siege from the same quality-of-life initiative. The community could not or did not step in to challenge the authoritarian removal. Without advocacy, community support, or buy-ins, not simply through commerce but also emotional support, it is difficult for public markets to be sustainable, and certainly difficult for public markets with a focus on immigrant populations.

A few days after the removal of “illegal” vendors from 125th Street, The New York Times published an editorial supporting Giuliani’s actions but still urging City Hall to offer assistance to the displaced. The editorial noted:

With the congestion problem solved, the city and the local business association need to consider whether 125th Street has been swept too clean of street life. On a recent sunny afternoon, strollers and shoppers were sparse. If thin foot traffic becomes persistent, shop owners could find themselves scrambling to bring back the crowds. Harlem is a tourist stop after all. Too little foot traffic is just as damaging as too much.151

150 Stoller 782.
151 “Walking! On 125th Street.”
The article was prophetic: foot traffic dwindled and revenues shrunk and rents kept rising. The “new” locations, proffered as incentive to comply, never materialized. Today, the African market exists as a 40 square foot blacktop surface enclosed by 10-foot chain link fence. Notwithstanding the quantifiable reduction in foot-traffic and the economic consequences, the intervention divested the community and visiting audiences of a cultural canopy, all in the name of order. Today, as a result of and in response to the mandated relocation, migrants have reassembled their businesses around the fenced market; they have erected an entirely new world, a cultural corridor affectionately named “Little Africa” that services their community.

The African community’s response to the strategy of power that conspired to regulate and exclude is an example of resistance. By expanding beyond the intended constriction, the market has become an anchor to the West African community: a place where clothing, foods from native lands, and musical instruments are sold and where information is shared. It serves as a community gathering space for waves of the newest black immigrants to Harlem and is tied by both familial and proximal kinship bonds. This is a space that set root and grew and allowed for divergent religions and nationalities—Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gambia, and others—a dense demographic of West African immigrants in New York City. There are now mosques, stores, restaurants, and community centers. It is a homeplace.

\[152\] Stoller 97.  
\[153\] Zain 13.
STUDY 3: HARLEM’S GREENMARKET PROGRAM

The last case study example reviews a “successful” iteration of a market: one that has been adopted by the state and has secured an exclusive commercial contract throughout the tri-state area. New York City’s Greenmarket program was founded in 1976 “with an $800 grant from the America the Beautiful Fund, $10,000 from the J.M. Kaplan Fund, $10,000 from the Vincent Astor Foundation, and $5000 from the Fund for the City of New York.”154 Benepe and Lewis established the first Greenmarket—in an empty city-owned parking lot at 59th Street and 2nd Avenue—as a municipal farmers’ market program designed to bring fresh local food to residents while preventing the loss of regional farmland to increasing suburbanization. To participate as a Greenmarket vendor, a person must be a local farmer, fisherman, or baker, and sell only what they grow, raise, catch, and bake themselves.

NEED AND BENEFIT

The online mission statement details “a mission to improve New York City’s quality of life through environmental programs that transform communities block by block and empower all New Yorkers to secure a clean and healthy environment for future generations . . . [O]ur network of Greenmarket farmers markets, Youthmarkets, fresh food box pick-ups and Greenmarket Co. ensures that all New Yorkers have access to the freshest, healthiest local food.”155

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154 Kornfeld 345–356.
155 “About GrowNYC.”
MUNICIPAL INTERVENTION

Developed and supported at its inception by the state, the Greenmarket is a model of success, a well-attended and welcome amenity. These spaces serve as an example of the sustainability of a public market when aided by the state and incorporated into urban development planning. Many of the Greenmarkets are located on public property and government plazas, often on sites where other commercial activity is limited. As detailed by Kornfeld, Greenmarket has expanded since its inception from a single location with seven vendors to 195 vendors selling at 53 markets across all five boroughs. To meet local need, Greenmarket opened sites in Harlem and the Upper West Side “primarily geared towards low-income communities.”\textsuperscript{156} Benepe’s intimate knowledge of the bureaucracies due to his years as a city planner made this partnership possible. As John McPhee writes in \textit{Giving Good Weight}: “He knows where City Hall is. He once worked for the Housing and Redevelopment Board. To start the Greenmarket, he knew which doors to knock on and why they would not open.”\textsuperscript{157}

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Though the Greenmarkets are now generally welcome and commonplace on weekends in and around Harlem, it has been argued that much of the Greenmarket artisanal movement is for the elite, for connoisseurs in the know. It is prohibitively expensive and the opposite of a democratic polis. There is a cultural component to this program that leads long-term residents of gentrified neighborhoods to interpret these interventions as imperialist in nature. This program, it is argued, is a Band-Aid, as it addresses the issues on the surface, doing little to

\textsuperscript{156} Kornfeld 345–356. 
\textsuperscript{157} McPhee 51.
alter structural inequalities. Adding a fruit and vegetable cart to a corner, for example, does little for long-term, deep change. A closer look at the regulation of these markets also reveals a disconcerting oversight. Across the board, the markets hosted on state plazas are grower- or producer-only markets, meaning that vendors-participants may sell only items they have grown or produced themselves. Reselling is not permitted. Crafts and merchandise are also not permitted, which seems fair until you consider that Harlem is made up of 77 percent minority residents, primarily of African and Latin descent. These are post-slavery migrants and immigrants who may have been landowners and agriculturalists in their country of origin, but who are not generally landowners or farmers by trade in the United States. And yet, if by chance one or two of the 77 percent minority populace are fortunate enough to have procured land on United States soil, their culturally specific diets revolve around crops that are not indigenous to North America: tomatillo, cassava, tamarind, guava, plantains, yucca, and jicama. While some items, like mangoes and plantains, are readily found in most local grocery stores, other fruits and vegetables require a trip to a Latin American market or specialty gourmet shop since they cannot be grown here. Attention to these details and a small adjustment to policy would integrate these spaces. That glaring inequities like this exist, unchecked, compels us to ask, “placemaking by whom for whom?”

158 “Race and Ethnicity in Harlem, New York, New York (Neighborhood).”
SUMMARY

Disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realized in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite. This is why, though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power.

—Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*

This study describes in detail how over several decades, policy makers and stewards of Harlem’s public spaces have equated aesthetic improvement with increased urban functionality and civic virtue. They have done so regardless of the anthropological needs of the community and in spite of the knowledge that markets foster social integration and can serve as vehicles for social integration and upward mobility. Markets have existed for as long as humans have engaged in trade.159

Reviewing the three cases, it is possible to surmise that two of the three referenced iterations of community amenity originated in response to Harlem’s diverse community immediate needs (cultural goods). Both African and Latino markets formed organically in response to an inherent demand for culturally specific resources in the absence of outlets that directly serviced these communities. Both markets, however, ultimately served more than the immediate Latino and African/black community—visitors traveled to partake and spectate and were encouraged to enter the cultural canopy. The third case (the Greenmarket) also emerged in response to need, not because of Harlem’s community needs but in response to a need of the farming community.

The pushcarts were able to provide low-cost food (and other goods) to poor people. In 1936, Florence Brobeck wrote in *The New York Times* that the “pushcart peddlers” bought

159 Millar 63.
food at the wholesale market after the stores did and sold these seconds “in the poorer
districts at prices which people with small incomes can afford to pay.” However, to the
rising middle class they indicated the persistence of poverty, the deterioration of
neighborhoods (and real estate values), and an essential anti-modern outlook that did not
match their visions of a city of skyscrapers, department stores, and segregated land uses.

In the case of both culturally specific markets, the narrative justifying municipal
intervention suggested that the unregulated citizen-led production of (untidy and untaxed)
poleis presented a danger to the immediate populace. The policies relegating that which do
not conform to the prevailing standards of aesthetic order and withdrawing support for the
anthropological norms of its constituents are inequitable to Harlem’s (still majority) minority
populace, and they draw upon theories of pathology and disorder often cited in the event of
“urban revitalization” and the strategies of control engendered by this revitalization. As
previously detailed, these strategies of control were based on formed and subjective
narratives of “disorganized” and “chaotic” vendors and equally subjective enforcement of
quality-of-life regulation. Other examples of this control are subjective use of permits; noise
control enforcement; subjective policing of homeplace and cabaret places; selective
enforcement of codes; criminalization of behaviors such as access to parks after dusk and
production of food in parks; and collective labeling of immigrants, race, and poverty as
“disordered.” At worst, the interventions are authoritarian, malevolent, and discriminatory
and at best paternalistic, emerging from “a genuine, though often misguided, desire to aid

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160 Bluestone 287.
161 In “Defining Paternalism,” Dworkin notes that paternalism is standardly defined as “interference of a state
or an individual with another person against their will, and defended or motivated by the claim that the person
interfered with will be better off or protected from harm.”
peoples seen as inferior and dependent.” In both demographically predominant Latin and African cases, exclusion and barriers to participation and citizenship are present and instigated at both state and municipality-level government.

The desire for cleanliness and order is reasonable. The need for regulation can be justified, while the intolerance and elimination of culturally specific custom cannot. The reconstitution of space by the state, spurred not only by the need to regulate, but by racial politics and economic incentive, results in not only the disruption of the informal economy and evanescence of cultural resources but also serves to formally establish spatial order, effectively serving as a twenty-first-century re-segregation of the already segregated. An example of inequitable governance, as in its current iteration, the Constitution does not provide for second-class citizenry. Had either community had advocacy, they might have argued that the municipal interventions cited throughout the case studies in the name of imposing “order” infringed on amenities of life that should be considered subject to constitutional protection, as an aspect of the “Liberty” protected by the Fourteenth Amendment due process clause. The distancing of these markets, this practice of “purification” exemplified by municipal intervention as a response to the fear of urban disorder, encourages insularity and a shrinking base of experience for city dwellers.

Inequities manifest themselves in more ways than limited access to space and square footage. Obstacles to participation also create segregation, an illuminating example of this being the Greenmarkets. Intercultural understanding and dialogue are necessary to negotiate

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162 Francis Paul Prucha, qtd. in “Paternalism.”
163 The Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution each contain a due process clause. Due process deals with the administration of justice and thus the due process clause acts as a safeguard from arbitrary denial of life, liberty, or property by the government outside the sanction of law.
164 Sennett 9.
everyday experiences within these public spaces, and as Amin notes, this kind of change
most often comes at the hyperlocal level.\textsuperscript{165} Intolerance and conflict in urban contexts,
specifically among public spaces, requires revision to inform better planning and proactive
measures by local leaders. Public markets present a unique challenge for scholars of retail
planning because of their complexity and their many forms and functions.\textsuperscript{166} As Morales
asserts in his 2011 overview of public market systems, markets are believed to be community
integrators, both ethnically and economically. In fact, markets are viewed as symbols of
wellness, capable of improving the health of marginalized populations.\textsuperscript{167}

The rise and, in some cases, demise of the public markets in Harlem illustrate policy
and planning decisions that might have benefited from intercultural knowledge and
understanding at the hyperlocal level, examples that the analysis reveals have failed to
produce social cohesion and cultural interchange. These studies provide concrete and current
examples of non-equitable municipal dispensation and support for specific publics.\textsuperscript{168}

Urban reform has a documented history of using pathology and disorder to create
need for intervention. This is linked to the reformer tradition and societal views of urban
areas as blighted and lacking civility (exemplified by theories of pathology and social
disorganization). From this tradition, a paternalistic attitude emerges (in opposition to
Marxist ideas, for example) in which those with more not only grant resources but determine
how these resources should be used.

\textsuperscript{165} Amin 959.
\textsuperscript{166} Scattergood 10.
\textsuperscript{167} Morales 3.
\textsuperscript{168} There are, however, inherent limitations in the selected sample as the observations of Harlem’s markets
have limited application to other locales that have less culturally specific demographics and a thinner density of
immigrant populations.
The three cases studies presented above emphasize what urban theorists have long known: public spheres (poleis) are a necessity of community. If any of these iterations were approached with consideration for the anthropological and cultural norms of its constituents and with intercultural knowledge, any one might attain Arendt’s radical freedom: a freedom discoverable only in a sphere of action and achieved only when a social and political order is founded upon a political experience of “being together” in what she calls a space of appearance—the only space where truly significant speech and action can transpire. By curtailing this freedom, the political order is restricting the opportunities for artistic production, cultural expression and exchange, and opportunities for performance. The curtailment affects not only individual actors but the very spaces of appearance: spaces that allow for the creation of homeplace. Whether called town square, agora, forum, piazza, plaza, platz, platea, piata, námesti, rynek, trg, or marketplace, the creation of public spaces for action and interaction among citizens has been a distinguishing characteristic of cities in one form or another for over two thousand years. And while modern societies no longer depend on the town square or the piazza for basic needs, there remains the need for a varied and adaptable polis for the social and psychological health of modern communities.

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169 Arendt 199.
CHAPTER 4

POLICY, ACCESS, GOVERNANCE

Citizenship is practiced, lived, challenged and changed in public space and in turn opens opportunities, shapes and sets limits to public space.
—Certomà Chiara, The Politics of Space and Place

Previous chapters demonstrated Harlem as arts incubus and a site of critical resistance, a place of nurture as well as identifiable homeplace; yet we see that over the span of almost a century, incremental diminutions of homeplace and culturally specific expressions have led to instances of erasure and marginalization. The phasing out of programs and withdrawal of support for institutions that promote creative expression, regulation of public space, and the steady increase toward development that has built-in exclusions, bring to fore the truly precarious nature of citizenship for longstanding Harlem resident communities. This discussion of citizenship as a lived practice differs in its conceptual and empirical emphasis when compared to notions of citizenship that focus on rights and duties. The practice of citizenship suggests a dynamic experience of belonging to a political and social community rather than a political status.170

This precarity can be placed in dialogue with Butler’s view of vulnerability, which is not ontological, essential, or foundational but rather seen as “unequally distributed effects of a field of power that acts on and through bodies.”171 Because the body or bodies are relational—whether socially, economically, infrastructurally, technologically, or otherwise—vulnerability acts simultaneously within and outside the body. The body is not distinct from

170 Chiara et al. 73.
171 Butler 145.
the given historical situation in which it resides, and in that sense, neither is vulnerability. Instead, rather than existing in isolation, both are constructed in relation to built and natural environments. As a result, the body and polis are vulnerable to forces that shape and manipulate their response within a democratic society.

POLICY

The ability to access, participate, and share space with others in the public realm makes a profound difference to the physical and mental health of citizens, their development, social mobility, and life chances. The research presented affirms that markets and the poleis they engender can be viewed as symbols of wellness, capable of improving the health of marginalized populations. It has been widely demonstrated that social capital is enhanced and levels of psychological well-being increased by access to public commons and that participation in public space results in an increased sense of community. By offering citizens a place where they can meet and spend time together outside their homes (the public sphere), a municipality can facilitate opportunities to build bridges and bonds within their community.

This social interaction and reproduction, however, is largely dependent on the presence and policing of such public spaces. The role of public space in creating enthusiastic participants with better life chances is inestimable, yet historically public space has been stratified, tending to disproportionately exclude women, the poor, and people of color. The

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172 Cattell et al. 544–561.
173 Francis et al. 401–409.
174 Toolis 184–199.
presence and potential of Harlem public space has been established. The following chapter switches focus from the built environment to examine the regulation of such spaces, focusing on the formal and informal technologies of power and forces that facilitate control and curtail agency, of which the most ubiquitous example is the ways spaces are policed.

During the 1990s, the sociopolitical climate in the United States took an increasingly authoritarian turn, as a Nixon-era presidential edict launched a government-backed war on drugs that devastated communities of color and decimated the black family unit as we know it.176 Forty years later, it has been widely documented that the war on drugs was waged largely in poor, inner-city communities. Sociologist Michael Tonry explains: “The institutional character of urban police departments led to a tactical focus on disadvantaged minority neighborhoods. For a variety of reasons, it is easier to make arrests in socially disorganized neighborhoods, as contrasted with urban blue-collar and urban or suburban white-collar neighborhoods.”177 The New York Civil Liberties Union finds that New York City’s policing practices demonstrate the routine and widespread practice of racial profiling.178

An initiative of this war was Police Strategy No. 5: Reclaiming the Public Spaces of New York, launched in 1994 by the administration of newly elected Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and his appointed police commissioner Bill Bratton. Bratton explained the premises of the quality-of-life initiative and, citing the broken windows theory,179 launched a focused quality-

176 According to the United States Census Bureau, Bureau of Justice Statistics, one in nine black children has an incarcerated parent, compared to one in 28 Latino children and one in 57 white children (“The Drug War, Mass Incarceration, and Race”).
177 Kennedy 378.
178 “Analysis Finds Racial Disparities, Ineffectiveness In NYPD Stop-And-Frisk Program.”
179 More than ten years ago, James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, authors of the groundbreaking article, “Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety” in the March 1982 issue of The Atlantic Monthly, postulated the “broken windows” thesis that unaddressed disorder is a sign that no one cares and invites both
of-life campaign that justified an ongoing program of force and harassment portrayed as a legitimate step toward curtailing crime in urban neighborhoods.

Broken windows policy and other initiatives such as stop-and-frisk \(^{180}\) disproportionately impact minority communities, particularly blacks and Latinos. Attorney and legal scholar Graham Boyd has referred to the drug war as the “new Jim Crow.” \(^{181}\)

Law enforcement intensified across the nation, and a campaign to eliminate crime and disorder empowered a backlash against the poor and downwardly mobile. One of the strategies employed to do this involved reassigning public spaces to private management. For example, in the year 2000, New York City contained more than 500 plazas, parks, and atriums located on private property yet by law accessible to and usable by the public. \(^{182}\) This type of public-private partnership shifts to the private sector the responsibility of managing these spaces and providing facilities for the public. Tension arises when private interest diverges from public interest; when this happens, these spaces can fail to live up their potential. Kayden writes: “When gates to privately owned public spaces are locked during hours of public access, or when door (persons) improperly inform visitors that the space is private, the greatness of the city, its inherent publicness is diminished.” \(^{183}\)

\(^{180}\) A stop-and-frisk refers to a brief, non-intrusive police stop of a suspect. The Fourth Amendment requires that before stopping the suspect, the police must have a reasonable suspicion that a crime has been, is being, or is about to be committed by the suspect. If the police reasonably suspect that the suspect is armed and dangerous, the police may frisk the suspect, meaning that the police will give a quick pat-down of the suspect's outer clothing (“Stop and Frisk”).

\(^{181}\) “The Drug War Is the New Jim Crow.”

\(^{182}\) Kayden.

\(^{183}\) Kayden 1.
ACCESS

Beyond the state policing of space, there exist inherent behaviors deployed by architects, planners, policy makers, developers, real estate brokers, and other urban actors to restrict or increase access to urban space, to open and close the city at will. Some of these strategies include privately owned public spaces (POPS); \(^{184}\) armrests; \(^{185}\) covenants, codes, and restrictions; \(^{186}\) curfews; \(^{187}\) gates; \(^{188}\) “No Loitering” signage; \(^{189}\) and the appointment of informal stewards to police space, including door attendants, security guards, and watch-guards. Urban planning and design of space actively contributes to the processes of security, imposing, maintaining, and reinforcing specific narratives of order and safety. These seemingly small design decisions shape the space of the city and landscape according to the dominant narrative: law and order, security, cleanliness, and efficiency. The implications

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\(^{184}\) Privately owned public space (POPS) in New York City was introduced in a 1961 zoning resolution. The city offers zoning concessions to commercial and residential developers in exchange for a variety of spaces accessible and usable for the public. There are approximately 503 POPS at 320 buildings in New York City and are found principally in Manhattan. Spaces range from extended sidewalks to indoor atriums with seating and amenities (“Privately Owned Public Space in New York City”).

\(^{185}\) To deter the homeless from sleeping on park benches, decorative armrests are sometimes installed at the midpoint of the benches, making it impossible (or at least very difficult) to get too comfortable on them.

\(^{186}\) Covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs) are rules governing land use in private communities. Typically drafted by a homeowners’ association, CC&Rs attempt to guard the property value of homes in the community by regulating everything from paint colors to landscape materials to lawn ornaments. CC&Rs are often classist: CC&Rs have restricted aluminum siding, barbecue grills, lawn ornaments, basketball hoops, and even American flags.

\(^{187}\) Many teen curfews represent an unlawful imposition of martial law. In early 2010, San Diego overturned its curfew law due to ambiguous language, and Indianapolis recently overturned its curfew laws when it determined that they forcefully undermine adolescents’ First Amendment rights (Armbrorst).

\(^{188}\) Gated communities offer one of the more obvious examples of how we keep out “undesirables.” Although there is little statistical evidence that gated communities are safer (or have higher home values) than non-gated communities, the perception that they are has led to more and more Americans living in them each year.

\(^{189}\) This signage supposes that people who loiter will often do some type of damage to property, such as tagging buildings with graffiti or damaging concrete with skates. It is a violation to loiter in a public place for the purpose of gambling (PL 240.35(2)), with others wearing masks (PL 240.35(4)), around schools for no purpose or permission (PL 240.35(5)), and around a transportation center with no purpose or permission (PL 240.35(6). The crime jumps up to a misdemeanor when you loiter or remain in a public place with at least one other person and you do so for the purpose of using or possessing a controlled substance or drug set forth in New York Penal Law Article 220. Article 220.
cannot be reduced for those who do not consider the ideals of “order” and culture and community nurturing to be mutually exclusive.

Municipal bureaucratic and legal strategies of exclusion are the next level of regulatory practices of space. The state regulates personal, professional, and commercial activity through the construction and reconstruction of law, civil, and penal codes. Ostensibly, the purpose of these codes is to structure “appropriate behavior” according to the managing authority or administration.\textsuperscript{190} Public assembly rules, noise ordinances, and required municipal permitting requirements for parking, vendor permissions, amplified sound, sidewalk access, and street activity are just a few examples of such codes. In addition to these codes, there are requirements for permits, licenses, and identification cards authenticating a specific authority’s approval of one’s right to perform a particular activity, or to live and work in a locality. The corollary of this state regulatory power is an administrative burden that is alarming and prohibitive to ordinary private citizens. It is fundamentally flawed in that it leaves commercial organizations and authorities like the New York Police Department (NYPD) to arbitrarily decide what it constitutes as “appropriate.” This extends to all public activity, including parades, all public assembly, and street performance. This unguided delegation of authority is improper especially where the rights of free expression are at stake; selective discretionary enforcement has the real potential for suppressing particular points of view or cultural expression.\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{190} Gibson. Pursuant to certain broadly worded statutes, state agencies and court regulations are promulgated with and published in the New York State Register and compiled in the New York Codes, Rules and Regulations (NYCRR).

\textsuperscript{191} In “Inequitable Enforcement,” Aviram et al. argue that existing constitutional mechanisms are flawed and fail to provide an appropriate remedy in cases of arbitrary and disproportionate enforcement for minor infractions (413–455).
For example, employing its police department to issue summonses and make arrests, the City of New York has sought to control Critical Mass, groups of citizens who gather on bikes and tour the streets en masse, their numbers at times halting traffic. In response, Critical Mass successfully brought and won a lawsuit against the City of New York, citing the overreaching efforts of the NYPD to control the rides. These bikers often wear clothes that announce their presence and display group affiliation via their fashion and types of bikes. These spontaneous group assemblies could be understood as an announcement of affiliation, of community and a desire to be seen, a display similar to the tradition of pageantry and group assembly favored by Renaissance-era Harlemites. Though highly regulated, this desire manifests itself today in many ways, including via these rides, which despite being maligned as disorderly or unsafe, are in fact privately organized forms of cultural expression.

The logic of extreme punitive measures against low-level disorder in the interest of “nipping a potential problem in the bud” speaks to a culture of classism that engenders a deficit perspective—defining a community, individual, or an entire race by its weaknesses rather than its strengths. Broken windows policing propagates this perspective by: (1) drawing on well-established stereotypes, and (2) ignoring systemic conditions, such as inequitable access, that support the cycle of poverty.192 It is indicative of theories of social pathology often used to deflect from policy effects and place blame in the lap of the oppressed. More problematically, it provides an entry point for the normalization of military-

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192 See Sampson and Raudenbush’s article “Seeing Disorder” for a discussion of the grounds on which individuals form perceptions of disorder. The work integrates ideas about implicit bias and statistical discrimination with a theoretical framework on neighborhood racial stigma.
style enforcement for arbitrary perceptions of what might be a crime.\textsuperscript{193} The use of surveillance and aggressive management of public space are integral to NYC’s combined crime control and order maintenance initiatives.\textsuperscript{194} Regularly, the stewards of space arbitrarily implement these law enforcement mechanisms to control access to and use of public space despite the Supreme Court ruling that walking, strolling, and lingering are unwritten amenities deserving of judicial protection from the vague proscriptions of a loitering law.\textsuperscript{195}

Examples of public order strategies include curtailing of public activity such as untaxed street vendors, noise ordinances on music, dissuading large assemblies of community in park spaces or streets (e.g., Critical Mass), penalizing unauthorized artistic visual and street performance, and policing the gathering of persons on residential stoops. All of these strategies for maintaining public order directly impact homeplace and have the potential to restrict the creation of art and self-expression.

PRIVATE CITIZEN PUSHBACK

Streets and parks are traditional public forums, places which “by long tradition or government fiat have been devoted to assembly or debate.”\textsuperscript{196} However, from 1936 to 1975,

\textsuperscript{193} Kraska and Kappeler.
\textsuperscript{194} Erzen and McArdle 6.
\textsuperscript{195} In the 1999 United States Supreme Court case City of Chicago v. Morales et al. 527 US 41, the Court held that a law cannot be so vague that a person of ordinary intelligence can not figure out what is innocent activity and what is illegal.
\textsuperscript{196} See the 1983 Supreme Court case Perry Education Association v. Perry Local Educator’s Association 400 US 37. With respect to public property that is not, by tradition or government designation, a forum for public communication, a state may reserve the use of the property for its intended purposes, communicative or otherwise, as long as a regulation on speech is reasonable, and not an effort to suppress expression merely because public officials oppose the speaker’s view.
the City of New York outlawed street performance. Mayor LaGuardia implemented a street performers’ ban across Manhattan in 1935, and the total ban went into effect on January 1, 1936, thereby criminalizing an entire mode of musical labor. LaGuardia refused to renew organ grinders’ licenses in 1936, saying that the radio and outdoor concerts had made them superfluous and that the city should discourage street begging.

There was public outcry over the ban, covered extensively by The New York Times. One reporter observed: “By mayoral fiat he declared them public nuisances, ordered the police to roust them on sight and refused to relent, despite pleas from citizens.” Ultimately, judges ruled the ban unconstitutional, but it remained in effect throughout four successive mayoral administrations, until 1970, when it was repealed under Mayor Lindsey’s term.

Today, though not outlawed, street performance is still heavily policed. The police can permit or prohibit performance at will, effectively deciding what is and is not “art.” Similarly stringent about performers, the NYC Parks Department’s permitting system requires at least 21 days notice to (contingently) approve and issue a permit for performance, eliminating spontaneity—a hallmark of street performing since it began centuries ago. Additionally, Manhattan Parks and Recreation rules mandate that musicians perform only on one of 100 spots in which a medallion is embedded in concrete, and nowhere else. Performers must be at least five feet away from a park bench, and fifty feet from a statue at Central Park, Battery Park, the High Line, and Union Square Park. These rules are enforced by Park Enforcement Patrol and NYPD officers; violators could receive a summons and a

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198 Pollack, “Silence of the Cranks.”
199 Hawkins 106–123.
200 Tanenbaum 46.
Street performances are a form of expression protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution, and the city has been sued repeatedly for encroaching on the right to freedom of expression. Parades and other public gatherings are core First Amendment activities and should not be restricted absent compelling reasons and objective, definite standards. This delegation of authority clearly impacts the range and possibilities of performance in public space.

Employing the same cross-section of Harlem previously employed to identify its homeplaces, figure 14 extrapolates the city agencies involved in shaping contemporary Harlem as the formal stewards of public space. These agencies act as officers of government and are considered public services. As is the case in Harlem, public services are often provided in markets where both public and private providers operate.

201 For example, *Turley v. New York City Police Dept.*, 988 F. Supp. 675 (1997). Robert Turley challenged the city’s amplification rules as violating his free speech and equal protection rights under the United States Constitution. He also challenged the Parks Department’s permitting system, police confiscation of musical instruments and equipment, and the city’s vendor law for requiring a license to sell CD recordings.
City agencies, stewards of public space.

Source: Google Maps, https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1ZwMCm0aRHq6bsjxTgclXoUJTktR_4yrn&ll=40.816580008578455%2C-73.94345067398376&z=15.

The map identifies the entities with which a person or organization must interface and navigate (usually two or more) to acquire the dispensation to act in these spaces. The process can be daunting and prohibitive, requiring an understanding and capacity to untangle a web of red tape. Obstacles include multimillion-dollar insurance premiums, collection and submission of community signatures, deadlines for approvals, fees, and completion of burdensome and often repetitive paper and online applications.

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202 Bozeman 12.
Figure 15

List of municipal and state agencies required to approve action in public space.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Improvement District (BID)</strong></td>
<td>125th Street BID is a tax assessment district. Funds from an assessment are levied on the property owners for the following services:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Street and sidewalk cleaning and sweeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Serve as eyes and ears for public safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Service delivery from city agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Promote 125th Street as a great place to do business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Retail recruitment and retention services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Real estate development services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Board 10</strong></td>
<td>- Addressing the welfare of the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Communicating with the people of the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Participating in the budget process and the capital program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Planning for the needs of the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Monitoring and evaluating the delivery of services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Department of Transportation</strong></td>
<td>Coordinating and developing comprehensive transportation policy for the State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Street Activity Permit Office</strong></td>
<td>The function of the Street Activity Permit Office (SAPO) is to issue permits for street festivals, block parties, farmers markets, commercial or promotional events, and other events on the city’s streets, sidewalks, and pedestrian plazas while protecting the interests of the city, the community and the general public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NY Police Department</strong></td>
<td>Application processes for sound amplification device and parade permits. Sound amplification device permits are usually issued by the local precinct. The NYPD reviews and approves applications for parade permits, which are organized by the Mayor’s Office of Citywide Event Coordination and Management.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 15 illustrates the current fractured, siloed structure of Harlem’s space governance and its myriad departments and bureaucratic processes. This ad hoc organization surrounding space directly impedes the creation of successful public spaces. This bureaucratic burden can be understood as a strategy of dissuasion. Rather than directly refusing the general public, governance increases administrative burdens and, in turn, creates learning costs to navigating them. These obstacles can be especially daunting for applicants with little advocacy experience or form of assistance. In this way, the regulation serves as an effective deterrent. In his 1988 essay “The Burden of Bureaucracy,” Mark E. Bradford writes:

For the end result of every new addition to the machinery of the state, each of its new bureaus and investigative or regulatory agencies, whatever the ostensible reason for their creation, is to increase statist regimentation and diminish individual initiative: no more and no less. Bureaucracy is essentially military in its character, needing an “army” to carry out its collective will. It is the routine (as opposed to the exceptional) power of the state in its coercive mode. It is wholly political in its nature and thus
exists primarily to augment the scope of government. And it never surrenders any ground it has gained, never gives up voluntarily any function once assigned to it.203

The ways in which public places are planned and regulated, both in terms of their physical attributes and their intended use, significantly influence how social inequalities are perpetuated and mitigated. These divergent practices and policies of disallowing and regulating spontaneous performance and cultural expression have the effect of curtailing freedom of expression, diversity of opinion, and artistic innovation. This construction of an administrative maze and the lack of transparency surrounding access runs counter to the idea of public services being accessible regardless of clients’ race, gender, ethnicity, or age.204

SUPPORT

Within Manhattan, there are agencies with agendas that consider space to be mere static gaps between their areas of purview, and have benefited from alignment with organizations that give primary consideration to community and use. An example of successful community-led transformation of space to support social activity is the NYC Department of Transportation Plaza program, a model centered on partnering with local community-based management capacity to plan, maintain, and program the city’s new plaza spaces (figure 16). Many of these first spaces grew out of community-initiated placemaking and self-governance.205

204 Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs receiving federal financial assistance.
205 Kent, “Toward Place Governance.”
Figure 16

DOT works with selected organizations to create neighborhood plazas throughout the city, transforming underused streets into vibrant, social public spaces.


Figure 17

Typical governance structure.

Figure 17, a diagram by Project for Public Space, illustrates how public agencies, when focused on the mundane tasks involved in sustaining public spaces, miss the organic opportunities that arise from social interactions within them. The regulatory practices of Harlem spaces covered in this chapter reveal a strong and formal commitment to exclusion on a municipal level. These practices have had a direct impact on Harlem, its homeplaces, and the output and occurrence of public arts.

Outside the walls of institutions, a dynamic new generation of artists, and the diverse communities where they live and work, are being denied access to their right to the city and cultural legitimation. David Harvey articulates this best in “The Right to the City”:

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization.

Harvey’s theory engenders a number of questions: Who has this power to reshape the process of urbanization? Who gets to change the city? Who is at the proverbial table when decisions regarding community are made? Who can access resources?

When Harlem was less hierarchical, less supervised, less controlled, and left to its own devices, it had the space to create. More structure leads to less democracy and less ability to innovate, create, and perform. In his book *Art, Space and the City*, Malcolm Miles argues:

[T]he methodologies of planning privilege the representations of space (in [Henri] Lefebvre’s terms) of the expert, just as the law, according to [Ivan] Illich, privileges

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206 Kent.
207 Harvey, “The Right to the City” 236–239.
the dominant interests in society; yet if a doctor describes his patients as ‘experts on their own health,’ perhaps dwellers are also experts on their city, and if so, their expertise begins in their awareness of the spaces around their bodies and the lattices of memory and appropriation they assemble as a personal reading of the city.  

Public environments are shared by all, and stewardship or ownership varies; invariably, many different agendas and narratives compete against each other, and none are politically or historically neutral. Although many entities contribute to the making of a community, it is natural that the dominant class attempts to create a coherent narrative that supports its interests, as Bakhtin notes in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. The dominant class is in possession of not only the narrative but also the tools of the state: both subjective lawmaking and policing to control and enforce. This dominant story could be described as the master narrative, one that suppresses other stories by portraying itself as a reflection of a universally agreed upon natural and eternal order. The creation of a master narrative often hides inequalities in the interest of maintaining the status quo.

**IMPORT OF NARRATIVE**

On the connection between culture and empire, Edward Said observes in *Culture and Imperialism* that "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and

208 Miles 200.
209 Hammack and Pilecki 75–103.
211 Hammack and Cohler 3–22; Thomas and Rappaport 317–366.
emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.”\textsuperscript{212}

Public places are spaces where narratives and histories are transmitted. Narrative can determine inclusion and participation in public spaces through physical, symbolic, as well as dialogical elements; these narrative signifiers become part of our daily interactions.\textsuperscript{213} The previous case studies offer examples of a primary narrative promoting a sense of threat (uncleanliness and rot) employed to justify removal of what did not conform to ideas of order. That narrative resulted in the eventual relocation and eradication of the Latin market. The broken windows narrative that plays upon fear and classist stereotypes has and is currently used to justify privatizing public spaces. In both instances, different social classes are kept apart, which promotes social alienation. This paper posits that prioritizing consistent, sensitive creation and support of spaces in Harlem, making use of intercultural knowledge, and allowing many voices and narratives to be heard will promote community inclusion: placemaking for the multiple publics and the broader community.

In their research on the housed and the homeless in the United States, Toolis and Hammack demonstrated that narratives have the capacity to stigmatize. Toolis writes: “By excluding marginalized perspectives from consideration in ‘the public,’ master narratives mask inequality and reproduce existing social relations.”\textsuperscript{214} Her research on housed and unhoused community members in the United States shows how discourse that frames unhoused people as \textit{out of control} and \textit{out of place} serves as a justification for their

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{212} Said xiii. \\
\textsuperscript{213} Hammack 222–247; Vygotsky. \\
\textsuperscript{214} Toolis 187.
\end{flushright}
punishment and removal, thereby justifying sanctions against them. Individual citizens tend to interpret their personal experiences through the lens of the master narrative, either in the way in which they follow it or reject it.

Such created narratives have an inherent power: they can either suppress or offer freedom to society. If a narrative characterizes certain groups or individuals as not being full members of society, this narrative can be employed to delegitimize, dehumanize, and exclude. Examples of this were shown in the case of African and Latin markets, in which the narrative to support municipal relocation centered on the markets’ cleanliness and order rather than lack of sanitation services. The same exclusionary power of narrative was demonstrated in LaGuardia’s outlawing of street performers as a chaotic public nuisance, and once more with the skewed narrative used to prop up prejudiced quality-of-life initiatives launched in the name of a forty-year war on drugs, which has statistically proven to be a war on the poor and communities of color.

Such narratives can offer, alternatively, a pluralistic and sharing vision of society, creating stories that disrupt the master narrative and help to take back public spaces for the community. As demonstrated in previous chapters, the creation and nurturing of homeplace can transform society through inclusion. The concept of societal narratives building public places overturns the idea that the way such places are built, and the way we behave in them,
is natural and cannot be changed. Members of society can and must be active creators in their environment rather than passive absorbers of it.\textsuperscript{220}

**CHANGING NARRATIVE**

*The narrative is essentially a linguistic device that reconstructs that which has happened in history through a plot that privileges human agents more than impersonal processes and that no longer derives its meaning of the particular from the general.*

—Simona Forti, *Life of the Spirit and Time of the Polis*

When administered and governed justly, the designation and fair use of public space can work against preconceived ideas and a prevailing narrative by showing that different strata of society can mix. The public is plural, not monolithic.\textsuperscript{221} Private spaces are inherently designed for a generally homogenous segment of society and are more tightly controlled than public places. Ideally, public places offer members of society a rare opportunity to meet, converse with, and try to understand those from outside their own societal strata. As previously discussed, such spaces are sometimes created with the intention to exclude—by architects, policy makers (by segregation, for example), planners, and other urban actors. However, meeting and engaging with those from outside our own community leads to greater understanding and sympathy and can even blend our societal narratives together.\textsuperscript{222} Careful and thoughtful creation of spaces permits stories,\textsuperscript{223} which previously may have been hidden.

\textsuperscript{220} Thomas and Rappaport 317–336.
\textsuperscript{221} Fraser 56–80.
\textsuperscript{222} Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*.
\textsuperscript{223} See Arendt’s *The Human Condition* on the importance of storytelling. As d’Entreves notes in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Arendt points out that the Greeks valued poetry and history so highly, because they rescued the glorious (as well as the less glorious) deeds of the past for the benefit of future generations. It was the poet’s and the historian’s political function to preserve the memory of past actions and to make them a source of instruction for the future” (d’Entreves, “Hannah Arendt”).
It affords the opportunity for public representation, which may in turn alter the prevailing narrative of society.

The project Brenda’s Way provides an example of a transformative narrative: a tour of the Harlem neighborhood, this project takes the biography of Brenda Dixon Gottschild and uses it a basis for walking tours and a public talk, designed by the community, in Harlem.\textsuperscript{224} During the sixty-minute walking tour, Dixon Gottschild shares her unique perspective as someone who grew up in New York City and danced in Harlem in the 1960s. She shares personal memories of the neighborhood, her childhood home, and the church she attended, creating an afternoon where history intersects with memory. Dixon’s tour can be seen as a performance that resists the master narrative and provides an alternative to the current city-run programs in Harlem. The tour aims to illuminate what working people, particularly women of color, have fought for and accomplished for their community, and provokes discussion as to the relevance of that work for the present day.

Making these histories public expands the prevailing narrative and gives voice to many previously unsung lives and contributions. When members of a community from different social strata and with different points of view have a space in which they can meet, the community narrative can become more inclusive. Moreover, this creates a common repository of stories that are reflective of the participants’ identity, values, and beliefs. “Consequently, the nature of available community narratives,” Rappaport writes, “is a key element in both individual and social change.”\textsuperscript{225} This resonates with Arendt’s notion of storytelling and its importance in worlding — how we experience a world as familiar. Arendt believed that storytelling was a vital element of the vita activa—the ways that humans create

\textsuperscript{224}“About Brenda.”

\textsuperscript{225}Rappaport, “The Art of Social Change” 225.
and recreate their world. The narratives of a storyteller, Arendt claims, “tell us more about their subjects, the ‘hero’ in the center of each story, than any product of human hands ever tells us about the master who produced it.”

PLACE MAKING AND A PLAN FOR HARLEM

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Harlem underwent another renaissance, called “revitalization,” led by real estate and city agencies. The city laid new water mains and sewers, installed new curbs and sidewalks, street lights and traffic lights, and planted trees along its central shopping district. This was followed by a controversial rezoning of its main thoroughfare and business district, a planning and redevelopment project with an “emphasis on arts, cultural, and entertainment retail development.” In 2001, former president Bill Clinton moved into office space in Harlem, raising the neighborhood’s profile. By 2009, The New York Times reported that 125th Street had been transformed from “a low-rise boulevard lined with hair salons and buffet-style soul food restaurants into a regional business hub with office towers market-rate condominiums, as well as hotels, bookstores, art galleries and nightclubs.” This revitalization was followed by an influx of middle-class black, white, Asian, and Latino residents, and today, Harlem finds itself contending with a new form of erasure as the many changes that accompany gentrification displace longtime residents. The cost of revitalization appears to be the destruction and deletion of a long history of rich black

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226 Arendt 184.
227 See, for example, New York City Economic Development Corporation’s description of the project (“125th Street Revitalization”).
228 “125th Street Revitalization.”
229 Williams, “City’s Sweeping Rezoning Plan.”
culture and community. As many as seventy black-owned businesses have been lost to redevelopment.  

A report by Humanity in Action concluded that this top-down approach to development, initiated by city planning commissioners and private developers, has left many Harlem residents feeling disempowered and angry. William Allen, the Democratic district leader in Harlem, describes a feeling of instability and frustration in the community as people slowly realize that the long-awaited improvements are not meant for them but instead are aimed to move them out.

The frustrations manifest themselves in many ways, particularly in interactions between residents. Consider, for example, the case of Mount Morris Park, also known as Marcus Garvey Park. The park was the site of an archetypal gentrification quarrel in 2008, when residents of a new building on the park’s edge attempted to shut down the long-running Saturday afternoon drum circle, citing disturbance of the peace. Historically, the drum and drumming as a form of artistry were the heartbeat of African communities, with deep symbolic significance. Drums heralded political and social events, ceremonies of birth, death, and marriage, homecomings, and danger. They were used as an alarm for battle or war. Drums were also used for communication and to make music. Drumming as an artistic tradition in Harlem originated around the time of the Civil Rights Movement. These drum circles in Marcus Garvey Park had been in place for more than thirty years. Despite this legacy, after the complaints from the new building’s inhabitants, the drummers were required

230 Williams, “City’s Sweeping Rezoning Plan.”
231 Gørrild et al., “Gentrification and Displacement in Harlem.”
232 Williams, “An Old Sound in Harlem.”
233 Evans, “African Drums.”
to change location. A Parks Department sign indicates their current approved site in the park’s northeast quadrant.\textsuperscript{234}

Exchanges such as this affirm that the feelings of instability and frustration expressed by longtime Harlem residents are warranted. The previous chapters identified that relocation has sometimes been the first step toward the elimination of homeplace, and city agency decisions such as this one, which defer to incoming residents over longtime residents and new expectations of public space over the storied historical culture of Harlem, only serve to deepen the distrust.

With the ongoing development of Harlem’s polis, complaints and exchanges such as this are frequent. The complaints do not differ greatly from those experienced by any other place undergoing redevelopment. Frequently, residents express their frustration with gentrification, observing that under the auspices of “placemaking,” local government and business improvement districts “assist” corporate development and bring in external investment by making public spaces more attractive, cleaner, and more user-friendly, while ignoring any economic and racial inequalities which may prevail in a district.\textsuperscript{235}

A recent example of this can be seen in figures 18 and 19. The pictured glass mosaic mural, \textit{Spirit of Harlem} by Brooklyn-born artist Louis Delsarte, was commissioned by North Fork Bank in 2005; it depicts pride in Harlem’s artistic legacy and has stood at the corner at West 125th Street and Frederick Douglass Boulevard since 2006. In 2017, Footaction, a sneaker and apparel company owned by mega-retailer Foot Locker, took over the location and covered the iconic Harlem mural with a wall of black bricks and signage bearing the company logo as it rebrands the exterior of its new store. The community when made aware

\textsuperscript{234} Mitter, “Across 110th Street.”
\textsuperscript{235} Bedoya 24
of the erasure, gathered and made its objection heard. Responding to the community outcry, Footaction restored the iconic mural.

Figure 18

Louis Delsarte’s *Spirit of Harlem*, 2006 (10’ x 30’), Harlem, NY.

*Source: Louis Delsarte, [www.louisdelsarte.net/lifestyle?lightbox=image1qn3](http://www.louisdelsarte.net/lifestyle?lightbox=image1qn3).*
In many instances of urban development, and specifically in Harlem, the general focus of revitalization has been to employ arts and culture in post-deindustrialized and suburbanized urban environments, using them to improve societal interaction, economic potential, and the physical environment. The culture and heritage of Harlem is a primary attraction for tourism and commercial activity, yet as demonstrated, the city actively disinvests in the spaces and homeplaces where arts and culture had previously taken root and were nurtured. Those who bear witness to the cumulative erasures have reason to believe that the revitalization investments in Harlem are not in service to longtime residents.


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236 Lees and Melhuish 242–260.
Placemaking, when focused on elite sections of society and “creatives,” accelerates the marginalization and eventual displacement of the most underprivileged inhabitants.\textsuperscript{237}

In the quest to create successful places and inclusive placemaking, planning and programs must include an interweaving of community narrative and history as well as a sense of place and acknowledgement of inequities. By fostering discussion and even friction, artistic endeavors can offer multifaceted ways of understanding the community and inspiring difficult yet necessary conversations around placemaking. Inclusion of intercultural knowledge is a cornerstone to programming and planning, yet there is a growing vacuum of that knowledge in the public spaces detailed in this thesis. As the research details, this may be due to the diminution and erasures of homeplace by municipalities, incurred over a period of successive administrations with agendas that dissuade the use of public space.

Through speech and action, people have the ability to engage in meaningful discussions and debates across differences as they negotiate the world in which we would like to live. It is with this natal capacity\textsuperscript{238} that humankind creates a new world and future. To do this, we must create public gathering spaces. The meetings in these spaces are ephemeral: we come together and disperse, and each time we come together again, it is a new configuration with new potential. Human beings are observers; we learn from the experience of our public spaces.\textsuperscript{239} In addition, our environment influences our behavior and enhances our sense of identity and connection to place.

\textsuperscript{237} Doucet et al.1438–1454.
\textsuperscript{238} Arendt introduces “natality” as a conceptual moment when one is born into the political as the sphere where acting together can create the truly unexpected (9).
\textsuperscript{239} Reed 6.
This research suggests that public placemaking, which is attentive to the notion of homeplace, can be restored in Harlem. It is possible to create public spaces that are inclusive, accessible, and plural and that encourage participation while addressing inequality, removing the power narrative of the dominant class, and encouraging social justice. The fact that people have such dynamic and active ways of interacting with their environment makes a strong argument for restoring the vibrant public places that once existed and maintaining them as a space for placemaking and as a vehicle for social improvement in Harlem.
CONCLUSION

This thesis explores how the convergence of community, institution, and retooling of the current stewardship of public spaces to include intercultural knowledge at the hyperlocal level might contribute to more democratic spaces and practices and unifying projects in Harlem. There is an established critical need for public spaces of various kinds to be maintained, developed, and supported. These spaces allow for the building of community, the creation of culture, and the development of artistic performance. The stewards charged with access and programming of these spaces must be attuned to the desires, and open to the traditions and norms, of all of Harlem’s populace. Since the Renaissance of the 1920s, Harlem has an established and rich history as a hotbed for the arts, artistry that was nurtured by the creation and maintenance of homeplace. This can and must continue.

This research was guided by the following questions: How is participation in Harlem’s public spaces shaped by strategies of power and community need? How do both official policies and local practices, strategic and tactical, play a role in ownership and use of space? In addressing these questions, the research shows that decisions made over the course of the current century at the state and local levels and affecting policy and planning of public space have resulted in a concrete and traceable diminution of public space and, in turn, a decrease in public participation. Moreover, a paucity of intercultural understanding or disregard for intercultural knowledge when determining policy can result in cultural erasure for certain communities and social stratification across the community as a whole.
The cases studied here reveal how multiple strategies contribute to this erasure: an array of interventions that do not offer support for the creation of homeplace, a pejorative narrative used to justify the out-of-sight relocation of “untidy” cultural expression, and increased bureaucratic requirements that negate participation and spontaneous artistic expression. An examination of Harlem’s current revitalization programs and efforts in placemaking reveals them to be too often in service of commercial interests rather than community need. Culture has been utilized as a vehicle for soft entry and speculation; there is investment in the built environment without investment in maintaining the very communities that built the culture. This study concludes that without (1) a truth and reconciliation process that prioritizes community wants and needs over aesthetic order, (2) a concerted effort across agencies to apply the widely demonstrated sociological knowledge, and (3) inclusion of representative community voices in planning and development, there will be no improvement to the stratification that Harlem is currently experiencing.

Making successful, culturally vital places starts with the people in society. Spaces must be built with a unified goal of enabling ways for communities to collaborate in improving their urban environments. Poverty reduction and social change occur when members of a society are empowered to participate actively in development processes and democratic practices and when communities and marginalized groups are able to articulate political demands.

By applying this knowledge to planning and policy making, Harlem’s state and local municipalities can open the doors to conversations across agency silos that include community and cultural insights. There must be a community advocacy group or agency that

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communicates with the disparate city agencies that manage public space, and that entity must prioritize community needs over aesthetic order. There must be a commitment not just to preserving the arts of excluded communities but to nurturing them at the most basic level, to creating homeplace: providing the opportunity to witness, retell, and perform each other’s stories is central to the polis as a site for arts and cultural exchange. When allowed to fulfill their potential, public spaces can operate as a bridge between personal and collective narratives, which strengthens civil society. Public spaces where people act and speak together and co-create stories to promote intercultural understanding and individuality increase the chances of positive collective endeavor. There are so many ways in which Harlem’s community is divided and disparate: new arrivals and longtime residents; new immigrants and multigenerational citizens; divisions across race and class. Harlem’s public spaces must be forums for connecting these communities. In order to do this, they must be activated as democratic spaces for appearances, as described in Arendt’s ideal polis.

This potential can be realized by employing a multifaceted approach to the design and management of Harlem’s polis. By capitalizing on Harlem community’s multicultural assets, inspiration, and potential, and by building bridges and creating meaningful partnerships and collaborations between the multitude of small and large arts organizations, it is possible to create public spaces that promote people’s health, happiness, and well-being. This kind of communitas is possible even in the midst of polarity. With informed stewardship and community advocacy, Harlem can have public spaces that do not confuse privilege with freedom, that do not ignore, exclude, destroy, or erase from view that which does not

conform to prevailing narrative. Spaces that leave room to cultivate empathy and understanding are spaces that allow for the creation of homeplace.

The need for democratic spaces, practices, and unifying projects in Harlem is clear. Spaces for the public must be maintained and made available for action and appearance. The culture of exclusion, must be acknowledged and addressed, so as to mitigate further exclusions of culture.
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