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Community planning without displacement: strategies for progressive planning

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Community Planning without Displacement: Strategies for Progressive Planning

Political classes are never convinced merely by arguments at the round table. These groups match power, not wits.

—Oliver C. Cox, *Caste, Class and Race*

Since the rise of the modern metropolis over a century ago, urban social movements have opposed giant public and private redevelopment schemes that threaten to displace residents and businesses. As part of these movements, people organize, say “we won’t move” in a collective voice, and try to stop the bulldozers. This scenario occurs in every region of the world, including rich and poor countries.¹ The Habitat International Coalition² regularly broadcasts news from its members around the world about their struggles against displacement. For example, in Karachi, Pakistan, residents are now organizing to protest the demolition of thousands of homes to make way for a new freeway. Further south, the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions works with Palestinians to stop demolitions and rebuild some of the 18,000 Palestinian homes destroyed by Israeli bulldozers since 1967.³

According to the Center on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE),⁴ a global nongovernmental organization, “Security of tenure is one of the cornerstones of the right to adequate housing,” yet an estimated half of all households in the world have no access to basic housing rights. International housing rights groups normally include in the right to housing the right to a stable, healthy, living environment that is free from threats of displacement. In the United States, however, the 1949 Housing Act established the broad goal of “a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family” without explicitly making a connection between housing and security of tenure, and federal housing policy has contributed in many ways to insecurity among households, particularly low-income people and communities of color.⁵ Forging this

link between housing and security of tenure has been a consistent goal of urban housing and community movements. In one of the first major works on displacement, Chester Hartman, Dennis Keating, and Richard LeGates stated that

The term [*displacement*] describes what happens when forces outside the household make living there impossible, or hazardous, or unaffordable. The fact of displacement is a grotesque and spreading feature of life for lower-income people in the United States. It also means a process by which they are engineered out of their traditional neighborhoods, to make way for new occupants deemed more “desirable” because of the color of their skins, the taxes they will pay, or the “life style” they lead.⁶

For the last century, struggles against displacement in New York City have been a central part of one of the largest and most diverse urban social movements in the United States. These struggles include the fights against the eviction of unemployed people in the 1930s, government-sponsored urban renewal programs in the 1950s and 1960s, landlord abandonment in the 1970s, expressway projects such as Westway and the Lower Manhattan Expressway, university and hospital expansion, and large-scale luxury housing projects that displace low-cost housing and encourage gentrification. The community struggles arose along with labor, civil rights, and radical civic and political movements that developed strong bases in New York City. As an indicator of their relative strength and maturity, in the last half century the struggles against displacement in New York have moved beyond protest and individual battles. Now community activists create their own proactive community plans that seek to protect residents and businesses in the long-term future. They have also promoted new citywide plans that address the needs of many neighborhoods that are facing displacement (figure 1.1).

Community Planning and Real Estate in New York City

In 1959, community activist Frances Goldin organized a group of residents and businesses to stop a city-sponsored urban renewal program from evicting people and turning her Lower East Side working-class neighborhood into a middle-class enclave. She sought the help of Walter Thabit, a professional urban planner, and the Cooper Square Committee completed the first community plan in New York City in 1961. Nine years later, it became the first officially adopted community plan in the city.

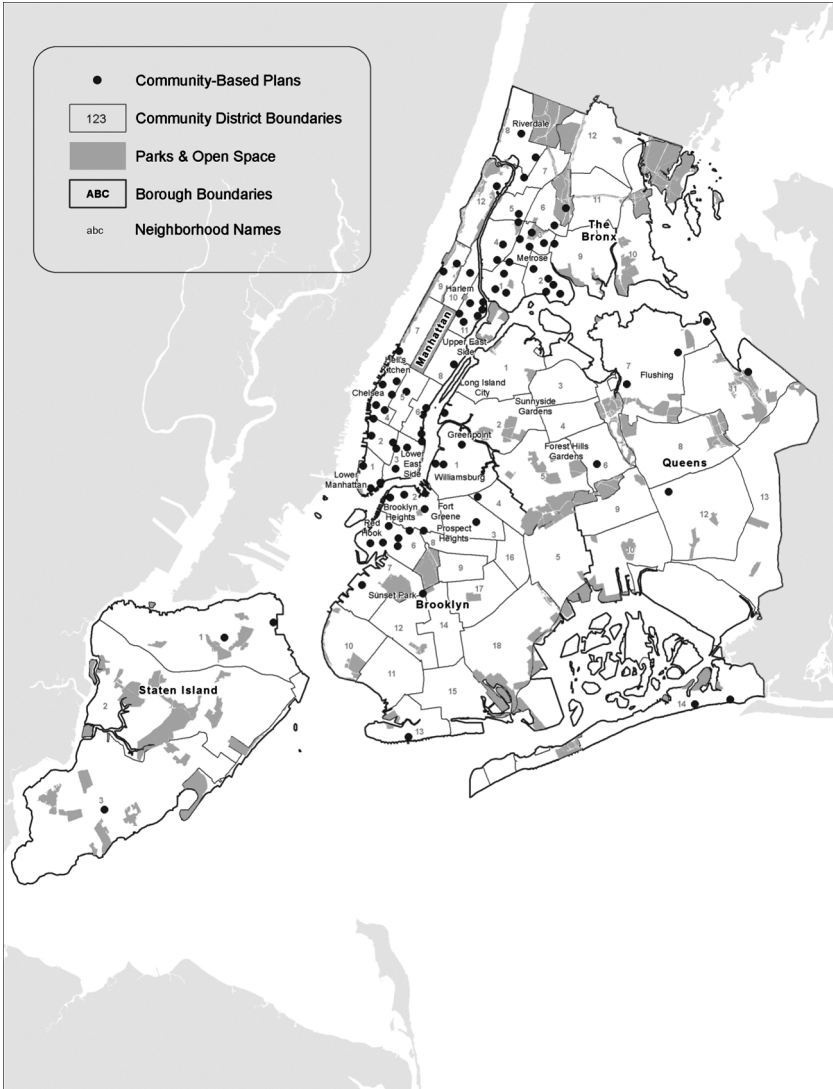


Figure 1.1
 Map showing community-based plans in New York City. *Credit:* Municipal Art Society Planning Center

In 1993, Yolanda García, a South Bronx mother, stood up against a city-sponsored urban renewal plan, protesting that it would turn her neighborhood into an exclusive enclave of homeowners. She led a community-planning process and won endorsement by government for a plan that guaranteed no displacement of residents and businesses and reshaped the city's project in other important ways.

In 2003, residents and businesses organized *Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn* to prevent being displaced by the largest development project in Brooklyn's history, sponsored by Forest City Ratner, a major real estate firm. They prepared their own plan, which called for development without displacement, and today the struggle against Forest City Ratner continues in the streets and in the courts.

These are only three examples (described in detail in chapters 4 and 7) from a large pool of community-based plans in New York City, many of which emerged out of protest and struggles against displacement and gentrification, sometimes in opposition to government-sponsored plans and other times after winning battles against unwanted megaprojects. Some community plans were subsequently adopted, in whole or in part, by city government. Today there are at least 100 community plans in New York City, a municipality with over 8 million people and fifty-nine officially designated community districts, and many grassroots community planners like Frances Goldin and Yolanda García. Though much of the city's territory is not covered by community plans, the grassroots plans dwarf in number the land-use plans produced by government agencies, and together they represent perhaps one of the largest collections of community-initiated plans in the world. Reflecting wider imbalances in economic and political power in the city, proportionately more of the plans came from low-income, working-class communities with people of color, and many recent ones emerged from the environmental justice movement. The citywide Campaign for Community-Based Planning—which brings together over fifty community-based organizations, community boards, and professionals to advocate for community planning—arose in 2001 after decades of grassroots planning efforts in the city's neighborhoods to press local government to recognize and support community planning.⁷

This book tells some of the many stories of community planning in New York City with the objective of understanding how and why community planning occurs, how it influences (or does not influence) public policy, what the prospects for the future are, and what lessons can be learned. It aims to demonstrate the close relationships between commu-

nity planning and the political strategies of urban social movements against displacement and gentrification and for environmental justice. The visions for the future in community plans are usually much more than static, abstract ideals or laundry lists of needs and desires, although they sometimes look like that on the surface. Community plans are products of ongoing political processes and usually reflect the contradictory elements in those processes. To community organizers, plans are usually conscious political strategies that seek, within the context of broader struggles for social justice, to change the relations of political power both within neighborhoods and between neighborhoods and outside forces. They are a means for setting priorities and principles that people believe should govern what happens in their communities. Understanding this relationship between political strategy and community planning is essential to the growing ranks of community planners as they seek guidance about how to plan. This includes the community planners like Walter Thabit, who have formal academic and professional training that too often fails to link community organizing and planning; community organizers with no formal training in planning like Yolanda García and Frances Goldin; and students who would aspire to be community planners. The pioneering community planners were especially skillful in linking political strategy with planning strategy, so that both the content of the plan and the process followed to develop it were connected to the struggles against displacement, for social justice, and for a better quality of life.

This book is not intended to be a detailed analysis of New York City's community plans. An entire book could be written about any one of the plans to be covered, either as a history, an ethnography, or a sociological or decision-making study. Instead, it looks broadly at representative community plans and places them in their political and social contexts to help better explain their content and the diverse processes followed in developing them. A broad overview of major historical trends and the economic, social, and political conditions that gave rise to them is combined with selected case studies that illustrate these trends and conditions.⁸ This work cannot include the complete stories of any of the neighborhoods discussed herein. There are already many books that analyze individual New York City neighborhoods in detail.⁹ And while it starts from an interdisciplinary urban planning approach, this book is not intended as a definitive work on urban planning in New York City or the region. There are several texts that cover part of the territory, but any comprehensive historical and

political analysis of urban planning in New York would be an encyclopedic project.¹⁰

Much of what has been written about urban policy in New York City focuses on broad issues of political power, the prominent role of hegemonic state institutions, and the role of important private actors.¹¹ An ample body of literature also focuses on electoral politics and the protagonist role of prominent elected officials.¹² Many comprehensive historic studies include important social and political analyses of the city's urban history.¹³ While this literature is crucial for an understanding of urban reality, it is not sufficient for community planners. Too often the urban policy narratives fail to include individuals and urban social movements as active agents of social change, thereby contributing to the impression that they are relatively passive subjects of unchangeable globalization trends.¹⁴ This book instead looks at urban policy from the bottom up from the vantage point of the mature, progressive community movements whose struggles for social justice continue to play a powerful role in shaping the city.¹⁵ The purpose, quite simply, is not only to understand the world but to learn how to change it.¹⁶ This study therefore begins with a question: *what knowledge and analysis will help community planners in developing their plans and linking them with political strategies?*

It may appear self-evident to many that race and class play central roles in New York City politics, given the city's historic role as a center for working-class immigrants and its wide ethnic diversity. But very little has been written about the central role that has been played by race and class in the city's urban planning and development policies. This book highlights their significance in the formulation and evolution of land-use, zoning, and community-planning policies. Furthermore, it attempts to show that race and class are not just two among many variables but the central factors needed to understand planning in the city.

One of the most remarkable facts about community planning in New York City is that it has flourished in the shadows of an immensely powerful private real estate industry. NYC and Company, the city's tourist agency, claims that New York is "the real estate capital of the world." Local folklore has it that real estate is to New York what oil is to Houston. As demonstrated in Robert Fitch's *Assassination of New York*,¹⁷ the finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) sector has increasingly come to dominate the city's land-use and fiscal policies. Powerful real estate clans and financial corporations (Fitch focuses mostly on the Rockefellers) control the most valuable land in Manhattan and the new

business and residential districts in the city's four outlying boroughs. They are the largest single source of campaign funding for local elected officials. They backed the construction of the nation's largest subway system and helped create one of the most dynamic metropolises in the world. They are truly a hegemonic economic, social, and political force.

This determined opposition—the most powerful real estate growth machine facing dynamic and sophisticated community movements—is critical to understanding the logic and future of community organizing and planning everywhere. This book aims to unravel this contradiction. It is written for the community organizers and planners in the city's neighborhoods, professionals in city government, and activists in the many organizations and institutions engaged in the process of preventing displacement, controlling development, building viable communities, and combating racial and economic inequalities. But it is also for everyone outside New York who faces similar contradictions and cares about neighborhoods. We all live in a world that is increasingly dominated by global metropolises—centers of global finance and real estate—where real estate and community collide in a complex regional territory divided up into neighborhoods of diverse sizes and shapes.¹⁸

The purpose here is to unravel the diverse stories of community planning in a way that will inform and support community planners in New York City and every other metropolis. This is not a cookbook with recipes about how to do a community plan. The conditions facing community planners are so distinct that they require flexibility, creativity, and adaptation, and their point of departure should be political strategies that are dynamic and complex. No formula for community planning will suffice.¹⁹

In this book, *planning* is defined as a conscious human activity that envisions and may ultimately determine the urban future. Since the first human settlements, all urban environments have been the product of planning of one kind or another by both individuals and the state. Under industrial capitalism, planning became an explicit function of the state, and it both reflects and mediates the contradictions of capitalism—contradictions within the capitalist class and between capital and labor. Urban planning has been a means for addressing these contradictions as they are manifest in the realm of urban space.²⁰ In chapter 2, the dynamics and contradictions of real estate capital in New York City and the ways that they affect urban planning and the role of the state are analyzed. Community planning reflects a new social practice that joins the urban social movements as they confront and engage the state.

A common myth in the urban planning profession is that planning should be a neutral process carried out in the public interest outside the political arena (more about this later).²¹ Another myth is that plans are or should be about life within the limited territorial boundaries of neighborhoods and should avoid addressing broader economic and social issues they cannot resolve. As the case studies in this book illustrate, community planning is rarely politically neutral at the local level and often addresses citywide, regional, and global political issues.

Progressive Community Planning

Progressive community planning is defined here as planning that seeks to achieve local and global equality, social inclusion, and environmental justice. Progressive planning in New York City has been part of a long-standing local progressive political tradition based on principles of racial and economic inclusion. It is based largely in low-income, working-class neighborhoods, most of them communities of color. It is preceded by a long history of community, labor, and progressive social movements.²² The pioneer of this inclusive planning model, the Cooper Square plan in Manhattan's Lower East Side, is described in more detail in chapter 4. For the last two decades, the environmental justice movement has further advanced the progressive approach to community planning, as illustrated in chapter 5. In fact, today environmental justice advocates are the most outspoken proponents of inclusionary community planning in the city. In this book, some of these vanguard neighborhood plans—including Melrose Commons in the Bronx, Greenpoint/Williamsburg in Brooklyn, and West Harlem in Manhattan—disprove the charge that all community planning is by definition exclusionary and driven by not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) sentiments. In fact, community planning in many cases is more inclusionary than large-scale government or private planning.

Another longstanding trend in community planning attempts to achieve social exclusion through land-use controls. These community plans are devices for consolidating control of the most powerful property interests and often create a façade of consensus to undermine those who challenge these interests. Over the last century, the tradition of suburban zoning and planning in the United States has been built on exclusionary principles.²³ Exclusionary planning practice in New York City has been less apparent because of the city's dynamic growth, ethnic diversity, and relative acceptance of new immigrant populations. Yet chapters 2 and 3

show how zoning and land-use planning in the city have contributed to the segregation of neighborhoods by race and class. In the city's most exclusive neighborhoods, the planning process is not truly open and transparent and is used to obscure negotiations that occur behind closed doors. Chapter 7 shows how real estate megaprojects such as Midtown West, the rebuilding of lower Manhattan after 9/11, and Brooklyn's Atlantic Yards are shrouded in highly controlled processes of planning that may involve some citizen participation but severely limit any public role in decision making. They are examples of planning for the few that may in practice involve many people.

Many plans fall in between the extremes of exclusionary and progressive approaches, and some are ambiguous and self-contradictory. No plan is entirely progressive because all communities include both tendencies, and community plans often bring them into the open for discussion, debate, and compromise. And in all cases, the role of the state is contradictory and reflective of wider struggles related to race, class, and urban space.

Progressive planning implies an awareness of regional and global issues beyond the neighborhood level, and community planners must struggle for such an awareness. Because they usually have to work one neighborhood at a time, they can easily become disconnected from larger territorial and global issues. However, as shown in this book's narratives of community plans, the possibility of isolation and failure in lonely neighborhood struggles incessantly drives community activists and planners to seek broader coalitions and objectives. Solidarities of class, race, and social justice are powerful instruments for relatively powerless communities. And in building solidarity, community planners begin to make the connections between what they are doing and the long history of place-based struggles against displacement in the city. Chapter 3 examines these connections in a way that has not been done before, going back to slave rebellions, tenant organizing, the civil rights movement, the struggles against the federal urban renewal program, and the long string of government reforms that were demanded by grassroots groups that were attempting to decentralize decision making.

This work follows the tradition of participatory action research in which scholars engage in the processes that they seek to describe and analyze, address questions of vital importance to the communities they study, and design their research in a dialogue with the people they work with.²⁴ In the field of urban planning, this approach implies an engagement by professionals in the complex process of community organizing

and political change.²⁵ It follows a long tradition within the urban planning profession of insurgent theory and practice—moving from advocacy toward new models of progressive planning.

Rational-Comprehensive Planning and the Neoliberal City

New models of progressive planning are needed to address the complex tasks facing both professionally trained community planners and those who have learned by doing. New models will build on the rich legacy of advocacy planning and incorporate lessons from the practice of community planning. To develop these new models, community planners need to recognize the significance of *community land* (defined below) and the roles played by conflict, contradiction, and complexity. This will help resolve the most critical dilemma currently facing community planners—*how to win the struggles against the concentration of noxious land uses without contributing to displacement and gentrification*. Preserving and developing community land are critical to resolving this question.

The orthodox approach to urban planning in the United States is the *rational-comprehensive planning model*, which arose at the beginning of the twentieth century as the nation underwent a dramatic transformation from rural to urban and as metropolitan regions began to dominate the landscape. The ideology of rational-comprehensive planning has its roots in the Enlightenment faith in the ability of humans to determine the shape of their environment through scientific knowledge and practice, which was put into practice by the modern state. It arose in large part as a reaction to the miserable conditions of the cities of early industrial capitalism and the insurgent working-class movements in those cities.²⁶ Its best-known example was the monumental late nineteenth-century plan for central Paris that displaced vibrant working-class neighborhoods, imposed uniform building heights, and created public parks, wide boulevards, and an enormous sewer system. In the United States, it led to the City Beautiful movement, which created the elite civic center epitomized in the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893, Daniel Burnham's 1906 Chicago Plan, and later the federal urban renewal program. It also led to Ebenezer Howard's Garden City idea, which created planned new towns outside older industrial cities in Great Britain and, though it never had much practical success in the United States, lent credence to the practice of low-density suburban sprawl that characterized twentieth-century urban growth in this country.²⁷

One of the first and most durable critiques of rational-comprehensive planning came out of New York City's vital social movements. In her

classic 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs showed how the orthodox planning approach placed too much power in the hands of professional planners, relied on grand schemes for urban transformation that often made some problems worse, and failed to take into account the multiple ways in which people and neighborhoods develop organically.²⁸ Jacobs was stimulated to write her book after years of struggling against megaprojects in New York City that came out of the orthodox comprehensive planning tradition. Her nemesis was New York's Robert Moses, the master of urban renewal, giant civic projects, highways, and parks, many of which were built by bulldozing neighborhoods.²⁹

Rational-comprehensive planning promised physical solutions to social problems, an example of *physical determinism*. Urban renewal and public housing programs, for example, were supposed to resolve the problems of urban poverty, when in practice they only changed the geography of poverty and displaced millions of poor people. They fed the thirst of real estate investors for centrally located land and further marginalized the neighborhoods of low-income people. One of the theoretical underpinnings of this approach is the orthodox urban planning principle of "highest and best use of land," which relies on quantifiable measures of land value, defined by the real estate market, to suggest to planners what uses are appropriate at any given location.

With respect to the planning process itself, rational-comprehensive planning promises a neat, logically constructed process of plan development engineered by technically trained planners. It often starts with an inventory of existing land uses, community assets and liabilities, and goals and objectives; goes on to examine alternative scenarios; and finally outlines a physical plan or set of strategies. This approach is consistent with the theory of scientific management that heavily influenced the twentieth-century urban reform movements and created the foundations for the growth of regulatory institutions in government, including city planning commissions and departments. The professional planners would be the prime movers, and the plan would be a product of the rationally organized process that they managed.

Rational-comprehensive planning thrived during the era of Keynesian political economy and the expanding, interventionist state. Under assault by structural changes in global capitalism and by community movements, it has receded as a hegemonic theoretical construct. While it has fallen into disuse among planning academics, the rational-comprehensive

model still exercises a powerful pull in practice on community planners no less than others.³⁰

In the 1970s, *neoliberalism* called into question the underpinnings of traditional rational-comprehensive planning. Neoliberalism calls for deregulation, privatization, market-driven development, decentralization, and the downloading of government functions to weak local governments, nonprofit organizations, and civil society. Neoliberal urban policy was a product of global capitalist restructuring that resulted in the globalization of industrial production, flexible accumulation strategies, and the restructuring of the state. During the 1980s, the administrations of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom consolidated the neoliberal shift in public policy. The near-bankruptcy of New York City in 1975 was a well-publicized trigger in the dramatic shift away from public spending, public works, and public spaces in all U.S. cities, and in New York it diluted the traditionally powerful role of organized labor and allied social movements. As aptly summarized by Jason Hackworth in *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*,³¹ neoliberal urban policy is based on classical notions of individual liberty, an unfettered marketplace, and a noninterventionist state. These traditional eighteenth-century ideas were resurrected as challenges to Keynesian political economy and the modern welfare state. A strong public sector is to be replaced by public-private partnerships or outright privatization. As a result, communities now confront local governments that are both less aggressive in leading land development and more dependent on hegemonic real estate interests and the progrowth civic coalitions they are able to assemble.

According to Hackworth, “The boundaries of urban governance have shifted dramatically in the past thirty years, partially because of structural constraints to governments (municipal or otherwise) in the capitalist world . . . but also because of a related ideological shift toward neoliberal governing practices.”³² Neoliberalism rejects the belief that aggressive state action is required to maintain market demand, correct market imperfections, and prime economic growth. Neoliberal thinking denies that the state is needed to provide for certain “public goods” or “public space.” Instead, the public goods that were created under Keynesian regimes should be privatized, including public housing, parks, transportation, and services. The role of the state in the neoliberal city is to stay out of the way of the real estate market, reduce its regulatory powers (including land use and zoning) to a minimum, limit taxation, and divest itself of all but a minimal public infrastructure. Neoliberal

ideology “is not a thing as much as a process”³³ and has been applied unevenly in the real urban world.

With the collapse of the socialist camp, neoliberalism became religion, and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s boast that “there is no alternative” (TINA) was internalized by many, including activists and professionals. But throughout the United States and the world, the new social movements that arose since the 1970s, with both their practice and new theories, have proven that “another world is possible,” to use the phrase of the World Social Forum.³⁴

A reflection of the contradictory trends within the neoliberal state, grandiose comprehensive planning is experiencing a minor revival in New York City (discussed in chapter 7), and consequently there is a trend toward rehabilitating the discredited master planners of the past. One reason is that public planning disasters that affect the accumulation of capital continue to occur even with the private sector clearly in command.³⁵ But for the most part, rational-comprehensive planning has ceased to be a defensible theory, and Jane Jacobs’s critique has withstood the test of time. New York’s official planners rely not so much on any comprehensive theory or strategy but instead on a neoliberal faith in the magic of the real estate marketplace.

As is shown in chapter 2, despite the powerful role of Keynesianism, Robert Moses, and New Deal public works, New York City’s land-use policy has from the very start been strongly dominated by liberal economic theory and a powerful real estate sector. The first plans were made by surveyors to facilitate land subdivision. After the consolidation of the city in 1898, government turned away from any comprehensive approach to development of the region and instead limited its role to the narrow tool of zoning, which followed growth instead of leading it. While other cities and towns in the United States produced comprehensive master plans, New York produced only one, and it was never approved. Even the efforts of the heroic Robert Moses to direct and control development appear from the long historical perspective to be both fleeting and inadequate. New York City is an excellent test case for the city that grew in tandem with the needs of the financial, insurance, and real estate sector, and paradoxically it is also the test case for community planning, which has emerged in the large void left open by liberal capitalism.

The Roots of Progressive Community Planning

Since Jane Jacobs’s classical critique of rational-comprehensive planning in the United States, multiple theories and practices of community planning have emerged that have roots in urban social movements, beginning

with advocacy planning. A review of this legacy can help inform any search for new progressive approaches to community planning beyond neoliberalism and the rational-comprehensive orthodoxy.

Advocacy planning is the foundation for all progressive planning in the United States today.³⁶ While its philosophical roots can be traced to the Enlightenment faith in human self-determination and political pluralism, advocacy planning was an innovation of the 1960s. It was a direct consequence of the engagement of urban planners in the civil rights movement, the struggles against the displacement of low-income communities by the federal urban renewal program, and the opportunities for innovation offered by the federal War on Poverty, including the Model Cities program. The theory of advocacy planning was first outlined by Paul Davidoff, an urban planner who helped found the graduate planning program at Hunter College in New York City. Davidoff's theory was informed by the multiple practices of community activists and professionals who sought to redress issues of racial and class oppression. It confronted a planning profession that was narrowly focused on the physical city, rationalized the destruction of "slums" by urban renewal, sided with powerful real estate interests, and was overwhelmingly a club of white males who claimed for themselves a position of technocratic superiority over protesting communities. Advocacy planning was a prescription meant for urban planners, but the theory applies to all professions and disciplines that confront the political and ethical dilemmas bound up in their practice—social work, public health, public administration, and all of the social sciences that deal with urban policy.

Davidoff's seminal 1965 work, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning,"³⁷ made the following main points:

- The planner is not solely a *value-neutral* technician. Instead, values are part of every planning process.
- City planners should not attempt to frame a single plan that represents the "public interest" but should "represent and plead the plans of many interest groups." In other words, planning should be pluralistic and represent diverse interests, especially minority interests.
- So-called citizen participation programs usually react to official plans and programs rather than encourage people to propose their own goals, policies, and future actions. Neighborhood groups and ad hoc associations brought together to protest public actions should create their own plans.
- Planning commissions were set up as supposedly neutral bodies acting in the public interest, but they are responsible to no constituency and

too often irrelevant. There is no escaping the reality that politics is at the very heart of planning and that planning commissions are political.

- Urban planning is fixated on the physical city. Davidoff stated that “the city planning profession’s historical concern with the physical environment has warped its ability to see physical structures and land as servants to those who use them.” He thought that professionals should be concerned with physical, economic, and social planning. He also said that “the practice of plural planning requires educating planners who would be able to engage as professional advocates in the contentious work of forming social policy.”³⁸

One of the limitations of the advocacy planning model is that it is based on a legal approach where the advocate planner represents the interests of clients who do not have access to professional help. There is a need to expand this approach now that the civil rights movement has ebbed, black and white divisions are complicated by a new array of ethnic divisions and identities, the War on Poverty was subverted in the Nixon years, and the Reagan revolution undermined critical public-policy instruments for achieving racial equality and equal economic opportunity. The banner of affirmative action, for example, has been covered up by charges of reverse discrimination. Poor people have again been blamed for poverty, and public assistance has been cut back, even as tax cuts and subsidies continued to flow to the rich. And perpetual foreign wars, now an indefinite war against terrorism, have diverted resources needed to solve solvable urban problems.

After the demise of federal urban programs in the 1970s, many professionals dedicated to social justice went to work in public agencies and became quiet advocates from within. Norman Krumholz popularized the term *equity planning* based on his own practice as planning director under Cleveland Mayor Carl Stokes, the first African American mayor of a major U.S. city. Krumholz and John Forester questioned the inaction of professionals in public service when confronted with evidence of social injustice:

The Cleveland experience helps us to move beyond a perplexing paradox, one we will call *the practical paradox of professional style*. The gist of the paradox is quite simple: “neutral” action in a world of severe inequality reproduces that inequality.³⁹

This approach borrows from advocacy planning and models of normative policy making and proactive public administration, casting aside those that favor incrementalism and “muddling through” in bureaucracies.⁴⁰ It continues to be relevant for community planning because

neoliberal ideology penetrates deeply into the ranks of the public sector, which helps legitimize private accumulation strategies that reinforce displacement pressures. Community strategies invariably include mining information and building alliances within government. Such an inside-outside approach to organizing rejects a strictly instrumentalist view of the state in which there are no conflicts or contradictions in government, the state at all levels is presumed equally as powerful or impotent, and there are no humans in government institutions who are capable of conscious political action.

Feminism has had a profound impact on planning by uncovering the many and diverse practices of women who have shaped cities and neighborhoods. Dolores Hayden's *Redesigning the American Dream* and *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* and Leonie Sandercock's *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*⁴¹ are but a few examples. Perhaps it is no accident that as women entered the workforce in large numbers, the women's movement brought into focus the importance of place to the reproduction of capital and labor. Women have traditionally played a central role in urban social movements and community planning. This book's stories of community planning show how women, whether or not identified with feminist movements, have helped transform the planning profession. Jane Jacobs is a key figure not only because she is responsible for the classic critique of orthodox urban planning and played a prominent role in New York City's dynamic urban struggles but also because she rejected a patriarchal assault, led by "visionary" male planners, on a domain of great concern to women—her community.⁴² What started as an exclusively male urban planning profession emphasizing physical form has now changed to one in which women make up about half of all planning students and social and economic aspects of planning are routinely included in their training.

In the United States, *indigenous planning* occupies a unique space by incorporating diverse approaches, ranging from rational-comprehensive to advocacy and progressive planning, on Indian reservations and in indigenous urban communities.⁴³ The space for indigenous planning is unique because it has evolved from the struggles of the first nations to gain control of land that was taken from them and placed under a semi-colonial structure dominated by the U.S. government. Community planning can learn several lessons from the theories and practice of land use in indigenous communities.

Finally, the environmental movement produced what is coming to be called *sustainability planning*, which starts with the objective of meeting

today's needs without compromising the needs of future generations.⁴⁴ Environmentalism emerged both as a protest against the negative consequences of uncontrolled growth and as a trend within capital to moderate growth in line with its needs for global restructuring. Theories of sustainability also brought forward efforts toward more holistic, grass-roots approaches that integrate public health and quality-of-life issues in land-use planning.⁴⁵ Chapter 5 discusses how the environmental justice movement brings a progressive approach to sustainability by underlining the role of social justice in environmental and land-use planning.

Transformative community planning evolved with the maturation of the civil rights movement beyond advocacy and protest to the question of political empowerment. It reflected a shift of the civil rights movement after the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, following Martin Luther King Jr.'s call to go from the struggle to get a seat at the lunch counter to the struggle for the money to pay for lunch. It reflected the move from legal battles, which often put professional advocates in key positions, to broader political struggles for decent jobs and housing and for a role as equals in politics and society. This meant building the capacity of communities to control their own destinies. According to Marie Kennedy,

Genuine community development combines material development with the development of people, increasing a community's capacity for taking control of its own development. This requires building within the community critical thinking and planning abilities so that development projects and planning processes can be replicated by community members in the future.⁴⁶

Kennedy and many others base their transformative approach on Paolo Freire's notions of engaging people in ways that empower them and bring about social change. The Freirian dialogue among people rejects the "banking" approach to development, in which the professional is the supposed repository of technical knowledge about planning and transfers it to "students" who must listen and learn.⁴⁷ The theories of transformative planning help explain how new generations of effective community planners emerge without formal training as they "learn by doing" and by engaging in dialogues with the people who can help them to solve their community's problems and bring about radical social change.⁴⁸

The long tradition of *utopian planning* also has a place among progressive approaches because it can help challenge the despair engendered by TINA and dare us to imagine a better world. Utopian thinkers dating back to Plato and his *Republic* imprinted on their ideal communities characteristics present in their own societies, and many of them validated existing inequalities. But the utopian socialists of the nineteenth century

imagined new societies based on equality and cooperation instead of competition. Some of them intentionally created new communities based on these principles (none of which lasted very long).⁴⁹ There is sometimes a nostalgic strain in utopian thinking, when utopia harkens back to preindustrial villages instead of looking forward to an urban future. There is also a utopian strain in the classical rational-comprehensive theories of urban planning.⁵⁰ But unless community planners are able to imagine a better world and incorporate the progressive legacies of the past in that world, there is little hope for planning as a human endeavor.⁵¹

Marxist critiques of utopian schemes rest on the assertion by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.”⁵² Marx’s associate, Engels, was one of the first to develop a critique of utopian reformism, capitalist urbanization, and the housing market under capitalism.⁵³ Marx and Engels introduced the methodology of dialectical and historical materialism, which is valuable for understanding the contradictions in urban development and the ways that the production and reproduction of capital are critical determinants of urban history. They also showed how a scientific approach to understanding the world required going beneath superficial events and human behavior and understanding underlying class relations.

Urban planning in the socialist countries of the twentieth century, which was not always based on the theories of Marx and Engels, offers many important lessons, including successes and failures. If we ignore them and fall prey to blind historic prejudice, we may well be doomed to repeating the mistakes in our search for new alternatives.⁵⁴ One of the great achievements of the socialist city was to minimize displacement and social segregation and create a freely accessible public infrastructure. But this also led to a lack of mobility in jobs and housing and economic stagnation. After a brief period of experimentation with utopian ideas, the Soviet Union’s Bolshevik revolution sank into an urban policy that discouraged innovation and diversity as a price for growing quantitatively by producing more jobs and housing. Urban planning became a highly centralized practice monopolized by the state and dependent on decisions about the location of production facilities. In some important ways, it mimicked the undemocratic rational-comprehensive model. Nevertheless, there are many rich lessons⁵⁵ for those who would dare to imagine an urban future not dictated by invisible free-market forces, not

the least of which is the importance of linking socialism and participatory democracy.

Urban scholar David Harvey has asked whether it is possible to construct “a stronger utopianism . . . that integrates social process and spatial form.” The task, he says, is to define an alternative

not in terms of some static spatial form or even of some perfected emancipatory process. The task is to pull together a spatiotemporal utopianism—a dialectical utopianism—that is rooted in our present possibilities at the same time as it points towards different trajectories for human uneven geographical developments.⁵⁶

Each of the theories discussed above, from advocacy to Marxism, is as much a critique of mainstream planning as it is a rich mine of ideas for alternative theories and practices, but none of them alone is adequate for progressive planning today. Progressive planning today incorporates all of these concepts and practices, but it must be more than the sum of the parts. This book attempts to show how *progressive planning in New York City is uniquely characterized by its focus on local and global equality, social inclusion, environmental justice, and community land*. It must be more than a collection of critiques because its purpose is to yield new strategies to bring about fundamental change in our economic and political systems. It must involve a holistic, comprehensive approach to planning that joins land, people, and environment, physical and social planning, local and global economics, individual and community, and preservation and development. It is planning for healthy and sustainable cities with many differences but fewer inequalities and with planning at multiple levels for the short-term and long-term that improves our urbanity and our urban places. This is not an unreachable panacea but must be closely tied to strategies for community organizing and empowerment. Given the enormous imbalance in political power between real estate and community, these strategies necessarily include “biding time” in a long-term struggle to gain a better position that may pay off when real estate’s hegemony erodes, wanes, or is ended in the ultimate market crash.⁵⁷ Further details about how this approach can be applied to New York City are provided in chapter 8.

Elements of Progressive Community Planning

Three key elements of progressive planning are community land; the bundle of processes including conflict, contradiction, and complexity; and the tension between eliminating environmental injustice and preventing gentrification.

Elements of Progressive Planning: Community Land

A central aspect of progressive community planning in New York City must be a strategic approach to land, including the planning, development, and control of land. Unlike rational-comprehensive planning, the starting point is to question who controls land and who benefits from its use. The urban planning professional is trained in ways to conserve, develop, and regulate land. Land use is the urban planner's special domain.

This is perhaps one area in which community planners have fallen short by too often focusing on immediate struggles and pragmatic tactics and too infrequently looking at strategic, long-term issues of land use. This very North American tendency toward pragmatism plays into the orthodox approach to land-use planning that sees urban planning as a mechanism for pragmatic accommodation to market forces. One of the leading texts in land-use planning begins with the statement that "Local land use planning and decision making can be seen as a big-stakes game of serious multiparty competition over an area's future land use pattern."⁵⁸ According to this text, the role of the urban planner is to help manage this competition so that the market produces positive outcomes: "The goal of the land planner is not simply to accommodate market demand for development, but to guide the market toward producing good communities."⁵⁹

Community-based planners may share this view and see themselves as incrementalists who are there to "play the game." Often community activists have to spend so much time and energy just getting into the game that they have little energy left to change the rules of the game. As a result, they may see no need to look strategically at the question of land. In part, this has to do with objective limitations in community movements. For example, people struggling against displacement are often tenants who own no land and whose tenure is precarious. Their most urgent concern is to keep a roof over their heads, and they may be less interested in the right to housing or the long-term future of their neighborhood. Nevertheless, progressive community plans almost always go beyond pragmatic accommodations and express, in practice if not in theory, the collective efforts of residents, workers, and businesses to take control of the land on which their housing and neighborhoods lie, and many incorporate broad strategies for the city and region.⁶⁰

One of the main themes of this book, illustrated in the history and practice of community planning in New York City, is the central importance of community land. To gain control over their land, communities

do not necessarily need to own the land. *Community land* may be held in various forms of social ownership or regulated in a way that is consistent with community strategies. More concretely, *community land is land taken out of the speculative real estate market and owned by public, nonprofit, or private entities that are responsible for holding the land in public trust, using it for a public purpose, or limiting profits from resale.* It may involve a wide variety of forms of ownership: locally based nonprofits, limited-equity cooperatives, and community land trusts; publicly owned community facilities and open spaces; and private homeowners in a local real estate market that is stable and not in flux. Privately owned land can become community land if its private use is restricted by democratically controlled zoning, land-use regulations, condemnation powers, deed restrictions, easements, and other measures.⁶¹

Community planning can strengthen community land as a basic element in building a sense of *place* and showing that place matters.⁶² By building up the stock of community land, neighborhoods can build places that slow or stop the process of dislocation and *displacement* caused by giant development projects or the gradual process of gentrification. Community land can help stake out public space in the national and global struggles against the uncontrolled speculative marketplace.

However, there is a logical contradiction between community control of land and the principles of progressive planning (outlined above) that criticize physical determinism and emphasize human transformation in the planning process. Local control of land can easily perpetuate or worsen existing relations of oppression and inequality. Therefore, there also needs to be a fundamental paradigm shift in the way land is defined and treated. According to Davidoff, land should be thought of not as simply a physical object but as *a set of social relations. Community land should sustain the human relations and cultures associated with places while progressively eliminating inequalities.* The modern North American tradition of urban land treats land as only the physical *space* used for human activities, as a commodity to be bought and sold on the market, and as an instrument of economic and political power. For those who came to occupy the land, exploit it, and sell it for a profit, it was an object measured in spatial terms and located on a grid by geographic coordinates—a site for producing buildings and reproducing investments. New Yorkers are further alienated from land in yet another sense: most of the city's surface is covered by concrete and asphalt (which required the diverting and covering of many local streams), so that residents and workers have little direct contact with natural soil and water and only

visit the buildings that occupy the land. A more humane conception of land has to go beyond the notion of a physical, material space demarcated by a finite number of square feet. It also must be understood to be an integral part of the social and spiritual life of our communities—socially produced *places* that have meaning for all of us.⁶³ This view is consistent with and responds to the struggles against displacement and for the protection of urban places. When land becomes space alone, its utility to anyone whose name is not on the deed is purely secondary, and there is no expectation that it must serve a broader social purpose.⁶⁴

Perhaps we can learn something from the cultural traditions in the world that deal with land free from the realm of commodity exchange. According to Australian indigenous activist Mudrooroo,

Life came from and through the land and is manifested in the land. The land is not an inanimate thing: it is alive. Land to us Aborigines is not a possession in material terms, as the white man looks upon land, but a responsibility held in sacred trust. We do not say the land belongs to us, but we belong to the land.⁶⁵

As is shown in chapter 7, this idea that land can have a spiritual value emerged among the families of the 9/11 victims. And in other chapters, stories of people threatened with displacement show how land may evoke deep feelings and emotions associated with the everyday lives and activities of people. This approach cannot be understood as purely “subjective” because ideologies and symbols have a material base and are a material force in the world. Sacred places are defined not just by what humans did or did not do on the land but by the myths and cultural values passed on through the generations.

According to Lakota elder Vine Deloria Jr., there are many different kinds of sacred places, and they all come “out of a lot of experience. The idea is not to pretend to own it, not to exploit it, but to respect it.”⁶⁶ The kind of sacred place that is most difficult for non-Indians to understand teaches and gives to humans, who are in turn obliged to preserve it as a healthy place. “The creed of the Lakotas,” says one observer, “requires not a general reverence for land (though that is a near-certain outgrowth of it) but a particular attentiveness to place.”⁶⁷ In such a framework, the very modern term *land use* seems jolting. If there is an organic tie between land and people, how can it be “used”?

This approach should not romanticize non-Western cultures or suggest they never abused the land but should stretch our imaginations beyond our own culture to find alternatives to modern uses and abuses.⁶⁸ If we simply drop all land titles and dismiss property owners, all problems will

not be solved. Such simplistic notions miss the main point about the nature of land and its relationship to people.

The following story of Maria Lai and a small town in Italy further demonstrates how an issue of land can be intimately connected to the history, culture and spiritual life of a community. Lai is a well-known sculptress who was asked to design a memorial to war veterans in her home town of Collasai on the island of Sardinia (Italy). Wanting to avoid yet another mundane obelisk or heroic statue, Lai set out to create something with more meaning to the people of Collasai. She held many discussions with people in the town, who identified what they felt best symbolized the town's history. Women, who were not often consulted in civic matters, consistently brought up the myth of the blue ribbon. In this folk tale, a young girl was stranded in a cave on the hillside above the town during a flood. As flood waters rose and entered the cave, a blue ribbon descended from the heavens and pulled her to safety on the hilltop.

The women of the town together with Maria Lai invented the Festival of the Blue Ribbon, a three-day festival that coincided with the annual celebration of the town's patron saint. The women sewed together strips of blue denim, strung them from window to window, covering all the households in town and finally reaching skyward to the hilltop overlooking the town. In the traditional procession, the patron saint was bedecked in blue ribbons. The Festival of the Blue Ribbon is now an annual event in Collasai. Maria Lai brought together the ingredients of a progressive community plan—history, culture, equity, and democratic participation. The story is a parable of community planning and answered the question of how to use the land in the center of the town—the town's public space—not simply by proposing a physical change but by creating new public places that integrate land with the social and spiritual life of the community.⁶⁹

The Commons: Land in the Public Trust

When considering patterns of land ownership, local land-use planning often looks at only two categories, public and private land. In reality, there are many different forms of land tenure throughout the world, but throughout Western history one other main form of land tenure has been prevalent—the *commons*. The ancient Romans had private, public, and common property. In medieval England, villagers kept certain lands to be shared by all. The concept of the commons is used today as a generic term including all land for which a community has responsibility.

According to The Friends of the Commons, it “embraces all the creations of nature and society that we inherit jointly and freely, and hold in trust for future generations.”⁷⁰

Over a century ago, conservationists in the United States started creating natural reserves to protect selected land from exploitation by private owners. By using a combination of public ownership, nonprofit land trusts, public easements, environmental laws, deed restrictions, and tax benefits, about a fourth of the land in the United States came to be held in the public trust. Unfortunately, this kind of conservation tends to reinforce the value of land owned by large private owners and often involves huge direct or indirect public subsidies to private concessions. Corporate mining, ranching, and logging interests have found ways to get cheap access to exploit the 20 percent of all U.S. land managed by the U.S. Department of the Interior. But even with these limitations, land that has many of the nation’s most valuable natural resources is still subject to public control. The community-planning approach to community land dares to propose that *urban* land be placed in the public trust.

The idea of putting urban land in the public trust is not just a pipe dream. This book’s stories of community planning in New York City illustrate the extent to which community land is not only possible but already exists. Over at least the last century, accumulated protest and action by displaced people and tenants have expanded the stock of land that is off-limits to speculation, creating a new *de facto* urban commons. As is noted in chapter 8, most of New York City’s land is already restricted in one way or another. The question now is how to bring it under conscious, democratic control and remove the inequalities in access to land.

Elements of Progressive Planning: Conflict, Contradiction, and Complexity

Progressive community planning in one of the world’s largest cities has emerged out of a complex and contradictory process and in a political environment that is rich in conflict. It comes from political struggles for social justice, not from any idealistic desire for social harmony. Community planning is anything but a tidy, rational, or linear process, and attempts to force preconceived notions of order on the process invariably succumb to the interests of the most powerful social forces.

Plans and planning are not static *things* but nodes of social and political relations that occur in urban places. Community planning necessarily

involves multiple and complex social relations, some of them highly antagonistic. In *Dialectical Urbanism: Social Struggles in the Capitalist City*, Andy Merrifield calls for “an understanding of what gives cities their frightening force and awesome grandeur . . . an understanding of dialectical urbanism, of an urbanism of ambiguity and contradiction and conflict.”⁷¹ Such a dialectical approach is necessary to understand the tensions, debates, and asymmetries that are part of planning as they are part of every social process.

The first major set of contradictions is between real estate and communities. Perhaps community movements in New York City would not be as pervasive if real estate were not as powerful as it is and did not pose serious threats to communities. Community planning arises in response to real estate growth and thrives in “the real estate capital of the world.” Real estate and community planning are inexorably tied to one another and in conflict with each other just as capital and labor are.

Conflicts between real estate and community are common in global cities like New York because as major nodes for the transaction of global capital, they are repositories of an abundant surplus, some of which is absorbed locally and invested in real estate, which in turn creates pressures on communities. Also, “capitalism is always under the impulsion to accelerate turnover time, to speed up the circulation of capital and consequently to revolutionize the time horizons of development,” and “capitalism is under the impulsion to eliminate all spatial barriers.”⁷²

This dynamic movement of capital places pressure on urban working-class neighborhoods where land values and rents go up and endanger low-cost housing. In *The Housing Question*, Engels showed how local land markets further create opportunities for the circulation of capital:

The expansion of the big modern cities gives the land in certain sections of them, particularly in those which are centrally situated, an artificial and often enormously increasing value; the buildings erected in these areas depress this value, instead of increasing it, because they no longer correspond to the changed circumstances. They are pulled down and replaced by others. . . . The result is that the workers are forced out of the center of the towns towards the outskirts; the workers' dwellings and small dwellings in general become rare and expensive and often altogether unobtainable, for under these circumstances the building industry, which is offered a much better field for speculation by more expensive dwelling houses, builds workers' dwellings only by way of exception.⁷³

As a consequence of local resistance and a host of geographical anomalies, the patterns of real estate growth are spatially uneven because

investors are forced to leap-frog over areas that pose serious opposition. Thus, uneven spatial development is as central to market-driven real estate development as the drive for speedy capital turnover.

As detailed in chapter 2, from its early days as a Dutch settlement New York City's real estate development was tied to global trade and a dynamic, flexible, and expanding capital market. Until well into the nineteenth century, it thrived on the profits extracted from slavery and Southern agriculture. As the U.S. empire expanded in the twentieth century, more capital accumulated in the city's banks and on Wall Street. The New York region became one of the world's largest centers of global finance, producing an unprecedented surplus for which investors sought speculative outlets. A century ago, the appetite for profit in real property led the city's landlords to create what is now the largest mass transit system in the country, which made possible high central densities, widespread growth throughout the city's five boroughs, and a new metropolitan region that now includes some 20 million people. With the decline of manufacturing in the twentieth century, the myth that real estate is the city's main industry is now deeply imbedded in the city's policy discourse.

The second set of conflicts of concern to community planning is within the finance, insurance, and real estate sector. As is shown in chapter 2, the city's real estate industry is large, complex, and diverse. Wealthy individuals and clans have formed the backbone of the propertied elite, and they have always sought to distance themselves from the thousands of small developers, builders, and agents who are scattered throughout the region's neighborhoods and who may alternatively be both their competitors and allies in a broad political bloc promoting growth. The large rifts between corporate real estate giants and small, local property interests underlie many local political battles and community plans. With the arrival of powerful new real estate investment trusts (REITs) and global real estate brokers, big real estate and global finance have reached a new level of integration, and their conflicts with locally based small-scale property interests have widened. These contradictions also help to explain the uneven spatial development of real estate in the city. They are of strategic importance for community planning, which has often found a natural ally in small-scale local property interests and taken advantage of rifts among the giants.

Underlying this division between globalized and local real estate is a basic underlying economic tension between the relatively fixed nature of real estate investment and the dynamic needs of flexible capitalism.

David Harvey has pointed to capital's need to address this tension with a "spatial fix," which requires pouring capital into urban infrastructure and housing to both absorb surplus capital and create conditions for the reproduction of capital and labor.⁷⁴ The spatial fix is also related to a giant contradiction within New York City's real estate and financial elite—between the expanding and dynamic global market that creates excess capital for real estate investment and the need of the local economy to provide affordable housing for people who work for them in the city. Most sectors of the local economy need affordable housing because without it labor costs would soar. Labor and working-class communities also need affordable housing so that they can have access to local jobs. New York City's real estate giants have therefore sought a sort of social contract with labor and community by supporting programs that provide affordable housing for low-income workers. As a consequence, New York has the largest stock of public, cooperative, and municipally owned housing for low-income people in the nation. Because of the dynamic nature of the local real estate market, however, affordable housing is constantly constrained and under siege. Real estate interests must limit affordable housing so that it does not threaten the most active and dynamic sectors of the market, and (as is shown in chapter 2) they benefit handsomely from the public subsidies for affordable housing. On the other hand, workers organized in unions, housing advocacy groups, and neighborhood-based organizations try to maximize affordable housing. Community planning is one arena in which this contradiction gets played out.

The more general contradiction confronting capitalism everywhere is that as capital accumulates so does labor and that labor needs to be housed to be of any value to capital. Displaced from their jobs and homes by invading U.S. capital, millions of people from less affluent countries around the world migrate to the urban centers of capital in the United States and Europe to fill low-paying industrial and service jobs. If real estate could rule solely according to its own profit-making logic, the new urban immigrants would have no place to live. The city would be one homogeneous luxury enclave if developers simply produced only the most profitable housing for people with the largest disposable incomes. But since real estate is wedded to other sectors of global and local capital that are constantly expanding, displacing more people and drawing them into its urban centers, the urban real estate establishment must find a way to produce and preserve housing for the new immigrants. Thus, cities like New York have a diverse mix of housing for the very wealthy,

very poor, and many in between—a true reflection of the global capitalist economy.

The upscale growth and gentrification that drive the city's real estate market have never reduced poverty or poor housing, contrary to the claims of the trickle-down theory of economics and advocates of perpetual growth. Instead, gentrification and poverty are intimately linked and dependent on one another. To care for the Park Avenue coops selling for \$5 million, there must be a pool of poorly paid cleaning people, drivers, cooks, and nannies, some of whom are not able to find a place to sleep and therefore join the homeless population. That is why even the biggest real estate magnates believe there is a place for affordable working-class housing (but not in their backyards) and programs to care for the homeless. Indeed, the globalized real estate industry dominates the development of both market-rate and affordable housing (see chapter 2).

The third important contradiction is within communities. Community organizing and planning require both conflict and harmony—not for the sake of conflict but because conflict is a preexisting condition and normal. If there is no conflict, there is no stimulus for communities to organize or do planning. As shown in the case studies throughout this book, democratic community planning arises most often not because someone thought it would be nice to have a plan but because people organize to protest the conditions under which they live. According to Manning Marable,

It is from the site of community that many of us wage struggles in the living space around the reality of day-to-day existence: access to decent and affordable housing, public health services, crime and personal safety, the quality of the environment, public transportation, the education of our children.⁷⁵

The early work of Frances Fox Piven illustrates how successful community action arises from protest and struggle.⁷⁶ Conflict *within* communities also drives community planning. Communities are not homogeneous entities in which everyone has the same needs, problems, and priorities. Community plans can reach some consensus on key issues, but by ignoring difference and diversity community plans will surely perpetuate inequalities and imbalances in political power and fail to transform both individuals and communities. Fetishizing consensus is but one part of a larger methodological problem—seeing reality as a static set of ideas or values and not a set of social contradictions.⁷⁷

In his critique of the New Urbanism, a recent trend among architects and planners, David Harvey states that “community has often been a

barrier to, rather than facilitator of, social change.” This happens when the myth of community is used “as an antidote to threats of social disorder, class war and revolutionary violence.”⁷⁸ If community planners use “the community” as a palliative and tranquilizer, they will surely fail to confront the most serious community issues. They may very well be using it to protect their own roles as power brokers. Planners should ask themselves what groups they are referring to whenever they talk about “the community.”

The orthodox approach to urban planning in the United States tends to worship consensus through planning. “Best practices” in planning are always those that have a happy ending in which a community agrees on a common program. In reality, consensus too often serves those in power because it requires those who are not in power to accept the dominant ideology and political agenda, posited in seemingly neutral terms as a product of consensual agreement in the public interest. Consensus-driven planning, often accompanied by “visioning” and “strategic planning,” works well in relatively homogeneous, exclusive white communities where the objective is protection from outside development pressures.⁷⁹ But it also plays a powerful role in low-income communities where it is often promoted by influential foundations, nonprofits, and public agencies. From the point of view of social justice, consensus-driven planning can be counterproductive when it legitimizes the most powerful factions within communities instead of empowering those who have been historically marginalized, as Marie Kennedy proposed.⁸⁰

The win-win scenario of consensus planning is a myth from an imaginary world where there is no conflict or contradiction, everybody benefits, and nobody ever loses. Such a static paradise is impossible. “Participatory planning” is another myth that can obscure real differences, and while it has been a widely accepted practice in the United States, it is now increasingly gaining ground throughout the world. In practice, participation can mean nothing more than sitting silently at a public hearing or attending scores of meetings that have no significant role in making decisions that matter. Participation can be confused with real democracy—the power of people to collectively control the decisions that affect their economic and environmental futures.⁸¹ Progressive community planning must be inspired by new visions of participatory democracy and not the traditional approach of representative democracy, in which stakeholders represent other people in a planning game.

Elements of Progressive Planning: Environmental Justice versus Gentrification

The most difficult dilemma facing community planners today is how to join the struggle against the concentration of noxious land uses in low-income communities of color without encouraging displacement and gentrification. Community-based social movements, particularly the environmental justice movement,⁸² have fought against the concentration of noxious land uses in their neighborhoods only to find themselves confronting the threat of displacement by gentrification—that is, the more or less gradual land-value and rent increases that force tenants and owners to move.⁸³ Unlike the urban renewal bulldozer, its effect is gradual and highly uneven and may vary drastically from one block to another. There is no simple or definitive solution to this contradiction, especially in a loosely regulated real estate market.

Environmental justice advocates confront gentrification when they focus on removing locally unwanted land uses (LULUs)—waste-transfer stations, bus depots, highways, waste-treatment plants—that are concentrated in low-income communities of color. If LULUs are removed and distributed more equitably and the threats they pose to public health and the environment are reduced, the threat of displacement by gentrification emerges. Activists who struggled for decades to make their neighborhoods better places to live and work find themselves unable to stay in their communities as land values and rents skyrocket.

In the worst years of neighborhood abandonment during the 1960s and 1970s, New York City's engineers and planners looked on areas like the South Bronx as likely places to locate and expand facilities that nobody wanted in their backyards. They either consciously targeted the struggling neighborhoods, citing low land costs, or simply neglected to intervene by using their regulatory powers to ensure that no neighborhood had more than its fair share of such facilities. The neighborhoods most affected were low-income communities of color that were already facing epidemics of asthma and respiratory disease that were linked to existing and new polluting facilities. Whether there was conscious racial discrimination on the part of the planners is secondary. The effect of their actions and inactions was to reinforce structural racism, which is based not on individual or institutional behavior but on "interinstitutional arrangements."⁸⁴ Out of the grassroots resistance against these facilities emerged the environmental justice movement.⁸⁵ As told in the stories in chapter 5, environmental justice activists have led the search

for sustainable strategies to eliminate the disparate effects of LULUs and prevent displacement by gentrification.

The struggles against gentrification are intimately tied to struggles to protect public space and the commons from neoliberal urban policies. For example, activists who took over Tompkins Square Park in Manhattan's Lower East Side in 1993 argued that the expulsion of poor people from the neighborhood's premiere public space was tied to gentrification. While gentrification pressures have always been a feature of market-driven land development, they became more pronounced since the onset of neoliberal urban policy in the 1970s. They represent the single most important challenge facing community planners in the twenty-first century.

In the search for a new progressive community planning that addresses gentrification, the construction of a theory and practice of community land is critical. This requires moving beyond struggles for individual parcels of land toward a strategic conception of community land incorporating local, regional, and global scales. It also requires that planners develop a sophisticated understanding of how community and real estate interact and conflict, the contradictions within each, and the complex ways in which communities, cities, and regions change at local, regional, and global levels. The most immediate task for progressive community planning is to develop a deeper understanding of how community land can help prevent displacement and gentrification while at the same time addressing the concentration of noxious land uses. This is one of the central objectives of this work.

How the Book Is Organized

Part I of the book (chapters 2 and 3) provides background and history on planning in New York City. The two chapters in part I are there for several reasons. First, though community planners may confront and cooperate with developers and property owners individually and collectively, we tend to know very little about real estate. How can such a powerful real estate market be addressed without knowledge of how it works and its internal contradictions? Second, we tend to know very little about our own roots. How can we hope to develop community planning in the future if we do not know where we came from? This part of the book is presented in the spirit of Howard Zinn's history of the United States, which looks not at the powerful people in history but

at history from the point of view of the people out of power.⁸⁶ It seeks to demonstrate the active agency of organized community movements in transforming the way planning is done in the city. The chapters in part I are not a definitive history. Their purpose is to look at the city's history and search for the underlying currents of class and race that have evolved and relate to community planning today.

Chapter 2 is a brief sketch of the political economy of New York City real estate. Those who are bound up with neighborhood struggles can lose sight of the big picture, fail to understand the contradictions and divisions within real estate, and even worse, begin to mimic real estate practice by getting caught up in the game and making deals that undermine inclusive, democratic planning. Because community plans are inevitably local, planners can also lose sight of the global context. New York City's real estate from the time of the earliest European settlement was bound up with global trade and finance and expansion of the U.S. empire. But the global-local relationship needs to be put in proper perspective, since neoliberal ideology tends to pose globalization as inevitable and immune to resistance.

Chapter 3 is about the roots of community planning. In a society that values the present and future and ignores the past, community planners tend to know very little about where we came from, which invariably prevents us from understanding where we are going. The pragmatic American tradition values the successful project or plan—the “best practice” or idealized model—but fails when it comes to projecting a sustainable long-term future. Many community planners do not see themselves as part of the legacy of slave revolts, tenant organizing, and the struggles against urban renewal, and many fail to grasp the significance of the environmental justice movement. This may always be true for planners whose job is to protect privileged enclaves and prop up real estate values, but it is not good enough for progressive community planners.

Part II (chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7) tells the stories behind New York City's community plans in four chapters about two pioneering plans that were forged in protests against official urban renewal plans, the struggles for environmental justice that form the backdrop for many community plans, officially adopted community plans, and plans dominated by powerful real estate interests.

Chapter 4 is about two seminal plans that emerged out of struggles against neighborhood displacement. The 1961 Cooper Square Alternate Plan was the first community plan in the city. It was prepared in response to a Robert Moses-sponsored urban renewal plan that would have

leveled an eleven-block area and built middle-income housing. Behind the slogan “We won’t move,” the Cooper Square Committee fought against both the city and real estate abandonment to preserve low-cost housing for low-income tenants. This story is significant because Cooper Square set up one of the city’s first community land trusts, an important and underutilized mechanism for securing community control of land. Thirty-two years after the Cooper Square Alternate Plan, residents and business owners in the Melrose section of the South Bronx, under the slogan “We Stay! ¡Nos Quedamos!,” defeated an official urban renewal proposal that would have created a suburban-style enclave for homeowners on abandoned city-owned land. Their alternative plan eventually became the official instrument for redevelopment policy in the neighborhood.

Chapter 5 tells stories of the struggles for environmental justice that led to community plans. These include the waterfront battles, incinerator battles, sludge battles, and garbage battles. The first citywide community plan, written by the Organization of Waterfront Neighborhoods, challenged the city’s Solid Waste Management Plan and eventually led to changes in the city’s waste policy.

Chapter 6 tells the stories of the community-based plans submitted for official approval under City Charter section 197a, known as “197a plans.” These and other community plans often challenge the city’s land-use and zoning practices and face serious obstacles when it comes to implementation.

Chapter 7 tells stories of planning “for the few,” in which community involvement in decision making was severely restricted. Indeed, the community-planning process was dominated by powerful real estate interests. These cases are in the hot property markets of Manhattan—lower Manhattan and Midtown West—and in downtown Brooklyn, where the most powerful real estate interests rule. The cases demonstrate how the space for progressive community planning diminishes as we get closer to the center of global and local economic power. The largest bottom line promotes social exclusion and physically separate enclave development, not inclusive and diverse communities. Progressive planning must be concerned with understanding and exposing the practices of exclusionary planning if it is to promote an inclusionary and socially just alternative. However, planning at the periphery of the most powerful real estate interests offers the best opportunities for strategic advances.

Part III (chapter 8) puts forth proposals for advancing progressive community planning in New York City. This part is designed especially

for New Yorkers who care about progressive planning, but it also includes suggestions for global strategies that may be relevant in other cities. Like other dialectics, these proposals will develop and change as they are discussed and debated by community planners in New York and in other global cities who are also struggling against great odds for a new progressive approach to our urban future.