

WAKE UP ALL THE BUILDERS:
Fatigue and Utopia
In Washington Heights and Inwood

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ABSTRACT

This study explores community leaders' perceptions of the future of the New York City neighborhoods of Washington Heights and Inwood. Taking an ethnographic approach, the author conducted in-depth interviews with community leaders about neighborhood challenges and potential futures. In addition, the author observed neighborhood events and Community Board meetings over two years from 2020 to 2022, while also reviewing historical analysis and social media discussions. The study asked informants to imagine utopian and dystopian futures of Washington Heights in 2050, eliciting their aspirations, fears, and expectations for the neighborhood. Through these discussions, the author developed an ethnography of the future, illustrating informants' expansive visions for more just societies built on care, equity, and the celebration of new ways of being in the world, where complex biodiversity ensures healthy soil and productive growth, both literally and metaphorically. However, this research also makes clear that future visions cannot be understood independently of the troubled history of the neighborhood as well as its challenging present, which has been steeped in the fear and fatigue of the Covid-19 era. Acting on the collective aspirations for the neighborhood in 2050 requires imagining the repair of injustices from the past, identifying the traces of repair that exist in the present, and carrying forward those traces toward an emancipatory future.

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This paper reflects, most importantly, the time, thoughtfulness, and patience my informants generously shared with me. Through this work, I hope to underline their commitment to their neighborhood, their creativity, and the wide-reaching impact of the work they do. I hope I've reflected my admiration of them and their work appropriately but just in case, it seems important to start by acknowledging them.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A BAROMETER OF INSECURITY

“Hold on. Hold. On. You might be tired of hearing Hold on. You might be tired of that refrain. You have held on and yet here we are. Still in the masks. Still in a pandemic. Still in the middle of all of it.” Reverend Bridget Kelso Anthony began her sermon on a recent Sunday in Washington Heights with this plea: “Hold on. God did not bring us this far to leave us.”

Ft. Washington Collegiate Church, where Reverend Anthony spoke, Our Savior’s Atonement Lutheran Church, Holyrood Episcopalian Church, and other churches and synagogues in Washington Heights and Inwood all shared the same message that Sunday morning: hold on. These pastors joined in an urgently needed “community day of healing” organized by members of the Northern Manhattan Agenda, a collective of nonprofits and community organizations. People in the neighborhood have seen deaths from Covid, well-publicized deaths of beloved police officers, random acts of violence on the street, and they’re seeing it in isolation, through the lens of social media or a Zoom call. One informant said, “we had so much time during the isolation of covid to ferment that fear and ferment those conversations that people are thinking “oh my god, I’m going to die today.” Many other people I spoke with see these pressures becoming overwhelming. One said, “it gives a sense of unraveling, and then there’s the sense of fatigue -- how much is this community going to take? How many storms are we going to weather?”

In his diary of his travels through Colombia during a particularly dangerous time in that country's bloody conflict, Michael Taussig wrote, "there's something like a public barometer of insecurity. How it functions is a mystery. It is erratic and unreliable yet all we have so we cling to it. What's more, it affects what it is meant to merely reflect, and this is probably why it exists in the first place."¹ Community leaders in Washington Heights remember an earlier time when the barometer of insecurity read that high: during the late 1980s and early 1990s when wars between rival drug gangs generated storms of violence that made the neighborhood infamous. Although crime data² makes clear that the levels of violence in Washington Heights today remain a small fraction of the dark days of the crack epidemic, the barometer continues to measure increases in pressure. One long-time resident and non-profit leader said, "there are all these layers of tensions, you have fear of eviction and homelessness. You have mental health issues, the layers just get higher and higher and then you put Covid on top of all that, and then you hear that there's violence going on top of that.... And at any point in time a person or a society is going to explode. And I think we are at that brink."

REGRESSIONS

Dr. Robert Fullilove, who has studied Washington Heights and the intersection of public health, drugs, and crime for nearly 30 years says, "there's no question but that there's a kind of regression, not so much because of the kinds of organized shootouts you used to have in the 1990s, but because there are more folks who are struggling with mental health issues than has

¹ Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land*, 27–28.

² NYC Police Department, "Borough and Precinct Crime Stats." The murder rate for Manhattan's 34th Precinct (which covers much of Washington Heights) in 2021 was 12% of the murder rate for the precinct in 1990.

been the case in the past. I've seen more random behavior of all types." As he wrote in the early 1990s,

"Retreatism (i.e., increased isolation from the larger group) was the dominant solution to the problems of community violence. The wish to avoid others reflected the fears of parents, who wanted to protect their children, and the fears of those who had been victims of violence, who wanted to insulate themselves from further harm. The cumulative effect of the violence epidemic was the growth of anomie, as evidenced by the presence of intergroup prejudice and neighborhood stratification and the absence of common, unifying sites or symbols."³

Reading that passage now, after two years of isolation, one could almost replace the word "violence" with the word "Covid-19". 30 years of repair, of the hard work of community organizing, of wresting peace from the grip of violence, seems to almost disappear. To veterans of the neighborhood Community Board, meetings feel suddenly combative in a way they have never experienced: personal attacks, accusations of intrusion and invasion, breakdowns in the regular rules of order -- all leading to exhaustion and despair. That sense of regression -- and for some regression to an even more complicated version of that dark past -- feels particularly heartbreaking, given how far the neighborhood has come. In many ways, pre-Covid Washington Heights might have been a utopian vision from 1990. If you had asked a community member in 1990 to imagine, within 30 years, the murder rate falling by almost 90%; children playing freely in safe parks and streets; a Major Motion Picture, *In the Heights*, turning High Bridge Pool, a notorious murder scene,⁴ into a Busby Berkeley musical fantasy, they might well have scoffed at your idealism. There's a through-line, a clear path from 30 years

³ Fullilove et al., "Injury and Anomie."

⁴ Hays, "Moment of Madness Destroys Two Lives of Quiet Promise."

ago, to today, continuing through to 2050, and the future of the neighborhood 30 years from now.

ABOUT TIME

This paper is about time. It's about a particular moment, a stretch of particularly cold winter days in early 2022 that coincided with yet another spike in Covid-19 cases. It's about the previous two years of the pandemic and that strange sense of timelessness it created. It's about "the crack years"⁵ of 30 years ago and the resolutions that emerged from determined community efforts towards peace. It's about the issues that remained unresolved: the lingering distrust between the community and the police; the 100 million cars a year⁶ that continue to stream across the neighborhood and their resulting environmental impact; the ever-present precarity that seems to have only gotten worse in the last 30 years. It's about whether the time spent working to make the neighborhood beautiful and peaceful will cause the community to lose hold of it, as the gentrification some see coming takes hold. It's about the next 30 years and whether Washington Heights will define itself or let others do so; whether it can remain a place for newcomers to find their feet, while also encouraging families to establish generational roots. It's about whether the neighborhood's high ground and relative safety from rising seas will protect it from the terrible promises of climate change. In a "thick present", to use Donna Haraway's phrase,⁷ one that gathers up the threads of the past to make them visible in the present, while spooling out those threads into the future, we've asked ourselves, what will we become? What do we aspire to and what do we fear?

⁵ Snyder, *Crossing Broadway*, 158.

⁶ Wikipedia Contributors, "George Washington Bridge."

⁷ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1.

To answer these questions, community leaders in Washington Heights spent those cold, Omicron weeks of early 2022 imagining Utopia with me. They imagined visions for Washington Heights in 2050 where the burdens of the past and the struggles of the present have been relieved, or even just counterbalanced with a little hope. Inspired by Donna Haraway's "storytelling for earthly survival"⁸ and Kim Stanley Robinson's science fiction,⁹ and many others, it was a practice that was both imaginative and theoretical, that opened up the possibilities for a simultaneous critique of the present moment and expression of aspirations for the future. What is important about utopian thinking in our present moment is simply that it exists, that people in a society feel some "imperative" to imagine that a different world might be possible.¹⁰ The farther we get from the possibility of preventing the worst impacts of climate change, the more urgent this imperative becomes.

EMOTIONS ARE IDEAS WE DON'T UNDERSTAND YET¹¹

The paper is about grief for the loss of the hundreds of people in Washington Heights who died from Covid 19; for the people who lost jobs and homes; for two years of isolation and fear. It's about grief for the violent death of Officer Jason Rivera, "Tata", a beloved son of Inwood and a lost symbol of hope for a neighborhood longing for a new relationship with the NYPD. It's about grief for the 19 members of immigrant families who died in a fire in the Bronx because they were trying to stay warm on a frigid day, a future that many residents of Washington Heights fear is in store for them as their hold on their homes feels ever more uncertain. It's also about grief that's harder to articulate, grief for a future that feels increasingly tenuous and

⁸ Terranova, *Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival*.

⁹ Robinson, "Remarks on Utopia in the Age of Climate Change."

¹⁰ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 416.

¹¹ Wilson, "Timothy Morton."

unpredictable. It's a grief that the people I spoke with attempt to suppress: "I'd never get out of bed in the morning if I thought about it". It's also about anger, the anger of a neighborhood where many have spent the last 2 years being called "essential" without being treated that way. These essential workers are now looking around them and saying, "this can no longer be our status quo". It's about anomie, the derangement of a culture that used to make sense but now mystifies us, as all the constraints we used to think were permanent seem in the process of falling away.¹² It's about the disorientation of the present, and the kinds of futures that disorientation will generate. It's about the mass extinction event we face if we remain unable to transform our dependence on fossil fuels.¹³ But it's also about hope, about the ability of people struggling with layers of conflict and challenge in Washington Heights to nevertheless imagine positive, regenerative futures. Many of the people I spoke with elaborated expansive, provocative, optimistic visions for Washington Heights in 2050 and beyond. These hopeful visions can lead to paths through grief and disorientation, and begin to allow for new ways of living in Washington Heights and in the world.

WAYFINDING

This paper starts in Washington Heights, my home for the past 20 years, and the focus of my research. The first chapter offers an introduction to the history of the neighborhood, the challenges it faces today and the changes residents anticipate in the future. In the next chapter, titled "Utopian Imperative", I explore different scholarly approaches to thinking about the future, and how those approaches might be changing as a result of climate change. Building on research and creative work from a variety of different disciplines, I trace the conclusions that

¹² Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie."

¹³ "IPCC, 2022: Summary for Policymakers."

scholars and artists have drawn about the importance of imagining utopian futures to guide the metamorphosis that climate change demands. I focus in particular on three uses of utopia: as a diagnostic to test our sense of possibility and the kind of change we can imagine; as a path towards establishing a community's collective aspirations; and as a starting point for transformation. In the third chapter, I describe my research approach which starts with these three uses of utopia, incorporating them into an ethnographic method focused on gathering perspectives on the future. During research with community leaders in Washington Heights, I asked informants to imagine their most optimistic, most pessimistic, and most likely futures. In the following chapter, I illustrate and analyze my informants' responses, concluding that their perspectives about the future of the neighborhood build on close attention to past injustices and current efforts to repair those injustices, rather than on more common future imaginaries like technological progress or economic growth. The three subsequent chapters detail three specific challenges the neighborhood faces: a rising sense of disorder; a real estate market seemingly gone awry; and changes to mobility and public space. I consider the ways in which the community imagines the future of these challenges, and connect current attempts to address them with informants' utopian visions. Finally, I conclude with a consideration of what my informants' utopian visions had in common and how they connect to a broader understanding of the expanding possibilities for different ways to be in the world.

2. WELCOME TO WASHINGTON HEIGHTS

A HIGH POINT

I've lived in Washington Heights since 2001 but I've never actually "worked" here. As the pandemic's constraints circumscribed my spatial relationship with my city and my neighborhood, I started to look around myself. My day used to be oriented around departures and returns, my daily routines taking me long distances away from my neighborhood while I traveled only short distances within it -- from home to the subway entrance, from the subway entrance to the grocery store, from the grocery store to my kitchen. In the pandemic that dynamic inverted itself. I find myself on long walks up and down the hills of my neighborhood, developing new relationships with people I wouldn't have encountered, views I would have missed, patterns of life that wouldn't have made sense before. As I spent more time in my neighborhood, I began to consider its future and the effect that climate change would have on this community's ability to define it for themselves.

Washington Heights and Inwood take up the northern end of Manhattan. Bisected by a notorious expressway leading off the George Washington Bridge and enclosed by highways or rivers on all sides, the neighborhood feels like its own world. Unlike many other parts of New York City, the topography of the neighborhood is complex. Bennett Park, the site of a famous revolutionary war battle, sits at the highest point in Manhattan, the top of a ridge that runs north from 181st Street more than a mile up to the Cloisters Museum in Ft. Tryon Park. Farther north, Inwood Hill Park rises above Dyckman Avenue. Broadway runs through a valley that leads to another high ridge at the eastern edge of the neighborhood. These elevation changes isolate some parts of the neighborhood from the rest, but also give residents a sense of

protection from the elements. When Hurricane Sandy hit New York City in 2012, Washington Heights remained dry and mostly untouched, with the exception of a few downed trees and branches. In fact, Washington Heights' status as the highest point in Manhattan inspired Kim Stanley Robinson to imagine the neighborhood in his novel, *New York 2140*. He describes a future New York City which is essentially underwater south of Central Park. At 300 feet above sea level, Parts of Washington Heights become the most sought-after real estate in the city:

“The Cloister cluster, capital of the twenty-second century! Or so they liked to imagine up there...For now, the north end of Manhattan is the capital of capital, the proving ground for the new composite building materials for skyscrapers, materials invented for not-yet-happening space elevator cables but in the meantime great for three-hundred-story superscrapers, needling far up into the clouds, such that when you are in their uppermost floors, on one of the nosebleed terraces trying to conquer your altitude sickness and looking south, downtown looks like a kid's train set left behind in a flooded basement. You could bat the moon out of the sky from those terraces.”¹⁴

Robinson's novel represents a dystopian future in which humans fail to curb CO₂ emissions causing the polar ice caps to melt catastrophically. His image of Washington Heights, even without the context of climate catastrophe, represents the worst possible future many of my informants can imagine: Washington Heights as an enclave for the super-rich, a higher-altitude Hudson Yards.

A PLACE TO LAND

¹⁴ Robinson, *New York 2140*.

Within this hilly terrain, Washington Heights has a long history of immigration; even as new neighbors arrive existing families retain deep ties. 40% of residents have lived here for ten years or less, but roughly the same percentage have lived here for more than 30 years.¹⁵ One neighbor, a descendant of Irish immigrants, was born in this neighborhood 78 years ago and has lived here ever since. He's not alone: St. Spyridon Greek Orthodox Church, built to accommodate a wave of Greek immigrants in 1931, still offers services in Greek, now for the great-grandchildren of the original parishioners.¹⁶ The YM and YWHA of Washington Heights & Inwood, which celebrated its centenary in 2017, was founded to resettle Jewish refugees from World War I, and still serves the neighborhood today.¹⁷ In the 1960s, immigrants from the Dominican Republic began to arrive. Now designated "Little Dominican Republic", the neighborhood can feel like a less tropical outpost of Santo Domingo. Connections to the Dominican Republic abound: street vendors sell plantains and pasteles; signs and posters advertise in a Dominican-inflected Spanish; storefronts offer ways to visit, call and ship things to Santo Domingo. Until recently those shops jostled for space next to Jewish bakeries and Irish pubs, most of which have slowly disappeared.

The neighborhood continues to change: although the population remains mostly Latino, that number is declining. Between the 2010 and 2020 Census, over 17,000 or 13% fewer people of Latino descent live in Washington Heights and Inwood.¹⁸ The neighborhood was one of the few areas of the city whose overall population declined in those ten years, and discussions of what caused those declines remain inconclusive, although the U.S. Census Bureau recently released

¹⁵ NYC Department of City Planning, "NYC Planning Population FactFinder 2021."

¹⁶ "St. Spyridon Greek Orthodox Church."

¹⁷ YM&YWHA of Washington Heights & Inwood, "Our History."

¹⁸ NYC Department of City Planning, "NYC Planning Population FactFinder 2021."

a report suggesting a significant undercounting of Latino residents.¹⁹ Other commentators point to rent increases and gentrification but also increases in education levels and career success that might have opened new possibilities for residents elsewhere.²⁰

INESCAPABLE INEQUALITIES

Like New York City as a whole, Washington Heights hosts deep inequalities. 8% of residents have an income equal to less than half of the poverty rate, while 17% have incomes more than 5 times the poverty rate.²¹ A very clear demarcation separates the wealthier, primarily white part of the neighborhood from the poorer residents living on the East side of the neighborhood, making these inequalities tangible: neighbors must ascend a steep hill when walking west from Broadway. Professor Robert Snyder wrote *Crossing Broadway*, documenting the disconnect between the two sides of the neighborhood, the inequalities in the neighborhood, and also the way that the community managed to “cross Broadway” as it emerged from the worst of the “Crack Years” in the late 1980s and early 1990s.²²

Although the inequalities are not new, the neighborhood’s experience with Covid-19 exposed them more starkly than ever before. With nearly twice the number of Covid-19 cases than the city average²³ and a population of workers mostly unable to stay home, inequality in the neighborhood feels more urgent than ever. To make matters worse, a complex, interconnected set of changes threatens to deepen it. A major rezoning project in Inwood, directly north of Washington Heights, was officially approved in 2021 even though community members fought

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, “Census Bureau Releases Estimates of Undercount and Overcount in the 2020 Census.”

²⁰ Martinez, “Washington Heights and Inwood See Population Dip, Uptick in White Residents, 2020 Census Shows.”

²¹ NYC Department of City Planning, “NYC Planning Population FactFinder 2021.”

²² Snyder, *Crossing Broadway*.

²³ NYC Department of Health, “COVID-19 Data: Neighborhood Profiles.”

the change for years.²⁴ The rezoning project dominates conversations about the future of the neighborhood and makes some residents fear they will be displaced. Indeed, some argue that the decline in the Latino population is directly related to increases in rent driven by the rezoning effort, while others argue that the new supply of housing will reduce rents and make it easier for residents to remain.²⁵

To complicate matters further, the George Washington Bridge, the busiest bridge in the world, carries over 100 million cars and trucks a year directly across the neighborhood.²⁶

Environmental justice issues like traffic, noise and air quality complaints have been ignored for decades, as have demands for more equitable distribution and maintenance of street trees. A recent study by Columbia's Center for Resilient Cities and Landscapes in collaboration with high school students at WHEELS Academy found stark differences in summer temperatures between the east and west sides of the neighborhood.²⁷ New York State Senator Robert Jackson, who represents Washington Heights, successfully passed a new "Environmental Rights Amendment" which guarantees New Yorkers access to clean air and water, potentially giving residents standing to sue in order to ameliorate these environmental burdens.²⁸ New initiatives building on the passage of this amendment are likely already underway.

These changes and conflicts make Washington Heights an ideal location to gather insight into how different community leaders representing different parts of the neighborhood think about the future, and whether those perspectives are reconcilable with each other and with scientists'

²⁴ Kully, "Appeals Court Sides With City Hall in Dispute Over Inwood Rezoning."

²⁵ Martinez, "Washington Heights and Inwood See Population Dip, Uptick in White Residents, 2020 Census Shows."

²⁶ Wikipedia Contributors, "George Washington Bridge."

²⁷ Information shared in Resilient Urban Systems class taught by Thad Pawlowski at Columbia GSAPP in Fall of 2020.

²⁸ "New York Proposal 2, Environmental Rights Amendment (2021)."

predictions of hotter temperatures, more violent storms, and more erratic weather patterns as a result of climate change.

3. UTOPIAN IMPERATIVE

Thinking about the future tends to be a reaction to the present: concern that an idyllic present might collapse into dystopia; confidence in an eternal status quo; hope that the burdens of the present might be laid down in a gentler future; despair that despite everything, no change to the status quo will emerge.²⁹ These emotional impulses motivate us to seek reassurance, to reduce uncertainty, to explore potential risks, “crossing frontiers” into the unknown.³⁰ In this time of climate change and the resulting disorientation that it causes, understanding how we think about the future feels more urgent than ever. For many around the world, “the future is a trauma inflicted on the present by the arrival of crises of every description”.³¹ Images of the future illustrate the values and cultural conditions of the times in which they emerged, expressing the sense of control a society felt they had over the future, and the optimism with which they anticipated it.³² Futures that a society fears or aspires to should be considered “historically grounded analytic categories” that allow us to understand the cultural conditions of the society that imagined them.³³

We say to someone grieving, “give it time”. As far back as Hellenistic Greece, humans conceived of time as “a healer of all wounds”.³⁴ Yet, as the Anthropocene takes hold, we have begun to realize that our relationship to the future and time has changed. The future is no longer a neutral realm of possibility and potential. Kim Stanley Robinson writes, “Now the future is a kind of attenuating peninsula: As we move out on it, one side drops off to

²⁹ Polak and Boulding, *The Image of the Future*, 2.

³⁰ Polak and Boulding, 5.

³¹ Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*, 299.

³² Polak and Boulding, *The Image of the Future*, 17.

³³ Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash, *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, 4.

³⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, “Time, n., Int., and Conj.”

catastrophe; the other side, nowhere near as steep, moves down into various kinds of utopian futures.”³⁵ Amidst these disruptions, risk has become increasingly resistant to certainty as models built on the conditions of the Holocene lose relevance in the Anthropocene.³⁶ Older models, definitions, ontologies, and expectations no longer hold, and uncertainty becomes the only thing we can be sure of.³⁷ At the same time, the way we define ourselves in relation to the world around us has shifted: humans have begun to realize that the careful distinctions between nature and culture that guided so much of our behavior no longer apply.³⁸ Our political orientations are shifting, forcing us to reevaluate our alignments.³⁹ New, transnational imperial powers have emerged: individuals with immense power over the future and against whom ordinary people have found, until now, little recourse.⁴⁰ Even our language is changing, to accommodate experiences no human has had cause to describe before.⁴¹ These shifts require new maps and new ontologies, new ways of being in the world and being with each other.⁴² The changes required to respond to climate change aren’t merely philosophical or theoretical. We must reimagine daily life in a civilization where “every morsel of bread you eat, you are eating fossil fuel”.⁴³ As Margaret Atwood says, “it’s *everything* change”.⁴⁴ We can envision an Anthropocene that is shorter and less violent than it otherwise would be, but we have to meet

³⁵ Robinson, “Remarks on Utopia in the Age of Climate Change.”

³⁶ Oreskes and Stern, “Opinion | Climate Change Will Cost Us Even More Than We Think”; HKW Anthropocene, *Dipesh Chakrabarty | Keynote | The Anthropocene Project. An Opening*.

³⁷ HKW Anthropocene, *Dipesh Chakrabarty | Keynote | The Anthropocene Project. An Opening*. 25:30.

³⁸ Hamilton, “Towards a Fifth Ontology for the Anthropocene”; Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, 19; Beck, *The Metamorphosis of the World*, 41.

³⁹ Latour, *Down to Earth*, 2.

⁴⁰ Beck, *The Metamorphosis of the World*, 39.

⁴¹ Albrecht, “Negating Solastalgia.”

⁴² Latour, *Down to Earth*, 41; Tsing, “Monsters and the Arts of Living: Introduction”; Hamilton, “Towards a Fifth Ontology for the Anthropocene”; Bonneuil and Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, 20; Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 98; Beck, *The Metamorphosis of the World*, 20.

⁴³ Azhar, “Growth and the Energy Transition with Vaclav Smil.”

⁴⁴ Atwood, “It’s Not Climate Change — It’s Everything Change.”

the scale of this metamorphosis in planetary systems with a metamorphosis of our own, in our political and social systems.⁴⁵

PATHS TO METAMORPHOSIS

In this grim reality, we can identify threads of hope: writers and scholars talk of a hope of a future of multispecies entanglement⁴⁶ or of a “cold utopia”⁴⁷ or of a new “politics of vitality”⁴⁸ or of a Green New Deal that mobilizes the necessary resources to deal collectively with the social and environmental costs of adaptation.⁴⁹ It is perhaps the “capacity to aspire” itself, the presence of hope, that stimulates the imagination and offers societies a map with which to navigate towards their vision of a good life.⁵⁰ Hope is a prerequisite for transformation; “it opens the future broadly before us”⁵¹ and propels us to act, pushing us towards a “commitment to the future”.⁵² The presence of hope allows for the possibility that a path through this transformation exists. Images of the future have always served to help humans engage with the unknown, serving as a “propelling power” that pushes them towards new boundaries.⁵³ Ernst Bloch says, “Nobody has ever lived without daydreams, but it is a question of knowing them deeper and deeper and in this way keeping them trained unerringly, usefully, on what is right.”⁵⁴ The creation of new, hopeful images of the future can illustrate an

⁴⁵ Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene”; Klein, *On Fire*, 290.

⁴⁶ Tsing, “Monsters and the Arts of Living: Introduction”; Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene”; Morton, *The Ecological Thought*.

⁴⁷ Le Guin, “A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be,” 719.

⁴⁸ Ghosh, *Nutmeg’s Curse*, 222.

⁴⁹ Klein, *On Fire*.

⁵⁰ Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*, 289.

⁵¹ Crapanzano, *Imaginative Horizons*, 103.

⁵² Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, 4.

⁵³ Polak and Boulding, *The Image of the Future*, 5.

⁵⁴ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 1:3.

alternative to the status quo and a shift in mindset that redirects our ambitions away from extractive expansion to alternative ways of being.⁵⁵

These new, positive images of the future – utopias – serve a number of critical roles in this uncertain time. First, they can serve as a diagnostic, a way of testing our own sense of possibility. Fredric Jameson says,

“the utopia, I argue, is not a representation but an operation calculated to disclose the limits of our own imagination of the future, the lines beyond which we do not seem able to go in imagining changes in our own society and world (except in the direction of dystopia and catastrophe). Is this then a failure of imagination, or is it simply a fundamental skepticism about the possibilities of change as such, no matter how attractive our visions of what it would be desirable to change into?”⁵⁶

One of the intentions of my research is to answer this question: are our communities so blinkered by the existing structures of power, by capitalism and all its defending forces that they cannot imagine futures that don't include these structures? Or are we bound by a sense of the impossibility of change because even though we can easily imagine new ways of living, they seem to us to be impossible dreams? Or is there some other option, some other kind of thinking at work in our communities that either transcends both these obstacles to transformation or simply works around them? Evaluating the kinds of utopias we can imagine offers us an answer to these questions. David Harvey says, “Critical reflection on our imaginaries entails...both confronting the hidden utopianism and resurrecting it in order to act

⁵⁵ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*; Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash, *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, 4.

⁵⁶ Jameson, “Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future.”

as conscious architects of our fates rather than as 'helpless puppets' of the institutional and imaginative worlds we inhabit.”⁵⁷

Second, utopias offer an opportunity for collective alignment, for the development of shared aspirations and shared creation of paths through an uncertain future. As climate change forces us to move beyond current understandings of boundaries and sovereignty, communities and the way they work together become the most critical “units of research”.⁵⁸ Eric Klinenberg’s research demonstrated that “it’s the strength of a neighborhood that determines who lives and who dies in a disaster”.⁵⁹ As neighborhoods begin to grapple with the challenges of adaptation, they will need to work toward both individual and collective expressions of aspiration. David Harvey says, “Projects concerning what we want our cities to be are, therefore, projects concerning human possibilities, who we want, or, perhaps even more pertinently, who we do not want to become. Every single one of us has something to think, say, and do about that. How our individual and collective imagination works is, therefore, crucial to defining the labor of urbanization.”⁶⁰ For Harvey, this facility has always been critical to the exercise of our “right to the city”.⁶¹ In the context of climate change, it becomes urgent.

Finally, utopias offer paths towards reinvention. They offer us a way to think “differently, systemically and concretely” about possible futures, while shaping critiques of the present.⁶²

Thinking with utopias offers estrangement from our present moment, allowing us to consider

⁵⁷ Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 159.

⁵⁸ Beck, *The Metamorphosis of the World*, 39.

⁵⁹ Klinenberg, “We Can Survive Climate Change By Building Tight-Knit Communities.”

⁶⁰ Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 159.

⁶¹ Harvey, “The Right to the City.”

⁶² Levitas, “Where There Is No Vision, the People Perish.”

how our actions in the present will influence the future.⁶³ Utopias -- and their reflected dystopias -- allow us to engage with “conditions of possibility”, with imagination, as a way of understanding and possibly shaping the present.⁶⁴ They are “expressions of desire” for new possibilities and new ways of being.⁶⁵ What is important about utopian thinking is simply that it exists, that people in a society feel some “imperative” to imagine difference.⁶⁶ Utopia serves as a method of critique, not in order to draw a map to a specific future, but to identify constraints in a current state and explore vectors leading to new imagined future states.⁶⁷ Utopias also allow for the “education of desire” that deepens our sense that not only *can* things be different, they *should* be different, that we must demand more.⁶⁸ Utopias allow us to “occupy the future”, insisting on the possibility of making real what feels to us now to be impossible.⁶⁹ Faranak Miraftab insists on an imaginative occupation of the future that starts with the assumption of “equality and solidarity as normality, interrupted by struggles of domination”.⁷⁰

In our neoliberal “end of history”, an anti-utopian would argue, utopian visions are no longer necessary; we already live in the best of all possible worlds.⁷¹ Seen through this lens, the many dystopias described in popular literature and film serve as nothing less than neoliberal cautionary tales, generating a sense of dread that losing access to an endless supply of consumer goods might immediately send us into a war of all against all.⁷² To counter these dystopias and apocalyptic visions, we need different ways to represent the possibilities that

⁶³ Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, 202; Jameson, “Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future.”

⁶⁴ Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash, *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, 2.

⁶⁵ Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, 2.

⁶⁶ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 416.

⁶⁷ Jameson, “Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future”; Levitas, *Utopia as Method*.

⁶⁸ Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, 4.

⁶⁹ Miraftab, “Insurgent Practices and Decolonization of Future(s).”

⁷⁰ Miraftab.

⁷¹ Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, 11; Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 232.

⁷² Domingo, “Analyzing Zombie Dystopia as Neoliberal Scenario.”

climate change represents.⁷³ Utopias get inside “end-of-history” arguments, pointing out their flaws and imagining alternative worlds, ones in which humans haven’t strapped themselves onto a runaway train that can’t be stopped or even slowed.⁷⁴ The Anthropocene imbues our ability to imagine a different future with urgency. Fredric Jameson writes, “one cannot imagine any fundamental change...which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet.”⁷⁵

REORIENTING PLANNING PRACTICE

Our response to the Anthropocene requires transformative adaptation that addresses the root causes of vulnerability and the structures of power that maintain them.⁷⁶ Transformative adaptation in the context of Urban Planning requires a critique of existing planning practices which focus primarily on maintaining the status quo and ensuring stable urban development.⁷⁷ These critiques required by the Anthropocene are not new. Legacies of radical and insurgent planners have called for planning to serve as a force for universal emancipation rather than economic growth,⁷⁸ but they take on greater urgency now. Planners have assumed stability, well-defined spatial and climatic parameters and clearly understood social trends that, when scientifically analyzed, generate optimal delineations of land use.⁷⁹ But when climatic

⁷³ Swyngedouw, “Apocalypse Forever?”

⁷⁴ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*; Jameson, “Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future.” xii.

⁷⁵ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*. xii.

⁷⁶ Pelling, *Adaptation to Climate Change*, 29; Fedele et al., “Transformative Adaptation to Climate Change for Sustainable Social-Ecological Systems”; Shi and Moser, “Transformative Climate Adaptation in the United States.”

⁷⁷ Campanella, “Jane Jacobs and the Death and Life of American Planning”; Miraftab, “Insurgent Practices and Decolonization of Future(s)”; Dalton, “Thinking about Tomorrow Bringing the Future to the Forefront of Planning”; Gunder, “Planning as the Ideology of (Neoliberal) Space”; Abram, “Contemporary Obsessions with Time and the Promise of the Future.”

⁷⁸ Friedmann, “The Good City”; Huq, “Seeing the Insurgent in Transformative Planning Practices”; Miraftab, “Insurgent Practices and Decolonization of Future(s).”

⁷⁹ Baum, “Planning with Half a Mind.”

conditions, spatial parameters, and social trends all refuse to remain stable, the tools of planning need augmentation and new ways of seeing.⁸⁰

We must reorient planning practices towards the future, towards utopian visions for the future, and towards the emotional and aspirational understandings that they generate.⁸¹ Planning practice needs to engage with the future not just by following a trendline to make a forecast but working to intervene in that trendline to create alternative possibilities.⁸² Planning by forecast, already steeped in critique of its technocratic authority,⁸³ will become increasingly less reliable as past trends no longer serve as indicators of future action.⁸⁴ The Anthropocene represents a “New Climatic Regime”,⁸⁵ one that will resist our ability to create accurate assumptions needed to train the models that will generate our forecasts.⁸⁶ These models, already only as reliable as the assumptions and understanding of past trends - sometimes self-serving⁸⁷ - that go into them, will drift further and further as climatic conditions become ever more unpredictable.

Utopian visions can help planners augment their mechanistic view of the future, working with utopia as a method of understanding and shaping desire, and through that shaping, to possibly even intervene in the trajectories of future events.⁸⁸ Utopian vision, a foundational element of planning practice, has fallen into disrepute, often dismissed as at best fanciful and at worst, the

⁸⁰ Laurian, “Planning Just Futures”; Bina, Inch, and Pereira, “Beyond Techno-Utopia and Its Discontents”; Inch, “Planning Just Futures”; Bina and Pereira, “Planning Just Futures”; Hoetmer, “Radical Urban Transformations - RLS Brüssel”; Ratcliffe and Krawczyk, “Imagineering City Futures.”

⁸¹ Inch, “Planning Just Futures”; Bina, Inch, and Pereira, “Beyond Techno-Utopia and Its Discontents”; Bina and Pereira, “Planning Just Futures”; Dalton, “Thinking about Tomorrow Bringing the Future to the Forefront of Planning”; Miraftab, “Insurgent Practices and Decolonization of Future(s)”; Cole, “Dare to Dream.”

⁸² Inch, “Planning Just Futures.”

⁸³ Wachs, “Forecasting versus Envisioning.”

⁸⁴ Oreskes and Stern, “Opinion | Climate Change Will Cost Us Even More Than We Think.”

⁸⁵ Latour, *Down to Earth*, 18.

⁸⁶ Oreskes and Stern, “Opinion | Climate Change Will Cost Us Even More Than We Think.”

⁸⁷ Wachs, “Forecasting versus Envisioning.”

⁸⁸ Inch, “Planning Just Futures.”

beginning of a slide towards totalitarianism.⁸⁹ Yet John Friedmann, in a defense of utopian vision, described it as one of three mutually interdependent elements of practice that allow planners the authority to claim an understanding of the common good.⁹⁰ For him, utopian visions serve to both offer a critique of our current state as well as a direction towards a desired future.⁹¹ These two aspects of utopian vision are, for Friedmann, indispensable and worth the risks and critiques.⁹² For some contemporary planning theorists, planning's utopian heritage should be restored, especially given the challenges of our new era.⁹³ Andy Inch presents Fredric Jameson, Ruth Levitas, Miguel Abensour, and others' views on the uses of Utopia to an audience of planners.⁹⁴ Inch considers "Utopias as Method" a powerful tool to help planners adapt to our new reality, one that will require epistemological shifts and the remaking of urban futures.⁹⁵ He imagines this future-orientation offering planning a method for deeper emotional engagement, for creating a "dynamic archive of social dreams" that can guide passionate re-engagement with the emancipatory possibilities that cities generate.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, 6.

⁹⁰ Friedmann, "Planning in the Public Domain."

⁹¹ Friedmann, "The Good City."

⁹² Friedmann, "Planning in the Public Domain."

⁹³ Bina, Inch, and Pereira, "Beyond Techno-Utopia and Its Discontents"; Inch, "Planning Just Futures"; Cole, "Dare to Dream."

⁹⁴ Inch, "Planning Just Futures"; Bina, Inch, and Pereira, "Beyond Techno-Utopia and Its Discontents."

⁹⁵ Inch, "Planning Just Futures."

⁹⁶ Inch.

4. LOOKING FOR UTOPIA IN THE HEIGHTS

METHODS OF EXPLORING THE FUTURE

Many different techniques of futuring have emerged to allow for that frontier crossing, each with its own implications and effects on meaning-making.⁹⁷ Of those techniques, more technocratic modes of futuring, like Scenario Planning, have emerged as the predominant tools in the exploration of the potential futures.⁹⁸ Starting in the 1970s with the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth*⁹⁹ and expanding to serve as a foundational element of the IPCC's climate communication strategy, scenario planning has become one of the primary methods of developing hypotheses about the ways in which human society and the natural world might move together into the future.¹⁰⁰ While the kind of scenario planning carried out by the IPCC is useful for anticipating changes in scientific phenomena, it's been less useful as a method for anticipating changes in culture, which don't always follow the same predictable path as chemical reactions or ocean currents.¹⁰¹ Arjun Appadurai says, "the future is not just a technical or neutral space, but is shot through with affect and sensation", explaining that "affect and sensation" too have the power to shape the future.¹⁰²

Among the many creative responses to the limitations of technocratic methods of evaluating potential futures, some researchers have found their way back to Ethnographic Futures Research, which was initially developed in the 1970s by Robert Textor.¹⁰³ Researchers have

⁹⁷ Oomen, Hoffman, and Hajer, "Techniques of Futuring."

⁹⁸ Urry, *What Is the Future?*, 97; Rounsevell and Metzger, "Developing Qualitative Scenario Storylines for Environmental Change Assessment."

⁹⁹ Meadows and Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth*.

¹⁰⁰ Rounsevell and Metzger, "Developing Qualitative Scenario Storylines for Environmental Change Assessment."

¹⁰¹ Tyszczyk and Smith, "Culture and Climate Change Scenarios."

¹⁰² Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*, 286–87.

¹⁰³ Candy and Kornet, "Turning Foresight Inside Out."

used this method to understand the perspectives of Alaskan tribal communities¹⁰⁴, Thai government officials¹⁰⁵, young Ukrainian political activists¹⁰⁶, Jesuit university administrators¹⁰⁷ and many others. Textor developed the methodology as a response to the rapid pace of development, arguing for the development of anticipatory skills, both for citizens and researchers.¹⁰⁸ Ethnographic Futures Research, using a semi-structured interview format, asks participants to consider possible futures along a spectrum ranging from their most desired future to their least desired, and then to describe a scenario that illustrates futures close to each end of the spectrum, followed by one that the participants considers most likely, regardless of her specific preference.¹⁰⁹ This elaboration of future scenarios allows a researcher to understand an informant's desires, fears, and expectations, and through them to generate an image of the future.¹¹⁰ It also allows for a way to understand how an informant perceives the structural constraints on change -- the forces that would prevent a desired future from emerging.¹¹¹ Taken collectively, these images of the future and the constraints they illustrate have the power to create a shared frame of reference for a community, shared priorities, and even, a renewed sense of energy and self-empowerment.¹¹² Textor's method "generates a sense of ownership among participants about the type of future they want most for their communities", which explains its popularity.¹¹³

¹⁰⁴ Gordon, "Ethnographic Futures Research as a Method for Working with Indigenous Communities to Develop Sustainability Indicators."

¹⁰⁵ Textor, "The Ethnographic Futures Research Method."

¹⁰⁶ Shyyan, "Ethnographic Futures Research of Democracy in Ukraine."

¹⁰⁷ Lowdon, "Ethnographic Futures Research."

¹⁰⁸ Textor, "A Brief Explanation of Ethnographic Futures Research."

¹⁰⁹ Textor, "The Ethnographic Futures Research Method."

¹¹⁰ Candy and Kornet, "Turning Foresight Inside Out."

¹¹¹ Textor, "The Ethnographic Futures Research Method."

¹¹² Gordon, "Ethnographic Futures Research as a Method for Working with Indigenous Communities to Develop Sustainability Indicators."

¹¹³ Natcher et al., "Notions of Time and Sentience."

Beyond Futures research explicitly using the EFR methodology, researchers have conducted a number of studies focused on engaging the future through storytelling, in Urban Planning practice and elsewhere. In Sweden, researchers used storytelling methods to gather insight into the ways in which women's perspectives have been elided in planning practice.¹¹⁴ An international conversation about alternative visions for the future of Jerusalem generated new ideas and strategies that enriched the conversation and expanded possibilities for peace.¹¹⁵ An analysis of more than a dozen different city visioning exercises illustrated the ways in which these kinds of efforts allow cities to engage with changes in values, and to create shared visions that provide a foundation for city planning.¹¹⁶ An improvisational filmmaking effort the researchers called "Ethno Science Fiction" worked with informants to co-create their own science fiction, which, when screened back to them, worked to "facilitate reflection and change."¹¹⁷ The value of this work of co-creation is in the way that it makes "an imagined future explicit and tangible", clarifying and revealing connections and values.¹¹⁸ The value of tangibility of future imaginaries also serves as motivation for a variation on Ethnographic Futures Research called Ethnographic Experiential Futures.¹¹⁹ This approach gathers perspectives on the future from informants and then uses those perspectives to design artifacts or props that illustrate the implications of that imagined future, through a cycle of "map, multiply, mediate, mount" which gathers images of the future (map), generates a variety of scenarios based on those images (multiply), creates experiences based on those scenarios (mediate), then stages encounters that allow for reflection, correction and revision (mount), which leads back to a

¹¹⁴ Hudson and Rönblom, "Is an 'Other' City Possible?"

¹¹⁵ Davis and Hatuka, "The Right to Vision."

¹¹⁶ Ratcliffe and Krawczyk, "Imagineering City Futures."

¹¹⁷ Sjöberg, "Ethno Science Fiction."

¹¹⁸ Sjöberg.

¹¹⁹ Candy and Kornet, "Turning Foresight Inside Out."

re-mapping.¹²⁰ These methods all take slightly different paths to intervention in the future by working to expand human imaginative capacity on an individual, community, and eventually, global scale.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In my research, I combined Robert Textor's Ethnographic Futures Research with perspectives from Ruth Levitas, Fredric Jameson, Andy Inch, and others on "Utopia as a Method"(see Appendix A for detailed methodology). I hoped to explore the presence of utopian visions in Washington Heights and their influence on the way the community anticipates change, what it hopes and fears, and whether the expression of those hopes and fears might lead to collective aspirations for the future, answering the following questions:

1. Utopia as a diagnostic: What kind of future imaginaries do people who have dedicated their lives to improving this community carry with them? How do they imagine their community in 2050? What stories will they tell of the future they envision for themselves and the community they serve?
2. Utopia as a way to express collective aspirations: Will those stories and images align and converge in a way that would allow for the development of a coherent shared aspiration for the future of the community?
3. Utopia as reinvention: Do those images of the future of Washington Heights encompass the scale of change that climate scientists anticipate?

COMMUNITY LEADERS AS INFORMANTS

¹²⁰ Candy and Kornet.

People who lead and serve in their communities play different roles -- managing non-profit organizations, ministering to religious congregations, organizing political action, serving on committees, and governing as elected officials. But each of these people, in their choice to play this community service-focused role has a theory of change, a sense of the structures of power that constrain their community, and sufficient engagement with events and people in the community to reflect on what people fear and hope for, and what they believe is possible. Given their dedication to service and relief of suffering, these leaders, I hoped, would be able to express visions of the future actively, resisting both apathy and what Fredric Jameson describes as “impotent lucidity” based on a cynical sense that despite our dire state, change is no longer possible.¹²¹ Instead, they will have all made “unconscious utopian investments”¹²² that might allow them to more effectively marshal their imagination towards positive transformation. Given the short time available for research in this project, I focused on these leaders as a way to gather a broader perspective, to engage with people who have already thought about the issues I plan to discuss with them in interviews, and who have some authority to reflect on the needs of their community members. I spoke in-depth with 15 community leaders, spending several hours in semi-structured interviews with each about the future of the neighborhood (see Appendix A for more detailed interview methodology). Of these 15 community leaders, 7 work or worked directly with children, as teachers, coaches and administrators of youth programs. Others manage non-profit organizations, from large institutions like the YM&YWH of Washington Heights and Inwood or the Community League of the Heights to small organizations like WordUp Community Bookshop. Others serve on the staff of local political representatives. In addition to their other roles, six informants also serve

¹²¹ Jameson, “Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future.”

¹²² Jameson.

on Manhattan's Community Board 12. In addition to those 15 community leaders, I also spoke to two people who had studied the neighborhood in great depth: Dr. Robert Fullilove, a public health researcher and long-time resident of Washington Heights, and Dr. Robert Snyder, who wrote a history of Washington Heights called *Crossing Broadway*.

My informants have long tenures in the neighborhood. The person with the shortest tenure was Pastor John Flack, who has lived here for eight years; the longest was Community Board member Jim Berlin, who was born here 78 years ago and never left the neighborhood. More than half of my informants have lived in the neighborhood for over 20 years, most of them people who grew up here. Two informants, Yvonne Stennett, Executive Director of Community League of the Heights and Martin Englisner, CEO of the YM & YWHA, have both led their respective organizations for over 40 years. This is a group with deep roots in the neighborhood and a long perspective on its history and patterns of development.

Representing a range of races and ethnicities, six of my informants were Latino, of those one identified as Afro-latino; four were African-American; five were White and non-Latino, and one was of Asian descent. People with tenures of fewer than 20 years were more likely to be White non-Latinos, although the two people with the longest tenure, Jim Berlin and Martin Englisner, are also White non-Latinos. My White non-Latino informants are more likely to live West of Broadway (the "wealthier" side of the neighborhood) but these lines aren't strictly defined. Some non-Latino informants live on the East side of Broadway and some Latino informants live on the West side. Given the small sample size and the presence of many "boundary crossers", as I analyzed visions of the future and perspectives on challenges in the neighborhood, I

hesitated to draw firm connections between specific kinds of visions or challenges and racial, ethnic, or wealth-based classifications. I noticed a few threads that may correspond with racial and ethnic patterns, which I will discuss, but these threads were not distinct or unequivocal. For a list of informants, see Appendix B.

NON-REPLICABLE METHODS

Michael Burawoy described his Extended Case Method as an example of “reflexive science”, a kind of reverse image of “positive science”, which insists on replicability, reliability, and representativeness.¹²³ Burawoy describes “positive science” as an approach in which researchers work to “suspend our participation in the world we study.”¹²⁴ Like Burawoy, my research and its outcomes *depended* on my participation in my neighborhood. I’ve lived in Washington Heights for over twenty years. Many of my informants run organizations that I’ve supported by volunteering or donating or both. I volunteered for Angela Fernandez’s City Council campaign; I’m on the Board of Uptown Stories, Kate Reuther’s non-profit. Domingo Estevez’s non-profit, Uplift NYC, collects donations every Christmas to give the ingredients for traditional Dominican holiday meals to over a thousand families. I’ve donated to that collection several times. My daughter attended camps and classes at the Y run by Martin English. I connect to other informants through kinship – through our children, through friends. The depth of my prior relationships with my informants allowed for a level of trust and informality that would have been difficult to cultivate in the short time frame available for this research. For most of the people I hadn’t met before this winter, I had the benefit of a warm introduction from a mutual, trusted friend. Even for the few informants with whom I had no prior connection, my

¹²³ Burawoy, “The Extended Case Method.”

¹²⁴ Burawoy.

knowledge of the neighborhood, its history, and characters allowed for a short-hand, a sense of connection and companionship over shared experiences in the neighborhood. Without these prior relationships, I would never have been able to navigate my conversations into the deeper, more emotional terrain that they traversed without a much longer time commitment.

My history in the neighborhood and my role as a member of the community also meant that I had a stake in the conversations about the future. I have my own visions for the future of my neighborhood. Even though I didn't share a complete vision with my informants during these interviews, they often knew my opinions and knew that I might agree or disagree with something they said. In some cases, a prior conversation may have actually influenced their thinking about the kind of future they imagined. When those moments arose in conversation, it was sometimes prefaced with, "I know you're going to disagree with this, HK, but..." or "I remember we had a conversation about bike lanes a few years ago and we thought...". Given this history, the impossibility of avoiding "distorting" or influencing my informants' views had been established well before I began thinking about this research. Perhaps more importantly, my very presence as a resident in the neighborhood may have influenced its trajectory, albeit in a very small way. I moved to Washington Heights in 2001, as part of a slow increase in the population of White, wealthier residents, whose presence twenty years later has begun to feel like a crisis to some of my informants. There was no hope of isolating my subjective views and experiences from this research, although perhaps that would be true of anyone asking these kinds of questions.¹²⁵ For those with whom I hadn't had prior conversations about these topics, or for whom my presence in the neighborhood wasn't inherently charged, my role as a neighbor and potential friend still made it difficult to ask some kinds of questions. An

¹²⁵ Burawoy; Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority."

anonymous researcher can ask about income levels without causing discomfort, for example. A neighbor and friend cannot.

In a further violation of the demands of positive science, my informants do not constitute a representative sample of the neighborhood population. My intention was to focus on community leaders, who as a subpopulation may not follow the same distributions of race, ethnicity, age, tenure, and income levels as the neighborhood as a whole. Of my initial list of nearly fifty community leaders to contact for this project, the people I spoke with were the people who responded to my request and agreed to spend time with me during January and February of 2022, during a new outbreak of Covid and just after the investiture of a new Mayor and City Council. I created that list based on my own knowledge of the neighborhood and the roles of different institutions in it. In some cases, I contacted people specifically because I knew them and I knew they would represent a particular perspective that I wanted to include.

Relying on experience as a source of authority “often smacks of mystification.”¹²⁶ That is to some extent true here. I can say, “I’ve lived in this neighborhood for twenty years” but that does not mean that I’ve spent those twenty years closely observing anything beyond my small corner of it. For most of that time, I simply existed in it, making connections haphazardly, coming across “scenes” in passing, on my way to do something else. It’s only been in the last two years that I’ve observed deliberately in service of a specific project with specific questions, using ethnographic methods of participant-observation, interviewing and taking field notes. However, when I did start actively observing and participating in the last two years, the previous eighteen years’ worth of simply existing in this world made the patterns I was seeing

¹²⁶ Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority.”

more legible, giving them more context. I knew the questions to ask, and the ones that didn't need asking. This experience wasn't without its own challenges – I sometimes found my assumptions misplaced, or failed to sufficiently challenge my own perspective on a problem. Nonetheless, This long observation, paired with in-depth conversations about fears and hopes for the neighborhood with a variety of informants with their own long histories of observation and participation, offered a deeply-rooted position from which to consider the future. Ursula Le Guin, in an essay on Utopias, wrote, “The opening formula for a Cree story is an invitation to listen, followed by the phrase ‘I go backward, look forward, as the porcupine does.’ In order to speculate safely on an inhabitable future, perhaps we would do well to find a rock crevice and go backward. In order to find our roots, perhaps we should look for them where roots are usually found.”¹²⁷ My hope for this project is that it serves as the tiniest of rock crevices, just a small crack in which to secure a foothold, the beginning of a place of safety.

MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

A grassy, unprepossessing slope meets the street at the southern edge of the tangled forest of Inwood Hill Park, running along Dyckman for about 100 feet. It's a sort of in-between space, not really the park, but clearly not the sidewalk. It's not a place one would remember on a visit to the neighborhood and yet so much happens on this untended grassy slope. At the end of the summer of 2020, the first Pandemic summer, the summer of the George Floyd protests, the NYPD hosted a “Build the Block” meeting on the slope. As I walked past, a tall, handsome and crisply uniformed Black officer held his hands out as if in supplication to the Latina woman speaking with him. She was saying angrily, “why didn't you let anyone know you were coming? We would have prepared. We would have brought others. We have so much to say.” The officer

¹²⁷ Le Guin, “A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be,” 708.

said, “Ma'am, ma'am, please, please.” As neighbors crowded around the officers, the sun began to set over the river a half-block away. In the other direction, music played in Quisqueya Plaza, newly closed to cars and filled with restaurant patrons enjoying a summer evening.

In the second summer of the pandemic, the mulberry trees just past the grassy slope where the officers met their community the summer before, produced a bonanza of berries. Trees that hadn't produced fruit in recent memory suddenly sprang to life. For a few weeks, that stretch of Dyckman smelled of the slightly deflated sweetness of mulberries, and traces of fallen berries covered the sidewalks and parked cars.

Later that same summer an ambulance pulled up just as I walked past. At the top of the slope lay the body of a dead man, alone along the line of trees. As the EMTs walked slowly up towards him I crossed the street so as not to interfere. Twenty minutes later I walked back the other way, just as the EMTs were about to load the now-covered body into their quiet ambulance. A few days later a small memorial shrine – a handmade wooden plaque, some plastic flowers – appeared, along with a small group of men who had set up camp nearby. I didn't ask whether the men now camping in the park had known the man who died and whether they had made the small memorial. The men lived in that spot for a few weeks - it was still warm and pleasant out, and there are likely much less comfortable places to live outside in New York City. Eventually, they moved away, whether driven away by the weather or the police is unclear.

So much happens on this grassy slope. In early April, yellow wildflowers appear for a moment, dappled brightness in the spring grass. As summer arrives, the playground next to the slope fills with kids on swings and running through sprinklers, birthday parties, and balloons. The slope is surrounded by delight and at the same time, tragedy and conflict. Without the repetition, visiting, and revisiting the same spot, I wouldn't have recognized the delight or the conflict. I would have just walked past. In my conversations during this research, the importance of careful attention, of looking, of seeing and being seen, of observation, and sense-making, arose over and over again. To make the future we have to look at where we are now, reckon with the past, understand the threads that led to the present and the threads from today that might lead forward. "Go backward. Turn and return," as Ursula Le Guin says.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Le Guin, 708.

4. STORYTELLING FOR EARTHLY SURVIVAL¹²⁹

Utopian visions and ideas of new possibilities spread most effectively through art and storytelling.¹³⁰ A storytelling genre like science fiction, which explicitly rejects existing imaginaries and ontologies, demonstrates the ways in which “things need not eternally be as they are”.¹³¹ The idea of using storytelling as a way to co-create alternative futures has emerged in a variety of different venues. Donna Haraway, urging the creation of stories that might lead to a “short/thin” Anthropocene says, “we relate, know, think, world, and tell stories through and with other stories, worlds, knowledges, thinkings, yearnings.”¹³² Storytelling, for Haraway, both expresses and creates, demonstrating possibilities and new ways of being in the world.¹³³ She reads science fiction works as philosophical texts, saying, “The storytellers are, in my view, thinking. And thinking is what we need to do.”¹³⁴ Kim Stanley Robinson agrees, writing, “It has become a case of utopia or catastrophe, and utopia has gone from being a somewhat minor literary problem to a necessary survival strategy.”¹³⁵

Of the 17 people I spoke with about the future of the neighborhood, I was able to spend enough time with 7 to develop coherent narratives of their utopian visions based on several hours of discussion, reflection, and follow-up. For this project, I resisted the temptation to write full stories. Instead, I used the visions that informants shared with me to do a bit of world-building, describing their futures in a way that contrasts them with the present,

¹²⁹ Terranova, *Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival*.

¹³⁰ National Book, *Ursula K. Le Guin Accepts the National Book Foundation's Medal*; Le Guin, “Deep In Admiration.”

¹³¹ Freedman, “Science Fiction and Critical Theory (La Science-Fiction et La Théorie de La Critique).”

¹³² Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 97.

¹³³ Haraway, 10.

¹³⁴ Terranova, *Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival*. Timestamp: 36:00.

¹³⁵ Robinson, “Remarks on Utopia in the Age of Climate Change.”

illustrating the fundamental conceptual change each informant imagined, and then describing the ways they envision the experience of those changes in 2050. The result is “an ethnography of the future”, a series of imaginative descriptions of possible futures that I hope will be able “to tell a powerful new story about the future that awaits”.¹³⁶ Each of these informants described a world based on a particular kind of foundational ethic, from collective power to healing and caretaking, to mutual trust. From these foundations, they imagined fairly complete new experiences for people living in Washington Heights and Inwood in 2050. As a contrast, they also imagined a dystopian future – what was their worst possible outcome for the neighborhood in 2050? – and the future they considered most likely. These alternative views represent, for each informant, an expression of their hopes, fears, and expectations for their neighborhood.

These new worlds reflect deep emotional engagement. In my opinion, they do have the potential to serve as a “dynamic archive of social dreams” that could establish a foundation for emancipatory possibilities, as planning theorist Andy Inch suggested.¹³⁷ But as with any theory that comes into contact with the real world, we encountered complications as well. Imagining positive futures through Zoom windows, back again inside our apartments, reeling from seemingly endless onslaughts of bad news, turned out to be a challenge. People felt vulnerable and exposed. Somehow world-weary cautionary tales seem easier to compose than stories of hopeful possibility. A few informants had to postpone their interviews when they came down with Covid, or when they had to care for a sick family member. In conversations, current pressures and stresses made it difficult for most people to stop thinking about the present and

¹³⁶ Willow, “The World We (Re)Build.”

¹³⁷ Inch, “Planning Just Futures.”

imagine the future. Even when urged and reminded, some discussions about ideal futures for Washington Heights tended to remain mired in the stresses of the present. A constructed example of what I mean:

HK: Imagine your most ideal streetscape in Washington Heights in 2050. What would that look like?

Informant: My ideal streetscape? But there's so much garbage on the streets now, it's disgusting.

HK: Can we turn that into an aspiration? What would you hope the streets would be like in 2050?

Informant: Well, the streets would be cleaner, I guess.

Some conversations about 2050 remained in this mode throughout. Others imagined positive futures with ease but when we moved on to talking about their dystopian image, conflated their worst-case future vision with the future they thought would be most likely. I had to continually check whether informants were describing the worst future they could imagine or just the future they thought most likely. It was through these conversations that I learned how intensely my informants were struggling during those weeks. Although my informants were able to imagine positive futures, only three felt a sense of optimism about their ability to bring those positive futures to life, and even that optimism felt tenuous, an insistence on optimism because the alternative was too grim to imagine.

There were also contradictions: expectations that climate change might be simply resolved with the invention of some new energy technology; expressions of dystopia where both rampant gentrification and a descent into violence happen at the same time; Teslas for all in a

world without private property; demands for an increase in housing without an increase in supply; demands to change nothing while also changing everything. Despite these contradictions, most of my informants imagined healing, repair, and the elimination of suffering as a basis for their world-building.

GÉNESIS ABREU

Génesis Abreu, from WHEELS Academy, a charter school in Washington Heights, works with students to help them take action on environmental justice issues. They are a nonbinary person of color with Mayan and Nahuat Indigenous roots and Salvadoran and Dominican ancestry. They described their own journey to working on environmental justice issues, saying “I was raised not to question injustice -- that this was just how poor people lived... but I realized that my community and my family deserved so much more than we had been allotted. It radicalized me to fight for environmental justice.” For Génesis, the question of how to ensure people can exist safely and authentically, in their own neighborhoods, as both queer and trans people and people of color, feels urgent. They balance both anger and admiration -- anger at the repeated violent displacements and injustices people like them have faced through history -- but admiration for the people and communities here and around the world who have innovated and persevered in the face of deep injustice. After working with indigenous farmers in Peru they felt inspired to bring what they’d learned back to the neighborhood they grew up in.

Génesis Abreu: Utopian 2050

Génesis imagines an ideal 2050 where the Washington Heights community has made radical innovations in collective engagement and community building. In their ideal future, everyone participates in making decisions about the neighborhood. Everyone has the ability to spend time deliberating, considering priorities, and building on trusted relationships to make truly just, equitable decisions for community progress. Residents have created a network of these trusted relationships by collaborating on art projects and cultural events, creating experiences that encourage greater and deeper participation in the community.

These deep relationships have emerged through transformations in equitable, reparative policies like the right to housing and investments in great schools. Neighbors have also, perhaps even more importantly, transformed their sense of how they classify each other, rejecting the pre-defined boxes they used to fit each other into. In Génesis's ideal 2050 the neighborhood has moved beyond "demographics": everyone is safe and welcomed, resplendent in complexity, and resistant to being organized and categorized. In any case, by 2050, there's been so much mixing of "races" that current racial categories don't apply; everyone is a combination of something. In this 2050, members of the Queer and Trans community serve as guides to help people understand how to build the world they want to live in, collectively, compassionately, and as their authentic selves.

In this equitable, post-category landscape, neighbors create opportunities for each other. Street vendors and small businesses, for example, make the neighborhood feel alive. In this ideal 2050, people have developed collective investment models to support small-scale

entrepreneurs. They've decided as a community to reject the intrusion of corporate chains which extract value from the neighborhood without developing roots there. These investments in local businesses have created economic strength for the neighborhood, both through the goods and services these businesses provide, but also through the circulation of these investments back into the neighborhood. Washington Heights, through its innovative support of its entrepreneurs, has created a sense of self-sufficiency and community resilience.

One way that the community supports entrepreneurs, in this ideal 2050, is through a new way of thinking about infrastructure. Streetscapes have been transformed: the city has replaced cars and parking with street architecture that manages storm run-off and supports robust ecosystems while also creating beautiful outdoor meeting spaces, creative spaces, places to work out, and room for street vendors and small businesses. The community expects changes to the streetscape to be generative, serving many purposes: they're functional, recreational, health-enhancing, and community building. Streets of all sizes, even I-95, are now green corridors that support public transportation, biking, and walking, while also providing room for social engagement, for bioswales and other water-collection infrastructure, for kitchen gardens, and concert spaces.

The community's approach to housing, like its approach to entrepreneurship, relies on collective investments. Community land trusts and other mechanisms serve to concentrate ownership and financial power in the neighborhood and ensure that residents feel secure in their long-term hold on their homes. In this future, healthy, safe housing is a human right, one that the community works together to provide.

Schools in this 2050 expand beyond the classroom. Children explore their community. They learn about their city and their neighborhood by being out in it, rather than sitting in an airless room. Children learn to apply and embody what they're learning, not just memorize it. They also learn life skills -- cooking, crafts, financial literacy -- as a way to prepare them for the practical experiences of adulthood, not just the intellectual ones. School buildings also have the support they need to offer children in every neighborhood in the city high-quality experiences, in science labs, theaters, gardens, and safe, green outdoor spaces. As with everything else, schools serve multiple purposes: school kitchens provide communal meals; school social workers also serve the community at large, helping parents navigate challenges while educating their children. Open spaces -- playgrounds and gardens -- welcome community members and expand the possibilities for engagement with neighbors.

Génesis Abreu: Dystopian 2050

In Génesis's dystopian 2050 Washington Heights is stuck in an endless cycle of oppression and poverty; our nascent dreams of transformation remain unfulfilled. Today's status quo has resisted change and, in this future, gaps between rich and poor have turned into chasms that have weakened the social order so intensely that collapse becomes inevitable. The forces that insist on "individualism" create an increasingly segregated world where some gorge themselves and others starve -- a Hunger Games-style division between rich and poor that destabilizes everything. Génesis, ever the optimist, holds out hope for that destabilization: maybe there's power in that collapse. Even in this dystopian future, they see a path towards a just transformation.

Génesis Abreu: Expected 2050

Génesis expects a just transition to a fossil-free future. They saw the way people rallied together during the pandemic, how resilient this community is at a collective informal level, and that gives them hope that the community will navigate future challenges as well. A new City Council Member, Carmen De La Rosa, also gives them hope. De La Rosa and other new City Council members seem to be working towards the principles of the Just Transition Framework,¹³⁸ towards regeneration rather than extraction. Génesis' ideal future builds on the Just Transition Framework and its shifts in worldview from "consumerist and colonial mindset" to "caring and sacredness"¹³⁹. They have hope that this transformation is already underway.

COACH DAVE CRENSHAW

Coach Dave is a youth sports coach and community organizer and a larger-than-life character in the neighborhood. When I emailed him to ask for a short introductory meeting he responded, "I would love to help, but be aware it will never be a short time when I talk about my neighborhood." He grew up in Washington Heights and learned about community organizing from his parents, who were African American in a neighborhood that was becoming home to increasingly larger numbers of Latino residents. Nonetheless, this is Dave's place. He says, with his typical charm and talent for a turn of phrase, "I don't speak Spanish but I do speak Washington Heights."

¹³⁸ "Just Transition - Climate Justice Alliance."

¹³⁹ "Just Transition - Climate Justice Alliance."

Dave speaks with tenderness and admiration for the people he encounters. When talking about the different groups of people he works with, he claims them as his own: “I’ve got my seniors, I’ve got my students, I’ve got my parents, I’ve got my teachers, I’ve got my caretakers”. He started with the deep roots his parents created for him, and then expanded on those to create even more. He celebrates opportunities to work with people who aren't the same as him; he says, “it’s the diversity of the community and the way we all learn to work with each other and find each other is the reason I’m still here.” Coach Dave extends this welcome even to those others might call “gentrifiers” because he believes we need newcomers. He says, “It’s really hard to change the community because a lot of us have been beaten down, a lot of us have been brutalized, a lot of us have been hurt so much. It’s hard for us to believe in real change and real help.”

He’s used to making do, accepting progress in small steps, facing disappointment and helping his people struggle through challenge after challenge while still somehow finding delight in small things like organizing a tea party for his seniors. “Oh my gosh, the seniors had a blast with all the different flavors. Their budgets are so tight that all they can usually afford is the no-frills tea. They’re not used to getting all the different flavors, the herbal teas. And then they got kids from the gym to drink it.” He has dozens of stories like this, examples of the way he notices the details that might make a hard life more bearable, for seniors, for school safety officers, for people collecting bottles from the trash, for homeless people, for people worried about Covid vaccinations. He’s eager for people to build personal strength: to exercise, to eat well, to prepare themselves for emergencies, to stay inspired, “to keep listening to the words of

the right people”. There’s a song -- Wake Up Everybody -- he plays when he’s trying to get people up and working that says:

Wake up all the builders time to build a new land

I know we can do it if we all lend a hand

Coach Dave: Utopian 2050

Coach Dave has seen what it takes to make change in Washington Heights, and so he tempers his optimism with realism. He advocated for 30 years to build Discovery Park and the ball fields just north of it that run along the Hudson River Greenway -- that’s just one park, on land that was already open, owned by the City and ready to develop. From that perspective, 30 years is not a long time, and there’s still much more work to be done on that waterfront. In his version of an optimistic future for Washington Heights, the pace of positive, incremental change accelerates, focusing on seemingly small details of daily life that create new burdens for people already struggling. The neighborhood, and the City as a whole, strengthens their commitment to the struggle for equity and dignity for those in need. New York becomes a model for the rest of the country, demonstrating effective, creative, caretaking practices in a disrupted world.

Working together, even if the neighborhood and the city can’t eliminate the need for housing shelters in 30 years, they can run them well and provide a dignified life for the people there; they may not be able to provide universal health care but they can give people skills and resources to improve their health, to cook with fresh food, to exercise, to prevent the need for

medical intervention; all subways can have elevators and all parks can have restrooms. Schools serve as sanctuaries, and prisons -- for those who must go -- help people come out stronger, with skills and an education. All these forms of relief emerge from collective, innovative discussion and action, people working and building together. In this 2050, the community has imagined new ways of navigating the struggles of urban life, and works together to implement them. Within this incremental social progress, the technological world has advanced relatively quickly to address climate change, with hyper-efficient solar panels and electric cars and bikes everywhere. These technological changes allow for independent action, individual people literally taking power into their own hands, generating their own electricity on rooftops and fire escapes. There's free energy out there, and in this optimistic 2050, the community has learned to harness it. New York City has also begun encouraging electric cars by offering access to subsidized municipal parking garages and bikes are everywhere.

Even though Washington Heights will be protected from the worst of the effects of sea-level rise, the community has created a culture of preparation and planning, where people stock up with sleeping bags and supplies, to ensure that they can take care of themselves during storms. Meanwhile, technological progress means buildings can now power themselves, possibly using hyper-efficient rooftop solar panels. In Coach Dave's ideal 2050, many of the seemingly small struggles of urban life have been eased: subway signage helps people make better choices about the fastest route. Universal free wi-fi means that no one in the City, regardless of where they are or what they can pay, strains to access the internet.

Coach Dave: Dystopian 2050

The theme song of Coach Dave's dystopian 2050 is Play that Funky Music, White Boy. This is a future in which the color and life of the neighborhood has been drained, gentrified, and tidied away; we don't hear Salsa, Bachata, Motown, or Reggae anymore. The only Latinos and African Americans in most of the neighborhood are the ones working in restaurants and cleaning houses. They've been isolated in small "hot zones" which slowly turn into the wild west, areas the police decline to protect and serve. Violence is random in these parts of the neighborhood, and when cops do appear, they shoot first and ask questions later. In this disastrous future, schools have been almost entirely privatized, healthcare serves a boutique audience and basic or emergency care becomes even more inaccessible, and small businesses have been replaced by national chains.

Coach Dave: Expected Future 2050

Coach Dave's expected future isn't far removed from his ideal future. He struggles to imagine a future where Washington Heights remains a place for working people, for small businesses, for people of color. With some regret, Coach Dave admits that even in his most optimistic future, he can't imagine Washington Heights continuing to serve as a landing spot for newcomers to the City where they can work to build a new life for themselves. Instead, he hopes for a Washington Heights that serves as a landing spot for professionals of all colors, rather than just white professionals. Among these many displacements, Coach Dave suggests that protections for small business owners might allow for some bodegas and neighborhood retail to remain, rather than being replaced by major chain stores. It's these small businesses that create the support network -- extending credit, providing eyes on the street, offering connection -- that

neighborhoods need to thrive, and he hopes for the possibility of those support networks continuing in his ideal 2050, but doesn't expect that it will happen.

PASTOR JOHN FLACK

The Reverend John Flack serves as pastor for Our Savior's Atonement Lutheran Church in Washington Heights. The child of a family of pastors, he felt called to religious service in college and spent time working with the church in Argentina and Tanzania before moving to New York City. He's been at Our Savior's Atonement for 8 years, and although he worries about the prospect of getting too comfortable, has grown to love the community – it's his dream job. He's seen the way that participation in the church, and in the Cornerstone Center, a community arts center that's housed in the church, bring joy and belonging to people in the neighborhood. At the same time, it's been a difficult few years. His parishioners are struggling to hold on to hope but the longer that Covid continues the more stuck they feel. He notes the way that Covid has limited his parishioners' ability to plan for the future. Even planning just a few months out feels risky at the moment. As he considers the challenges of climate change and the long-term thinking that's required to solve those challenges, the future disorientation caused by Covid worries him. He feels like everyone is just "hoping and hoping that everything is just going to be fine. But it's not going to be fine. We have to make it fine. We have to solve these problems. They're not going to get better on their own." He has an idea of how to solve them, or at least some of them, that builds on the work that his church and Cornerstone Center are already doing.

Pastor John: Utopian 2050

In Pastor John's ideal Washington Heights, the neighborhood has begun to heal. The community has found a path through Covid and future viral pandemics; they've found a way to overcome addictions both to fossil fuels and the opiates that threaten to overtake many in the neighborhood. Dangerous and polluting private cars have disappeared from the streets, giving way to green space, gardens that provide beauty, clean air, and sustenance. Neighbors collaborate to create art and music and community, to educate their children in great schools. They've begun, in the neighborhood and in the world at large, to make decisions based on compassion and reason, perhaps even to prepare for the eventual transformation and renewal of Revelation, of the arrival of God's city on earth. They may not be able to reach that city themselves, Pastor John believes, but they can still prepare themselves and the earth for a time when they might experience doors that are always open, where tears have been wiped away, and the whole world streams into God's city to be healed. In this ideal 2050, the city and the neighborhood have begun that preparation.

The healing would start with a universal coronavirus vaccine, one that's mandated and effective. This vaccine and other interventions relieve the impact of future pandemics in a way that just works and fits into people's lives. In this future Washington Heights, the community deals with addiction compassionately, while disarming and disrupting the power of drug dealers. The forces that encourage young men to find their way toward dealing drugs would be

counteracted; people dealing drugs would be redirected towards new, more productive paths, non-optionally, but with care and empathy.

Washington Heights, New York City, and the world have taken climate adaptation and mitigation seriously, treating the issue with the urgency it demands. Greenery covers the city, replacing cars and parking, and dark empty rooftops. Some of that green space provides food, some simply provides beauty, or homes for the many creatures that inhabit it. It's a city for pollinators, for bees, for birds, for the hawks and coyotes who take care of rats and pigeons. It's an ecosystem, one where the community welcomes the aid of their non-human kin. They also welcome human pollinators, newcomers who bring new ideas and energy to the neighborhood as others voluntarily follow new paths out of the neighborhood. New York City and this country continue to serve as a refuge, encouraging both freedom of movement as well as complex collections of cultures and experiences. Washington Heights is a neighborhood that's resisted both calcification and exclusion. They make room for newcomers, while also encouraging those who wish to lay down roots to do so.

The world has found a way to stop burning fossil fuels. The energy supply, with the advent of small-scale nuclear fusion tokamaks sized to power buildings and neighborhoods, is non-polluting, reliable, and integrated into everyday life. Buildings can heat and cool themselves efficiently, without requiring fossil fuels or exorbitant costs. Streets lack cars but are full of reliable, non-polluting public transportation. In this 2050, the city has begun to build public infrastructure and pay for public goods like broadband access and housing. Here, people have a right to housing, in a system that's generous but practical. You may not live in the exact

apartment you want, or in the exact location you want, but you're assured a clean, safe place to live.

Pastor John: Dystopian 2050

In Pastor John's worst case for 2050, drug cartels have overtaken New York City and turned it into a narcostate. The narcotraffickers have taken control of the city, its infrastructures and supply chains, and now city residents are completely at their mercy. In this future Washington Heights, people navigate constant violence and deprivation, while also suffering from overwhelming heat waves compounded by dust storms and smoke carried by wind from droughts and wildfires to the west. Meanwhile, many areas of the Southern United States have become uninhabitable, and waves of refugees arrive to complicate the declining situation even further. It's a future in which the world has been unable to mitigate climate change. Rising heat and sea water and increasingly violent storms make some places uninhabitable while elsewhere, people die violent deaths from chaos on the streets, drought or starvation. In this grim future, the police exist to enforce the cartel's laws, not to keep the peace. Eventually, all remaining order and safety collapse and the neighborhood and the city emerge into a Mad Max-style devastation. As in the last ice age, where human populations dwindled to just a few thousand individuals, this dystopian 2050 finds humans on a path towards near extinction. However, Pastor John ends even this grim prediction with hope: those humans did emerge from the ice age and begin to expand and build civilizations; perhaps our descendants will eventually do the same.

Pastor John: Expected 2050

The future Pastor John expects is dingy and dusty, filled with trash and dead ends. New York City fills up with climate migrants fleeing rising heat and water in places like Phoenix, Las Vegas, and Miami. He imagines the slow but steady decline described by Octavia Butler in Parable of the Sower, where corporations hoard power and retreat into enclaves and the rest of society makes do with increasingly scarce resources. He envisions a future New York City that's more like the suburbs of Buenos Aires, lacking social safety nets, access to clean water and power, and always under threat.

KATE REUTHER

Kate founded and runs Uptown Stories, a pay-what-you-can creative writing program for kids. Kate, who spent her early career as an English teacher and writer, moved to Washington Heights in 2003 with her husband and two young children. She grew up on the Upper West Side and although Washington Heights had a dangerous reputation when she was a kid, she moved in part because it reminded her of the diverse Upper West Side of her childhood. Living here she realized that one thing the neighborhood lacked was the rich educational opportunities kids in other parts of the City had access to. Kate, who is the granddaughter of one of the famous Reuther brothers who founded United Auto Workers, considers workers' rights and social justice issues a birthright, a tradition of activism that she's proud to be a part of. Uptown Stories' pay-what-you-can approach carries a particularly sharp social intention within it: that parents on the wealthier side subsidize the classes and make it possible for Kate to hire world-class teachers and provide a range of inventive classes, giving kids of poor,

immigrant parents the same kinds of “enrichment” experiences that kids of wealthier parents take for granted. Parents on the East side of Broadway can choose to pay any amount they wish, no questions asked. For Kate, this kind of service is not enough - it doesn't come close to solving all the problems of the neighborhood, but it's what she can do, and she knows it makes a profound difference to the kids she's serving. She gets her energy and inspiration from the future these kids will create, using their writing superpowers to change their community and their world. And, somewhat depressingly for Kate, she believes these kids are going to need superpowers, given the difficult future she's worried they will face. Nonetheless, she says, “the mental deal I've made with myself is to say, you're not working on all the issues. You're not fixing climate change. You're not fixing racism. You're teaching kids how to write. Keep your head down and focus on that.” To make progress she says, we need to, “stop bitching. Pick an issue that's important to you and put your shoulder to the wheel. Think about what your issue is and fight like hell about that issue.”

Kate Reuther: Utopian 2050

Kate imagines a social “microgrid” that powers a locally-managed social infrastructure, allowing for mutual dependence and close connections. In Kate's future world, Washington Heights is a tight-knit village, but one that's well-connected to the world around it. For her, the Washington Heights community in 2050 recognizes the importance of mutual dependence and shared endeavors to build and foster relationships. Kate's ideal Washington Heights is intimate, one where people are known and seen, where close, supportive connections replace bureaucratic anonymity. In Kate's ideal Washington Heights people don't need to conform or assimilate.

Instead, their cultural norm is acceptance and cooperation: there is no default culture. It's this openness that makes the neighborhood such a welcoming place for newcomers, whether they're Mexican or Malaysian or from anywhere else in the world.

To ensure people in the community feel seen and cared for -- and to allow them to know, see and care for others in turn -- Kate would reorient city government, realigning the various monolithic city agencies to serve neighborhoods. A neighborhood school could also serve as a health center, an employment and job training center, and many other things. Parents dropping off their children on a school day could enlist the support of other services, or offer their own services; they might even work in the building. In this future, no one needs to anonymously trudge from bureaucratic office to bureaucratic office to get the help they need. Help would be there on offer, provided by a neighbor, incorporated into daily life. The community would expand our existing moments of connection -- a parent bringing a child to school -- to create deeper and more supportive relationships. Schools and public services in Kate's 2050 actually have sufficient funding to make substantial improvements to their current states. This funding change comes from a political reorientation away from free-reign capitalism and the "up-by-your-own-bootstraps" social expectation that we have now, to a commitment to building social infrastructure and supporting human development.

In this future, most people work in the neighborhood, as teachers, small business owners, support service coordinators; as artists and musicians; as gardeners caring for the lush, green streetscapes; or just working from home. Beyond schools, people come together in community spaces like the Cornerstone Center, where a person taking a pottery class might bump into

someone coming from a book club and create a connection that leads to some new kind of collaboration.

The neighborhood provides space, both for newcomers and for those who want to put down roots, starting with retrofitting unused commercial buildings and opening up apartments being held vacant for financial reasons. When they build new buildings they respect the scale and context of the neighborhood. In Kate's ideal world, the community and the city find ways to add new housing without turning to clusters of high rises to solve the problem.

Over time, the community's mindset shifted away from insular, nuclear-family-centered living arrangements to celebrate different shaped families; cooperative living arrangements and flexible, multigenerational buildings support the idea of mutual care. Redesigned apartment buildings offer community playspace, kitchens, and gathering spaces. Private spaces might get a little smaller so that public spaces could be expansive. These positive changes happen on both sides of Broadway, making improvements while balancing affordability and the right to remain in one's home.

In this ideal 2050, I-95 has been dismantled. Cars might still wander the streets of Washington Heights but they will do so slowly and quietly and will be driven mostly by residents and visitors to the neighborhood, rather than people passing through. Deliveries arrive by cargo bike and everyone uses the newly transformed and expanded 24-hour public transportation system. The streets host a variety of new experiments in getting around, and the new developments feel exciting. People move through greenways with shade and benches and playgrounds, spaces

that encourage community and life on the street. The community hosts frequent festivals and arts events that cross Broadway, encouraging people to get out of their silos and make new connections.

Kate Reuther: Dystopian 2050

In Kate's worst possible scenario for 2050, Washington Heights turns into a grimmer version of Hudson Yards, towering luxury buildings surrounded by traffic and inhabited only by the wealthy. The skies fill with private vehicles and large flying advertisements that call Blade Runner to mind. Education and infrastructure are increasingly privatized as funding for public services disappears entirely. People who can afford to take taxis and send their children to private schools retreat and consolidate their privilege, while the rest of the community struggles to get by. Streets become more dangerous and street trees die from lack of care, eliminating shade just when it becomes most necessary. At some times of the year, the only way to navigate the neighborhood at all is in an air-conditioned car -- it's just too hot to walk or bike. People who live in this Washington Heights either move away or resign themselves to watching their neighborhood slowly collapse.

Kate Reuther: Expected 2050

For Kate, the poem Good Bones by Maggie Smith serves as a precise articulation of her current state, and the state of what she expects for the world. For her, the poem is about "the agony of being an adult now. I'm trying to instill a sense of optimism, hope, and possibility in young people but it is often hope that I myself do not have."

Good Bones¹⁴⁰
-- Maggie Smith

*Life is short, though I keep this from my children.
Life is short, and I've shortened mine
in a thousand delicious, ill-advised ways,
a thousand deliciously ill-advised ways
I'll keep from my children. The world is at least
fifty percent terrible, and that's a conservative
estimate, though I keep this from my children.
For every bird there is a stone thrown at a bird.
For every loved child, a child broken, bagged,
sunk in a lake. Life is short and the world
is at least half terrible, and for every kind
stranger, there is one who would break you,
though I keep this from my children. I am trying
to sell them the world. Any decent realtor,
walking you through a real shithole, chirps on
about good bones: This place could be beautiful,
right? You could make this place beautiful.*

DOMINGO ESTEVEZ

Domingo runs after-school programs in the neighborhood with Urban Arts Partnership. He also founded Uplift NYC, which started as a non-profit to support troubled kids, but during the pandemic pivoted to provide weekly food boxes to families in need. Domingo grew up in Washington Heights. As a kid, he was trouble. It was a hard life, a life he describes as a jungle where he had to fight to survive. At 23 he turned things around, got his GED, and went to CUNY, where he came across Huey Newton's *Revolutionary Suicide*. That book and his experience in college changed everything -- according to him, he evolved. It changed the way he saw his neighborhood and the systems of oppression that forced people into terrible

¹⁴⁰ Smith, *Good Bones*.

situations. He started to question everything, recasting his childhood struggles as part of larger forces that he hadn't even seen before. He understands what kids are going through now, particularly the young boys who face many of the same pressures he dealt with, compounded by the new performative demands of social media and more recently, violence and the intensities of the Pandemic. As he reflects on the increases in violent crime in the neighborhood, he worries about boys who have dropped out of his after-school programs to sell drugs, who are trying on new roles as kingpins. He understands their motivation: "When you show a kid so much glitz and glamor and then they go home and they can't even get a full meal, that kid is going to prepare himself to do whatever he has to do to achieve that glitz, even if it costs him his life." He's worked hard to bring information about cannabis legalization, and the resources that legalization has opened up for entrepreneurs who've spent their careers working in the shadows to become legal business owners. On the Community Board, Domingo brings both his experience working with hundreds of at-risk kids a year as well as his sense of justice and his intention to repair past harms, sometimes impolitely. He demands, in Community Board meetings, careful attention to whose voices matter, often taking a deliberately contentious stance on an issue. He's eager to point out hypocrisy on the board: "there are people on the board sometimes that I gotta ask, you know you're talking to a person of color about a person of color issue and you're not listening. You're dictating your interpretation to me."

Domingo Estevez: Utopian 2050

In Domingo's ideal Washington Heights, everyone can let their guard down. It's a world where the violence he witnessed as a kid, and the violence he sees increasing in the neighborhood today, has been resolved. The community has emerged from the uncertainty and danger of the jungle, and everyone has begun to garden their plots of land, or perhaps they've begun working together to garden collectively, without worrying that someone might come in and destroy what they've grown. This ideal 2050 recreates the sense of closeness and mutual support he remembers as a kid, when neighbors checked on each other and supported each other. The difference in 2050 is that now, neighbors come together not in solidarity of mutual suffering, but around shared values, shared experiences, shared pleasures. This 2050 is a time when everyone works collectively to generate ideas and inspirations, rather than simply to alleviate past pain. The people who live in Washington Heights in 2050 live here because they love it here. It's a small microcosm of the entire world, where people are free to pursue their passions and interests, to learn, to follow their curiosities. People who found their way to Washington Heights stayed here because it was the best possible place for them, discovered after a determined exploration. This exploratory experience starts in schools, where a kid who loves the sea finds encouragement and support to learn about Marine Biology; a kid who grows up wondering at the stars finds a path that leads towards expeditions to space. Instead of the indoctrination schools provide now, training children to grow up to be obedient workers, schools activate their brains, empowering them to explore who they are, even if that means sending them out into the world. This is a Washington Heights that faces outward, exploring paths for people to find what they love, either in Washington Heights or in Senegal or Iraq or wherever else their contributions would be most valued. Domingo's future Washington Heights is a launchpad, not only a landing place. Washington Heights becomes the world.

In this ideal future, the global push and pull of forces that drive most immigration resolve, removing the need for people to flee their homes. People who want to remain in their homes simply stay. When they migrate it's because they're seeking something new, a new adventure or a place that feels more like home to them. This kind of experience isn't unimaginable: it happens today for some. A French college student moves to New York City to study graphic design; a retired American accountant discovers a love of ceramics and moves to Japan to pursue her passion; an Australian snowboarder moves to Utah during the North American winter so he can ride all year long. The community that these newcomers create in Washington Heights feels powerful and intimate -- they've chosen this place, where they feel they truly belong. The global currents of power that currently define value, limit opportunities, that ensure a continual supply of obedient laborers, would have dissolved by 2050. In their place, networks of different kinds of value and power would arise, imaginative evolutions of society that allow for equilibrium, where the resources you have access to don't depend on which avenue you live on.

In this future of redefined structures of power, housing serves a different role than it did before. As in some indigenous communities, there are communal, public spaces, with boundaries that establish personal space. Those boundaries allow for coexistence and personal belongings but they don't operate the way private property operates now. In this new, potentially nomadic future, private property limits people, binding them to a particular place, rather than giving them the freedom to explore. Seeking their full potential, in this future people hesitate to settle, to "invest" in real estate rather than experience.

In a community and a world whose structures of power have been redefined, infrastructure, and the technology behind it takes on a different role. Technology has shifted from serving corporate interests; it's now directed towards the common good. Emerging forms of transportation resist manipulation: if they serve the public, they take their place on the street, without the need for lobbyists or power struggles. If there are trips to space happening, they're expanding human potential, not corporate profits and power. Cars still tool around the streets of Washington Heights but in this 2050, they're all electric. Technologies to address climate change work to slow it down, maybe even reverse it, and those who currently profit from fossil fuels find themselves suddenly without the power to stop these changes. In this new future, great powers come together, despite their differences, to resolve existential challenges.

Domingo Estevez: Dystopian 2050

In Domingo's dystopian Washington Heights, the government has collapsed and violence defines our daily lives. People live with fear and worry. A mother walking on the street with her child will worry about the risk of getting caught in the crossfire of some violent dispute. The anarchy that Domingo sees starting to emerge on the streets now, with kids taking up weapons and joining the drug trade, dominates everything by 2050. Ordinary people exist on the margins of a constant battle for control of the streets, with young boys having no choice but to join in or try to escape.

Domingo Estevez: Expected 2050

Domingo says, “in Washington Heights, you prepare for the worst, hope for the best.” On the east side of Broadway, he anticipates rising violence, empty storefronts, increased drug use, and a return to the abuses of NYPD against young men of color. To him, his part of Washington Heights will be like Detroit in 2050, emptied of all but the most vulnerable people, lacking services and support. He imagines the west side of Broadway as completely gentrified and cut off from the east. All these trends feel inescapable, but, as Domingo says, he always has hope that things will turn around.

DEBBY NABAVIAN

Debby is the Chairperson of Manhattan Community Board 12’s Transportation Committee, and works for U.S. Representative Adriano Espaillat, who serves New York’s 13th District. She’s lived in Washington Heights for 12 years, after moving uptown with her husband and young children. She describes arriving in the neighborhood and feeling like it just worked for her right away. The neighborhood reminds her of what the Upper West Side was like when she was growing up: “people just feel real, no one is trying too hard to represent themselves, we’re just being alive.” Debby enjoys and wants to preserve the “ineffable thing” that makes this neighborhood what it is. She spends a lot of time talking and working with people in the neighborhood, in Rep. Espaillat’s constituent services office. She catalogs the overwhelming challenges that bring people into her office, each one with a different complex problem that requires navigating different bureaucracies. The need feels overwhelming sometimes and she

wonders, “what’s the endgame for a city that’s too expensive for most people to live in?”

Debby speaks in very long sentences, and each sentence is packed with clauses and side notes, and layers. She appreciates complexity and recognizes that all of the issues she deals with represent conflicts and challenges. Debby is passionate about many of the issues that come before the Community Board, but she works to contain herself and to guide people away from difficult conversations, rather than entering the fight as a combatant, an “activist” fighting for her own particular vision. She appreciates and expects that people will respond emotionally to potential changes in the neighborhood, and wants to help them reframe conversations in more practical terms. She describes her attempts to shift the conversation about biking infrastructure, for example. She explains how she wants to move from statements like, “Dominicans don’t ride bikes -- those are for white hipsters” or “it’s a crime against humanity to remove parking to add a bike lane” to more measured discussions and objections around the physical characteristics of the neighborhood that might make biking here less popular. For her, emotional engagement with these issues feels like a “parochial response” that limits discussion and the potential for compromise. As she says, if she has a specific vision for the future, it’s really a vision for productive discourse, for making compromises and trade-offs easier, rather than for a specific outcome.

Debby Nabavian: Utopian 2050

Debby's vision for 2050 starts with preservation. In her ideal future, that ineffable quality that makes Washington Heights a neighborhood where people want to put down roots has been

retained and even strengthened. The quality of the neighborhood that Debby hopes to preserve starts with complexity, with a density of different kinds of people with different histories and priorities, who nevertheless share space and work together to make a community. This complexity leads to vibrancy, surprise, and openness. For Debby there's also the satisfaction of a comfortable discomfort, with knowing that not everything in the neighborhood was made just for you; there's a pleasure in mysteries and uncertainties, in a place where not everything feels immediately legible. This is a community that does more than just accept people's differences, we understand that it's those differences that make this a place we want to put down roots. It's the kind of experience that Debby and many others in the neighborhood remember growing up on the Upper West Side, but that has been drained from there and from many other neighborhoods in the City.

In this ideal 2050, the community and the city have strengthened small, family-run businesses, who in turn strengthen the neighborhood. They invest themselves and their lives in ensuring the health and longevity of the neighborhood. This future Washington Heights has resisted the monocultures created by chain stores, which work to extract value from neighborhoods, rather than generating it. Small business owners connect people, they provide refuge, they hold keys, they offer credit. They convert geography into neighborhood into community, and in this Washington Heights, the network of small businesses anchors and supports the people who live here.

If neighborhoods were ecosystems, Washington Heights's complexity would create a lush, generative, prolific landscape where different systems worked together to create a vital,

connected whole. It's a place where people can put down roots and expand into generations, creating layers of new growth to integrate with the old. By 2050, the city and the community have figured out ways to create sufficient housing to allow Washington Heights to continue to serve as a landing place for newcomers while also encouraging the continuity of families who are already here. All this happens in a time when national priorities have shifted to reallocate things like police budgets to serve people in need: the elderly, the mentally ill, struggling families.

In this NYC in 2050, people have a different relationship with their natural environment, and with their preparedness for climate change. City policies like the NYC Streets Plan and others have unspooled over the years to create safer streets that prioritize biking and walking over cars, which have radically declined in number. In the city's bays and shorelines, oysters and living breakwaters proliferate, protecting the city from rising waters while creating more connection with the water's edge as a place for recreation and open space. On the streets, trees and green spaces offer shade, but more than that, the city has created systems that work to restore soils, creating living streetscapes that connect to a larger urban ecosystem. This 2050 is a time when the community observes and reflects, considering how each problem that arises fits into a larger system. When they're ready to address the problem, the new solution fits into an accelerating process of strengthening and improving.

Debby Nabavian: Dystopian 2050

In Debby's dystopian vision of 2050, rising real estate prices have drained our complexity and vibrancy and replaced it with a monoculture of chain stores and luxury apartment buildings.

Debby herself has had to move away, as the neighborhood has become steadily more affluent. In this version of Washington Heights, wealthy new residents arrive and consolidate their privilege, hoarding opportunities for themselves. These new arrivals turn inward, insulating themselves from the rest of the people who live here, leaving other people to swelter in the rising heat of climate change. We're held hostage by persistently empty storefronts and the new chain stores which colonize the neighborhood. At the same time, more and more people are fighting for lower and lower quality housing. It's a world driven by financialization; of real estate values instead of living values. We've taken the city apart in 2050, and sold off all the pieces.

Debby Nabavian: Expected 2050

When Debby sees things happening that she worries will head us towards a dystopian future, she tries to remind herself about the resilience of the city. The city surprises her sometimes, and she does trust many of the smart professionals who work in City agencies. They give her hope that we will make it through this tough time. She knows things will have to change quite a bit for us to avoid her worst-case scenario, but she doesn't see things budging. To make matters worse, her current experience in the Community Board is one of rejection and refusal of change.

ANGELA FERNANDEZ

Until 2020, Angela ran Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights, an immigration advocacy non-profit. She left in 2020 to run for City Council Manhattan's District 12, which runs

from 155th street up to the tip of the island. Although her run wasn't successful, she spent nearly two years out in the district, talking with everyone from young guys fixing their motorbikes on the street to church groups to people living in public housing. She knocked on doors, organized street festivals, and attracted an enthusiastic crowd of young activists drawn to her rejection of machine politics. Her mother is Dominican so even though she didn't grow up in Washington Heights, she spent her childhood coming here to shop and visit family. When she graduated from Law School she moved uptown and never left. She lives in a building on Ft. Washington Avenue that represents, to her, the best of what used to be called the middle class: teachers, midwives, social workers, and public interest lawyers, from many different ethnic and economic backgrounds, all living together and remaining connected through years and generations.

Angela Fernandez: Utopian 2050

Angela's vision for the future is both radical and familiar. William Gibson wrote, "the future is already here. It's just not evenly distributed yet." This quote provides a common thread between all the different parts of Angela's vision for 2050. The future, for Angela, is already here. She just wants to distribute it evenly. In her ideal 2050, all children will receive the same kind of education that kids in New York City private schools get now. Parks in Washington Heights receive the same lavish attention that parks in wealthier neighborhoods do now, without the burden of collecting private donations to do so. Workers' collectives like the one in Mandragon, Spain, provide a basis for most workers' experiences in 2050. Underlying these changes, Angela imagines a complete redefinition of which interests drive decision-making in New York

City and the country as a whole. She starts with suffering, with acknowledging the suffering that our current system of power creates now. What would it look like if we reimagined society to reduce suffering? Housing, in this future, might follow a pattern illustrated by the great social housing and collective housing projects in Vienna and Berlin, or housing might just be free. In this Washington Heights, the profit motive to provide housing would disappear, replaced by fair, accessible housing for all. Housing becomes a service, not an asset class. Similarly, debt burdens for school and healthcare would be lifted, replaced by supportive public services including medicare for all, and free education. To be clear, Angela isn't talking about indiscriminate giveaways. She's talking about structuring a society that works for all, one where parents don't accumulate a lifetime of debt if one of their children gets cancer; or where a young person graduating from college doesn't spend the rest of their career paying off their loans. Angela's vision for 2050 asks the question: "what kind of society would we create if we could lift the burdens that everyday people struggle with, the burdens that generate insecure childhoods followed by precarious lives?" In Angela's ideal Washington Heights, people have the freedom to follow their passions, to bring their neighbors together to celebrate, or just to live their lives.

Even in this ideal 2050, the world still struggles with the climate crisis. Angela imagines that by 2050 we might face severe restrictions on movement, and that many newcomers to New York will be climate migrants, traveling north to escape heat and sea-level rise in places like Florida and Arizona. Meanwhile, immigrants from other countries who arrive in Washington Heights find welcome, the neighborhood adapting to their needs. Schools might begin including teaching in new languages, allowing for bi- or tri-lingual education. In this ideal 2050, the community's

young men, having had the benefit of education designed for their needs, find encouragement to pursue their passions and contribute to the life of the neighborhood. As a society, and in Washington Heights, we've begun to come to terms with the way that toxic masculinity infects young men's ability to be themselves and to use their potential to innovate new productive ways of living, rather than innovating on the margins, just to survive.

Housing, in Angela's ideal 2050, is a human right. If not completely free, it's considered a service, provided with the same certainty as water flowing through the pipes or the arrival of FDNY to a fire. Housing, no longer held and managed for profit, is dignified, safe and clean, maintained with care. By 2050, empty housing being held by developers in hopes of greater returns would be filled first, followed by construction of new housing of a scale and character appropriate to the setting and the community. Getting to this point by 2050 wasn't easy. Angela imagines struggles with property owners that require reassessment and reorientation of some of our most fundamental constitutional rights. But, given the destabilizing effects of sea-level rise in Florida and along the Gulf Coast, wildfires in the west, and floods along rivers and waterways across the country, by 2050 climate change has reset our understanding of private property, and its role as a financial asset rather than a source of basic human rights. Community land trusts bring neighborhoods together in collaboration and mutual care, maintaining housing for the next generations. In this 2050, the community celebrates different-shaped families, multigenerational living, and supportive living for parents with small children or the elderly.

In this ideal 2050, public transportation has been improved and expanded. It runs smoothly and frequently. On the streets, the very few cars that remain run quietly, with no sputtering fumes.

Most people make short trips by bike -- with bikes that allow for different kinds of abilities, and street spaces designed to accommodate them. These bikes once seemed like an invasion. They threatened Washington Heights residents with a sense that they might lose their place in their community as newer, wealthier residents arrived. Now, with many of those fears resolved, neighbors see them as just another form of transportation. Trees shade the streets, providing relief in the summer and framing gathering places that encourage outdoor activities and chance meetings between neighbors who can enjoy the outdoors together. In the winter, some of these places convert to skating rinks or sheltered nooks, where people can continue to meet each other. Parks encourage fitness, with well-designed and maintained workout equipment. Public spaces slowly shape themselves to serve the needs of families and the elderly: libraries expand to support a wider variety of services that support these needs.

MAKING SENSE OF THE FUTURE, OR, THE PORCUPINE AND THE ANGEL

Ursula Le Guin wrote, “‘I go backward, look forward, as the porcupine does.’ In order to speculate safely on an inhabitable future, perhaps we would do well to find a rock crevice and go backward.”¹⁴¹ For Le Guin, the way into a future that doesn’t lead to devastation of one kind or another begins with slowness, with understanding and truly inhabiting the present. She

¹⁴¹ Le Guin, “A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be,” 708.

rejects progress in favor of process; rejects the machine in favor of the organic; rejects yang in favor of yin. She says, “Our civilization is now so intensely yang that any imagination of bettering its injustices or eluding its self-destructiveness must involve a reversal.”¹⁴² The porcupine, going backward, looking forward forms a sharp contrast with Walter Benjamin’s angel of history. Benjamin’s angel, looking backward while being blown forward into the future, “would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed.”¹⁴³ But for Benjamin, progress is an irresistible storm, “blowing in from paradise”¹⁴⁴ and leaving the angel with no choice but to watch helplessly as catastrophes pile up around him. Le Guin insists that the storm can be resisted, that we can “make whole what has been smashed”, as long as one can find a “rock crevice”, a safe, sturdy place in which to shelter while we think about what to do. Sociologist Ruth Levitas considers “Utopia as Method” in a similar vein, not as a destination or prescription, but as a tool to allow for a considered, thoughtful, imagining of a new way of being in the world. She says, “Utopia offers a base outside from which to critically observe the present”.¹⁴⁵

In some sense, my informants in this project entered into that rock crevice, considering the future with a clear sense of resistance to the storm of progress. That resistance wasn’t always possible - some technologies seem to resist resistance – but the intention to resist amongst my informants was widespread. Through their descriptions of ideal futures, many also expressed an intuition – contrary to the kind of Utopian thought that might be taught in business school¹⁴⁶ – that the future is not an empty vessel just waiting to be filled with *innovative, fresh* ideas. The

¹⁴² Le Guin, 713.

¹⁴³ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

¹⁴⁴ Benjamin.

¹⁴⁵ Levitas, “Where There Is No Vision, the People Perish.”

¹⁴⁶ de Jong, Marston, and Roth, “The Eight Essentials of Innovation | McKinsey.”

only flying cars anyone mentioned appeared in their dystopian vision of the future. The future is already happening: threads of Utopian and Dystopian futures are both woven into the present challenges and triumphs of the neighborhood. These patterns are difficult to see up close. To see them it was necessary to zoom out to 2050 and then look around ourselves at the present. From the perspective of a utopian 2050, an expression of intense desire for a particular kind of future, it's possible to identify current threads that might lead to those positive futures. From that perspective, my informants were also able to identify -- and express the need to struggle against -- the current constraints that might prevent the kind of futures they aspired to. The transformation humanity faces is both urgent and difficult. Imagining what the future might be like if we make it through to the other side serves to change our view of the present, and allows us to strengthen the threads that lead to positive futures and resist the threads that take us the other way.

UTOPIA AS DIAGNOSTIC

The first question guiding my research was, "What kind of ideas about the future do people who have dedicated their lives to improving this community carry with them?" These were emotional conversations. My informants talked about their struggle to maintain hope and to encourage others to feel hope in turn. In their roles as teachers, pastors, and caregivers, the difficulty of instilling optimism that you may not yourself possess occupied many of my informants. Despite the challenges, out of this strange, painful moment came truly hopeful visions. Many of the people with whom I imagined Washington Heights in 2050 comfortably rejected ideological status quos. If these informants are any indication, there is no shortage of Utopian visions sparking in Washington Heights. Most of the people I spoke with expressed

fairly radical visions -- at least as compared to existing political platforms. Those who didn't fall into three categories: they were unable to escape their current stresses; they had been working in the neighborhood so long that only the most incremental change seemed worth talking about, or they didn't feel it was their place to express a vision for the neighborhood as a whole.

To answer Fredric Jameson's question¹⁴⁷ about the possibility of imagining utopias, in my research, I didn't find anyone for whom the structures of power were completely invisible or who couldn't even imagine any other kind of society. Images of the ideal neoliberal future that one might have expected, that appear over and over again in mass-market films and stories -- cool gadgets, gleaming skyscrapers, Jetsons-style robot housekeepers -- appeared only in dystopian visions of Washington Heights. In utopian visions, technology served to heal -- a universally available coronavirus vaccine -- or to resolve the challenge of a just transition from fossil fuels. These ideal futures repudiated -- to varying degrees -- the kinds of futures that neoliberal capitalism insists on.

My informants, however, in this difficult moment, felt bound by a sense of impossibility. They could imagine different kinds of societies but didn't necessarily see a clear path toward them. Coach Dave points to the decades it's taken him to get a few bathrooms installed in Edgecombe Park as a measure of how unlikely emancipatory change will be by 2050. Others, when discussing the future they expect, rather than the one they most hope for or most fear, imagined something akin to Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, a slow, difficult decline involving ever-increasing enclosures and hoardings by the privileged, while everyone else fell

¹⁴⁷ Jameson, "Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future."

into chaos and anarchy.¹⁴⁸ Fatigue, fear, darkness: these were the emotional states my informants described. Their Utopias were sometimes reluctant, sometimes shrugging and humoring me, but even so, threads of Utopia emerged. At the core of what people can imagine in 2050 are ideas that are already in place now -- new modes of repair to relationships between the police and the community; new modes of entrepreneurship and grassroots-led reimagining of streets. Each of these offers a glimpse of a future in which these ideas become commonplace.

UTOPIA FOR COLLECTIVE ALIGNMENT

My second question was: “Will informants’ aspirations align and converge in a way that would allow for the development of a coherent shared aspiration for the future of the community?” I wanted to test whether expressing aspirations for 2050 might lead to agreement on collective expressions of the right to the city. Although the answer to this question depends on the aspiration in question, there was one clear result: given the current state of things in Washington Heights, alignment will come after the repair of past harms, not before. Regardless of the topic under consideration, the inescapable presence of grinding inequality makes these conversations complicated, even contentious.

There was, however, a difference in the kinds of complications and challenges depending on the topic at hand. When thinking about aspirations for public safety, my informants expressed a variety of conflicting desires and aspirations but also a fair amount of hope in the possibility of a more just future. They tended to agree about their fears: for many, the dystopian future they imagined for Washington Heights was a collapse into violent anarchy. On the other hand, most

¹⁴⁸ Butler, *Parable of the Sower*.

informants imagined Utopias grounded in an ethic of care, repair, and maintenance, rather than one of “progress” and the new. This ethic of care was expressed by Pastor John as “healing”, by Génesis as “building community power”, by Kate and Debby as “radical acceptance” and by Domingo and Angela as redress of inequality. Sociologist Ruth Levitas, in her writing about the uses of Utopias, also considers the possibility of a Utopia based on an ethic of care.¹⁴⁹ She says, “If our imagined future is to embed an ethic of care, we will need to value the activities we currently construe as ‘caring’ very differently.”¹⁵⁰ Levitas expresses clearly what many of my informants would say about what needs to change in order for their utopian future to emerge. They believe in the need for a change in values. In Yvonne Stennett’s Utopian vision for 2050 she “feels a true sense of community safety, cleanliness, appreciation for each other. A respect for life. I will say...the divine in me sees and honors the divine in you. I want to feel that sense of divinity as I walk by people in the streets.” Other informants might phrase it differently, but this ethic of care emerged clearly and consistently, and for some, in direct contradiction to the dominant forces that insist on continuous economic growth above all else.

The people I spoke with did disagree on some things. On questions of housing and property values, the people I spoke with mostly agreed about their end goal: they hope for a future where people have stable, healthy housing options and can remain in the neighborhood as long as they want, and where small business owners can remain in their stores or start new ones. However, some informants believe that a recent rezoning will make that goal impossible to achieve while others believe that the rezoning is the only way to achieve that goal. The Inwood Rezoning Project makes change to the built environment of Uptown Manhattan

¹⁴⁹ Levitas, “Where There Is No Vision, the People Perish.”

¹⁵⁰ Levitas.

inevitable. It remains to be seen whether the same kind of change is on the way for the demographics of the neighborhood. On questions of mobility and the uses of the street, aspirations and expectations were deeply divided. Some looked forward to the implementation of New York City's new Streets Plan for 2050, a plan that explicitly aims to redistribute street space from cars to other uses. For others, the implications of that plan -- reduced space on the street for cars and parking; bike lanes, and Citi Bike expansions -- feel like an intrusion and a precursor to gentrification.

A next step for this project would involve bringing neighbors together to discuss each other's aspirations and to allow people to identify their own patterns of alignment and disagreement to see whether, through some form of deliberation, they might arrive at a collective aspiration for the community. Given the differences in perspective, and the very different definitions of what constitutes justice or freedom, as well as layers of existing conflict, resolution may prove difficult if dependent on existing deliberative bodies like the Community Board. I was inspired by the idea of using Utopian imagination to frame a Habermasian moment of collective deliberation, as others have done when considering paths to identifying just responses to climate change,¹⁵¹ but that kind of dialogue will require a further stage of research.

UTOPIA FOR REINVENTION

The third question guiding my research was: "Do those images of the future of Washington Heights encompass the scale of change that climate scientists anticipate?" Can informants imagine not just transformative ideas but transformative ideas that would allow for a just transition away from fossil fuels? Most people did not consider issues of climate change

¹⁵¹ Prattico, "How Can Habermas Help Us Think about Climate Change?"

unprompted. Those who imagined an optimistic future that included the impacts of climate change tended to imagine technological *Deus Ex Machina*, a sudden new invention that solved everything: nuclear fusion, high-intensity solar panels, and other unnamed techno-fixes that pull us back from the brink. These techno-fixes were a kind of magical thinking, an activity that's apparently quite common in climate change response.¹⁵² They also represent a latent faith in the modernist march of progress that remains somehow unshakeable, even for people who openly reject the economic and social implications of that march. It's a faith, furthermore, that's likely to be unrewarded. A miracle is always possible but the current state of climate and energy technology suggests that a rapid, single-technology resolution to the energy transition is not at all likely.¹⁵³ Perhaps my informants who are most attentive to the grim future climate scientists predict must rely on techno-fixes to even imagine a hopeful future at all.

Even so, many of the Utopian visions my informants described were, in fact, visions that would very likely result in climate change mitigation or at least, healthy adaptation: green streets, dense housing, improvements to public transportation, and most of all, radical reductions in inequality, changes in what we value and how we think about growth. The experience mirrored what Amitav Ghosh found when interviewing Bangladeshi migrants in Italy: all challenges are climate challenges, even if the people in the struggle aren't thinking about it that way. He writes: "In this sense climate change, mass dislocations, pollution, environmental degradation, political breakdown, and the Covid-19 pandemic are all cognate effects of the ever-increasing acceleration of the last three decades. Not only are these crises interlinked—they are all deeply rooted in history, and they are all ultimately driven by the dynamics of global power."¹⁵⁴ As we

¹⁵² Rayner, "What Might Evans-Pritchard Have Made of Two Degrees?"

¹⁵³ Willson and Anchondo, "Most Clean Energy Tech Is Not on Track to Meet Climate Goals."

¹⁵⁴ Ghosh, *Nutmeg's Curse*, 157.

talked through ideal futures for Washington Heights, the “dynamics of global power” remained ever-present; again and again an informant would imagine some different, more just future, and then pause: “of course, that would mean the whole world would have to change, for that to happen.”

GOING BACKWARDS, LOOKING FORWARDS

Out of these Utopian visions, three themes emerged, three challenges in the present that were particularly active in shaping my informants’ future visions. If we take the stance of Ursula Le Guin’s porcupine, going backward, looking forwards, these elements allow us to ground their utopias in careful observation of the present. The first challenge, disorder and safety, influences two aspects of these future visions. The current “barometer of insecurity” experienced in the neighborhood creates visions that, when extended out into the future, turn into familiar post-apocalyptic disaster stories. This is the fear that our current state of disorder engenders: social collapse. On the other hand, when pushed to reimagine our current state of disorder in Utopian terms, many informants imagined care and rehabilitation, particularly in the education and care of young men, to help them direct their passions productively. For these informants, public safety depends on care, equality, and investment in public goods like education, rather than on increases in enforcement.

The second challenge, housing and property value, also influenced the imagination of both Dystopian and Utopian futures. Washington Heights might become Long Island City or worse, Hudson Yards, by 2050, clusters of anonymous high rises available only to the rich. On the other hand, this current challenge also inspired a wide variety of imaginative responses, from

collective investments to European-style social housing, to larger questions of how and what we value.

The third challenge, mobility and changes to the streetscape, while seemingly less urgent, serves to reinforce the effects of both disorder and property value. Trash collection - or lack thereof - increases residents' sense that things may be spinning out of control. New bike lanes and bike shares represent an invasion of preparatory infrastructure for white gentrifiers. Changes to the streetscape also generate acrimony and conflict in Community Board discussions and elsewhere in the neighborhood. Despite these present challenges, informants imagined flourishing new green streets, full of public space, space for walking and biking, and expansive public transit networks. They've imagined a future where the "proxy wars"-- as one informant described them - fought over changes to the street let up in response to the relief of the inequalities and past harms that generated them.

Each of these three themes contains within them opposing threads, some that might lead toward the Utopias that my informants have imagined, and others that lead away. Rooting ourselves in this present moment allows us to understand their histories and potential futures, and the implications they suggest for the future of the neighborhood.

5. DISORDER AND SAFETY

OFFICER JASON RIVERA

On January 25th, Manhattan's Community Board 12 opened their meeting, over Zoom, with a moment of silence for Officers Jason Rivera and Wilbert Mora who were killed responding to a domestic violence call.¹⁵⁵ Board Member Steve Simon said, "Officer Rivera was the best our community has to offer." In a rare moment of comity, the Board claimed Jason Rivera as one of their own. "They called him Tata here in Inwood," Domingo said, "he grew up in Dyckman... he understood ways to use his experience to improve what's already there." Other board members remembered Officer Rivera and what he represented for Washington Heights, and to themselves personally. Several board members knew him from his childhood in the neighborhood. They used this convening, this formal event, to register their official condolences, and to participate in a public moment of mourning.

The death of Jason Rivera came up in nearly every conversation I had during my conversations after his death. Community Board member Bruce Robertson, as well as Domingo and Coach Dave remembered Jason Rivera as a symbol of the possibility of a new kind of relationship between the NYPD and Washington Heights. Historian Robert Snyder, in his book *Crossing Broadway*, documents decades of conflict between the police in the 34th Precinct and the community, which sharpened during what he calls "the crack years" of the 1980s and early 1990s. Snyder describes a violent back-and-forth of police officers killing and being killed; of accusations of corruption and brutality that culminated, in 1992, in a protest-turned-riot.¹⁵⁶ The

¹⁵⁵ CB12M NYC, *CB12M General Meeting Jan. 2022*.

¹⁵⁶ Snyder, *Crossing Broadway*, 181.

following year, Pedro Jose Gil killed Officer John Williamson by dropping a 30-lb bucket of spackle on his head, to protest the towing of double-parked cars.¹⁵⁷ The L.A. Times reported that officers on the scene heard the crowd cheering when the bucket hit Officer Williamson, a claim that cemented itself at the center of NYPD's sense of grievance.¹⁵⁸ As recently as 2008, in a publicly-accessible discussion board, active and retired NYPD officers discussed the case, concluding, "I remember that, too... Dominican Savages... RIP, John".¹⁵⁹ Given these very deep-seated tensions young Dominican officers like Rivera and Mora felt, to some residents of Washington Heights, like the beginning of something new. Beyond the tragedy of Rivera's death come the anticipatory fears of retaliation and yet another generation of young police officers trained to feel fear and contempt for the community they're meant to serve.

In my conversations with informants, the most common aspiration related to public safety was for a repaired relationship with the police. Martin Englisher has been the CEO of YM & YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood for over 40 years and has lived in the neighborhood all his life. He has a close connection with the 34th Precinct, and has been working to build connections between NYPD and the kids who take classes and afterschool programs at the Y. He said, "Let's hope that in 2050, the efforts that we're putting in now can lead to a time when universal distrust and disregard is not the norm but the exception". Others talked about their hope that in 2050 people will be able to be their authentic selves in public, without fear of violence or exclusion. Building this kind of trusted relationship with the NYPD is part of that hope.

¹⁵⁷ Snyder, 186.

¹⁵⁸ Hays, "Moment of Madness Destroys Two Lives of Quiet Promise."

¹⁵⁹ "Cop Assaulted."

The people I spoke with agreed with this desire but had very different perspectives on the likelihood of reaching this state. Martin, Coach Dave, and Dr. Fullilove, who work most closely with the NYPD, felt somewhat hopeful that the death of Jason Rivera would not eliminate the possibility of repair. Dr. Fullilove, who spent time at the 33rd Precinct says, “I believe that it’s an actual asset to the community. The majority of its officers are Dominican, and they are least trying to talk the talk of being community concerned and connected.” Others aren’t as hopeful, pointing to the lack of structural change -- changes in training, changes in accountability -- that would result in real transformation.

PERCEPTION OF VIOLENCE

Despite these conflicted relationships with the NYPD, none of my informants suggested a future in which the police have been entirely abolished. They instead point to increases in crime to explain the importance of that relationship. For my informants, the more crime increases, the more that relationship comes under pressure. Pew Research analysis shows that the murder rate in the United States rose 30% in 2020, which represents possibly the largest increase in the murder rate ever.¹⁶⁰ Newspapers of record, over the course of the pandemic, have reported increases in crime, even “crime waves”, followed by analyses of what technically defines a crime wave. Critics of these reports have argued that many amounts to a moral panic, intended for political effect, rather than anything that might qualify as a legitimately concerning trend.¹⁶¹ The measurable level of violence is a fraction of what it was in the 1980s and 1990s. Yvonne worries about how the pressures of Covid -- “the return to lock-down after we’d been told the vaccine would free us, then the booster would free us” -- combined with the pressures of the

¹⁶⁰ Gramlich, “What We Know about the Increase in U.S. Murders in 2020.”

¹⁶¹ Godvin, “Crime Waves and Moral Panics.”

layers of already existing challenges, housing, systemic racism, poverty, combined with this new sense of fear, those combined layers of pressure, bring us to the brink. Yvonne says, “I want to be hopeful... But I also want to recognize that we are in a struggle, and be honest in that struggle because it’s the only way we’re going to get out.”

The fear of violence, for Johanna Garcia, isn’t entirely imaginary. There may not or may not be a huge crime wave, but the crimes that are happening feel random, feel out of place, and out of time. She says people feel like, “so when can I go to the candy store or the bodega? I thought 3 pm was ok?” In the old days, crimes happened at night, with intention: one drug dealer fighting for territory with another. Now there may be fewer events but each event makes less sense and feels as a result, more dangerous. Johanna has been organizing a public safety task force in Senator Jackson’s office to bring people together on the issue. She says, “We all want to feel safe, but what does that look like for different people?” Martin agrees with Johanna’s description of the current situation. He says, “it feels like random acts of violence. In the 1980s you had bad guys killing bad guys. Now you have bad guys killing good guys and that’s scary.”

Martin and Dr. Fullilove both suggest that the source of most of the violent crime is untreated mental illness, paired with an increase in drug use. Others diagnose the problem differently.

Domingo Estevez works with over 500 kids a year in his after-school programs. He understands what they are going through now, particularly the young boys who are facing many of the same pressures he dealt with growing up, compounded by the new performative demands of social media and more recently, violence and the intensities of the pandemic. As he reflects on the increases in violent crime in the neighborhood, he worries about boys who

have dropped out of his after-school programs to sell drugs, and who are trying on new roles as kingpins. One of his former students was recently involved with a high-profile robbery by the “Own Every Dollar” gang that resulted in a bystander’s death.¹⁶² Domingo feels like he’s battling a cycle of poverty with the kids that drop out of his program: “they get a taste of good money and they lose their soul”.

A friend from the neighborhood who happens to be an Acting Justice of the Supreme Court in the NYS Supreme Court- Criminal Term would agree with Domingo’s take on the issue. Since the Summer of 2020, the summer of Covid and George Floyd, she’s anecdotally and statistically seen more and more young men of color in her courtroom accused of either murder or attempted murder, and criminal possession of a weapon- all involving guns. For her, the isolation and forced inactivity of Covid is mostly responsible: people aren’t at school or at work and are looking for an outlet. She worked for a public defender organization for many years and is very sympathetic to the social, economic, and emotional forces at work for these young men. Nonetheless, she said, “there are so many crimes with guns coming into my courtroom sometimes I feel like a gun might fall from the sky and hit me on the head when I leave the courthouse.”

Kathy Diaz, political organizer and Community Board member suggests another perspective, that the issue is really with disorder itself, with the disorder caused by the pandemic, which radiated out to affect daily life on the street in a dozen small but collectively disturbing ways. There are the larger disruptions of kids following paths to the streets and of mentally ill people falling through safety nets, who also find their way out to the streets. But the smaller

¹⁶² Diaz, “Moment NYPD Officers Fired on Gang Member Driving BMW Who Mounts Curb.”

disruptions create tension as well. At the beginning of the pandemic, the NYC Department of Sanitation's budget fell considerably, leaving just over half the number of trucks to serve Manhattan than had been available before the pandemic.¹⁶³ As people started getting back to normal and using those public trash cans more actively, the cans overflowed, leaving garbage all over sidewalks. Almost two years later, garbage seems to be the only thing people see when they walk on the street. Community Board member Bruce and his wife Lynn complain about the amount of trash they find in front of their apartment, which is on a popular route down to the waterfront. Génesis and their students find trash - often dangerous trash like IV drug paraphernalia - littering the streets in front of their school every day, and it seems to be getting worse. Street trash has gotten so bad near Community Board member Jumirna Alcober's apartment that part of her utopian vision involved the community pulling together to clean up the streets. Kathy says, "maybe people say 'violence' when they mean 'disorder'".

IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF ORDER AND DISORDER

These are the trends my informants see continuing and expanding as they imagine the worst possible future for the neighborhood. They imagined continued escalations of violence, either causing or as a result of social collapse. In these futures, NYPD becomes an occupying force rather than a force for peace. These images of violent futures feel familiar: we've seen them in countless post-apocalyptic narratives. They're the classic images of collapse, and those images felt present and accessible in our conversations. Importantly though, several of my informants made the point that these kinds of breakdowns don't happen in isolation, but are closely tied with increasing inequality. For Génesis, the worst possible case would be that today's status quo has resisted change and, in this future, gaps between rich and poor have

¹⁶³ Chang, "Manhattan Officials Ask City To Bring Back Pre-Pandemic Garbage Pickup Service, Expand Composting."

turned into chasms that have weakened the social order so intensely that collapse becomes inevitable. Dr. Fullilove expresses this fear differently. He said, “I’m assuming that if this nation, in its current form, is able to last for that length of time, it will do so literally because it has figured out how to solve the problems created by structural inequality, period. You just can't have a society where some people make more money than they can spend in 1000 lifetimes occupying the same space as people who are digging in garbage cans to find enough to eat.” These dystopian images represent, to Dr. Fullilove and my other informants, the absence of intervention, and the intensity of impoverishment paired with the consolidation of wealth among a small, increasingly omnipotent oligarchy. It’s the prevalence of these kinds of images and the ease with which they come to mind that makes the insistence on countering them with hopeful futures so important.

REPAIRING PAST HARMS

One way to counter these dystopian perspectives is to identify the traces of Utopia that already exist. There is no shortage of these traces in Washington Heights, even during this difficult time. One example of a trace of Utopia occurred on January 4th, in an unlikely venue: Community Board 12’s Business Development Committee hosted a meeting attended by hundreds of visitors, where New York State Cannabis Control Board Chair Tremaine Wright talked through the new licensing procedures for cannabis entrepreneurs.¹⁶⁴ Even over Zoom the tone of the meeting was celebratory, jolly, even -- one participant was vaping on camera -- but equally full of detail about the kinds of licenses available, who might qualify, and how to get started. The intent of the law is to ensure people who were harmed by the drug laws, even if

¹⁶⁴ CB12M NYC, *Business Development Committee Meeting Jan. 2022*.

they do not have a “legacy” of drug-related incarceration, can find relief.¹⁶⁵ Tremaine Wright said, “Who has been harmed? People who have been over-surveilled, traumatized by investigations, caught up on the sweeps on the wrong day, these are the traumas and the terrors that erase innocence. This is what we think about when we think about harms in our community. Harm extends beyond an actual arrest.” The program will designate 50% of new cannabis licenses for people who have been harmed by cannabis prohibition. Her goal is to help people who want to participate in the market succeed, by walking them through interpretations of licensing and what will be required and allowed. As she wrapped up, Community Board member Francisco López talked about “legacy”: “The people in this neighborhood created cannabis culture. We have to take advantage of that legacy. Stop living in the shadows. We want you to come legit.” He then introduced a speaker from the Washington Heights and Inwood Development Corporation, who offered free help developing business plans. Watching this meeting play out on Zoom, I couldn’t help but feel like at least a part of what my informants imagined for the future of Washington Heights had already begun. This kind of reparative, careful support to help people begin to work legally in a business that’s been stigmatized and repressed, feels like a start. It takes place in what Donna Haraway means by “a thick present” -- one that encompasses and works to address past harms, while looking forward to a new kind of future. It’s not enough but it feels like the beginning of a path that could lead to broader systems of care, to compassionate, empathetic decision making.

¹⁶⁵ New York State, “Office of Cannabis Management.”

6. VALUES, PROPERTIES

NIGHTMARE IN DYCKMAN

A short section of Dyckman Avenue, now called “Quisqueya Plaza”, has been closed to car traffic since the pandemic started. The many restaurants along that street, expanding outside and experimenting with shelters and bubbles and other new forms of street furniture, created a new social center for the neighborhood. Dyckman has always attracted a crowd but before people were tucked away inside individual restaurants. Now they’re outside, creating a party where there used to be traffic. On Halloween of 2020, a group of artists screened a new movie -- a horror movie called *Nightmare in Dyckman*, directed by local filmmaker and activist, Charlie Gomez -- out on the street in front of neighborhood-classic Mama Sushi.

The night was cold but clear. A large screen faced out into the street, converting it into an outdoor theater. Chairs had been placed safely apart from each other, and the street slowly filled with neighbors ready to support their friends. The film started: green smoke trails along the street, eerie noises whoosh and snap as a mysterious figure with the head of the pyramid from the dollar bill peers around a corner. The figure sidles from building to building, spreading a contagion of green fog. People shriek in fear, shove their belongings into bags and grab people they see along the way -- Run! Run! The fleeing crowd runs past a young woman on her way out to meet friends. She tries to figure out what's happening but people are too terrified to stop and explain. They just point behind them as they run past. At one point the camera zooms into a box of plantains: \$5.00 each! The music swells as the danger becomes clearer -- the green fog is already everywhere. The fleeing crowd follows signs to the Bronx. There's no fighting this gentrification monster.

As the credits rolled, friends and families of the filmmakers cheered. The actors and director spoke, and then local elected officials came to speak. It was a moment of fun, but not a funny topic. Speakers talked about the importance of getting political, “getting on the boards” and getting involved. Angela Fernandez, who was running for City Council at the time, spoke to the crowd. She asked them to consider the seriousness of the moment, urging them to fight back against the forces already working to take over this beautiful neighborhood.

As community activists’ last hope to prevent the Inwood Rezoning project failed,¹⁶⁶ and people began to grapple with the threat of displacement, these fears began to feel very real. Housing in the neighborhood already feels increasingly difficult, even in advance of the new activity the rezoning will generate. My informants have reported increases in rents anecdotally, and NYU’s Furman Center data shows that rents in Washington Heights and Inwood increased by 25% between 2006 and 2019, roughly the same rate as increases across the city.¹⁶⁷ The rezoning project will result in new construction, including new high rises on previously industrial land, potentially creating thousands of new apartments in the neighborhood but also creating the risk that those new apartments -- and the new investments in the neighborhood that will accompany them -- will attract gentrifiers priced out of other neighborhoods in the city. In the Inwood Rezoning Project’s official statements, affordability takes pride of place. NYC EDC anticipates that the Inwood Rezoning Project will result in as many as 1600 new affordable apartments and describes extensive efforts to protect existing renters from losing their homes while funding new parks, school improvements, workforce development, and arts initiatives.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Kully, “Appeals Court Sides With City Hall in Dispute Over Inwood Rezoning.”

¹⁶⁷ NYU Furman Center, “Washington Heights/Inwood Neighborhood Profile.”

¹⁶⁸ NYC Economic Development Corporation, “Inwood NYC Planning Initiative.”

Despite these protective mechanisms, the outcome of the Inwood Rezoning Project feels uncertain, like the neighborhood is holding its breath to see which way things will go. Organizations like Northern Manhattan Not for Sale, which rallied residents to protest the rezoning, continue to press for oversight and to highlight the risks of the project. However, not everyone believes that new construction will invariably result in displacement. Yvonne Stennett, whose organization manages 63 affordable buildings in the neighborhood, advocated for the construction of The Eliza, a 174-unit, 100% deeply affordable apartment building with a library and community center on the ground floor. The plans raised considerable controversy in the neighborhood because it is a public-private partnership that required the demolition and reconstruction of the Inwood Public Library to make space for the new building. Yvonne says, “Controversial or not, the opportunities are so few and far between in our community because of how dense the neighborhood is.” For her, the potential risks of gentrification are far outweighed by the possibility of immediately preventing homelessness for 174 families. Martin also supported the construction of The Eliza and the overall goals of the Rezoning. Although he worries about the possibility of gentrification, he does support an increase in housing supply. From his perspective, many of the buildings in the neighborhood are already quite old and require significant refurbishment. Given the housing shortage, replacing these older, smaller buildings with newer, larger ones makes sense to him, especially if they can be kept affordable. Others I’ve spoken with feel confused: they see the passion with which many in the neighborhood fought to prevent the rezoning but also note the scarcity of affordable housing across the city which they believe can only be resolved by building new buildings. Everyone wants to do the right thing, but the right thing isn’t always clear. Planning scholar Tom Angotti’s research shows that New York City’s recent history of neighborhood rezoning efforts, even

those ostensibly motivated by increasing the supply of affordable housing, have coincided with the displacement of people of color from the neighborhoods where the rezoning took place.¹⁶⁹ However, many other scholars offer different perspectives on the risks and challenges, leaving the potential effects of the Inwood Rezoning Project uncertain.¹⁷⁰

Given the deep disagreements among experts, it's no wonder that the future of housing in the neighborhood feels like a mystery to the people who live here. David Harvey describes the forces of real estate development in New York City in terms strikingly similar to Charlie Gomez's acid green fog in *Nightmare in Dyckman*. Harvey says an "insidious and cancerous progression took hold through municipal fiscal discipline, property speculation and the sorting of land-use according to the rate of return for its 'highest and best use'".¹⁷¹ It's the way that this "highest and best use" of property has been encouraged and enabled by city government that creates the most concern for residents of Washington Heights. Community members anticipate displacement and the acceleration of what David Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession".¹⁷² This is the future my informants fear: property developers strike gold, while residents drag their belongings and their children across the bridge to The Bronx, to even more tenuous living conditions.

Although community resistance to the rezoning, followed by the pandemic, delayed the rush of new construction, it seems to now be underway, to the dismay, relief or perplexed concern of the people I spoke with. Walking through the neighborhood now, signs of change are

¹⁶⁹ Angotti, "Zoned Out in the City."

¹⁷⁰ Savitch-Lew, "Will Rezoning Cause or Resist Displacement?"

¹⁷¹ Harvey, "The Right to the City."

¹⁷² Harvey.

everywhere. As of early 2022, plans for a dozen or more new buildings in the Inwood Rezoning area have been permitted by New York City’s Department of Buildings.¹⁷³ Further south, a new 22-story hotel, office, and retail tower nears completion, its bright yellow bulk looming over 181st Street like a misplaced toy. Many more new buildings will likely appear over the next few years. Real Estate Investment advisors, in a report published soon after NY City Council approved the Rezoning, said:

In summary, a strengthening residential market and dwindling supply of large-scale development opportunities in other areas of Northern Manhattan are driving many developers to look north of West 155th Street. This phenomenon, coupled with City initiatives, is increasingly attractive to developers and residents, which will make Washington Heights and Inwood premier residential markets in the near future.¹⁷⁴

Most residents of Washington and Inwood don’t want to live in a “premier residential market” - they want reassurance that they can continue to live in their neighborhood, where they grew up, where their families live. Given the rate of change, many are worried that that reassurance will be increasingly difficult to find. In neighborhoods across the city -- and across the world, according to David Harvey¹⁷⁵ -- communities that have carved homes for themselves, emerging out of hardship through determination and collective action, find themselves unable to resist the power of capital. Those interests seem to be in the process of defining the future of Washington Heights and Inwood, just as they defined the futures of Harlem, Williamsburg, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and many other neighborhoods in the City. Property ownership provides the only truly protected right to place. Jumirna Alcober, a young political activist and

¹⁷³ New York YIMBY, “Inwood Development Projects.”

¹⁷⁴ Gillis and Mandell, “Inwood & Washington Heights Properties Primed to Appreciate on Rezoning, Waterfront Initiatives.”

¹⁷⁵ Harvey, “The Right to the City.”

Community Board member, describing the changes she sees coming to the neighborhood, says, “Some roots in the neighborhood are stronger than others. It’s called Little Dominican Republic but you can displace and evict the Dominicans -- they’re renters. They don’t have any power.” As I talked about the future of the neighborhood with my informants, the progression of Washington Heights and Inwood to something like a new Hudson Yards by 2050 felt both real and terrifying. The prospect of watching their neighborhood turn from an effervescence of origins, experiences, and priorities to a monoculture of wealthy white people who will turn inward and demand a pristine silence makes current residents shudder.

IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF PROPERTY AND WHAT WE VALUE

The image of Charlie Gomez’s shadowy figure, spreading a poison fog that sends people fleeing, feels impossible to resist. Kathy summarizes the concern: “who is going to stop the rent from going up every year?” Nearly everyone understood how limited the community’s ability to influence the course of changes to property value is, and the way that issues like this would require intervention at multiple scales. Locally, my informants imagined deeply committed, collective action designed to consolidate power locally. On the national scale, they imagined a reorientation of national priorities towards investment in public goods and public support. Internationally, they considered the ways in which disruptions elsewhere create changes in Washington Heights, as people fleeing hunger, war or other dangers consider Washington Heights a refuge.

Angela has a vision for a city and society that actively works to eliminate suffering. It’s a provocation: she doesn’t expect this vision to actually exist in 2050. She uses her provocation

to illustrate the future that would be possible if we were able to think differently about existing structures of power, and about fundamental concepts like private property and the way that the use of property as a financial asset upends the possibility for housing justice. She says, "think about it instead as a shepherding, like the way the Native Americans would think of housing. Are we shepherding this for our next generation? Rather than, 'I own this' we should say, 'I have access to this'". She's not alone in pushing against these fundamental constraints, although most people I spoke with didn't go this far. Others imagined fundamental changes in expectations for housing, in how we decide who to live with, and how much space should be private versus public. Informants imagined collective housing, multi-family arrangements, and shared amenities in public spaces to allow for room to shelter people. Others I spoke with were more cautious in their expressions of their future visions, but only because they were clear that that expansiveness requires deconstructing the existing systems we work within. Yvonne, when discussing her expectations for the ongoing need for food pantries and other emergency services, believes that there's no way to imagine a future without these services, "Because we live in a capitalistic society. Unless capitalism disappears -- and it ain't, okay, let's be real -- that would be a total dismantling of our capitalistic society. The dollar would have to disappear, for us to get to where everybody's perfect."

This winter, just as I began interviewing people for this project, a fire started by a space heater spread rapidly through a 19-story building in the Bronx, killing 19 and injuring 44 people.¹⁷⁶ An FDNY representative, Sandra Sanchez, spoke to the Community Board in their January meeting, soon after the fire occurred.¹⁷⁷ "The bad actor was a space heater," she said, and then

¹⁷⁶ Southall, Ashford, and Marcius, "19 Killed in New York City's Deadliest Fire in Decades."

¹⁷⁷ CB12M NYC, *CB12M General Meeting Jan. 2022*, sec. 40:00.

proceeded loudly and incongruously cheerfully, as if speaking to children, to offer up a set of tips about how to use space heaters safely: “never leave them unattended!” As she wrapped up her presentation, a board member stopped her to say, “The problem isn’t space heaters. The problem is cold apartments. There are circumstances that cause people to make these tragic decisions.” One board member responded to the tips from FDNY with all seriousness: she too had used her oven to heat her apartment, until she learned how dangerous it was. Poor building maintenance, poor care-taking of living environments, and the marginal, risky experiences they create are something this Community Board understands well, but the Bronx fire and its impact intensified their concerns.

Beyond the constant threat of eviction, even for those who have a place to live, the poor state of their apartments creates its own stresses. Génesis sees the effects of these stresses on their students, whose homes served as poor substitutes for classrooms during the pandemic. These apartments are often moldy, with unreliable heating and hot water, on top of being too small for a family. Even so, these students feel the stress their parents are under to hold on to their homes, stress intense enough to affect their ability to pay attention in class. Génesis says parents struggle with the disconnect, “I don’t want to move because this is the most affordable thing I can get, but at the same time, I’m just suffering in this home”.

The unsafe state of many apartments and the rumors of thousands of empty apartments being warehoused by landlords prompted several of my informants to argue against building new buildings. They asked, why not take care of what we already have? This question returns to the ethic of care that forms the basis for many of my informants' utopian visions. In a time of

“innovation” and constant demand for “the new”, focusing on maintenance requires a reassessment of values. Shannon Mattern, in an essay titled, “Maintenance and Care” quotes economist Larry Summers: “All of the incentives for all the actors are against maintenance”.¹⁷⁸ And yet, she explains, as the urgency of maintenance in a “broken world” increases, it becomes clear that caring for infrastructure, caring for the relationships between objects, tends to extend to relationships between people, and to relationships to power.¹⁷⁹ My informants’ have already begun to shift what they value, imagining a future of repair: repair of apartments, repair of injustices, repair of the fraying threads that lead towards Dystopia.

SMALL BUSINESSES

Questions of property value also influence the kinds of businesses and local entrepreneurship that prosper in the neighborhood. When imagining the future of small businesses, much of what people imagined was based in the past. Martin, whose parents and grandparents both owned stores in the neighborhood, explained the role of “mom and pop” stores. For him -- and for others I spoke with -- small businesses allow for intimacy. They allow for trusted relationships that build over time. Martin remembers people coming into his father’s store with a broken appliance they’d bought from him. His father would take a look, and tell the customer, “you don’t need a new one. This is fixable.” He’d then fix it and send the customer on their way - no charge. Martin remembers: “At eight years old, I said to him, how are we gonna make any money if you don't charge anything? And he said, ‘you know, there's no reason for me to charge’”. Martin laughs, “imagine having that kind of experience at a CVS.”

¹⁷⁸ Mattern, “Maintenance and Care.”

¹⁷⁹ Mattern.

David Harvey, in his exploration of utopias, identifies this nostalgic strain of utopian thinking, saying, “it has important consequences for how, if at all, such schemes get translated into material fact.”¹⁸⁰ Harvey also notes the nostalgic strain of utopia in Jane Jacobs' counter to the utopian visions of Le Corbusier and Robert Moses.¹⁸¹ For Jacobs, the value of mom-and-pop stores is well-understood. In *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, she describes a candy shop owner on her street who plays a similar role to the one Martin remembers his father playing:

“As Bernie always does because he sees the need; lent an umbrella to one customer and a dollar to another; took custody of two keys; took in some packages for people in the next building who were away; lectured two youngsters who asked for cigarettes; gave street directions; took custody of a watch to give the repair man across the street when he opened later....”¹⁸²

Jacobs' case for the intricate networks of neighborhood support systems, emergent but reinforcing and strengthening, serves as a reminder of the urgency of Utopian imagination. Sometimes these efforts can help us imagine new forms of relating to each other; sometimes they're a reminder of what we've lost or are on the edge of losing. Several of the people I talked with described with pleasure the current experience of this kind of layering of relationships in the neighborhood, which do still exist but are in peril. It's an experience people want to preserve and strengthen, expressing worry about the lines of empty storefronts slowly filling up with chain stores. Of course, Harvey reminds us, Jacobs' utopian “eyes on the street” imply their own forms of control and potential exclusions, as we've seen in the ways in which her work has been used to rationalize NIMBYism and reject any imaginative urbanism that edges

¹⁸⁰ Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 160.

¹⁸¹ Harvey, 164.

¹⁸² Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 61.

towards “visionary”.¹⁸³ It raises the question of how much of what people imagine for 2050 might generate new challenges of exclusion and calcification, as has happened elsewhere.

Génesis imagines a way through the risks that Harvey raises: collective investment. Financial power or the lack of it also defines our small business landscape now. One example of this kind of community-oriented enterprise already exists in the neighborhood, one that offers a glimmer of a path towards the Utopian ethic of care that many informants described. WordUp Community Bookshop represents a reinvention that treads a careful balance between the need to preserve small businesses and the need for care and attention to exclusionary dynamics. Founded by Veronica Liu, WordUp Community Bookshop serves as a community bookstore, event space, and all-purpose neighborhood resource. Veronica is a force in the neighborhood, so much so that Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer declared Feb 28th Veronica Liu Day, in honor of her contributions to the art and cultural life of the City. When she first moved to the neighborhood from Canada 19 years ago, she found an apartment on a “chaotic block, with constant surprise”. As a writer she was drawn to the chaos, delighted where others might have been frustrated. For her, life on her block was an introduction to a different, less tame existence -- a long way from Canada, and the beginning of her curiosity about the “huge range of people who were just coexisting.” She made friends with the people she met who had passed out in front of her apartment, and who ran the bike shop and the bodegas next door. She became part of the place, but carefully, observing and engaging without changing anything. She says, “I didn’t want to disturb anything, I just wanted to see what was up. Your relationship with a place can change if you’re just open to it.” Her attention to whether she was “an outsider or an organic part of what’s happening” made her watchful but also responsive; she worked to fill

¹⁸³ Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 164; Campanella, “Jane Jacobs and the Death and Life of American Planning.”

gaps she'd figured she could help with, like letting folks without a permanent address use her apartment to receive mail or running an extension cable to a local bike shop whose landlord had cut them off. Eventually, she established WordUp, which continues to fill gaps in the community beyond its original intention. She provides library services for several local schools; she welcomed Covid testing and outreach teams into her store when there was an early need for space; children from Kate Reuther's organization, Uptown Stories, celebrate the end of their semesters with public readings of their creative writing there. Veronica thinks about expanding to translation services, information access, and healthcare access, while continuing to be present and attentive to community needs, without wanting to impose her own vision or her own priorities. Her store is also a place where neighbors come to simply make things known, to report the small news of the neighborhood -- who got in trouble, what's happening on the block, to ask for help with translations, to get a "one-minute-workshop on self-publishing", to find a job. Veronica's approach is both old and new: she's selling books in a neighborhood with no other bookstores in a roughly 50-block radius, serving as a principal dancer in Jane Jacob's street ballet.¹⁸⁴ But WordUp is also a non-profit, a collective committed to community service. She didn't just happen to take up this role. Veronica is closely attentive to the inequalities that constrain the neighborhood, her role in reducing those inequalities, and how the needs of the community at large must drive the choices she makes as she runs her organization. Veronica's approach and commitment to running a non-profit collective rather than a for-profit corporation offers an illustration of the kinds of initiatives that many of the people I spoke with imagine, in their ideal future, proliferating across the neighborhood.

¹⁸⁴ Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 50.

7. MOBILITY AND PUBLIC SPACE

THE BUSWAY

In June of 2020, New York City Mayor Bill DeBlasio, touting the success of the conversion of heavily-trafficked 14th Street in downtown Manhattan into a car-free busway, announced a Better Buses Restart, which would create 9 new busway projects across New York City, focusing on vulnerable populations with particularly challenging bus routes.¹⁸⁵ The six bus lines that ran along 181st Street were notorious, even during the pandemic. Bus riders regularly had to wait for several buses to pass before one came along with enough space for them to board, crowding the sidewalks and blocking pedestrians trying to get by. Once onboard, passengers struggled to find a place to hold on as the bus lurched its way along 181st Street, averaging less than 4 miles per hour.¹⁸⁶ Before the Busway opened in April of 2021, I paced a Bx36 bus, beginning to walk east from Broadway just as it closed its doors. I arrived at the Amsterdam Avenue stop on foot more than 5 minutes ahead of the bus. 181st Street was often at a standstill, with buses struggling to make their way around double-parked cars and out-of-town drivers using the street to avoid traffic on the approach to the George Washington Bridge. A walk along 181st Street now is a much calmer affair. Although there are still cars parked along the busway, there is very little traffic. Buses swing along the street with intention, rather than simply inching along. The busway was intended to save bus riders time, but it has also made the air less polluted, made the sidewalks more passable, and reduced the noise of buses and

¹⁸⁵ The City of New York Department of Transportation, “Better Buses Restart – 181st Street Busway Pilot Manhattan Community Board 12 Transportation Committee.”

¹⁸⁶ The City of New York Department of Transportation.

trucks idling behind stopped cars. As a community member myself, I wholeheartedly approve of the changes.

On February 7th, planners from DOT reported on the effects of the busway after a year of operation to the Community Board's Traffic and Transportation Committee. DOT's Dustin Khuu and MTA's Joe Chiarmonte walked through a report on the Busway, talking about the rationale, the timeline, the outreach they've done, and ultimately, the results of the changes to the street. As expected, the speed of buses on 181st Street increased by ~10-30% depending on time of day, saving time for the 68,000 people who rely on those buses every day.¹⁸⁷ Traffic volumes on side streets around 181st Street actually decreased when compared to pre-pandemic level traffic rates. By these objective measures, the busway seems like a success. Committee members, however, seemed skeptical. Everyone on the committee seemed to have their own terrible story of traffic snarls. A local business owner talked about his customers from New Jersey who can't find parking nearby -- and who might not bother making the trip as a result. A visitor to the meeting complained about the quality of the statistical analysis, "why isn't the data normalized?", "This is all so hand-wavey". You could hear her hitting her table emphatically as she spoke. She was angry, exasperated: "people's lives are being impacted and you gave us something you probably put together in the hour before this meeting started."

A few committee members complained about the new automated enforcement of people forgetting about the restrictions or attempting to double-park. Maria Luna, a deeply respected community activist, was instrumental in bringing people together around issues of public safety

¹⁸⁷ CB12M NYC, *Traffic & Transportation February 2022 Committee Meeting*, 12.

as the neighborhood recovered from the dark years of the late 1980s.¹⁸⁸ In this meeting, she asked for a break in automated ticketing for people who violate the rules of the Busway, saying that it was too expensive for people in the neighborhood to have to conform to the new regulations. I found it strange that Maria Luna would use her platform to advocate for the rights of drivers to violate traffic rules. It seemed, at the very least, contrary to her commitment to public safety, given the risks that traffic generates in the neighborhood. When I spoke to Community Board members after the meeting, one said, “there’s a sense in these meetings that fighting for people in cars means fighting for the real people in the neighborhood.”

In December of 2021, NYC’s Department of Transportation released a new Streets Plan, the department’s vision for 2050. The plan, which builds on OneNYC 2050, a long-term strategic plan that lays out New York City’s intention “to confront our climate crisis, achieve equity and strengthen our democracy,...building a strong and fair city”.¹⁸⁹ The Streets Plan explicitly describes the process DOT has already begun to follow to reorient space on the street, taking space away from cars and distributing it to bikes, transit, and social interaction. The 181st Street Busway is an important example of the kind of tactics the Streets Plan anticipates rolling out during the next few years. Despite being part of New York City’s long-term strategic plan, the Busway discussion unearthed real emotion in the Community Board meeting. Changes to the street that prioritize public transit at the expense of cars -- a fundamental tenet of the Streets Plan -- when enacted in real life, rather than discussed in theory, create waves of discontent in these meetings. Although fewer than 18% of residents in Washington Heights have access to a car,¹⁹⁰ Committee Members argue against restrictions on drivers far more

¹⁸⁸ Snyder, *Crossing Broadway*, 175.

¹⁸⁹ New York City Office of Mayor, “#OneNYC.”

¹⁹⁰ NYC Economic Development Corporation, “New Yorkers and Their Cars.”

frequently than they argue for the rights of pedestrians, transit riders, or bikers, in my observation. No one in the meeting I observed spoke up on behalf of bus riders. Based on my conversations and observations, Community Board 12 members are far more likely to have cars than the general population of the neighborhood. By fighting for the rights of a small number of drivers – something that many Community Boards across the city do – over the rights of the majority of residents in the neighborhood, who are not drivers but pedestrians, bikers, or transit riders, Community Boards risk losing their credibility and their ability to influence transportation decision-making at all.¹⁹¹

However, these emotional connections to cars and parking aren't limited to Community Board meetings. Bruce Robertson, another Board Member and member of the Traffic & Transportation Committee took me on a walk through his part of the neighborhood to see where the DOT had begun establishing new "traffic easing" rules, designed to slow cars down and prevent accidents. Bruce said that one of his neighbors had been hit by a speeding car the year before, and showed me several intersections with dangerous histories of collisions and injury.

Regardless of the seemingly good sense of these changes, Bruce describes the outcry that he's been dealing with among some of his neighbors. One neighbor accosted Bruce's wife in the elevator, furious about Bruce's support for the changes. Despite the vehement response, Bruce takes it in stride - that's just how people deal with change. To me, this unpleasantness seems out of proportion to the changes the DOT made, which removed 3 or 4 parking spaces as a way to slow cars streaming through the neighborhood to avoid traffic on the Henry Hudson Parkway. The DOT made these interventions in response to immediate dangers to neighbors crossing these narrow streets, not in response to an abstract, distant possibility like

¹⁹¹ Meyer, "Community Boards."

climate change, and yet they still generate these intense encounters. These kinds of encounters are not limited to Washington Heights either. According to StreetsBlog, they're a frequent and – to transit activists, infuriating – aspect of many community discussions about redistributing space away from cars.¹⁹²

When talking with informants about their aspirations for the neighborhood in 2050 I asked, “will there still be cars in the neighborhood in 2050?” Several people shuddered at the thought that cars might disappear. Yvonne said, “you cannot rob us of *some* freedom, individual freedom”, with the “*some*” inflected as if to suggest that I had already taken so many others. Others suggested that we should build more municipal parking by 2050 to make parking easier. For these informants, we could maybe convert everyone to electric cars, but we can't get rid of them altogether. People described cars as “lifesaving”: for people who need them to get to an early-morning job at Hunt's Point Market that would be almost impossible on the subway; for people who fear taking the subway late at night; to get out of the city to visit family; to transport equipment. Cars, as Yvonne explained, represent freedom. Our need to mitigate CO₂ emissions requires a move away from the dominance of cars without creating hardship for people who depend on them now.¹⁹³

These challenges are central to the issue of “automobility” and the layers of complexity that car dependence creates. Sociologist John Urry introduced the concept: “automobility is a complex amalgam of interlocking machines, social practices and especially ways of inhabiting, dwelling within, a mobile, semi-privatized and hugely dangerous auto-mobile capsule.”¹⁹⁴ Urry describes

¹⁹² Colon, “BIKELASH.”

¹⁹³ Schwanen, “Achieving Just Transitions to Low-Carbon Urban Mobility.”

¹⁹⁴ Urry, “Inhabiting the Car.”

the “coercive flexibility” of cars, the way that they define our built environment and our social engagements in a way that makes them the only possible option. Urry and others have theorized that they have come to be seen in terms of individual freedom, people choosing their own path, their own time, their own destinations.¹⁹⁵ Cars have become a kind of common sense, seemingly inevitable and indispensable. Encroachment into their space, or worse, endorsement of alternative forms of mobility, becomes a transgression.¹⁹⁶ People value the flexibility they get from cars without understanding the underlying coercion -- why such flexibility is required in the first place. Constraints on cars become constraints on liberty and can generate intense reactions among people who feel their rights are being violated.

To make matters worse, cars make every other way of navigating the streets more difficult and dangerous, crowding them out and making them infeasible.¹⁹⁷ Traffic violence affects some groups more than others, with the most vulnerable among us, the very old and very young, people of color, and poor people, more likely to be killed in collisions.¹⁹⁸ Beyond the people killed directly each year by traffic violence, an even greater number die from health problems related to the air pollution cars generate.¹⁹⁹ Cars represent an unjust ecology, an entire system of physical, political, cultural, and economic conditions that must be grappled with as a *system*, in order for cities to fully decarbonize.²⁰⁰ Until transportation infrastructure systems prioritize transit over private cars, cars will almost always be more convenient, and not just convenient, but empowering.

¹⁹⁵ Urry.

¹⁹⁶ Walks, *Urban Political Economy and Ecology of Automobility*, 16.

¹⁹⁷ Walks, 6.

¹⁹⁸ Culver, “Death and the Car.”

¹⁹⁹ Mims, “More Americans Die from Car Pollution than Car Accidents.”

²⁰⁰ Walks, *Urban Political Economy and Ecology of Automobility*, 4.

Brian Larkin, in his review of anthropological literature focused on infrastructure, describes the way that infrastructure shapes modern society, serving as an evolutionary force, offering a sense of promise and mastery.²⁰¹ Larkin quotes Freud: “With every tool man is perfecting his own organs... Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic god.”²⁰² Freud says, “motor power places gigantic forces at [man’s] disposal, which like his muscles, he can employ in any direction; thanks to ships and aircraft neither water nor air can hinder his movements.”²⁰³ This is a city of space and distance, which our new, fossil-fueled powers allowed us to reconfigure and overcome with ease. These new powers came with layers of tension and threat, the most insidious being the CO₂ emissions that have accumulated over time. We prosthetic gods breathe a poison breath, one that could eventually cause mass extinction. But how can we stop breathing? Our prostheses have melded with our bodies so inextricably that most of us don’t even realize they’re not a natural part of who we are. Traffic deaths, called “accidents”, are naturalized violence, part of a system that supports dozens of different kinds of industries: car insurance, manufacturing of everything from seat belts to brake pads and rubber tires, and real estate owned by parking garages, so tightly intertwined as to be almost invisible.²⁰⁴

When the automobile was still new, artists understood and expressed its complex role; now that it has become mundane, the social significance has been eroded, leaving only the functional role.²⁰⁵ It began as “the triumphant culmination of a collective dream”, evolved into a “totem of cultural achievement” and now, at last, its costs have become too great to bear. It represents the gridlock we find ourselves in, unable to progress without radical reimagination of

²⁰¹ Larkin, “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure.”

²⁰² Larkin.

²⁰³ Freud, p 64.

²⁰⁴ Culver, “Death and the Car.”

²⁰⁵ Ryder, “The Motorcar and Desire.”

our cities and lives.²⁰⁶ The automobile, responsible for our present condition, is now seen as the only tool to contend with it. We've created a transportation monoculture and the process of reseeding our roads with different ways of getting around will create loss and hardship. We're all stuck in traffic.

BIKE STANDS

At a late lunch one day with Kathy and Domingo, partners and Community Board members, I asked about Citibike and bike lanes coming into the neighborhood. Domingo said loudly, "I hate fucking bike lanes."

Kathy laughed at him. "You have a bike!"

And he laughed back, "I know, I know but I still hate them. I hate the configuration they have now. I'm a driver and a biker. As a driver, I hate all the things that disrupt driving. You have to configure them properly. How do you configure bike lanes so they work?"

In 2018, the City installed painted bike lanes along Dyckman Avenue, a large commercial street that serves as a border between Washington Heights and Inwood. The bike lanes caused an outcry, requiring emergency meetings of the Community Board and intervention from elected officials. Neighbors and business owners objected vehemently, and the lanes were removed. Representative Adriano Espaillat (D-NY) took a picture of himself while parked in a bike lane on Dyckman, ostensibly highlighting the dangers to the public of the new bike lanes, and in the process, enraging bike and road safety activists who had been advocating for this change for over a decade.²⁰⁷ These activists hoped that the new bike lanes would allow Dyckman to serve

²⁰⁶ Ryder.

²⁰⁷ Aaron, "Adriano Espaillat Attacks Dyckman Bikeway From the Driver's Seat of His Car."

as a safe connector between the bikeways along the Hudson and the East River, while residents argued that their goal was a smooth passage through the neighborhood rather than engagement within it. Domingo described the dismay of business owners along Dyckman who were suddenly faced with a bike lane passing in front of their stores, without a way for them to park or get deliveries. Despite the outrage, the obstructions were fairly minor and most store owners simply parked in the bike lanes. Nonetheless, he's clearly furious about this, about the way the lanes felt imposed on the community, especially since they seemed like "infrastructure for white people."

This perception of bikes as signs of gentrification was fairly widespread among my informants. Angela, who spent months in the neighborhood talking with people about their concerns just as the new Citibike stands started appearing on streets and sidewalks said, "it represents an invasion. It tells us we are going to be pushed out of here." Yvonne agrees. She says that bikes, "are a huge sign of gentrification and it doesn't fit within the cultural view of those who live here." What's more, for Citibike, Johanna says, "there's this huge conglomerate [Citibank] that can be very predatory on communities like ours. Whenever I see a Citibike stand I think, 'there's someone making money out of it.'"

Kathy explained the concerns of many: "There was really a lack of information about the process. It was reductive. No one understood why bike lanes were important. What was the value to the community?" She went on to say that since she'd raised those objections in the Community Board meeting, she'd learned more about bike lanes and their context as a way to prevent "traffic violence", as a way of protecting delivery workers, and a way to improve air

quality. She explained that the outcry wasn't against bike lanes per se, but against the imposition of something new that required the community to adapt, without an effort to communicate the value of what was going on. She believes that if the bike lanes had been communicated with an environmental justice message or a safety message, they would have been received differently.

Kathy's thoughtful response mirrors research about "bikelash" done in 2018, studying outsized, emotional reactions to bike infrastructure, and how communities at risk of displacement can aggressively reject biking infrastructure. "Opposition to gentrification amongst poorer, working-class and ethnically diverse neighborhoods has been identified as an important component of conflicts over bike lanes in cities such as Portland, Chicago, Washington, New York, and London."²⁰⁸ The authors recommend the exact engagement that Kathy describes: a focus on "bike justice" and environmental justice concerns, and active outreach to community members. NYC's current installation of bike infrastructure follows a "managerial reform" to mobility options, one that relies on technocratic decision-making that lacks consideration of specific needs of communities, particularly those most marginalized already.²⁰⁹

As I talked with these informants about their aspirations for Washington Heights in 2050, we discussed the question of where bikes might fit. In this ideal future, where structural racism and inequality have been relieved, where shifts in power have already happened, then, Domingo says, "you can have nice bike lanes, [because then] everything will be balanced." Angela agrees. She says, at that point, "we have all sorts of bikes, tandem bikes, three-wheelers,

²⁰⁸ Wild et al., "Beyond 'Bikelash.'"

²⁰⁹ Schwanen, "Achieving Just Transitions to Low-Carbon Urban Mobility."

housing is set up so you can roll up with your bike.” Once the fear of displacement goes away, a bike becomes just a bike. When the fear is gone, Angela says, “I don’t think they’re really going to care about bikes.” In a future where we’ve managed to erase inequality and to make life feel like less of a struggle, according to Johanna, people will have time to explore new things like Citibikes, and since they’re not on the lookout for signs of risk, the arrival of new mobility options on the streets might feel more like an amenity than an invasion. In the meantime, bikes relieve some forms of injustice while potentially creating others. The futures that my informants imagine illustrate that decarbonization requires careful development of capabilities for these new kinds of mobility options, while also effectively dismantling existing structures of marginalization and exclusion.²¹⁰

CLEAN AIR, GREEN CORRIDORS

In 2019, High School students at Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School (WHEELS) began a course section on Environmental Justice. That course led them, with their instructors, to evaluate the street in front of their school.²¹¹ The students conducted surveys with residents and evaluated the state of the neighborhood's trees and empty tree wells. They noted the litter and the drug paraphernalia surrounding the school, and with help from researchers and scientists, measured air quality and the urban heat index. 182nd Street hosts 6 different schools along the 4 blocks from Broadway to Amsterdam. It’s also home to a parking lot, a long-abandoned building, a few brownstones, and a block where officers from NYC’s 34th Precinct park their cars, rear wheels up on the sidewalk. For the past few summers

²¹⁰ Schwanen.

²¹¹ In 2020 I worked with WHEELS students as part of a Resilient Urban Systems class to help develop a plan for their “clean air green corridor.” My encounters with them occurred both as part of my class work and as part of my own interest in supporting their efforts.

students have worked with Columbia's Center for Resilient Cities and Landscapes and graduate students from Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory to evaluate the impacts of the lack of greenery on their street, learning that on a sunny summer day, the area around WHEELS Academy is almost 10 degrees hotter than other parts of the same neighborhood. To address these challenges, the students proposed the Clean Air Green Corridor, a closed, greenery-filled street that runs along 182nd Street from Amsterdam to Broadway. Génesis Abreu, my informant and Environmental Justice Organizer, joined WHEELS to work with students to turn the Clean Air Green Corridor into a reality. Many of the students who came up with the idea originally have since graduated and moved on to college. They've been replaced by three successive senior classes that are now dedicating their final projects, and a significant amount of their free time, to fighting for their Clean Air Green Corridor.

Of all the proposed changes to the streets of Washington Heights, the Clean Air Green Corridor is both most explicitly connected to questions of environmental and climate justice, and is also the only one not being brought into the neighborhood by a City agency. This is a grassroots movement, led by the students, to begin to repair the injustices that they live with every day. Génesis' perspective leading this small movement -- one street in one neighborhood -- nonetheless feels expansive. The students they work with bring creativity but also difficulty -- they watch students' parents struggle to pay rent or work through illness, and in some cases, struggle to buy food, and with Génesis' guidance, students integrate their personal experiences into the larger questions their project raises: why is it ok that 100 million cars a year pass within a few dozen feet of their school? Why is it ok that they live in unhealthy apartments, that their air is harder to breathe, that their part of the neighborhood is hotter? After several years of

advocating for this project, students have also started asking, why does it take so long to close this street and plant a few trees? As Covid took hold, Génesis said, “it allowed people to sit back and think about the future and what it would be”, allowing them to “see beyond where we are now”.

As I talked with my informants for this project about their visions for the future, many of them envisioned streetscapes like the Clean Air Green Corridor, even though only a few of them discussed climate change or environmental justice explicitly. Génesis and others, in this ideal 2050, think about infrastructure differently. Streetscapes have been transformed: the neighborhood has replaced cars and parking with street architecture that manages storm run-off and supports robust garden ecosystems, including dense tree canopies, while also creating beautiful outdoor meeting spaces, creative spaces, places to work out, and room for street vendors and small businesses. When the community makes changes to the neighborhood in 2050, they expect those changes to be generative, to serve multiple purposes: they’re functional, recreational, health-enhancing and community building. On the streets, trees and green spaces offer shade, but more than that, they’ve created systems that work to restore soils, creating living streetscapes that connect to a larger urban ecosystem.

8. CONCLUSION

As we face, to use Bruno Latour's phrase, a "New Climatic Regime"²¹² exploring the possibility of different kinds of human societies becomes urgent. Our future will be very different from our past, as our world emerges from a passive, stable Holocene into an unpredictable, almost certainly more dangerous Anthropocene. We will have to adapt, to change, to reimagine society to serve different goals.²¹³ This is a task we will all have to take on in some way. I began by looking around me, at my own home and neighborhood. Amid the pain and loss of Covid, the layered instabilities of poverty, political unrest, and climate uncertainty, what kind of stories can my community tell about the worlds that might be possible to create together?

The people I spoke with imagined sweeping, generative new ways of being in the world and being together, from radical approaches to education; to ensuring everyone has a safe place to live; to thinking of our communities as ecosystems, where complex biodiversity ensures healthy soil and productive growth, both literally and metaphorically. The early seeds of some of these imagined futures exist today, in the potential for restorative justice with cannabis reform, in WHEELS Academy's Clean Air Green Corridor, in WordUp Community Bookshop's attentive care and commitment to community service. These are not the only seeds. Many of the people I've spoken with are working in their own focused way on dismantling some part of the pervasive structures of inequality that constrain our future. If all these seeds proliferate, imagine what Washington Heights in 2050 will be like.

²¹² Latour, *Down to Earth*, 18.

²¹³ Levitas, "Where There Is No Vision, the People Perish."

We began with hope. Hope “opens the future broadly before us.”²¹⁴ It helps us reconcile ourselves to the reality that although we cannot keep going on the way we have, there are other paths to explore. Rebecca Solnit says: “Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope.”²¹⁵ David Graeber and David Wengrow’s recent book *The Dawn of Everything*, builds on recent anthropological and historical research to show us that early human societies were much richer, more imaginative, and more creative than our current narratives would suggest.²¹⁶ Ursula Le Guin, who anticipated Graeber and Wengrow’s research in her novels and stories, illustrated different possible paths human societies might take. She demonstrated through her writing the possibilities for human societies where “no one must choose between happiness and freedom”.²¹⁷ For her, the exploration of these different possibilities was an essential form of resistance. She said, “To me the important thing is not to offer any specific hope of betterment but, by offering an imagined but persuasive alternative reality, to dislodge my mind, and so the reader’s mind, from the lazy, timorous habit of thinking that the way we live now is the only way people can live. It is that inertia that allows the institutions of injustice to continue unquestioned.”²¹⁸

Although they might agree in theory with many of the elements of each other's individual visions of the future, my informants also struggle with painful histories and painful current realities that can weigh down the potential for change. In a present still inescapably linked to those painful histories, a bike isn't just a bike. It's a portent of dispossession and a sign of

²¹⁴ Crapanzano, *Imaginative Horizons*, 103.

²¹⁵ Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, 4.

²¹⁶ Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*.

²¹⁷ Le Guin, “A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be,” 722.

²¹⁸ Le Guin, *The Wave in the Mind*, 218.

abandonment by elected officials. Without repairing those past harms and ensuring trust in a future where they won't return, even small changes may remain mired in destructive symbolism and resistance. N.K. Jemisin, in her short story about a city where inequality has been eradicated, illustrates the transformation that might be possible:

“And yet you will puzzle over the Um-Helatians’ choice to retain descriptive terms for themselves like kinky-haired or fat or deaf. But these are just words, friend, don’t you see? Without the attached contempt, such terms have no more meaning than if horses could proudly introduce themselves as palomino or miniature or hairy-footed. Difference was never the problem in and of itself—and Um-Helatians still have differences with each other, of opinion and otherwise.”²¹⁹

Without the attached threats, bikes can just be bikes. Without the risk of displacement, perhaps places become more amenable to experimentation. In Jemisin’s imagined city, realigning structures of power allows for explosions of creativity, of play, of merriment. It’s the jolliness of the Community Board discussion about licensing cannabis businesses, rather than the teeth-gnashing about the 181st Street Busway.

Relief and repair of inequality requires time and attention at many different scales, as my informants realize. There’s very little that is actually under the community’s control. The community cannot, on their own, end property speculation, the proliferation of vacant storefronts, poorly maintained apartments, the potential for violence, pollution from I-95 or any number of other challenges they raised. However, they each independently imagined the traces of a new kind of society in which these different challenges are lifted, a society based in “an

²¹⁹ Jemisin, “The Ones Who Stay and Fight.”

ethos of maintenance and care”²²⁰. This ethos requires Ursula Le Guin’s porcupine stance: moving backward, looking forward. To repair and maintain, one must first understand what’s broken, how it broke, how to fix it, and how to ensure that those fixes will hold, even as time passes. This paper is about time, about memories of a dark time thirty years ago, about a dark present, and about the hope that thirty years from now we will have repaired the traces of that darkness and begun to work together to survive what’s next.

²²⁰ Mattern, “Maintenance and Care.”

APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

In order to get a sense of what people hope, fear and expect, I planned a hybridized ethnographic approach, building on Textor's Ethnographic Futures methodology as extended by Sjöberg, Candy, and Kornet, and aligned with Ruth Levitas and Fredric Jameson's perspectives on "Utopia as Method". I worked with my informants to create a cycle of engagement, to express their visions for the future in their own words -- a sort of stream of consciousness -- that I used to create a structured narrative. Informants could respond, correct my understanding of their perspective, and consider the implications of the future they imagined. By making these futures more tangible and specific, I hoped to work with them to refine or expand on their initial perspectives. This refinement did not occur to the extent that I was expecting, so in future phases of the research, I hope to connect informants with each other to compare narratives, consider common and diverging elements, to work collaboratively to generate a combined narrative of the hopes and fears of the community as a whole.

In collecting data, I attempted to follow a series of 3 steps:

1. Introductory discussion: These initial conversations served as a window into general issues and concerns that members within the community are struggling with, that might influence their consideration and expressions of their images of the future. These conversations also helped me to prepare for the next step, by providing context and suggestions for further questioning. These interviews were semi-structured to ensure some common threads of conversation but allowed for exploration of different priorities and perspectives. Main topics of discussion included:
 - a. Demographic background
 - b. Career background: what prompted the informant to choose their current career path? How did they come to play a public service or activist role?
 - c. Neighborhood background: Why Washington Heights? How did they find the neighborhood and why have they committed their time and energies to it?
 - d. Neighborhood challenges: what are the primary challenges that the community faces from the informants' perspective? Is this something they have a sense of control over, or that they are fighting for or against?
 - e. Sense of the future of Washington Heights: how do they think about the future of the neighborhood? What are the main threads of possibility from their perspective? Here I will probe on the news from the 2020 census about the population decline, since it is a topic of conversation and concern.

- f. General discussion of future orientation: is future orientation something you feel is important in your role? If so, how do you work with it/use it? If not, why not
2. Ethnographic Futures Interview: This second interview attempted to follow the structure of an EFR interview, but allowed for modifications and flexibility, given differences in roles, interests and levels of comfort with future orientation. The overall framework of the interview followed these steps:
- a. Spectrum of futures: I asked informants to consider a spectrum of possible futures for Washington Heights in 2050, from least to most desirable according to their own set of values.
 - b. Optimistic future: From that spectrum I asked informants to imagine an ideal future for Washington Heights in 2050. Using probes to encourage them to consider issues like: housing, transportation, streetscape, social experience of the neighborhood, infrastructure and energy and governance and power structures, we explored the optimistic possibilities for Washington Heights.
 - c. Pessimistic future: Using the same framing and probing questions asked informants to imagine a future towards the negative end of the spectrum.
 - d. Expected future: building on the previous two imagined futures, I asked informants to describe the future they consider most likely, delving into detail about the future itself (following the same set of probes described above) as well as their reasoning for why this future seems most likely to them.
3. Narrative Revision: For about half of my informants -- those with whom I'd been able to spend the most time -- I created a structured, condensed, narrative version of the futures they described. I shared the narrative I'd created with each informant via email, and asked them to review to ensure that I had captured our conversation accurately. I also shared an audio transcript of the conversation with them so that they could revisit the conversation if that felt appropriate. I was surprised to find that informants scanned the narrative and responded that they'd agreed with it, but didn't feel the need to engage more deeply. Future research of this type will require some experimenting to elicit the kinds of collaborative responses that I was hoping for.

Beyond my in-person conversations with informants, I observed many hours of Community Board meetings, considering the kinds of issues the board deals with, the different ways they respond to issues, to city officials and to each other. Many of these observations provided greater context for interviews, and many interviews referred directly to events that occurred during Community Board meetings, providing context for what I was hearing in interviews. I also spent time reviewing discussions about the neighborhood on Instagram, Facebook and Nextdoor, which allowed me to gauge broader perspectives on issues and challenges my informants brought up with me.

APPENDIX B. LIST OF INFORMANTS

Name	Title and Organization
Dr. Robert Fullilove	Professor and associate dean at Columbia University MSPH
Dr. Robert Snyder	Professor, Journalism and American Studies, Rutgers University
James Berlin	Community Board Member, Retired school teacher
Yvonne Stennett	Executive Director, Community League of the Heights
Johanna Garcia	Chief of Staff, NY State Senator Robert Jackson
Veronica Santiago Liu	Founder and Executive Director, WordUp Community Bookshop
Katherine Diaz	Community Board member, political organizer
Jumirna Alcobar	Community Board member, political organizer
Martin Englisher	CEO, YM&YWHA of Washington Heights & Inwood
Bruce Robertson	Community Board Member, Real Estate Broker
Coach Dave Crenshaw	Founder, President, Head Coach, Team Dreamers NYC
Debby Nabavian	Community Board member, Small Business Advisor, Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D, NY)
Génesis Abreu	Youth Environmental Leadership Program Manager, WHEELS Academy
Angela Fernandez	Former City Council Candidate, Immigration Attorney
Domingo Estevez	Community Board Member, Founder and Executive Director, Uplift NYC
Reverend John Flack	Senior Pastor at Our Savior's Atonement Lutheran Church
Kate Reuther	Founder and Executive Director, Uptown Stories

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