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## **Changing Cities and Directions: New York and Los Angeles**

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## CHANGING CITIES AND DIRECTIONS: NEW YORK and LOS ANGELES

David Halle and Andrew A. Beveridge

(October 4, 2008)

Chapter in *The Metropolitan Century: Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and International Cities in Current Urban Scholarship*

Edited by Dennis R. Judd and Dick Simpson

From the 1960s to the end of the twentieth century, the nation's two largest cities each helped to nurture a distinct approach to urban analysis. There was the "Los Angeles School," and there was a "New York School" whose perspective was quite different. Each school had many valuable insights applicable to the study of most major urban regions, not just New York and Los Angeles.

It is time to move beyond the framework of these schools. Partly this is because their main insights have been widely acknowledged. More importantly, it is because both schools were reacting, in different ways, to a common view that American cities were in decline. Elements of this decline involved the well-known phenomenon of "White Flight," which included the flight of the middle class and working class from residential areas within cities to the suburbs, and the concentration of the poor and minorities within the cities. The advent of "urban renewal" did little or nothing to stem this decline, and many even argued that it exacerbated it by "warehousing" the poor. The urban decline view dominated analyses for much of the second half of the twentieth century, mainly because it had a basis in the real situation of American cities. That the perspective is no longer widely held reflects the reality that it is no longer a compelling account of the actual situation of many American cities, at least not without major modifications.

No dominant alternative perspective has yet emerged. Major American cities are in a state of change, with several directions and possibilities apparent, though some directions look likely to have more staying power than others.

In this chapter we first lay out the main tenets of the New York and Los Angeles schools of urban analysis, and show how they were both rooted in an urban decline perspective. We then use the most current data available to look at some of the main, often new, directions emerging in these two cities and regions. The analysis of new directions is inevitably exploratory and tentative and does not claim to be comprehensive. It is too soon for that.

Although our focus is New York and Los Angeles, we sometimes introduce broader comparative data too. Among the data we examine are median income, home values, income inequality, and the black, Asian and Latino composition of the two regions or megalopolises.

We also include two case studies. The first looks at changes in Harlem to ask if "ghetto" is still an appropriate term for what was once the country's most famous urban ghetto. The second case study examines the "High Line" in Manhattan, a disused, above-ground railroad that environmentalists are turning into a park. The "High Line" is an early example of some of the issues faced in New York and Los Angeles by environmentalism, which has raced to the top of

the mayoral agenda in both cities. Although our two case studies focus on New York, many of their major implications and lessons are generalizable to Los Angeles and beyond.

### **The New York and the Los Angeles Schools and their Fading Usefulness**

The book *New York and Los Angeles*, which appeared in 2003, began with an account of these two schools, and continued with empirical analyses by experts on a range of topics in the two cities and regions, including the respective economies, political structures, cultures and demographics, drawing on the latest (2000) census data.

#### ***The New York School***

The New York School that flourished in the later decades of the twentieth century could be characterized by the following features. First, a strong interest in the central city, especially Manhattan; second, a determination to fix up and improve city life; third, a utopianism about social classes marked by a belief that the central city can and should be a place where the wealthy, the middle class, the working class and the poor reside; fourth, a belief city life is superior to suburban life.

Some key figures of this New York School were Jane Jacobs, arguably its intellectual and organizational founder, whose 1961 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* remains widely regarded as the best analysis of how to make cities work; historian Kenneth Jackson, whose 1985 book *Crabgrass Frontier* contains a biting critique of how government policies--federal and local--undermined the health of American cities especially from the 1920s to the 1970s; architect Robert Stern, who provided some of the key ideas associated with the rejuvenation of Times Square; and sociologists Richard Sennett, William Whyte and Sharon Zukin. The latter's 1982 book *Loft Living* arguably pioneered the study of "gentrification", with an analysis of the famous conversion of Soho industrial lofts to residence-workspaces.

The overview of the New York school presented in *New York and Los Angeles* was stated with several caveats. The first was that there are "many important urban researchers in New York City and the region whose work scarcely, or only partly, fits this New York school model." The point was just that the New York School perspective is a distinct and important approach to cities exemplified by a cluster of distinguished analysts in the nation's largest city.

The second caveat was that the basics of the New York School perspective are clearly not confined to discussion of New York City. For example, Manhattan-centricity is, with different names, transferable to other cities.

The third caveat was that most of the New York School did not, and do not, think of themselves as a "school" This was not, it was argued, a reason to avoid using the term. It just depends what is meant by "school," an issue on which there is not a consensus. In our view, and briefly, one might mean here by a "school" any group having at least the first two of the following four features: 1) sharing certain perspectives and ideas; 2) having an agenda to promote; 3) seeing itself as a distinct school; 4) residing in the same area/region.

The thinkers classified as the New York School possess features 1 and 2, and for the most part 4, but not 3.

#### ***The Los Angeles School***

The Los Angeles School's key idea was to stress, when analyzing Los Angeles and many (but not all) major urban areas, their "sprawling, polycentric character", containing "multiple urban cores" or "edge cities" or "techno-cities" spread around the periphery of the traditional city center. The central point was these "edge cities" are not just "bedroom suburbs" from which people commute to the central city. Instead, they contain many jobs and retail outlets. Formally, "edge cities" could be defined, following Garreau (1988), as "places that have substantial leasable office and retail space, have more 'jobs than bedrooms', are perceived by their populations as a unitary place, and have appeared in the past thirty years." Key figures in the Los Angeles School were Robert Fogelson (arguably the founding thinker), Joel Garreau, Robert Fishman, Michael Dear, Jennifer Wolch, Allen Scott, Edward Soja, and Michael Davis.

In terms of the criteria for constituting a "school," the thinkers classified as the Los Angeles School, on the whole, met criteria 1 (sharing the common stress on the polycentric character of modern urban areas, though disagreeing for sure on other ideas), and 2 (their agenda was to promote research based on recognition of this urban dispersal). Also, a majority of them met criterion 4 (residing, in this case, in the Los Angeles region, though some key members resided elsewhere, especially on the East Coast--e.g., Fogelson in Boston, Garreau in the Washington DC area and Fishman in the New York-New Jersey region).

Regarding criterion 3, (viewing themselves as a distinct "school"), this was true for key members at some point in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, the embryo of the school was a series of meetings and publications in the late 1980s which included, for instance, Dear, Scott, Soja and Wolch. But over time it became less and less true that these key figures viewed themselves as a distinct school, especially in the 21st century, as various intellectual disagreements surfaced (though not over the core idea of urban dispersal). For example, Michael Dear grafted a strong version of the Frankfurt School of Sociology's approach to culture onto the Los Angeles School's central idea, so that individuals who purchased tract homes in the suburbs were seen as part of a giant latifundia dominated by real estate interests, patrolled by a kind of praetorian guard, and requiring an elaborate new vocabulary to understand. This was too elaborate and explicit for most of the other members of the school. By 2008, when several key figures from the school's early days gathered for a retirement party for Edward Soja held at UCLA, only Michael Dear was willing to advocate for the continued existence of the Los Angeles School. The rest denied the continued usefulness of the concept of the Los Angeles School, mostly on the grounds that its key idea had been acknowledged, and also that there were numerous intellectual disagreements between its former members.

The book *New York and Los Angeles* argued that each perspective, the Los Angeles School and the New York School, had valuable insights and lessons that could fruitfully be applied to most urban regions in the United States and elsewhere. Several of the analyses in that book drew, in an eclectic and open-minded way, on the best insights of the two schools. For example, the chapter on riots tried to correct a common perception that "Los Angeles" was more riot prone than "New York" in the period after World War II, and did so by looking at riots in a broader, regional perspective, not just one that was confined to the respective cities. From this point of view, the City of Los Angeles had two mega riots (Watts in 1965 and Rodney King in 1992), but no major or mega riots elsewhere in the Los Angeles region. By contrast, New York City not only had the ("black out") mega riot of 1977 and major riots of 1964 ("Harlem-Bedford Stuyvesant"), 1991 ("Crown Heights") and 1992 ("Washington Heights"), but there were also several riots in the region, including Newark's 1967 mega riot, and major riots in Plainfield (1967), Jersey City

(1967 and 1970) and Englewood (1967). From a broad regional perspective, New York was at least as riot prone as Los Angeles.

### ***The Boom in the Cities and the Declining Usefulness of the Schools***

Looking back from the vantage point of the economic and real estate boom that both regions enjoyed, especially from 2002 to 2007, it is clear that there was actually a similar driving force underlying both schools. Each school developed and flourished well before this boom, and each was reacting, though in quite different ways, to the perceived decline of cities and to the growth of the urban periphery. The Los Angeles School's reaction was to focus on studying the expanding periphery ("edge cities" etc), while the New York School's reaction was to appreciate, and to try to rescue, the urban core.

Today's context--an increasingly perceived and to some extent actual resurgence of urban life--creates a far more complex and balanced situation. (The full impact of the 2008 unfolding sub-prime mortgage crisis and its ramifications clearly cannot yet be analyzed. Still, below we point to some demographic factors underlying the housing bubble in the two regions.) When cities and suburbs are more equally valued, there is far less opportunity or need for scholars to take distinct sides, for example; either vigorously to defend under-appreciated cities, as in the New York School; or to shift attention to a burgeoning suburban and peripheral context, as in the Los Angeles School. (Again, we wish to stress that many urban scholars never did take sides.) This more equal footing on which cities and suburbs are now valued is, we believe, a major reason why the work of fewer and fewer analysts can these days be usefully described as adhering to either school. The context offers increasingly less reason to take one of the extreme positions represented by each school.

For example, in New York the now colossal popularity of residing in Manhattan and the resurgence of the city's "outer boroughs", especially Brooklyn and Queens, and, though more modestly the Bronx (Staten Island's popularity never really flagged), means that one key component of the New York School's perspective, namely its advocacy of the superiority of urban over suburban life, is less and less necessary.

Likewise, the Los Angeles School's focus on the periphery looks unbalanced, given the somewhat successful efforts to build up downtown Los Angeles and the growing momentum of the attack on downtown's main perceived blemish, "Skid Row." The Los Angeles School's focus on the periphery also looks unfashionably un-green, given the increasing recognition of the unsustainability of extreme modes of automobile-based, suburban life.

In this context, new topics have come to the fore while some classic topics are being re-evaluated. Here we re-evaluate two old topics, "white flight" and the classic urban "ghetto", and we examine two new topics, the underpinnings of the recently collapsed housing bubble, and environmentalism

### **Comparing the Los Angeles and New York Metropolises**

Though New York City and Los Angeles are both major cities, they are also the major urban agglomeration in their two regions, which include many counties and municipalities, and, in the case of New York City, population in several states. To highlight population trends, we divided each region into roughly comparable areas, which are presented in Figure 1 for both metros.

The New York metro area is relatively easy to divide. The definition of the whole area follows closely that of the old Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area definitions that were used through the 2000 Census. We then divided this area into three: Manhattan, the Outer Boroughs (Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island), and the rest of the metro area, which includes all the counties outside New York City and which here we call the “Suburbs.”

For Los Angeles, we made a comparable tri-partite division. We specified an area in the city as “West of Downtown”, a term often used locally to define a highly affluent area that includes West LA, Century City and the like, and also includes some areas outside the City of Los Angeles (e.g. Beverly Hills and Malibu). The two other divisions are the rest of the City of Los Angeles, and the rest of Los Angeles metro.<sup>1</sup>

For both New York and Los Angeles we also present data that include the entire metropolitan areas (“LA Metro Total” and “NY Metro”) so that the regional trends can be compared to trends in the three specific divisions.

These divisions allow us to look at the city compared to the suburbs, but also define an area in each city that is widely considered as highly desirable as a place to live: Manhattan and West of Downtown.

#### -----Figure 1----- About Here.

##### *White Flight and Families with Young Children?*

Although suburbanization began long before 1945, after World War II, it developed enormous traction as large proportions of the better-paid working class, middle and upper middle class moved away from the city and into suburbs (documented most recently by Robert Beauregard, 2006). The pull and advantages of leaving the city, along with some of the pitfalls, was amusingly portrayed in the 1948 classic *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*, starring Cary Grant and Myrna Loy. Grant, an advertising man with a wife and two children and a small apartment in Manhattan, buys a house in Connecticut, and then faces problems renovating it, as well as commuting to his job in New York City.

The move to the suburbs in the New York City area was sustained for decade after decade. With it, of course, came “white flight,” as the cities became more and more concentrated in terms of minority population, while the suburban ring was generally much, much whiter. Indeed, the title of the classic article concerning residential preferences and their relationship to racial segregation captures this very well: “‘Chocolate City, Vanilla Suburb’: Will the Trend Toward Racially Separate Communities Continue?” (Farley, et al, 1978).

The flight out of major American cities, including Los Angeles and New York City, had been so obvious a trend that when journalists and others noticed it had reversed, it was newsworthy. ‘White Flight’ Has Reversed, Census Finds (Sam Roberts, September 23, 2008, *New York Times*, p. B1); The End of White Flight (Conor Dougherty, July 19, 2008, *Wall Street Journal*, p. B1). This reversal is fueled by the changing composition of family and labor force in the major cities,

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<sup>1</sup>The three areas of each metropolitan area were defined in terms of PUMAs... PUMAs are Public Use Micro-data Areas and contain at least 100,000 population. Because of their size, they give a general idea of the distribution of race and Hispanic population. PUMAs are the only geographic unit from the American Community Survey (the large, yearly survey that is the replacement for the Census long form) that allows for an accurate analysis of the metro areas.

most particularly the changing role of women in the workforce, as well as changing economic opportunities. Still, though the overall trend seems to have reversed, how it is playing out in different parts of the Los Angeles and New York metros varies greatly.

The changing racial and Hispanic composition of the areas is presented in Table 1 and is mapped in Figures 2-5. (Tables and figures that are not in the text are in the appendix.) In Los Angeles, these data make plain the following general trends for the entire LA metro region from 2000 to 2006: 1) An increase in the Hispanic population, from 39.0 percent to 42.9 percent; 2) A continuing decline in the non-Hispanic white population, from 40.6 percent to 36.4 percent; 3) A continuing, albeit slight, decline in the non-Hispanic black population, from 6.7 percent to 6.54 percent; and, 4) an increase in the Asian population, from 10.9 percent to 11.8 percent.

-----**Table 1 About Here**-----

-----**Figure 2—About Here**-----

When this is looked at by area of Los Angeles, however, some of the trends are different or not as marked. In particular, West of Downtown the non-Hispanic white population is barely changing (53.4 percent to 52.9 percent between 2000 and 2006), whilst the Hispanic population has increased only slightly (22.5 percent to 23.6 percent) as has the non-Hispanic Asian population (10.2 percent to 10.4 percent), while the non-Hispanic black population has continued to decline (13.2 percent to 12.1 percent).

Further, when one considers only those people aged 0 to 4 years old (See Table 2), the patterns for the West of Downtown are quite different from those for the metro region. West of Downtown, the proportion of non-Hispanic white aged 0 to 4 years shows a marked increase from 2000 to 2006, from 39.7 percent of all children to 47.6 percent.

The general patterns from 2000 to 2006 for the entire New York metro region are similar to the general patterns for the entire Los Angeles metro region (See Table 3.): increase in Hispanics, from 18.6 percent to 20.4 percent; decrease in non-Hispanic whites (from 56.5 percent to 53.6 percent) and non-Hispanic blacks (from 17.1 percent to 16.6 percent; and, an increase in the Asian population (from 7.2 percent to 8.8 percent).

-----**Table 3---About Here**

In Manhattan, however, there is an increase in the number and proportion of non-Hispanic white, from 46.6 percent to 48.7 percent. (See Table 3.). Furthermore, in Manhattan there is a very striking increase in the number and percent of children aged 0 to 4 who are non-Hispanic white, from 34.8 percent to 44.4 percent. (See Table 4.)

Thus, in the most desirable area in both major metros, there is an increase in non-Hispanic white young children. Further, in Manhattan there has been a substantial increase in the number of children overall, from 76,300 in 2000 to 99,841 in 2006 (See Table 4.).

One trend that seems to be fueling these increases in income and in the number of non-Hispanic white children in Manhattan and the West of Downtown area is the gap with respect to sex for full-time workers aged 20 to 29 between men and women. In both metropolitan areas, younger women workers earned high salaries and wages than did younger male workers. Overall women and men workers now earn similar amounts (Beveridge, 2008.) This seems to be largely due to the increasing gap with respect to education between men and women. When one examines the household income of young children (See Table 7.), it is plain that for young children of all race



and ethnic back grounds in Manhattan in the New York area, there has been a rapid growth of income from 2000 through 2006, from \$54,450 to \$81,502 (though this is not true of West of Downtown in Los Angeles).

Families with young children seem to be increasingly staying in the cities, at least in the more desirable areas. If this trend continues, it will represent a major reversal of a long standing pattern. Plainly, it is in part the result of women now being in the labor force in large proportions, which was not true in 1948, when Mr. Blandings (Cary Grant) built his dream house and moved Muriel (Myrna Loy) and their children to Connecticut. These days, Muriel would be working in her own professional level job, and would eschew the commute, if she could. Instead, they would either move to a larger apartment, if they could afford it, and begin to search for an acceptable school for their children. Of course, if they could not find or afford the appropriate apartment or school, they might still make the trek to the suburbs.

### ***Income, Rent and Housing Bubbles***

Examining income trends (See Table 5.) in both metro areas, only in the preferred areas are there real income gains. From 2000 to 2006, median household income rose by 3.5 percent West of Downtown and by 8.4 percent in Manhattan.

Median house value (in 2006 dollars) by area is also shown in Table 5. There are two key points here. First, there was a major housing bubble in both regions from 2000 to 2006, but the overall bubble was far greater in the overall Los Angeles region than in New York. In New York for all three of our areas house values rose from between 42 percent and 48 percent, while in Los Angeles for all three of our areas house values rose from between 106 percent and 123 percent.

Second, only in Manhattan did house values rise substantially in the decade before 2000, rising 29 percent. In that sense, Manhattan has had its own housing bubble.

Further, in all three sections of each region rents rose sharply during the period 2000 to 2006, with rises ranging from 12-22 percent. Given the more or less stagnant median household income in all sectors of the region except the preferred sections, the economic pressure on renters is apparent.

This review of income, house value and rental trends suggests a key basis of the now collapsed housing bubble. Overall in the region house values rose rapidly from 2000 to 2006, as did the cost of renting, while, income for most people did not substantially increase. The likelihood that those who wished to enter the housing market would be enticed by a loan that would allow them to borrow above their means is apparent.

### **Does the “Ghetto” Remain an Appropriate Term? Is Harlem a “Ghetto”?**

One of the most distinct features associated with major American cities after World War II was the “ghetto”, an inner-city section inhabited primarily by blacks living in areas of concentrated poverty. A current debate, that reveals much about changing American cities, is whether it remains appropriate to refer to places such as Harlem and South Central Los Angeles (since officially renamed Central Los Angeles, partly as a result of commercial interests there wishing to erase the ghetto-like stigma associated with the “South Central” label) as “ghettos”. The long-standing movement of Latinos into these areas (especially into Central Los Angeles), the well-publicized movement of some (non-Latino) whites into Harlem, and the rise in the number of

properties in Harlem that sell for well over 1 million dollars all raise questions about whether these areas are indeed still “ghettos”.

We focus here on changes in Harlem, once America’s most iconic “ghetto”, as a case study of the issues at stake. We begin with an overview of demographic changes from 1910 through the period 1950-1980 which was, in retrospect, the “classic” period of the American ghetto. We then consider the characteristics of Harlem during that time that made “ghetto” an appropriate term. Finally, we look at recent demographic and other changes in Harlem that have led many people to doubt whether “ghetto” is now an appropriate term for Harlem.

### ***Harlem: Demographic Changes 1910-1980***

Major changes in Central Harlem and New York City from 1910 to 2006 are shown in Table 8 (“Central Harlem” is defined as set out by Gilbert Osofsky in his 1966 book *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*. Central Harlem is basically north of Central Park and east of Morningside and St. Nicholas Avenues. The southern edge starts at 96th Street on the East Side; at Fifth Avenue and Central Park it goes up to 110th, and then cuts over to 106th Street on the West Side. The northern boundary in most places is 155th Street, though it extends a bit further up on the East Side.) (See Figure 6.)

-----**Figure 6 About Here** -----

-----**Table 8 About Here**-----

In 1910, Central Harlem was about 10 percent black, Greater Harlem was a little more than 4 percent black, while the rest of New York City was less than 2 percent black. By 1930, during the Harlem Renaissance, Central Harlem had become a definably black area in a largely white city. Central Harlem was over 70 percent black and Greater Harlem was about 35 percent black, but the rest of New York City was still less than 2 percent black. By 1950, Central Harlem was about 98 percent black, while Greater Harlem was 57.5 percent black. Central Harlem remained almost entirely black through 1980, with the black population never dropping below 94 percent. (See Table 8.)

Looking at economics, in the early days of Harlem the black community there was quite diverse economically, especially when African Americans in Harlem are compared to those who lived elsewhere. As the "great migration" of blacks from the American South continued, and the size of the black population expanded, an area of concentrated poverty developed.

The period 1950 to 1980 was a period of sharp demographic decline for Harlem. Central Harlem lost more than half of its population, dropping from roughly 237,000 to 101,000, and Greater Harlem also saw its population drop, from roughly 593,000 to 339,000. This also marked the era of urban renewal, and many older housing units were razed, either for public housing projects or for other apartment developments, though the new developments did not come close to housing the same number of people. At the same time, areas further out such as southeast Queens attracted affluent black families.

This period from 1950 to 1980 was, as we have said, the “classic” period of the American urban ghetto. In order to understand fully why this was so, it is necessary to look briefly at the usage if the term “ghetto.”

### ***The Concept of the “Ghetto”***

In writings and discourse, the term “ghetto” has been used primarily to describe two situations, that of Jews in many European cities from the late middle ages until World War II, and that of blacks in American cities, especially in the period from the 1960s until the 1980s. In each case, a core set of characteristics made the term “ghetto” seem an appropriate designation to most observers (though there was never unanimity about use of the term for blacks in American cities). (For an excellent discussion of ghetto, including the history of the use of the term, see the online discussion by members of the ASA Community and Urban section, 2008, as well as a forum on the Ghetto to be published in *City and Community*).

In the European case, the “ghetto” was used to refer to a situation that had three main features. It was spatially bounded, residence there was basically involuntary, and the inhabitants were all Jewish. The Venetian ghetto from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century on was a prototype of the European Jewish ghetto. It was a gated community whose residents were locked in each night by the city. Being locked in was not typical of most Jewish ghettos, but more or less involuntary residence, imposed by law or physical force, or both.

By the 1960s, “ghetto” was routinely being used to refer to the situation of blacks in many American inner cities. In this US context, the “ghetto” was generally viewed as having three main features. It was spatially bounded, residence there was viewed by many observers as basically involuntary, and the inhabitants were almost all black. These features seem to more or less replicate the use of the term for European ghettos (with blacks switched for Jews), which is clearly why many people thought the term was appropriate for the US case.

Actually, the nature of the “involuntariness” associated by observers with the US case is clearly different from the Jewish ghetto. Residence in the US ghetto was not basically imposed legally or by physical force, which is why it makes sense to add four corollary features of the US case which flesh out the character of the “involuntariness” ascribed to urban “ghetto” life. First, the vast majority of residents were poor, and hence for economic reasons had (and/or were believed to have had) difficulty leaving. Second, the outside environment was hostile, in particular with prejudice in the external housing market, making it hard for residents to move elsewhere. Third, the ghetto was dangerous (high crime), with the implication that people might prefer to leave if only they could. Fourth, the ghetto had meager day to day economic resources, for example, few medium-level let alone high-end retail outlets, again with the implication that people with choices would probably not remain. All these features together clearly made a compelling case, to outsiders at least, that residence in the ghetto was typically involuntary. That said, the concept of “involuntariness”, though central to the idea of the ghetto as applied by observers to the US case, is complex, and the appropriateness of its applicability should not be over-stated. There is no doubt that many urban blacks felt some sense of community and solidarity in their neighborhoods, and probably would not have moved elsewhere if given a real choice. Still, most such choices were not realistically afforded to blacks until the end of legal residential segregation, which came with the first Civil Rights Act of 1964. For instance, black servicemen were not allowed to move to suburban Levittown, either in New York or Pennsylvania, and though racial covenants may not have been legal in New York since right after the World War II, their effects still lingered.

It is now clear why, in the heyday of the use of the term “ghetto”, the term seemed appropriate at least to outside observers. Looking at the Harlem case in the period 1950-1980, all the characteristics associated with the ghetto as outlined above basically held true.

### *The Whitening of Harlem*

A review of recent demographic changes in Harlem also make it clear why now “ghetto” is far less often used for Harlem. First, since 1980, Central Harlem has become less black. By 2006, the percentage of the population that was black had dropped to 69 percent, just below its 1930 level of 70 percent.

Meanwhile, the white and Hispanic populations rose. Hispanics accounted for 4.3 percent of Harlem residents in 1980, the first year they were classified separately in the U.S. Census. In 2006, that number reached 18.6 percent. The movement of Latinos into areas of Harlem raises the question of whether sections with significant numbers of Latinos are “ghettos.” Latino, of course, refers to their urban areas not as “ghettos” but as “barrios,” a term that translates exactly as “neighborhood” with none of the negative connotations of “ghetto.” The in-movement of non-Hispanic whites to Harlem has compounded the problem of calling Harlem a “ghetto.” In 1980, there were just 672 non-Hispanic whites in Central Harlem, constituting about 0.6 percent of the population. By 2006, there were 7,741, or about 6.6 percent. Further, the non-Hispanic white population that had moved to Harlem by 2000 was distributed in many different places throughout Harlem.

Further, it appears that areas of Harlem are sought after once again. By 2000 and 2006, there were areas of some highly affluent black and white residents. Median household income in Central Harlem rose from about \$13,765 in 1950 to over \$26,161 in 2006, in 2006 dollars (This figure is, however, still well below the median of \$46,285 for the rest of New York City.) The traditional townhouse areas around Strivers Row, Sugar Hill and Marcus Garvey Park have undergone a rebirth. At the height of the housing boom, in 2006, some sold for one to three million dollars. Stores and restaurants catering to the affluent have opened in West Harlem, while Magic Johnson opened a Starbucks and a Multiplex on 125th Street, near where former President Bill Clinton has his office suite. Columbia University's expansion will bring more change to West Harlem.

Figure 7 compares the concentration with respect to the black population in 1980 and 2000 at the tract level. As that makes plain, the deconcentration of the black population in Harlem is happening in many different areas. It is not that the non-African American population, which is largely non-Hispanic, is moving into enclaves, but rather that many parts of Harlem are becoming less black.

All of this has seriously clouded, for Harlem, the “involuntariness” traditionally ascribed to life in the ghetto. The well-publicized existence of some middle-class (by income) blacks and star (over 1 million dollars) residences, some reduction of crime, and the well-publicized appearance of medium retail stores (some high-profile such as those opened by Magic Johnson) means that it is no longer clear to outsiders that those who live in Harlem are there on an “involuntary” basis in the sense that they would (and should) leave if they could.

Of course, the large stock of public housing and the relatively low income of many residents insure that high levels of poverty will continue to be a feature of Harlem. Harlem will neither lose its black majority or its high concentrations of poverty anytime soon. Still, enough changes have occurred to those core features that from 1950-1980 convinced many that Harlem was unquestionably a “ghetto” to mean that there is considerable uncertainty over whether the term applies to Harlem today, whether Central or Greater Harlem

## **The High Line: Environmentalism and Its Dilemmas**

The debate over whether Harlem is still a “ghetto” illustrates the erosion of a central institution of the classic American city of the last fifty years of the twentieth century. By contrast, the High Line in New York City illustrates environmentalism’s emergence as a dominant twenty-first century topic.

The current mayors of New York and Los Angeles have both placed development at the top of their agenda, but both still have proposed a number of environmental efforts. Antonio Villaraigosa, inaugurated on July, 2005, proclaimed a key goal that “Los Angeles become the greenest big city in America.” Two years later in April 2007 Mayor Bloomberg’s administration published its ambitious plan for how the city would manage population growth estimated to go from its current 8.2m to 9.0m in 2030. Environmentalism’s centrality to the plan was proclaimed in the title, “Plan NYC: A Greener, Greater New York.” Almost every page made a bow toward greening the city and making it more environmentally sustainable. Announcing itself as “the most sweeping plan to enhance New York’s urban environment in the city’s modern history,” the plan proposed projects to enhance the quality of the city’s land, air, water, energy, and transportation, and asserted (not to be outdone by Los Angeles) that New York “can become a model for cities in the 21st century.” Nonetheless, many of the details of Plan NYC focused on increasing transportation, power and other infrastructural resources, while clearing the way for massive development in many parts of the city through zoning changes.

Environmentalism raises acute political questions--basically what to aim for and how to achieve it. These political issues are apparent in both cities. In Los Angeles to move his agenda forward, Villaraigosa appointed a slate of new environmental activists and policy people on powerful Commissions such as the City’s Department of Water and Power and the Harbor Department which guides the nation’s largest Port complex. He also rolled out a plan for renewable energy and a Climate Plan to reduce the City’s greenhouse gas emissions 30 percent below their 1990 levels by the year 2030. The Port of LA and the Port of Long Beach collaborated for the first time around a shared air policy, passing its first Harbor-wide Clean Air Action Plan (CAAP) with the City adopting a Clean Trucks Plan, a key objective in the CAAP that transforms the current trucking system into a system requiring licensed motor carriers to hire employees instead of relying on independent contractors.

As these initiatives were rolled out, the Mayor began to confront the political realities of governing in a city and a region with some of the most protracted environmental problems in the country. At the same time, the movement activists began to confront the realities of how to continue their own activism and push their own agendas while situating themselves with respect to a Mayor who had emerged from the same movements and embraced a progressive (including a strong environmental) agenda when he took office.

In New York, environmentalism’s political aspects are also key. They have, for example, already stumbled in a major way against the fault line of City-State conflict. In 2008, New York State Assemblyman Silver torpedoed the first major effort to implement plan 2030, namely congestion charges. Mayor Bloomberg had proposed to address the city’s traffic and air-quality problem by charging automobiles a fee for entering mid-town and downtown Manhattan. In blocking congestion charges, Silver was acting on behalf of many of his suburban and non-Manhattan

Democratic State colleagues whose constituents did not wish to pay an extra fee to drive into Manhattan's core.

***Saving the High Line: An Environmental and Developmental Odyssey***

We present here New York City's High Line project, as a fascinating case study of many of the key issues and difficulties facing environmental initiatives.

The High Line is an elevated freight rail line that was originally built between 1930 and 1934 on the Far West Side of Manhattan in order to remove dangerous trains from Tenth Avenue by raising them up. High Line trains served the key function of bringing freight, food and other merchandise, after it had been offloaded from the waterfront, to factories and warehouses along New York City's busy industrial West Side. It ran from 34<sup>th</sup> Street (now the Hudson Rail Yards) down to Sprint Street, just south of Canal Street.

By the 1960s, the growth of trucking made the High Line obsolete. Its last freight run was in 1980, when it took a carload of frozen turkeys to the Gansevoort Meat Market. The High Line's southern part, below 16<sup>th</sup> Street, was demolished in the 1980s. From then until 1999, when two young environmentalists proposed turning it into an elevated park, it languished. No longer necessary for its original purpose, yet valuable as an unobstructed right-of-way through Manhattan, it lingered on, its tracks overrun with wild vegetation. At the time of the movement to turn it into a park, it was owned by Conrail and managed by Conrail shareholder CSX Corporation. (See photo 1)

-----**Photo 1 about Here**-----

In 1999, a group of neighborhood residents, businesses, design professionals, and civic organizations joined forces to form Friends of the High Line, a not-for-profit (501C3) organization, hoping to save the remaining 1.5 miles of track. The key figures were two Chelsea residents, Joshua David and Robert Hammond, who first met at a Community Board meeting where the High Line was discussed and who discovered that they both liked the precedent of Paris's Promenade Plantée. (See photo 2.) The Promenade Plantée is an unused rail viaduct whose conversion to a park was in process in 1999 (the first section had only just opened). It has since become one of Paris's most popular parks. Hammond believed that the High Line could improve on the Promenade Plantée design.

-----**Photo 2 About Here**-----

Still, in 1999, the High Line's prospects were dim. Many residents saw it as a blight. As far back as 1992, the railroad had been put under an order, won by the Chelsea Property Owners, to demolish the structure. The Chelsea Property Owners consisted of those who owned property next to and under the High Line, and were anxious to develop their property. They had been formed by a parking-lot and storage-facility operator in the area, around 1990, to force the High Line's owner, CSX Transportation, to tear down the structure. The actual demolition, however, had been held up because of disagreement among the Chelsea Property Owners about how the demolition costs would be shared.

Robert Hammond had helpful connections. His Princeton roommate had been Gifford Miller, the then President of the City Council, so Miller favored the Highline early on. The Friends of the High Line created an effective board, including, for example, Phil Aarons, a principal in Millennium Partners, a real estate development firm, so real estate developers were involved from the start. Also, Amanda Burden, Chair of the Department of City Planning, who lived in the

Village nearby, was an early convert to the idea. The Friends of the High Line commissioned landscape photographer Joel Sternfeld to take photos for a book they produced celebrating the High Line and especially the wild vegetation that grew along its tracks. Robert Hammond commented that the High Line got a big boost in 2001, a mayoral election year, since the Friends got all six mayoral candidates to support the project.

Then, in December, 2001, in the final week of his administration, aware that incoming mayor Bloomberg had promised to save the High Line, Mayor Giuliani signed a Demolition Agreement with the Chelsea Property Owners seeking to compel CSX, the railroad that owns the High Line, to demolish it. He was doubtless moved to act by the Chelsea Property Owners, anxious to kill the incipient movement to preserve the High Line.

In response, the Friends, joined by the City Council under Gifford Miller and by Manhattan Borough President C Virginia Fields, filed a lawsuit to require the High Line demolition to go through the city's review process, the Uniform Land-Use Review Procedure, which would give several months breathing space. The suit won a favorable ruling in March, 2002.

### ***Public Environmentalism, Development and the Highline***

Newly elected Mayor Bloomberg had been a big High Line supporter during his campaign, but then in early 2002 he said that the serious economic problems triggered by 9/11 meant that all bets were off. The City requested an economic feasibility study and Deputy Mayor for Economic Development Dan Doctoroff said city support would depend entirely on the economic case. "Does it make sense for the City to support the High Line financially?" In response, Hammond and the Friends showed that, over a 20 year period, the revenue to the city (generated in taxes etc) would be about 140m, over twice the cost (about 65m). The Bloomberg administration then reaffirmed its support for the High Line.

In short, the High Line conversion was openly in part a real estate development deal, presented to and accepted by the city based on the High Line's capacity to generate significant revenue, especially property tax revenue, for the city.

"Rail-banking" was the term for the mechanism that Friends of the High Line identified to convert the High Line to a public open space. As part of the 1983 National Trail Systems Act, the U.S. Congress passed legislation that allowed out-of-use rail corridors to be used as trails while being "banked" for future transportation needs. The key to rail-banking a rail corridor was the ability to maintain that corridor's potential future connection to the national rail system. An easement had to be preserved that permitted a future connection if needed.

So on Dec 17, 2002, a year after Bloomberg's election as mayor, the city filed an application to the Federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) to start negotiations to transform the High Line into an elevated public walkway, reversing the Giuliani administration's policy and formally requesting a Certificate of Interim Trail Use, or CITU, for the High Line.

The biggest obstacle remained the Chelsea Property Owners. They insisted that the structure was a dangerous eyesore and derided the Friends of the High Line as "romantics." The Chelsea Property Owners had considerable influence with STB, and by 2003, word had come from Washington that the STB would not grant the "Certificate of Interim Trail Use" to allow the High Line to convert to a park unless the Chelsea Property Owners were compensated.

The eventual key to winning over the Chelsea Property Owners was the West Chelsea Rezoning, which Amanda Burden, Chair of the Department of City Planning, first proposed as an idea in

September 2003, and which finally became law two years later. The title of the Environmental Impact Statement required for the rezoning made clear the link between the rezoning and the High Line. It was called “Special West Chelsea Rezoning and High Line Open Space EIS.” (See figure 8.).

-----**Figure 8 About Here**-----

The rezoning gave the Chelsea Property Owners an alternative method of making an equivalent profit to what they would have made if they had been allowed to develop their properties adjacent to and under the High Line. The rezoning would allow them to sell their air rights to special “receiving sites”--basically potential condo sites-- that did not adjoin the High Line. Actually, new development could still also occur adjacent to the High Line, but subject to a series of building bulk and use controls to encourage connections to the High Line and the preservation of light, air and views. Very tall buildings could only be put up in the special “receiving zones” some distance from the High Line. As a result, the Chelsea Property Owners dropped their opposition to the High Line and the Certificate of Interim Trail Use was granted on June 13, 2005, 19 days after, and clearly as a result of, the Department of City Planning’s adoption of the West Chelsea Rezoning on May 25, 2005.

The High Line created enormous excitement and buzz for several years before an inch of it had opened. (The first completed stage of the project was set to open in 2009.) Advocating for the project in a *New York Times* Op-Ed piece in 2003 while the struggle for approval was still underway, Kenneth Jackson said: “Just as everyone loves Central Park because its meadows and glades allow us to forget that we are in the midst of a huge city, a High Line Park could become a public open space of an altogether different sort, a place that celebrates density and diversity, that shows us how nature can persevere in even the grittiest circumstances, that enables us to understand history not through a book or through a movie but through our own eyes.” After the last major approval hurdle, obtaining the Certificate of Interim Trail Use, was crossed, the High Line was also widely hailed as proof that New York could still pull off visionary projects despite the complex approval processes always entailed.

So successful was the High Line idea that Amanda Burden, chair of City Planning, received a planning prize in April 2006 from the American Planning Association for the new West Chelsea zoning district. Still, by early 2008, the High Line, which had not yet opened, had already triggered such a frenzy of condominium development, driven basically by the belief that rich people would pay huge sums for residences with views of this new park, as to raise broad unease. There had always been a few skeptics—a September 2005 Observer article by Matthew Schuerman, commented: “Benigno Serrano bought 12,350 square feet adjacent to Chelsea’s High Line for just \$900,000 in 1986. Last year, he turned down \$10 million for it. This year, a developer named Alf Naman finally got it for \$12.5 million, according to city transfer records. And that’s just the beginning. Welcome to the great High Line development cash-in! While the elevated railway itself is still just a rusty, weed-covered insurance liability, speculators and developers are already squeezing money from it.” The High Line was, after all, a publicly owned project, now formally part of the Parks Department, and it’s conversion was mostly publicly funded (the initial budget included \$84.25 million in city and federal funds), albeit with an active private component.

-----**Photo 3 About Here**-----



The conspicuous luxury of some of the condo developments adjoining the High Line was striking even by Manhattan standards. For example, one building included a parking space next to each apartment—the car ascended in a special elevator. (See photo 3 ). By 2008, the huge sums of money available for condos had seduced one of New York’s often cash-strapped cultural institutions too. The Museum of the City of New York in 2008 held an exhibition devoted to praising—not one critical word-- the design of a condominium set to open adjacent to the High Line in 2009. (The condo’s name was HL23, i.e. High Line, located at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. See photo 4). It was inappropriate enough that the exhibition’s lead funder was the condo’s developer, Alf Naman, given that the developer was then marketing the apartments to rich clients. Worse, while the exhibition text acknowledged substantial funding from Al Naman, it did not say that he was the condo’s developer.

#### -----Photo 4 About Here-----

A May, 2007 article for New York Magazine, journalist Adam Sterbergh brilliantly captured the unease with which many people now viewed the flood of condominium developments associated with the High Line.

What you’ll get, in other words, is a thoughtfully conceived, beautifully designed *simulation* of the former High Line—and what more, really, do we ask for in our city right now? Isn’t that what we want: that each new bistro that opens should give us the *feeling* of a cozy neighborhood joint, right down to the expertly battered wooden tables and exquisitely selected faucet knobs? And that each new clothing boutique that opens in the space where the dry cleaner’s used to be—you know, the one driven out by rising rents—should retain that charming dry cleaner’s signage, so you can be *reconnected* to the city’s hardscrabble past even as you shop for a \$300 blouse? And that each dazzling, glass-skinned condo tower, with the up-to-date amenities and Hudson views and *en suite freaking parking*, should be nestled in a charming, grit-chic neighborhood, full of old warehouses and reclaimed gallery spaces and retroactively trendy chunks of rusted urban blight? Isn’t that exactly what we ask New York to be right now?

The High Line...will one day look to us like a monument to the time we live in now. A time of great optimism for the city’s future. A time of essentially unfettered growth. A time when a rusted rail bed could beget a park and a park could beget a millionaire’s wonderland. And a time when the city was, for many, never safer, never more prosperous, and never more likely to evoke an unshakable suspicion: that more and more, New York has become like a gorgeous antique that someone bought, refurbished, and restored, then offered back to you at a price you couldn’t possibly afford.”

In summary, the High Line has not yet opened, but it raises a major question facing civic minded environmentalists. When the urban environment is cleaned and polished, then the surrounding neighborhood becomes hugely more desirable, rent and housing prices rise in response to the increased numbers who wish to live in the area, and those with less money lose out to those with more. This is disconcerting, especially when public funds have gone into fixing the environment in the first place.

## Conclusion

We have argued that the New York and Los Angeles schools of urban analysis were each rooted in a context of urban decline which is no longer valid. Instead, the situation of major cities such as New York and Los Angeles is fluid and unclear, with multiple possible and simultaneous directions.

We have, therefore, taken the opportunity to sketch out some new trends and issues. Whether these will eventually coalesce into a major direction or “school” is just unclear. There is some slowdown or reversal of “white flight”, at least for those able to afford the most desirable sections of each city, with the effects clearest when one looks at the rising numbers of non-Hispanic white children in the most desirable sections of each city. There is the massive rise in housing prices in each region from 2000- 2006 (overall much faster in the Los Angeles region than in the New York region, though Manhattan’s prices have been rising far longer than elsewhere in either region). This, together with the failure of most people’s income to keep pace with these housing price increases, provided an important underpinning of the now collapsed housing bubble. There are the changing demographics of areas such as Harlem which raise the question of whether the term “ghetto” remains an appropriate description.

There is the case of the High Line in New York, which poses key issues for the burgeoning environmental movement including the dilemma of using public funds for a project that then makes a section of the city so desirable that those with the greatest economic resources (the wealthy) move there and are most able to enjoy it. Development wrapped in environmentalism seems to be very popular in New York and Los Angeles and in many other cities. Indeed, as Portland, Oregon and other cities have shown, serious concern for the environment make places very desirable, as a place to live. Once again, for members of the upper middle class or higher who can afford it, the amenities of large city life together with the convenience of having employment and family life being reasonable proximate, is very attractive. Whether this 21<sup>st</sup> Century trend continues through the real estate and economic downtrend is still to be determined. Urban America is charting new directions; the study of urban society will undoubtedly follow them.

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