# Urban Planning and Queer Erasure: A Study of Hudson River Park and Reclaiming Our Spaces

By

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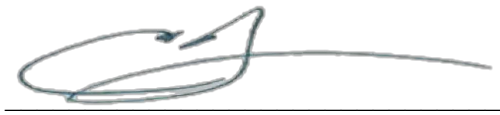

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Statement of Issue

Long before the West Side Highway was a grade-level five-mile boulevard boarded by the Hudson River waterfront park, and long before Battery Park City or Hudson Yard built their towers in the sky were the piers. The piers that saw commerce both from steamships and sex workers in the night long after the day's work were long done. Between the decline of manufacturing in New York City and the gentrification and mass rezonings of the 1990s and early 2000s sat a museum in a time of decrepit warehouses and rotting piers casually being used by the Queer community as an informal meeting place. Many used these spaces for anonymous casual sex, others to get a tan during the warm summer months. Much of this changed in 1992 when a collaboration between New York State and New York City created the Hudson River Park Conservancy (The Trust). All part of what began as the slow start of gentrification and the ongoing revitalization of NYC out of the rubble that was left from the fiscal and social crisis of the 1970s and 80s.

In order to beautify and revitalize the waterfront along Manhattan's West Side, rezonings and new development that has been fueled by a desire from the government at both the state and local level to improve the image and reputation of the West Village. In conjunction with support from the local community board, these

actions have encouraged the erasure of spaces occupied by Queer people. Most notably, Queer people of color felt they were not welcome elsewhere. Furthermore, while the desire to improve public space is most definitely not a crime, as everyone has a right to participate and enjoy spaces that welcome, encourage, and in many cases create environments for excellent programming. By outright removing any trace of history in an area that for at least two generations were the site of social and political movements and a gathering place for members of society who felt that they hide from the mainstream is a travesty. For the purposes of this study, the term Queer shall be deemed to encompass the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) community, but is not by any means the sole definition.

Image: Hudson River Park Promenade at Pier 45-Christopher Street looking South. Jim Henderson, (n.d.).

## Goal

This study aimed to address two main issues: to recognize further the history Queer people bring to places like the West Village, and prevent the further displacement of Queer spaces caused by gentrification, hyper-development, and NIMBYISM. Additionally, to work with the residents of Manhattan Community Board 2 and members of the Hudson River Park

Conservancy to collaborate alongside community organizations that specifically cater to the LGBTQ community

## Objectives

The main objective was to make recommendations that included creating a toolkit that further enhances Queer youth's inherent power to navigate community organization and government spaces, thereby allowing them to reclaim their spaces by formalizing a third-place through space preservation. Third place, coined by Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of West Florida Ray Oldenburg, refers to places where people spend time between home and work. (Oldenburg, 1991).

I undertook this process by first looking at the history and background of both the built environment within the study area and assessing the surrounding factors that created the present environment from both a physical and socio-cultural point of view. In taking a look at the past, this allowed me to identify the way(s) marginalized groups gathered (through formal and informal means), especially in the light of how our society is dealing with global pandemics, causing groups to meet virtually or through covert means. I attempted to look at how the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s is similar to the present-day COVID-19 pandemic, causing people to seek alternative means of socialization and interaction. One key idea I

explored is where did Queer people go to hangout? Where were they excluded? By Whom?

Furthermore, I wanted to understand the effect of the Hudson River Park Act on the surrounding Queer community and Greenwich Village residents. Essentially, what I am asking here is the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How did this process occur and the positive/adverse effects.

The relationship between the Queer community and law enforcement has always been a tense one, as history shows from the early gay rights movement and later decades. This tension shifted from being solely all Queer vs. the law to Queer youth and people of color vs. law enforcement and community members who felt threatened by the presence of this segment of the Queer community. I looked into identifying the resources that community organizations and grassroots groups currently have to assist displaced groups. The LGBTQ+ community has a long history of activism, and two local groups have been at the forefront of advocating for Queer people of color (FIERCE and Audre Lorde Project). What actions did these groups take to help Queer people that reported harassment from police and local community members that may have seen them as a threat? To what effect has law enforcement policy helped or failed to ensure the right to use public space freely guaranteed through Henri Lefebvre's idea of the "Right to the City." These

questions are critical in light of the current pandemic; how has COVID affect constituents.

This study primarily focused on how erasure has affected young people's relationship with public space, namely Hudson River Park and the adjacent streets near Pier 45. I do preemptively recommend that the changes in spaces welcoming to Queer people including, but not limited to: bars, nightclubs, and other age-restricted spaces should further be assessed in a later study. Through an inventory of business data provided by the NYC Open Data repository, one could investigate how many LGBTQ+ bars, clubs, and coffee shops have both opened and closed in the area since 2000.

## Methodology and Sources

This study followed a mixed-method approach in order to meet the objectives and goals laid out previously. My leading resource was using archival research from the NY Public Library and LGBT Center to find any articles, oral histories, interviews that can point to the question, where did Queer people go to hang out, and where were they excluded?

For my other objectives, I looked at some sources that will help me to understand the process of NYC's community-initiated rezonings (197-a Plans). Section 197-a of the New York City Charter authorizes community boards and

borough boards, along with the Mayor, the City Planning Commission (the "Commission"), the Department of City Planning ("DCP"), and any Borough President, to sponsor plans for the development, growth, and improvement of the city, its boroughs, and communities. Once approved by the Commission and adopted by the City Council, 197-a plans will guide city agencies' future actions in the areas addressed in the plans. Neighborhood or civic groups within the larger community may draft a 197-a plan. However, they must be approved, sponsored, and submitted by a community board, borough board, or borough president (NYC Department of City Planning, 2020).

Through the document analysis provided by the following agencies: the NYC Department of City Planning, Manhattan Community Boards 2 & 4, as well as real estate and local demographics assessed from Census reports, I will document a good set of reasons for the changes which took place over the years.

Additionally, to help identify the resources community organizations and grassroots groups have to assist displaced groups, I conducted interviews with community groups to see what opportunities still exist for improving relations between police and youth. I also spoke with peer groups from my younger years as someone who also hung out within the study area. Through the documentation of these conversations, as well as including some of my own lived experience as a “Pier Youth,” I hope it will shed some light from a first-person perspective of what it was

like being a Queer Youth of Color experiencing many of these changes firsthand as well as provide an insight as to what are the needs for the Queer youth of today. Furthermore, I performed data analysis of NYPD arrest information from NYC Open Data and looked for the connections between arrests in the area in the vicinity of the Christopher Street Piers.

Due to COVID-19, access to physical archives was not possible. Still, I reached out to the main branch of the New York Public Library and the NYC LGBT Center for assistance with obtaining documents using their "Scan and Deliver" service. They also provided me with online resources that I had overlooked earlier in my research. Over the summer, as the weather improved and it became safer to socially distance myself from others, I performed direct observation along the waterfront. Typically, summer and fall are times where Queer youth come to this space and gather.

- Mixed-Methods Approach
  - Archival Research
  - Interviews
  - Direct Observation/Ethnography
  - Document & Data Analysis

Organization of the Study

Before I dive into the heart of the research, this study provides a literature review on the themes of Queer Erasure, Lavender Lining, Spatial Stigma as a social determinant of health among youth of color, Anti-blackness in Queer Politics, and Social Infrastructure. These themes will set up the framework for the recommendations made at the end.

Following, I take a step back and look briefly at the past. Chapter 2 will help the reader to understand the history of the Hudson River Waterfront as it relates to the West Village and Chelsea by giving a brief overview of the study area from its place as a bohemian and Queer mecca post World War II, during the Stonewall era, and during the Giuliani years of the 1990s showing how it has become what it is today. Chapter 3 will highlight some precedents in other cities of the work currently being done. While the history of activism, outreach, and Queer life can be explored to great depth in New York alone, it would not do justice to the greater work happening across the country and the world. Stepping outside the comfort zone that is New York City and looking at other examples from similar but yet very different scenes can put things back into perspective. More explicitly thinking in terms of scale and diversity.

Chapter 4 goes over the findings made during the study and leads into the recommendations I am making to the following groups: The Hudson River Park Conservatory, Manhattan Community Board Two, and the City of New York overall. I also include in my findings and recommendations the beginnings of a framework for a toolkit geared toward youth that can be disseminated through community organizations which provide a general overview of how our governance structure works in New York City as well as how to get involved in the participatory process for having one's voice heard. Whether through grassroots involvement, being part of established Youth Advocacy groups, or contacting elected officials.

## Literature Review

### Queer Erasure

As the LGBTQ+ movement has progressed from its clandestine organizations such as the 1950s and 60s Mattachine Society into out and proud groups post-Stonewall like GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) and PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), an effort to be seen as regular members of society who are accepted and welcome has caused an unintended side effect; that of Queer Erasure.

Queer Erasure is "a heteronormative cultural practice where Queer people are erased from cultural narratives "(Pollack, 2016). Erasure can be seen in various sexual identities, gender identities, as well as race. Still, in this context, whereas time

progresses, many underrepresented groups within the Queer community feel that their history is being overlooked for the "greater good." This greater good being, pushing the larger Queer movement forward for more inclusion and acceptance by mainstream society. Doan and Higgins (2011) take a look at the Atlanta metro area in an attempt to explore the effects of LGBT neighborhoods that have been gentrified. Their data analysis and in-person interviews found that increasing home values and other external market factors were the big drive to push people out. In addition, they found that as neighborhoods were changing, they no longer were as friendly to the community or businesses that attracted them. They point of that the LGBT Community has been left out of the planning process and, as with any other marginalized community, is a critical part of ensuring that they are involved in preventing further displacement and erasure of the local identity in cities. In the West Village's case, this might not totally be true; a significant segment of the community is undoubtedly being left out.

## Lavender Lining

In this respect, the theme of Lavender lining comes into play. It is a form of Queer urbanism that was built upon the foundation of redlining. Lavender Lining is a newer term that deliberately combines the celebratory marking of gay pride parade routes with the discriminatory practice of drawing red lines on maps to identify urban areas supposedly undesirable for mortgage insurance and investment

purposes. (Esperdy, 2018). Through the initial effects of gentrification by the creation of gayborhoods and a fight for social acceptance, the eventual "straightening" of the West Village and neighborhoods like it seem as what's typical for the course of urban history. It is even of greater importance that communities acknowledge and protect Queer people, especially Queer youth of color. As Papi Juice co-founder Oscar Nuñez points out, "…for QTPOC these spaces are still not safe…but as dangerous as the night may be, the freedom Queer people feel when coming together in a space makes it worth it (Nuñez, 2018). Here Nuñez discusses the importance of spaces open to Queer people so they have freedom. Freedom to express themselves, however that might be, freedom to dance, freedom to socialize without having to look over their shoulders, freedom from harassment by law enforcement.

Furthermore, Hanhardt (2013) notes that during the 60s, President Johnson's 'War on Poverty' included the notion of Community Action Programs. These programs called for community control to combat poverty. Decades later, during the Giuliani 90s, more conservative approaches such as zero-tolerance "youth policing" would go hand-in-hand with rising rents and the need to protect private property owners who live within the confines of MN CB 2. Hanhardt writes, "As a result [of Giuliani's policies], community board members in Greenwich Village often used the term community in order to restrict membership in the neighborhood..." (Hanhardt,

2013). Hanhardt writes how community services that serve the LGBT community are unevenly spread throughout the city even though for decades prior, the youth who one would see in the area were often from a variety of racial and socio-economic backgrounds. It just so happens that the piers are located in Greenwich Village, which has decades of Queer history attached and is racially homogenous. Due to the more complicated history between Queerness, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, it is difficult to say if a similar condition would have organically developed in other neighborhoods throughout the city.

## Spatial stigma as a social determinant of health among youth of color

Additionally, issues such as safe spaces have strong links to health and race. Studies from San Diego State University showed the "stigmatization of YoC [Youth of Color] based on place, race, and class (i.e., being from poor and low-income, racialized South and West sides communities) impacts their opportunities in the neighborhood and access to health-supporting resources" (Felner et al. 2018), which means that vital organizations such as Callen Lorde, the Ryan Center, Hettrick-Martin Institute among others, act as critical assets to communities that cater to Queer youth.

## The Right to the City

The "Right to the City" concept came out of Henri Lefebvre's 1968 book, *Le Droit à la Ville*. Lefebvre defines the Right to the city as a right of no exclusion of

urban society from the qualities and benefits of urban life. In the text, Lefebvre writes about socio-economic segregation and its phenomenon of estrangement. He refers to the "tragedy of the *banlieusards*," people forced into residential ghettos far from the city center. Against this backdrop, he demands the Right to the city as a collective reclamation of the urban space by marginalized groups living in the city's border districts. In the 1990s, Lefebvre's idea was taken up in the fields of geography and urban planning, and became the slogan for many social movements. This concept of public spaces and the right for all to reclaim and take back or occupy spaces deemed public is critical to understand the history and study of Queer erasure as well as looking to the future for ways to incorporate this right into policy and practice and not just theory in the classroom.

Social theorist David Harvey reaffirms this point when he writes,

> "The Right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights." (Harvey, 2008).

He is not necessarily speaking of individual rights. However, these are very important, but Lefebvre and Harvey are asserting this right to many of an Urban Populus' diverse groups: The Working Class, the Disabled, People of Color, Immigrants, First Nations People, and very important for this thesis —Youth.

## Anti-blackness in Queer Politics

There hasn't always been tension between the Queer community and the Black community. One would assume that based on what is seen in the media, hip-hop culture, and through select accounts that Black people, in general, were homophobic. On the contrary, during the Harlem Renaissance, there were many prominent figures and Queer spaces located in Harlem. Artists such as Ma Rainey, Richard Bruce Nugent, and Claude McKay join the likes of Langston Hughes and Bessie Smith, who did not blatantly say they were Queer, point to various works that note as such (Maysles Documentary Center, 2020). Not only that, but Queer people allied with Black Panthers in the very early years after Stonewall. It was only after fears of violence against Queer people did the rift begin to show in the light. The notion of Anti-Blackness within the Queer community stems from the Anti-violence movement during the Post-Stonewall era late 1970 and 80s. This movement was led by numerous Lesbian and Gay Activist Groups such as the National Gay Taskforce teaming up with the National Anti-Violence Project in order to raise awareness of Anti-Queer violence. Until that time, law enforcement would not classify attacks against Queers as a hate crime. There was nothing on the books requiring them to do so (Hanhardt, 2013). Elena Kiesling highlights this in her paper "The Missing Colors of the Rainbow: Black Queer Resistance." She writes about the

need to separate Queer lives from Black lives, "Queerness then, needs to define itself as anything but the criminal, anything but black. The black body remains criminal, while the Queer body moves into the realm of citizenship" (Kieseling, 2017). This is further bolstered by the constant whitewashing of the Stonewall riots which took place in June 1969. Yes, there were white Queer people present that initial evening and in the following days after, but it was primarily Black and Brown people, Queer, Transgender, and Gender Non-Conforming people who regularly hung out at Stonewall and in the West Village who played vital roles. (Duberman, 2019). Going back to Hanhardt for a second, in her discussion of the anti-violence movement and anti-black sentiment, she goes on to suggest that when gay-safe street patrols on Manhattan's West Side pre-emptively tried to stop Queer-bashing by lobbying for an increased police presence, members of the "pink patrols" would occasionally use coded language and pinpoint African American and Puerto Rican public housing projects in Chelsea as the source of the threat, contributing to class-based and racialized understandings of homophobic violence (Hanhardt, 2008).

A few other things to note about Anti-Blackness with respect to Queer politics; three key events were emblematic for black erasure within mainstream Queer organizing:

1) The passing of Proposition 8 in 2008 in California: many key Queer organizations blamed homophobia within the Black community for its passing,

which is simply untrue. On November 4, 2008, California voters approved Proposition 8, a state ballot initiative. Proposition 8 added a new section to the state Constitution which provides that "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California." (California Courts, 2008). The U.S. Supreme Court later overturned this proposition on June 26, 2015 in Obergefell v. Hodges which ruled that that the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples by both the Due Process Clause and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (*Supreme Court of the United States Opinions* 2015).

2) A biased push toward strong hate crimes legislation: Commonly known as "The Matthew Shepard Act," its full name is "The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009". The Black man who was lynched is erased from its naming entirely when someone refers to the bill. Congress attached this bill to a Department of Defense Bill, which provided increased funding to local law enforcement and military, furthering harassment and violent acts against people of color. (Egan and Sherril, 2016).

3) The silence of Queer organizations concerning blacks' mass incarceration, as noted by Jared Sexton. (Sexton, 2010). Queer mainstream organizations simply cannot ignore the Black community in light of the events of 2020 with the senseless

murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis Police among the many other Black men and women who have had their lives taken from them. Justice requires that Queer people speak up against this violence. If Queer people want to see change occur on a grander scale, they must address these issues since they go hand in hand. Simultaneously, the many demonstrations that happened over the summer months in 2020 called attention to police brutality and racism involved a coalition of various organizations whose primary goals address many injustices. Individuals who perhaps made a statement on their social media pages or even attended a demonstration, like many in the past did not follow through beyond this performative action. These individuals showed up with a sign, perhaps walked a few blocks, posted it for their community to see then moved on with their lives. This not only pertains to the lives of Black and Brown bodies outside of the Queer community but also to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous People of Color) Transgender people as well. Violence against Trans people, specifically Trans Women on the streets, in the NYC Shelter system, and our Prison system has been on the rise. The policies which currently exist vehemently work against them and must change.

## Social Infrastructure

No matter where a person comes from in life, a robust social network is crucial to their success and overall well-being. At the same time, something that's not thought about on the surface is that the Stonewall Riots of 1969 brought Queer

liberation and invited more blatant displays of homophobia in our mainstream. The 1960s and 70s were already a tumultuous time due to various liberation and civil rights movements, the War in Vietnam, the rise of political Conservatism from the Right-Wing Republican Party and religious groups. Paired with a declining economy, rising inflation, and other factors, there were many people who had frustrations bottled up inside and felt the need to take it out on others. The sudden freedom for Queer people to be more open about who they were was met with an increase in anti-gay violence (Kurutz, 2006). As a result of the rise in attacks on Queer people in these years in major cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, the creation of Safe Streets Patrols allowed for a militant gay liberation if you will.

# Chapter 2: Background and Context

## History of the Hudson River Waterfront and its recent development

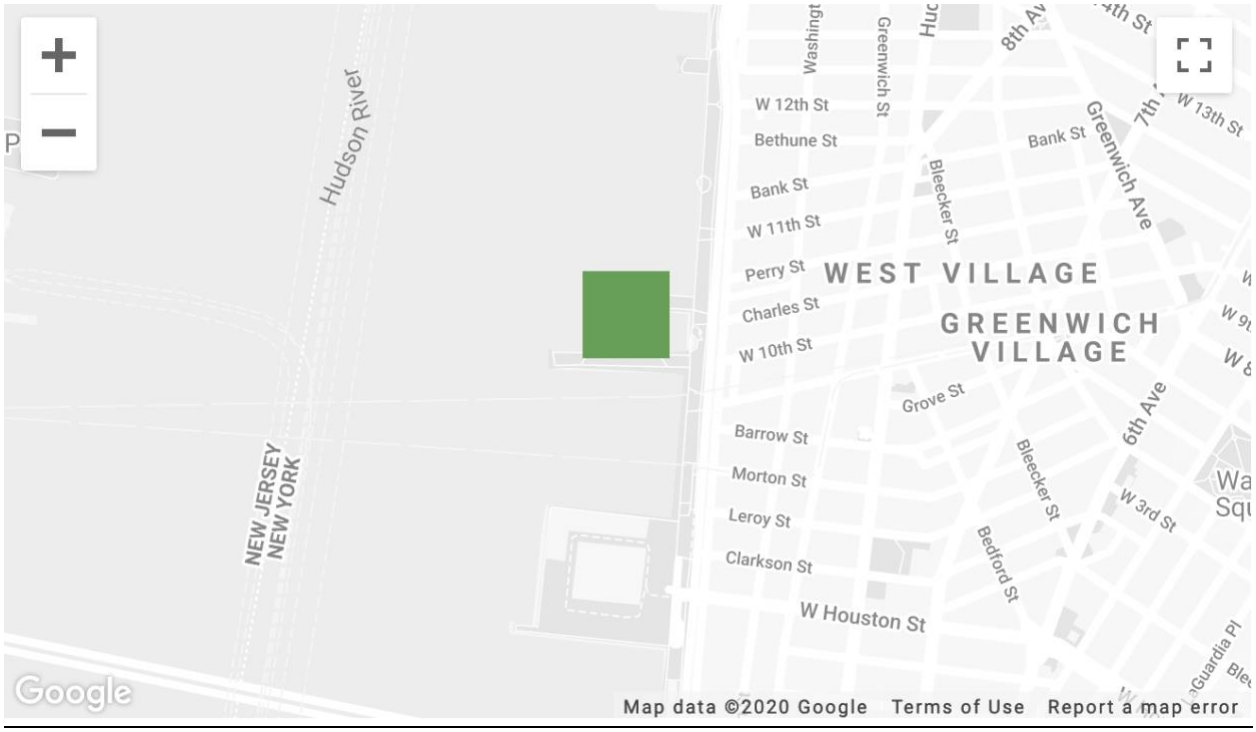


Image: Screenshot of the study area within the confines of Manhattan Community District 2 (Google Maps, 2020)

New York City's Hudson River waterfront borders the western edge of the neighborhood of Greenwich Village. It is located within the confines of Manhattan Community District 2 and the NYPD's 6th Precinct. Greenwich Village is officially

bordered by Houston Street to the South, Broadway to the East, 14th Street to the North, and the Hudson River to the West (NYC Department of City Planning, NYC Community District Profiles 2017).

Greenwich Village or "The Village," has been an integral part of the metropolis' growth since the early 20th Century when it was a busy port, filled with: Trans-Atlantic passenger ocean liners, cargo, merchant ships, steamships, barges, and commuter ferries (The Bowery Boys, 2017). Along with the diversity of vessels came the workers on them and those of the docks. In this place were gathered tens of thousands of workers from all sorts of backgrounds and experiences along with the plethora of unmarried men who came into port each year: sailors, new arrivals to the city, visitors from one place or another. While the area known as Greenwich Village has a long history of Queer life going as far back as the late 19th Century, the area along the piers became very popular during the 1920s among Gay men as a cruising area. Cruising is the act of walking or driving in a public or semi-public place with the expectation of a casual sexual encounter with another person or people (Kilgannon, 2005)

Following the formerly elevated West Side Highway construction, demolished in the 1980s after a section collapsed in 1973, creating a physical barrier between Greenwich Village and the Hudson River Waterfront. This barrier physically and visually allowed for more obscurity of those seeking

discreet encounters with others behind the elevated's shadows. Combining the number of men, the nearby taverns, warehouses, and isolation from the city at large set up the piers as the crux of gay life in New York City well into the late 1960s.

Image: Three gay men socializing at the Piers circa 1975 (Back2Stonewall, 2019).

Although cruising and the topic of public sexual encounters among gay men is not the main subject of this thesis, the adjacent themes of informal place creation or place-taking are intertwined with the issues I will discuss later on.

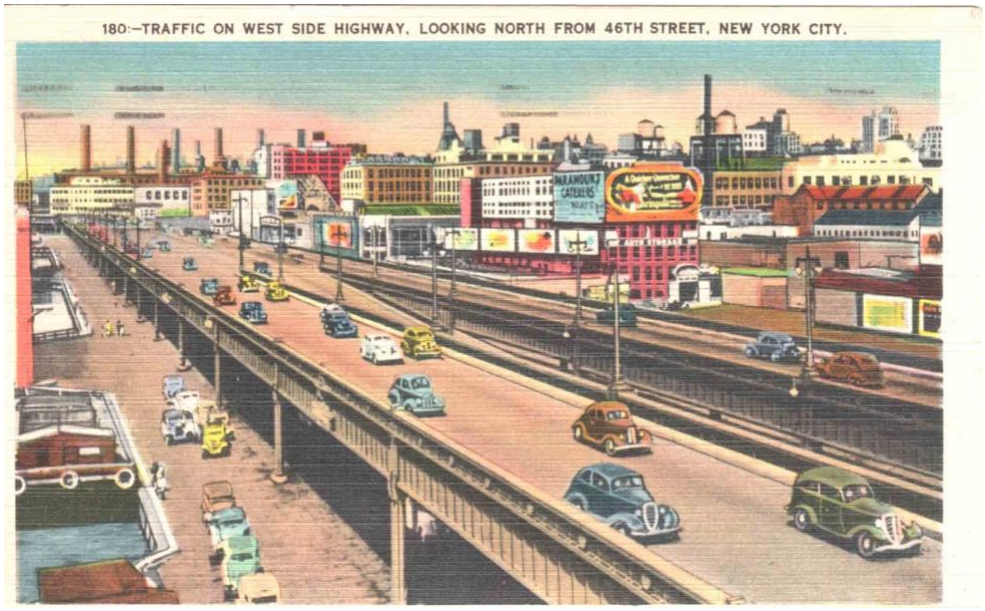


Image: Miller (West Side) Highway Elevated Circa 1930s. Retrieved from NYC LGBT Sites.

Image: West Side Highway collapsed section South of West 14th Street 1973. Retrieved from Library of Congress.

## Queer enclaves in the West & Greenwich Village neighborhoods

Greenwich Village also contains several subsections, including the West Village west of Seventh Avenue and the Meatpacking District in the northwest corner of Greenwich Village. As noted previously, Queer people have long existed and resided in the Greenwich and West Village neighborhoods. At times they may have been freer to be open about themselves than others as one looks at the Village's bohemian history (Bowery Boys, 2017). The neighborhood known as "The Village" has been a mecca for Queer people all over the nation and perhaps the world from time to time. The period leading up to and immediately following Stonewall attracted people from places near and far to this place where rumors told that they would be more accepted as who they were, not only that, but that there was a place they could meet other people:  The Stonewall Inn.

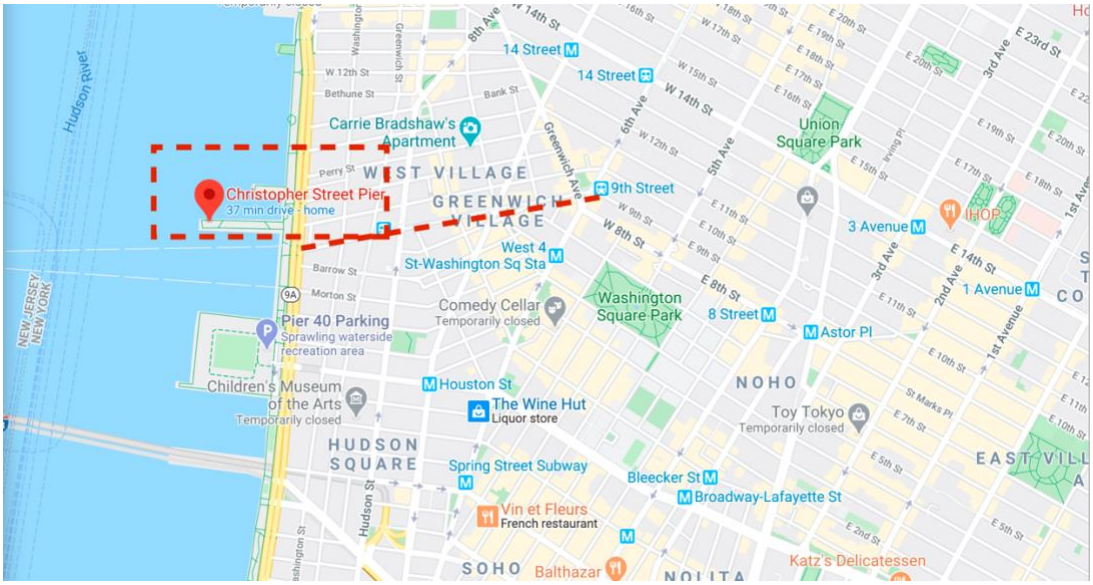


Image: Screenshot outlining Pier 45 (Christopher Street Pier) and Christopher Street to the East Google Maps, 2020.

The neighborhood known as Greenwich Village was predominantly a working-class, family neighborhood. Anchored by its new neighbor New York University to the East in the late 60s/early 70s, it has also been home to famous Urban Planner Jane Jacobs at 555 Hudson Street. This neighborhood was also very affordable early on due to the redlining policies of the late 1930s.

What cannot be ignored nor forgotten is the involvement of Queer youth from the very beginning of the movement. Young people from all over the country and all walks of life would hear of this place where there were others like them. Whether they were kicked out of the homes by their families, or they had decided to move to New York on their own, they found themselves here. Men, Women, Cisgender, Trans, Gender-non conforming individuals who during the 60s would be

labeled as drag queens or transvestites found spaces where they could be themselves, at least for a little while. The streets and even the bars were spaces where young people could hang out and socialize even under cover of dim lighting. The drinking age was 18 until 1984, and using a fake ID was very easy at the time. Fast forward to the 1980s and 90s, and young people were still seen hanging out along the waterfront, albeit a dilapidated one. Tales of a time gone by from older Queer folk were recounted to me in passing over the years where one would go meet a friend at the corner of Christopher Street and 7th Avenue and take a stroll down to the piers. These activities continue to this day, and I was one of those kids.

The unfortunate situation Queer youth of color find themselves in is that the mecca they love and take part in is being overseen by policies and local residents who do not see nor do not care to know the critical role in which they play. One of which includes Ballroom culture. Ball culture consists of events that mix performance, dance, lip-syncing, and modeling. Events are divided into various categories and participants "walk" for prizes and trophies. They can walk individually or as a house. The culture extends beyond the extravagant events as many participants in ball culture also belong to groups known as "houses," a longstanding tradition in LGBT Communities and racial minorities, where chosen families of friends live in households together. They form relationships and

communities to replace families of origin from which they may be estranged — a chosen family (Paris is Burning, 1990).

Image: Scenes from the film *Paris is Burning*, 1990.

## The decline of the Industrial waterfront and reuse of "public space"

In the years after Stonewall, the neighborhood enjoyed a slow but gradual increase in popularity as a safe haven for Queer people coming to New York City, even more so than in the years before. During the 1970s and early 1980s after the elevated West Side Highway collapsed, plans to redevelop this section of highway came about. Originally coined the Westway plan in 1974, the plan called to redevelop the West Side waterfront into 100 acres of parkland and submerge the highway underneath as a six-lane highway similar to Boston's Big Dig (Willis, *Westway lecture at The Skyscraper Museum* 2014). In 1982 the plan was halted after a judge ruled that the landfill would harm striped bass; this was after multiple protests and calls to action against the plan even though the Reagan administration had approved it (The Villager, 2004). By 1985, Congress had recalled the funds for the project, and the City of New York had decided to reallocate most of the funding

for Westway to public transportation as that too by then was in a critical state in need of a lifeline.

While this was happening on a political level, the state of the waterfront was falling apart on its very own. As manufacturing in New York City had been in decline, many ships and jobs associated with them had moved across the Hudson and South to new shipping ports in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The piers and warehouses were no longer maintained, and some of the piers started to rot and collapse. The piers and warehouses that remained began a transformation as a space for sunbathing and leisure by local residents; in the West Village neighborhood, this meant mostly gay men. Both the Westway plan's failure and the piers' demise created a brand-new opportunity for the government and other private interests to envision a future that would resemble nothing of this past.

## West Side Task Force & Hudson River Park Conservancy

After the Westway project's shutdown and the reallocation of funds, the City of New York still wanted to redevelop the waterfront as it would bring new investment to the city from real-estate developers and commercial businesses. The city desperately needed investment, and this was still an opportunity to be seized upon. $811 million was set aside from the original funds for a West Side Highway redevelopment project in 1987. The new highway was decided to be a six-lane

boulevard at grade level, which would replace the elevated structure south of 59th Street. The new West Side Highway/Boulevard officially opened in 2001 (NY Department of Transportation, 2018). This updated plan took care of the roadway but not the adjacent water's edge and landfill. Then-Governor Mario Cuomo was wholly opposed to the Westway plan and the waterfront's subsequent redevelopment, so the project remained on hold for a few years until 1994 when incoming Governor George E. Pataki resumed interest in the plan. He did not do it for his own sake, but that of the State of New York as this was the tail-end of a transition period into the New York which many of us know today. Hudson River Park is a joint state and city collaboration but is organized as a New York State public-benefit corporation. Interestingly enough, the State's involvement is solely due to the Hudson River being under New York State jurisdiction as it flows North beyond the boundaries of the City of New York. As such, it is the state's responsibility to protect this natural resource for its environmental and historical attributes for the benefit of all of New York's almost twenty million residents.

## Hudson River Park Act and transformation of the West Side

After years of lobbying and negotiation at both the city and state level, in July 1998 the NY State legislature passed the Hudson River Park Act. It was eagerly

signed in September 1998 by Governor Pataki. The legislature found these five key points which informed their decision to pass the law:

- Planning and development of the Hudson River Park as a **public resource** was a matter of State concern and in **the interest of the people of the State.** Further, the Park will enhance the ability of New Yorkers to **enjoy the Hudson River**, one of the great natural and public resources of the State.
- The marine environment of the Park is known to provide critical habitat for striped bass and other aquatic species. It is in the public interest to **protect and conserve this habitat**.
- **Quality of life and economic benefits** can be derived from creating the Park. (Through the establishment of the HRP Trust)
- The Park will encourage, promote, and expand public access to the river, promote water-based recreation, and enhance the natural, cultural and historic aspects of the Hudson River.
- It is in the public interest to **encourage park uses** and allow limited commercial uses in the Park. (Hudson River Park Conservancy, 2020).

The Act further established the Hudson River Park Trust (the "Trust"), which is in charge of designing, building, and maintaining the four-mile stretch of green space along the water's edge. As a partnership between city and state, it was set up

under a self-sufficient financial model in order to pay its staff and maintain regular operations costs. Maintenance is paid for by revenue generated within the park by rents from commercial tenants, fees, concession agreements, grants, and donations through its support arm, Friends of Hudson River Park. Although not the intent, all new construction is paid through Capital funding from the state, city, and federal budget appropriations. A thirteen-member Board of Directors runs the trust, and additionally, there is an Advisory Council made up of fifty-members who inform the park planning process. This council Advisory Council membership consists of three primary categories: 1) elected officials directly representing the Park area; 2) individuals directly appointed by certain elected officials identified in the Hudson River Park Act; 3) representatives from organizations meeting the membership requirements and approved by both the Advisory Council and the Trust Board of Directors. Membership from community organizations is limited to a two-year term. A member from Community Boards 1, 2, and 4 must be on the council as well as according to the By-Laws section D (Emphasis my own):

> The remaining members of the Advisory Council ("Community Members") shall be representatives of local community, park, environmental, civic, labor and business organizations, and, in so far as is consistent with the Act, other established organizations with a relevant interest in or relationship to the Park. ***The selection by the Advisory Council of any new Community Member organization shall be subject to approval by the HRPT Board, whose purpose in approving the nominated Community Member organization shall be to confirm that overall, the Advisory Council membership reflects a***

> ***balanced representation of the different neighborhoods and interest groups along the Park***. Each confirmed Community Member organization shall designate an individual to be its Official Representative on the Advisory Council (Hudson River Park Advisory Council By-Laws, 1998).

The advisory council can make requests, and non-binding recommendations to Manhattan Community Boards 1, 2, and 4 as the park sits within its jurisdiction. While the by-laws state that the goal is to confirm that overall membership reflects a balanced representation of the different neighborhoods and interest groups, not all groups or groups of people have been adequately represented during the last two decades of the park's existence.

The park was initially expected to be completed by 2003, with construction costs estimated at around $300 million. The first complete section of the park started construction in 1998 shortly after the ink on the new law dried, and Piers 45 and 46 opened in 2003 in Greenwich Village.

One important thing to keep in mind is that while the Act encourages the redevelopment of the waterfront from a dilapidated edge into a vibrant, open space for public enjoyment, it also begins to determine who can and cannot participate in this space. The park is a public benefit operated by a private entity. Many may see this setup as not fully working for the benefit of everyone who would use these spaces, and it is essential that any future changes involve greater community

involvement. As it stands, the trust will ultimately bend toward the will of those whom they want to come and utilize the space. By participating in this space as with any other Privately Operated Public Space (POPS), you adjust to their rules.

Even as construction began in 1998, many of the old piers were still accessible and used. Until early 2001, at the site where Pier 45 is at Christopher Street, one could go and hang out with friends without any rules or regulations from the park. As stated by both an interviewee named 'Star' in the 2001 documentary "Fenced Out" as well as from multiple conversations I have had with people within the Queer community about the pier,

> "When I went down there's I saw I wasn't the only one who was like that. There's a place that I can go cuz there's not that many places you can go and associate with people like that...um who are in the life" (Interview with Star, *Fenced Out*, 2001).

Statements such as this one are similar to many made by countless others who felt that this space was a refuge from the world which they were temporarily getting away from in order to feel free. Once the construction of the park reached pier 45, the space transformed into something new and unrecognizable. When the piers reopened in 2003, with the new lawns, benches, and views, they came with new rules about how one should behave in this space. Gone were the days of hanging out until daylight as the police began to patrol the park late at night to ensure that illicit activities of any sort were not happening here. The arrival of Hudson River Park

ushered the next two decades of change in terms of residential property values and neighborhood constituency.

## Timeline: History of Community Boards

While people might be familiar with town councils, city councils, school boards, and other forms of municipal structures, Community Boards work a little differently. Community Boards are the official municipal body whose primary mission is to advise elected officials and government agencies on matters affecting the social welfare of the district (NYC.gov, 2020). They function as non-partisan arms of the city and review several areas for community needs, including but not limited to Land Use, Budget considerations for neighborhoods under their purview, the processing of complaints and requests for municipal services. According to Queens Community Board 1's website,

> "The board, its District Manager, and its office staff serve as advocates and service coordinators for the community and its residents. They cannot order any City agency or official to perform any task, but Boards are usually successful in resolving the problems they address" (Queens Community Board 1, *Community Board Mandates* 2014).

In other words, community boards can hear the local community's needs on a granular level and make determinations based on the information provided to them.

One might ask, how can an advisory body adequately represent the needs of ¼ Million residents along with its local business owners, local schools, and other services in an equitable way? The answer is it usually can't or isn't representative of

the Community District that it represents; this leads to Community Boards being exclusionary and far from inclusive in their decision making.

Below is a consolidated history of NYC's Community Boards for perspective:

> **1951** - First Community Planning Councils established by the Manhattan Borough President.
>
> **1963** - 62 Community Planning Boards established by the New York City Charter.
>
> **1968** - Local Law 39 expands the powers of Community Planning Boards.
>
> **1975** - 59 Community Boards established by the Charter Revision Commission.
>
> **1989** - Charter Revision Commission changes the structure of City government and increases the role of Community Boards in the environmental review process.
>
> **Currently,** there are 59 Community Boards:
>
> - 12 in the Bronx
> - 18 in Brooklyn
> - 12 in Manhattan
> - 14 in Queens
> - 3 in Staten Island
>
> (Maximum of 250,000 people per Community District). --- (Queens Community Board 1, *Community Board History*, 2014).

## A Look Back on Youth

This discussion causes me to look back at my own experience as a young Queer teenager beginning to discover and navigate this new space. Moving ahead a few years after the pier had opened, I first came to the pier in the Summer of 2005. Up until this point, I was completely unaware and ignorant of the history tied to this space. I just "knew" that this is where gay people came to hangout. I didn't know anyone, but I was curious to see what was here. Eventually, I learned about the LGBT Center on 13th Street. There I started attending different programs at their YES (Youth Enrichment Services) Program and met other people like myself. Here I learned about safer sex, how to address anti-LGBT sentiment in schools, and created long-lasting relationships, many of which I still have to this day. Through the center, I learned about other community organizations and activist groups. Groups such as FIERCE and the Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI) had their own catalog of programming and workshops to inform and educate Queer youth about how to deal with encounters with law enforcement. This was during a period of time when the conflict between Queer youth of color and MN CB 2 was seemingly at its crescendo. The tension between these groups includes public protests by FIERCE in 2004 against the NYPD and the 6th Precinct opposing earlier curfews at the pier and harassment of Queer youth by authorities and local residents is seemingly a

nuisance by the board and an issue which needs to be quickly resolved in order to maintain a sense of peace and tranquility in the neighborhood.

Around this time, the pier started closing at 1 am since, although privately managed, it used the NYC Department of Parks structure for opening and closing times. Just after midnight, one could see the privately hired Park Enforcement Agents or "Parks police," as we called them, driving up and down the piers in their golf carts harassing people repeatedly about the pier's closing time of 1 am. Now the bikeway at the entrance wasn't closed, but the promenade and the adjacent piers would be fenced off until the morning. If you were around after 1 am, you would get a summons of $25. The youth, myself included, on occasion during the summer would make our way off the pier onto Christopher Street either to keep hanging out in the neighborhood or to make our way to the nearby subway stops and go home. Here is where the conflict between residents and youth really picks up. Neighborhood residents and local business owners complained of drug use, harassment, solicitation by sex workers on side streets to the police and the community board. Their solution was to crack down on people along Christopher Street.

During my research process, I interviewed several of my peers from that time and spoke with a staff member from FIERCE about the police and community board's actions and their thoughts about what youth might benefit from today. To

have a broad representation of stories and reflections, I included interviews with at least one person who identified as White, Black, Latinx, Asian, and other. I also ensured to do my best to speak with people who identified as either Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Queer. I also interviewed two Transgender individuals. Their ages ranged between 22 and 35 noting their former years as "pier youth." One could interview youth under 18, but it is important to note the special protections one must consider when interviewing and documenting conversations with minors. The interviews were conducted as a combination of phone conversations, Video conferences, in-person physically distanced interviews (when the weather allowed). Three of my interviews were made by the recommendation of a former member of the St. Luke's youth drop-in program whom I knew for some time and was able to facilitate our conversation. The FIERCE employee serves as a community organizer and youth leader who effectively trains other youth to engage with the police. The following are some excerpts from those interviews:

> "I remember what is was like to hang out and Kiki at the pier. We're too old for that now, I guess. I mean, we can still go and hang out, but it's not the same, you know? Now I might not get harassed because I'm more put together. I have nicer clothes and don't look sus [suspect]. I feel bad for the kids because they don't know how much fun it used to be yet now, they're much more free than it was for us" – (Interview with AH, October 8, 2020).

> "The police never harassed me, but they were always bothering my friends. I wasn't the worst of the bunch, but I was ratchet. My mom didn't know I was a lesbian yet, so I tried to not get in trouble. I did get told to move along once

> because I was wearing baggy clothes once and talking to this girl. I still don't get it. It was way before closing time, and they already started their stuff. We just kept it moving because we didn't want any problems" – (Interview with Jackie L, November 2020).
>
> "When we finally arrived at the Piers, it was like sensory overload! The view was, of course, breathtaking, especially on a warm summer day despite the broken-down appearance. It certainly wasn't the well-kept, renovated Pier that it is today, but regardless it had charm, color, and community. I recall lots of Queer folks of all colors and creeds voguing everywhere, sashaying down the streets as if they were walking on a runway during New York Fashion Week, a significant amount of LGBTQ homeless kids, trans women of color…" - (Interview with ML, November 17th, 2020).
>
> **"**I actually work with youth in the Bronx who were just like us. Fun, curious, daring to do a lot of crazy stuff. They feel a bit more free today than we did back then but the basics haven't changed. They want to feel safe. They want to be amongst their own and have a sense of belonging. That feeling you get when you get off the train at West 4th or Christopher Street" – (Interview with SB, December 4th, 2020).

These conversations with young adults reflecting on a time in their lives where they found safety and community in this space among a group of people, many of whom would go on to be part of their chosen family apart from blood relatives. This unique bond should be preserved and recognized by the surrounding organizations (HRP Trust, Manhattan CB 2, City Council District 3, among others).

# Chapter 3: Applicable Precedence

As the LGBT movement has progressed and evolved since the days of Stonewall, there have always been facets of this community that seek to either fully integrate into general society seeking full acceptance and pockets of groups that have sought to remain separate in order to preserve their identity. Groups such as the Leather and Kink community have fought long and hard to preserve their heritage while still being part of the fight for progress. This is in addition to well-known and documented work of activist groups such as GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis) and ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) who began to draw major attention from the media and politicians (local, state, and federal) during the 1980s when the HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) originally known as GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency began to plague populations of gay men living in major cities (Altman, 1982). Because the initial groups affected were seen as "degenerates" among the conservatives in both the Federal Government and in more "religious" circles of society, the epidemic was actively ignored. The official policy even as far as then-President Ronald Reagan not uttering the word AIDS in public until a press conference in 1985 and several speeches in 1987 (NBC News, 2018).

Even during the 1990s and early 2000s, mainstream society had many "gayborhoods" with their own shops and bars. Many Queer people in parts of the country still did not feel safe entering spaces traditionally not seen as Queer. Through the gentrification of cities and changes in neighborhoods, along came the slow but steady closures of neighborhood gay coffee shops, bars, lounges, and other spaces that defined the lives of many social circles.

In order to better inform my study and make recommendations that would potentially make sense in places other than New York; as issues that affect Queer Youth and Youth of Color is not isolated to this city, I sought examples of place preservation, placemaking, and programming in other cities with similar features. I also looked at examples of planning and placemaking within New York that were not solely Queer-focused. I felt that it was important to note that addressing issues of erasure, as highlighted earlier in my literature review, can be applied to many marginalized groups. The rationale for choosing San Francisco and Chicago as examples as opposed to others in this study were primarily due to their similarities to New York City in terms of Queer history with their own long-time established Queer neighborhoods as well as being two cities with viable public transit, which allow its visitors and residents to travel throughout these cities and experience them in its entirety versus large cities such as Los Angeles, Austin, and Miami which while also having Queer scenes are not all in one set location nor have as broad a

network of reliable public transportation which puts certain population groups at a disadvantage whether it being due to income or accessibility.

## San Francisco

In cities such as San Francisco, where rising commercial rents and changing landscapes caused the displacement of many long-time businesses, movements have been created to remember these places. The Castro District, commonly referred to as the Castro, is a neighborhood in San Francisco. The Castro was one of the first gay neighborhoods in the United States. Formerly a working-class, Irish-Catholic neighborhood through the 1960s and 1970s, the Castro remains one of the most prominent symbols of Queer activism and events in the world (SF Gate, 2014). Like NYC's West Village, its transformation was slow but not as extreme until the last two decades. While the Village's Queer history can be traced back to the early 20th and mid 20th Century, the transformation of the Castro began in the late 1960s during the summer of love (1967). Between the end of World War II and this period, many former gay sailors settled in San Francisco and settled in the Tenderloin and SoMa (South of Market) Districts. They moved to the Castro on the tail end of the many families who were leaving and moving out to the suburbs due to white flight happening in the city at the time. The Castro is a huge economic driver for the City of San Francisco. Still, it's also being affected by gentrification and the displacement of long-time residents and businesses due to rising costs.

A March to Remember and Reclaim Queer Space was held on March 10, 2018 in the Polk Gulch section of San Francisco. The Starting Point was at the site of the former Gangway located at 841 Larkin Street. A march visiting four former Queer spaces to lay black wreaths and call for commemorating and sustaining the city's LGBTQ Queer heritage and culture. Sponsored by GBLT Historical Society, SF LGBT Center, Lower Polk Neighbors, Middle Polk Neighborhood Association, and others (Do the Bay, 2018). The march was organized and led by drag queen and activist Juanita MORE!, as well as members of the Sister of Perpetual Indulgence, also known as the Order of Perpetual Indulgence. More commonly known as "The Sisters," they are a charity, protest, and street performance organization that uses drag and religious imagery to call attention to sexual intolerance and satirizes gender and morality issues.


Image: March to Remember & Reclaim Queer Space, 2018 Image: Bay Area Reporter

## Chicago — Queering the Parks Initiative

Queering the Parks is a Queer-identified youth-led initiative within the Chicago Parks District (CPD) celebrating Queer youth and families. There are events with formal programming, including a family BBQ, a pool party for youth 13-17, and a masQUEERade ball for youth 13-24. The initiative promotes food, health, wellness, and community. According to CPD, "*Queering takes the above definition and turns it into an action. We define Queering as expanding access and inclusion, in this case to our parks which serve the public, in all diverse and changing formations*" (Chicago Parks District, *Queering the Parks*, 2019).

Image: Queering the Parks organizers at the MasQUEERade Ball, 2019 Photo: Glitter Gut

## FIERCE, NYC – #RainbowToJustice Campaign

The #RainbowToJustice Campaign is one of several currently active campaigns by FIERCE with a focus on youth training and addressing justice reform through policy changes. FIERCE's mission and main scope of work is to provide training to youth (Queer and Queer-allies) to know their full rights when dealing with law enforcement and how to participate effectively in "cop-watch teams" which help protect people from violence enact by the police. They are in the process of building out an ongoing team near their offices in the Bronx that partners their members with neighborhood residents (FIERCE, 2019). This collaborative effort is critical to the organization's ongoing effort, but they do mention that they want to ensure that their youth leaders lead these teams. In a statement on their website,

> "Ideally, we will be able to have a cop-watch team that can support both youth and anyone in our community who is unjustly harassed, surveilled, arrested, or detained by police officers. This means we will also partner with groups like Bronx Defenders and Legal aid to assist us with legal challenges that come up" (FIERCE, *RainbowToJustice*, 2019).

## Hillel Place Plaza (Brooklyn, NY)

Coming out of the Fall 2017 Pratt Urban Placemaking Program's Lab Workshop, the studio had as their client the Flatbush Junction BID. They were tasked with analyzing a potential new plaza that would be part of the NYC Department of Transportation Plaza Program. Through a process of data analysis, which included stakeholder interviews, a place audit, intercept surveys, and focus group workshops, they made a set of recommendations that would inform their client of how the plaza would best benefit the community. Within their data collection, they noticed the diversity of the people who transited the space and called out a group of users that would otherwise be ignored during the design process if not for the studio. The studio noticed that seniors were a group that raised many concerns about the potential street redesign. Key takeaways from the focus groups were: safer streets, more places to sit and relax, and increased green space (Pratt GCPE, *Lab Workshop,* 2017). Through these processes, a concept of a new governance structure for long-term planning could be created in collaboration between The Junction BID and local Community Organizations. Forming an alliance would bring in members from outside organizations with common goals toward Sustainable Community Development. This finding is used as inspiration for one of the recommendations I am making for this study.

# Chapter 4:
# Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations

## Pier 40 Working Group:

The Hudson River Park Act was amended in July 2019, but the legislation has yet to dictate if Hudson River Park can put out a Request for Proposal (RFP) to rehabilitate Pier 40 Successfully and expand the sports fields and open spaces for the community. Looking into this, I discovered a major misstep on this working group's side: As of the writing of this thesis, no Queer organizations within or around Hudson River Park have been included in the working group. This blatant exclusion of Queer individuals and organizations is a significant oversight of the working group. It seems evident that a neighborhood tied to so much tension between certain groups would be working to at the very least include a representative, if not many, to take part in the discussion process.

## COVID-19, Community Services, and Mental Health for Youth Participants

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have been operating with limited in-person services and canceled all non-essential in-person programming, which cannot be done physically distanced per Governor Andrew Cuomo's Executive Order. This disparately impacts Queer Youth of Color who may have relied on these services as a way to engage with others. Some youth come from non-affirming homes that have made the last nine months (all the more difficult as

they might not have been able to exercise their self-expression in ways that these spaces would have previously allowed. (Trevor Project, 2020). This is crucial to understand as planners; although digital spaces have become very popular over the years as a form to connect, as seen in micro-blogs of the 90s and early 2000s to the more modern social media networks of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Physical spaces are still just as important to both preserve and create anew. The major challenge here is how these concerns can be addressed by the public-sector without furthering hyper-development, which has been the primary way to gain new revenue from property taxes.

## Third Places Build Communities

Throughout my research, I noticed a common theme, and that was of a third place. Just to recap from earlier in this paper; Third place is a term coined by Ray Oldenburg as it refers to places where people spend time between home and work (the first and second places) (Oldenburg, 1991). In a 2016 article from the Brookings Institution, Stuart Butler and Carmen Diaz discuss third places as it relates to Urban Planning and community building. They write, "[Third places] ...they are locations where we exchange ideas, have a good time, and build relationships" (Brookings Institute, 2016). I had encountered this term before when I worked as a barista at Starbucks right after I graduated from high school. It hadn't occurred to me at the time that

public spaces such as Hudson River Park, Christopher Street Pier, The Center, and other such places fell under the umbrella of third place. I had assumed it was a concept made up by the coffee conglomerate's marketing team to make stores feel home-like. Yet, third place is a great way to describe these arenas of gathering. Families come to enjoy outdoor space along the waterfront; nearby workers go and sit on a nice day for lunch. Young people find refuge from places near and far that might have ridiculed them for who they liked, how they spoke, and in the matter which they presented themselves matched up with their gender identity.

Safety is a matter of concern for all members of the public, not just a small segment. Still, it's crucial to identify when there are situations and environments where a person's level of privilege innately gives them a greater sense of security without intervention from an outside force. As planners and place-makers, when making recommendations for public spaces, one must consult the stakeholders and consider the voices and experiences of those who might yet not have spoken up, or have since been excluded by existing processes. Albeit difficult to anticipate every situation at present, there needs to be room for flexibility. Any new rules, regulations, and frameworks can't be set in stone because we do not live in a static society.

## Memory is intricately linked to community

The spaces along the waterfront are only some of the many spaces that Queer youth take and create community, but from the conversations I had with peers and community organizations alike, one of the most important. When you get to the pier, there's a sense that you've arrived, you are home. This was demonstrated in one of the interviews I shared toward the end of Chapter 2 with a former pier youth that preceded my time named ML. Theirs was one statement that stayed with me for a while. It wasn't about kept up lawns, fancy amenities, or bike lanes. Those are great but at what cost? The question remains:  How can this memory be preserved through policy and governance?

## What do young people really want?

The idea of memory leads to this question of what do young people really want. Trends and fads change through the times but at the heart of it remains the desire to belong. Having space, whether formal or informal, where one feels comfortable to be seen and heard. My interview with SB from Chapter 2 reflects these concerns and the common themes of third place, memory, belonging, and community. It's not unique to the LGBTQ community, but these interviews stand out the most as we too have in some form of form experienced the phenomenon of what Dr. Mindy Fullilove calls Rootshock (Fullilove, 2016). A place you knew changes suddenly and gets taken away from you, and you might not know how to

cope. Again, I stress that not everyone experiences this. Still, for many Queer people, especially youth of color, the places to go are limited if you're not shown how, and the powers that be aren't considering those needs when creating grander plans.

## Another Note on Community Boards:

Community Board members must live, work, or have an otherwise significant interest in the neighborhoods served by the community district and be a New York City resident. Boards are able to conduct volunteer surveys to show their overall make-up, but recently calls for better transparency have been brought up as the city has seen many rezonings occur in neighborhoods that are made up by a majority of low-income or working-class residents. In 2020, Gale R. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President, set out to create a public tool available on her office's website that collected the data from the twelve Manhattan Community Boards, which layout their overall demographic make-up. According to the data collected for Manhattan Community Board 2, the board composition is: 73.3% White, 82% of members are age 40 or older, 12% identified as either Black or Hispanic and 12% identified as LGBTQ+ (Manhattan Borough President's Office, 2020). While the Board is representative of the district's racial supermajority, the make-up of individuals under 40 and members of the LGBTQ community still have room for improvement.

Additionally, because of this district's unique history and characteristics and the community organizations that do work within it are not adequately represented.

Groups such as Hudson River Park Trust are non-profits who have their own members and have their own agendas to achieve. Likewise, community boards are most likely prone to listen to the loudest voices and the ones deemed to serve in the best interest of its members.

# Recommendations

## Creating Community

*Advocate for the rebuilding of Pier 40, allocating a community space to a/an LGBTQ+ organization(s) who have contributed significantly to the local community (Pier 40 for ALL).*

Community is a word that, like a diamond, will have a different meaning depending on who you may be asking. Still, it has a common thread, one of coming together—bringing variety and life to the place where it exists. You can have a neighborhood and not have a sense of community, but community transcends geographic boundaries. The LGBTQ community's contributions to Greenwich Village, NYC, and the world deserves more than a simple community center. Artforms such as Voguing and Ballroom culture have invaded popular culture through the famous 1990 documentary *Paris Is Burning* and FX's series *Pose,* which is based on ballroom and those who live in the life.

Being such an influential member of larger society, and the long history of this community within the great communities which Hudson River Park inhabits, it

seems not only reasonable but necessary that a variety of organizations have a formal space at Pier 40.

As of January 8th, 2020, the NY State Assembly amended the Hudson River Park act in Bill A08350 to state,

> **No less than the equivalent of fifty percent of the footprint of Pier 40 shall be passive and active public open space, except in such event that the Pier 40 building is developed or redeveloped with new or substantially rehabilitated structures for business, professional or governmental office use, then the equivalent of sixty-five percent of the footprint of Pier 40 shall be passive and active public open space effective at the time that a certificate of occupancy is issued for the redevelopment;(HUDSON RIVER PARK ACT, 1998)**

For the Hudson River Park Trust, this means that Pier 40 can finally be redeveloped in such a way that not only are emergency repairs able to be addressed by available funds but also the Trust can; if they choose to, select a responsible developer to build a new space on Pier 40 which both provides passive and active public open space as well as commercial space that can be used by small businesses, community group organizations such as FIERCE and AUDRE LORDE PROJECT among others. This idea is an enormous task but with support from community members who want to see more diversity and equity can lobby for this to be done. Residents and local business owners wield a lot of power, and both the trust and the city council member who represents this district can support the need that exists. It could also be feasible that a general space is allocated for these organizations' services for outreach and educational purposes. Before the beginning of the COVID-19

pandemic, Ryan Center staff and outreach volunteers worked along Christopher Street and the piers. This work included disseminating information about regular programming, safer sex education and resources, free HIV/STD testing and counseling, homeless outreach, etc. (Ryan Center, 2020). This is a delicate subject, but it can be achieved as it would be seen as a community benefit by keeping this space shared instead of leased out as a private commercial space.

## Neighborhood integration to hyperlocal government

*Advocate for the inclusion of a member from neighborhood organizations that primarily serve LGBTQ Youth & People of Color to represent them during Community Board Meetings and/or be part of the Hudson River Park Advisory Council.*

This recommendation was informed and inspired by the Junction People Alliance. Using the Hillel Place case study as precedence, this new governance structure would function apart from the Hudson River Park Trust and the local community board. This group would work directly for the interests of community organizations that cater to Queer Youth of Color. They would work on programming in conjunction with the HRP Trust, act as a liaison between stakeholders and city officials. Additionally, this organization can work with youth on conflict resolution using FIERCE's current model. This would hopefully work to continually improve and establish trusting relationships with residents and business owners. While it would be simpler to just add members from the LGBTQ community into the existing HRP Trust Advisory council itself, as it stands, they

could theoretically apply for membership on the council. To date, there have not been any groups with members represented on the council. This subject did not come up during the interviews I conducted prior. Unless the by-laws are modified to the existing trust, a separate entity of which HRP is not the main focus would ease this tension and allow for simultaneous cooperation between all parties. By utilizing this model, the work toward a true participatory planning process can continue.

## Programming

*Create programming at HRP that embraces the history of the piers and the surrounding community. Connecting the past & present through voguing workshops, storytelling, and other activities inclusive of everyone with creating additional barriers (admission).*

St. Luke in the Field's, a local Episcopal church on Greenwich Avenue and Christopher Street, runs a Saturday evening drop-in program called *Art & Acceptance: A Saturday Night Drop-In Program for LGBTQ+ Homeless, Runaway, or Marginally Housed Youth Ages 16-29*. This program provides dinner, opportunities for performances, community, and even free legal services! Their website says it best, "Sometimes all you need is a safe place to hang out for a while, a hot meal or a space to be yourself and meet other young people. Saturday nights, that place is here" (St Luke in the Fields, 2020). St. Luke's can collaborate with the Trust and other organizations to solicit input and ideas from participants for programming that opens the window of ball culture and storytelling through vogue to visitors to the

park. These free programs take history and make it alive and attractive. The media is already bringing ballroom culture and voguing into people's homes through shows such as FX's *POSE* and HBO's *Legendary.* Many of those featured on these programs got their start in places like St. Luke's and the piers. We need more spaces that are like these.

Image: The legendary Aniyah Juicy performs at Christopher Street Pier in New York City. (The Atlantic, 2019)

## Youth Advocacy in the Long-Term

*Create a toolkit that enables youth to navigate the arenas of local government and community organizing in self-empowering ways and begin to create spaces for them to belong.*

This study was inspired by the stories and history of the LGBTQ community, especially the young people who have been at the forefront of the fight over the decades. From Stonewall to the 80s AIDS crisis and the Ballroom scenes happening at the same time in parallel, to the stories of youth finding their chosen families or discovering who they were for the very first time. What's difficult to imagine are the journey's young people have is the feeling of not being heard. While each person has a different experience growing up, for Queer youth, Queer youth of color specifically, the lack of resources in the home or within the school system showing them how to engage with the existing government systems creates a greater barrier.

There are a few examples that exist in some shape or another: the Coro NYC Youth Council (NYCYC) and the NYC Youth Advisory Council out of the Civil Complaint Review Board. The NYCYC is by nomination only by the district's City Council member for students in $10^{th}$ – $12^{th}$ Grade. This group will mirror the New York City Council by recruiting, competitively selecting, and training 51 Youth Council Members (current high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors) to represent the 51 districts throughout all five boroughs (Coro Leadership Center,

2015). A great opportunity, but as it's by recruitment and a high selection process, it will inevitably disqualify interested individuals who would not meet their rigid criteria.

The NYC Youth Advisory Council addresses criminal justice issues and police-community relations (Civilian Complaint Review Board, 2020). While this is a great start and very much needed, especially with the growing calls to Defund the Police in the wake of the demonstrations this summer, more should be done to engage youth and expose them to our government beyond a US Government class within the school curriculum or for the first time when a person turns eighteen and registers to vote.

More and more are young people wanting to express their voice and views in ways that make actual change. FIERCE's Organizing Model is one of the methods which can do this but implement them with other community organizations and could be rolled out in phases as the capacity grows. This toolkit would have a group of community-based organizations collaborate with the Hudson River Park Conservancy and Manhattan CB 2 in creating a better environment and common safe space for all, especially Queer youth of color. Some key groups which can lead the charge are FIERCE, the LGBT Center, which has a robust youth program for people aged 13-23, and St. Luke in the Field's Church. In addition to these organizations, other partners that already do great work for youth in the city are The

Door and from a municipal level: NYC Department of Youth and Community Development.

## For Further Study

While at the onset of my research, I attempted to look at how the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s is similar to the present day COVID-19 pandemic, which is causing people to seek alternative means of socialization and interaction. Time nor the resources made available to made allowed me to go down this road, but I still think it merits being looked into, either by myself at a later date or by another researcher who can provide a new perspective. In my conversations with friends and acquaintances, I noticed that some people sought clandestine ways of meeting despite the pandemic. While these individuals did not ultimately reveal the details to me as a matter of safety, I could infer that during the COVID pandemic, individuals made the conscious decision to engage in meeting with others. These gatherings (both platonic and sexual in nature) would have otherwise violated existing Government mandates. A suggestion to document these details would be to perform an oral history or retell a narrative.

# Conclusion and Next Steps

The struggle of the LGBT community is far from over. Racism still resides within it and our larger society. Poverty, Transphobia, HIV infections among Queer Youth of Color is still rampant, perhaps due to naïve youth who think that the AIDS crisis is behind them. Add to that the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, which has turned our world upside down. Now more than ever is the need for tightly knit communities, social services that address the needs of those who would otherwise be left to the wayside. We need an education system that actually cares about our youth and not just numbers. Outside of the schools, we need members of society, politicians, and activist that will do the work to ensure that EVERYONE has safe access to public space, no strings attached.

As Lefebvre argued, the right to the city is one where the citizen has a right to participate in and appropriate the city. The people should be at the heart of any decision-making process about the creation and management of the city, as well as having the common right to use and occupy the spaces of the city without restriction. The physical and social spaces of the city are our public theatre where we act out everyday life. No two days are the same, and this impacts us all in profound ways.

While this study is only one small facet of this idea of the right to the city and its limited in scope, there is still much work to be done. I hope that in the future, I

will be able to work alongside community activist groups and politicians to improve the lives of Queer youth through the lens of Urban Planning. Los Angeles Urban Planner Jonathan Pacheco Bell's Embedded Planning theory can take us in the right direction. I think he says it best,

> "It's time for a radical reorientation in practice. Good planning starts on the ground: We need to get out from behind the comfort of our desks. We need to embed ourselves in the communities we plan. We need to connect with the people we serve." (Bell, 2018)

Now let's get to work!

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