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Lower East Side

An artist community of activists, young and determined go-getters, and a large homeless population. The Lower East Side of Manhattan is completely divided when it comes to its residence's social and class grouping. From private Zumba lessons on top floors, to Union Square Park being lined with sleeping backs and blankets, it is significant to understand this divide and its causes and consequences. The root of it all could lead back to children as young age four years old as their parent's either get to choose between the many highly elite and private schools or being forced to send their kids to a school that meets their district code. The environment that children are being raised in significantly impacts their perspective life paths and choices. Whether it is a segregated community full of similar faces and backgrounds, to a highly diverse and integrated setting, who one is growing up with, solving problems with, and socializing with can determine their social understanding and empathy in the future.

It is important to look at the history of Lower East Side to understand why diversity and social integration is important. Lower East Side has a rich history of organized crime, encouraging and creating counter-culture and being a home to punk. Originally being the hub for immigrants and the working class population in New York, it has since been hit with massive gentrification efforts and changes. Major hub areas such as Union Square now being surrounded by high scale chain stores and restaurants and hosting expensive fairs and markets. Chinatown, Alphabet, Little Italy, and East Village bringing in even more tradition and backgrounds to this

already inclusive area. This neighborhood is deeply rooted in politics and social reforms as well, often hosting protests and rallies by passionate groups and individuals in its East Village area.

However, this once immigrant area soon began filling up with hipsters, musicians, and artists looking for a break and as new younger faces raised, so did the prices and living conditions. Walking through the different areas and streets of Lower East Side, the extreme impacts of gentrification are quite evident and so are the areas that have not been touched yet. Walking just 10 minutes in either direction could either present a highly social hub with high fashion brands and craft breweries, or an entire street of closed down stores with vandalized lots and a high population of homeless individuals who rely on subway carts for comfort. The extremes of gentrification presents itself in this highly segregated neighborhood in New York City but does not take away from the potentials and opportunities of changing this way and improving this neighborhood further.