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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 as four years old as their parents 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.

There is a large amount of potential in renovating and improving lots and certain areas without stripping the identity of it at the same time. A few present strengths are the numerous corners and streets where even the smallest of renovation could welcome new businesses and opportunities while still keeping it accessible to locals and the people of that certain area without gentrifying and completely removing its background. Secondly, fairs and markets that set up regularly could set up and be available in more than one location even if it means lessening quantity to spread accessibility and availability. Thirdly, the area has numerous shops, whether clothing, electronics, food, etc. it is a neighborhood overfilled with available shops of all prices and types. Lastly, having Union Square at its center, it has easy access for transportation.

Some threats include and are centered around gentrification which also leads to zoning and ultimately is dividing the neighborhood into sections based on incomes and property values. This only further segregates the community, schools, and its people creating misunderstandings and divides. This could be reflected in the weaknesses of the neighborhood as well. The area is largely divided in housing and schools based on race and income. There are clear boundaries on who lives where and who is even comfortable where. Secondly, the new shops and business being introduced seem to all target specific and similar types of people, the white population, making the minority community feel left out and without growth.

There is lots of opportunity in what already exists in this neighborhood to grow. With multiple beautiful and large parks located in transportation spots, these areas could be hosts of numerous events helping the community. Secondly, since it houses many young students and young adults, it is always flowing with fresh new ideas that could really be useful if utilized properly.

Growing up must be very confusing and highly frustrating time having to be a witness to these changes and challenges being on either side. One of the most evident examples of this is on 15th street between 1st and 2nd Ave. Walking down this way, you find yourself smiling to the sound of laughter and joyous school children who are playing out in the gated and guarded play area. The Friends Seminary is a beautiful and welcoming K-12 private school that boasts about their college-bound students from a young age. With renovated buildings, clean and flower filled sidewalks, the children's joy comes as no surprise. Of course that should be expected with its outstanding yearly tuition price of \$44,800. It should be noted that most of the students walking between classes and buildings are primarily also White. As you are walking down that very same

street however, about 20 seconds later you encounter a very old and bland building. More students walk by, this time primarily Black and Hispanic descent.