
Environmental Justice

Session 13: Gentrification and Displacement



Group Agreements



One Mic

Only one person should be speaking at a time!



Challenge Ideas, Not People

Try to question and critique the ideas being presented, rather than the person presenting them, so everyone can engage without feeling shut down.



Listen with Empathy

Everyone has different experiences and perspectives - try to avoid judgement and seek understanding.



Step Up, Step Back

If you are usually quiet challenge yourself to take more space, and if you usually talk a lot be mindful to leave room for quieter voices.



Land the Plane

Out of respect for our limited time, please try to get to the point of your comment or question as concisely as possible.



An Incomplete Picture

Every lecture here is an incomplete picture of the topic we are about to discuss. I invite folks with classroom, professional, or lived experiences with the topic to participate and share those experiences, whether they align or conflict with the narrative i present.

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Discussing Next Week

01

Introduction to Gentrification



Warm up:

What comes to mind when you think of
gentrification?

Are there negative connotations?
What about positive ones?



GENTRIFICATION

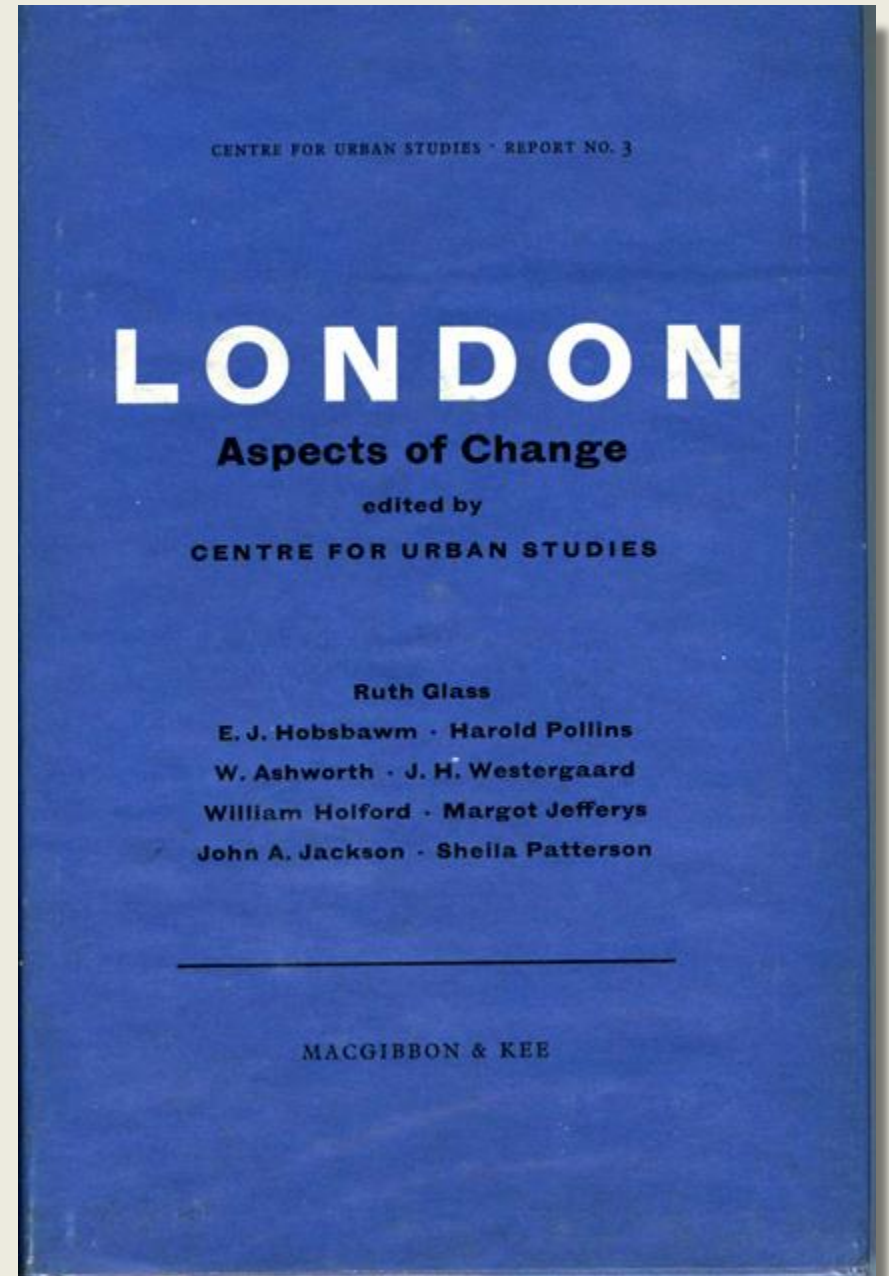


Gentrification

“One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes – upper and lower.

Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed.”

-Sociologist Ruth Glass, 1964



Gentrification and Segregation

c. Detrimental Influences. Obsolescence and poor maintenance. Infiltration of Negroes. Elevated structures on Lexington Ave. & Fulton & Grand Avenue. Mixed races.

Tactics of Residential Segregation

- Blockbusting
- Contract Selling
- Racially-restrictive covenant

Blockbusting

"I make my money—quite a lot of it, incidentally—in three ways:

- 1. By beating down the prices I pay the white owners by stimulating their fear of what is to come;*
- 2. by selling to the eager Negroes at inflated prices; and*
- 3. by financing these purchases at what amounts to a very high rate of interest."*

Confessions of a Block-Buster

The
Saturday
Evening
POST
FOUNDED IN 1896 BY
H. R. HARRIS

Not long ago in an all-white block on Chicago's West Side, a FOR SALE sign appeared in front of a modest frame bungalow. Immediately a wave of fear swept across the block. A Negro family already was living several blocks away. Not far beyond that was the western edge of Chicago's "Black Belt." Every year its border had been moving closer, enclosing blocks like this one along the way. Suppose the bungalow came into possession of a Negro? What would happen to the rest of the block?

All the residents were plainly worried. Among them were a widow who had been living alone and had no assets but her home, and the parents of four young children who feared what "change" might mean to the youngsters' safety. "Relax," said the bungalow owner. "I'm selling this through a white real-estate man. I won't even talk to a Negro."

Imagine their shock, then, when the FOR SALE sign came down and the new owners moved in—Negroes. And consider the impact of what happened next. Three more buildings, which were already owned by property speculators, "turned" immediately. Other Negro families arrived to look at homes in the block. Real-estate men, both white and Negro, swarmed in.

Almost overnight the family with four children sold out at a sizable loss. So did six other homeowners in quick succession. "We'll stay," a few owners said. "We're broad-minded." But the situation was out of their control. Finally the last of the whites left—whether or not they could afford to move. Like hundreds of others who have been similarly blitzed, they never really knew what had hit them.

I knew. I triggered the whole sequence of events by buying the bungalow and quickly selling it to a Negro. I am a block-buster. Another and perhaps slightly less odious name for my craft is real-estate speculator.

Cornering a Share of the Harvest

I specialize in locating blocks which I consider ripe for racial change. Then I "bust" them by buying properties from the white owners and selling them to Negroes—with the intent of breaking down the rest of the block for colored occupancy. Sometimes the groundwork—the initial block-busting—has already been done by some other speculator by the time I arrive on the scene. In that case all I have to do is work on the remaining whites and reap my share of the harvest.

A Chicago real-estate agent who moves Negro families into all-white blocks reveals how he reaps enormous profits from racial prejudice.

By NORRIS VITCHEK as told to Alfred Balk



Contract Selling

“National Asset Advisors also began sending her letters threatening to evict her. That’s when Smith had a heart-stopping realization: She hadn’t actually purchased her home at all. The document she had signed wasn’t a traditional mortgage, as she had believed, but a “contract for deed”—a type of seller-financed transaction under which buyers lack any equity in the property until they’ve paid for it in full.

Since Smith didn’t actually have a deed to the house, or any of the rights typically afforded home owners, she and her mother could be thrown out without a foreclosure process, forfeiting the thousands of dollars they’d already spent to rehabilitate the home.”

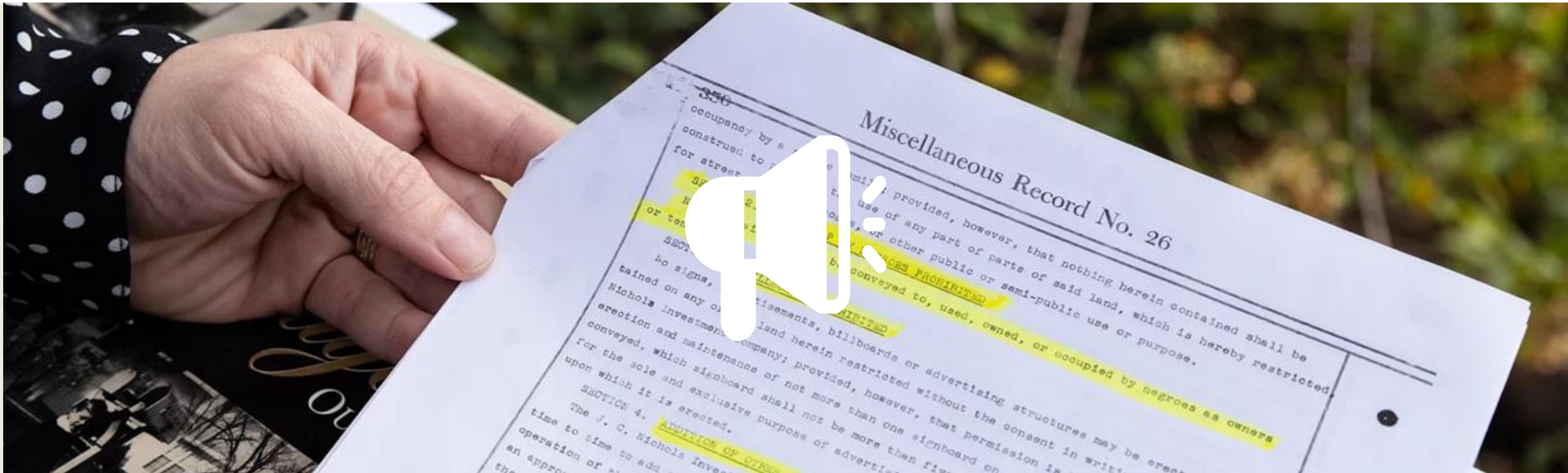
The infamous practice of contract selling is back in Chicago

Wall Street-backed firms are duping would-be homebuyers, 50 years after Martin Luther King Jr. and west-side activists fought against housing discrimination.



Racial Covenants

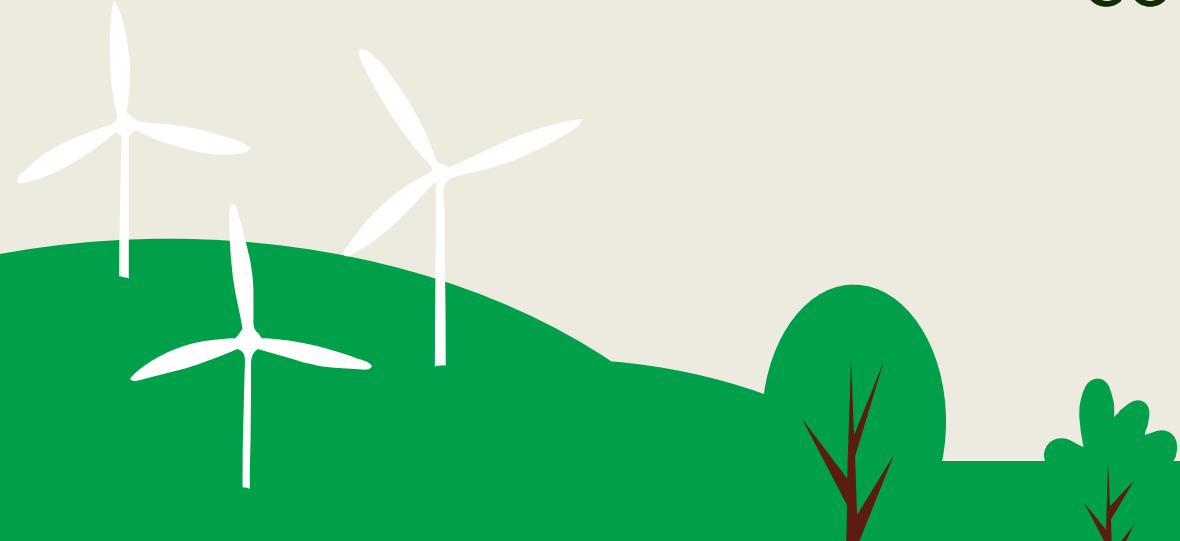
Racial covenants, a relic of the past, are still on the books across the country



Text reads: SECTION 2: OWNERSHIP BY NEGROES PROHIBITED: None of the land may be conveyed to, used, owned, or occupied by negroes as owners or tenants.

Discuss with your group:

How do you think that some of the instruments of residential segregation, including redlining, racially restrictive covenants, contract selling, and blockbusting, contribute to gentrification today?



Planned Shrinkage



“A Persistent Policy of Serial Forced Displacement”

FROM OUR FELLOWS

LAYERED METROPOLIS

Gentrifying the City: From Racialized Neglect to Racialized Reinvestment

The intertwined dynamics of urban “revitalization” and the displacement and destabilization of African Americans in US cities is not a phenomenon new to twenty-first century New York City. Amanda Boston’s examination of the “redevelopment” of Downtown Brooklyn exposes the changing roles of government and the market in the erasure and destabilization of long-standing communities of color. As municipal government has moved from market regulator to market facilitator—inviting the influx of global capital and gentrification into majority-minority neighborhoods—the impact on the space has benefited the affluent (often white) residents and consumers of the city to the detriment of minority communities. A consideration of the construction of the Barclay’s Center in Brooklyn provides a close-to-home lens on the role of race and profit in the organization of urban space.

by Amanda Boston

02

Green & Climate Gentrification



What is Climate Gentrification?



Climate Gentrification Can Move in Two Directions



Higher Ground



Coastal Redevelopment





“Green” Gentrification

03

Case Study: Columbia University



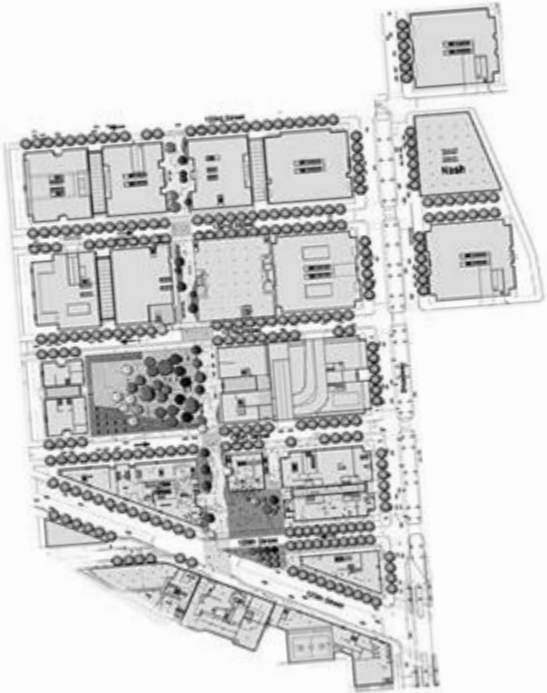
1900 - 1970s: Displacement and “Gym Crow”





2008 Expansion

Columbia's West Harlem Expansion: A Look at the Issues



The cultural richness of Harlem, Washington Heights, and surrounding neighborhoods is an essential part of what makes Columbia a great place to work and study.

—neighbors.columbia.edu (May 2007)

Columbia is a mostly white university that has proposed building a new campus in a neighborhood whose residents are predominantly people of color. The University's past developments are largely responsible for the transformation of Morningside Heights from a racially and economically diverse neighborhood to an affluent white one. Yet current campus discourse regarding Columbia's latest development proposal largely avoids critically engaging issues of race and racism. Columbia today is neither removed from its own history as a developer nor from gentrification in New York City as a whole.

Gentrification is the process by which poor and working-class urban neighborhoods are transformed for middle class residential and business uses. This occurs through an influx of private capital and affluent residents that often results in the displacement of low-income tenants and neighborhood businesses. In the US, gentrification is most often associated with the displacement of people of color and the rupture of their communities as more affluent white residents move in. Many see gentrification as the continuation of this country's long history of uprooting people of color in the interest of economic or political gain.

The fact that gentrification tends to rely on racism and classism conflicts with the way most college students are taught to see race and ethnicity — that is, in terms of affirmative action, cultural heritage months, and promotional brochures full of diverse classrooms. Students and universities generally see the presence of people of color on a college campus as valuable. The presence of people of color in urban neighborhood, however, is viewed as an obstacle to rising property values.

This contradiction is alive and well in Columbia's proposed expansion: even as the University promotes its plan by celebrating Harlem's racial diversity, its proposal is certain to accelerate gentrification in a neighborhood that is over 90 percent people of color.

- In its current form, Columbia's expansion would shut down more than eighty neighborhood businesses and destroy 132 units of affordable housing.
- More importantly, it would bring thousands of Columbia affiliates from both the Morningside and Medical campuses into West Harlem, dramatically increasing housing pressures throughout Harlem and Washington Heights.
- In addition to destroying so many businesses that serve current residents, Columbia's expansion would bring with it new businesses that cater to the more affluent population of students, faculty, and administrators, further changing neighborhood character.

Columbia markets itself on the basis of the racial diversity of its student body and of surrounding neighborhoods, but it does so without demonstrating respect for people of color or commitment to their well-being.

If the University truly values Harlem for its "cultural richness," it must expand in such a way that ensures that the mostly black and Latino residents of Harlem and Washington Heights will not see their communities destroyed by displacement and their neighborhoods changed beyond recognition.

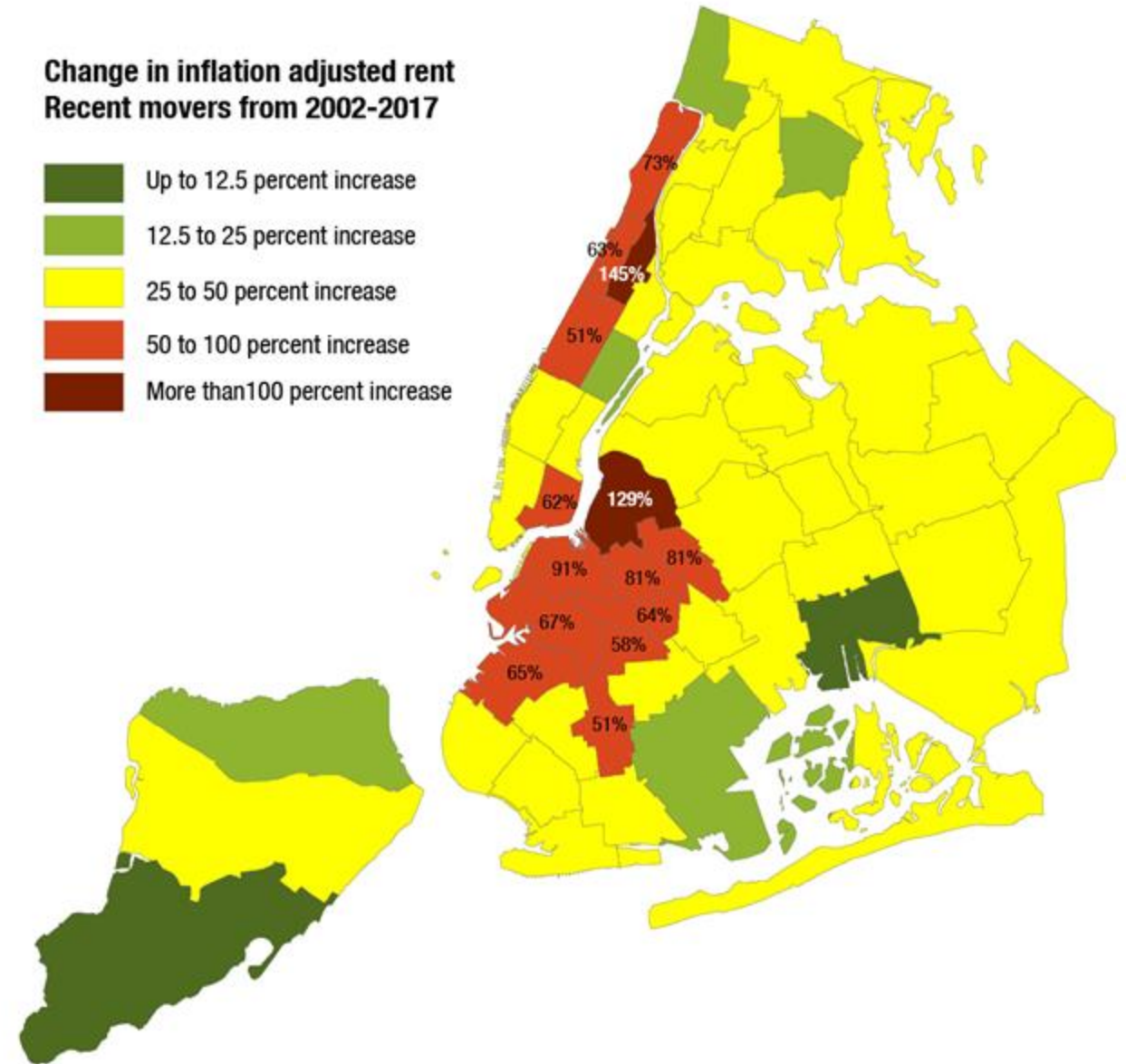
A guide and reference created by the
Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification



Examining West Harlem: Demographic and Economic Changes

“Between 2010 and 2020, Community District 9’s Black population declined by 14 percent (3,800 residents) and its Hispanic population declined by 10 percent (4,500 residents).”

In Central Harlem in particular, there has been a 145% increase in inflation-adjusted rent between 2002-2017





‘The Untouchables’: How Columbia and N.Y.U. Benefit From Huge Tax Breaks

As New York City’s budget tightens, its wealthiest universities are bigger and richer than ever. Now, some officials think it’s time for the schools to pay more in taxes.

puts the last touches on its brand-new campus in Harlem, it has reached a milestone: The university is now the largest private landowner in New York City.

In a city where land is more valuable than almost anywhere in the nation, the school now owns more than 320 properties, with a combined value of nearly \$4 billion”

Columbia's tax exemptions exceed its annual community investment by millions. West Harlem residents want more.

By Amira McKee

Graphic by Jenny Ye, Illustration by Katya Reichert

October 27, 2023

04

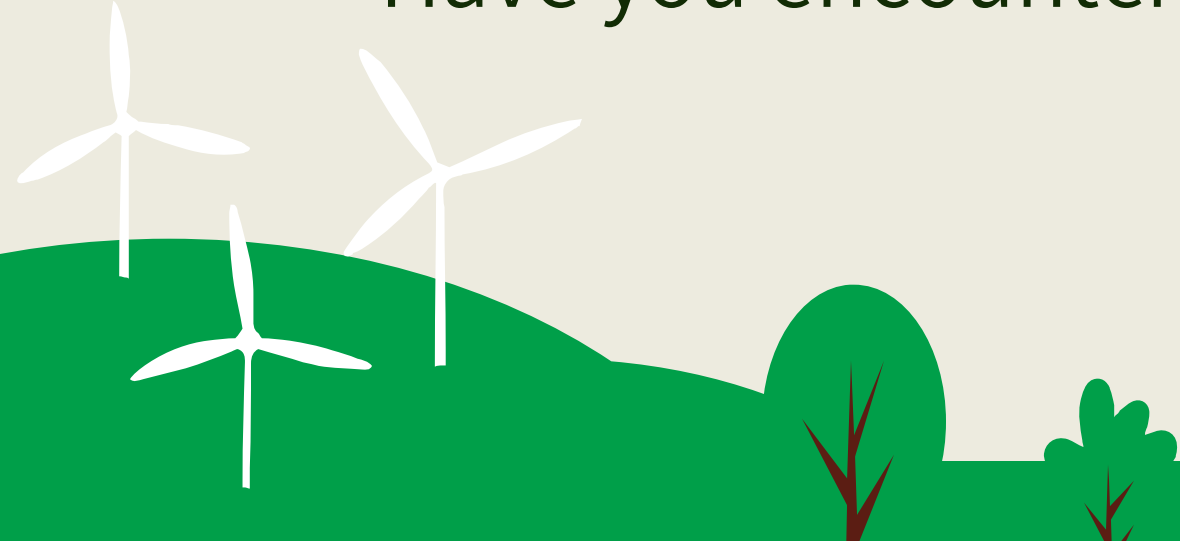
Fighting Displacement



Discuss with your group:

What are some tools and strategies communities can use to push back against displacement and gentrification?

Have you encountered any of these in your own life?





Education

Gentrification

Housing

Protest Movements



West Harlem Pushes Back Against Columbia's Latest Manhattanville Campus Expansion

Harlem politicians, community advocates announce support for bill to halt Columbia's expansion projects at 'Juneteenth Rally for Housing Justice'

During the event, speakers expressed their desire for the University to help build more affordable housing in West Harlem.



**DEFEND
HARLEM**
NY INTERFAITH COMMISSION
FOR HOUSING EQUALITY

Senate Bill S9028A

2023-2024 Legislative Session

Prohibits the urban development corporation from participating in projects related to the Columbia University Education Mixed-Use Development Land Use Improvement and Civic Project Modified General Project Plan

 [DOWNLOAD BILL TEXT PDF](#)

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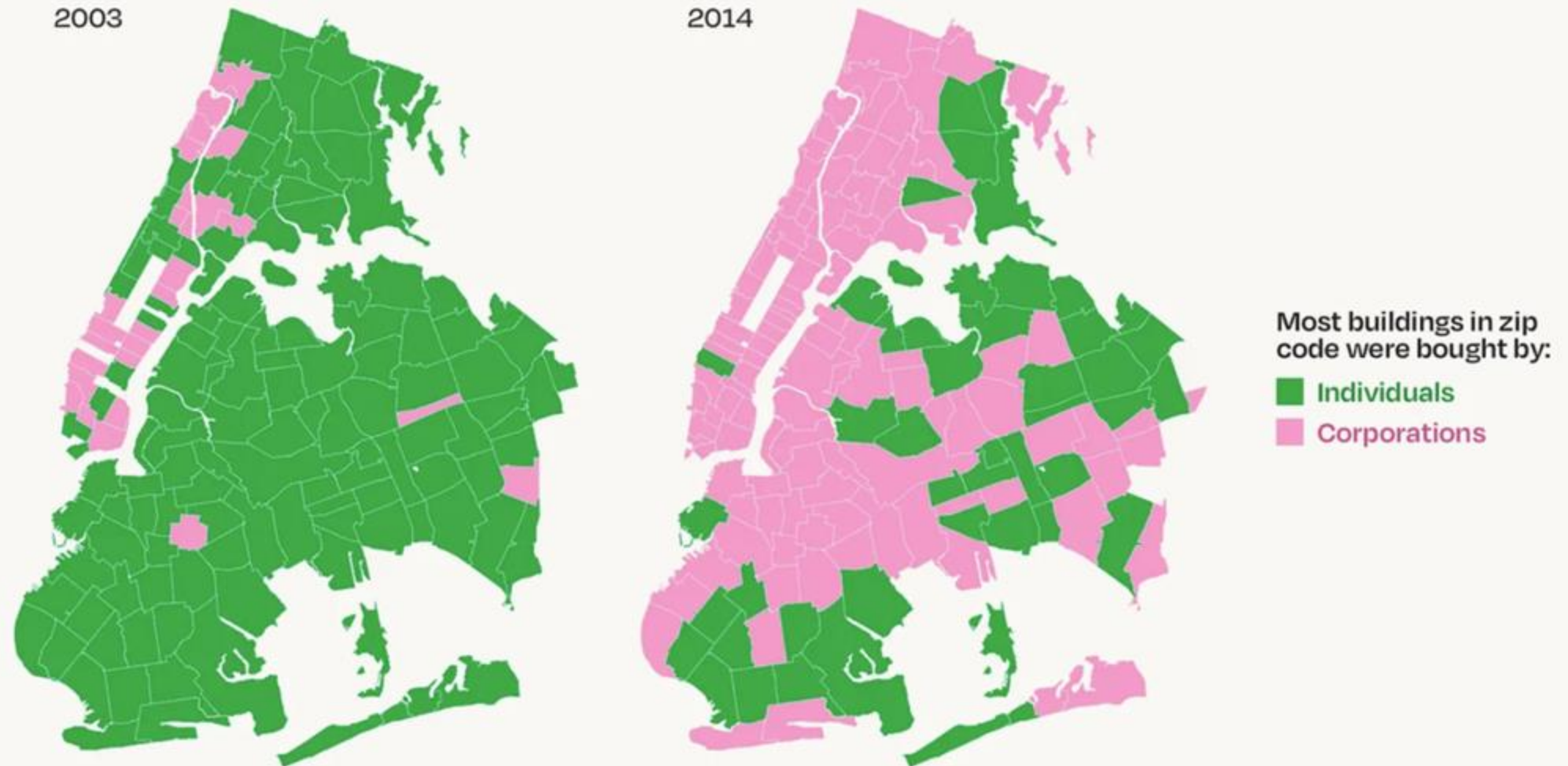
Cordell Cleare
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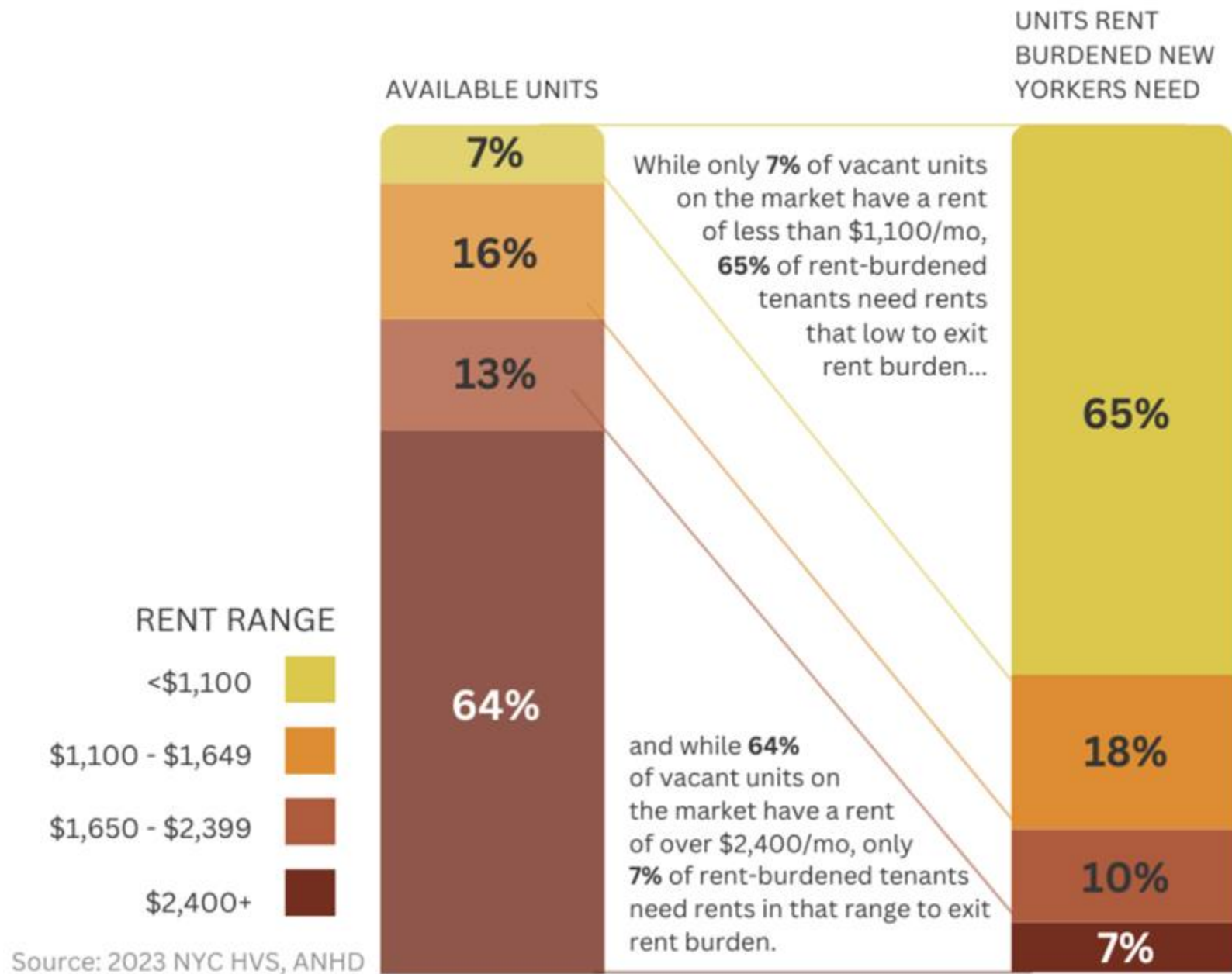
05

Community Land Trusts



Corporate acquisition of 3+ unit buildings: 2003 vs 2014





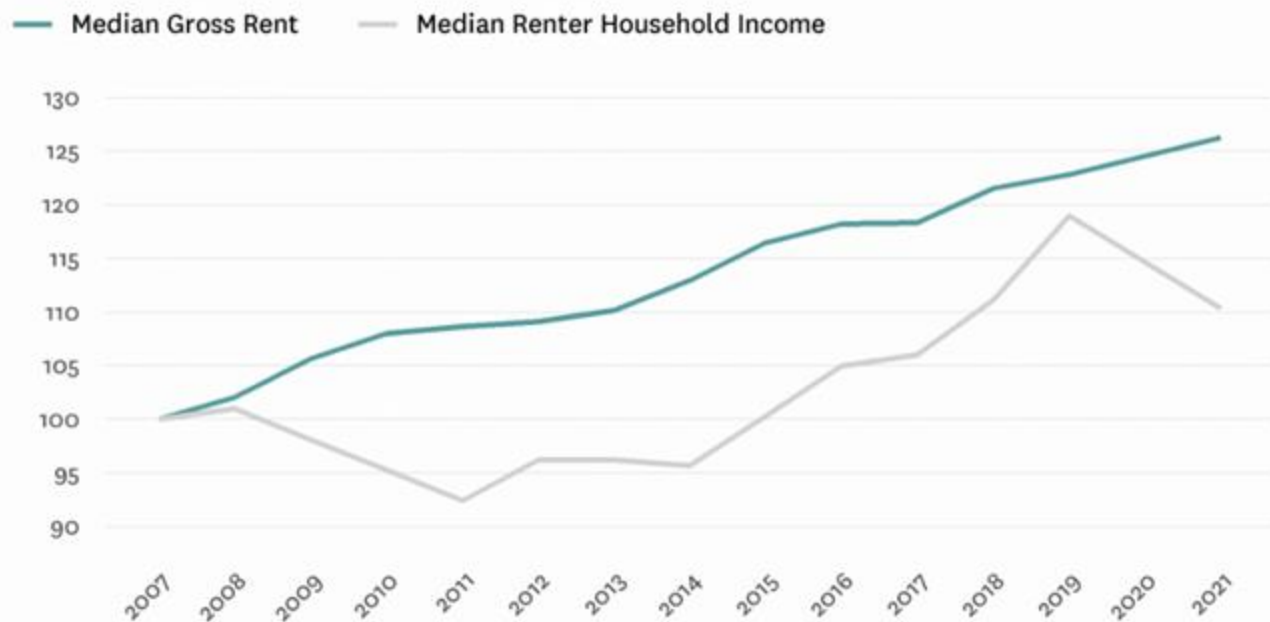
LOW-INCOME FOLKS ARE THE MOST RENT BURDENED

Rents have risen twice as fast as wages for the past 20 years*

84% of low-income households spend over half their income on rent*

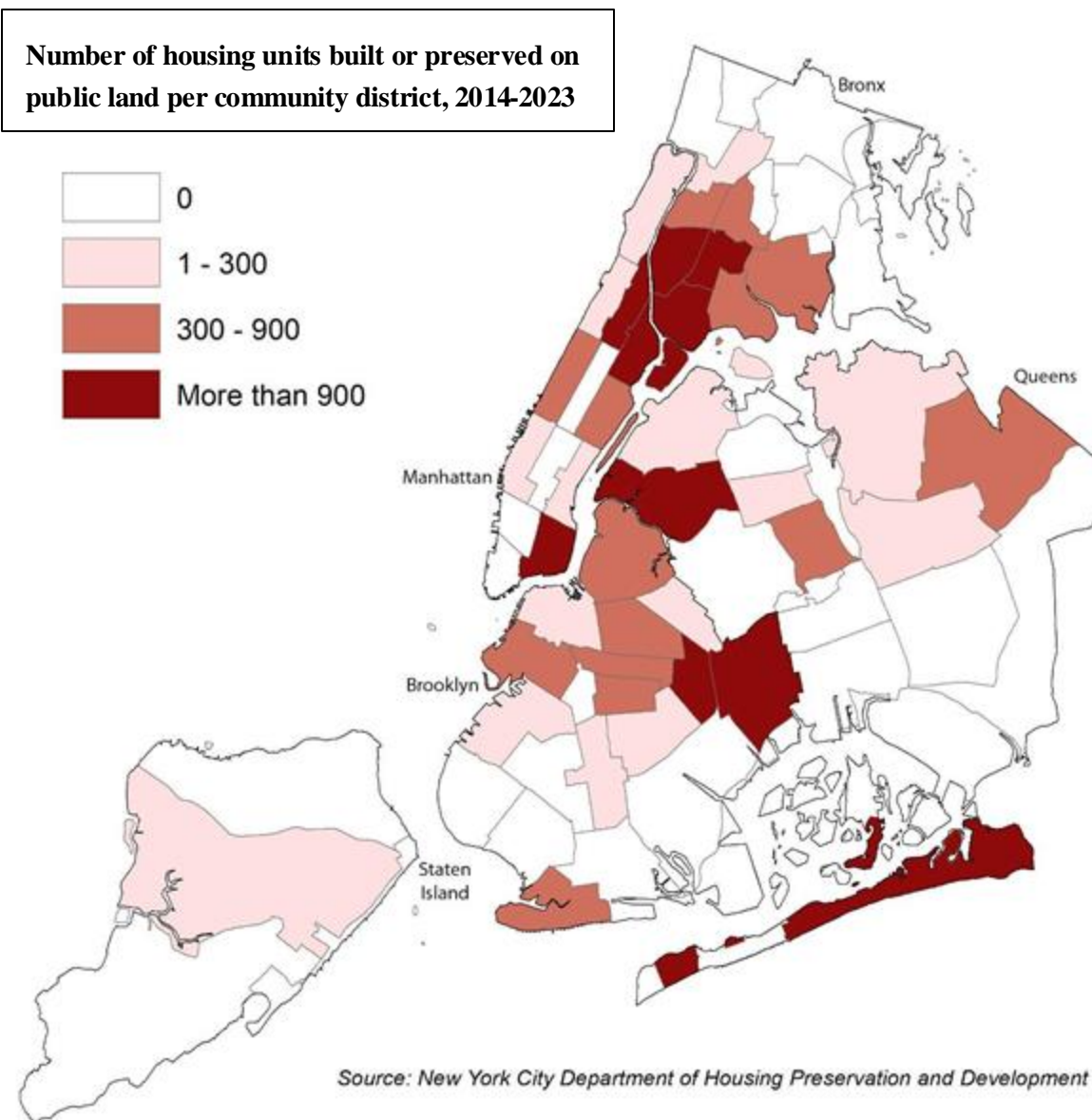
Evictions are up 25-fold since the end of the moratorium*

Index of Real Median Gross Rent and Real Median Renter Household Income, New York City (Index = 100 in 2007)

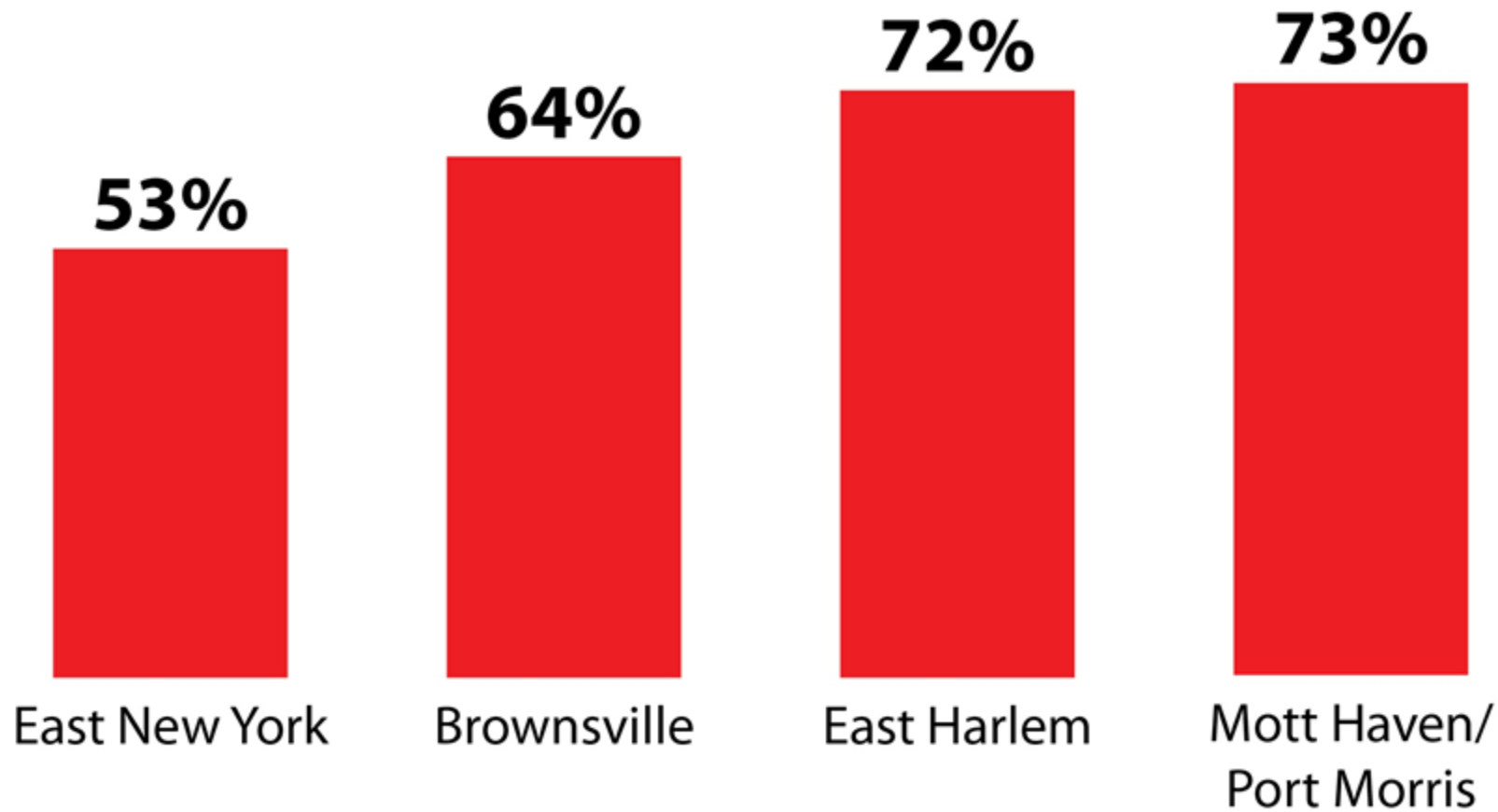


Sources: American Community Survey, NYU Furman Center.

Public land dispositions are concentrated in low-income Black and brown neighborhoods that need the deepest levels of affordable housing.



Percentage of homes on public land that are not affordable to median income families in each neighborhood (2014-2023)



Source: New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development

Community Participation

- Many communities don't have a say in the things that are built in their neighborhoods.
- Instead of parks, we get power plants, instead of affordable housing, its luxury housing.
- And when neighborhoods are improved, longtime residents are displaced against their will by unaffordable housing costs.



Who has the power to bring the things we want to our community?

Who has the power to block the things we don't want?

Who benefits when our community changes?

Community Land Trusts

Origins of Community Land Trusts

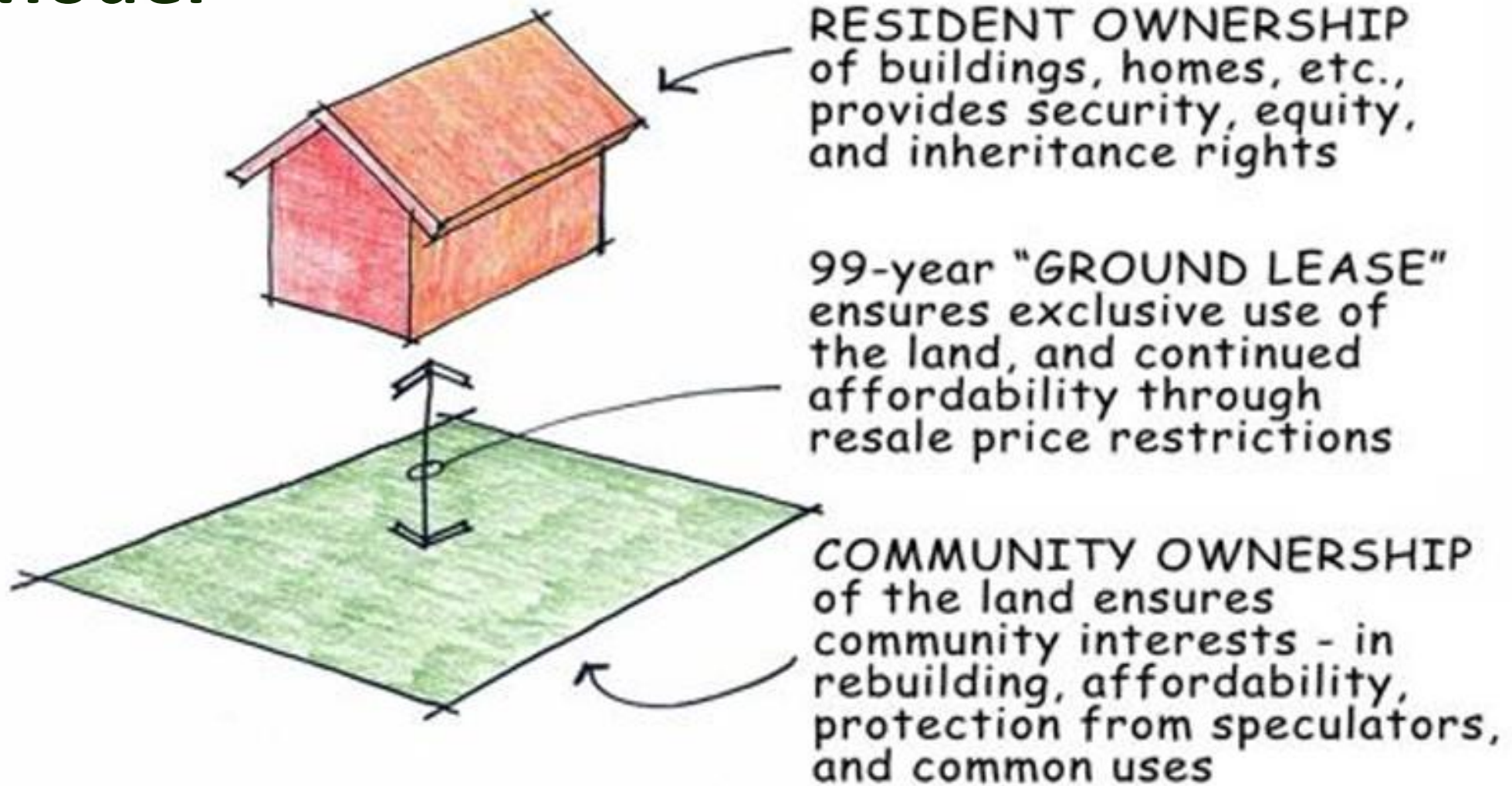
Building on cooperative
ownership strategies from
around the world



The New
Communities Inc.



The Model



Non- Housing Uses for Community Land Trusts

Beyond Housing

**Urban
Agriculture**



**Small
Businesses**



**Open
Spaces**



**Community
Spaces**



99 YEAR GROUND LEASE

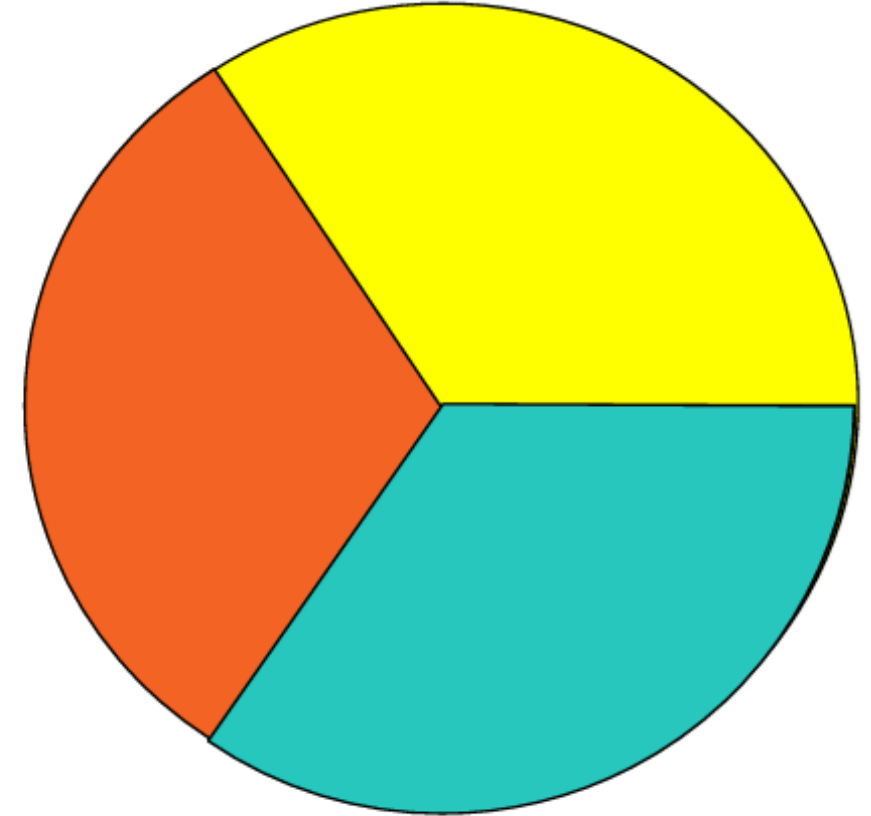
COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF LAND



Community Control

Residents and community members guide their CLTs through membership structures and 3 part boards:

- CLT Residents
- Community members
- Stakeholders representing the public interest and/or bringing community development expertise



Many CLTs have 1/3 of each category, but there are many variations, and startup CLTs often don't have residents for some period.

Community Land Trusts in New York City

Land Status as of October 2023

- Advocating for Land
- ◐ Land Transfer in Process
- Has Land

Not pictured:
Central Harlem CLT





Press Release

East Harlem El Barrio Community Land Trust, the City of New York and Partners Announce \$13M Deal to Transform 4 City-Owned Buildings in East and Central Harlem into Affordable Housing

The Community Land Act

The Community Land Act

Community
Opportunity to
Purchase Act
(Intro 902)

Public Land for
Public Good
(Intro 78)

Tenant
Opportunity to
Purchase
Resolution
(Resolution 374)

Abolish and
Replace the NYC
Lien Sale



1. Community Opportunity to Purchase Act (COPA)

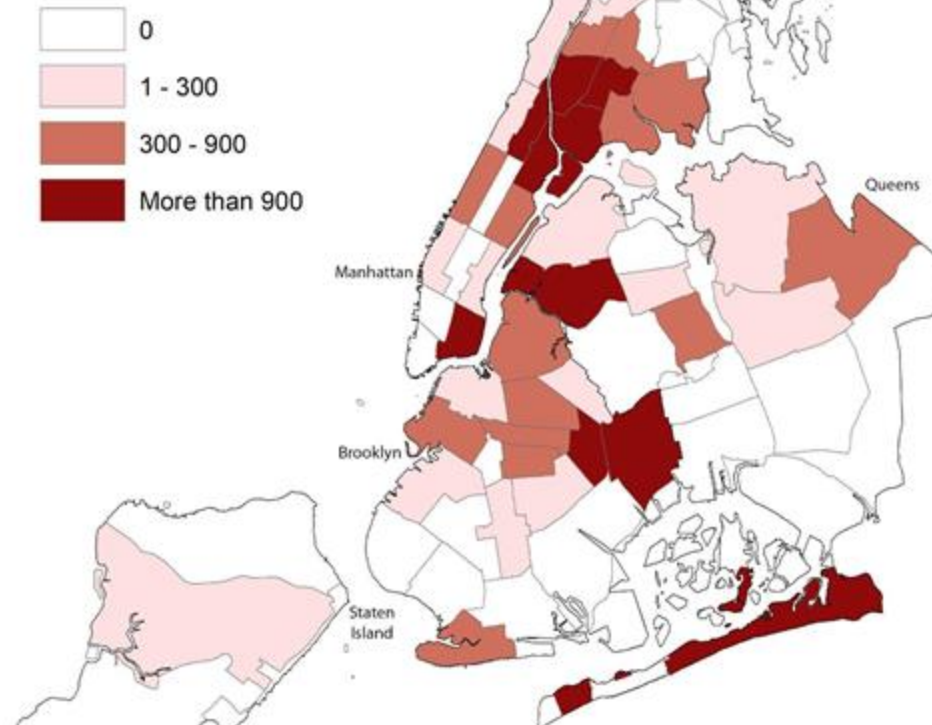
- Gives eligible CLTs/nonprofits right to make a first offer on multifamily (3+ unit) buildings when landlord decides to sell
- Modeled on successful legislation in SF, D.C., and beyond that has preserved thousands of affordable homes
- Engages NYC's robust non-profit housing sector, CLTs, CDFIs and other stakeholders



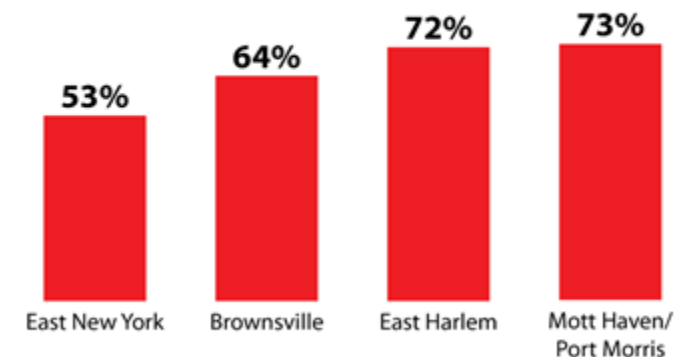
2. Public Land for Public Good (Int. 78)

- Requires NYC to **prioritize eligible CLTs and nonprofits** when disposing of City-owned land, to ensure public land is used for public good:
 - Most public land dispositions have been awarded to **for-profit developers, exacerbating gentrification and displacement**
 - Public land should be used to minimize displacement and ensure residents have the right to remain, if they so choose, in the communities they built
- Encourages community to build spaces that might not be prioritized like green space or community space

Number of housing units built or preserved on public land per community district, 2014-2023



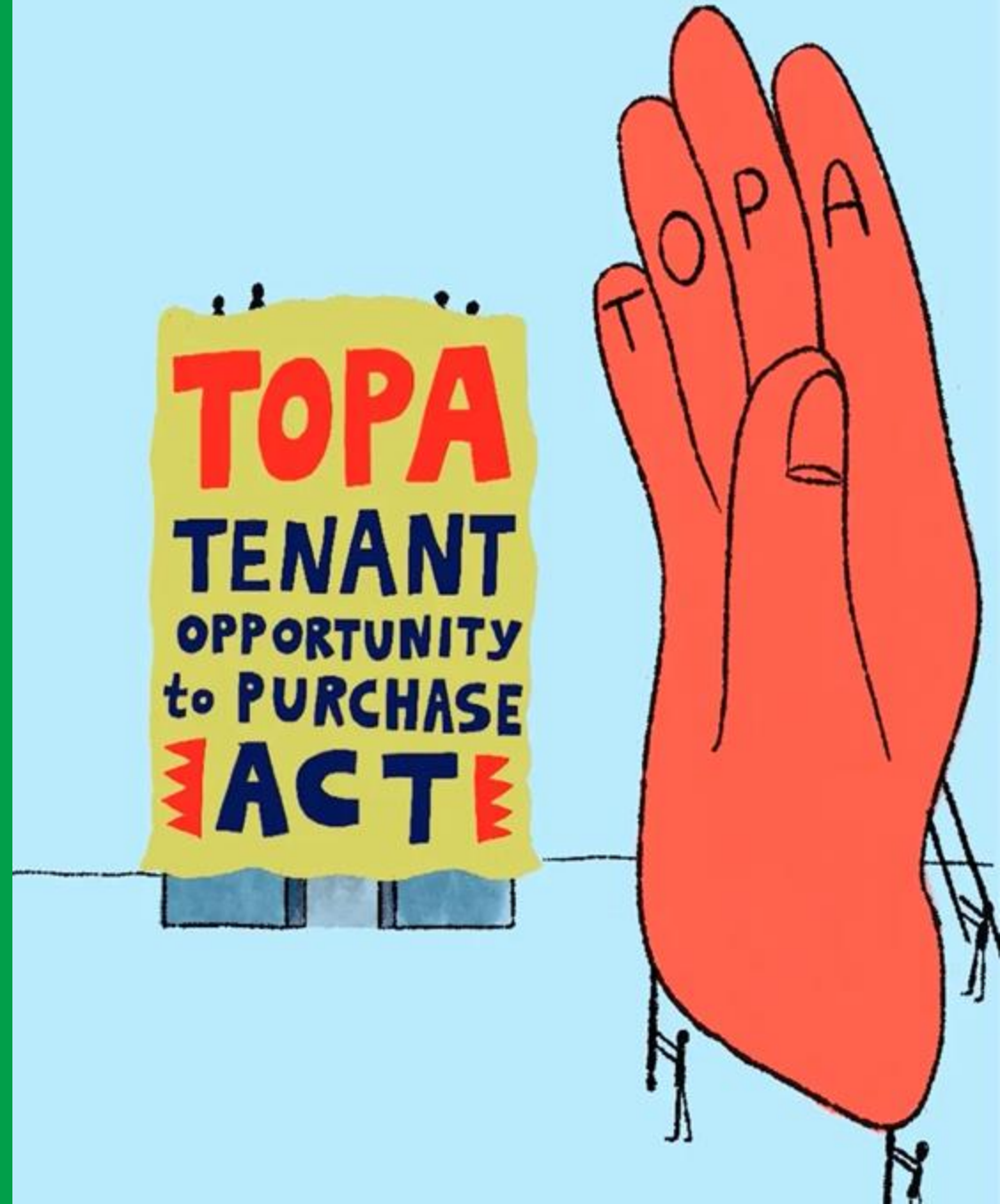
Percentage of homes on public land that are not affordable to median income families in each neighborhood (2014-2023)



Source: New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development

3. NYS Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act

- Resolution to support state legislation
- Would give **tenants in eligible buildings the right to the first offer** when their building goes on sale
- Tenants could buy the building together and own it as a cooperative, turn the building into publicly owned housing, or work with a nonprofit to remain a permanently affordable rental.



4. Abolish the Tax Lien Sale

- Replace the predatory tax lien sale (a mechanism to collect unpaid property taxes, water, and sewer charges) with options that preserve affordable housing and community wealth
- If a property owner failed to pay the debts, **the City would sell the lien (or the right to collect on the debt) to a private debt collector which would then add high fees or penalties**, driving the homeowner further into distress
- This program disproportionately harmed Black and Brown homeowners and renters in communities of color, contributing to predatory lending, foreclosures and the erosion of Black and brown wealth for decades



03

Next Week: Final Presentations



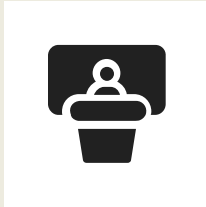
Final Project



Report

Submit a final report and presentation for the public meeting. The final report should be composed of the problem framing, campaign position, data and expert testimonies, and other information needed to advance the campaign.

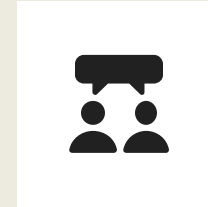
Reports should be a maximum of 10 pages, single spaced, including graphics and layout, and not including the cover, table of contents, acknowledgements (if any), and references. In addition to a strong narrative, you are also encouraged to use graphic design, images, data/figures, and case studies to create a compelling final product.



Presentation

The presentation should be a 15-20 minute powerpoint on your campaign position, and should include the problem framing, data and testimony, and other information needed to advance the campaign.

Include a section on “What We Heard” from stakeholders in your public meeting.



Public Meeting

The public meeting will be with an audience of class members and guest lecturers, and groups will use role play to frame the EJ issue, its impacts, and present different expert perspectives (e.g., community member, community organizer, engineer, sociologist, lawyer, scientist, elected official) Each team member should plan to attend in-person and speak for at least 3-5 minutes.