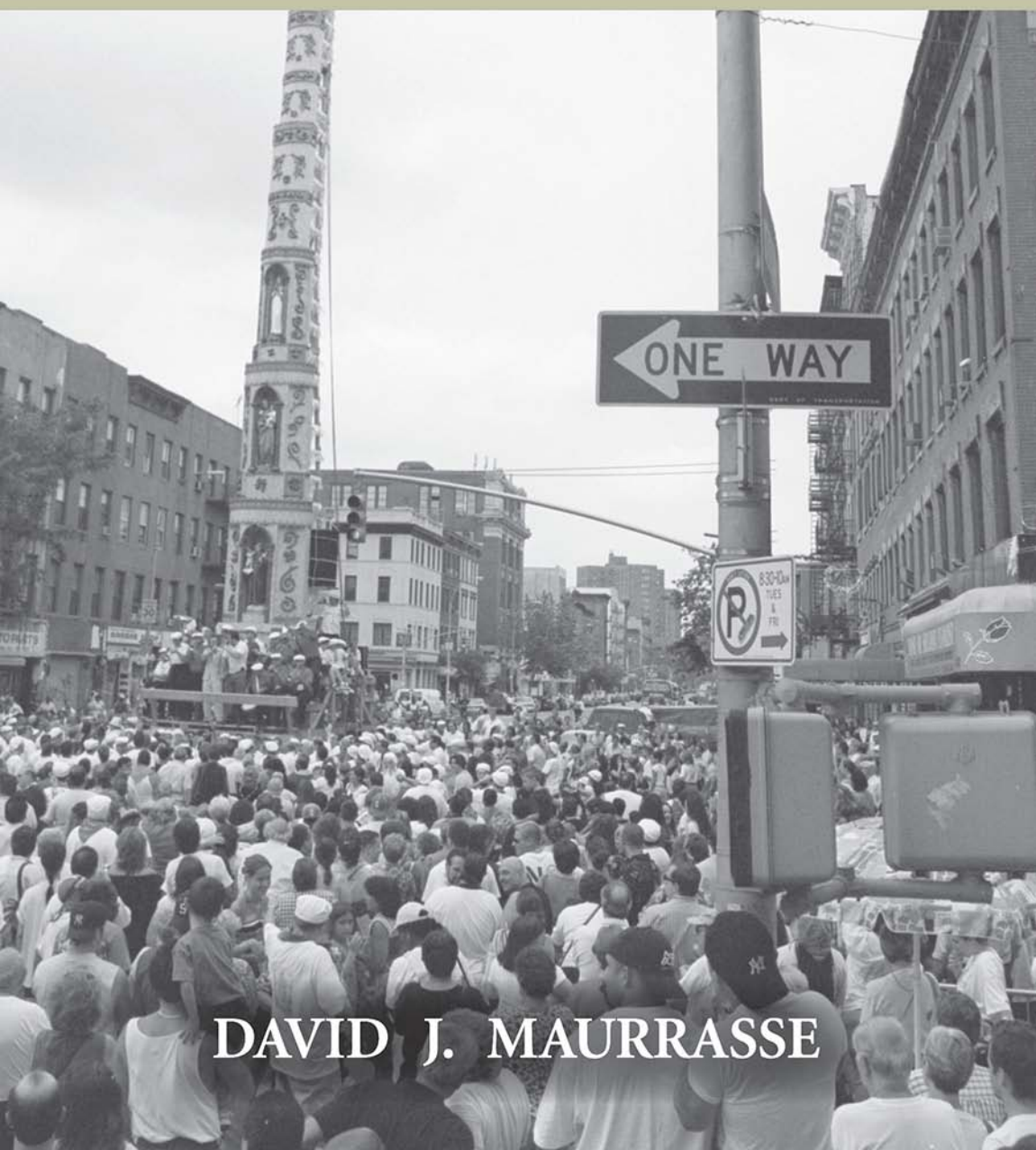


LISTENING TO HARLEM

GENTRIFICATION, COMMUNITY, AND BUSINESS



DAVID J. MAURRASSE

LISTENING TO
HARLEM

This page intentionally left blank

LISTENING TO HARLEM

GENTRIFICATION, COMMUNITY, AND BUSINESS

DAVID J. MAURRASSE



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
New York London

Published in 2006 by
Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
711 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Published in Great Britain by
Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
2 Park Square
Milton Park, Abingdon
Oxon OX14 4RN

© 2006 by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

International Standard Book Number-10: 0-415-93305-6 (Hardcover) 0-415-93306-4 (Softcover)
International Standard Book Number-13: 978-0-415-93305-6 (Hardcover) 978-0-415-93306-3 (Softcover)
Library of Congress Card Number 2005026790

No part of this book may be reprinted, reproduced, transmitted, or utilized in any form by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, microfilming, and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publishers.

Trademark Notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Maurasse, David, 1968-

Listening to Harlem : gentrification, community, and business / David J. Maurasse.
p. cm.

1. Urban renewal--New York (State)--Harlem (New York) 2. Gentrification--New York
(State)--Harlem (New York) 3. Harlem (New York, N.Y.)--Social conditions. 4. Harlem (New York,
N.Y.)--Economic conditions. I. Title.

HT177.N5M38 2005
307.3'41609747--dc22

2005026790

DEDICATION

For my mother, Daphne Maurrasse, who is always there

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Harlem Then and Now	13
Chapter 2 Harlem Rising	41
Chapter 3 Equitable Urban Development	59
Chapter 4 Resident Perspectives	77
Chapter 5 Making Urban Development Work	141
Chapter 6 CBO's Perspectives and Proposed Solutions	169
Chapter 7 Development's New Day?	187
Endnotes	207
Appendix	223
Index	227

This page intentionally left blank

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As with past projects, I am ever so fortunate to benefit from many helpful and generous people who made this book a reality. I should first thank the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University for providing critical financial support. I want to especially thank Manning Marable, the Institute's director, and Kecia Hayes, his (now former) administrative assistant for feedback, advice, help in finding research assistants, and everything else.

I also want to give extra special thanks to Negin Farsad, my primary research assistant on the early stages of this project. Negin helped me put this project together in every possible way, from background research to arranging interviews, and even conducting some interviews herself. What a find! I also want to thank James Crowder, who provided research assistance in the early stages of the project. Karine Walther and Shanda Mays also assisted by transcribing interviews. Very special thanks should also go to Jackie Bliss, who provided monumental assistance in various stages of revision and in processing and analyzing survey data. Thanks to Cynthia Jones, who at the time was the Program Coordinator for the Center for Innovation in Social Responsibility for research assistance, especially transcribing—a most essential task for the qualitative researcher.

Both Jackie and Cynthia now work with me at my company, Marga Incorporated, which maximizes existing resources for societal gain through forging partnerships between major institutions and communities, and developing strategic plans. Others at Marga, such as Amaury Larancuent and Tara Wood helped in canvassing residents on the street about their perspectives on the changing landscape of their

neighborhood. Through Marga, I—and the entire Marga crew—which also includes Rick Greenberg and Michael Price, have become closer to Harlem through our work. Since I began writing this book, Marga has worked closely with Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement (HCCI), and the Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC), for which we facilitated the development of a strategic plan for the coming years. Lucille McEwan of HCCI and Sheena Wright of ADC both provided me with essential insight into the various dimensions of change in Harlem. Both of their organizations are significant players in the landscape of contemporary Harlem, each simultaneously engaging in residential and commercial (in ADC's case) development, yet attempting to maintain supportive environments for longtime residents. In many ways, their work characterizes the complexity and difficulty in seeking equitable solutions in an environment driven by demand and profit.

I have also gotten a bit closer to Harlem through the Alliance for Community Enhancement (ACE), which is actually both one of my classes, and a nonprofit organization for which I am the Board Chair. The class is running the organization. The organization seeks out partnerships with Harlem-based community organizations. Our first major partnership was with HCCI and our current one, a youth mentoring program, is with the Harlem Children's Zone. Everyone I have encountered through ACE, from the Board to the partners, and especially the many students who have passed through the class, has helped to shape the thinking in this book.

I am ever so grateful to all of those who agreed to be interviewed for this book. These issues are not without tension or controversy. In some cases, agreeing to be interviewed and tell it like it is was courageous in itself. Everyone was given the option of being anonymous, and very few interviewees chose to do so. This book seeks to improve the state of urban development, and all of the interviewees wanted to be a part of that. I can't thank them all enough. Also, finding interviewees leads to more interviewees, and thanks to all of those who opened up the network for me. The focus groups cited in the book, for example, emerged solely by the generosity of a couple of community based organizations—the Harlem Children's Zone's Community Pride initiative, at the time, headed by Lee Farrow, and the Valley, headed by John Bess.

Not everyone wanted to be interviewed around this delicate topic, and I just want to underscore that those who agreed to be interviewed

made a monumental sacrifice for the sake of getting out the story and improving the situation. Overall, it is my impression, whether people agreed to be interviewed or not, that longtime residents in Harlem only want to make the situation better, and many of them have been tirelessly working to enhance their neighborhood for years. I can only hope that as Harlem's economic development unfolds, that same majority will be able to share in the resources being produced in the neighborhood's "new renaissance."

For continuous advice on the direction of this research, I should thank Jocelyn Sargent, Vicky Gholson, and Gail Aska. I also want to thank all of my students in my two Urban Planning classes, "Social Movements" and "Community Building and Urban Institutions." In both of these classes, students conducted research in Harlem as a part of their coursework. This research helped me think about the nature of economic development, access, and community building in contemporary Harlem. PolicyLink and the National Community Building Network also deserve acknowledgement, as both organizations, through their work on "equitable development," helped me shape my conceptualization of these issues. Indeed, the hope for development that prioritizes the needs of people in communities rests with organizations such as these.

At Columbia, other colleagues who have helped me get through this research include William Eimicke, Alan Yang, Lance Freeman, and Elliott Sclar. Thanks should always go to Aldon Morris of Northwestern University's Department of Sociology for continuous guidance. I will embark on no major research project without his input, and he is always willing to provide such.

Thanks to Community Voices Heard for building a system of checks and balances to ensure that low-income people have a voice, and that policy makers are accountable. Many of the members of this dynamic organization are from Harlem.

As always, thanks to Ilene Kalish, the original editor on this book, and the editor on two previous books of mine. She has now gone on to a different publisher. Nevertheless, I remain grateful for her insight and patience. Her disposition with me has brought joy to even the most arduous aspects of developing a book.

This page intentionally left blank

INTRODUCTION

From my thirteenth-floor office window at Columbia University, the highest peak of the Morningside Heights neighborhood, you can catch a panoramic glimpse of Harlem. I am always struck by the concentration of myriad towering red brick apartment buildings. Intermittent patches of greenery break the monotony. But, despite the overabundance of similar seemingly unimaginative mammoth structures, one cannot truly get a feel for Harlem from up so high. Nor can one actually see how much Harlem has changed; today's overhead view probably looks a lot like the one from a decade ago. After all, at its core, Harlem is and always has been a residential community.

To really feel Harlem's old grandeur and understand today's new developments, one must be on the ground, walking along the neighborhood's often teeming streets. On this one spectacular summer Sunday, the lights of the landmark Sylvia's Restaurant on Malcolm X Boulevard blink as if on the Las Vegas strip. One block up the Boulevard, a Black woman who appears to be homeless dons a straw hat, holding a denim piece of cloth in her hand, wearing jeans covered by an old skirt. Standing in front of a garbage can, she digs in her pockets. A few feet away, two middle-aged Black men sit next to each other. They appear to be marketing something to passersby. A White man in a beret passes, and crosses at 127th Street and the Boulevard. Further east, a number of

bow-tied, hat-wearing Black men, members of the Nation of Islam, congregate in front of a local Muslim mosque. Young men aggressively zip around on small-wheeled bicycles with long handlebars and high seats. On one corner, a man rides one of these bikes holding a baby in his arm. On 133rd Street, several African Americans of all ages sit on stoops, while a number of SUVs and vans are double-parked. At 136th Street, a car stops in the middle of the narrow block by the side of a pedestrian. The driver leans out of his window to talk to the man on the street, holding up traffic. On this warm summer's day, no one honks. It's not that people don't honk in Harlem as they do in Midtown. There is almost a "country" element to Harlem, likely influenced by the various cultures that converge on these streets, from the South to the Caribbean to Latin America to Africa. While this conversation continues, the feast for the ears is musical, blaring on each corner, spewing hip-hop in front of me, merengue behind me, and dance hall reggae on each side. The bounce of basketballs seems to move in rhythm with all of these beats, as every court in sight is in use. And those basketball games, whether pickup games or tournaments, are simply not complete without continuous howling and jabbering, rim ringing, and crowd cheering.

Whereas lower Manhattan streets are practically painted yellow with taxi cabs, Harlem's are filled with black or gray cars, usually old luxury sedans known as "livery" cabs. According to New York City policy, these independent taxi companies are not supposed to pick up passengers on the street. But they do so regularly, providing a service for Harlem residents that they would otherwise not receive. I flag down livery cabs myself when I am on Harlem streets. What else is one to do? The refusal of many yellow cab drivers to venture into Harlem and other New York City neighborhoods that are predominantly lower income and of color is well known.¹

Turning to Harlem's legendary 125th Street, the typical bustle vibrates. But this present day scene can be distinguished from what one would have encountered ten years ago, when throngs of street vendors hocking their African wares and arts and crafts dotted most sidewalk spaces along the heart of this thoroughfare. In the commercial spaces, one would have found many smaller, independent, less-known establishments. The vibrancy of the street had a different character. It was unmistakable, uniquely Harlem, as crowds could only crawl along the sidewalks given the sheer volume of human bodies. Today's foot traffic is still significant but not quite as congested. The stores have changed

vastly. Some street vendors dot these sidewalks, but many of them are new, as some of the seasoned ones were forced to move by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani during his administration. The Shabazz Market on 116th Street was to be the new haven for street vendors—a space designated by the city for these entrepreneurs. Business at this site has been spotty. On this glorious day, one would think this market would be flourishing. I counted twenty people shopping in this area on this day—a far cry from the foot traffic that these vendors would have encountered in a place where their consumer base would have been ready-made.

But the most noticeable change on 125th Street is the presence of chain retail stores. These stores could be anywhere in Manhattan or the rest of the country: HMV Records, Old Navy, Modell's, the Disney Store, H & M, and so on. To my eye, they almost appear out of place given Harlem's unique culture and history, but there they are. Change happens! One can also see commercial banking activity emerging on the street as well, such as Washington Mutual's new branch at the new Harlem Center, developed by the Abyssinian Development Corporation and Forrest City Ratner, one of the larger real estate developers in the New York City area. This space, at the corner of Malcolm X Boulevard and 125th Street, was once the open-air base for a number of African vendors. The Harlem Center is a small shopping mall including Marshall's and other retail establishments.

Although the sparkling new establishments leap out as you pass by, 125th Street's most well-known landmark, the Apollo Theatre, appears in need of renovation. Indeed, the scaffolding stretching across the front of the noted theatre suggests that repairs are underway. The sign for the old Blumstein's department store, having existed before the significant divestment of the '60s, '70s, and '80s, still stretches vertically above 125th Street. But a sign on the building now reads, "For Rent, 100,000 square feet, four floors, 25,000 square feet each." Mart 125, where independent vendors could sell their goods indoors on 125th Street, is completely closed down, and is now reduced to a two-story building with a glass storefront, surrounded by metal bars. This mart was a place where small entrepreneurs could sell any variety of goods from artwork to music to books and beyond. Not much has happened here for some time. Initially, these vendors received promises that they would be able to stay, but, in the end, Mart 125 became a real estate pricing casualty. Two massive American flags, flying in front of Old Navy, probably tell a story in itself. I can't recall ever having seen an

American flag of that size in Harlem, or any African American neighborhood, for that matter.

But one thing has not changed on 125th Street—the majority of the foot traffic is brown-skinned. A few White faces are dispersed among the African-descended masses, probably more than one would have seen ten years ago. The White population in the neighborhood has increased recently, but it doesn't appear that too many Whites partake in Harlem's vivacious pedestrian life.

Moving up Madison Avenue, the stretch of public housing from 132nd Street to 137th Street is unmistakable—the Riverton Houses, the Abraham Lincoln houses, public housing complexes. These rows of red brick buildings might be the hope for low-income residents to stay in the neighborhood. These are your quintessential public housing complexes. The Abraham Lincoln Houses, for example, contain fourteen buildings, six and fourteen stories tall, with 1,282 apartments and 3,117 residents²—a city unto itself. On 135th Street, the vast Harlem Hospital boasts a sign, "Harlem Hospital Physicians Acclaimed Among the Nation's Leading Black Doctors," and a sign at a nearby playground says, "Harlem Plays the Best Ball in the Country." Although many of the 125th Street businesses have been replaced by chain stores, the older African American-owned businesses there, such as funeral homes, barbershops, and beauty shops, remain.

Harlem is truly a neighborhood of neighborhoods. The housing stock reflects this internal diversity, as some areas contain concentrated housing, others public housing, and others tenements—those approximately five-story buildings lined in rows on many New York City streets, covered by their trademark fire escapes, and usually resting over small commercial businesses.

On this August Sunday afternoon, these are some of the sights in Harlem. Still predominantly populated by people of African descent, the neighborhood particularly comes to life in the summer. August, in fact, is known for its Harlem Week—once this was just a week long, now it lasts a whole month—when various local events bring out locals and visitors alike. For example, the plaza at the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building on 125th Street is full on this day, as hundreds of people thunderously applaud a fashion show, which seems to have ended, as statuesque young women and men of multiple hues make a final sojourn down the stage.

As dusk approaches, the sun drapes itself like a yellow curtain over the neighborhood, from public housing to brownstones, and from parks to long stretches of concrete. The delicate transition from day to night that has always been my favorite time of day brings particular visibility to Harlem's many churches. They come in all shapes and sizes, and dot numerous Harlem corners and sometimes find themselves in the middle of blocks as well. I can see Metropolitan Baptist Church, a gigantic gray stone structure, favoring a castle, spreading its majesty, partly in light and partly in shade. Several other houses of worship join in observing the end of their holy day—some even in storefronts, sandwiched in between bodegas, right alongside the other more noticeable structures. Even on a residential street, like 136th, near Frederick Douglass Boulevard, one can find a church, Beulah Wesleyan Methodist, tucked into the middle of the block. It is hard to miss the significance of worship in this historic neighborhood. And as the wheels of economic development turn increasingly northward on the island of Manhattan, it would be hard to imagine the Harlem landscape without its many houses of worship.

Even though Harlem's economic development is well underway, at this stage, it is still spotty. The noted Striver's Row area of Harlem remains pristine, but is very close to poverty and blight. On one section of 137th Street, most of the brownstones lining the path are boarded up. The block has an almost ominous feel, as a man barbecues out of a barrel in the middle of the sidewalk, and a small group of folks have a picnic on a concrete slab. Going further west, toward Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard, 137th Street becomes tree-lined, renovated, and well kept. The trees on either side of the street literally form a tunnel as their branches meet overhead. There is no boarding on this block.

A few children play on this street, but the overall mood is far more sedate, almost suburban. At Frederick Douglass Boulevard, the housing stock changes again, but it is still decidedly developed and spotless, as a complex of three-story red brick townhouses represent a more modern incarnation of Striver's Row. But 136th Street changes again with far more varied architecture, and, like 137th, the eastern part of the street plays host to a number of boarded up buildings—"shells," in real estate parlance.

Making my way up St. Nicholas Avenue, a lovely park adorns the west side of the block, while five-story multicolored tenements line the other side. Emerging from the serenity is some kind of festive gathering

on the concrete portions of the park. Hip-hop blares, and balloons are everywhere. What is most striking are the African Americans playing basketball in one section of the park, and the Latinos playing another sport in another section. It's hard to tell exactly what the Latinos are doing, but they play in a volleyball court with a soccer ball, bouncing it around, but not actually playing volleyball. I later came to find that foot volleyball is an actual sport! Indeed, this is volleyball where one can't use one's hands. One can use any part of one's body in this game that otherwise mirrors the rules of traditional volleyball.

Harlem has a few quite attractive enclaves. As one steers to the northern end of the vast neighborhood, this becomes even more evident, over the steeper hills and through the spaces of lush greenery. One truly picturesque spot rests at the northern end of St. Nicholas, at 151st Street, which plays host to a triangular small park in the middle of the street, surrounded by beautiful six-story residential buildings—simply regal.

Moving west over to Broadway, commercial activity overwhelms. Underneath seemingly endless rows of tenements, a diverse array of small retail shops contribute to a bustling aura. At Broadway and 139th Street, a Subway sandwich shop is next to a bodega, which is next to another bodega, which is next to the Santiago Deli, which is next to a pharmacy. It's all so crowded. More of a mix of Latinos and African Americans can be found walking about Broadway, but at this point, the pedestrians are primarily Latino. Even moving eastward on 135th Street, toward the top of the hill, Latinos of all ages sit at outdoor tables playing dominoes.

Going toward Central Harlem's southern tip, the neighborhood's proximity to the rest of Manhattan becomes very prominent, especially near the northern end of Central Park at 110th Street. At 114th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard, one can see spectacular prewar (built before World War II) residential buildings, almost resting in a bed of fertile greenery. Not surprisingly, in this area, a great deal of development is in process. Sandwiched between Morningside Park on the west and Park Avenue on the east, and bordered by 125th to the north and Central Park to the south, these Harlem flatlands could be emerging as an extension of Manhattan proper.

At 122nd Street, near Morningside Avenue, two White men peer into the window of a brownstone, maybe speculating about the unit's and the neighborhood's livability. Although some boarded-up buildings

remain in this section, like one red brick structure on 122nd Street and St. Nicholas Avenue, one is far more likely to see various construction projects underway, ones that involve renovation of old homes or sites starting from scratch on empty lots. At 120th Street and Lenox Avenue, a new café/bakery called Settepani looks like something you'd find on 23rd Street. The storefront looks brand spanking new, the windows sparkling clean. The mostly White but still relatively multiracial crowd inside conjures up images of almost anywhere but what many would associate with Harlem. This is quite a nice café, by the way. And it is only one among a few others that have recently opened in the neighborhood.

A couple of blocks to the east, the various lamppost banners reading "Mount Morris Park Historic District" are hard to miss. This elegant square of classic residential architecture with a park in the middle offers the kind of living that most people dream about. Interestingly enough, Mount Morris Park was renamed Marcus Garvey Park in 1973, by a city councilperson, Charles L. Taylor. The mayor at the time, John Lindsay, signed it into law. Nevertheless, it does not appear that residents in the district have embraced the new moniker.

At Madison Avenue, the eastern end of this area, just south of this park, a sign reads, "Madison Court, your desire for affordable luxury is now addressed." All around this area are signs for the Fedders Development Corporation, a large developer that, like others, is creating new complexes. Simultaneously, local community development corporations are offering affordable housing and are helping to renovate existing residential properties.

Although the signs of development blossom at every turn, the metal gratings are pulled down over storefront windows; the graffiti scribbled across them can't be missed. Although commercial and economic development forges ahead, the public infrastructure of the area remains. For example, the Sojourner Truth School on 118th Street does not appear to be recently renovated. And at 5th Avenue and 115th Street and downward one can find a stretch of public housing, such as the King Jr. Towers and the Taft Houses, that does not appear any different than it was some years ago.

Visually, Harlem's overall landscape smacks of transition—a convergence of the neighborhood's past and future. I ended my long Sunday in Harlem gazing at a colorful sign on 119th Street. It depicts several flags—Jamaica's, the Dominican Republic's, Puerto Rico's and others—and reads, "Sharing Wisdom and the Dream of a Better Community."

Yes, Harlem is somewhat of a mosaic of different cultures, largely people of color. It represents the potential of these communities uniting around a collective idea of a better neighborhood. Yet, these cultures coexist in the face of a future that may or may not include them. The Harlem of tomorrow will likely be shaped by a peculiar amalgam of multiple racial and ethnic groups, community organizations, government, private funding sources, developers, churches, and corporations, sometimes operating with the same goal, and at other times moving with divergent views. Sometimes those views will, deliberately or accidentally, converge. Today's Harlem is already experiencing how varied interests and differing degrees of influence manifest in the effort to shape a suddenly desirable neighborhood. In this ever-so-unique area, the bandwagon has been built. The tickets to get on can be expensive, and some may get a free ride, but many are joining in the scramble to get the most out of this landmark, this goldmine called Harlem.

* * * *

Some understanding of the state of Harlem—why it's changing, and where it's headed—can be found through the voices of Harlem's longtime residents. They have lived through the area's decline and are now witnessing its apparent, yet debatable, resurgence. That significant economic development is occurring in Harlem is undeniable. However, the degree to which it leads to economic empowerment for longtime residents remains to be seen. The change in the neighborhood is well on its way—some of which brings clear benefit to longtime residents, and some of which exacerbates anxiety and shakes the security of, particularly, low-income residents.

John Bess, a Harlem native, reflected on the local changes he has witnessed over the last fifty years. I found Bess in his office at the back of the majestic Cathedral of St. John the Divine in Morningside Heights. The organization that he founded and still runs, The Valley, is located in this space. Tracking him down for an interview was no easy task as his organization, a nonprofit providing services to local African American and Latino youth, is comprehensive in scope and nationally renowned. Bess's busy schedule showed on his medium-brown face. A widely framed, fifty-ish African American man, Bess sat down across from me at a table in an open space of The Valley's office, and bestowed his experiential wisdom upon me.

The Harlem that I lived in was the Harlem where we as young people were revered and supported and nurtured. We could go into each other's houses at that time and doors were not locked ... but someone dropped an atomic bomb on Harlem that traumatized us enormously. There was something called heroin. People who were upwardly mobile began to say, "I'm not living in this community." Then we had another neutron bomb called the crack addiction. No longer could you go in the people's houses, and no longer were people friendly, and no longer would people tell you what to do, because now people were behaving in a negative, violent, vicious, and malicious way.

In the decades of which Bess spoke, the 1960s to the 1980s, Harlem was rattled by drugs, crime, and the subsequent abandonment by those who had the option of moving. Boarded-up brownstone buildings lined various Harlem streets, some of which became havens for drug dealers and users. As Bess noted, the neighborhood became a place of fear. But Bess has recently been witnessing changes of an entirely different character. He said, "So now we are seeing a housing boom. Where there was once the stay away from, stay out of, there becomes an attractive community for people to live in. The transformation of Harlem is a radical change."³

Eighty-six-year-old Mary Baker has been living in the same building on 154th Street and Amsterdam Avenue for more than forty-two years. The long hallway of her first floor apartment is characteristic of pre-World War II architecture, before apartments were either cut into pieces or built as much smaller units in newer developments. She remembers all of the well-known African Americans who lived on her block and in her building—Coleman Hawkins, Joe Lewis, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald. Baker was born in Jacksonville, Florida, and, like many of her African American contemporaries, took the trek northward to the big city in the 1930s. "I wanted to get away from home, and I heard so much talk about New York," she told me in her slightly quivering yet decidedly strong voice.⁴

Her first apartment was on 119th Street, between Seventh and Lenox Avenues. She recalls how Seventh Avenue once played host to Mardi Gras, which ultimately became the West Indian Day Parade in Brooklyn—New York's most well-attended annual parade. In the 1930s, trolley cars moved about 125th Street and, although many residents were of African descent, few "coloreds" worked in any of the stores. The famous restaurant, "Charles," didn't even have a Black dishwasher, and only

Whites could eat there. Segregation in New York City was very much alive during this time, with only one difference from segregation in the South, according to Baker: “If you went anywhere, they wouldn’t tell you; they wouldn’t serve you. They’d pass by you, and just wouldn’t pay you any attention. You didn’t exist.”⁵ That segregation has been apparent throughout the history of New York City is well known, and I will discuss this later in this book. However, as Ms. Baker suggests, Black people have received inferior service and access absent of any explicit racial policy. This can be found in the school system, for example, to this day.

This can be found in other major aspects of the city’s public and private infrastructure. In 1935, for example, a Black doctor at Harlem Hospital brought to light a *de facto* discrimination policy. Dr. Lucien Brown had resigned from his position at the hospital because of these practices. A *New York Times* article on his testimony at a hearing of the Mayor’s Commission on Conditions in Harlem revealed “that although about 90 percent of the patients in the hospital are Negroes, only six internes [*sic*] out of twenty-seven on the junior staff are Negroes. The entire medical staff numbers 283, of whom 199 are white.”⁶

In 1956, New York Senator Herbert H. Lehman called for “residential integration” in the city. In his eyes, it was segregation in housing, exacerbated by the presence of predominantly Black public housing complexes that made the segregation in all aspects of New York City life so palpable. He said, “Harlem is an area of poverty, congestion, sub-standard housing and sub-standard schools.” He further noted, “Residential segregation is the other side of the coin of school segregation.”⁷

According to Baker, it was Adam Clayton Powell, who could have passed for White, who broke segregation in Harlem. She can recall the first time she could enter the “five and ten” and sit down. “And we had a hot dog. I’ll never forget it,” she reminisced. She ultimately found work, cleaning up the hardwood floors in Jewish homes for fifty cents an hour. She “did everything” from cooking to washing to taking care of children in order to survive. But rent was much more affordable in those days. “You could get a nice kitchenette room for five dollars.”⁸

Through her eyes, African Americans were gradually becoming more empowered in Harlem, as Black business ownership began to increase. “During the fifties and sixties, we had a lot of those Black shoeshine parlors, Black beauty parlors, and corner grocery stores, and fish and chip places,” she remembered. She thought of “Mr. Sherman’s,”

a barbeque restaurant at 151st Street. She said, “His barbeque stores were all over Harlem, and the thing that made him so unique is that not only did he own the store, he owned the whole building.” In her view, this surge in Black ownership lasted “at least until the eighties.”⁹

In their respective interviews, Bess focused on a rise in crime and Baker on a decline in Black ownership of homes and businesses. Both are aspects of Harlem’s historical reality. Longtime residents of Harlem are not short on opinions, and they possess a strong sense of ownership over their neighborhood. Opinions can be as varied as the myriad types of personalities and backgrounds that one can find in the neighborhood. Harlem, throughout the twentieth century and to the present, has been a haven for people of African descent—the artists, the intellectuals, the workers, the poor, and beyond. With all of the richness inherent in Harlem’s longtime residents, their perspectives are critical to shaping the future of the neighborhood. Seeing the neighborhood through their eyes can bring to light nuances that should not be overlooked as Harlem undergoes rapid changes.

My research assistants and I primarily interviewed longtime residents, nonprofit community organizations, and small business owners. Interviews were, at first, strictly qualitative, but eventually included a survey dimension, which allowed us to reach a broader cross section of people. This research assumes that through soliciting the opinions of those directly impacted by recent developments in the neighborhood, we can get a greater sense of the indicators of equitable and inequitable urban initiatives. We hoped that by conducting this research through this angle, we could develop a set of suggestions for more effective policies that will bring resources into urban neighborhoods without hurting longtime, especially low-income, residents.

However, this book is not simply about talking to people; it is ultimately an analysis of the paradox of urban development, where low-income neighborhoods are revitalized, but preexisting residents are not empowered in the long run. Harlem is in transition; but if the present day “renaissance” is to be truly groundbreaking, it will lead to improved economic opportunity for longtime residents, because it is the economic empowerment of individuals and families that has eluded communities of color, such as those residing in Harlem. A combination of jobs and business development coupled with improved training and education would be a good start.

Great learning can be found by listening to communities. Unfortunately, their perspectives have often fallen on deaf ears or their voices are simply ignored. In some instances, community voices are actually invited to the table, but often merely symbolically. Malcolm X said, "Sitting at the table does not make you a diner, unless you eat some of what's on that plate."¹⁰

In the presence of such dynamics, the process of this research intentionally focuses most of its energy on the perspectives of community residents and community-based organizations. Hopefully, the ideas emerging from these interviews can be beneficial to policy makers, scholars, community-based organizations, corporations, small businesses, and residents in similar urban communities.

Decisions always have consequences. The policies that determined Harlem's latest phase of development, whether public or private decisions, have had both positive and negative ripple effects on longtime, especially, low-income Harlem residents. What is the ratio of economic development projects to actual improvements in the economic livelihood of residents? Through working closely with and listening to community residents, it is easier to get an indication of how the damaging ripple effects of some tendencies in economic development can be turned even more in the residents' favor.

What are the ingredients of economic development strategies that advance opportunities for those who are less advantaged from the start? The impact of the ripple effects of development can best be understood through communication with the residents themselves. The residents can tell the story of how changes in the neighborhood directly affect their lives, and how alternate strategies can be more effective. Interviewees for this book were engaged in dialogue about the strengths, weaknesses, and future possibilities of Harlem's "new renaissance."

After decades of limited development initiatives, the concept of "impact" has come into vogue. It is in the slogan of the United Way, "community impact," and it is the lens through which many nonprofit, philanthropic, governmental, and community initiatives are critiqued and measured. The core question with which this view of urban economic development grapples is what kind of impact? We have reached a point where a higher standard can be placed on impact that enhances communities' capacity to exhibit greater control over their lives. Development does not necessarily lead to empowerment.