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Politics on the Middle Cityscape: Gentrification and Reform Democrats in South Brooklyn, 1950-1965

In the late 1950's, Brooklyn Heights was a nebulous "middle landscape" on the periphery of Manhattan, an eclectic collection of white college-educated settlers living among poor Puerto Rican and Black migrants, Italian Catholic longshoremen, and aging Brahmins. While new middle-class arrivals avidly described a "historically diverse" *gestalt*, an intangible place-sense that pervaded the area, few formally outlined the boundaries of the Heights or listed systematically the exact characteristics that distinguished the "real neighborhood" from the inauthentic cityscape that surrounded it. With no legal or political definition, the Heights remained a vague in-between zone. On the northern periphery, the neighborhood transformed abruptly into Downtown Brooklyn; to the South, the Heights blended into the peripheral slums.

In the history of the American city, the concept of a "neighborhood," like "nation" or "ethnicity," forms when mobilizing against a perceived outside threat. Most often a new ethnic group, an invading force inspires residents to exchange the class, ethnic, gender, and religious turf lines that divide an area for a general "neighborhood" whose boundaries need to be defended. For Brooklyn Heights -- as well as the West Side of Manhattan, Greenwich Village, and other postwar "middle landscapes" throughout the city -- the catalyst for neighborhood formation was the intrusion of the Machine. The Machine although a metaphor represented real political, architectural, and social forces. In fact two "Machines" threatened Brooklyn Heights each encroaching from opposite sides. From the slum of South Brooklyn lurked the Old Machine: the industrial cityscape of polluted factories, corrupt ward politicians, violent youth gangs, and frightening crime syndicates. But from Manhattan threatened a modern and more potent New Machine – a matrix of centralized public authorities, city planning agencies and private development groups spearheading a program of Modernist redevelopment in Brooklyn. In defending the "middle cityscape" against these two Machines, Brooklyn Heights residents -- as well the new urban middle class in Greenwich Village, the West Side, Morningside Heights, and

in cities around the nation – developed a coherent definition of urban "place" and awakened as a force in city politics.[1]

The Old Machine in the Urban Garden

> "Brooklyn Heights is too uniform. I'd like to 'unique' it with a few off-Broadway theatres" – Norman Rosten, 1958. [2]

Famed poet and new Heights resident Norman Rosten was not alone in his assessment. In 1957, Greenwich Village refugee Sylvia Taylor wrote a short letter to the local paper suggesting a few additions to her new neighborhood:

> My walks in Brooklyn Heights have decided my moving to that section. Here are four things I would like to see there:
> 1. An informal nite spot featuring good Jazz
> 2. A Café Espresso shop or two
> 3. A theater devoted, entirely to foreign pictures
> 4. Spring art shows along the Promenade"[3]

Residents reacted in outrage and a flood of letters streamed into the Brooklyn Heights Press. "I would not like to see the four suggestions in the letter on the Heights" wrote one woman. "Evidently she would like to see the Heights converted to a Greenwich Village," complained another letter. "Feeling as she evidently does, we wonder why she doesn't live in the Village? Maybe she does…." "The published letter brought forth a storm of abuse from residents," explained the paper, "who feared that Miss Taylor's brand of culture would turn the Heights into another Greenwich Village – a tourist trap and a haven for unsavory characters who dwelt on the lunatic fringe of the art world."[4]

Both Sylvia Taylor's letter and the hostile reaction highlight an internal tension in the Romantic urban ideal. For although more "organic" to settlers than the Central Business District or suburbia, the "middle cityscape" of Brooklyn Heights was an urban garden rather than ghetto wilderness, and had to be cultivated rather than simply acknowledged. Just as "place" is a verb as well as a noun, "historic diversity" was an ideal that had to be created rather than a reality simply

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[1] The distinction between "Old" and "New" Machines is made by Theodore J. Lowi, The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Policy, and the Crisis of Public Authority (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), 200-206.
[2] "The Heights is Too Uniform," BHP, Nov 13, 1958, 5.
[3] "Four Suggestions," letter from Sylvia Taylor to editor, BHP, January 10, 1957, 4.
[4] "Residents Name New Ways to Improve Life on the Heights", Jan 17, 1957, 1; "Keep Village Out," letter from Mrs. William R. Willets to the editor, BHP, Jan 24, 1957, 4; "Art Reaches the Heights," BHP, October 2, 1958, 4.

to be acknowledged and preserved. While settlers described a "real" city-place unmolested by the modern grid of New York City, new residents actively tried to change the environment they lived in to fit their needs and tastes. If Brooklyn Heights was a sanctuary of Heideggerian "being" in a rapidly modernizing city, it was also a neighboring "becoming." Dull Brooklyn Heights had to be "uniqued": dilapidated buildings had to be "historicized," gray blight had to be "diversified."

Although they purposefully transformed the "middle cityscape," new residents were not Modernists who decidedly wanted to reshape and exploit the obsolete cityscape in the name of progress. Instead they were Romantic developers who envisioned themselves excavating an authentic cityscape hidden under an artificial layer of blight. Free expression, colorful diversity, and storied history all sat quashed by an oppressive industrial cityscape of dictatorial machine bosses, industrial smoke, and absentee landlords. "Historic diversity" was not something to be created *ex nihlio* in Brooklyn Heights, but exhumed. Underneath the Old Machine – the Democratic clubhouse, the polluted factory, the rooming-house and the corner bar – lay a natural garden that needed only to be set free. Street fairs, farmer's markets, block associations, and art galleries were not "new" institutions, but an older and spontaneous form of city life and folk culture revived.

On slum blocks with over-crowded homes, empty factories, and youth gangs, settlers started new block associations, playground committees, art galleries, and tree-planting drives with the goal of creating a vibrant neighborhood that would benefit both white-collar and poorer residents. But if settlers were akin to gardeners cultivating a "historic diverse" middle cityscape, they had to irrigate through a South Brooklyn thicket of pre-existing "places." To create "Brooklyn Heights," settlers would have to carve a new neighborhood unit that traversed the various overlapping turfs that made up the area: the machine ward, the youth gang's territory, the union district, the parish, the factory yard. As "Brooklyn Heights" expanded into the "slum," middle-class settlers clashed with indigenous "bosses" and "chiefs" in an acrimonious and sometimes violent struggle for control. The Heights was a battleground for conflict "between youth and age," warned Richard Mendes in a talk at the First Presbyterian Church. "Brooklyn Heights," he said, "is – and will become even more so – the arena of greater strife between the existing informal power structure…and the new, young and militant group of comparative newcomers to the Heights." Newcomers were changing the neighborhood in visible ways. "Women who wouldn't *dare* walk down Hicks street in slacks 20 years ago now do it everyday," Mendes pointed out. "Stevenson buttons were seen in the living rooms of some of the best homes on Brooklyn Heights' during the last election." Yet despite these differences, Heights residents held out hope for a coexistence between old and new. The local newspaper explained: ""…it

would have to include a greater measure of tolerance between senior residents and newcomers, a recognition on the part of both that the Heights belongs to very resident, that is neither a second Greenwich Village or a private club. “”[5]

No part of Brooklyn Heights needed to be “uniqued” more than its physical landscape. If Brooklyn Heights was a “historic” landscape that settlers juxtaposed to the Modern City, residents first had to “historicize” its brownstones and townhouses. New homeowners bought the aging structures with a sense of mission. Absentee slumlords and poor tenants in the eyes of new residents abused and neglected the magnificent buildings. Dozens of renters lived transiently in “homes” meant to be privately owned. To convert a brownstone from a rooming house to single-family or owner-occupied usage was to liberate it from misuse. Conversion was both a restoration of physical structure and class structure. Settlers were returning blocks to their original aristocratic character, allowing buildings to express their intended use, and uncovering the “real” neighborhood from the shroud of blight. “We were among the first couples to buy a house in the area,” explained Milly Kantrowitz of her townhouse on the northern periphery of the Heights, “and in the beginning we were sort of discouraged by all the run-down property surrounding us. But all that’s changed.” In five years new residents had bought and converted two boarded up buildings, a vacant townhouse, and a “noisy rooming house” to owner-occupied homes. “I hope the trend continues,” Kantrowitz added, “This end of the Heights has become a wonderful place to live – a *real* neighborhood.”[6] (italics added)

When Greenwich Village bookstore owners Jeanne and Eli Wilentz moved into 56 Middagh St, they were excited to find a historic house with room for their three children. A former rooming-house, the grey clapboard house needed much renovation and the couple did much of it themselves, scraping floors, building closets, and rebuilding the decaying stoop outside. What drove the Wilentz family through the hardship was the rich history of the building. Clasping an old yellowed piece of an 1832 newspaper she found in the cellar wall, Jeanne hoped her house “was one of the oldest houses on the Heights.” (Although, she quipped, “everyone who lives in a frame house is sure *theirs* is the oldest one of all”) Eli Wilentz, fascinated by local history, kept a large collection of reference books on the Heights. By renovating, Eli hoped to restore the houses to its original state: “We took off all the Victorian additions and have got it stripped down to pretty much its original condition,” Eli explained: “All the architectural details

[5] “Mendes Cites Youth Trend on Heights, BHP, March 28, 1957, 1; “New Program for the Changing Heights,” editorial, BHP, April 4, 1957.
[6] “The Pioneers: Renaissance in Flower on Lower Hicks Street,” BHP, 22 January, 1959, 5.

and hardware are Federal. We had modern furniture when we moved in but it just didn't look right in this setting, so we've been slowly replacing it with antiques."[7]

The brownstone's "historic" character had to be evoked and excavated, rather than simply recognized and commemorated. If South Brooklyn was a layered landscape, settlers worked with their hands to 'delayer' the brownstone of its modern history, hoping to pull off the fake and restore it to its authentic historical character. When settlers talked of renovation, they emphasized not the process of "addition," but of "removal." While adding new pipes, electrical wiring, and heating, they talked most excitedly about the action of taking away: "scraping," "exposing," "peeling." Brownstones, they felt, were covered under layers of grime and working-class distasteful choices in paint-color, linoleum, and siding. Like archivists x-raying a palimpsest, brownstone renovators sliced through recent history to reach a symbolic era – "long-vanished dignity" – that resonated with their present class aspirations. "The splendor of the New York row house stemmed from the wealth accruing to merchants and businessmen and the presence of a large prosperous middle class," wrote brownstone settler and historian Charles Lockwood. "In recent years, renovation-minded New Yorkers have reclaimed some of this vanished splendor from beneath layers of cheap pain and behind rooming-house partitions."[8]

Sometimes to restore the brownstone, the settler had to 'delayer' both the inanimate and the human. When Tom and Ronnie Levin converted their brownstone to a single- family home, they had to remove an old water heater and old wiring, and to replace the decaying floor. They had to remove the old tenants as well, notifying the residents of the rooming-house that they had to leave in six months. "I'll never learn to think of myself as a landlord," joked Ronnie, "Of course, we won't be for long." With three young children, a Siamese cat, and a dog named Captain Nemo, the Levins needed the entire brownstone for bedrooms, a den, and a playroom in the basement. "It seems the more space we get," complained Ronnie, "the more we need."[9]

While avidly converting rooming-houses to single or dual-family homes (or in their words "re-converting to original use"), brownstone settlers rarely relished the process of eviction. Upon buying a townhouse, some new homeowners found themselves reluctant landlords for several remaining tenants. Others rented out top floor or basement apartments to create a self-paying "income property." "For 'John Purchaser,'" explained a frustrated new home-owner, "he may find several apartments of unevictable tenants protected under rent control. If he wants to convert the first two floors into a duplex, he must figure how to evict 'Mr. and Mrs. Like-It-

[7] "The Rewards of Renovation are Many," BHP, Jan 8, 1959, 1, 6.
[8] Charles Lockwood, Bricks & Brownstones: The New York Row House, 1783-1929 An Architectural & Social History (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972), xii-xiii.
[9] "Levins Learn Renovating First Hand," BHP, January 15, 1959, 1.

Here.' He must go the Brooklyn Rent Control Office and obtain an eviction certificate by justifying that the apartment is of 'immediate and compelling' necessity for his family. For 'Mr. Rehabilitator' who buys a rooming-house and wants to create a duplex and two sets of apartments, he can't evict the tenants unless he can prove that more housing accommodations would result from his renovations. Thus one should do research before buying a house on the Heights."[10]

Residents who purposefully moved to Brooklyn Heights to transcend the class stratification of suburbia found themselves members of a landlord class in an area sharply divided between landlords and renters. "The realtor through whom we bought the house had dwelt at length on the utopian aspects of this arrangement," complained a new owner of a "Vintage 1845" brownstone, "pointing out that the money we collected from tenants would cover such expenses as mortgage payments, taxes, heat and repairs. It turns out later he had never owned a house…[We were] like the old plantation owners of the honey-suckle South….At bottom, I think, we still feel like tenants. When our faucet leaks, something of a shock when a tenant grows irate – can it be that he's angry with us?"[11]

In a further unintentional form of class formation, owners of dilapidated brownstones depended on a casual labor force for home repair, placing them uncomfortably in the position of a bourgeoisie who managed and paid wages to workers. "We started the job with a contractor, but after a while we discovered nothing was getting done, so we fired him," explained a frustrated new homeowner George Maroon. "I took a week off from work to round up my own crew of workman, but it's hard to find good men....They used sagging rulers, didn't even carry nails, and did most of the measuring by 'eye.'…[It's too bad I'm so Americanized] I'm of Lebanese extraction, and I wish I had the old Lebanese technique of driving a bargain. It'd make dealing with workmen a lot easier!"[12]

The relationship between young college-educated landlords and older tenants – often poor or elderly – was filled with ambiguous feelings of guilt and displeasure. For often the same settlers who evicted residents from their individual townhouse also celebrated the "diversity" of the neighborhood as a whole. But the desire both to remove the poor and to celebrate their authentic folkways was an inherent tension in the ideal of "historic diversity." For in neighborhood "place," the poor – particularly the non-white migrants arriving in increasing numbers after World War II – both embodied and destroyed local distinctiveness. In the

[10] "Is Rent Control For You?," BHP, 30 July, 1959, 3.
[11] "Progress and Poverty on the Heights," BHP, 23 July, 1959, 2.
[12] "State Street is a Great Street These Days," BHP, 12 February, 1959, 3.

"historic" city, the poor were *toxic*, a Modern pollutant that ripped off Victorian ornamentation, painted over natural wood, stored rusty bikes in marble fireplaces, left backyard gardens fallow, and infested rooming-houses that were once aristocratic single-family homes. In the "diverse" city, the poor were *organic*, an indigenous cityfolk on the cusp of elimination or assimilation by Modernization. Sitting on folding chairs and peering out kitchen windows, the elderly poor spoke with local twang, filled the air the savory smells of ethnic foods, and watched over children at play. Their teenage grandchildren played loud music on street corners, littered the street with shards of broken beer bottles, and urinated on brownstone stoops.[13]

Just as the "historic" landscape had to be made historic, so too did South Brooklyn's "diversity" require a process of diversification. Settlers attempted to "unique" the neighborhood by opening new stores, art galleries, cafés and restaurants. If blight was dull and gray, the Heights boasted new colorful institutions that mixed an aesthetic of free expression with a refined taste for high culture. "Even as she was being pummeled for her apostasy," explained a local editorial, "[Sylvia Taylor's] suggested innovations were in the making. Now they are here – the café espresso house, the art galleries and fine films… Such citadels of Heights tradition as the Bossert Hotel and the Candlelight Restaurant are exhibiting paintings and culture and the patrons love it. The St. George Playhouse seems to be learning that good movies mean good box office, around here at any rate. On Montague Street Paul Meunier has fronted his ballet school with a fine arts gift shop, and across the street Sylvia Dwyer is running a new and vital art gallery. Down on Hick Street the trend has moved swiftly. No less than six galleries have appeared. Together with Gina's Heights Espresso at 46 Hicks they are known as the Hicks Street Artists Group."[14]

The cafés and art galleries founded by Heights' residents certainly catered to the new middle class. But many residents attempted to include poor residents in a grassroots effort to fix up the neighborhood by forming block associations, organizing block festivals, and building new play areas for local children. In early 1952, Richard Mendes and other members of the South Brooklyn Neighborhood House organized a committee of local volunteers to raise funds for a new playground on the roof of its Willow Place building. Sitting on the southern edge of the Heights, Willow Place was home to a mix of working-class Italians, new white middle-class residents, and a growing Puerto Rican migrant population. After hosting a successful block festival, the committee decided to expand into a permanent block association, renaming itself to the "Willow Town Association." Along with organizing an annual street fair, the new group

[13] For a discussion of "toxic discourses," see Lawrence Buell, Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 30-54.
[14] "Art Reaches the Heights."

pressured the city to crackdown on negligent landlords, demanded better street lighting and alerted authorities about sanitary violations.[15]

But just as brownstone historicization at times required a stripping away of poorer residents, diversification too involved a delayering of Brooklyn's industrial landscape. The new neighborhood cultivated by settlers was distinctly a postindustrial commemoration of a pre-industrial past. Independent film theaters, cafes, art galleries made up a diverse landscape of consumption for white-collar workers eager to reestablish an authentic form of living in an increasingly technocratic city. But while residents eagerly established diverse forms of consumption, they felt less enthusiastic about the area's diverse landscape of industrial production. While Heights residents celebrated the area's non-Fordist, non-bureaucratic economy as a Jeffersonian alternative to the Modern City's large corporations, they remained selective about which aspects of Brooklyn's economy they valued. "Pre-industrial" forms of labor like arts and crafts, shipping, fishing, and shop-keeping evoked a village past. Farmer's markets and street carnivals harkened back to Brooklyn's agricultural era. Block associations revived an older form of participatory town hall democracy. Even the abandoned shells of industrial buildings formed a historic landscape eagerly re-inhabitated by artists.[16]

But new Heights residents were decidedly unreceptive to functioning industry. In a form of grassroots "deindustrialization" of the South Brooklyn, Heights residents attempted to expel light manufacturing from the neighborhood and to prevent new industry from inhabiting unused factories and lofts. In January 1956, Heights resident A.J. Burrows bought an abandoned industrial building on 26 Columbia Place with plans to open a small metal fabricating factory. After rehabilitating the structure and cleaning the property of "old socks, beer cans, and garbage," Burrows and 20 employees began manufacturing electronic equipment. Both the Willowtown and the Brooklyn Heights Associations were outraged and began protests to have the factory closed. Burrows, a dues-paying member of both associations, was dismayed: "Most of our work is by hand. We don't create any smoke or soot, and we're quieter than many of our neighbors….I'm just as interested in the good of Willow Town as anyone else. After all, don't I own property there?"[17]

In November, the Willowtown Association brought a motion to the Board of Standards and Appeals to force the factory to move. The motion was a curious advocacy of gentrification. Brooklyn Heights, the association argued, was a residential neighborhood undergoing a dramatic

[15] "Willow Town Association," BHP, 11 September, 1952, 3; "Willowtown Party to be 'Carnival'," BHP, May 23, 1957, 4
[16] Nan Ellin, Postmodern Urbanism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 156-163.
[17] "Willowtown Factory Has Growing Pains," BHP, 25 October, 1956, 1.

revival. If new manufacturing were allowed to open in abandoned factories, the process would be turned back. The historically diverse neighborhood would once again become dull blight. The restored brownstones would once again become home to the poor. "Houses that been converted to private homes will revert back to buildings exploited as rooming houses." The Board allowed the property to stay, but imposed strict conditions: no signs on Willow Street, no loading or unloading on the street, and no use of street side doors for business. "It was partial victory," complained Richard Mendes of the South Brooklyn Neighborhood Houses, "[but] the day will come when we have no manufacturing in the neighborhood."[18]

When in July 1959 Love Lane Garage applied to the city for permission to build bigger doors on their plumbing supply storage facility, residents of the area and the Brooklyn Heights Association made similar arguments to protest the move. Operating out of four old carriage houses for years, Love Lane Garage was a creative, organic adaptation of industry to an old commercial landscape. To the dozens of new Heights residents living in the alleyway's recently renovated carriage houses, however, the arrival of trucks twice a month for pipe and car traffic was a "flagrant abuse of the street." "We have worked very hard to make our little mews a more attractive place," protested spokesperson Harry Holtzman, artist and professor of art at Brooklyn College. "Outside of the initial cost of the property, six residents have put more than $100,000 in improving their homes. We clean the street ourselves, and we would like to plant trees along one side." The Board of Standards and Variance subsequently turned down the garage's plea. "I've applied for many variances of this sort and this the first time I've been turned down," explained the dismayed owner. "[We] just wanted to create a more efficient operation." "I'm very pleased about the decision," said a jubilant Holtzman. "Now we can continue to make this a prettier place."[19]

Industrial operating equipment and trucks were not the only machines settlers wanted stripped from the Heights. The struggle against the Old Machine was a political one as well. On June 13, 1957, a collection of new Heights residents fed up with local politicians met in a brownstone to form a new Democratic club to represent the Third A.D., a broad district of 20,000 voters covering much of South Brooklyn. The new "West Brooklyn Independent Democrats" (WBID) dismissed the existing "regular" Democratic club as a corrupt machine tyrannically controlled by local boss Frank Cunningham. "We are tired of one-man rule," explained club president Philip Jessup, a lawyer and recent arrival to the Heights. "One-man rule is *the* rule in

[18] Heights Factory Wins Fight to Stay Here Neither Side Satisfied," BHP, 15 November, 1956, 1; Letter from Malcolm Chesney Jr. to the Editor, BHP, 15 November, 1956, 1.
[19] "Heights Protests Garage Expansion," BHP, 16 July 1959, 1; "Garage Denied College Place Zone Variance," BHP, 30 July 1959, 1.

the regular Democratic organization," exclaimed the Heights Press. "Year after year the De Sapios and the Cunninghams are allowed to hold on their positions as party bosses. No one in the organization would dare oppose them. They rule by decree. And now, suddenly we have insurgent Democrats like the WIBD's, springing up all over the city, and insisting on democracy within the Democratic party." Frank Cunningham was unimpressed. "We're not afraid of this new group," he told the local paper. "They can oppose us if they want."[20]

The WBID was but one of many "reform" clubs to emerge in the late 1950's. Starting with the East Side's Lexington Club, college-educated urbanites founded independent democratic organizations to challenge local ward bosses in Greenwich Village, the West Side, Morningside Heights and other "middle cityscapes" around Manhattan. The movement was national as well. In Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia, reform clubs formed in inner-city Gold Coasts where a new urban managerial class lived in luxury apartment buildings and rehabilitated townhouses on the periphery of the Central Business District and major universities.[21]

Brooklyn Heights's new urban reform movement was not the first middle-class attempt to curtail the power of the borough's corrupt political machine. But by founding an independent Democratic club, they distinctly rejected the party supported by reform-minded Brooklynites in decades past: the Republican party. As a minority party in a city run by a Democratic ethnic machine, New York City's Republican Party had long been a upper middle-class Protestant "good government" party producing the city's most powerful reform leaders throughout the twentieth century like Seth Low, Fiorello LaGuardia, John Lindsay, and Robert Moses. Postwar Brooklyn Heights – like other "silk stocking" or "Gold Coast" districts in Manhattan, Chicago, and Boston – voted solidly Republican in both local and national elections. In 1952, 70% of Brooklyn Heights voters in the area supported presidential candidate Dwight Eisenhower, and the district elected the only Republican representative from Brooklyn to Congress.[22]

But for the younger and more liberal white-collar migrants arriving in the Heights, the postwar national G.O.P. was too conservative, hostile to the "Fair Deal," and hawkish on foreign policy to remain attractive as a local reform party. "There was no possibility of a deal with

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[20] "New Way to Be a Democrat," BHP, 20 June, 1957, 1; "In the Future, a Fight," BHP, 14 November, 1957, 2; "Reform Dems Hit 'One-Man' Rule, Name Candidates," BHP, 13 March, 1958, 1; "Democracy Revisited," BHP, 5 February, 1959, 4.

[21] James Q. Wilson, The Amateur Democrat: Club Politics in Three Cities (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 2-16, 41-43,67-69; Daniel P. Moynihan, "'Bosses' and 'Reformers'," Commentary, June 1961, 462-463.

[22] "Heights GOP Edge Is More or Less (More or Less)," Brooklyn Heights Press, 6 December, 1956; "Dorn is in 3-Way Race to Keep 12th District in G.O.P. Column," NYT, October 23, 1958, 24.

Republicans," explained one reformer. "We are at the opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to foreign policy." The new "reformers" populating the Heights had a new political sensibility that shared both the good-governmentism of Republicans and liberal political views of the Democrats. Initially, residents experimented with a third party option: the Liberal Party. Started in 1944 by anti-communist Jewish union leaders and supported primarily by lower-middle class Jews, the Liberal Party endorsed reform-minded candidates from either party to form Fusion tickets, and occasionally ran candidates of its own. [23]

In 1957, LeRoy Bowman, a sociology professor at Brooklyn College, ran on the Liberal ticket for councilman from the 13th Senatorial District. Although at 70 he was a generation older than most new residents, Bowman's resume was similar to many of the "missionaries" to move to the Heights after the war. A specialist in race relations and juvenile delinquency, Bowman was active in community organizing, volunteering for the South Brooklyn Neighborhood House and directing both the Citizens for All Day Neighborhood Schools and the United Parents Association. As a candidate, he ran on a platform of a strong supreme court, civil rights, clean government, anti-McCarthyism and increased government spending on social programs in the area. Most pointedly, however, he was "independent" of the local machine. "Everyone knows that I would stand up for what I believe," explained Bowman. "I'm really an independent. I think a councilman should represent his neighborhood, not just his party." Operating out of local realtor and supporter Kenneth Boss's office, Bowman ran a small campaign using a Liberal Party sound truck, speaking on corners, and using $1000 of donations to send mailers and handbills. Along with the Liberal Party, an independent committee of local doctors, ministers, lawyers, businessmen and teachers spearheaded the campaign. [24]

Bowman's campaign highlighted the radically different approaches to politics of new white collar residents and the Old Machine. When Bowman and the Republican candidate arranged for a town-hall style debate in the Heights to discuss "issues," the Democratic incumbent Arthur Low didn't show up. Heights residents were furious to hear that Low spent the evening instead socializing with other club politicians elsewhere in the borough. When the League of Women Voters organized a second debate, Low sent word that he too sick to attend. "In theory, he represents his neighborhood," complained the Heights Press. "In practice, he has represented no one." Further aggravating Heights residents, the rest of the South Brooklyn

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[23] "Republicans, Liberals Call Cronin Charge 'Ridiculous'," BHP, 30 October, 1958, 1; Roy Peel, "New Machines for Old: Decline of the Bosses," Nation, 5 September, 1953, 89; Wilson, 36-40.
[24] "Dr. Bowman Is a Modest Man," BHP, 3 October, 1957, 1; "Best Man for the Job," BHP, 17 October, 1957; "Candidates With a Difference," BHP, 23 October, 1958.

seemed not to care. Despite endorsements from the Brooklyn Heights Press and the Citizens Union, Bowman won only 7% of the vote, losing heavily to the Democratic incumbent.[25]

It was a national election -- the failed 1952 and 1956 Adlai Stevenson presidential runs -- that finally ruptured the New York City Democratic party. In Brooklyn Heights and other "middle cityscapes" around the country, Adlai Stevenson was an inspirational figure who sparked a political awakening among the city's new young college-educated apartment and brownstone denizens. As the first political hero of the "superurban" middle-class, Adlai Stevenson, in a sense, was the first "historically diverse" postwar politician. Where many young college graduates were apathetic to the cigar-chomping backroom dealings of city politics, Stevenson appeared an "authentic" political voice motivated by a genuine passion rather than calculated self-interest. His Yankee pedigree and Brahmin accent gave him an aristocratic "historicity" more congenial to Heights residents than the ethnic hacks and Southern bosses who dominated Democratic party politics. His ability to speak articulately about complex issues, his cosmopolitan world view, and his willingness to embrace subtlety gave him an urbane "diverse" sophistication lacking in provincial, didactic rural Democrats like Harry Truman.[26]

[*Miller Center note: many of these words like "superurban," "missionaries," the "middle cityscape," "settlers," and "Modernists" were introduced in earlier chapters*]

During the 1956 primaries, a group of Heights residents started the "Brooklyn Heights Stevenson-Kefauver-Wagner Committee" to mobilize local support for Stevenson. During the campaign, Stevenson supporters became increasingly frustrated when the "regular" Democratic club made a backroom deal to support Governor Averell Harriman in the primaries. When Stevenson beat Harriman for the nomination, the machine made little effort to support his presidential campaign. Since Stevenson, unlike Governor Harriman, offered no access to patronage, "regulars" focused instead on local elections. For the Heights' new urban middle class, the betrayal of Adlai Stevenson ignited a wave of outrage about the corruption of the local machine. Incensed by seeing an inspirational idealist fall victim to deal-making and graft, Stevenson supporters in Brooklyn Heights decided to form a "reform" Democratic club free of "boss" control. Following a trend in Manhattan, Boston, and Chicago, the "Stevenson Committee" renamed itself the West Brooklyn Independent Democrats.[27]

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[25] "The Great Debates: 2 Candidates In Search of a Missing Councilman," BHP, 31 October, 1957, 1; "Two Debates, One Winner," BHP, 31 October, 1957, 2; "Best Man for the Job," 17 October, 1957, 2.
[26] Wilson, 52-56.
[27] "New Way to Be a Democrat"; "Reform Democrats Hit 'One-Man Rule"; "Independent Dems to Fight Regulars," BHP, 20 February, 1958, 1; For similar events in Manhattan, see Moynihan,

The WBID was a radical shift in city reform tactics. Where earlier reformers depended on third parties or non-partisan groups organized around a single-issue, the "reform" Democrats hoped to reform the Democratic party from within. "The West Brooklyn Independent Democrat, which rose last year out of the ruins of Stevenson's defeat, continues to grow in strength," lauded the Heights Press. "Its goal is nothing less than to control the regular Democratic party organization in this area, the Third Assembly District." "It was felt that the best way we could achieve our goals," explained Heights lawyer and WBID president Philip Jessup, "was by *becoming* the regular Democratic organization." In 1958, the WBID put up its first slate of "reformers" to challenge machine candidates in local primaries. While WBID candidates polled well in higher-income parts of the Heights, "regulars" won overwhelmingly in the district as a whole. "Naturally we were disappointed in losing the District-wide contests," explained Jessup, "but there were several encouraging signs." The declaration was an opening salvo in what would be a decades-long acrimonious fight between older machine leaders and in-migrating middle-class reformers in South Brooklyn.[28]

On the surface, the rift between "reformers" and "regulars" was a clash over specific political issues. The "regular" democratic clubs took an older, Catholic view of government that fused economically liberal and socially conservative ideals. Machine candidates supported generous government expenditures on city programs, but were hawkish on foreign policy and remained cool to the counterculture, civil rights, and other social movements emerging in the late 1950's. "Reformers," in contrast, articulated a new urban white-collar version of liberalism that mixed an emphasis on fiscal responsibility with social libertarianism. The WBID complained that the machine was both wasteful and corrupt, as well as apathetic to civil rights. The "regulars" in contrast complained that Stevenson and his supporters were "beatniks" soft on communism and crime.[29]

But the schism was about more than specific political issues. "Regulars" and "reformers" disagreed about the nature of politics itself. When "regulars" were not inspired by Adlai Stevenson, it was not primarily because they disagreed with his ideology. Instead, it was precisely because the machine had no ideology. Machine politics cared little about "issues," but rather

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"'Bosses' and 'Reformers'," 462, 465-466; Robert Lekachman, "How We Beat the Machine: Challenging Tammany at the District Level," Commentary, April 1958, 290-291; Dan Wakefield, "Greenwich Village Challenges Tammany," Commentary, October 1959, 309-310.

[28] "In the Future, a Fight," BHP, 14 November, 1957, 4; "Republicans, Liberals Call Cronin Charge 'Ridiculous'"; "Independent Democrats to Meet, Assess Primary," BHP, 25 September, 1958, 2; "The Art of Losing," BHP, 20 November, 1958, 4.

[29] "Where We Stand," BHP, 20 October, 1959, 4; "Candidates With a Difference"; "'Bosses' and 'Reformers'," 462-463; "Greenwich Village Challenges Tammany," 308-309;

personal relationships, patronage, favors, ethnic identity, and mutual self-interest. Voters supported politicians whom they knew personally and who provided them with jobs and city services. Politicians provided services in exchange for votes and bribes. Politicians cared little about national or international issues, and instead were inextricably tied to a local web of institutions: small businesses, the unions, organized crime, the Catholic Church, local restaurants and bars, and ethnic fraternal organizations.[30]

"Reformers," however, were decidedly hostile to the secret backroom deal-making of "professional politicians." As residents of the "middle cityscape," reformers brought a Romantic ideal to politics that emphasized direct democracy, free expression, and passion rather than pluralistic compromise. In contrast to the hierarchical structure of the "machine," reformers promoted an urban version of Jeffersonian democracy where local communities met in town-hall meetings free of corruption and bureaucracy. The "regular" Democratic party, in their eyes, was not a local institution, but a dictatorial machine controlled by a "boss" antithetical to democratic principles. They described their movement in revolutionary terms, envisioning themselves as liberating a captive population from despotic rule. "Slightly less than two centuries ago an American general was digging trenches on Brooklyn Heights in full and open rebellion against British tyranny," wrote the Heights Press. "Another 'rebel' group on the Heights is the West Brooklyn Independent Democrats. Their political aim is to overthrow the regular Democrats in the Third Assembly District. Like General Washington, they are seeking greater representation in government by the governed."[31]

WBID leaders created a radically different organization from the Old Machine. The WBID believed that an authentic political club should be a forum for concerned citizens to discuss "issues" and "causes" rather than exchange stations for patronage, building permits, work chits, number-running, and bribes. "The WBID wants to be a political club, not a employment agency," explained one member of its policy of forbidding officers from accepting patronage. Instead of bartering services, the WBID held open debates, hosted lectures by invited speakers about national and international issues, and organized kaffeeklatsch discussion groups. The club purposefully remained an "amateur" organization staffed by volunteers who worked out of a sense of civic duty rather than for power or financial rewards. Where the "regular" club controlled by Frank Cunningham doled out staff positions to loyal supporters, the WBID held frequent elections for leadership, refused to offer patronage jobs, formed volunteer committees to

[30] Norman M. Adler and Blanche Davis Blank, Political Clubs in New York (New York: Prager Publishers, 1975), 174-175.
[31] "Heroes and Heresies," BHP 22 January, 1959, 2.

tackle local problems, and lobbied to make civil service positions merit-based. The young lawyers who made up the majority of its leadership categorically rejected offering "favors" to constituents, believing instead that assistance to poor residents should stem from higher ideals of passion and justice. Where the local machine informally offered housing, jobs, and city services to constituents in exchange for votes and payoffs (and the "new machine" operated as a scientifically-managed bureaucracy centered in City Hall), the WBID created "community service" and "outreach" programs to serve the needs of local residents. While in the "regular" club, constituents waited on line to meet with politicians to schmooze and ask for assistance, the WBID in 1959 opened a "consulting bureau" run by middle-class volunteers in which residents could ask questions about "individual neighborhood problems or issues affecting the area."[32]

The clash between "regulars" and "reformers" was more than a battle of ideas. The schism represented a larger cultural and class conflict between in-migrating white-collar residents and the Irish and Italian Catholic *petit bourgeoisie* who controlled inner-city politics. Political parties are social institutions as much as political organizations. For young white-collar residents migrating to Brooklyn Heights and Greenwich Village, the WBID and other political organizations served as ways to meet neighbors, find possible dating partners, and feel a sense of community in a transient urban environment. College-educated lawyers, artists, and writers felt little social connection to the web of institutions that formed the Old Machine. New residents eager to get involved in local politics described feeling awkward and intimidated as they entered the local bar or clubhouse, often receiving hostile stares from older Italian or Irish club members. Others felt outraged when they had to wait for hours on line with poorer residents to meet with leaders whose qualifications they little respected. Young women particularly felt uncomfortable in clubhouses in which in local working-class females never stepped foot. "In many clubs, the principal interest is the card game in the back room or the bar which pays the rent," complained one reformer. "Often a headquarters is operated from, or is very handy to the leader's saloon, undertaking parlor, or other business office…Too often these old style political party headquarters, like old union headquarters, turn the stomachs of the majority of the 'unhardened' people who are not 'in.'"[33]

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[32] "West Brooklyn Independent Democrats," World Telegram and Sun, 24 March 1962; "Agenda," The Independent Democrat, February 1962, 1; "The Independent Dems Plan a New Service," BHP, 8 January 1959, 4; Letter from Monroe Singer to Editor, BHP, 15 January, 1959, 1. For similar organizations, see James Ottenberg, The Democratic Club Story (New York: Lexington Democratic Club, 1960), 7-12, 45; Steven A. Mitchell, Elm Street Politics (New York: Oceana Publications, 1959), 40-41; Wilson 226-257.

[33] Mitchell, Elm Street Politics, 31; Wilson, 165-175.

The fight between regulars and reformers was a clash between an older, male industrial and new, mixed-gender postindustrial landscapes, or better yet between alcohol and coffee. South Brooklyn politics was intricately tied to working-class all-male institutions: bars, storefront clubs, the Knights of Columbus and other fraternal organizations. Drinking alcohol, in particular, was an essential ritual that connected politicians to their constituents. The perception that local leaders were "drunks" was a mainstay of reform rhetoric. When an inebriated "regular" club bigwig Walter Cook plowed his car through Joe's restaurant blocks away from the Heights, and received no fine from a machine-appointed judge, reformers became incensed. Further alienating the Heights' new middle class, local boss Frank Cunningham used clubhouse dues to organize popular boat rides where politicians and loyal constituents reveled and drank heavily on a hired barge. "Reformers," on the other hand, were a cross-section of the new urban professional class: young, white, Protestant or Jewish, college-educated, and disproportionately single or married without children. Unlike in all-male "regular" clubs, women were heavily represented at club events. To raise money and register members, the WBID organized kaffeeklatches, lecture series, forums, and wine-tasting parties in rehabilitated brownstones and new apartment towers.[34]

This was not the first time local machines had to adjust to a changing constituency. With new populations constantly replacing old as neighborhoods "filtered down" in a constantly evolving city, the machine for decades had constantly to assimilate new immigrants into its organization to maintain power. By nominating "balanced tickets" with representatives from each ethnic enclave and distributing patronage among different communities, the machine attempted to keep stability through pluralistic compromise. With the arrival of thousands of Blacks and Puerto Ricans to the city after World War II, the machine tried to digest the new groups by placing loyal non-white leaders to key positions in city government. When in a 1946 state assembly race, black female Republican and Urban League activist Maude Richardson lost by only 200 votes to the white democratic "regular" in Brooklyn's Fort Greene and Bedford-Stuyvesant, machine leaders realized that they could no longer ignore the area's growing black constituency. Nominating West Indian bookkeeper and clubhouse loyalist Bertram Baker, the party won handily against Richardson in 1948. Baker, Brooklyn's first black elected to the state legislature, soon became one of Tammany's most powerful politicians. In Harlem, J. Raymond "Harlem Fox" Jones and Hulan Jack followed similar career trajectories.[35]

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[34] Charles Monaghan, interview by author, 1 April, 2003; Wilson, 258-288; Wakefield, 308-309; Mitchell, 46, 86-87.

[35] Wesley McD. Holder, Interview, 1973, transcript, Oral History Collection, Columbia University; James Q. Wilson, Negro Politics: The Search for Leadership (New York: Free Press, 1960), 44-76; Wilson, The Amateur Democrat, 280-282; Will Chasan, "Congressman Powell's

But while the machine was designed to accommodate neighborhoods "filtering down" to newer, non-assimilated poorer ethnics, it was ill-equipped to adjust to neighborhoods that were "filtering up." While machines offered upward mobility to lower-income groups, they provided little of need to wealthy, college-educated urbanites. New residents had little need for patronage or favors. Their social and professional lives were linked to the offices, universities, and cultural institutions of the central business district rather than the union halls, bars, organized crime syndicates, and fraternal clubs in which the machine had influence. More importantly, they rejected the very core principles that underlay the machine. They believed in merit rather than patronage, clear morality rather than pluralistic compromise. Attacking the very core of machine politics, reformers categorically rejected any form of ethnically balanced tickets. Rather than an artificial quota system, they believed leadership should represented the authentic voice of the people as expressed in open elections.[36]

But just as the regulars failed to appeal to new white-collar residents, the WBID struggled to address the working-class constituency of the Old Machine. While perhaps not purposefully exclusive, the very structure of the WBID catered to the tastes of the new urban middle class and made it difficult for poor or less educated residents to participate in club activities. By rejecting patronage and operating on a volunteer basis, reform democrats ensured that only wealthy residents or their spouses with the time and funds to work for free could participate fully in club activities. In the debates, committees, and townhall meetings organized by the WBID, articulate lawyers and other college-educated residents familiar with Robert's Rules of Order dominated the proceedings. The WBID's categorical rejection of ethnically balanced tickets made it difficult to incorporate new Black and Puerto Rican residents into the party. Beyond the structural impediments, the social environment of the club was distinctly upper middle-class. Just as reformers felt uncomfortable smoking cigars in a local bar, so too did working-class residents feel awkward attending a book reading in a renovated brownstone.[37]

This is not to suggest that the WBID did not try to enlist Brooklyn's growing non-white population into its fight against the "machine." If the "Regulars" sought to cull a loyal cadre of Black and Puerto Rican politicians from within the ranks, "Reformers" looked hopefully to a grassroots Democratic insurgency led by a group of West Indian professionals in neighboring Bedford-Stuyvesant. In 1953, Wesley "Mac" Holder, a British Guiana-born statistician working in the Brooklyn District Attorney's office, became outraged when the local Democratic club

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Downhill Fight in Harlem," Reporter, 10 July, 1958, 24-28. Meg Greenfield, "Tammany in Search of a Boss," Reporter, 13 April, 1961, 28-31; Adler and Blank, 187.

[36] Wilson, The Amateur Democrat, 312-316,

[37] Wilson, 258-288; "Mendes Cites Youth Trend on Heights," BHP, 28 March, 1957, 1.

nominated a white judge from outside the district to fill vacancy on the Second Municipal Court. With political roots in the Garvey movement, a degree in mathematics, and a solidly middle-class upbringing in British Guiana, Holder was representative of Brooklyn's large and vocal West Indian professional class. When African-American Lewis Flagg expressed interest in running for a municipal judgeship, Holder formed the Committee for the Election of Lewis S. Flagg, Jr.. With the help of whites and black volunteers, the Committee ran a hard-nosed campaign independent of the machine, even hiring private detectives to guard the ballot boxes on election night. Encouraged by the victory in the Flagg fight, Holder renamed the group the Bedford-Stuyvesant Political League, an independent Democratic club with the mission of electing black representatives and judges. By its disbandment in 1966, the BSPL had led successful campaigns for four Black civil court judges, three Black Supreme Court judges, two Black Criminal Court judges, three Black assemblymen, a Black City Councilman and a Black State Senator.[38]

Brooklyn Heights' and Manhattan's white "reformers" excitedly supported the black-led insurgency movements in Brooklyn and Harlem. When a fiery Barbadian Shirley Chisholm and a group of West Indian politicians broke from the machine to found the Unity Democratic Club in 1960, the reform umbrella New York Committee for Democratic Voters endorsed their ticket. Eleanor Roosevelt spoke at one of their campaign rallies. When Chisholm won a state assembly seat in 1964, she rode a wave a wave of anti-machine sentiment in both the black and white community, thumping with the theme to "end Boss-ruled plantation politics." Harlem's Adam Clayton Powell similarly rallied crowds with cries of "plantationism" and "send that Uncle Tom back downtown" in his landslide 1958 primary victory over Tammany Hall candidate Earl Brown.[39]

But if black and white "Reformers" shared certain rhetorical themes, their struggle in the 1950's and early 60's remained very different. When Holder and Chisholm spoke of "bossism" and "plantationism," they criticized not the "machine," but the denial of black access to its spoils. The 1950's black reform movement was a fight for power rather than an ideological clash over the nature of politics itself. The "independent" BSPL demanded that "regulars" dole out a fair share of patronage to local blacks, but questioned little the concepts of patronage or backroom deals. From her beginnings as a cigar-box decorator in a local clubhouse, Chisholm throughout her career remained tied to the Brooklyn machine. While in Washington she championed "issues" that appealed to reformist whites and civil rights leaders, in Brooklyn she entrusted Wesley

[38] Wesley McD Holder, Interview; Shirley Chisholm, Unbought and Unbossed (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 34-36.
[39] Chisholm, Unbought and Unbossed, 47-50; John C. Walter, The Harlem Fox: J. Raymond Jones and Tammany, 1920-1970 (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), 124-137.

Holder to operate a gritty, "issueless" club that offered constituents favors, visa extensions, and housing in exchange for loyal votes. Harlem's Adam Clayton Powell too mixed fiery civil rights rhetoric in Washington with savvy participation in machine politics and (to the dismay of reformers) a flamboyant lifestyle that rivaled the late mayor Jimmy Walker. The most effective of Brooklyn's West Indian politicians mixed dynamic and cathartic nationalist racial rhetoric with pragmatic, interracial deal-making with the borough machine. When Brooklyn's reformist whites and a new generation of black activists attempted to unseat Chisholm in the late 1960's and early 1970's, even enlisting CORE's James Farmer as a candidate, they found themselves stymied by her ability to mix militant reform language with old-fashioned machine mobilization of local voters.[40]

With the image of middle-class professionals holding wine-tasting parties in renovated brownstones, one could easily romanticize the Old Machine and accuse reformers of simply engineering a middle-class *coup d'etat* in Brooklyn politics. But many of the criticisms launched at the Old Machine by reformers – corruption, links to violent organized crime syndicates, inaction in stemming urban decline, ineptitude, and racism – were based in reality. And when Heights residents aimed to reorganized politics along principles of justice, openness and participatory democracy, they did so with the intention of liberating both themselves and the poor from the autocratic rule of "bosses." But it was precisely their idealistic intentions that made the lack of support by working-class Brooklynites all the more frustrating for young reformers. "The reform movement…is made up chiefly of college graduates and the wealthy, who are concerned with the conditions of the workers," lamented Zevie Schiver, Vice President of the New York Young Democrats, "Unfortunately it is the workers themselves, those with the economic problems, who vote against us." [41]

Through hard work, an openness to class and racial diversity, and a creative reimagination of the blighted cityscape, Brooklyn Heights's new residents cultivated a new urban "neighborhood" out of South Brooklyn's economically depressed cityscape. But within the "middle cityscape" -- a fault line between postindustrial and industrial -- there lay a tension. The new urban-pastoral oasis of Brooklyn Heights was a distinct place only in so much as it could be

[40] Chisholm, 67-77; "Head of Operation Breadbasket Says He Opposes Mrs. Chisholm," NYT, 27 November 1972, 22; ""Voice Articles Attacks Rep. Shirley Chisholm," Amsterdam News 28 October 1978, 1; Jim Sleeper, The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 56-67, 261-272.
[41] "WBID Panel Cites Gains Made By Insurgent Dems," BHP, 1 October, 1959, 1.

juxtaposed to the industrial blight that surrounded it. And to create urban "place" paradoxically required both an appreciation of the industrial landscape and an effort to clear it away. If the Heights was an "historically diverse" urban garden, it precipitated a clash between the gardeners and the urban industrial Machine that lay atop it.

The New Machine in the Garden

On April 21, 1959, four hundred Brooklyn Heights residents jammed the Gold Room of the Hotel Bossert on Montague Street to attend a forum on urban renewal. Organized by the Community Conservation and Improvement Committee (CCIC), a new civic group dedicated to fight development in the Heights, the meeting was unexpectedly large. At the packed crowded buzzed with anger and excitement, observers described an "electric atmosphere." When Robert Moses earlier that year announced plans for Cadman Plaza, a massive redevelopment project on the periphery of the Civic Center, the news ignited a wave of protest. The city planned to demolish five square blocks of Heights housing to erect high-rise, luxury apartment towers. The Heights' new middle class would have none of it. Over enthusiastic applause, Martin Schneider read a defiant letter drafted by the CCIC to Moses. Stop Cadman Plaza, read Schneider, for the Heights refuses to become "a backdrop of the civic center." Keynote speaker State Senator MacNeil Mitchell, coauthor of the Mitchell-Lama Law, assured the white middle-class audience of their new voice in city politics. "When I see this kind of crowd, I know that you have the voice and leadership to raise such a hue and cry that the city administration will have to listen." The Brooklyn Heights Association and other local civic groups endorsed the CCIC program. Even the "regular" Democrats of the Third Assembly District and the "reformer" West Brooklyn Independent Democrats put aside their differences to lend support to the campaign. Reporters from NBC, New York Times, and World-Telegram covered the event.[42]

While the CCIC criticized specific details, Cadman Plaza represented more to the audience than a poorly-planned development project. Just as the "Old Machine" loomed on the Heights's poorer periphery, Cadman Plaza marked for residents the arrival of a dangerous "New Machine" from Manhattan. If the ghetto threatened to swallow the "neighborhood" into frightening urban wilderness, "Manhattanization" politically, architecturally, and socially threatened to assimilate the pastoral oasis of Brooklyn Heights into a hypermodern, hyper-

[42] "Record Crowd Hears CCIC Housing Proposal," BHP, 23 April 1959, 1; "Mitchell Urges…," BHP, 28 April 1959, 1; "Otis Pratt Pearsall's Reminiscences of the Nine Year Effort to Designate Brooklyn Heights As New York City's First Historic District and its First Limited Heights District," 6; "Brooklynites Set Action On Heights," NYT, 21 April 1959, 37.

rational, impersonal bureaucracy. Pushing outward from the central business district, private developers, city agencies, and non-profit institutions like the New York City Housing Authority, the Jehovah's Witnesses and Long Island University hungrily demolished historic homes and "mom and pop" stores to build large apartments, public housing complexes, and office towers. A new Modernist bureaucracy of public authorities, scientifically-planned city agencies, and corporate administrators made large-scale plans and executive decisions with little regard for local communities and town hall democracy. The brownstone refuge only recently discovered and cultivated by young, middle-class Manhattan émigrés was transforming precisely into the "air-conditioned nightmare" they fled from. "We don't want to become a transient backwater of the downtown business district," exclaimed CCIC member to the enthusiastic crowd. Look at what happened to Manhattan's Park Avenue, he continued. Once a family neighborhood, "now it's a dormitory for high-priced executives." "If the present trend toward large-scale, high-rise construction continues," warned CCIC chairman Otis Pearsall, "the Heights as we know it will disappear."[43]

The battle in Brooklyn Heights was only one front of a widespread anti-development movement spreading throughout postwar New York City. In December, 1956, a group of middle-class residents inspired by Brooklyn Heights resistance formed "Gramercy Neighbors" on Third Avenue in Manhattan to fight a local development scheme. In Greenwich Village and the West Side, new local organizations galvanized fights against Title I projects. By the mid-1950's, local newspapers, once unabashed supporters of city development, wrote a series of exposes about Robert Moses, corruption, and the abuses of urban renewal. "Within the past few years resistance to Public Housing has been growing stronger daily," wrote assemblyman Samuel Spiegel of the burgeoning anti-renewal movement in 1959. "Site tenants are united and working cohesively as a concerted group rather than as disorganized individuals. They are becoming bold and more aggressive….Gramercy Neighbors, Harlem Housing and Tenants Group, Lincoln Square Chamber of Commerce, Lincoln Square Residents Committee, Queensboro Hill Community Church, Seward Park Site Tenants and Businessmen Committee, Washington Square Neighbors, Committee for the Preservation of E. 24th St. to East 28th St…."[44]

But if "Manhattanization" endangered the middle cityscape, it also gave it form. Like in the fight against the "Old Machine," Brooklyn Heights' new middle class in their fight against the "New Machine" formulated a coherent language of urban "place." As a machine violating an urban garden, the city bulldozer acted as the catalyst for neighborhood formation. In the battle

[43] "Record Crowd Hears CCIC Housing Proposal, 1, 2.
[44] Samuel S. Speigel, The Forgotten Man in Housing (New York: By the author, 1959), 5.

against new development projects, residents developed new local political and civic organizations, defined clear boundaries of their "neighborhood," promoted local democracy as an alternative to city-hall administered programs, and formally articulated in print the urban Romantic aesthetic that underlay the gentrification of the area. "We are not a slum!" cried the residents of Brooklyn Heights at Robert Moses and in doing so were forced to develop a clear definition of the "historic diversity" they cherished. In criticizing the sterile towers of new development projects, they drew detailed portraits of the "historic" neighborhood, and created new legal language to preserve its aristocratic architecture and Brahmin past. To battle both the high rents of luxury apartments and low-incomes of public housing, they articulated a middle-class aesthetic of urban "diversity," commemorating privately owned small shops, non-bureaucratic artisan labor, and family-owned townhouses. In a revolt against scientific expertise and planning, they contrasted an "organic" Victorian landscape to one-dimensional, one-class Modernist urban projects.[45]

The fight against urban renewal in Brooklyn Heights, as well as Greenwich Village and the West Side, brought together a remarkable coalition of white and black, middle-class and poor. On the belt of Victorian housing surrounding central business districts and universities in New York, San Francisco, Boston, and Chicago, a new urban managerial class united with elderly white ethnics, and new black and Latino migrants to revolt against urban modernism. As this tenuous interracial and interclass "middle cityscape" political coalition spoke against the "city interests," "The System," "The Master Plan," "one-dimensional dormitories," and "bureaucracy," they forged the language that would form the bedrock of the social movements of the 1960's.[46]

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[45] For the similar role of urban renewal in creating a sense of "neighborhood" in Greenwich Village, see Peter J. Mesler, "Confrontation Over Control of Neighborhood Renewal: The Relationship Between City Agencies and Local Residents in the Renewal of the West Village" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1979), 77-85.

[46] In this sense, Tom Sugrue and other historians' analysis of the collapse of the postwar Northern Liberal coalition is too limited in its sole focus on the racial backlash of working-class white ethnics. The Northern revolt against racial integration was the most vituperative expression of a larger anti-Modernist "community revolt" against *spatial integration*, centralized planning, bureaucracy and futurism. While white ethnics fought public housing, African-Americans also complained of "negro removal." And most influentially, a new professional class fought the development agenda with similar rhetoric. The same protesters who protested housing projects also protested highways and private luxury development projects with similar tactics: baby carriage marches, picket signs, vandalism, etc. By the 1970's, the "diverse mosaic" replaced the "modern integrated system" as the new urban ideal. Did Northern ethnic whites turn against "integration" because of the racial component? Or did racial "integration" fall prey to a larger turn against Modernism? The chicken or the egg? "Place" politics in the American context, unfortunately, has always been linked to various forms of racial conservatism.

But a closer look at the battle against the "New Machine" reveals a conflict more complex that a simple struggle of the grassroots versus the interests. Rather than a collection of scrappy underdogs holding back the bulldozer, Brooklyn Heights' anti-urban renewal activists confidently exercised the power of a new urban professional class. And rather than a bullying Robert Moses attempting to crush local communities in the name of an abstract master plan, in Brooklyn Heights the city urban renewal agency was flexible, conciliatory, and often cowed by the increasingly intransigent demands of local activists.

If the fight against the "old machine" revealed a tension in the ideal of "historic diversity," so too did the fight against the "new machine" make transparent some of the class and race divides in the gentrifying middle cityscape of Brooklyn Heights. As much crosspollination of anti-institutional ideas and political strategies between rich and poor as there was, the most successful anti-development movements in New York City remained in Brooklyn Heights, Greenwich Village, the West Side and neighborhoods with a powerful white middle class. The fight against Robert Moses in Brooklyn Heights was less subaltern revolution than a silk stocking rebellion, a revolt of the artist colonies. While the urban poor often sought *more* Modernist public housing and development projects built for *them* rather than for luxury developers, Brooklyn Heights's new middle class fought an aesthetic battle against the "sameness" and "alienation" of the Modern landscape. And while in the fight against luxury urban renewal projects they often invoked the struggles of the poor, middle class brownstone settlers dominated the movement and the agenda consciously and unconsciously served the process of gentrification. (*Miller Center note: too much perhaps?)*

When residents spoke of the encroachment of Concord Village on their Thoreauvian refuge, their fears were not simply symbolic. With the success of Concord Village and the expanding civic center, local banks and private developers excitedly contacted Robert Moses about the potential for similar developments deeper in Brooklyn Heights. "With the successful completion of the sale of Concord Village," wrote Brooklyn Savings Bank Vice President G.J. Bender to Robert Moses in August 1956, "perhaps the time has come to review the general idea of the possibility of Title I projects for the area of Brooklyn in which this bank is most interested....If there is any way this bank can be of service or if there are projects which need sponsoring after due analysis, we shall be delighted to be of service to you or whomsoever you may designate."[47]

[47] G.J. Bender to Robert Moses, 3 August 1956, Box 116, Robert Moses Papers, New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives (NYPLMA).

(*Miller Center note: Concord Village was the name of a new luxury apartment complex built by Robert Moses north of Brooklyn Heights)*

In July 1956, Moses' Slum Clearance Committee (SCC) announced plans for a small urban renewal project on the southern periphery of Brooklyn Heights. Only in the exploratory stage, Moses discussed with city officials the possibility of clearing nine square blocks hugging the dilapidated thoroughfare of Atlantic Avenue. North of Atlantic Avenue , the city would commission private developers to build a high-rise apartment complex of luxury units renting at $60 a room. Residents displaced from the area would find housing in a low-income project south of the avenue. "We have in mind also for discussion a low rental project to the south, that is below Atlantic Avenue," explained Moses, "into which present, tenants, mostly Puerto Ricans with comparatively low incomes, in the Title One area could be moved without hardship."[48]

The six block area chosen by Moses formed a typical cross-section of South Brooklyn's "middle cityscape" with a mix of white ethnics, Puerto Rican migrants, and a gentrifying middle class. In a few large decaying apartment buildings on the corner of Joralemon and Hicks streets, a mix of elderly Italian pensioners and working-class families lived in low-rent apartments and townhouses. Interspersed among the poor on Hicks and Willow Place, the Heights's new middle class lived in an assortment of renovated carriage houses and brownstones. South of Atlantic Avenue, a growing Puerto Rican population lived in tenements and rooming houses. On Joralemon Street, the South Brooklyn Neighborhood Houses offered classes, a playground and nursery school to a mix of all residents.[49]

Robert Moses and the Slum Clearance Committee were unimpressed with the area's diversity, instead dismissing the area as a "slum" with obsolete housing and poor infrastructure ripe for redevelopment. Starting negotiations with the city and private developers, Moses brought his unique mix of high-handedness and secrecy to the project. As he lobbied the Board of Estimate to request a $275,000 research grant from the federal government, he hoped to cut through red tape, to make a deal with a developer quickly and secretly, and to start construction immediately preempting local resistance with concrete facts on the ground.[50]

But if in the 1930's Moses' tough ability to get things done appeared heroic, the 1950's were the beginning of a new era in city politics. In Brooklyn Heights, as in the West Side and Greenwich Village sections of Manhattan, Moses faced a new powerful and increasingly vocal

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[48] Robert Moses to Otis Swann Carroll, 18 July 1956, Box 116, Robert Moses Papers, NYPLMA; "Slum Clearance In the Heights – The Full Story," Brooklyn Heights Press, 12 July 1956, 1.
[49] "A House to House Sampling," BHP, 12 July 1956, 1; Otis Swann Carroll to Robert Moses, 15 July 1956, Box 116, Robert Moses Papers.
[50] "Slum Clearance in the Heights – The Full Story."

urban white-collar class unwilling to accept city projects near their apartments and townhouses without a fight. When word of the project leaked to Brooklyn Heights in June 1956, a newly formed Willowtown Association met in the South Brooklyn Neighborhood to organize resistance to the project. Led by Settlement House Director Richard Mendes, the mostly white middle-class activists wrote personal letters to politicians, drafted a petition, and contacted local newspapers. Where city projects may be useful elsewhere, the activists exhorted, Brooklyn Heights was a "unique place" that needed preservation. "I'm writing to you very informally about a project that is being planned for lower Joralemon St and Willow Place," wrote the widow of influential lawyer and civic leader Otis Swann Carroll. "I've been told that Willow Place where there is a small playground and quite nice old houses is going to be demolished also. For the last few years, these small dwellings have been bought by young married people who prefer a small house and backyard where they can have flowers and shrubs to living in a huge apartment house. I do, myself, and so did my friend of long standing Genevieve Earle…We are very grateful Mr. Moses for all the wonderful things you have done for our city and parkways, but Brooklyn Heights is unique. Please leave it the way it is."

"I knew Otis well and recall having been at your house when Gen was there," responded an angry but deferential Moses. "All we designated at this early stage was an area for study included what you must agree are some very rundown slum buildings….It looks as we must anticipate here another one of those general, premature, ill informed attacks on a proposal before it even reaches the publications stage. The rehabilitation of the area on either side of Atlantic Avenue is pretty far down the list of new proposals and can readily be abandoned in favor of other competing projects which have great support or less advance criticism." Moses was furious to find the interchanged published the following week in the Brooklyn Heights Press. A series of articles criticizing the fledgling project also appeared soon after in World-Telegram.[51]

Along with pulling strings in city government and local newspapers, the Willowtown Association also pioneered a new strategy in the fight against urban development projects. If Modernist city leaders privileged expertise over local sentiment, the Association used its middle-class intellectual and social capital to challenge the city own its own terms. While poorer communities often felt intimidated and overwhelmed by the jargon and data of city planning agencies, the Heights had a deep pool of Manhattan émigré architects, lawyers, and academics eager to volunteer their services. Willowtown's white-collar volunteers collected data on the

[51] "Willowtown Drafts Petition For Survival," BHP, 23 August 1956, 1; "We Can Leave Heights Alone, Moses Writes," BHP, 2 August 1956, 1; "Willow Town Opposes Slum Study of Area, BHP, 2 August 1956, 1; Walter Bruchhausen to H. Haughton Bell, 4 February 1957, Box 116, Robert Moses Papers.

housing stock, conducted surveys, and dissected the legal and architectural shortcomings of Moses' project. In April 1957, the Willowtown Association presented an alternative redevelopment plan to the city, calling for the rehabilitation of existing structures rather than demolition, spot clearance of a few abandoned buildings, and the relocation of displaced residents in any new buildings built.[52]

For Willowtown activists, the battle against Moses was larger than the local issue of a few buildings. If the residents sought to save the neighborhood from the "Old Machine," the struggle against urban renewal marked a crusade to save the sanctity of local place from a technocratic, dehumanizing "New Machine" centered in the skyscrapers of downtown. While the threat to their homes was concrete, Willowtown's anti-Moses activists described a larger war to protect town-hall democracy, local folkways, and cultural distinctiveness from bureaucracy, centralized authority, and scientific planning. "A city should be built for the people," exhorted local activist Richard Mendes, "not to satisfy the whims of some master builder." The anti-renewal movement is "a sort of subway version of New England town meetings," exclaimed the editors of the Brooklyn Heights Press, "They are organized to express the will of the entire neighborhood (including both property owners and tenants), their amateur efforts often carry weight with professional politicians. In New York City, small neighborhoods are often as isolated from each other as frontier towns. We're glad that in this case Willowtown's dramatic example boosts the moral of another neighborhood fighting to save itself."[53]

Frustrated by mounting opposition, Moses abandoned the project only a year after plans were leaked to the press. "I don't see any useful purpose would be served in any further discussion of the Brooklyn Heights area as Title I project…," wrote Moses to the president of the Brooklyn Heights Association. "As you know, residents in the area, particularly in Willowtown, expressed opposition to proceeding with the project and in absence of support from the Community, the Committee dropped it from the program." Elated at the news, the Willowtown Association hung a sign on the front of the local Settlement House: "We Won." Moses, increasingly out-of-step with a new vocal generation, was bewildered and angry at the stubborn resistance to his role as a reformer and builder. At a 1957 United Neighborhood Houses dinner commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the settlement house movement, Moses blasted the "Victorian" residents of "Willow Village" (deliberately misnamed) for saving their own skins at

[52] "A House-to-House Sampling"; "Willowtown is Luke-Warm to New Housing Proposal," BHP, 27 December 1956, 1; "Willowtown Searches for New Housing Solutions," BHP, 24 January 1957; "Willowtown Will Fix 'Soft Spots'," BHP, 25 April 1957, 1.
[53] "Willowtown Ready to Fight 'Master Builder," BHP, 12 July, 1956, 1; "It's That Same Old Title," BHP, 13 December 1956, 2.

the expense of the neighborhood as a whole. "Heights projects should be put on a suspended list…because there is much intemperate and uninformed opposition," he wrote to a supportive local bank. "The only suggestion I can make, or rather renew is that Brooklyn develop some leadership in rehabilitation and reconstruction, and that as to the Brooklyn Heights area specifically, the Heights Association be revitalized with new blood and oxygen."[54]

The sense of victory for Heights residents was short-lived. With continued pressure from developers and business leaders eager to expand Concord Village and the Civic Center southward, Moses turned his eye from Willowtown to the northern periphery of the Heights. "[We] are deeply concerned over abandonment of plans for Cadman Plaza middle-income housing development in Brooklyn New York," wrote the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce in April, 1957. "This development is essential to our Brooklyn Civic Center." "In the Borough Hall area where we have our main office," pleaded Brooklyn Savings Bank president G.J Bender, "the Cadman Plaza project is of vital interest to us."[55]

Like "Willowtown," the northern section of the Heights eyed by the Slum Clearance Committee was a "middle cityscape" of dilapidated brownstones, tenements, small shops on the border of the modernist Civic Center and Concord Village. On Middagh Street, a 100 year-old factory still produced candy. Along Fulton Street, large numbers of derelicts congregated to form the borough's "skid row." The Lyons House on Fulton Street was Brooklyn Heights's "last flophouse." Overcrowded tenements sat next to boarded-up homes and broken glass. A local reporter in a quick survey of a few dilapidated blocks noted seventy-eight "For Rent" signs. Yet along with symptoms of industrial decline were signs of the early stages of gentrification. In Ovington Studios, Norman Mailer, Nathaniel Raz, and Truman Capote rented studios. On Monroe Place, newly renovated private homes surrounded a small church.[56]

Despite defeat in Willowtown, Robert Moses seemed unfazed by the prospect of local resistance, continuing in his planning to rely on his faith in Manhattan-based expertise and top-down executive power. In early 1957, he commissioned Helmsley Spear, Inc., a powerful Manhattan real estate firm to study and make recommendations for the area. A year later, the

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[54] Robert Moses to Hugh Cole, 15 April 1957, Box 116, Robert Moses Papers; "Moses' Memory: Long On Peeves, Short On Names," BHP, 22 November 1956, 2; Bruchhausen to Bell; Robert Moses to G.J. Bender, 8 August 1956, Box 116, Robert Moses Papers.

[55] Howard Swain to Robert Moses, 9 April 1957, Box 116, Robert Moses Papers; G.J. Bender to Robert Moses, 5 December 1959, Box 118, Robert Moses Papers.

[56] "Cadman Plaza Survey in Progress: Co-op Sought," BHP, 17 January 1957, 1; "Skid-Row Gone, But…," BHP, 25 February 1965, 1;"Century-Old Candy Plant in Brooklyn Will Be Converted Into Artist Studios," NYT. 3 March 1968, R8; "Some Slum! Monroe placers Retort," BHP. 12 February 1959, 1.

SCC awarded Seon Pierre Bonan sponsorship of the project, a developer with experience building Title I projects in Philadelphia, New Haven and Boston. Harrison and Abramovitz, the architectural firm responsible for the United Nations and Rockefeller Center, tentatively agreed to design the tower.[57]

In April 1959, the Slum Clearance Committee submitted plans to the Board of Estimate for "Cadman Plaza," a massive Title I project that required the clearance of five square blocks along Fulton Street. Where a jumble of tenements and lofts once stood, Moses proposed a modern twenty-story apartment tower surrounded by a cluster of five low commercial buildings and a landscaped terrace with an underground garage. Hoping to satisfy the demand of white-collar professionals for apartments close to the burgeoning financial sector in Lower Manhattan, Moses described a fully tax-paying development with small, luxury-class rental units. The average rent of the 772 units would be fifty-three dollars. Forty-two percent of the apartments would only consist of two rooms. With open space, florescent light, centralized air conditioning and air processing, superblocks, and soundproof windows, the project embodied the kinetic, impermeable, and integrated aesthetic of the Modern City. (*Miller Center note: this aesthetic is described in chapter 3)* "Through proper design and integration," explained Moses in a press release, "the project area will become part of the Brooklyn Civic Center Development program…. Construction of public buildings, expansion of educational facilities….parks, recreational facilities, local street improvements, improved traffic circulation, arterial improvements, expanded parking facilities which with large scale demolition of substandard sections in the 65 acre area will serve to create a better planned, integrated Civic Center…one of the largest and most comprehensive urban renewal programs undertaken in the United States."[58]

Modernist developers, bankers, and housing reformers heaped praised upon Cadman Plaza. The New York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing enthusiastically sent a telegram to Mayor Wagner urging approval of the project with a request to include low-income housing and a new school building. Moses tentatively agreed to add low-income public housing in an extension near the Brooklyn Bridge. (Overlooked by his critics, Moses often insisted on placing low-rent projects and luxury developments side by side in his Title I projects. His

[57] "Cadman Plaza Slum Survey in Progress," BHP, 17 January 1957, 1; "Tentative Sponsor Named for Cadman Development," BHP, 18 December, 1958, 1.
[58] 772-Unit Project Set for Brooklyn," NYT, 20 April 1959, 33. Robert Moses, "Press Release," 20 April 1959, Robert Moses Papers, Box 118, NYPL.

stubborn Modernist faith in "segregated uses," however, stopped him from considering mixed-income apartment buildings)[59]

If Willowtown caused a splash of discontent, Robert Moses' Cadman Plaza unleashed a wave of local resistance. Along with statements of protests from the Heights Press and Brooklyn Heights Association, hundreds residents galvanized by the announcement met to form new organizations to combat city development in the area. In late 1956, a group of young recent émigrés to the Heights met in the basement of the First Unitarian Church to discuss the threat of urban renewal to their newly discovered enclave. "In 1956, '57 and '58 significant numbers of young professionals, Nancy and I among them, began moving into the Heights," reminisced lawyer and organizer Otis Pratt Pearsall. "These newcomers to gracious living in charming period houses on tranquil, tree-lined streets just across from Wall Street spotted serious threats to their new found way of civilized urban life, and they began meeting regularly….The most important of these perceived threats were the well-advanced plan of Bob Moses' Slum Clearance Committee."[60]

In December 1958, Pearsall, lawyer William Fisher, and television producer Martin Schneider named the fledgling group the Community Conservation and Improvement Council, or CCIC (pronounced *kick*), and vowed to fight the Cadman Plaza project. "The community interests and unique charm of Brooklyn Heights may be seriously threatened," explained the CCIC mission statement. "Demolition of its fine old houses continues at a rate which must soon destroy the historic atmosphere of its quiet secluded streets. At the same time projects for Brooklyn Heights have been and continue to be proposed which fail to reflect the needs and interests of the community as a whole…Brooklyn Heights can not and must not stand still."[61]

Like the Willowtown Association, CCIC described a battle not just against a poorly planned project, but against the underlying principles of urban renewal. If Robert Moses envisioned a project created swiftly and effectively by experts centered in Manhattan, CCIC believed development should be democratically administered by the local communities affected. If Moses saw Brooklyn Heights as malleable space to be remade into new and improved forms, CCIC described a unique place in need of preservation and rehabilitation. "Fundamental

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[59] Telegram from Algernon Black to Robert Wagner, 25 June 1956, Robert Wagner Papers, Box 126, Folder 1799, NYMA.
[60] Otis Pratt Pearsall, "Reminiscences of the Nine Year Effort to Designate Brooklyn Heights as New York City's First Historic District and its First Limited Height District," Prepared on the occasion of the Historic District Council's 1993 Landmark Lion Award Presentation, Borough Hall, Brooklyn, 8 March, 1993, Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Public Library.
[61] "New Group Charts Plan for Housing, BHP, 24 December 1958, 2; "CCIC Lists Housing Goals," BHP, 1 January 1958, 1.

principles underpin each of our objectives," CCIC exclaimed. "Any decision affecting the future of Brooklyn Heights or any part thereof shall be made with the advice, participation and consent of its residents…Our houses, historic structures and the architectural character of the Heights must be vigilantly preserved and safeguards must be developed to this end. Rehabilitation and, where required, spot clearance rather than whole-sale demolition shall be our theme. Relocation shall be held to a minimum and those involved assisted accordingly."[62] Learning from the successful Willowtown fight, CCIC drew on the political and social capital of white-collar professional residents to stop Robert Moses in his tracks. Members with connections in city hall wrote official and personal letters to influential politicians. With a sincere faith in his role as unfettered, "scientific" public servant free from local corruption and cronyism, an ornery Robert Moses greeted these personal appeals with unveiled disdain. "We simply cannot remove pieces of property out of project areas because there are some objections on the part of owners and their representatives," Moses wrote to an assemblyman seeking protection of a "lovely" old building on Clark Street. "These projects must cover *logical* areas and in the process of determination of what is *logical*, the service of all agencies including the City Planning Commission is involved….If you have any *evidence* to support a contention that the plan which we have adopted is not sound or that we have included something which should be left out on the basis of *proper planning*, I would suggest you write me to that effect." (Italics added)[63]

But if Moses demanded logic and planning and dismissed local sentiment, in Brooklyn Heights he faced a new middle class willing and able to match his claim to expertise. With an abundance of lawyers, architects, businessmen, and academics at their disposal, CCIC set up three task forces to develop a multi-pronged attack on Cadman Plaza. The first, led by architect Herbert Kaufman, brought together local architects and housing experts to analyze closely the blueprints of Cadman Plaza and design an alternative plan. Another committee headed by Malcolm Chesney, an economist for the Brooklyn Union Gas Company, organized a group of twenty local architects to conduct a voluntary house-to-house survey of the entire fifty-block Brooklyn Heights neighborhood. The task force hoped to challenge the city's characterization of the area as a "slum" and to demonstrate closely the architectural value of many of the houses scheduled for demolition.[64]

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[62] "CCIC Lists Housing Goals."
[63] Robert Moses to Harry J. Donnelly, Jr., 5 October 1959, Robert Moses Papers, Box 118, NYPL.
[64] "Heights Architects Begin Local Survey," BHP, 12 February 1959, 1; "Brooklynites Set Action on the Heights, Residents Meet Tonight to Discuss How to Preserve Community's Charm," NYT. 21 April 1959, 37; "CCIC Gets Help From 60 Volunteers," BHP, 21 May 1959, 3.

While two committees of the CCIC battled the individual Cadman Plaza project, the last group explored new legal ways to protect Brooklyn Heights as a whole from future development projects. When researchers stumbled across the Bard Law, the committee found a new weapon in the battle against urban renewal: historic zoning. The one-paragraph, never-invoked state law gave cities the power to protect through zoning or acquisition "place, buildings, structures, works of art and other objects having a special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value." Inspired by the new "Beacon Hill" historic district established by the Massachusetts legislature in 1955, CCIC activists hoped to expand the law to protect not just individual landmarks, but the entire neighborhood. When in 1958 James Felt of City Planning Commission announced plans to overhaul the city's zoning laws for the first time since 1916, the CCIC saw a window of opportunity to establish New York City's first "historic district."[65]

The drive to establish a "historic district" was a mammoth effort requiring dozens of Heights volunteers with architectural and legal connections and know-how. On one front, the CCIC lobbied the city's architectural, civic, and legal organizations for help in drafting the ground-breaking ordinance. In February 1959, Otis Pearsall cajoled the powerful Municipal Arts Society to create a special subcommittee of experts to spearhead the effort, including the ninety-two year-old Albert S. Bard after whom the law was named. In April, the committee dropped a note in the mailbox of Clay Lancaster, a respected architectural historian living in the Heights, explaining the historic districting effort. Lancaster volunteered to write a detailed house-by-house historic survey of over 600 Heights buildings.[66]

While one group sought to stall any further development in the "historic" Heights, in April 1959, another CCIC sub-committee presented the city with an alternative plan for Cadman Plaza. In the place of high-rent studio and one bedroom units, the CCIC version called for large family-sized, middle-income cooperative apartments. The Heights, the committee argued, was an area undergoing a grassroots revival. As a type of affordable home-ownership, middle-income cooperatives would allow young Heights pioneers to continue the reclamation of the area. "[Both the CCIC and Brooklyn Heights Association], deeply committed to the Heights watched with mounting alarm the city's seemingly endless string of plans for the neighborhood: plans for high income housing at Cadman Plaza (and two years ago at Willowtown); the widening of Fulton

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[65] Pearsall, "Reminiscences of the Nine Year Effort to Designate Brooklyn Heights as New York City's First Historic District", 3; Clay Lancaster, Old Brooklyn Heights: New York's First Suburb (New York: Dover Publications, 1979); x-xiii; "Felt Urges New Zone Law," BHP, 9 April 1959, 8.

[66] Pearsall, 5-6; "Brooklyn Heights Association Pleads for Historic Zoning," BHP, 16 April 1959, 1.

Street, the Civic Center," explained the Brooklyn Heights Press. "How about middle income housing? What about converting rooming houses to family dwellings?" "Assessing Heights enthusiasm for cooperatives," explained the editor of the Press, "…in our passion to make the Heights a small town (just like the one all of us were born and raised in), we have nurtured a romantic belief in home ownership."[67] Along with detailed blueprints, the CCIC presented the city with alternative developers, Seymour and Jerome Berger, eager to build cooperative apartments without any tax abatements.

The city was moderately receptive. At a conference at the Slum Clearance Committee office on Randall's Island, the SCC promised Heights activists to give equal consideration to the new developers provided the new offer proved economically feasible. In February 1960, the SCC agreed to delay voting on Cadman Plaza and created a sub-committee to examine both Moses' plan and the CCIC plan. For an unbiased opinion, the city commissioned John R. White of Brown, Harris, Stevens, Inc, a private consultant to conduct an independent study of the two proposals.[68]

The SCC's willingness to cooperative with Brooklyn Heights civic groups was symptomatic of a larger national shift in the politics of city development. Despite the characterization of redevelopment by critics as monolithic and rigidly ideological, New York City and the federal government for a decade slowly tinkered with redevelopment programs to correct the excesses of Title I of the 1949 Housing Act. The Housing Act of 1954 shifted the emphasis of Title I from "urban redevelopment" to "urban renewal." (Although often used as epithet for the worst type of urban development programs, "urban renewal" was actually a corrective to the abuses of the 1949 version of Title I). Unlike the blunt slum clearance program funded by Title I, new legislation required that "urban renewal" projects be linked to a comprehensive "workable plan" for community development approved by the Housing Administrator. Along with acquisition and clearance, "urban renewal" also provided funds for conservation, rehabilitation and the "voluntary repair of existing buildings." To ease the trauma of redevelopment on local populations, the Federal government also pledged more money for public housing built specifically for the relocation of residents of site areas. In a further round of legislation in 1956, Congress authorized direct relocation payments to displaced residents and small businesses in renewal sites. In 1963, the Urban Renewal Administration published a guide, "Historic Preservation Through Urban Renewal," explaining how communities could use Title I funds to

[67] "It Takes a Heap of Housing to Make the Heights a Home," BHP, 2 April 1959, 4; "Co-ops and the Populists," BHP, 9 April 1959, 2.
[68] "City to Consider Brooklyn Co-ops," NYT, 30 April 1959, 33; "Vote on Co-op Delayed," NYT, 24 February 1960, 43.

conserve urban areas of historic significance. Over fourteen historic neighborhoods took advantage of the program.

On the local level, New York City officials too attempted to modify the urban redevelopment agenda. In 1951, under pressure from middle-class Manhattanites for more community participation in city development, Borough President Robert Wagner established twelve community planning councils in Manhattan. In 1963, the city created eight community planning districts for Brooklyn as well. In 1957, the New York City Housing Authority announced a shift from superblock public housing to smaller "vest-pocket" projects less disruptive to neighborhood context. In 1958, the city launched the West Side conservation program, an experimental Title I project with minimal demolition, rehabilitation of existing structures, on-site relocation of residents, citizen participation, and developments for a variety of income levels.[69]

In 1957, Willowtown activist and settlement house worker Richard Mendes attended a two-day conference on Urban Renewal sponsored by ACTION (the American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods). Once a harsh critic of urban redevelopment, he came back from the conference brimming with enthusiasm about the potential of the reformed federal housing program. "Perhaps the two most significant impressions I received…were the government aids available to private builders to conserve, rehabilitate and rebuild neighborhoods, and, the all-important role of the citizenry in planning with and stimulating Urban Renewal," beamed Mendes in a letter to the Heights Press entitled "Let's Support Urban Renewal." "In town after town, city after city, all over the country these programs have been sparked by the citizens and carried through by their acting in the closest kind of cooperation with the city officials. Baltimore, Oakland, Cleveland, New Haven and Philadelphia are only a few of the outstanding examples….I hope that all will support and participate with the Brooklyn Heights Association and Willow Town Association in their work to bring portions of the Urban Renewal program to the Heights."[70]

One casualty of the changing times was none other than Robert Moses. In 1960, faced with public outrage about mismanagement and graft in city development projects, the city replaced Robert Moses' Slum Clearance Committee with the Housing and Redevelopment Board

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[69] "Five Boroughs Form New Plan Boards," NYT, 5 July, 1963, 20; "Public Housing to Get New Look," NYT, 5 May, 1957, 76; William Slayton, "The Operation and Achievements of the Urban Renewal Program," in Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy, ed. James Q. Wilson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966), 191-195, 213-218; "City To Preserve Flavor of Area It Is Rebuilding," NYT, 24 May 1959, 1.

[70] "Let's Support Urban Renewal," Letter from Richard Mendes to Editor, BHP, October 24, 1957, 4.

(HRB). Headed by anti-Moses real estate leader J. Clarence Davies, the new HRB promised to bring reform to the urban renewal program. Rather than leaving the task to developers, the HRB took full responsibility for relocating displaced residents. To minimize dislocation and disruption of local communities, the agency replaced mass clearance projects with spot clearance of individual buildings and whenever possible funded the conservation and rehabilitation of existing structures. Aiming to be more open and accountable to the public, the HRB replaced Moses' unilateral deal-making with developers with a transparent process of open auctions for potential projects. Breaking from Moses insistence of planning projects only on an case by case basis, the HRB pledged to fit each development into an overall city plan approved by the City Planning Department. Along with J. Clarence Davies and realtor Walter Fried, African-American New Dealer and civil rights activist Robert Weaver served as the first co-commissioner. Puerto Rican Herman Badillo was named the city's Relocation Commissioner.[71]

As their first order of affairs, the newly-formed HRB faced a maelstrom of protest against Cadman Plaza. On July 19, 1960, seventy-five Brooklyn Heights mothers marched to protests the luxury development. Pushing baby carriages from the Long Island Historic Society to Borough Hall, the women flocked by small children attended a rally organized by a new civic group: the North Brooklyn Heights Community Group (NBHCG). The signs held by protesters juxtaposed the "homes," "history," and "intimacy" of the Heights to the encroaching Manhattan landscape: "We Don't Want to Move to the Suburbs," We Chose to Live and Work in the Heights and We Plan to Stay!," "Help Preserve the Historic Heights," "Public Funds for People, Not for Private Profit," "Homes Not Skyscrapers." The group's spokesperson, New York Times classical music critic and composer Eric Salzman, presented the borough president a petition to stop development with 3,500 signatures.[72]

Seeking to distinguish itself from their predecessor Robert Moses, the HRB attempted to allay community concerns with a more conciliatory tone. In September, 1960, the HRB proposed a compromise plan that divided Cadman Plaza into two sections of 400 cooperative apartments and 835 rental units split by a walkway. To make space for the larger cooperatives, the HRB architects eliminated plans for a suburban style shopping center. In December 1960, in attempt to answer criticism about the city's inadequate relocation program, the HRB sent Western Union Messengers to ring the doorbells of every tenant on the Cadman Plaza site. The messengers delivered a bulletin with a report on the current status of the new project and detailed description

[71] "New Title I Plan Outlined for City by Housing Board," NYT, 5 June 1960, 1; New Agency Planned to Spur Relocation Task, NYT, 8 July 1962, 1.
[72] "75 Picketing Mothers Demand Cashmore Back Cadman Co-ops," NYT, 19 July 1960, 31; "Pickets Denounce Unfair Relocation of Residents," BHP. 21 November 1963, 8.

of their rights under the city's relocation laws. The bulletin explained that although relocation would begin in 1961, tenants had legal recourse and could not be forced to move without ample notice. Outlining the assistance available for new tenants, the HRB concluded "it does not mean you will have to move at once. It does not mean you will have to move without notice. It does not mean you will have to move without help." In January 1961, the city announced plans for six new projects in outer Brooklyn and the Bronx with 2,500 apartments for residents displaced by slum clearance projects in Cadman Plaza and Manhattan's West Side.[73]

By February 1961, the HRB happily described to reporters an agreement with Brooklyn Heights residents about Cadman Plaza. Along with 835 luxury rental units, the new plan included 405 middle-income cooperative apartments in two-twenty-two story towers and forty-five ground-level duplex apartment "town houses," along with a swimming pool, play area, and 200 underground parking spots. The Brooklyn Heights Association applauded the new proposal. As the plan moved towards approval, 375 members of the newly formed Cadman Plaza Cooperative Association excitedly made $50 deposits on future units.[74]

To the surprise of HRB leaders, their attempt at compromise sparked even more angry protest. Immediately after hearing reports of the new plan, Eric Salzman's North Brooklyn Heights Community Group announced a new demand: 100% cooperatives for the entire Cadman Plaza project. Furthermore, the civic group called for the city to scrap plans for any form of high-rise towers, instead pushing for rehabilitation and conservation of existing buildings. In June 1961, the NBHCG presented the city with a detailed critique of Cadman Plaza written by Martin S. James, a local resident and assistant professor of art and urbanism at Brooklyn College. The 31-page report blasted the "clumsy, archaic, unprofessional administrative practice" and "scorched-earth techniques" of the city development program. Calling for the city to stop all forms of clearance and redevelopment and celebrating "organic" city life, the report was signed by a cross-section of the city's powerful intellectual class: local reformers LeRoy Bowman and Eli Wilentz, Nathan Glazer, Paul Goodman, Jane Jacobs, Staughton Lynd, Lewis Mumford, and several architecture professors from Columbia and the Museum of Modern Art. Lobbied by Martin James for further support, Brooks Atkinson, influential theater critic for the New York

[73] "Compromise Adds Co-ops in Cadman," NYT, 1 September 1960, 29; "Relocation Data Given to Tenants," NYT, 20 January 1961, 33.
[74] "City Plans Homes to Aid Relocation," NYT, 20 January 1961, 33; "Cadman Plaza Sponsor Chosen for Family Co-op Apartments," NYT, 10 February 1961, 31.

Times, wrote a lengthy "Critic at Large" column in May 1961 further criticizing Cadman Plaza and calling for the preservation of Brooklyn Heights's unique landscape.[75]

Just as Martin James issued his report, in December 1961, after three years of research, slide shows, and walking tours, Clay Lancaster published Old Brooklyn Heights: New York's First Suburb with Charles E. Tuttle Press. With detailed descriptions of 619 century-old buildings in the area, the text was the first of its kind in postwar New York City, the bedrock for the CCIC's increasingly powerful historic preservation drive. Armed with Lancaster's manuscript, in October 1961, leaders of the CCIC met with City Planning Commissioner James Felt to discuss the possibility of using the new 1961 zoning laws to protect the historic landscape of the Heights. Felt, a post-Robert Moses city planner who like J. Clarence Davies was open to rehabilitation and preservation enthusiastically endorsed the preservation plan. The Heights historic preservation movement received a further boost as public outrage grew over the planned demolition of Manhattan's Pennsylvania Station. With increased pressure from middle-class activists, in Spring 1962 Mayor Wagner established the Landmarks Preservation Commission, a 12 person committee of non-salaried artists, architects, lawyers, and businessmen with the power to endow buildings and monuments with landmark status. Brooklyn Heights (excluding the Cadman Plaza Title I site) was on its way to becoming the city's first designated historic district in 1965.[76]

While the city supported Heights' residents demands for the "historic" districting of the area outside of the Title I site, in March 1962, the HRB unveiled a new compromise plan for Cadman Plaza. Answering local calls for more cooperatives, the new plan included 60% middle-income cooperative multi-bedroom units and 40% luxury rental efficiencies and one-bedrooms. In the addition, the city would rehabilitate a factory on the site, converting the loft space into eighty artist studios. As with the previous proposal, a host of liberal groups endorsed the compromise. The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Citizens Housing and Planning Council and Citizens Union Planning Committee backed the new proposal. The Brooklyn Chapter of the NAACP too enthusiastically championed the plan, perhaps aware of city negotiations with NYCHA to include a low-income housing somewhere in the project.

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[75] "Cadman Plaza Sponsor Chosen"; "Critic at Large: 'Human Scale' is Urged in Gauging Need for Housing in Historic Brooklyn Heights," NYT, 2 May 1961, 34; Lancaster, Old Brooklyn Heights, xvii-xviii; "Cadman Plaza in Brooklyn Heights: A Study of the Misuse of Public Power and Funds in Urban Renewal," Martin S. James, June 13, 1961, Wagner Papers, Box 125, Folder 1799, Municipal Archives.

[76] Lancaster, xix, xxiii; "'Old Brooklyn Heights' Groups Fighting to Preserve Buildings," NYT, 9 December 1961, 29; "Landmarks Group Proposed for City," NYT, 3 December 1961, 83; "City Acts to Save Historic Sites," NYT, 22 April 1962, 1.

Heights protesters were less impressed, calling the plan in the words of a West Village Committee activist simply "another attempt by the city to bulldoze an entire area."[77]

For the next year, the HRB would meet almost 1,000 times with local community groups in Brooklyn Heights and neighborhoods around the city to offer compromises on urban development projects.[78] But in trying to bring a humane face to urban renewal, they were missing the point. What the New Dealers in the HRB couldn't understand was that the issue for Brooklyn Heights' new middle class was not the *details* of the plan, but *planning* itself. While the HRB was trying to tweak the numbers, the Heights activists were attacking precisely the impersonality of numbers. If HRB and other Modernist Liberals sought to renew, rebuild, and rationalize the landscape, Brooklyn Heights residents were Romantic urbanists, precisely celebrating the "organic," "subjective," "local," "historic," and "spontaneous" character of the Heights. If the HRB hoped to integrate the Heights into a regional, kinetic city-system, the Heights deliberately sought to protect their "hidden enclave" from being assimilated by "sameness." If the HRB sought to reshape the urban landscape on the principles of science and logic, Heights residents celebrated a urban landscape of passion, sexual freedom, and spontaneous growth. The HRB and CCIC weren't engaging in a debate about the future of Cadman Plaza, they were talking past one another.

Nowhere can these conflicting forms of urbanism be seen better than in the Martin James report. Similar in style and argument to Greenwich Village activist Jane Jacobs' influential Death and Life of American Cities, and works by middle-class activists in gentrifying sections of Manhattan and Brooklyn, the report was a "romantic urbanist" broadside on urban renewal. The report started with a description of Brooklyn Heights ante-urban renewal, a Victorian "middle cityscape" undergoing the early stages of gentrification. "Town houses, old but solid and distinguished, predominate," wrote James, "many have always been maintained as private homes. Decay, which reached alarming proportions in the wars between 1930 and 1950, has been dramatically turned back by a natural process of self renewal in the last decade. Young families, especially professional people, 'discovered' Brooklyn Heights and became property owners, restoring and rehabilitating the fine old houses, a process which is still going….An ever-diminishing number of old buildings are used as rooming-houses." Along with renovated townhouses, the report commemorated a local color collage of non-fordist, pre-mass culture

[77] "Cadman Details Unveiled by City," NYT, 6 March 1962, 41; "Architects Back Cadman Project," NYT, 10 April 1962, 37.
[78] "Urban Renewal Advance in City," NYT, 19 November 1962, 33.

artisan economic activity, "a richness and variety of small, specialized shops, workshops and studios…."[79]

But while delightfully diverse and eclectic, the five blocks eyed by the city stilled formed a coherent and unique urban "neighborhood," a postwar middle-class conception of urban "place" specifically situated in the gentrifying belt of Victorian housing surrounding the postindustrial central business district. "The unique character is more than a sum of its parts," explained James. "It grows out of the complexes of handsome facades, the clean lines of short and narrow streets bordered with trees. It grows out of the suggestion of age and history, and the views of harbor and skyline. It grows out of the rim of small shops, galleries, artisan quarters and studios, out of glimpses of gardens and well-tended back yards full of trees and flowers." Not only was the landscape "unique," but the community was "diverse" as well, as a gentrifying middle class mixed with the elderly poor. "The social makeup of the Heights is an unusual, organic unity of diverse elements: old Brooklyn families, young professional people, artists, musicians and writers, small shop owners and local employees. There are also a number of single people, most of them elderly, living on benefits and pensions. People of many different backgrounds, origins, income and social conditions live together successfully."[80]

But as a hidden enclave only recently "discovered" by middle-class pioneers, warned James, Brooklyn Heights' authenticity was in danger of being co-opted by pernicious developers. "Manhattanization," the perennial bane of distraught gentrifiers, threatened the fragile middle cityscape between ghetto and skyscraper. "This upgrading of the community has also introduced dangers," wrote James. "As elsewhere in the city, apartment house development threatens the irreplaceable old buildings which give the neighborhood its won charm. Speculators and developers are tastelessly destroying the old values that first attached them." Cadman Plaza represented the city's collusion with developers to turn the area in "midtown" Manhattan. "The planning so far introduced, on false premises, intrusive 'downtown' conceptions into a tiny residential neighborhood...." If the Height emplaced residents in a historic past and a folksy "urban village" of the present, the hypermodern bureaucratic sameness embodied in Cadman Plaza towers threatened to "alienate" a fragile community. "[Towers] clash with the character of the area; they introduce cultural, spatial, and psychological disruptions which will severely damage the coherence of the community, its outlook, and its survival possibilities. Large architectural masse and the grandiose and impersonal scale will jar with the rest of the community." "Housing developments which seemed originally to solve so many problems in a

[79] Martin James, "Cadman Plaza in Brooklyn Heights," 1, 3-4.
[80] James, 4.

rush," agreed critic Brooks Atkinson in his NYT review of James report, " treat human beings like statistics that can be tucked away in gigantic filing cabinets."[81]

When the HRB tried to incorporate community demands into blueprints of Cadman Plaza, they attempted the paradoxical goal of institutionalizing an anti-institutional critique, "integrating" a new anti-bureaucratic aesthetic of "diversity," or reconciling "place" and "space." The HRB hoped to affirm the principles of Modernist planning while acknowledging the localist aesthetic celebrated by Romantic middle-class urbanites. After doubling the number of cooperatives units in the project, the HRB explained in a statement that "every consideration was given to the many neighborhood groups which had expressed a need for additional units in the area….We have been impressed by the proponents of cooperative apartments and, consequently, we are extending appreciably the land space immediately available for this type of housing. *The Board is responsive to local community groups and their local needs*." (Italics added)[82]

But while heeding the calls of local groups, the HRB reconfirmed its commitment to scientific management, birds-eye regional city planning, and the creation of an open, kinetic, and integrated city-system. "However, it has, in addition, a responsibility to plan and develop projects which will make the maximum contribution of the city as a whole….*Our basic philosophy is one of considering the city as whole*, developing a program which evaluates each project in relation to its impact upon *a city-wide concept* and plan for urban renewal and housing, and recognizing, that, *while each neighborhood may and should have its own distinct character, it is fundamentally a segment in the totality which is New York*....We shall in attempt to develop a program which, when its various segments are considered in relation to each other, will yield a meaningful total. This composite will reflect the needs of many sections of the city, the variations in incomes and rent paying abilities, and the land use potentials of areas selected. Each project, therefore should be sound in itself and a vital and rational element in a total approach which meets realistically the housing and land use requirements of New York City…." (Italics added)[83]

The HRB acknowledged that Cadman Plaza was designed for high-income, white-collar professionals working on Wall Street. But only with the tax revenue from a fully-taxed luxury unit they argued could the HRB build projects in poorer sections of the city. "Our studies indicate that Cadman Plaza is one of the city's prime residential sites for rental housing. It will provide much needed living accommodations for those who are employed in the downtown financial district of Manhattan, as well as those who work in the downtown Brooklyn area…." But

[81] James, 3; "Critic at Large: 'Human Scale' is Urged."
[82] Statement of Housing & Redevelopment Board on Cadman Plaza," 31 August 1960, Wagner Papers, Box 126, Folder 1799, Municipal Archives.
[83] Ibid.

revenues from Cadman Plaza and other luxury developments, the city argued, made possible other projects like the Flatlands Industrial Park and a new industrial and commercial center in the Washington Street area. Title I luxury projects also produced funds for low-income housing projects without which the city would run a crippling deficit.[84]

To residents of a "rediscovered," "unique" neighborhood, the attempts of the HRB to demonstrate how the Heights fit into an integrated city-system was precisely a contradiction in terms. Heights activists scoffed when planners added low-rise housing and walkways to their project models, making clear that any attempt of city planners to include the "intimate streets," "mom and pop shops," and "rehabilitated artist studios," of the Heights and Greenwich Village into renewal projects was doomed from the onset. Brooklyn Heights was a neighborhood because it was "organic," the messy sum of million private decisions, a repository of symbolic and cultural value developed naturally over time. Any form of planning, rationality, bureaucracy, abstraction, no matter how sympathetic, would "sterilize" the cityscape, "alienating" its residents. "The rebuilding technique known as 'selective removal,' 'spot renewal,' or 'renewal planning' or 'planned conservation'…is largely [a] trick," concluded Jane Jacobs, Greenwich Village activist and supporter of the anti-Cadman Plaza movement. "[P]lans and drawings for projects and renewal areas in which, literally, room had been left here and there at great intervals for a corner grocery store…accompanied by letters that said, 'see we have taken into account what you said,"…[is a] corner-grocery gimmick…a thin, patronizing conception of city diversity…."[85] (Jacobs 23, 190)

In fighting "renewal," however, Martin James and Heights residents did not argue that the Heights should remain a "slum." As urban pioneers in a gentrifying neighborhood, Martin James, Jane Jacobs, and other Heights activists celebrated an "unslumming" process that was "organic" and "unplanned." "Demand for the kinds of town houses that stand on the site were never greater," argued James. "These rare, original, early homes are considered especially desirable. In this market, the buyers outnumber the available dwellings. Open market conditions would quickly rehabilitate most of the area." "One-dimensional," "sterile," "transient," "scorched-earth" – the florid rhetoric used by Heights activists obfuscated their main agenda. The real problem with government-funded luxury towers (and low-income projects) was not just their "dullness," but also that they were gentrification-proof. "If government intervention cannot make

[84] Ibid.; Lawrence E. Gerosa, "Report to the Board of Estimate on Title I Slum Clearance Projects and Tax Exempt Housing Projects," 9 May 1956, Schedule III, 6, Robert Moses Papers, Box 116, Municipal Archives.
[85] Jane Jacobs, The Death and Life of Great American Cities (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 23, 190.

a positive contribution that will benefit the area, the community, and the city, it has no business invading an area where private enterprise could do a better job! The city's intervention could be justified only by (1) a program of preservation and rehabilitation of all the historic homes, and (2) new construction and/or rehabilitation of other buildings where parking lots and garages now exist. All new housing units would be middle-income. Nothing short of this is even remotely justifiable."[86]

With ideological roots in New Deal public-private consensus and planning, city developers and advocates of urban renewal were puzzled by the attack on the public sector. If Brooklyn Heights was rapidly "unslumming," wouldn't it be better for all parties involved if the process were managed by city officials? Wasn't urban renewal simply a form of "planned gentrification," and conversely gentrification a type of "organic urban renewal"? "Private money invested in rehabilitating small residence buildings – 'unslumming' as [Jacobs] calls it," explained a bitter Roger Starr, New Deal liberal city planner and future Neo-Conservative, "is equally 'cataclysmic' for the tenants who happen to be living in them. These tenants – who must have been playing low rents if the entire enterprise is to be financially possible – must make way for Mrs. Jacobs and her 'unslummers' just as surely as if a bulldozer knocked down their homes. In privately financed rehabilitation, the unsubsidized rise in rent is formidable. To be more precise, private rehabilitation is *more* 'cataclysmic' to those affected by it than is public renewal, at least if the public activity is in a designated 'urban renewal' area. In such areas, the government pays moving expenses for displaced tenants and provides assistance in finding new homes. And if the displaced tenants find their own homes – and if these meet normal community standards – they are paid a bonus."[87]

Populist language was easy to invoke when defending the "neighborhood" against luxury developers. But when the HRB finalized plans to add low-income housing to the Cadman Plaza project, the fight to preserve "quaintness" from the city bulldozer became much stickier. Whereas the sheer injustice of displacing poorer residents for luxury apartments united Brooklyn Heights in opposition, public housing for the non-white poor was far more divisive. In 1963, the HRB and the city housing authority agreed to add a low-income project to an extension of the Cadman Plaza luxury development. On a single block sitting between Public School 8 and the Brooklyn Bridge, the city planned to demolish about 50 units of tenements to build a single fifteen story, 173-unit low-rent building. With the building likely to be home to a growing Black and Puerto

[86] James, 16.
[87] Roger Starr, The Living End: The City and its Critics (New York: Coward-McCann, 1966), 55-56.

Rican population, the city received praise from civil rights groups, and the Committee for Public Housing in Brooklyn Heights, a small Brooklyn Heights civic group committed to integrating the area. The WBID too voted to support the vest-pocket project.[88]

Many Heights residents were strongly involved in the emerging civil rights movement. Since the late fifties, a host of local community groups worked with neighboring poor areas to integrate what they feared was becoming a "lily white neighborhood," or worse yet "Scarsdale on the East River." The Brooklyn Heights Fair Housing Committee worked with the NAACP to actively recruit Black families from other parts of the city to move to apartments in the Heights. When the city initiated the "Princeton Plan" in 1964, pairing PS 8 with a mostly Black and Puerto Rican public school in the neighboring low-income Farragut Houses, the Parents Association was the only white parents group to vote to support the plan in the city. (Although many parents voted with their feet, transferring to Saint Ann's, an "anti-bureaucratic," "open classroom" private school created in the wake of government-mandated school integration. Brooklyn Friends too experienced an influx and in 1965, receiving 100 applications for 12 spots).[89]

But while a small group of Heights residents avidly lobbied for low-income housing, a larger group of Heights residents organized resistance. The Brooklyn Heights Community Council (BHCC), a new civic group formed specifically to fight the project, gathered 3,000 signatures and threatened a mass demonstration on city hall. "Local proponents of the low-cost housing plan may continue to seek its adoption," warned a BHCC member and vice-president of the Brooklyn Heights Association, "We won't let down to oppose this or any other attempt to impose poor planning concepts on the community." "The city is trying to put over public housing on us and overexploit the neighborhood," complained Paul Windels, Wall Street lawyer and president of the Brooklyn Heights Association. "This low-cost stuff is bunk." At an Association membership meeting in June 1963, 766 members voted for a resolution against public housing with only 39 in favor of the low-income project.[90]

While angry violent protests against low-income housing occurred in Forest Hills, Queens and other outer borough areas, Brooklyn Heights's white-collar residents did not resort to the vituperative racial rhetoric of the city's working-class white ethnics. "It is probably only the residents' idea of dignity," suggested the New York Times, "that kept parents…from

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[88] "Public Housing Project Dealt Knockout Blow," BHP, 5 September 1963, 1, 4; "The Independent Democrat," Newsletter of the West Brooklyn Independent Democrats," January 1963, 4.
[89] "Fair Housing Committee Finds Minority Housing," BHP, 2 April 1964, 1; "Public Housing," BHP, 2 July 1964, 1 (recheck).
[90] "Public Housing Project Dealt Knockout Blow"; "Heights Debates Shape of Future," 7 February 1965, 75; "Public Housing," Brooklyn Heights Association Bulletin, June 1963.

demonstrating in the streets." Instead of attacking the non-white poor, Heights residents described an aesthetic battle to maintain "uniqueness" in the face of sameness and "organic" citylife from the threat of sterile bureaucracy. They cast the battle against public housing to be precisely a form of advocacy for the poor, pointing to the "alienation" and isolation of residents in "planned" Modernist housing. "Low income housing is equated with the integration problem…," explained a Brooklyn Heights Press editorial, although we don't necessarily agree….We maintain the high-rise building, constructed in one corner of the Heights, would become a ghetto." "The solution to the problems of low-rent housing does not lie in the scaleless, intrusive, ill-designed brick monsters that we have come to know as 'projects,' whether they be built in our community or in any other," exhorted Heights architect and future Landmarks Preservation Commission vice-president Elliot Willensky. "…No further low-rent 'projects' should be foisted upon our citizens, regardless of the apparent nobility of the reason, whether those citizens be the articulate comfortable residents of Brooklyn Heights or our less articulate and less leisured neighbors in other communities whom low-rent housing is intended to benefit." Instead of institutional space, protesters called for a renovated public school, park space and more recreational facilities for children.[91]

[Maybe here a paragraph about new ideas about the "new poverty" described by Michael Harrington and others. Alienating, modernist, publicly-funded African-American slum juxtaposed to "old slum," the nostalgically-evoked white immigrant "pushcart" urban village of yesteryear.]]

In October 1963, the HRB offered a compromise plan to satisfy both the supporters and critics of low-income housing. To satisfy community demands for an improved school and recreational facilities, the city would build a new building for PS 8, along with a playground and kindergarten play area. Run jointly by the Board of Education and the Department of Parks, the playgrounds would be open to the community on vacations and weekends. On the site of the old PS 8, the city would build a 15 story housing project for 150 low-income families. An old parochial school on the site would be allowed to remain standing, as well as a factory the city would convert to artists studios. On the other side of the Brooklyn Bridge from the Heights, the largely African-American and Puerto Rican tenant association of the Farragut public housing project enthusiastically endorsed the plan.[92]

The Brooklyn Heights Association, the North Brooklyn Heights Community Group and Brooklyn Heights Press blasted the new compromise. Rather a racial or class conflict, protesters

[91] "Heights Debates Shape of Future"; "Where is City Now?," BHP, 27 February 1964, 4; Elliot Willensky to Editor, BHP, 18 June 1964, 4.
[92] "Project Planned Adjoining Cadman," 15 October 1963, 41.

again described an environmentalist crusade against over-exploitation and a democratic revolt against authoritarian modernist developers, in both cases casting their resistance as a form of advocacy for the poor. "The proposed low-income project…which would be geographically isolated in the extreme northern corner of the Heights, would simply become one of the ghettoes," wrote an angry resident to the New York Times. "The facts are the overwhelming sentiment of the community opposed the low-cost housing project because the land involved in the Cadman Plaza development has already been grossly overexploited," explained Brooklyn Heights Association member Paul Windels. "Brooklyn Heights has pulled itself up by the bootstraps and is now one of the most attractive, middle-income areas in any city in the country. It is open to any who seek residence there without regard to race or color…..the low-cost housing project would have been a very poor, artificial attempt at integration." "Brooklyn Heights is an integrated community!...We have low income families living here," complained a "sick and tired" resident to the Heights Press. "Moreover, 375 families were recently unceremoniously shuffled out against their wishes by the city. We fought to keep them here!...Now suddenly, the cry arises that we are 'A rich lily-white community," and that we are afraid of integration with low-income families….The only way to achieve integration is when people live in a community by choice, not by being picked out as a number from a list, and being told, 'You are to go to district X,' by some impersonal, uninterested board." [93]

In other line of argument, residents protested that the low-income project would require the destruction of important historic buildings. One Federal style building at 55 Middagh Street, argued classical composer and community activist Eric Salzman, was the oldest house on the Heights. "I wouldn't mind so much if they were going to build another Brasilia," explained Gregory Rabassa, a professor of Spanish and Portuguese at Columbia University and Middagh Street resident. "But I'm afraid they're planning another Stalinallee."[94]

Rather than demolishing buildings, Heights protesters proposed that the Housing Authority instead rehabilitate five buildings scattered throughout the Heights for 60 low-income families. To avoid isolating low-income residents in a single building, they suggested setting aside a few apartments in the luxury towers of Cadman Plaza for low-income families. On the tract of land eyed by the city, protesters called for the conservation of all buildings, and the transformation of empty lots into a parking-lot and a small park and baseball field for children. In August 1964, Borough President Abe Stark. under pressure from Heights activists proposed a

[93] William B. Pennell to Editor, NYT, 26 August 1964, 38; Paul Windels to the Editor, NYT, 7 September 1964, 18; J. Rullman to Editor, BHP. 27 August 1964, 4.
[94] "Residents Debate Cadman Proposal," 11 June 1967, 75;

new plan to satisfy both sides that dropped the low-income tower and substituted ninety-five garden apartments for elderly.[95]

Local civil rights leaders were furious. "You can't tell me that parking space and a ball field for the richest, most privileged white children in the borough of Brooklyn is more important that integrating Negro families into this community," complained Merrill Martin, chairman of the borough branch of CORE. "Here is a chance to create integrated schools and start breaking down ghettoes." "Distortion of the news…has been [the Heights Press] trademark for the last few years," complained former Willowtown activist and urban renewal convert Richard Mendes. "the proposed housing bears no resemblance whatsoever to the acknowledged deficiencies represented by Fort Greene, Gowanus, and Farragut [public housing complexes]. It is small – 150 units, not 1500 plus – and it is in Brooklyn Heights. It will not be a self-contained ghetto, encircled by a slum nor will it dominate the Heights." The Housing Authority already surveyed the tenements pointed to by the BHA in 1962, added Mendes, and found them unsuitable for rehabilitation. "At least 500,000 people live in dilapidated dwelling units [in NYC]….Low-rise, vacant houses are hardly the answer to a problem of such magnitude."[96]

But many Heights residents were simply ambivalent. "I suppose there is a high correlation between wanting to maintain our carriage houses and gas lamps and wanting to maintain our pristine population," mused Lee Adler, an advertising executive and "rediscoverer of the Heights." "Heights residents don't want poor people and they don't want Negroes and Puerto Ricans in the area," sighed Kenneth Boss, a Heights real-estate broker who kept a framed photograph of Norman Thomas over his desk. "There's no question about it. This will be a rich man's ghetto."[97]

In April 1964, after eight years of disputes, the city held a small groundbreaking ceremony for the Cadman Plaza project. In a small clearing amidst the rubble, the City Council president Paul Screvane and Borough President Abe Stark made short speeches praising the project and celebrating the dawn of a new era of prosperity for Brooklyn. Behind the speakers stood eighty-six empty, dilapidated tenements, storefronts and townhouses. While most of the families and businesses already relocated, a hundred or so remained warily in their homes.[98]

The rhetoric of the event was a far cry from the confident chest-thumping of Robert Moses and city leaders of the past. The era of bold plans to reshape and rebuild the cityscape, to

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[95] "Where is City Now?"; 'New Cadman Plan Urged By Stark," NYT, 12 August 1964, 72.
[96] "New Cadman Plan Urged By Stark"; "Integration in Brooklyn Heights," NYT, 14 August 1964, 26; Letter from Richard Mendes to Editor, BHP, 27 February 1964.
[97] "Heights Debate Shape of Future."
[98] "Demolition Started on Cadman Renewal," NYT, 27 February 1964, 23.

conquer the constraints of space and time, and to turn blight into light was nearing its end. Reading a speech on behalf of Mayor Wagner, Paul Screvane described the project in conciliatory terms. "The shining towers and green plazas that will occupy this area within a few short years will…be a worthy link between *the quiet grace of historic Brooklyn Heights and the sturdy dynamism of the Downtown Brooklyn* and the Civic Center areas…This project represents one of the first embodiments of the "new look" in renewal and housing that the Housing and Redevelopment board, at my direction, has brought to our City. The diversity of housing types and the distinguished design of the structures have shattered once and of all the stereotype of urban renewal projects as dull repetitions of the same cookie-cutter design….Most important of all, the long and stormy history of this project was finally brought to a constructive conclusion by a real *dialogue between the community and the City Government* – which we believe is essential to any worthwhile renewal activities."[99] (Italics added)

Sitting between the Modernist Civic Center and "anti-modern" renovated brownstones, Cadman Plaza did in many ways embody a spatial and ideological bridge between two types of urbanism: "historic Brooklyn Heights" and "dynamic Downtown." While the design of the tall towers looked similar, the final blueprints had evolved a long way from Robert Moses' luxury project a decade earlier. The final plan called for a pair of twenty-six and thirty-three apartment towers with 570 units of varying sizes split between them. Between the two skyscrapers would sit eighteen townhouses with two or three bedrooms. With prices of $600 per room and monthly maintenance charges of $30-35, the project consisted entirely of middle-income cooperatives. In 1968, the city approved a third addition to Cadman Plaza. Where housing advocates had once contemplated building a low-income project, the city built Brooklyn Heights Towers. The Heights Towers consisted of a thirty-one story building, a twelve-story building, and twelve townhouses. Of the 500 units in the project, 420 of them, 83% of the total, were "upper-middle-income" cooperatives. Abetted by new federal legislation requiring that 20% of the apartments in city-aided middle-income projects be designated low-income, the city set aside the remaining 84 units for low-income families.[100]

But while born out of compromise, the tall, air-conditioned towers did not represented not the dawn of a new era of enlightened urban renewal as HRB leaders hoped. Instead Cadman Plaza was the swan song of urban modernist liberalism in Brooklyn. For the next decade, city planners would attempt to incorporate community planning, maximum feasible participation of

[99] "Remarks by Mayor Robert F. Wagner (Read by Council President Paul R. Screvane)," Wagner Papers, Box 126, Folder 1799, Municipal Archives.
[100] "Cadman Plaza Co-op to Be Built After Eight Years of Disputes," NYT, 12 April 1964, R1; "Brooklyn Co-op Gains Approval," NYT, 19 July 1968, 20.

local communities, and the conservation and rehabilitation of local architecture into Model Cities and other Great Society development plans. But like with Cadman Plaza, the paradox of trying to maintain a sense of place through bureaucratic government intervention would be impossible. Attempting to institutionalize the anti-institutional rhetoric of critics, new development projects satisfied neither local communities or government planners. By 1974, as the city and federal government turned to section 8 vouchers, "little city halls," and federal block grants, "urban renewal" and the centralized-administered, regionally-planned, metropolitan system it strove for were dead.

But if Cadman Plaza signaled the death of urban renewal, the project marked the birth of a new cityscape. Far from destroying it as critics feared, Cadman Plaza gave "historic" Brooklyn Heights its form. In the battle against the towers, Heights residents drew formally boundaries of the "neighborhood," conducted historic studies of the architecture, and wrote eloquent descriptions of their "historically diverse" enclave. Faced with the intrusion of a government-planned, air-conditioned, regionally-integrated project, residents articulated a new type of urbanism that celebrated "organic street life," aged surfaces, private ownership, "diversity," and local distinctiveness. The Romantic urbanist literature produced in the fight against Cadman Plaza and urban renewal projects elsewhere in the city – Jacobs' Death and Life of Great American Cities, Martin James' report – would inspire brownstone renovators in new "neighborhoods" sprouting throughout the borough.

It is fashionable among urban historians to describe the "failure of urban renewal" and triumph of neighborhood activists after World War II. Yet if anything the strength of the anti-urban renewal movement was the result of the successes of Modernist development rather than its failures. " Manhattanization" -- with its alienating skyscrapers, university complexes, and bureaucratic white collar labor -- produced precisely the labor force who cultivated "historic" Brooklyn in opposition. The highways, housing projects, and office parks were used to delineate the boundaries of community districts. Urban renewal did not just destroy local communities – ironically, it also created them.

As the city slowly demolished the tenements and brownstones for Cadman Plaza, scores of Heights residents dug through the wreckage to salvage old banisters, doorknobs and knockers, woodwork, stone ornaments, and marble – all which they used to help restore their brownstones elsewhere in the area.[101] In "historic" neighborhoods around the city, brownstoners scavenged the

[101] "Old Days Traced at Cadman Plaza Site; 'Archeologists' Find Early 19th Century Items in Brooklyn," NYT, 30 June 1965, 39; "8 Hunt Antiques in Doomed Homes; Items Saved From Wreckers By Brooklyn Heights Group," NYT, 22 March 1964, 61.

debris of Title I construction to add to their homes. The renovated brownstone was in fact a bricolage. “Historic,” “local” place was literally created in the wake of destructive Modernist universalism. One could not exist without the other.

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The Two Machines Create the Urban Garden

In the battle against the “two machines,” a hodgepodge community of Manhattan expatriates coalesced into the “neighborhood” of Brooklyn Heights, a dramatically new type of urban “place” that would inspire similar neighborhoods around the city and country. New brownstone enclaves in Brooklyn would claim to be the “next Brooklyn Heights,” or alternatively juxtapose themselves to “co-opted” or “phony” Brooklyn Heights. In new settlements like “Cobble Hill,” “Boerum Hill” and “Carroll Gardens, new residents would create civic groups, block associations, historic districting laws, and political organizations modeled after those in Heights.

But more than just a “neighborhood,” the battle against the two Machines sparked the class consciousness of a new urban middle class: the young urban professional. If the industrial working-class once forged an identity in the saloons, fraternal clubs, and street marches of nineteenth-century New York City, a new white-collar proletariat developed a class-consciousness in street markets, art galleries, cafes, and brownstone renovation.
Derided by their enemies over the years as “yuppies,” “limousine liberals,” or “radical chic,” this socially liberal, yet fiscally conservative white collar constituency formed a Third Force in postwar New York City politics. “Yuppie” politics marked a striking departure from the two types of liberalism that held together the New Deal coalition. As urban reformers, young urban professionals were hostile to “crony” machine politics rooted in personal relationships, ethnic identity, and deal-making. Yet they were also waged war against the “abstract” New Machine, the liberal reform bureaucracy built on a Progressive faith in expertise, planning, and centralized executive power. Instead, the young urban professionals in gentrifying neighborhoods in Manhattan and Brownstone Brooklyn pioneered a new Romantic Liberalism that celebrated authentic self-expression, passion, local distinctiveness, spontaneity, grassroots government and individual rights. If the old machine divided politicians in those who were “loyal” and “disloyal,” and the new machine in those who were “dirty” and “clean,” the new urban professional split the political word between those who were “authentic” and those were “phony.” They envisioned a city neither as a pluralist coalition of ethnic “bosses,” nor as an integrated, managed, modern city system, but instead as a mosaic of “urban villages,” a former landscape of industrial production

transformed into a site of cultural consumption filled with hidden nooks, mom and pop shops, historic enclaves, ethnic eateries, farmer's markets, and art galleries.

Critics of Robert Moses have often quipped that while the New Dealer *loved the public, he hated people*. While city developers were enamored of mass clearance projects, grand civic centers, public housing complexes, superhighways, and mass consumer culture, they called little about the effects of their schemes on individuals. Standing over models and maps, they talked easily of moving thousands of people with little regard for the psychological effects of dislocation and the attachment to local place. If the CCIC, Jane Jacobs and the new young urban professionals in Greenwich Village and Brooklyn Heights accomplished anything, they brought an important appreciation of the messiness of city life, the intimacy of the street, the authentic, creative voice of local artists and musicians, and the idiosyncrasies of "diverse" communities. Brooklyn Heights residents presented an important corrective to the dehumanizing, authoritarian excesses of Modernism.

But perhaps the anti-Moses movement deserves an inverted version of the charge thrown at Modernists. If Brooklyn's new white collar professionals *loved people, they hated the public*. The Romantic urban imagery of "historically diverse" Brooklyn Heights was privatist, celebrating the sanctity of home, small shops, 'bootstrap" renovation, and freedom from city intervention. They were deeply hostile to "social engineering," big government, or organized labor. They sought to physically strip away the Modern landscape to restore the Romantic-era Olmsteadian Victorian landscape, labeling as "phony," "sterile," or "alienating" the government-funded playgrounds, hospitals, highways, colleges, and civic centers built since the New Deal. In the fight against urban renewal, they celebrated the free-market, extolling the benefits of "organic" cityscape and lambasting "abstract" regulation. (In their fight against urban renewal, they became bedfellows with an emerging New Right critique of government intervention).

But were the renovated brownstones, "unique" cafes, independent theaters, and street carnivals becoming another form of sameness? Both Cadman Plaza and Historic Brooklyn, urban renewal and historic preservation, Modernist and anti-Modernist urbanism were products of the same economic restructuring, mirror twins of the same postindustrial reshaping of industrial landscape. Whether through "planned gentrification" or "organic urban renewal," the Heights was slowly but surely becoming demographically indistinguishable from Scarsdale. "After World War II, a couple with $5,000 could put a down payment on a red-brick or brownstone house costing perhaps $15,000," explained the NYT in 1965 of the rapidly transforming area. "Today they have to put down $30,000 for a house costing up to $80,000 --- and more. With the increase in value, landlords who once found it profitable to run the brownstones as rooming houses have renovated

the buildings for sale to eager families. This has pushed many former lodgers, mostly Negroes and Puerto Ricans, out of the neighborhood."

"We are in danger of becoming a middling neighborhood – full of middle class housing for middle income families who believe in a middle-road way of life," warned the Brooklyn Heights Press in a rueful moment. "We discriminate no less against the rich than against the poor….Clearly this is no room at the co-op for the high income family….the City Authority is angrily upbraided for suggesting low income housing development….We can, if we set our minds to it, create as barren an atmosphere of uniformity as was ever envisioned by the Great Neck Chamber of Commerce….and later wonder why things seem so dull around here. Is this *really want we want*?"[102]

In early 2006, when a brownstone only blocks away from Cadman Plaza sold for eight million dollars the irony was bitter. Jane Jacob's "historically diverse" Brooklyn Heights was now "one-dimensional" high-income and white, while it was precisely Robert Moses' Modernist monoliths – Cadman Plaza, the government offices in the Civic Center, Fort Greene housing project, McDonald's, and Fulton Mall –that were oases of ethnic and class diversity in a sea of renovated brownstones. Somewhere Robert Moses is smiling.

[102] "The Middling Way," BHP. 26 March 1959, 4.