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Constructed Environments Seminar

12, March 2018

Bridge III: Crown Heights

History/Census/Social Characteristics

While visiting my neighborhood of Crown Heights I learned very quickly of the racial tension that plays a deep roll in the history and creation of the Brooklyn Hub. Through the assigned videos, research, and first hand experiences with residents of the area, I learned about the fast development of Crown Heights in the early 1900's, pictures from the New York Public library show how my narrowed-in zone of Nostrand Avenue turned from large countryside homes and farms to a bustling main street of new urban development and the spread of New York City from the early 1900's to the 1950's. During my walks exploring the neighborhood I took in the unique architecture and small townhouses, enjoying the character that it had not only on the main strip but as a unified neighborhood. I discovered a lot of demolished buildings and construction sights as I pushed the borders of Nostrand Ave, and further research told the story of years of gentrification slowing reaching Crown Heights. In "The Plan for New York City", a urban development proposal in 1969, Crown Heights would be the sight of three new and very large buildings that would bring people to the area and help solve criminal activity. The area is contingent to Weeksville, one of the first areas freed African American slaves settled in when allowed to purchase lands, the spread of gentrification through Brooklyn is very prominent in Crown Heights and seems to be affecting these families that first moved to the area. According

to census data, the black population shrank to 70 percent from 79 percent from 2000 to 2010, and the white population almost doubled to 16 percent, while the number of Hispanic and Asian residents also grew. In a quote from a found New York Times article, local Crown Heights resident Ms. Washington believes,

“-that with the decrease in crime and growth in conveniences like banks, she now has no plans to leave. However, she is worried that the area’s rapidly inflating home values are pushing out some of her neighbors, including many black and lower-income residents. ‘I want great people to move on the block — people who are going to take care of their properties and be neighborly — so I don’t care what race or income they are, but I do worry what this means for the diversity of the neighborhood,’ she said.” (Gregor, New York Times).

Though the 1969 urban spread helped clean up Crown Heights, the way it was done seemed to be a problem because in 2013 when another proposal was made, it was more local, and did not suggest the construction of large attractions, but a complex zoning of the neighborhood, keeping old and smaller style buildings, bringing in some development off the main strip, and the creation of a large affordable housing zone shows how gentrification can be done with more planning and thought to try and sustain a neighborhood’s culture and identity, while also cleaning up the streets and bringing in a new flourishing market.

Main Stakeholders/Problems/Questions

Looking into the urban sprawl of New York City into Crown Heights has led me down many paths of zoning and proposals that set motion to developing an area and make changes that will have lasting changes for years to come. In Crown Heights, Eastern Parkway, and 6 lane Northern State Highway was continued through the neighborhood below what had been built

since the Fulton St train, encouraging the development South of the road. The main stakeholders are the City employees in charge of regional urban planning that have shaped Crown Heights, and has slowly become more privatized and local through the 60's-90's. There is a large percentage of Brooklyn land in the ownership of large Jewish-owned companies that work within their community to buy, fix, and rent old properties, and have been a large factor in the gentrification of Crown Heights. But there is only so much private companies can do, and more recent zoning becomes a stakeholder in the area as they try to preserve the smaller community feel. In the main areas of Nostrand and Franklin Ave, there is a lot of historical zoning placed to prevent the rapid change of buildings being built to tall, while directly across the street of Eastern Parkway south of the highway there is no zoning on building height from 1960, and is rapidly changing the area and pushing long time residents out of their homes. There is affordable housing being build in the historical area to keep diversity throughout the neighborhood, but does not allow for a middle class in the area.

Potentials/Phenomena/Interview/Action Plan

Looking at the particular zoning and building proposals that have been place in Crown Heights I am searching for the effect they have had on the community, and what lasting impact these decisions from stakeholders have. Right now there is a trend of displacement of black residents from main areas as new designer stores and expensive restaurants have swept through Fulton St, and have reached Crown Heights. The phenomenon that occurs with the zoning and design of the 6 lane Northern State Parkway system, is almost that of a border, a stop in the spread of some aspects of gentrification. There is less regulation on building height, but no

demand for nicer stores and restaurants, therefore large cheap housing is made, and the area does not prosper in beauty or safety. I have narrowed this down to the design of Eastern Parkway, and how such a large public space is wasted and prevents people from using the space as you have to cross 4 different crosswalks, and the center “park” area is uninviting and does not provide applicable seating. I aim to ask questions to residents about this phenomenon, and seek a resolution to find out how to unite both sides of the neighborhood in what is now a clear borderline. I want to look for a design solution that gets rid of the divide, and create more of a center meeting point as it is geographically meant to.

Sources

* **Plan for New York City, 1969: A Proposal – Brooklyn – District 8**

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/c42cb93f-8e16-ca65-e040-e00a18064e5c>

* **New York Public Library: OldNYC – Nostrand Ave, Crown Heights**

<https://www.oldnyc.org/#706215f-a>

* **2013 Zoning Proposal**

http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/plans/crown-heights-west/\crown_heights_west.pdf

* **Crown Heights, Brooklyn, Where Stoop Life Still Thrives**

Gregor, Alison. “Crown Heights, Brooklyn, Where Stoop Life Still Thrives.” The New York Times, The New York Times, 17 June 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/realestate/crown-heights-brooklyn-where-stoop-life-still-thrives.html.