

East ‘Spanish’ Harlem, Chinatown, Hell’s Kitchen South – Throwing a Wrench in the Gentrification Wheel of Manhattan.

In the spring of 1995, faced by a \$3.1 billion budget deficit, Mayor Rudy Guiliani voiced explicitly a long intend of service and budget cuts. By cutting services, the mayor told a small group of newspaper editors, he hoped to encourage the poorest of the Manhattan’s population, those most dependent on public services, to move out of the city. Shrinkage of the poor population would be a “good thing” for the city, he suggested. “That’s not an unspoken part of our strategy,” he added. “That is our strategy” (Smith 1996).

Gentrification, as agreed by both dictionaries and theorists, is always associated with driving out the poorer. A popular description of the process of gentrification is the one of devalorization of urban areas through disinvestment, and the resulting opportunity of profitable reinvestment that is thereby created. An indicator for gentrifiable areas is the specific condition of “rent gap” -- the disparity between the capitalized and potential ground rent under the present land uses (Smith 1986). The typical actors are young, usually professional, middle-class people who have changed their lifestyles and consumption patterns. Broader theories of gentrification include also the producers of the process – builders, developers, landlords, mortgage lenders, and real estate agents. The local government often plays an active and direct role in the process. It stands to benefit directly from the dislocation of lower-class groups which burden it through social programs, and from their replacement by middle-class consumers whose income will

circulate in the local economy and whose investments will enhance the tax base (Beauregard, 1986).

In Manhattan, Mayor Giuliani made gentrification a city-wide policy. Since 1980, gentrification shows up strongly in all census tract data. Geographically, gentrification has spread throughout the island: Tribeca, Soho, Lower East Side, Greenwich Village, Chelsea, Clinton, Upper West Side, and Yorkville all experienced considerable rehabilitation of old building stock (Figure 1). It is against this background of extensive rehabilitation, rapidly rising housing cost and rent levels, and an extremely low city-wide vacancy rate of about 3 percent that the gentrification of the last frontiers in Manhattan came under discussion by residents, planners, and city agencies.

This paper examines three neighborhoods in New York City that have been target of gentrification: East 'Spanish' Harlem, Chinatown, and Hell's Kitchen South. The three areas are very different from each other. East 'Spanish' Harlem could be described as a racial ghetto, Chinatown as an ethnic enclave, and Hell's Kitchen South, formally an immigrant enclave, as a simply dilapidated area. All three of them represent desirable locations against the extreme shortage of housing and office space in Manhattan. They are bordered or surrounded by areas that were formally gentrified and under constant pressure to continue the same trend (Figure 1). Tested against the theories of gentrification (Smith 1996, Beauregard 1986), all three areas appear to be top candidates. The three neighborhoods are deteriorated, suffering continuous disinvestment, and occupied by lower- and moderate-income households. Their capitalized ground rent is

significantly bellow their potential ground rent, generating, therefor, a substantial ‘rent gap.’ All three of them promise considerable economic opportunity for developers and an income increase for the city.

East ‘Spanish’ Harlem, Chinatown, and Hell’s Kitchen South, then, located close to the highest rent districts in the world, are highly susceptible to gentrification. All three of them, on the other hand, represent a challenging obstacle for the gentrification process in New York City. The purpose of this paper is to offer case studies of these highly contested urban areas and cast more light on the reasons that made them a difficult target for gentrification. Each section will analyze the three neighborhoods based on location, population, ethnicity, class, income, community, conditions of the housing stock, ownership, and the level of city involvement. While drawing similarities between the three neighborhoods it’s not a formal goal of this paper, common factors that played role against gentrification will be identified. Based on the belief that the gentrification of East ‘Spanish’ Harlem, Chinatown, and Hell’s Kitchen South would be an event of some significance in Manhattan, the paper also seeks to document the neighborhoods in a early stage of the process, providing a baseline against future trends.

Most researchers have tended to study neighborhoods only after gentrification is an accomplished fact. The gentrified individuals are traditionally perceived as economically and politically powerless relative to the gentrifiers (Beauregard, 1993). This paper intends to test this belief. All three neighborhoods have historically faced economical, social, political, and physical segregation from Manhattan. On the other hand, the forces

that caused this segregation created neighborhoods with cohesive social and political identity. More importantly, they possess another power overlooked by many researchers – an ethnic cohesiveness. East ‘Spanish’ Harlem and Chinatown are virtually ethnically uniform. The population of Hell’s Kitchen South, although not as uniform as the other two, is made out of 62 percent non-white (predominately black and Latino). Is it their ethnicity that enabled these neighborhoods to throw a wrench in the gentrification wheel of Manhattan? Finally, the potential effect that the gentrification process will have on these ethnically cohesive, working-class residents will be perhaps more visible than in many other neighborhoods, and this is also a reason for this study.

East ‘Spanish’ Harlem

East ‘Spanish’ Harlem stretches for more than two miles north of Ninety-Sixth Street on the east side of Manhattan. East 96th Street marks the border of the Upper East Side, where the ‘golden zip code’ crawled north and swallowed Yorkville. During the late 70s and early 80s, some new construction and renovation began right above 96th Street. But the hearth of East Harlem is in desperate condition. The question remains – is the community going to pull together strength and resources to rehabilitate the neighborhood or the gentrification process will continue its trend and the ‘golden zip code’ will keep expanding.

The comparison of demographic data between East Harlem, the Borough, and New York City reveal telling differences. In all socioeconomic factors, including unemployment, labor force participation and income, East Harlem lags behind both the Borough and the

city. Many workers lack the skill necessary for jobs in the service industry. Moreover, where entry-level jobs in the service sector of the economy are available, they tend to be comparatively lower paying and offer fewer opportunities for advancement than blue color jobs, especially for minorities.

East Harlem reached its historic population high of 210,000 in 1950. Since then, the population began a steady, and sometimes precipitous decline. Today, its population is 110,508. As Figure 2 indicates, the rate of population decreased dramatically during 1980-1990 as compared to previous decades. In keeping with the historic of succession and dispersal that has characterized the growth of East Harlem, a dramatic shift has occurred in ethnic composition between 1970 and 1990. As Figure 3 shows, the population was roughly balanced in 1970 between three ethnic groups: whites, blacks, and Latinos. By 1990, Latinos, emerged as the predominant population with 53 percent, while blacks grew to 39 percent. US Census tract data reveals population concentration within the district. Figure 4 shows that the northern portion of East Harlem (above 125th Street) has a predominantly black population, while the southern portion, known as El Barrio, has a predominantly Latino population, many of them classified as black Latino. The white population is largely located in the southwest corner of the community district near 96th Street and Central Park. Immigration data shows that the number of foreign-born residents increased from 8.6 percent in 1980 to 11.1 percent in 1990. There is one notable change in the foreign born population: in 1980, the majority of those foreign born were US citizens (61 percent), but in 1990 the majority of those foreign born (62 percent) were not. It is also estimated that almost one-fourth of the foreign born are undocumented

aliens. The income per capita of East Harlem increased from \$6,936 in 1980 to \$8,888 in 1990. The median household income increased from \$12,235 in 1980 to \$14,882 in 1990. Despite of the increase of 22 percent, East Harlem’s median income is lower than 50 percent of the median income of the Metropolitan area. The unemployment rate for the district is 16 percent, twice the rate of Manhattan of 8 percent (www.east-harlem.com).

Figure 2.

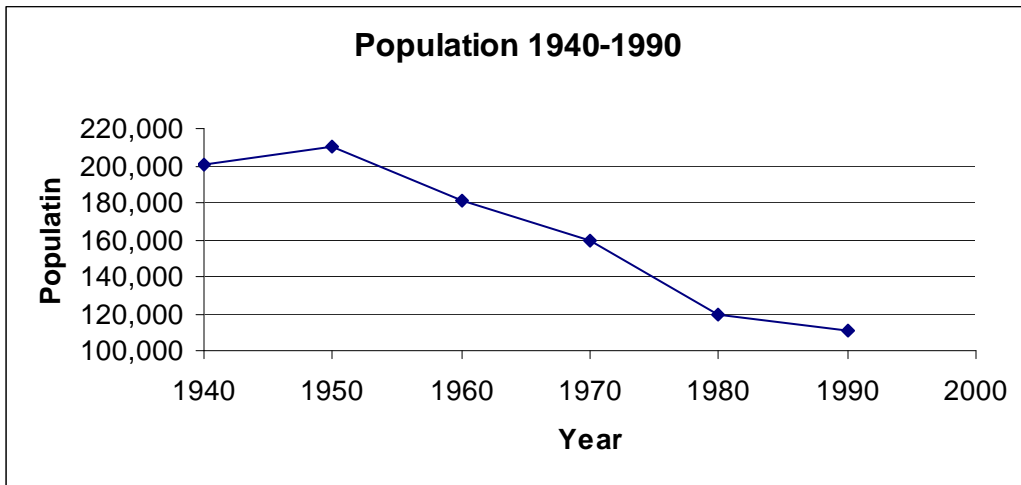
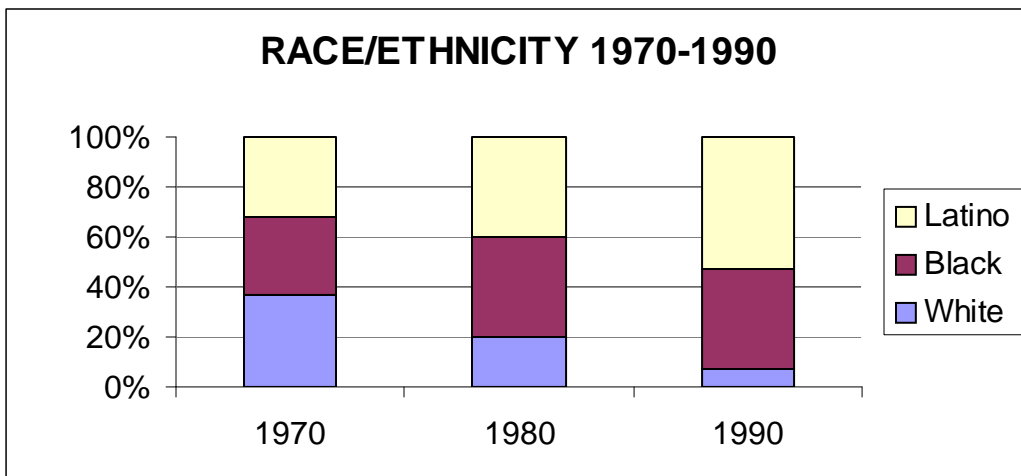


Figure 3.



The statistical picture clearly reaffirms the popular perception of East Harlem of predominantly poor, working class and black Hispanic. East Harlem has a very small

middle class and it is marked by disproportionately low percentage of collage graduates. Median rents are 25 percent lower than the Manhattan average, and 62 percent of the housing units are publicly owned, operated or assisted. 19 percent of the housing units were abandoned, housing conditions are bad and the private housing market has historically been very soft. The contrast with Manhattan could hardly be more stark.

East Harlem is comprised of brownstones and walk-ups, commercial areas, high-rise housing complexes, large institutions and 'super block's developments (Figure 4). In fact, East Harlem has the highest concentration of public housing development in New York City. These developments are structures surrounded by open green areas, often on 'super blocks' (blocks that were merged with other blocks, the roadway eliminated). These tower-in-the-park super block developments also tend to discourage the pedestrian street activity because they interrupt the ground floor retail continuity. Although the public housing complexes may have open spaces and other amenities, these assets were sometimes poorly designed. The Metro North Viaduct, beginning right after 96th Street, runs the whole length of the district along Park Avenue and divides the district into two parts. The pedestrian underpasses of the viaduct are narrow and dark. The crosswalks leading to the underpasses are poorly marked and often considered dangerous areas.

Homeowners are few. In contrast to the eleven percent in Manhattan and 22 percent in New York City, only four percent of East Harlem residents own their housing. One-third of the population spends over 45 percent of its household income on rent. This places East Harlem second for the highest rent to income ratio in Manhattan. The average age

for all housing structures is 50 years or older. In 1990, 14 percent of the housing stock was rated poor and more than 12 percent of the building had five or more structural problems. While East Harlem has a high vacancy rate (19 percent, counting unrentable apartments sealed up), the occupied units tend to be overcrowded. The number of persons per housing unit increased to 2.61 in 1990 in comparison to 1.55 for Manhattan (www.east-harlem.com).

Historically, very little rehabilitation took place, although significant acres of land were set aside in the 1960s for urban renewal areas. While the concept accomplished something in the other parts of the City, the low market estimates and the lack of bank participation kept investors from rebuilding on these urban renewal blocks (Smith, 1986). The urban renewal areas were cleared, removing factories, stores, churches, and social clubs, with a disastrous economic and employment impact on East Harlem. What resulted in these urban renewal areas were weed-strewn blocks 80,000 square feet (or two acres) of vacant land for over thirty years.

With all that said, East Harlem is much more than an area waiting to be gentrified. There is also East Harlem the ghetto, the everyday home for more than 100,000 people, predominantly poor, working class, Latino and black. East Harlem is also a community, a refuge from racism, starved for services. There is also East Harlem the landscape of physical dilapidation, landlord criminality, social deprivation, street crime, police brutality, drugs.

Recent collaboration between the City and the local community organizations lead to utilization of Federal programs such as Section Eight, alternative management programs, low income housing tax credit, and the federal senior housing. Since 1990, the number of rehabilitated units each by the community-based organizations has increased markedly. New bold development by the East Harlem Renewal Agency, North General Hospital, New York City Housing Partnership and NYCHA's co-op housing are expanding the ownership numbers. More homes, condominiums, and cooperatives are in the pipeline. Without private rehabilitation and redevelopment, however, majority of the neighborhood's housing stock will remain severely dilapidated. As a result, a large number of East Harlem Residents will ultimately be displaced and will not benefit from the better and more expensive housing.

The constrains on gentrification in East Harlem are considerable. The towers-in-the-park, situated on super-blocks, are difficult and costly to rehabilitate. They also represent the least desirable housing stock and, as NYC Department of Health reports, many of the areas are polluted, often with human waste. The brown stones, although much more desirable, represent yet another issue. One big problem, presented to the real estate brokers, is their growing realization that a major portion of the homes on the market are deeply troubled buildings. Not only are they in serious disrepair – many needing costly renovations – but they are caught up in financial and legal limbo (Pristin, 2000). Those buildings are focus of federal and state inquiries into possible abuses of federal programs intended to encourage homeownership in low-income neighborhoods. Alternatively, the City, as a major land owner, could play a major role in discouraging gentrification. The

City's major redevelopment of vacant land and buildings for mixed income and uses could halt significant investment in private rehabilitation. There is little hope in the current administration but maybe the new one will bring a change.

Another determinant in the future gentrification in East Harlem is the level of opposition within the community. It is not easy to display 100,000 poor, working-class, black Hispanic people with strong cultural roots and considerable political power. The blackness and the perceived danger of the neighborhood used to keep the white gentrifiers away. This is hardly the case anymore. The current trendiness of black culture and the quest for adventure made number of whites to become interested and intrigued by East Harlem. It is still not inevitable that East Harlem will become a majority white, middle and upper class neighborhood. With the extreme shortage of housing in Manhattan, however, its future will depend on the City's policy toward the area and the effectiveness of the political opposition of the community.

Note: While many of the issues discussed here apply to Harlem as a whole, East Harlem was carved out as an area less talked about but under increasing pressure of gentrification. The neighborhood also has distinctive physical and ethnic characteristics that separate it from the rest of Harlem: The highest concentration of public housing in NYC, tower-in-the-park developments placed on the super-block, large institutions, and ethnic identity based on the Hispanic heritage and culture.

Chinatown

Jammed vigorously into the southern pocket of Manhattan's Lower East Side, Chinatown was left alone for almost 100 years. Historically, Chinatown has been inscribed as an overcrowded, dilapidated place, plagued with social wretchedness and vice; an immigrant enclave crowded with unassimilated newcomers that live in separation from the American mainstream. In the public imagination, however, Chinatown is perceived as an exotic foreign enclave, Mecca of culinary experience, and a place for shopping in the low-cost pedestrian bazaar of street hawkers and imported goods stores. Recent campaign in New York Times heightened the vice and crime views of Chinatown with lurid exposes on prison-like brothels, barrack-like sweatshops and stories of violent killing by international smuggling rings (Lin, 1998). These stories, together with the poor sanitary conditions of many buildings and streets, make even the most adventurous gentrifiers think twice. Commercial real estate, however, is very high in demand and with the shrinking garment industry, many design concerns and other businesses are ready to pay higher rent for the loft spaces that become open in buildings south of East Houston Street and North of Canal Street. "We are getting computer companies, sound production and film studios, architects and photographers, moving east from SoHo and going south from the East Village," said Bill Lam, Chinese-American and president of Longines Realty on Grand Street, a brokerage company that manages about 400,000 square feet of space in 10 buildings, mainly in Chinatown (Oster, 1998). Accordingly, more buildings are in the process of transition from manufacturing to office uses as leases turn over. As the place becomes cleaner and safer, the designer and computer professionals will start looking for place to live nearby.

Census tract data reports 34,000 Asian-Americans and recent Asian immigrants that live in the neighborhood. Some unofficial sources believe that this number is much higher because of the low participation in the Census and also the large number of undocumented aliens. Chinatown was historically composed of lower-class and mercantile immigrants from China's Guangdong Province who spoke Cantonese dialect. Since the liberalization of immigration policy in 1965, however, Chinatown has absorbed a more diverse array of immigrants from both lower- and upper-class origins from Hong-Kong, Taiwan, and China's Fujian Province. Mandarin, Taiwanese, and Fuzhouese have been added to the repertoire of Chinese dialect used in the enclave. The affluent investors who are agents of capital flow into Chinatown mainly form Hong Kong and Taiwan. Fujianese, the newest arrivals to Chinatown, are mostly poorer immigrants (Foner, 1987). Recent middle and upper class immigrants rarely settle in Chinatown in Manhattan – they moved directly to the suburbs. The enclave is overcrowded with poor, working class immigrants. The median household income is \$17,443 compared to \$32,262 for Manhattan. 21.6 percent of all the families in Chinatown live below poverty level. Approximately 80 percent of Chinatown residents inhabit private tenement housing, with public housing and private middle-income housing servicing the remainder. Constructed quickly to house influxes of working class immigrants, the tenement housing has steadily deteriorated over the past century to deplorable conditions with rampant building code violations in the contemporary era. Some tenements are still cold water flats, and some units do not have private kitchens or bathrooms. As Figure 5 shows, units without plumbing facilities comprises 3.8 percent of Chinatown households in 1990. Chinatown apartments are also overcrowded, with a median of 2.99 persons per unit, nearly twice as

high as the median of 1.55 persons per unit among all households in Manhattan. When overcrowding is defined in persons per room, 49 percent of Chinatown households squeeze in more than 1 person per room, as opposed to just 10 percent of Manhattan households in general (Kwong, 1996).

Figure 5.

Housing Conditions in Chinatown and Manhattan, 1990

Housing Condition Indicator	Chinatown	Manhattan
Occupied Units Lacking Complete Plumbing	3.8%	1.9%
Median Persons per Unit	2.99	1.55
Persons per Room		
1.00 or less	51%	90%
1.01 to 1.50	14%	5%
1.50 or more	35%	5%

Source: U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1990.

New York City rent control regulations keep average monthly rent payments among Chinatown households. Vacancy rate of less than 2 percent have allowed some tenements rent to rise somewhat, but dramatic rent increase may occur only when a whole building is vacated and renovated or demolished to make way for new construction. The mismatch between supply and demand for affordable housing in Chinatown has also led to some illegal conversion of commercial and manufacturing space to residential units. Severe overcrowding occurs in these dormitory-style Chinatown apartments, where bunk beds allow up to twenty tenants to be squeezed in one room. Tenants even share the same bed, with one worker employed during the day, the other at night. Illegal residential

conversion has even occurred in building basements with no heat, hot water, or fire exit. In one of these basement apartments, fire investigators found that an area that previously served as a giant freezer compartment was being used for living quarters. Illegal immigrants, afraid to seek housing in the legitimate market, are typically found in these most deplorable living situations.

The Department of City Planning reports that landlords with Chinese surnames own 75 percent of tenement property in Chinatown. Chinese ownership continues to increase at a dramatic pace: sales data from 1995 indicates that 88 percent of new purchases were Chinese (Kwong, 1996). Commercial establishments are commonly found on the ground floor of tenement properties. Because upper floors are generally residential units subject to rent control, building owners make up their profit margins by charging commercial rents from \$10 to \$20 per square foot to co-ethnic operators of shops and restaurants. With most buildings rent controlled, and operation cost, taxes, and debt servicing a financial burden, Chinatown tenements owners often skimp on maintenance and sometimes try to vacate in order to allow greater rent increase. In addition to replacing existing tenants with higher-rent residents, landlords sometimes rent second-floor space to commercial tenants. Fourteen hundred residents were displaced from five hundred old Chinatown apartments in this manner between 1990 and 1995 (Lin, 1998).

The continuous high demand allows Chinatown landlords to milk buildings for profit. Tenements building (predominantly under private ownership) continue to pass from deteriorated to deplorable conditions and code violations are rampant. Federal Section 8

subsidies for low- and moderate-income housing rehabilitation were phased out under the Reagan administration. The question of upgrading is problematic. Jan Lin assessment (Lin, 1998) is that given the unlikelihood of complete rehabilitation (which will require massive public subsidy), tax abatement or stricter code reinforcement might improve level of maintenance.

The working people in contemporary Chinatown are highly concentrated in employment in the sweatshops the garment and restaurant industries and small retail trade establishment. Sweatshops may be defined as workplaces where employees are paid low wages, with few benefits and little employment security, under poor occupational conditions of light, health, and safety (Kinkead, 1992). In summary, Chinatown may be conceived as having a double-edge character that rewards landlords and bosses mainly at the expense on tenants and workers. The entrepreneurial accomplishments of the immigrant small-business sector, in other words, are based to a great extent on the exploitation of their co-ethnic tenants and workers. On the other hand, the immigrant landlords and bosses provide affordable housing and job opportunities for poor immigrants with limited resources, skills and often undocumented status. Additionally, through the multiple effect, immigrants' earnings are recirculated through purchases in co-ethnic businesses and the accumulated earnings are eventually reinvested in residential and commercial real estate. Local economy in Chinatown is robust. This situation is in contrast with the capital-scarce, vacant urban terrain of East Harlem.

Lower Manhattan residential boom, however, has hurt Chinatown. The upscale development that started in SoHo and crawled in the Lower East Side began to hem Chinatown in, causing economic and cultural clashes. The sidewalk fish and vegetable stalls that most New Yorkers once saw as quaint are viewed by some of the new neighbors as dirty and smelly inconveniences. The wholesale trades of poultry and groceries, with their early morning deliveries and congestion on the sidewalks, are seen as a nuisance. Appeals have been made to the local community boards to restrict certain business operations. The Police Departments and the Department of Consumer Affairs have dusted off the rule books, ticketing sidewalk vendors for all types of violations that had not been enforced in decades and, in some cases, are still not enforced elsewhere (Wang, 2000).

Dirty streets and poor conditions of residential units still keep the residential gentrifiers away from Chinatown. But the commercial ones are edging form the outside. Garment manufacturing tenants usually cannot afford rents higher than about \$11 a square foot a year, said Mr. Lam of Longines Realty (Oster, 1998). In the early 1990's, a period of depressed conditions in the real estate market, many came in on five-year leases at about \$7 or \$8 a square foot. Now, they often cannot afford renewal leases at current market rents which, even with minimum upgrading work, are about \$15 or \$16 a square foot, Mr. Lam said. The dot-com companies would gladly pay double. In the best locations, fully restored space in full service building will cost at least \$25 a square foot. It is unfortunate that Chinese-American developers are displacing co-ethnic business from the neighborhood. They cannot be blamed, however, for the declining garment industry and

their willingness to increase their profit share. Some provisions should be made to keep at least some building operating with affordable rents. Once the dot-comers move in, it is not going to be long before residents start to be displaced and buildings rehabilitated. What's most important for the preservation of Chinatown, however, is the recognition by the city itself that this neighborhood is an endangered asset.

Hell's Kitchen South

Hell's Kitchen South is the smallest of the three neighborhoods, bounded by West 34th and 42nd Streets, 8th Avenue and the Hudson River. Formally part of a larger neighborhood (renamed Clinton to escape the bad connotation of its original name and already rehabilitated), Hell's Kitchen South is also a highly contested area. This 100 year-old community contains major train, bus and commuter rail infrastructure and terminals in the midst of brownstone apartments, traditional ethnic eateries and specialty markets, manufacturing industries, artist' studios and office space. At the same time, with close to 30 percent of its land vacant, Hell's Kitchen is poised for physical and social change: Chelsea's residential and commercial development is approaching from the south; adjacent abandoned rail yards are being proposed as a possible site for a new sports stadium; 8th Avenue to the east may be re-zoned; to the west is the redeveloped waterfront; and in the center, the Port Authority, Penn Station and the Jacob Javits Convention Center are all planning expansions (Dennito, 1997).

Hell's Kitchen evokes many different images. The neighborhood means the Theater District, Clinton, the Javits Center, 9th Avenue restaurants, a traditional haven for

immigrants, hotly-contested real estate ripe for gentrification and a tough challenge to preserve low and middle-income housing and local business. The complex overlay of local, metropolitan and regional needs and uses that converge on this neighborhood ensures that any qualitative picture will be difficult to discern. Thus, the demographic picture can only give a schematic sense of this bustling community of residents, businesses and institutions. According to the 1990 Census, 4,433 people lived in Hell's Kitchen South. Most are concentrated along 34th, 35th, and 36th Streets, between 8th and 9th Avenues. More recently, unofficial statistics points to a population of 6,000 to 7,000 residents. 62 percent of the residents are described as non-white, with more than 50 percent black and Latino. Traditional family structure has declined. Though most residents live with more than one person, its more likely to be in a roommate situation; married couples and those with children are less common. The medial household income is \$23,352 per year, bellow the New York City average of \$32,262 a year. Most of the people who work in the Hell's Kitchen are employed by transportational concerns, such as the MTA, or by small to mid-sized factories. Compared with the NYC average, Hell's Kitchen is underserved by retail and service concerns.

The neighborhood is also home for many homeless people who settled on the vacant lots and in the Port Authority and Penn Station terminals. The 'cleaning' efforts of Guiliani's administration and the unleashed police brutality have removed a substantial number of the form mid- and lower Manhattan. Hell's Kitchen remains, however, a 'hot spot'. Despite of the multi-million-dollar suit alleging intensified police harassment, abuse, and brutality in Penn Station, the cleaning efforts continued. Current expansion plans for both

the Port Authority and Penn Station are hopping to kill to birds with one stone and completely cut homeless access to the indoor 'public' spaces (Deutsch, 1997).

Historically, Hell's kitchen played role as an economic engine, a place where the labor of skilled and unskilled workers was transformed into goods ranging from textiles to bagels. As a residential community, it has sheltered a global mix of successive generations of immigrants. Finally, located just west of the midtown business district, the neighborhood has also carried the weight of regional infrastructure: bus station, tunnel and, more recently, the convention center (Figure 6). The social costs of these often conflicting roles continue to exact payment from the lives of residents: substandard housing, tension over scarce resources, dangerous working conditions, little green space and sparse city services. At the same time, residents are proud of the vibrant social and cultural life that has weathered the historical pressures on the neighborhood (Kasandra, 1885).

The housing stock in Hell's kitchen South is very old: 81 percent of the buildings were built before the WWII and many are considered substandard. At the same time, located just west of booming midtown, gentrification remains a key issue for residents. As of 1990, 34 percent of the residential population lives in Single Room Occupancy (SRO's) buildings. As SRO's drop from federal and state low-income housing plans and convert to market-rate housing, no low-cost housing is replacing the lost. Moderate income families are also feeling the housing pinch. As many buildings are transformed into expensive lofts and co-ops, competition for housing becomes fierce. Since the mid-1990's, city programs run through the Department of Housing Preservation and Development

(HPD) have been placing city-owned buildings under tenants control but the pace is slow and the process cumbersome. Housing for seniors is especially scarce.

After the construction of the Port Authority and the third tube of the Lincoln Tunnel that displaced 1,400 families, transportation issues have altered the life of Hell's Kitchen South Residents (Winslow, 1987). Today, snarled tunnel traffic and fleets of idling buses have created hazardous health conditions and have forced many residents to stay indoors during rush hours. The neighborhood has also become a disembarkation point for the Midtown work force. Thousands of commuters use the many local parking lots and side streets to park their cars, creating an economic use at odds with community life. Many see the parking lots and the related auto-repair uses not only as eyesores but also as local economic engines. Ferry services continue to grow in popularity with commuters. The need is so robust that NY Waterway is expanding their existing terminal and building new float space. Together with the redeveloped waterfront, the planned expansions of the Port Authority, Penn Station and the Jacob Javits Convention Center and the proposal for a new sports stadium, the neighborhood is bound to change dramatically.

Hell's Kitchen South residents, on the other hand, have consistently organized to challenge unwelcome development in or around their neighborhood. It is astonishing that 6,000 people, considered 'powerless' by gentrification theorists, can have such a strong political voice. There are eight community based organizations holding weekly and bi-weekly meetings, two local newspapers and a community web site. Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association (HKNA) is a volunteer membership and advocacy organization which seeks to involve those who live and work in Hell's Kitchen in the

future of their community (Gwertzman, 1997). HKNA established and maintains a liaison with Community Board #4, local legislators and state senators to assure that the community demands are met. From the 1974 enactment of the neighborhood as Special District, to the current struggles to preserve low and moderate income, HKNA has demonstrated that it can present a proactive plan that protects community priorities. Current winning battles were the prevention of extensive hotel development in association with the Convention Center expansion and diverging bus traffic from the core of the neighborhood. They have also organized numerous workshops and design competitions to prepare a master plan that can accommodate the multitude of conflicting needs and demands that are daily fare of the community.

Despite of all these activities, the future of Hell's Kitchen South remains in questions. Five years of extensive publicity, press campaigns, endless meetings and low suits did not result in a local health clinic, a public school, or a senior services. The City and State support is only superficial since no major investment has been made into the rehabilitation and construction of low and moderate-income housing. The residents, with all their sense of ownership, are not the legal owners of the neighborhood. All the major landowners in Hell's Kitchen South are either entities of or connected with the State Government. It is inevitable that the State, then, will play an important role in deciding the future of the community. So far the state's priorities have been straight: they want to see the Jacob Javits Convention Center double its square footage, a new sport stadium and a timely expansion of the Port Authority and the new Penn Station.

The overrated press attention is maybe an indicator that Hell's Kitchen South is probably the first of the three studied areas to undergo gentrification. It is, after all, the last underdeveloped area in central Manhattan and according to all gentrification theories – rent gap, continuous disinvestment, divalorization – the real estate is ripe and ready. 6,000 people could be easily displaced, no matter how politically vocal they are. One of the major strength of the community is, however, the fact that they are very well organized. They may not be able to stop the process, but they are definitely going to throw a wrench in the wheel.

Speculation for the Future

In summary, the constrains that East 'Spanish' Harlem, Chinatown, and Hell's Kitchen South impose on gentrification, are not necessarily insurmountable. There are also strong forces pushing for the redevelopment and rehabilitation of the neighborhoods' housing stock. In the first place, there are the obvious assets of location. As professional, managerial and administrative employment continues to expand in Manhattan, as the number of households increases, and as the housing market becomes tighter, the three neighborhoods appear as increasingly attractive candidates for gentrification. But despite of the substantially underpriced housing in relationship with the rest of Manhattan (Figure 7) and the economic opportunity this represents, there is no automatic transformation of East 'Spanish' Harlem, Chinatown, and Hell's Kitchen South into gentrified 'haven.' In locational and economic terms, there is no doubt that the potential for gentrification is there. The question is whether these economic and locational forces are powerful enough to overcome the constrains.

Figure 7.

	East Harlem	Chinatown	Hell’s Kitchen	Manhattan
Population	110,508	34,000	6,000	1,487,536
% Non-white	97%	99%	62%	38%
Median Household Income	\$12,235	\$17,443	\$23,352	\$32,262
Median Rent	\$385	\$295	\$495	\$750
Persons per unit	2.61	2.99	2.3	1.55
Home Ownership Rate	4%	5%	2%	11%

Source: U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1990.

The fact that there are signs of the process in all three neighborhoods reaffirms the contention that far from being a curious anomaly, gentrification represents trenchant and extensive reconstruction of urban space. In the case of East Harlem, more visibly than the other two, it is clear that the process needs to involve ‘collective social players’ more than heroic individuals. In all tree case, it is not the private capital alone that will play a leading role. The City and the State will have to be heavily involved to facilitate an upward moment in the housing market.

In his annual address on January 9, 2001, in an attempt to change his legacy, Mayor Rudy Guiliani proposed that \$240,000,000 be invested in poor and dilapidated areas of Manhattan in order to benefit the residents and produce an ‘economically integrated’ communities. In one very real sense, this is probably possible in East Harlem and Hell’s Kitchen South where the City and the State own vast stock of abandoned buildings and

lots and rehabilitation and redevelopment may occur before low-income residents are directly threatened with displacement. But in order for this strategy to succeed, two prerequisites are crucial. First, the neighborhoods will have to attract large number of outside residents. It is conceivable that at first the new residents of East Harlem may be Latino and black, mostly Chinese in Chinatown and non-white in Hell's Kitchen South. But as the momentum builds, many of them will necessarily be white. Second, the areas will have to attract much larger quantities of private investment. Should these prerequisites be achieved, the studied neighborhoods could be transformed from depressed islands of disinvestment into 'hot spots' for reinvestment, and integrated fully to the Manhattan housing market. This would ultimately mean that large number of community residents would face displacement. Thus for East 'Spanish' Harlem, Chinatown, and Hell's Kitchen South, as for many other area that have undergone gentrification, 'economic integration' may be impossible hope and a 'little gentrification' may be too unstable state to survive for long. And Mayor Guiliani's strategy suggests as much: 'economic integration' means bringing in wealthy people, 'social balance' means an influx of whites.

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