

Spring 2021

a mass of what's departed: Analyzing the Influx of Middle Class Homeowners and Luxury Development Sustaining the Housing Crisis in Former Brick Manufacturing Hub Kingston, NY

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Recommended Citation

Irvine, Deirdre Frances, "a mass of what's departed: Analyzing the Influx of Middle Class Homeowners and Luxury Development Sustaining the Housing Crisis in Former Brick Manufacturing Hub Kingston, NY" (2021). *Senior Projects Spring 2021*. 234.

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a mass of what's departed

Analysing the Influx of Middle Class Homeowners and Luxury Development Sustaining the
Housing Crisis in Former Brick Manufacturing Hub Kingston, NY

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2021

Acknowledgements

I would first like to give special thanks to Adriane Colburn for providing me with infinite resources and insight with whatever lead I wanted to follow. Endless thanks for diligently working with my hybrid project despite its complete absence of formula. Adriane's support of my interdisciplinary research began in my freshman year and has continued to the completion of my academic career.

Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins was hugely influential in my decision to pursue EUS as a major, and I continue to utilize what I've learned in her class in my first semester at Bard to this day. Sophia's incredible work has inspired me to closely examine the materials at hand as well as what seems out of reach.

Countless other faculty members have played a crucial role in this project, whether through classes, conversations, or workshops. I would like to thank, in no particular order, Ivonne Santoyo-Orozco, Kwame Holmes, Peter Klein, Elias Dueker, Robin Smyth, Olga Touloumi, Ellen Driscoll, and Roman Hrab.

Thank you mom and dad for providing me with every opportunity to get to this point. You can breathe now!

Lastly, Sarah Bonder, thank you so much for your readiness to engage with my questions, critically examine my work, carry pounds of old bricks, and support me through every step of this project. Mariel Cupp, Mia Pelligrino, Benson Thach, Grey McAlaine, Muriel Panaggio, Evan John, Sofia Chelo, and Chelsey Davillier, of the few faces I've seen during this time, I'm so grateful that they were yours to support me.

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Land is a finite space with an ever expanding population of people, which inevitably increases in value as time moves forward. Cycles between the demand and the availability of housing are in a constant flux, both because of this existential fact and because entities with large amounts of capital are able to expedite rent inflation to make quick profits in real estate investment. Land is valued at different rates depending principally on location, each area containing a disparate character that residents bestow – or project – onto it. Patterns of development in the past have shown that corporations are less concerned with longer term benefits than with a quick return on their investment – the schemes are far more calculated and complex than one may assume of the real estate market roulette. Evolving prices in a given housing market and concurrent displacement of the most at-risk residents is not a novel cycle. An accumulated notion of community rooted in a less populated, working-class, or derelict industrial area has been romanticized by massive real-estate corporations, and marketed to individuals who felt drawn towards a presupposed authenticity.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, many towns and cities in New York, specifically in Brooklyn and, later, the Hudson Valley, have seen sequential trends of new buyers, renters, and rent spikes. Urban growth occurring atop working class neighborhoods inevitably leads to the continual displacement of the most financially vulnerable residents. In Kingston, NY, a former industrial brick manufacturing hub, homes bear evidence of decades of use. The exterior materials display unique formal changes that occur with the passage of time. The brick walls and ornate decorations in Ponckhockie, a neighborhood in Kingston,

individually contain marks of care and neglect. I argue that these features are attractive to property owners and real estate agents who understand, and have shaped, the market for renovation.

Moreover, Kingston's development and growth initiatives promote the creative atmosphere in the city that contains so many career artists. In blending physical space with an intangible sense of individualism, agents are able to manipulate the transitory 'creative class' into purchasing older homes for much higher prices than the previous owners had paid. It is advantageous for landlords to leverage disrepair against their tenants in the hope that the financial burden would be passed on. Even if tenants couldn't afford to pay for their own maintenance, or if landlords straightforwardly increased their monthly rent, the owner would still benefit from reclaiming and upselling the home.

Home restoration unfortunately favors affluence to most other factors. Newcomers in Ponckhockie often take up residence in worn, historic, individually constructed brick buildings, seeking a dichotomous sense of belonging and a personal expression of originality. Properties that had become vacant were typically in that condition because of rent increases by the landlord, indifference towards maintaining the unit, or vulture lending practices that would eventually balloon residents' monthly bills out of control. The residents to fill these vacant brick houses would almost always be able to afford upkeep or restoration, and signaled this to real estate agents by paying an inflated price. It is, however, massive real estate corporations based just miles from Kingston that have ushered in the current neglectful market practices and permitted the city to stall in addressing its housing crisis.

In Ponckhockie, remnants of a once thriving extractive industry exist on the facades and foundations of the houses, so many of which were made with brick that the past residents pulled from the riverbank themselves. In recent years, waves of migration into the historically working-class city of Kingston has led to dramatic increases in housing prices at and above market rate while affordable housing has plateaued. The small city is continually confronted with eager property developers who want to profit off of the evolving residential demographic. These real-estate entities actively promote the artistic climate of Kingston and facilitate the pipeline from which Brooklyn residents move to the Hudson Valley. The people who have historically settled in Kingston cannot keep up with the rising rent and other living-related expenses due to the stagnant minimum wage, and it has become clear that measures need to be taken to protect the sturdy homes of Kingston's long-term residents. Large scale landlords in Kingston are not interested in keeping people in their homes, rather, they are interested in maximizing profit.

The Hutton company would come to be the most notable manufacturer of extractive industries located on the coast of Kingston, New York, but the business itself has similarly eroded. Nineteenth century New Yorkers were enmeshed in cycles of immigration, overcrowding, and demands for labor. After a series of fires tore through the metropolis, building codes necessitated the use of brick, and the jobless now had prospects north of the city.¹ Hutton bricks were hugely responsible for the erection and growth of New York City in the 1860s, yet despite this legacy, the demand for brick was eventually subsumed by wider networks of material trade.² My research has pooled at this junction of decomposing and

¹ "Hudson River Brickmakers," *Jim Ormond*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW5P_rG1PsQ.

² "Hutton Brick Company," *Brick Collecting*, <https://brickcollecting.com/hutton.htm>.

preserving. By analyzing a defunct industry and consistent trends in what materials or appearances are favored in the housing market, I map how that decline coincides with the unique rate of development occurring in Kingston, NY.

Particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century, the flow of material has globalized, or has become incrementally less localized, much like the flow of capital. International finance has yielded incomprehensible amounts of wealth in tandem with an increase in investment of all kinds, establishing convoluted and often invisible webs of transactions. With \$750.8 million in revenue, Acme Brick, based out of Fort Worth, TX, is currently the largest brick distributor in the United States.³ In browsing real estate websites I have found that many recently constructed buildings in Fort Worth are made from brick, like the homes constructed in Ponckhockie a century ago. They, however, often cost around the same price as the multi-family brick buildings in Kingston despite being in better condition on the exterior and containing newer amenities. Acme Brick arguably became *the* quintessential globalized manufacturing and distribution company when it was subsumed by Berkshire Hathaway, multinational conglomerate holding company, whose CEO is none other than Warren Buffet.⁴ Although Acme is headquartered in Texas, Warren Buffet's son, Peter Buffet, is the largest philanthropist in Kingston, NY.

The Hutton Brick Company's downturn occurred because of several factors. The ease of transporting massive amounts of brick on barges down the Hudson River to New York City greatly benefited industries along its coastline, but with the rise of railway technology,

³ "Top Brick Suppliers and Manufacturers in the USA," *Thomasnet*, <https://www.thomasnet.com/articles/top-suppliers/top-brick-suppliers-and-manufacturers-in-the-usa/>

⁴ "The Great Hudson River Brick Industry: Commemorating Three and One Half Centuries of Brickmaking," *George V. Hutton*, (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 2003).

brickmakers in the American South could export their bricks for a lower price.⁵ Shale wasn't abundant in the Hudson Valley, yet it is a crucial component of a sturdy brick, and companies that were forced to purchase shale from elsewhere consequently lost profits. The earlier culture of commerce around the brickyards was more amicable; it was common for contractors and manufacturers to facilitate contracts between nearby businesses. For example, the Croton Aqueduct and Empire State Building are two notorious landmarks of New York City, both of which were built from Hudson Valley brick.⁶ Despite the monumental nature of the projects, construction regulations grew stricter during the mid twentieth century, and bricks were outsourced from other locations rather than local upriver companies. By 1980, Hutton's enterprise had ended.⁷ It turned out that the southern companies entering New York's market *lacked* one crucial structure that actually ensured their success. Laborers in the brickyards of the Hudson Valley were unionized, and had secured higher salaries than their southern counterparts.⁸

Around the turn of the twentieth century, sequential waves of Irish, Italian, and Hungarian immigration, as well as black Americans from the southern United States provided the brickyards with labor to accommodate a rapidly expanding New York City.⁹ The onset of mechanized labor prompted a mass migration of southern agricultural workers to the northern job market.¹⁰ Many family members of the brickyard workers remain living in the Hudson

⁵ "Hudson River Brickmakers," *Jim Ormond*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW5P_rG1PsQ.

⁶ "History of Croton-on-Hudson," *Brick Collecting*, <https://brickcollecting.com/croton.htm>; "Hudson River Brickmakers," *Jim Ormond*.

⁷ "Hutton Brick Company," *Brick Collecting*, <https://brickcollecting.com/hutton.htm>.

⁸ "The Great Hudson River Brick Industry: Commemorating Three and One Half Centuries of Brickmaking," *George V. Hutton*, (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 2003).

⁹ "Hudson River Brickmakers," *Jim Ormond*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW5P_rG1PsQ.

¹⁰ *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (America ReFramed, 2011), <http://www.pruitt-igoe.com/>.

Valley into the twenty-first century, and are responsible for preserving the history of industrial labor.¹¹ As homes in Kingston today, specifically Ponckhockie, are being purchased from the families affiliated with the brick yards, a symbiotic (parasitic) growth of increasingly expensive housing units and developments catering towards more affluent consumers arises. It appears as though the grungy, industrial-era aesthetics associated with the century-old brick manufacturers grow tremendously in value on the market. Rather than the simplistic, efficiency-oriented contemporary stylings that characterize suburbs across America, ornate designs created from brick decorate the trim along many roofs in Ponckhockie. As seen with the glamorization of brownstone buildings in Brooklyn in the 1960s and the emergence of the concept of gentrification, shifting notions of beauty and authority within the market realm of aesthetics can transform a neighborhood on a large scale.¹² The very first targets for renovation and redevelopment were the brick buildings lining the many streets of Brooklyn, which are now some of the most expensive properties nationwide.

When white-collar workers sought to flee the growing prices of Manhattan's mid-century housing market, they turned towards the commonplace rows of brick townhouses in Brooklyn. In the middle of the twentieth century, working class white people fled to the suburbs and outskirts of the city, placing a spotlight on the remaining black and brown residents. "White flight" left behind a deflated real estate market skewed by racist evaluations of neighborhoods of color, with the goal of appealing to communities of artists exiting Manhattan. The vacant townhouses sparked a trend of renovation among the artists and

¹¹ "About The Haverstraw Brick Museum," *Haverstraw Brick Museum*, <https://www.haverstrawbrickmuseum.org/museum-history>.

¹² "The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York," *Oxford University Press*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/reader.action?docID=665446>.

intellectuals moving across the East River. One author writes, “Brownstoning was a cultural revolt against sameness, conformity, and bureaucracy. In a city that was increasingly technocratic, Boerum Hill [Brooklyn] was a ‘real neighborhood,’ a vestige of an ‘authentic community’ lost in a modernizing society.”¹³ The finite amount of land and ever-growing population is constantly revalued in the housing market; brownstones in the twenty-first century are inconceivably valuable. Following the sixty years of exponentially transforming “value” in south Brooklyn, the individuality, authenticity, and creativity of Kingston’s residents is what current developers are deliberately seeking to highlight. At the detriment of affordable homes, real estate agents in Kingston promote the upselling of houses to those who can afford to fully renovate them.

One of these renovated brick buildings is located farther west along the coast of Rondout Creek from the Hutton Brickyard ruins in Ponckhockie. The Cornell Steamboat Building, an enormous brick boathouse, stood derelict from its previous function until inhabited by artists and later, the Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival. Contrary to the cheery name, the company conducts for-profit real estate redevelopment for “undervalued properties.” They specifically own land in the form of residential and commercial buildings in Kingston, Downtown Brooklyn, and Brooklyn Heights, as well as “the Western United States,” and waterfront property in the Carribean. Mega-landlords with extensive development plans, such as Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival, own a troubling number of buildings in the Kingston area. If developers are denied large plots of land, they are able to periodically accrue land to eventuate large infrastructural changes. Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival claims to “have

¹³ “The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York,” *Oxford University Press*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/reader.action?docID=665446>, 5,6.

participated in the redevelopment and the rehabilitation of unique properties for more than 25 years,” which raises eyebrows considering Ponckockie’s nature as an enclave with unique decorative elements covering their brick buildings.¹⁴ In addition to the eleven other properties in the Kingston area that include a dock on the Rondout Creek, undeveloped forest “wilderness,” and lots with large-scale development plans for commercial and residential complexes, Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival own at least one house in the Ponckhockie area.

The developers falsely claim that it is in the nearby, expensive, mixed commercial and residential Rondout neighborhood, as they describe the house as a “1,100 foot single-family home,” and offer that the property is “a good candidate for renovation.” The house is two stories, brick, and contains worn awnings above the windows and porch area. This house is in the vernacular of many of the other houses in Ponckhockie, and therefore is attractive to speculative investors like Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival. Beside the unique wood lattice adornments to the porch columns is a sign that reads “for sale by owner.”¹⁵ Labelling the acreage as “extra wide” suggests enough space for restoration, which is incongruous with the Google Street View image captured in 2012 that shows the home bordered by a playground on one side and overgrown plants on the other.¹⁶ The property was sold in 2020, possibly to Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival. In 2021, the property has increased in value by \$3,489

¹⁴ “About Us,” *Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival*, <https://www.historickingstonwaterfront.com/about-us>.

¹⁵ “Our Properties,” *Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival*, <https://www.historickingstonwaterfront.com/our-properties>.

¹⁶ “Google Maps,” *Google Maps (Google)*, accessed April 11, 2021, <https://www.google.com/maps/place/26+Gill+St,+Kingston,+NY+12401/@41.9235092,-73.9737172,3a,75y,62.21h,82.36t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1s2-ax5nO6EzAhoYSRkIFD8A!2e0!7i133!2!8i6656!4m5!3m4!1s0x89dd0e571825a2e3:0x88b597eb2ee03f5c!8m2!3d41.9235954!4d-73.9734872>.

over a period of thirty days.¹⁷ What often separates investment companies from single unit owners is their ability to sit with a property until it has reached an exaggerated margin of profit. Corporate emotional detachment from tenants, residents, neighbors, or community members is clearly a harmful precedent for anyone involved in property transactions, particularly if desertion or evictions coincide with hugely profitable developments.

Disaffection has been normalized since the onset of the real estate industry, especially as it engaged on larger scales, incorporating more tiers of finance and accumulating hordes of investors. The image-based aspect of the field gradually structured design in a way that accelerated displacement through projecting models of the future devoid of the previous residents. By erasing the appearance of the current community, developers could manipulate conceptions about the neighborhood for higher paying buyers. Woven into capitalist mentality is a process of “creative destruction,” in which physical structures are constantly expected to renew material and psychological conditions to accommodate market competition. This belief was adopted by seemingly progressive urban inhabitants who celebrated a type of “mandatory catastrophe” with the thought that it would spur productivity, and morphed into a similar “creative disruption,” which was often a justification for middle class homeowners to renovate inexpensive urban homes. Capitalizing off of this conceit, developers could facilitate displacement and erasure by rendering working-class neighborhoods as luxury housing.¹⁸ Influenced by the machinations of the free market, urban elites and liberal residents alike pursued an agenda of beautification. As is the case with maps, which delineate a space, one

¹⁷ “26 Gill St, Kingston, NY 12401,” *Zillow*, https://www.zillow.com/homedetails/26-Gill-St-Kingston-NY-12401/32835540_zpid/.

¹⁸ “Hito Steyerl: Duty-Free Art,” *Hito Steyerl, Carles Guerra, and Fernandes João*, (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2015), 12-14.

may wonder if the people existing in that place are invisibly present or visibly absent?¹⁹

Particularly as time progresses, computers grow more adept at rendering and synthesizing spaces.

Back in the middle of the twentieth century, middle class émigrés to Brooklyn’s brownstones in Boerum Hill “avidly renovated houses, stripping away paint and aluminum siding, as well as symbolically ripping off the trappings of mass consumer society to return to an older, more authentic form of life.”²⁰ The mobility and ease that Manhattan’s white collar professionals experienced when moving to Brooklyn suggests that there was little forethought about what space the existing residents would occupy following the arrival of middle class families. The initiative to build an idyllic community was paramount, so much so that the displacement of poorer residents was ignored. Echoes of this individualist pursuit towards an insular haven for the creative class occurs in the contemporary marketing of Kingston.

In 2018, a writer from a blog titled “Brooklyn Based,” published an article in which she described Kingston as “the Hudson Valley’s creative capital”:

Kingston, today, is emerging as a hub of artistic activity and has seen a huge surge in the number of people moving from elsewhere. Unlike many of the more rural surrounding towns, most of Kingston’s newer residents aren’t merely coming to weekend or vacation, but to work, live, and stay. While the Hudson Valley has always had a strong artistic community, Kingston is unique in its deliberate zoning and programming meant to attract, house, and retain working artists and craftspeople, particularly through the Midtown Arts District initiative.²¹

¹⁹ “The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography,” *Katherine Harmon and Gayle Clemans*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 186.

²⁰ “The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York,” *Oxford University Press*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/reader.action?docID=665446>.

²¹ “A Weekend in Kingston, the Hudson Valley’s Creative Capital,” *Brooklyn Based*, <https://brooklynbased.com/2018/11/07/weekend-kingston-ny-where-stay/>.

The artistic conceit of Kingston is featured twice in the paragraph, yet the demographic of transplants is suggested to be responsible for the atmosphere. The City of Kingston's government was involved in the growth of a population of twenty-first century 'Brownstoners' through development initiatives, according to the author. On the government website of the city there are extensive development plans under their "Growing Kingston" tab, easily accessible from the homepage. Above the main slideshow on the website Kingston is described as having a "thriving arts community."²² Even when searching the website for the mention of brick, the only matches I found were in sidewalk proposals. The author of the travel article, however, mentioned the Hutton Brickyards and stressed the companies' importance in manufacturing the physical material of New York City. Ponchockie is likely one of the "several historic neighborhoods facing increasing vacancy" that the author includes. Bureaucratic involvement in Kingston's housing market has shown to be irresponsible in the past by allowing private-sector individuals to reap a profit without the wellbeing of existing residents in mind. A huge factor in Kingston's recent popularity is how the city has been marketed as historic, yet the legacies of Kingston's almost extinct industries and its population fluxes over centuries have been overshadowed by the growth initiatives posted throughout the website.

A Hudson Valley Magazine article from 2014 quotes the owner of Westwood Metes & Bounds Realty discussing the upturn in residents in Brooklyn buying houses in Kingston. "There are wonderful creative people moving up and making it their primary residence because they can [commute] to the city once or twice a week.' The second-home market,

²² "Growing Kingston," *The City of Kingston, NY*, <https://www.kingston-ny.gov/grants>.

which was very quiet in 2011 and 2012, really gained steam last year too.”²³ It is clear that one must have an excess of disposable income to purchase a second home, and those in Kingston are likely owned by residents with incomes substantially above the median. However, there is additionally a steady influx of middle class artistic residents who may have less disposable income but can nonetheless afford to pay for upsold renovated historic homes. This cycle continues because of a lack of affordable housing in the city. Written into zoning laws are many stringent regulations about affordable housing and where it must occur, effectively gerrymandering the city along a class strata.²⁴ Effects of complex schemes to flip houses, essentially quickly completed renovations and reselling to achieve a higher profit, along with the perpetual increase of real estate prices and the prevalence of short-term rentals like Airbnb, have merged to create the housing crisis in Kingston.²⁵

In the past, the city’s zoning codes only necessitated affordable housing inclusion in the construction of new buildings if they were in the “Mixed Use Overlay District,” whose boundaries crossed the city at arbitrary points yielding a jagged and overlapping perimeter, or if the building would contain more than 20 units.²⁶ A 2020 article from the Daily Freeman, Kingston’s local newspaper, recounted a recent city planning board meeting in which the members resisted a push by the Zoning Board of Appeals to require new developments to incorporate 10% of buildings with five or more units to affordable housing. Member of the

²³ “Are We Really the New Brooklyn?,” *Hudson Valley Magazine*, <https://hvmag.com/uncategorized/are-we-really-the-new-brooklyn/>.

²⁴ “Gerrymandering,” *Miriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gerrymandering>.

²⁵ “Housing Crisis in Ulster County Education Event,” *March Gallagher* (Ulster County Comptroller), Zoom, March 19, 2021.

²⁶ “City of Kingston Zoning Map,” *The City of Kingston*, [https://kingston-ny.gov/filestorage/8399/10789/Most_Current_Revised_Zoning_Basemap_600_scale_3x5_NO_street_key_3-23-17-Model_\(002\).pdf](https://kingston-ny.gov/filestorage/8399/10789/Most_Current_Revised_Zoning_Basemap_600_scale_3x5_NO_street_key_3-23-17-Model_(002).pdf).

planning board Kevin Roach “was concerned developers would pass on the cost of creating affordable housing units to market-rate tenants to ensure that rate of return,” replenishing the lost funds from construction, because “developers seek a minimum rate of return for their investments.”²⁷ The bureaucratic involvement of city officials has been incredibly disadvantageous for the security of affordable housing in Kingston. On much different scales, speculative corporations seek to profit endlessly while renters question if their basic right to shelter is at risk of dissolution. Displacement financially serves the various companies with real-estate interests in Kingston by freeing lots of land – that will grow in value exponentially – of their inhabitants.

In August of 1980, grassroots organizations Acción Latina and the Tenants Action Committee distributed pamphlets in their Brooklyn neighborhood calling attention towards the revitalization projects that were “resulting in the displacement of low-income renters in the area. Greedy speculation by real estate agents and middle-class homeowners was leading to the eviction and harassment of longtime residents of color.”²⁸ Gentrification was on the rise in Brooklyn’s public consciousness during the latter half of the twentieth century, but displacement had been a common phenomenon following World War II, excluding the aggressive colonial land restructuring in New York’s history.²⁹ Black residents facing racially-based exclusion from the emerging suburban developments, particularly those around New York City, were pressured into dilapidated or unsafe brownstones, many of which once

²⁷ “Kingston affordable housing proposal meets some resistance from Planning Board,” *Daily Freeman*, https://www.dailyfreeman.com/news/local-news/kingston-affordable-housing-proposal-meets-some-resistance-from-planning-board/article_f23fa40a-8364-11ea-bcbe-0f44c0172191.html.

²⁸ “The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York,” *Oxford University Press*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/reader.action?docID=665446>.

²⁹ The Esopus people, of the larger Lenni Lenape, who manipulated and utilized the clay from the river, were the first to be displaced from what is now known as Kingston, NY.

held the era's previous occupants. These were the buildings that were absorbed by the restoration fever accompanying Manhattan's middle-class exodus.³⁰ Yet the federal government also had its hand in the movement of people in and out of dilapidated homes through the Department of Housing and Urban Development agenda to blend the private-sector and public housing.

This strategy had been critiqued since its conception, but was restructured following debates during the 1990s. Property owners would receive monthly subsidies regardless of the buildings' condition, which would often become dilapidated because of the lack of the private-sector motive of surplus revenue.³¹ Landlords indeed manipulated the public outreach program intended to offset criticism of the seemingly endless failed massive housing projects like Pruitt Igo.³² Much of the complaints failed to acknowledge the lack of maintenance with the property, which stemmed from a racially biased preference to channel funding towards developments and infrastructure for white working and middle class families, outside of city limits, rather than continue with upkeep in the thirty-something towers. Accumulating materials littered the housing project in its few years of existence. Not only was the appearance of the development deteriorated, the health of residents was overlooked when government officials neglected to fund necessary specialized maintenance, demanding that the budget be

³⁰ "The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York," *Oxford University Press*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/reader.action?docID=665446>, 9.

³¹ "Renegotiating the Public-Private Partnership: Efforts to Reform Section 8 Assisted Housing," Heather I. MacDonald, *Journal of Urban Affairs* 22, no. 3 (2000): pp. 279-299, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2166.00057>.

³² While Pruitt-Igoe existed in St. Louis, MO, its trajectory had similarities with that of New York City and surrounding suburbs. Those with power were able to manipulate neglect and maintenance to control the flow of inhabitants in given areas. Planners used many of the same techniques with public housing developments with the burgeoning suburbs, while funneling jobs into already stable income brackets in solely the suburbs. New homeowners in the segregated suburbs evolved gendered labor roles, wherein mothers' dedicated their lives to maintaining their home and caring for their husband, in the workforce, and children, entering the workforce.

extracted from tenants' rents.³³ Without extremely clinical, bureaucratic agencies again targeting property owners rather than potential residents, there may have been an opportunity to avoid displacement through federal programming.

First time homeownership was supposedly one of the main resident-oriented missions of the Federal Housing Authority, a subsidiary of HUD. Committed to allocating mortgages to lower income residents, the FHA sold houses primarily to people of color for next to nothing.³⁴ The housing stock that the city distributed during the twentieth century was hugely problematic – houses had leaking roofs, remnants of toxic early building materials like asbestos and lead, and faulty water, sewage, or heat systems. Authority over maintenance has proven to be one of the most burdensome aspects of rental housing. It is impractical to pass the onus of maintaining the space to tenants, who may already be using a disproportionate amount of their income to pay for housing. In the case of twentieth century FHA programs, mortgage recipients had far too much maintenance and mending to be done for their homes to be anything other than added costs. When abandoned, vulture agents seeking to make commission had identified the carcasses of the buildings, culminating in FHA subsidized buildings accounting for over 20% of property sales over the course of a few years.³⁵ For the real estate speculators gambling on urban properties, the livelihoods of people of color were insignificant, especially when they profited from shaping white residents' racist fears of the city.

Real estate speculation has been incredibly racialized since its conception. The metric of property value consists of a series of subjective assessments often surrounding the neighborhood rather than the state of the material structure. The pervasive belief in the

³³ *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (America ReFramed, 2011), <http://www.pruitt-igoe.com/>.

³⁴ "Race for Profit," Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

³⁵ Ibid.

real-estate market was that proximity to people of color greatly devalued the city properties left in the wake of white flight to the segregated suburban developments. The understanding was that speculative investors would undervalue buildings within the city if they were among communities of racial minorities. Racial stratification existed in the mid-century suburbia-influenced thought that the value of neighborhoods was based on their whiteness.³⁶ With less cash flow, areas of cities were left without a tax base necessary for the neighborhoods to be properly maintained. During interviews with white mothers in Levittown, a notorious suburban development on Long Island, one particular woman claimed that her previous neighborhood in Washington, D.C. was devalued along with the influx of middle-class black families, and stated that as her justification for the exclusion of black families from massive suburban developments like Levittown.³⁷ Biased involvement occurred in the suburbs as well as the city in the form of segregated single-family developments, in public policy as well as affordable housing policy. The developers could preserve their outward facing image by passing the overt racism in real estate onto individual residents' bigotry and save money by passing the burden of maintenance inherited by the State onto other private agents, who often neglected maintenance in turn.

Well into the twenty-first century, when it seems as though distance is no longer even a glimmer of a deterrent in land ownership, residents remain in fear of displacement because of emotionally and physically absent landlords. With increasing frequency, property owners are in discord with the constantly fluctuating economy in Ulster County. The standard for landlords with no ties to the locale is yet again overwhelmingly to disregard poverty and vacancy rates,

³⁶ "Race for Profit," Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

³⁷ "Crisis in Levittown (1957)," *Free Documentaries | Crisis in Levittown (1957) | Racism in USA Rare Footage*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ww9OckLY1g>.

most often by increasing rent or neglecting necessary maintenance. The 2018-2019 government shutdown during the Trump presidency was felt to much different extents; for some it was a financial disaster, while for others it made no difference.³⁸ Marisa McClinton, a government employee and Kingston resident, experienced displacement at the hands of an absent landlord. Marisa was furloughed, required to work a full schedule without income, and eventually lost her home because of it. The income she deserved was withheld from her, and like many others in Ulster County, she suffered from this economic crisis. The out of state developer in Georgia was indifferent towards the crisis in New York, leaving Marisa to bear the burden.³⁹ Whether existing several hundreds or thousands of miles away, out-of-state status may as well apply to Brooklyn based developers who similarly look the other way when communities are harmed by their futile objective of infinitely profiting.

Statistical Manipulation in Kingston

Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival, based in the Cornell Steamboat Building, has purchased about ten properties along Kingston's Rondout creek waterfront.⁴⁰ It is unlikely that the offices in the Steamboat Building are bustling, considering the company's origins in

³⁸ "Government Shutdowns in the United States," Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, March 18, 2021), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_shutdowns_in_the_United_States#January_2018.

³⁹ "Housing Crisis in Ulster County Education Event," *Marisa McClinton* (Ulster County resident), Zoom, March 19, 2021.

⁴⁰ "Our Properties," *Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival*, <https://www.historickingstonwaterfront.com/our-properties>.

Brooklyn. Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival is actually a portion of the larger Clocktower Properties company, a commercial real-estate management company that owns several properties in Brooklyn, and have only expanded into the Hudson Valley in more recent years, much like a similar speculation and management company.⁴¹ E&M Management, however, operates on a more widespread scale than Clocktower Properties. In 2018, E&M Management was involved in a complex two year long flipping scheme of large-scale housing units in Kingston and around Ulster County, some of which were designated as affordable units. E&M Management has had real estate stakes along the Rondout Creek as well, owning the Kingston Waterfront apartments, a brick laden exterior development with supposedly affordable and market rate units.⁴²

During the housing crisis occurring in tandem with the Covid-19 pandemic, trends in landlords demanding higher rents *before* cities enacted the Emergency Tenant Protection Act sprung up nationwide. Tenants in Kingston urged policymakers to pass the Emergency Tenant Protection Act, which distant landlords with property in the Hudson Valley were hoping to usurp before the act was passed.⁴³ The vacancy survey that the city needed to determine its eligibility for tenant protection in early 2020 had been delayed “because the Center for Governmental Research still [was] waiting to hear back from E&M Management, which [owned] the Stony Run apartment complex on Hurley Avenue, as well as ... the Dutch Village apartment complex on Washington Avenue. He said the complexes are large so the answers

⁴¹ “About Us,” *Clocktower Properties*, <https://www.cloctowerproperties.com/about-us>.

⁴² “Kingston Waterfront,” *E & M Management*, <https://emmanagement.com/property/kingston-waterfront/>.

⁴³ “Kingston Study Needed For Rent Control Not Done Because City Needs to Hear Back From Landlords, Alderman Says,” *The Daily Freeman*, https://www.dailyfreeman.com/news/local-news/kingston-study-needed-for-rent-control-not-done-because-city-needs-to-hear-back-from/article_593e85ba-46fa-11ea-bdbb-372b8ce91f5f.html.

from their owners matter to the outcome of the study.”⁴⁴ The scope of their land ownership in Kingston is incongruous with the lack of personal attention given to their properties. The ultimate decision by Mayor Steve Noble was that the 6.7% vacancy rate reported by the commissioned study was not high enough for the state to grant the city benefits through the Emergency Tenant Protection Act.⁴⁵ The actions by E&M Management have an effect on a much larger population of Kingston’s residents than solely their tenants. The company appears to be unphased about the public decoding their strategy as if they have understood to stay mute with experience.

E&M Management, a company based out of Brooklyn, NY, has purchased incrementally more multi-family residential developments in the Hudson Valley since the 2010s. E&M Management is widely regarded as a controversial property corporation, and regularly receives ample backlash for converting rent-stabilized apartments into those at market rate. In 2015 in Chelsea, New York City, a lawsuit against E&M management was issued because tenants “said E&M Management was using the threat of an impending 2018 rent reset to pressure residents to sell the firm their units so E&M could gain control of the building and pressure the holdouts to leave, in the hopes of eventually developing the site.”⁴⁶ Class action complaints against E&M executives litter Google, one of which details an extensive history of the real-estate company denying wages to its employees.⁴⁷ Neighbors, tenants, and laborers have all experienced exploitation at some degree by this management

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Kingston Not Eligible for Rent Control at This Time Study Finds,” *The Daily Freeman*, https://www.dailyfreeman.com/news/local-news/kingston-not-eligible-for-rent-control-at-this-time-study-finds/article_27a1d4ec-5368-11ea-a88a-ab01effad08.html.

⁴⁶ “Something is rotten” At Chelsea co-op, owners say,” *The Real Deal*, <https://therealdeal.com/2019/11/15/something-is-rotten-at-chelsea-co-op-owners-say/.cdxcx>.

⁴⁷ “Contrera v. Langer,” *Court Listener*; <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/6165140/1/contrera-v-langer/>.

company. Complaints against E&M range “from aggressively pushing out tenants to failing to provide basic maintenance in areas like heating and plumbing.”⁴⁸ A dark tactic used by landowners to evict their tenants is to leverage the cost of maintenance, which is disproportionately large if one is also dedicating so much of their income to rent. Unaffordable or severely cost burdened renters dedicate upwards of 30% of their income to rent, which is a ratio that changes drastically depending on income bracket.⁴⁹ The New York Times shone a spotlight on a subset of the management in 2018 after they evicted 15 low-income residents and sued 250 rent-regulated residents from a property in East Harlem.⁵⁰ The list goes on. Threats to affordable housing precede trends of displacement.

Evidence of E&M’s profit-driven motives exist in Kingston as well. In February of 2020, tenants at the Stony Run apartment complex received letters in the mail demanding that they renew their leases at a 200% increased rate than what they paid and could afford. An attorney for the company claimed that the letter “wasn’t theirs,” which comes as a surprise given that the bio on their company website writes that E&M is forever “aggressively pursuing value-added acquisitions,” elaborating that the company’s “leadership identifies and capitalizes on opportunities in the marketplace. Integrated within these communities, E&M’s management team keeps its fingers on the pulse of the market to identify opportunities as they develop.” To acknowledge the pulse of an immaterial construct before the people in “these communities,” is telling of this business’ character. Anything that the company doesn’t flip is claimed as a

⁴⁸ “Controversial Landlord Ramps Up in the Hudson Valley,” *The Real Deal*, https://therealdeal.com/tristate/issues_articles/controversial-landlord-ramps-up-in-the-hudson-valley/.

⁴⁹ “Housing Crisis in Ulster County Education Event,” *Evelyn Wright* (Ulster County Housing Action Plan), Zoom, March 19, 2021.

⁵⁰ “The Eviction Machine Churning Through New York City,” *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/05/20/nyregion/nyc-affordable-housing.html>.

“stabilized, income-producing assets within its long-term portfolio.” What is less surprising is the fictitious statement that follows, which claims that the company “is tenant-focused. The leadership and staff take a “hands-on” approach to providing the highest level of tenant satisfaction, by meeting needs quickly, intelligently and creatively. The E&M team understands that thriving properties and satisfied tenants go hand-in-hand,” and apparently prides itself on satisfying and quickly meeting the needs of its tenants.⁵¹

Letters sent to the Stony Run residents occurred when E&M simultaneously acquired larger development complexes like Sunset Gardens in Kingston and other apartment buildings in Kingston’s Ulster County.⁵² They also own substantial apartment buildings in Brooklyn and Queens, and given a certain financial and spatial authority that comes with land ownership, E&M Management could easily repeat offenses in the past and threaten their at-risk tenants in the name of profit.⁵³ The suspicious letters sent to units at Stony Run also came at a time when housing advocates were noticing patterns in threats to rent control in Kingston and more broadly in the country. An article published in Kingston’s Daily Freeman on the 13th of June in 2019 quoted an executive for RUPCO, an organization responsible for building much of the city’s affordable housing. Executive O’Connor listed the many barriers to affordable housing – many of which were not Kingston-specific dilemmas – when asked about potential rent-control measures. Like in many quickly-expanding cities, the threat of vulture real estate purchases for high profit developments undermines organizations’ pushes towards rent control.

⁵¹ “E & M Property Management,” *E & M Management*, <https://emmanagement.com/>.

⁵² “Stony Run Lawyer Says Letter Hinting At...,” *The Daily Freeman*, https://www.dailyfreeman.com/news/local-news/stony-run-lawyer-says-letter-hinting-at-200-percent-rent-increase-wasnt-theirs-but-alderman/article_dc6b53ee-4c3d-11ea-9227-135833d0ee98.html.

⁵³ “Our Properties,” *E & M Management*, <https://emmanagement.com/properties/>.

Some believed that E&M Management purposefully failed to respond to the vacancy survey commissioned by Kingston’s city government in order to prohibit the enactment of the Emergency Tenant Protection Act during the Covid-19 pandemic. A collection of housing advocates in Kingston “... has noted action such as widespread evictions and noncompliance throughout this process. It is clear that these actions by predatory property owners have had their intended effect’ of artificially high vacancy rates that ostensibly block tenant protections.”

⁵⁴ Vacancy rates can signal a multitude of dilemmas in a given city, and can point towards problems as broad as how urgent the housing crisis or job market is. Vacant apartments are targets for greedy speculation and upselling by real-estate firms. On occasion, property owners are conscious of vacancy rates in their properties and their respective cities, and how that applies to supply and demand. With a commercial apartment building operating on bank loans, high vacancy rates would signal to the bank that the landlord may have to lower the rent and couldn’t pay their debts because of it. For units in New York City, vacancy in their building mattered more for E&M Management than the tenants within.

In the mid 2010s, E&M purchased a large brick apartment building from 1920 in Harlem, New York. Reportedly, management and maintenance suffered under their ownership, while vacant units were particularly attractive to the company. A New York Times profile chronicles their brutal history, writing that following the purchase of the Dunbar apartment building in Harlem, “E&M Associates began pushing out longtime tenants, remodeling vacant apartments and charging far higher rents.”⁵⁵ Incessant conflict created by E&M is never

⁵⁴ “Kingston Tenants Urge Protections Even if Rent Control Can’t...,” *The Daily Freeman*, https://www.dailyfreeman.com/news/local-news/kingston-tenants-urge-protections-even-if-rent-control-can-t/article_ee4d8bb2-5418-11ea-998b-9f318b822ddf.html.

⁵⁵ “The Eviction Machine Churning Through New York City,” *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/05/20/nyregion/nyc-affordable-housing.html>.

considered to be a deterrent to the company's image considering they are almost universally hated. The housing crisis sustains their profits through instability. The stagnant crisis becomes stasis, the pervasive norm in the market, "as a perpetual transition between the private and public spheres."⁵⁶ E&M manipulates the material conditions of their units to control the infiltration of higher income residents to their properties. Over the course of two years, E&M in tandem with other large-scale mogul competitors escalated Kingston's housing crisis to a degree that the city had yet to experience. In 2018 and 2019, speculative real estate groups and anonymous LLC's acquired over one thousand rental units, exacerbating the unaffordability of homes in Ulster County.⁵⁷

Amidst the confusion of 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic, E&M flipped all but one of the five properties that they had purchased in 2018, making them the forerunner as Kingston's opponent to affordable housing. The largest development that E&M sold was the Stony Run complex, where residents had received threatening letters. Compared to Stony Run's 267 units, E&M's second largest property, the Sunset Gardens complex containing 217 units, was the only development retained. Lakeshore Villas with 151 units, Hudson Valley Landing with 68 units, and Black Creek Rd., with an undisclosed number of units, were also flipped by E&M in 2020. Including the surge of the short-term rental market catered towards tourists or travelers, which often results in the remote ownership of properties, a colossal 18% of Ulster County's rental stock has been flipped since 2018.⁵⁸ And because occupancy tax is passed onto the rental guests in most cases of short-term rentals, landlords have yet another lucrative incentive to

⁵⁶ "Hito Steyerl: Duty-Free Art," *Hito Steyerl, Carles Guerra, and Fernandes João*, (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2015).

⁵⁷ "Housing Crisis in Ulster County Education Event," *March Gallagher* (Ulster County Comptroller), Zoom, March 19, 2021.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

suck up inexpensive housing stock.⁵⁹ Before E&M flipped Stony Run, the corporation neglected to respond to the City's vacancy survey, and Kingston was unable to enact the Emergency Tenant Protection Act. The corporation's actions have clearly caused displacement and inflated rents long before their push into the Hudson Valley, while the concentrated effects of their unchecked development is experienced by members of Kingston's community.

The decline of Kingston's brick industry has provided the backdrop for rampant speculation in the small city, which began in the wake of postwar New Deal politics and evolved with segregated development around urban centers. As people grew disenchanted with stagnant racial politics and meager change brought about by liberal sensibilities during the middle of the twentieth century, polarization was occurring along grids of the city as well.⁶⁰ The foundation that was created allowed for government agents to reconstruct jeopardised neighborhoods while establishing debt or investments to financially help or hinder individuals based on their asset class. The top-down macroeconomic pattern produces income gains for elites, often living in global finance hubs themselves, while immense barriers to entry mean that corporate stocks are overwhelmingly owned by the wealthiest segment of the population.⁶¹ Housing advocates have identified the too-big-to-fail corporations of the twenty-first century as a materialization of postwar liberal dreams of globalization and cosmopolitanism.⁶² In the 1960's, as opposed to their conservative counterparts seeking homogeneity in the suburbs,

⁵⁹ "Airbnb Occupancy Tax Guide," MyLodgeTax, accessed April 11, 2021, <https://www.avalara.com/mylodgetax/en/resources/airbnb-occupancy-tax-guide.html>.

⁶⁰ "The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York," *Oxford University Press*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/reader.action?docID=665446>.

⁶¹ "Until the Next Crash," Jonathan Levy, *n+1*, January 23, 2019, <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/until-the-next-crash/>.

⁶² "Hito Steyerl: Duty-Free Art," *Hito Steyerl, Carles Guerra, and Fernandes João*, (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2015).

white, middle class, urban liberals were not intimidated by dilapidated brownstones. “Rather than laborers in declining industries along the waterfront... Brooklyn’s new residents worked in finance, law, publishing, education, and the arts.”⁶³ They altered the appearance of the neighborhoods they entered, transforming aging housing stock into “historic” architecture of the urban core, unaware of the watchful eye of the real-estate market and the future consequences of global finance.

⁶³ “The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York,” *Oxford University Press*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/reader.action?docID=665446>.

ii

Following centuries of extractive industries along the Hudson River, seemingly unrelated factors have woven together to set the stage for a uniquely high rate of commercial real estate development in Kingston, NY. Despite the historical and sustained majority population of working class residents, speculative developers continue to construct luxury projects which cater towards incoming visitors. Along the bank of the Hudson the first generation of corporate giants, inspired by sublime paintings of the valley, erected mansions from the marble, stone, and clay, but rejected the sight of labor – quarry pits and congested towns. As the brick industry that once employed so much of the city was subsumed by larger avenues of trade from the South, the deteriorating kiln structures produced brick exclusively for governmental projects. The enormous developments that arose during the twentieth century were orchestrated by elite government officials and private investors acting in the interests of profit rather than effective housing. Those with capital and power organized and benefited from the construction of racially polarized, white, suburban neighborhoods, bordering poorly maintained, massive structures housing residents of color in the nearby city. Displacement harms the most vulnerable residents as a product of the urban real estate market, rooted in the neglect of people and their environment.

Placing importance on the appearance of physical material rather than the utility of underlying structures allow matters of the human psyche to be forgotten. Forty percent of the world's population lives within about 60 miles of a coast, and despite rapid sea level rise occurring over past decades, people continue to flock to waterfront destinations for its appeal

as a luxury venue. Calls by waterfront communities to end development on the coast are overlooked by institutions backed by unfathomable amounts of capital. The same waterfront communities exist without tax bases to construct elaborate climate change mitigation plans. When hotels or luxury housing developments spring up on the coast, their proprietor clearly demonstrates that they are *not* investing in the people situated in the surrounding neighborhoods. Displacement can be forgotten because its flashy cousin, gentrification, often allows for design trends and popular materials emerging from elite urban spheres to infiltrate communities where incomes have stagnated for generations.

Due to an economic system that profits from keeping people within cycles of poverty, and creates an exponentially widening income gap, some grow incredibly rich while a large portion of the public subsist on unlivable wages. “Between 1980 and 2014 the bottom 50% of the US income distribution saw their incomes grow by 1%. The top 10% saw gains of 121%. The top 1%: 204%. The top 0.001%: 636 %.”⁶⁴ Capital has proven to dictate power over land, flows of resources, even geopolitics, and pools around already massive concentrations of wealth. “This is what income distribution looks like when growth is asset-led.”⁶⁵ Without disposable income and a trickle-down effect of negligence with their properties by landlords operating on massive scales, tenants are often stripped of opportunities to live in improved environments. Any repercussions of this lack of maintenance, like health problems, disruptions to jobs, and debts are additionally beared by renters or residents in areas threatened by speculative real-estate agents.

⁶⁴ “Until the Next Crash,” Jonathan Levy, *n+1*, January 23, 2019, <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/until-the-next-crash/>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Evidence of negligence within properties can be auspicious to developers, who are able to overlook living conditions and instead market surfaces for their rustic or rundown qualities. With time, wear, and movement of people in and out of their surroundings, the tangible changes form. Vast networks of trade allow for the movement of materials, which facilitate the transformation of the constructions' outward appearances. The built environment is mediated through a series of subjective human experiences – their perceptions of the appearance accumulating to create and recreate sentiments. Waves of inhabitants in the brick buildings along the Hudson River have both characterized the area through indications of use and have composed its atmosphere by amassing experiences. Large-scale real-estate corporations are often severely disconnected from the immaterial consequences of their imposition.

Personal memories influence how a viewer perceives their environment; the sense of intimacy a subject feels determines whether or not to consider a space – which has connotations of transit or disaffection – a place, which can be thought of as a locus of desire.⁶⁶ How a space is organized, who has dominion, or who uses a space can shift how inhabitants or visitors perceive it, effectively shaping their idea of *place*. “In contemporary criticism, the word ‘space’ represents the desentimentalised (some would say dehumanized) postmodern version of place. It is used as a neutral sociological and economic synonym for the more literary, aesthetic, cultural, sentimental, and sometimes ecological word ‘nature.’”⁶⁷ *Place*, therefore, is the aspect of *displacement* that is distinctly human; it is the immaterial that has been manipulated by entities and marketed at people who would *replace* the people who previously endowed the space with sentiment. Nature, however, should not be confused with a

⁶⁶ Lippard, Lucy R. *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*. New York: New Press, 1998.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

mythical force outside of human control. The landscape is an arena where people project their ways of seeing the world and their relationships to what they can view. Entities are able to curate what is visible through capital and construction, either speeding up or slowing down geological processes thought to be outside of human control.

The experiences and subsequent imagination that form a *place* for one person are worlds different for the next. The clay and stone quarry pits along the river were ambiguous spaces, and likely perceived in starkly different lights by the individual with the highest salary and a worker in a relative amount of imminent danger, or between a socialite on the lawn of an estate and a laborer digging clay across the river. While change itself is immutable, how spaces were created, how they transform, and what resources enter and exit, can alter personal affinities and notions of beauty as well. After the turn of the twentieth century, manufacturing cement blocks could replace a dozen bricks, and consequently blocks took the place of bricks as the sturdiest building supply, leading bricks to be used strictly as cosmetic adornments.⁶⁸ Almost overnight, bricks made from the Hudson River shifted in purpose, allowing all previous uses to gradually be considered historical with the passage of time. The fired clay from the river ended up fulfilling very divergent needs, either lining walkways or constructing some of the largest housing developments in the country. Both labor and material in the Hudson Valley adapted to the demands from New York City to create novel landscapes under the leadership of agents of the state.

Analyzing development in Kingston, and the Hutton plant's change of direction from principal manufacturer of building materials to commissioned supplier for select government

⁶⁸ "Hudson River Brickmakers," *Jim Ormond*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW5P_rG1PsQ.

projects would not be possible without examining key figures in New York City's government and their motives. Constructing massive highway systems that connected suburbs to labor in the city mirrored the calls and immaterial networking that brought private capital investors into the design and creation of public housing projects. During the twentieth century, sites of labor were mechanized, people migrated, notions of place shifted on a wide scale, largely prompted by geopolitical machinations out of the hands of the general public. While select individuals took stock of the national post-war unrest, and subsequent public works, welfare, or social security programs, their intentions behind infrastructure could be skewed towards biased cycles of profit.

Returning GI's from WWII prompted the dozen brickyards still operating in the Hudson Valley to amp up operations in order to supply the demand for housing. Of these new developments to be constructed out of materials from the Hudson Valley's famed industry, Co-Op City in the Bronx has remained the largest housing development in the United States into the twenty-first century.⁶⁹ Co-Op City's construction was at a unique point in the history of New York's growth because Hudson River brick manufacturers had to compete with bricks entering from southern states, and laborers who had collectivized and formed unions had to compete with southern non-unionized workers with much lower salaries. Unions and corporations negotiated their way to supplying bricks for Co-Op City by lowering wages of upstate brick workers.⁷⁰ Around this same time, another project was built from bricks manufactured along the banks of the Hudson River. Stuyvesant Town - Peter Cooper Village

⁶⁹ "Hudson River Brickmakers," *Jim Ormond*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW5P_rG1PsQ.

⁷⁰ "The Great Hudson River Brick Industry: Commemorating Three and One Half Centuries of Brickmaking," *George V. Hutton*, (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 2003).

stands as a massive housing development on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, a monument to the history of displacement and development involved at the state level.

Through a rise to power that involved befriending key members of New York Cities’ local government, Robert Moses was able to transform the urban framework in a way that specifically targeted low income communities, often composed of people of color. Moses razed family residences and businesses to create the microcosm of Stuyvesant Town, an exclusive public-private venture, financed and owned by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, intended to contain housing for middle-income families.⁷¹ What resulted from Moses’ initiative to bring banks and investors to the public sphere was a segregated housing complex, racist from its beginnings due to the investors’ fear that black residents – even black veterans whom the complex was promised to – would harm its profitability.⁷² Today, the units in Stuyvesant Town are owned by The Blackstone Group, a leading international investment management corporation, and are sold at luxury market rate.⁷³ Since 2006, the capital giant has received incredibly inflated “returns,” along with their gradual conversion of rent-regulated units. In 2015, “about 45% of the complex's residents [were] still paying the regulated rents – down from 71% in 2006.”⁷⁴ Private sector involvement in housing of this scale allows very few entities to reap enormous profits while rent-regulated units dissolve, and was facilitated by Moses’ manipulation of early development practices. Robert Moses was able to enact his

⁷¹ “The Great Hudson River Brick Industry: Commemorating Three and One Half Centuries of Brickmaking,” *George V. Hutton*, (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 2003).

⁷² “Stuyvesant Town–Peter Cooper Village (Controversy).” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, April 25, 2021. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuyvesant_Town%E2%80%93Peter_Cooper_Village#Controversy

⁷³ Brown, Eliot. “Stuyvesant Sale Typifies Boom in Real Estate.” *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, October 21, 2015.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/stuyvesant-sale-typifies-boom-in-real-estate-1445388300>.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

agenda through the State with the funds of private entities because of a sustained and intentional appeal to the financial elite and most powerful men in New York City's government.

Between 1927 and 1929, Robert Moses served as New York's Secretary of State. Then-governor of the state, Al Smith, appointed Moses despite his lack of experience because of their close connection. Moses' additional connections to Yale, Oxford, and Columbia University allowed him to move around freely within the elitist government circles. As the Secretary of State, Moses utilized Smith's connections and power to enact legislation such as the Long Island State Park Commission as well as the State Council of Parks. Moses cautiously extended his ambitions without drawing too much negative attention. His racist development practices and harmful building techniques had yet to be exposed to the general public of New York City. Moses benefitted from his class connections as well as government programs such as the New Deal, wherein he could utilize eminent domain, or state-sponsored land acquisition, to displace poor residents.

In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt created the New Deal in response to growing financial devastation associated with the Great Depression.⁷⁵ His New Deal aimed to bring jobs to those suffering from the Depression, which would in turn stabilize the economy. As a part of the New Deal, additional sources of funding were funneled into cities across America. During this time of tremendous financial insecurity throughout the country, Moses was able to capitalize on strategies to drastically transform life in a vulnerable metropolis. He was, coincidentally, one of the only city officials with enough experience and project ideas under his belt when this

⁷⁵ "Robert Moses." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, April 27, 2021. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Moses.

newfound funding entered New York City's palms.⁷⁶ With the capital, Moses continued to invest in development projects. In 1949, during work on Stuyvesant Town, Robert Moses obtained the title of Head of the Committee on Slum Clearance, allotting him even more power. This committee came at an opportune time for Moses, as the Federal Housing Act was put into practice in 1949 as well. This act financed urban development by providing developers federal money to offset the high cost of clearing urban land. An appealing prospect for many developers, Moses used this act to his advantage, serving as a blueprint for large-scale development well into the twenty-first century.

The suburbanization surrounding New York City's metropolitan area transcended the need for Hudson Valley brick as it became increasingly used for state sponsored building projects. Orchestrated in part by Robert Moses, the snaking roads and interstate expressways allowed inexpensive, efficiently produced materials to enter the expanding suburbs. "Lump together all the superhighways in existence in all the cities on earth in 1945, and their mileage would not add up to as many miles as Robert Moses was planning in 1945 to build in one city."

⁷⁷ Masons who traditionally worked with brick would spend more time focusing on exterior ornamentation, but the identical homes that sprung up in suburban developments necessitated large volumes of the same material and unspecialized labor. Mass production and consumption were made possible because of similarly large scale highway construction. Moses held the belief that cars were superior to public transportation, possibly influenced by the profits he reaped from blending private markets and government spheres to construct elaborate networks of roads. Out of the thirteen expressways that Moses created in New York City, his

⁷⁶ Caro, Robert A. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Cross-Bronx Expressway displaced seven miles of people. At one point in his career, he was simultaneously overseeing the construction of the Major Deegan Expressway, the Harlem River Drive, as well as the Alexander Hamilton Bridge.

With Robert Moses' unchecked expansion into the low income neighborhoods he deemed expendable, he gradually acquired a loyal team of critics who cited patterns in his development which would disenfranchise low-income residents. Despite residents' widespread discontent with the expressways and park projects that catered towards weekenders from the surrounding suburbs, Moses destroyed the notion that a public figure must avoid all controversy.⁷⁸ Moses may have revelled in the fact that he was undoubtedly controversial, because he continued to create almost inconceivable projects with the backing of colossal financiers until the end of his career. Community members in New York City began to question if all public works projects had to involve the use of autocratic power. Without competition in the capitalist marketplace, economists analysing situations of development through unimaginative foundational principles believed that "pure democracy has neither the imagination, nor the energy, nor the disciplined mentality to create major improvements."⁷⁹ Is a public work truly public if it was created by a totalitarian regime rather than derived from the people? Can Robert Moses' developments be considered public works projects if they did indeed serve many communities, but on his terms – expanding roadways to allow materials to efficiently travel and quickly construct profitable suburbs, favoring white, wealthier residents?

As fingers of imperialism, the road becomes a *place* because it is a site on which mobility occurs. Sites of transportation allow for materials to flow through the environment

⁷⁸ Fishman, Robert. "Revolt of the Urbs." In *Robert Moses and the Modern City: the Transformation of New York*. Ballon, Hilary, and Kenneth T. Jackson. New York: W.W. Norton, 2007.

⁷⁹ Ibid. Raymond Moley

after extraction. Resources can pass boundaries through the use of roads, whereas without them resources remain relatively static. Roads can be used to police the exchange of material or the limits of a locality; roads can be used to divide communities – sites imbued with a sense of cohesion between the people and the ground on which they stand. Displacement is an intrinsic factor of an area considered expropriated. Even the notion of community is thought to be fleeting in the present day, as cycles of displacement extend throughout New York City's boroughs, Kingston, and cities beyond. Robert Moses' Cross-Bronx Expressway severed a neighborhood in half, which established drastically different qualities of life on either side of the road. Of the seven miles of people displaced, the city had to plow through its own lifelines to create what would become a congested path leading drivers out of Manhattan.

Roads can also be thought of as arterials connecting paths to the heart of a metropolis. A beating heart circulates blood; the reciprocal nature of roads allows for the necessary materials to enter the city and exit it as well. Additionally, restricting movement in the arterials is damaging to the heart. When transportation is blocked, and resources cannot enter and exit the city, the transactional economy suffers.⁸⁰ A larger network of veins are affected if one resource stops moving through an artery. New York's lifelines, its water and gas mains, the electric cables and telephone wires, sewers and steam pipes, and residential streets and subways would all be dissected to pave the Cross-Bronx Expressway throughout the

⁸⁰ To end the exchange of fluids to a limb would render it useless. The hike in refrigerators as a kitchen essential led to the eventual dissolution of a mining industry along the Hudson that was also once prosperous like the brick manufacturers. The men who worked at the Hutton Brickyards during the 19th and early 20th centuries relied on the labor of extracting ice from frozen sections of the river during the winter to financially sustain themselves and their families. Seasonal work was common for all brick factories because of precipitation's negative effect on bricks. Rain, snow and cold weather would damage the bricks beyond use. Ice block chippers annually supplied Hudson Valley and New York City residents with blocks for ice boxes until refrigerators were inexpensive enough to include in nearly every home. This would occur before the middle of the 20th century, predating the decline of the brick industry. Without an active exchange, the arterial loses its purpose; its identity as a place was predicated on the mobility that occurred on the site.

mid-twentieth century. Uprooting residents in their apartments, which made up the flesh and bones of the city with their iron, steel, mortar, and brick, was apparently the simplest component of Moses' disruptive plans. The displacement caused by the Cross-Bronx Expressway was explained by Moses in one key address: "when you operate in an overbuilt metropolis, you have to hack your way with a meat ax."⁸¹ His visceral justification for the harm he caused to the *body* of the city has remained as an iconic reminder of the apathy of post-WWII real-estate development.

Without an active exchange, the arterial loses its purpose; its identity as a place was predicated on the mobility that occurred on the site. For an individual who resides off the grid, they are unreachable by cables, roads, privatized electric companies, and exploitation by spatial monopolies spawned via capitalist marketplace. This person also functions outside of the market and is not dependent on income for consumption. Yet a larger threat looms above (and below) the heads of anyone regardless of their entanglement in capitalism. *Any* location that is suspected to harbor valuable resources under its surface is at risk of subjugation by mining operations. This loophole identified by extractive industries - that most property owners have a deed for the surface, but not actually the ground that's far underneath, which is on the market to be purchased - has been used to claim dominion over resources.⁸² "Who owns the ground beneath your feet?" asks how our *places* have been constructed through the transfer of physical material.

By orchestrating the flow of material, entities can achieve power over others.

Possession or manufacturing of certain materials can be as mild as planting a flower or as utile

⁸¹ Caro, Robert A. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975.

⁸² "Undermining: a Wild Ride through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West," *Lucy R. Lippard*, (New York: The New Press, 2014), 8.

as mining clay that will become a home. Extraction and exchange of material can have broad political consequences or imperceptible effects on communities. Rather than the thought that people intrinsically crave war because of boredom and suppressed violence, there is a much clearer trajectory between conflict and access to resources. Whether extracting oil from reserves deep within the Earth, a primary motivator for the Gulf War, or uranium and lithium mining during the Cold War, domination over material transportation seems to be a war strategy adopted by governments, corporations, and others. America's allies during the start of the Cold War received weapons, one of the USA's main exports at the time, through a nonmonetary transaction, referred to as "grants" for capitalist-aligned governments.⁸³ During global financial unrest in the 2008 recession, networks of commodity exchange morphed as the US Federal Reserve scrambled to ensure American success in the world market. The Arab Spring was, in part, caused by a revolution in Tunisia over high food prices, which resulted from lowered US interest rates and expensive world commodities.⁸⁴ Geopolitical consequences arose from capital flows that were controlled by powerful organizations. The matter of who is physically removing the material versus who is responsible for organizing the operation is paramount in analyzing extractive industries. Much of imperialism is dictated by spatial relationships – who controls the land, extracted earth, and flow of material.

Who owns the ground beneath your feet?

⁸³ Schiller, Herbert. "Some Effects of the Cold War on United States Foreign Trade." *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 37, no. 4 (1955): 428-30. Accessed April 16, 2021. doi:10.2307/1925859.

⁸⁴ "Until the Next Crash," Jonathan Levy, n+1, January 23, 2019, <https://nplusemag.com/online-only/online-only/until-the-next-crash/>.

In the nineteenth century, when the Hudson River and its tributaries were significantly more polluted than they are currently, waterfront property was *not* desirable. Like the naturally occurring tributaries that were similarly contaminated by industrial runoff, sewage accumulated in settlements freely flowed from areas directly into the currents of the Hudson.⁸⁵ Beside a section of the Croton Aqueduct, New York City's vital water-delivering artery, was the Croton Landfill, which rested on a peninsula jutting into the river.⁸⁶ The landfill was eventually removed at the end of the twentieth century because it was leaking leachate, water that had passed through solids containing contaminants.⁸⁷ Residents downstream of the landfill endured noxious fumes rising from the bank of the river for decades before it was officially addressed. The Croton Aqueduct, conversely, was able to reach residents in New York City en masse with relative efficiency, and additionally marked a shift from hierarchical class divisions in terms of water access. Densely populated, working-class areas would receive clean water around the same times as wealthy residents of Manhattan island, altering “the moral and physical influence of water.”⁸⁸ Townships between the garbage landfill and the metropolis seemed to have been deprived of this resource, despite being the very communities that culled clay and stacked brick to create the massive water pipeline.

Four years after the landfill was removed, a scrap metal smelting facility in Newburgh was shut down because it was leaking oil, lead, and other industrial toxins like PCBs into the

⁸⁵ “Up River: Man-Made Sites of Interest on the Hudson from the Battery to Troy,” *The Center For Land Use Interpretation*, (New York: Blast Books, 2008).

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 72.

⁸⁷ “Leachate,” *Science Direct*, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/leachate>.

⁸⁸ Gandy, Matthew. 2003. “Engineering and the Technological Sublime,” *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), pp. 32-51.

soil, and consequently, the Hudson River.⁸⁹ Polychlorinated Biphenyls were components in industrial coolants, and seeped into the Earth under factories that manufactured refrigerator and air conditioning parts. The most infamous PCB contaminator manufactured various industrial plastics at a plant north of Troy, NY.⁹⁰ General Electric has since been asked ad nauseum to pay for dredging the toxic silt in the Hudson River, which was declared a Superfund site in 1984.⁹¹ Between 1947 and 1977, GE dumped almost 1.5 million pounds of PCBs into the river, which has found its way into the sediment, the animals in the river, and many people along the coast.⁹² What is particularly frightening about PCBs is their ability to bioaccumulate; they grow in concentration as one fish eats a smaller fish, and another fish eats the bigger one, until one large, toxic fish ends up on a person's plate. Plenty of research exists on the birth defects of fish inundated with PCBs in the Hudson River.⁹³ The ecological health of the river has had stark effects on the communities that reside along it.

Incongruity exists between the quantities of toxins residents – as opposed to daytrippers to the Hudson Valley – are able to consume, who are in a position to control the amount of certain substances that they are exposed to. Visitors can digest the landscape in ideal conditions and quantities, and view it for its luxury appeal despite its harmfully inundated waters.

Similarly to tourists, new homeowners to Kingston in 2020 and 2021, arriving from New York

⁸⁹ “Up River: Man-Made Sites of Interest on the Hudson from the Battery to Troy,” *The Center For Land Use Interpretation*, (New York: Blast Books, 2008), 108.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 162.

⁹¹ “Pollution of the Hudson River,” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pollution_of_the_Hudson_River#:~:text=Environmental%20activism%20nationwide%20led%20to,a%20Superfund%20site%20in%201984.

⁹² “Hudson River PCBs,” *Riverkeeper*, <https://www.riverkeeper.org/campaigns/stop-polluters/pcbs/#:~:text=Between%201947%20and%201977%2C%20General,50%20miles%20north%20of%20Albany.>

⁹³ “Health Effects of PCBs,” *Riverkeeper*, <https://www.riverkeeper.org/campaigns/stop-polluters/pcbs/#:~:text=Between%201947%20and%201977%2C%20General,50%20miles%20north%20of%20Albany.>

City, are able to enter and exit the current at free will, and will inevitably experience less environmental harm than residents with significantly less income and mobility. After a majority of affordable housing stock in Kingston was converted to short-term rental units, they were then purchased as homes by New York City's residents able to work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic, rocketing up home prices and destroying the little affordable housing left upstate.⁹⁴ Escapism has been pursued by the upper class, particularly struck by the magnificent landscapes captured by the Hudson Valley school of painting. Since the beginnings of Manhattan as a metropolis, the overcrowding necessitated rural respite to those who could achieve it. Originally drawn in by the strict English requirements of Sublime works of art, which emphasised heavenly imagery and light-bathed hillsides, painters in New York expanded the aesthetic norms to include plein-air landscapes. The proliferation of these paintings led to an increase in upstate tourism during the Civil War Period, wherein wealthy resort goers could receive nature in doses.

The idyllic image of the Hudson Valley following colonization, amplified by the Hudson River School of painters, led to an expectation that there was a transcendent landscape unaltered by human settlement. Outward appearances could be deceiving, but the concentration of contaminants in the river made inhabitants and visitors question if their surroundings were truly beautiful. Beauty is an influential force when it comes to the movement of material, people, or niche economies. While the present state of the Hudson River remains visually stunning to onlookers, it is significantly different from previous periods when the river's

⁹⁴ Some of these new homeowners purchased homes without seeing them in person or getting them inspected. The frenzy to move away from NYC for fear of the virus frightened upstate residents without the infrastructure to accommodate an infectious disease. The salaries of couples able to work from home during the pandemic exceeded many Kingston households left without mobility or protection.

reputation was foul. If the Hudson could be entirely cleared of pollution, one could suspect that the value of waterfront property would be exceedingly high, particularly in higher-elevation areas. Because of an increase in storm events, flooding, and sea level rise, Kingston's downward sloping waterfront neighborhoods are projected to be susceptible to the threat of climate change more so than their neighbors. In 2012, a flood abatement task force was appointed by the city government, yet this dilemma has had a relatively benign effect on the stream of developers along Kingston's waterfront.⁹⁵

Work from Bedroom Community

Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival received a CFA grant to draw up extensive plans for a massive, two mile development along the entire waterfront of Kingston. In completely transforming the nearby coastline of the Rondout and Ponckhockie neighborhoods to a mixed-use commercial venture, Historic Kingston Waterfront Revival will erect structures that block a subsidized housing complex and low to moderate income neighborhoods from their view of the waterfront, which could arguably reduce their property values. The indifference of the developers towards the pre-existing residents is made apparent as they prioritize travel and commercial experiences catered towards upper-class visitors. The company plans on transforming one million square feet of the existing waterfront in addition to landfilling a significant portion of the Rondout Creek. The development features "a variety of housing options, creative office space, new local and regional retail, a commitment to a working waterfront, an ecologically sensitive hotel and waterfront access and park space." The project

⁹⁵ "Waterfront Flooding Task Force," *The City of Kingston, NY*, <https://www.kingston-ny.gov/waterfrontfloodingtaskforce>.

is marketed as a “place for Kingston residents to live, work, and play and also becomes a unique destination in the Hudson Valley,” as if the coastline of eroded bricks is commonplace.

Former offices of the Hutton Brick Company inhabit Ponckhockie as a few crumbling beams rising vertically from the foundation. Scattered throughout the woods and beach are hundreds of brick fragments that either partially or completely spell out ‘Hutton.’ These particular chunks of earth have been weathered by wind and water, yet many letters remain fully legible. The sheer mass of what has been abandoned may be the most striking aspect of the valley’s old brick industry. It is almost unfathomable that there would be a force strong enough to disband such a massive enterprise. As networks of material extraction moved from a local to a global scale, smaller manufacturers were subsumed by the industrial giants manufacturing inexpensive clay bricks, promising to quickly and cheaply erect the cities of the future for half the price of those further north.

For-profit entities in Kingston have little regard for families that once enjoyed the properties they are eagerly purchasing, and conduct business at a rate that long term residents cannot keep up with. In taking an informal walking tour of the Ponckhockie neighborhood in Kingston with Rashida Tyler, a local grassroots organizer, she pointed out the buildings in her childhood neighborhood that once housed family members. She described the network in the neighborhood which was spatial as well as familial. Families would grow lush gardens and exchange foods amongst one another. Because of a series of foreclosures, Rashida is now familiar with a much smaller portion of the neighborhood. During the walking tour she was able to identify two homes that had recently been purchased by couples, whom she speculated had moved from New York City. Given the overwhelming population of new residents from

the downriver metropolis, this is not a far off guess. My desire to analyze gentrification in Kingston is because of the material that was paramount in building the neighborhood, and has been valued very highly by the real-estate market. The structures of the once defunct Hutton brick plant, responsible for producing so much of the prized material that has exponentially raised the prices of homes in Ponckhockie, have been bought by out-of-state developers.

Salt Hotels have repaired the infrastructure to serve a new function, using the brick structures, kilns, and storage as event spaces; safeguarding the remnants of the brickyard is not the out of state company's intention with the lot. They have no aim to archive the extensive working-class history behind the desired industrial structure. The Brickyards have been marketed as a luxury getaway for wealthy families. The Salt Hotels' Hutton Brickyards boasts owning over 70 acres of pastoral land along the Hudson River. They even describe their "industrial structures soaring skyward..." claiming that "Hutton Brickyards [will enter] a new chapter in 2021 being reborn as a rambling, imaginative new hotel, spa, restaurant and events retreat." The company owns five luxury hotel 'experiences,' and each one of them a waterfront property. Pandering towards a very elite crowd, the Salt Hotels' team are not concerned with the history of labor on the land that they have purchased. The hotel's website contains no mention of the Hutton Brickyards' past, and the only nod towards the remnants of the industry is a photo of some Hutton brick fragments at the very bottom of the home page. In the past months the hotel staff removed a page labelled 'Our History,' which contained brief descriptions of the brickyards' atmosphere when it was in use, and two short videos containing interviews with former employees of the Hutton Company.

During an unofficial visit to the construction site, I noticed that many of the intact bricks had been taken from the riverbank and caged in sculptural fences along the hotel's property. Of the dozens of miniature waterfront 'tiny homes,' each one has a path paved with salvaged Hutton bricks. The departed materials have made their way *back* to the Hutton grounds to construct the posh accessory dwellings. The steady trend of development in Kingston has been harmfully amplified by the complex flipping schemes of 2018 and later, the failure of the city to enact tenant protections because of crooked project management. Residents and housing advocates in Kingston implored officials to address the city's stark housing crisis, but in the midst of the bureaucratic process, speculative real-estate and hotel companies have established a footing making enormous profits while many remain displaced. Organizer Rashida Tyler applied for a \$200,000 grant for the construction of emergency tiny homes, which was approved in December of 2020.⁹⁶

In the spring of 2021, the city stalled in greenlighting the use of a vacant property on Broadway for these units, which had been requested by those residing *in* Kingston. This project intended to benefit displaced residents without homes in the winter months, but a privately owned group home responsible for housing many of Kingston's displaced went on the market, destabilizing already at-risk residents. The 57% of households which make less than the basic cost of living in New York State face crises at disparate rates than the policymakers who dictate allocations or investors who can sit on land while it grows in value. The homeless shelter in the city has 21 beds, and Kingston was in need of non-congregate housing during the

⁹⁶ Ulster County Coalition for Housing Justice, "Tiny Homes in Kingston, NY," YouTube (YouTube, April 8, 2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLr9KzyB1KA>.

Covid-19 pandemic. People in Kingston have waited in dire need of shelter during the entire construction of the Hutton Brickyards luxury hotel experience.

Backdrop of a Departed Industry

Beauty is a factor dictating the movement of building materials, particularly as price becomes superior to geological location. Heirs during the Gilded Age were at most times likely restricted to lumber and marble received from adjacent extractive operations scattered along the coastline of the Hudson River to build their estates. Contemporary developments no longer depend on nearby resources for construction, and developers often rely on the global material transit status-quo of the 21st century for deliveries of the most inexpensive and quickly manufactured product on the market. Bureaucratic decisions additionally disseminate standards, through requirements in material for building foundations or often ignored laws about maintenance. Roads facilitate a physical transfer of matter while monetary transactions, exchanging thoughts, and social hierarchization occurs immaterially. This is how private real estate deals have remained isolated from the general public.

Resource transportation and conflict was present in the brick industries along the Hudson River, which would eventually decline because of an absence of a natural resource. Shale rock was used to fortify bricks and grew in popularity because of construction codes. Hudson Valley bricks were said to be prone to cracking during the winter because their substance was more porous.⁹⁷ The last brick factory in the Hudson Valley, Powell & Minnock, was sold in 2002. When shale was discovered at a close stone quarry, the brick company

⁹⁷ Hudson River Brickmakers," *Jim Ormond*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW5P_rG1PsQ.

quickly adapted and manufactured bricks according to the new production standards.⁹⁸ Other brick companies along the coastline paid exorbitant prices to ship shale from elsewhere, and deteriorated because of that added cost.⁹⁹

The details surrounding resource transactions are often shrouded to the public to avoid interest in the path taken by the material, or the context in which that material was removed from the Earth. Hidden below a veil of industry, something thought to be ugly enough to separate from the public's gaze, are the extracted materials necessary for everyday life. Industry is what cannot be manicured, it is the antithesis of the idea of the undisturbed wilderness, despite that notion's falsehood. Forests exist as engineered landscapes, their boundaries and contents dictated by surrounding settlements. Yet the attraction urban residents had (and have) towards tourism in the Hudson Valley was due in part for its reputation as wild, and in part for its reputation as opulent. Blissfully unaware travelers could find enclaves without people, but resource depletion and toxicity in the landscape gradually becomes visible as a result of unregulated industrial corporations. Physical displacement can often be a hidden result of excess pollutants, and unfortunately, resource extraction continues at rates much higher than systems can replenish.

Landfilling Global Finance

Departed materials inevitably make their way to a new locale, erecting a new structure, regardless of the state of its origin point. The movement of material in the case of landfilling has close ties to the recent and early history of New York City. Manhattan's population growth

⁹⁸ "Up River: Man-Made Sites of Interest on the Hudson from the Battery to Troy," *The Center For Land Use Interpretation*, (New York: Blast Books, 2008).

⁹⁹ Hudson River Brickmakers," *Jim Ormond*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW5P_rG1PsQ.

during the nineteenth century necessitated more land where there was none. Excavated substance from elsewhere could be used to build up artificial elevations, in the case of most of lower Manhattan. In the twentieth century, space was still limited and in need of supplemental infrastructure because of the ever growing corporate enterprises on the tip of the island. Construction of the World Trade Center in the 1960's and 70's yielded excess material that was then used to construct an additional 90 acres to Manhattan's financial district. The World Financial Center was built in the 1980's out of these excavated materials, atop a landfill made from *other* excavated materials. This construction held the headquarters of American Express, Dow Jones, and other major corporations.¹⁰⁰ In this case, the movement of material has constructed, in part, a global financial system.

When banks and investors panicked and traded digital funds en masse during the 2008 financial crisis, they created instability in an already unreliable and unregulated worldwide market. Private investment in the global economy suddenly disappeared as the wealthiest constituents worldwide attempted to recall their assets. Laissez-faire capitalism of the Reagan and Thatcher era allowed for networks of international financial corporations to trade amongst one another without the scrutiny of regulation or pressure to involve the public in their whereabouts. The world market remains composed of unorganized and opaque short-term financial bets using trillions of dollars. The faulty mortgage backed securities that spurred the recession were originally gobbled up by investors in America, because homeowners paying subprime mortgages were in suburbs across the nation, but also by investors and *banks* in Europe and elsewhere. Global policymakers were thrown because of this tie between goliath

¹⁰⁰ "Up River: Man-Made Sites of Interest on the Hudson from the Battery to Troy," *The Center For Land Use Interpretation*, (New York: Blast Books, 2008), 10.

corporations and poorly financed and maintained suburban homes. Nonetheless, banks were bailed out. People who accrued heavy debt and defaulted on their mortgages were in rough shape because of vulture lending practices. When landlords neglected the needs of homeowners enduring the Great Recession, there was little in place to protect people from losing their homes.

The flow of capital is obscured even more than physical resources, but plays a major role in the movement and displacement of people. The international scope of trade, especially of liquid assets, abandons any consideration for humans on an individual scale. A majority of Americans faced immense strife during the crisis of 2008, their problems a result of unseeable entities manipulating finances worlds away. Investors placed bets on pools of mortgages residents simply could not afford because their homes were in disrepair or debtors demanded exorbitant payments. Financial catastrophe occurred in 2008 because of disregard for human livelihoods during the creation of credit-default-swap insurance contracts on US mortgage bonds composed of faulty subprime properties. AIG Financial Products, responsible for writing these cataclysmic swaps that sent millions of Americans into hardship and poverty, was based out of London, with no intimate ties to suburban residents across the Atlantic.¹⁰¹

Brick Mine

The coast of the Hudson River was on full display to the traveling public because of parallel railways exiting Manhattan. Its beauty continues to be scrutinized by observers, impacted by the stringent value system created by the housing market. Trends rise and fall with

¹⁰¹ “Until the Next Crash,” Jonathan Levy, n+1, January 23, 2019, <https://nplusemag.com/online-only/online-only/until-the-next-crash/>.

shifting conceptions of value for land based on appearance, constructed both by environmental factors and human influence, such as appeal to contemporary aesthetics. To mine clay for brickmaking, workers dug into and excavated clay earth in quarries or deep offshore clay beds.

¹⁰² The clay laid in horizontal stratifications that early workers in the brickyards would manipulate and pry with their hands.¹⁰³ Extractive technologies became more effective to a point where entire cliffs were constructed as a result of digging out clay for bricks. In the twenty-first century, circular ponds along the coastline indicate where laborers once removed earth from below the river. It is likely that many brick companies had not anticipated a public response to their industry eventuating clay cliffsides. Around the turn of the twentieth century, brick factories and other quarrying enterprises shaped the landscape viewed by passengers on the railways to and from New York City. In the brickyards along the coast of the Hudson River, excavated clay earth material would change in form from amorphous pile to block while the desaturated color of the clay mutated to red – the iron oxide content responding to heat in the kilns. The bank of the Hudson River and the bordering industries were coupled both materially and immaterially because of their malleable nature.

The bricks changed color and form, location and purpose, and the geology of the valley. The labor that occurred along the riverbank constructed visually new landscapes that could be seen by residents and travellers. Market demand for building materials during New York City's rapid growth in the late nineteenth century, and the desire for bricks created as a result of workers digging into clay beds, was incongruous with the sightseers presupposing a picturesque countryside and depreciating evidence of industry. Labor is thought to be the

¹⁰² "Up River: Man-Made Sites of Interest on the Hudson from the Battery to Troy," *The Center For Land Use Interpretation*, (New York: Blast Books, 2008), 78.

¹⁰³ "Hudson River Brickmakers," *Jim Ormond*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW5P_rG1PsQ.

“mediator between nature and culture,” through the organization of naturally occurring material, the production of synthetic materials, and the distribution of these materials to cities, contractors, construction teams or hands, given the scope of analysis.¹⁰⁴ Drawing from this nineteenth century Marxist thought, Lucy Lipard continues to describe “landscape as the product of labor is a synthesis, resting somewhere between [nature and culture] (as a ‘countryside forms the buffer zone between “civilization” and “wilderness”’).”¹⁰⁵ A manipulated landscape perpetually reaches back to its clearly defined depictions.

Hudson River School painters reached international recognition for exaggerated, heavenly scenes of the valley. The paintings had such a strong psychic value that even the industries that residents, particularly the wealthy elite, depended on or benefited from, rejected the view of factories along the river. Rich residents of the Hudson Valley acted as land conservation before public agencies like the Palisades Interstate Park Commission was created in 1900 to manage the remarkable cliff sides along the river. For families with estates on the eastern side of the Hudson, their prized view of the cliffs was in immediate danger. Their location was attractive specifically because of the sight of the naturally occurring rock face, which residents feared was ephemeral. Downstream of the mansions, closer to New York City, quarriers had begun blasting into the rock face after most of the ground had been dug out.¹⁰⁶ An 1860 essay in the agriculture journal *The Country Gentleman* reads more as an opinion piece when describing the view from the train window during the author’s ride from Manhattan to

¹⁰⁴ “Capital: Volume 1: a Critique of Political Economy,” *Karl Marx and Ben Fowkes*, (London: Penguin, 1976).

¹⁰⁵ “Undermining: a Wild Ride through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West,” *Lucy R. Lipard*, (New York: The New Press, 2014), 8.

¹⁰⁶ “Up River: Man-Made Sites of Interest on the Hudson from the Battery to Troy,” *The Center For Land Use Interpretation*, (New York: Blast Books, 2008), 60.

Albany. Following a comprehensive of the brickmaking process, the author goes on to criticize the appearance of the dug out landscape from clay mining.¹⁰⁷

Structural safety is paramount to design in residential developments, yet those dictating visual standards were focused on the waterfront for less urgent reasons. The riverside town of Haverstraw was at the apex of Hudson Valley brick manufacturing before the industry's decline. Considering around 400,000 bricks were needed per building, the labor required to produce those bricks was wildly sought after. Around the time of the American Civil War, about one in eight people in Haverstraw, north of the ever-expanding New York City, was employed by the brick industry.¹⁰⁸ It also employed a large population of migrant workers who took up seasonal residence in impermanent shacks along the riverbank, one of the visual critiques in *The Country Gentleman* article. The demand for bricks in New York City was so forceful that workers in Haverstraw kept digging into the riverbank by the town, damaging the structure of the ground on which countless homes stood. In 1906, the surface gave way and a mudslide tore through the waterfront, knocking houses off of their foundations. There was a consequential electrical fire which ensued because of damaged cables, and nineteen people died.¹⁰⁹ The event was likely unpleasant to view and damaging to the community, but brickyard workers and their families had no eden to escape to. As a result of extraction, residents of Haverstraw faced an unexpected tragedy in the wake of general prosperity from an industry that employed such a large population of the town.

¹⁰⁷ "Rural improvement: Brick Making on the Hudson River Shores," H.C.W, *Country Gentleman*. 07/26/1860, Vol. 16 Issue 4, p66-67.

¹⁰⁸ "Hudson River Brickmakers," *Jim Ormond*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW5P_rG1PsQ.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*

Up until the mid-1900's, builders still constructed walls and foundations with bricks from Hudson River clay. This yielded a much more intimate transfiguration of material than what was to accompany the increasing scale change in commodity transportation. The global economy developed and organizers of material gradually grew in scale, becoming enormous networks. When the immediacy of upstream brick factories to New York City diminished as a benefit to using the Hudson River product, builders began sourcing from elsewhere.

Association with the product and its proximate origins, the clay in the Hudson, and the networks of human hands which gently managed it, appears to be influential in the exponentially increasing value of buildings created with the bricks. Teams of workers tirelessly situated heavy mounds of clay into rectangular molds. Each brick required personal attention, the entire line of production carefully monitored. Bricks were ensured that they were dried and flipped onto all sides and fired correctly to produce durable building blocks. The river's clay yielded a rich, deep red which has characterized the facades of New York City. Brownstone housing units in Brooklyn, NY have dramatically risen in price since the 1960's while Hudson Valley bricks were used less and less by developers. In the twenty-first century, patterns that have occurred with brownstone buildings in Brooklyn are occurring in the very areas that once produced the materials to construct those buildings.

The brickyards north of the city created burgeoning economies sprinkled along the Hudson River, which were characterized by their exceptionally beautiful brick buildings, some well-preserved, painted, and lived in for generations. Although abandoned or neglected by absent landlords, homes avoid becoming entirely derelict because of their sturdy walls of carefully placed brick. Ponckockie is one of Kingston's neighborhoods often left out on

visitor's maps, where increasingly more people residing in the area for generations have begun to struggle to find access to affordable food or housing. While Kingston is celebrated for preserving the aesthetics which emerged from Hudson River industries, the long-term residents have reaped fewer benefits in recent years. Families in Ponckhockie may have intimate ties to the departed brick industry, as opposed to the real estate speculation companies who famously purchase and upsell the brick buildings, most of which are Brooklyn-based, or have offices out of state.

The presupposed authenticity of neighborhoods with brick properties was a powerful force moving people in and out of buildings in mid-century Brooklyn as well as twenty-first century Ulster County. Bucolic riverscapes captured in nineteenth century paintings melded with remnants of an early industrial era in the Hudson Valley, producing the image of a spacious retreat. The structural beauty created in Kingston appeared to be profitable enough for landlords to leverage their tenants livelihoods for a larger offer. Emphasis on Kingston's historic character continues to benefit companies which appeal to wealthy visitors, not the residents in poorly maintained homes eyed by speculative investors. The experiential and wealth disparity has ballooned into a housing crisis in Kingston, NY, wherein corporate entities manipulate housing stock on a large scale. Brickmaking enterprises that once employed swathes of the Hudson Valley's population eventually lost footing in local construction as nonunionized southern labor appealed to corporate executives expanding their exports. The concurrent expansion of trade networks and spheres of investors has led real estate speculators to highly value the vestiges of a localized industry that shaped the vernacular of infrastructure in Ponckhockie. Nearby buildings without ornate brick designs are projected to grow in value

concurrently because of their proximity to future waterfront developments, catered towards commercial experiences rather than addressing the city's housing needs. The salaries of newcomers from New York City differ starkly from the stagnant wages of long term residents. Yet while Kingston is an active site for speculation and displacement orchestrated by remote entities backed by capital, residents are equally active in working to combat the harm done to their neighborhoods.

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