

Understanding Columbia University's Expansion into West Harlem: An Activist's Guide



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I. Introduction

This document is designed to help the reader grasp the complex changes underway in West Harlem. Since 2003, Columbia University has moved to execute their plan to construct a new campus in the area running from 125th to 133rd street, between Broadway and Riverside. In November 2007, the NYC Department of City Planning approved Columbia's proposal to rezone 35 acres of the neighborhood known as Manhattanville, which spans roughly from 122nd street to 135th, east of St. Nicholas and Edgecombe Avenues (in total Manhattanville comprises approximately 228 acres of land). A year later, the University was granted legal permission by New York State's highest economic planning agency to confiscate privately owned businesses standing in the way of their expansion. Columbia demolished the remaining edifices on the expansion site in 2011, and erected the first scaffoldings of the new campus in spring of 2014.

The zoning change replaces small businesses, manufacturers, and residential buildings with a mixed-use academic model that will displace an estimated 298 residents from 135 affordable housing units in the 35-acre area. Columbia has promised to relocate those affected by direct displacement. The introduction of University facilities to the neighborhood, however, will encourage significant rent increases in surrounding apartment complexes, as well. Landlords will attempt to attract a new influx of wealthier tenants, both University affiliates, and other individuals enticed by the style of living today associated with Morningside Heights. In 2007, Columbia was forced to complete an [Environmental Impact Statement](#) (EIS) in conjunction with the NYC Department of City Planning. Their report admitted “the potential for the indirect residential displacement impact within the primary study area to be significant and adverse” (p. 36).

According to [statistics recorded by City-Data in 2008](#), Manhattanville is home to around 32,000 people. 70% of Manhattanville’s residents are Latino, 25% African American, and the remaining 5% Chinese, South East Asian, or White. The median household income for the neighborhood is \$32,617. The Federal Poverty line for New York State in 2014-15 is \$29,000 for a household of two, \$36,000 for a household of three. There is no information available as to the median size of households in Manhattanville. The average size is 2.8 people per household. The implication is that most tenants in the area live at or below the poverty level. The changes in property value that Columbia’s expansion will bring to the neighborhood present an immanent threat of displacement for unprotected tenants.

Meanwhile, legal guidelines for tenants in public housing facilities are shifting. One of the biggest apartment complexes in the area is 3333 Broadway, with close to 1,200 units on 135th street. The building was completed in 1976 under the Mitchell-Lama housing program, which gives low-interest loans to private property developers committed to providing affordable housing to poor tenants. Under the Mitchell Lama protocol, property developers are permitted to remove rent boundaries after 20 years and the reimbursement of the original loan. In 2005, 3333 Broadway repaid the last of their loan, and began to remove affordable units in favor of market rate apartments. The University's entrance into Manhattanville has fueled this process further, by channeling an influx of new tenants willing to pay substantially higher rents. Without intervention, 3333 Broadway will be entirely purged of affordable housing by the time Columbia completes their campus in the year 2030. The change will ensue along racial lines, replacing a predominantly African American and Latino demographic with largely white newcomers.

The only other residential buildings in Manhattanville protected from rent increases lie within the Grant and Manhattanville public housing facilities. The Manhattanville Houses comprise six buildings with approximately 2,756 tenants, while Grant Houses has nine buildings and 4,519 tenants. Residents of the projects meet their costs of living in different ways. Some pay mostly out of their own pocket, while others receive vouchers from federal programs like Section 8 and Social Security, which cover the majority of their housing expenses. Since 2009, Columbia University has begun purchasing shares in Manhattanville Houses. It is unclear what their intentions are for the future of the buildings. They sit immediately across the street from the site of Columbia’s new campus. We are unable to scrutinize Columbia’s ownership shares, because around 90% of the University’s investments are kept secret.

What we do know is that Columbia University's Public Safety Program intends to escalate their surveillance and patrol activity throughout the housing projects, in collaboration with the New York Police Department. Vice President of Public Safety James McShane's announcement of the University's plans arrived in the aftermath of this summer's police raids targeting Grant and Manhattanville Houses. 103 teenagers and young adults were incarcerated under indictments ranging from conspiracy to murder, assault, gun possession, loitering and larceny. Heralded by the District Attorney and the Mayor's Office as the city's largest 'gang bust', the raid on public housing in West Harlem has caused anger and resentment amongst local tenants. Since 2011, parents living in Grant and Manhattanville Houses have organized community-based solutions to the problems in their neighborhood. These have included petitions for a new playground, a community center, smaller classes in public schools, family lead truces between rival groups, and job councilors to mitigate unemployment rates hovering above 27%. But their efforts were mostly ignored. Instead, the city spent as much as a hundred million dollars conducting a four-year covert surveillance operation, that used thousands of hours of Facebook chats, tweets, text messages, and security reels to formulate criminal indictments. The police raid itself was staged as a public relations stunt for Mayor Bill de Blasio and Police Commissioner Bill Bratton to prove to their donors that they too are 'tough on crime'.

According to Columbia University's leadership, the number of tenant displacements caused by their expansion is exaggerated by misinformed student activists, and inflammatory community organizations. The administration also accuses critics of neglecting the merits of their charitable work in the community. The University has funded [a new apartment complex at 148th street and Broadway](#), which is to house all of the residents displaced by their land-grabs in Manhattanville. In actuality, the 148th street initiative will suffice only to relocate tenants under an Interim Lease Program from two buildings on the 17-acre site of the new campus. *The real crisis, the danger of gradual displacement threatening 32,000 New Yorkers through increases in property value affecting the entire neighborhood, is effectively concealed by the University, and seldom mentioned on Columbia's campus.* As explained above, the only two housing developments ostensibly exempt from this process are in fact at risk of losing state protection. The first, 3333 Broadway, has already begun the process of purging working class people of color from the building. The second, Manhattanville Houses, is increasingly coming under Columbia's purview. The University now owns shares in the projects, and plans to carry out extensive policing and surveillance on its tenants. The key to producing a credible analysis of these changes is *to conceive of the long-term effects of Columbia's expansion into West Harlem from our present point in time, until the project's scheduled completion in 2030.*

The following pages will begin to unpack some of these difficult questions. First, we will trace the basic outlines of Columbia's expansion process until now, to reveal its actual history. Second, we will emphasize the fact that the struggle for the right to West Harlem is by no means decided. *The large majority of displacements caused by Columbia's expansion into of Manhattanville will take place between 2014 and 2030, the estimated time frame for the construction of the new campus.* During this period, landlords will continue to raise rent rates for local tenants as they prepare for arrivals of better financial means. Local businesses will close because of untenable ground rents. Columbia has said they will fund enterprises run by 'minorities'. But they have not said when or where, and no one living in the neighborhood has much reason to trust them. The police, operating in tandem with the University, will increase the

scope and scale of their patrol activity, targeting young tenants of color for drug possession, larceny, and assault – crimes committed at an equal if not higher rate by Columbia students themselves. The incarcerated will struggle for many years with criminal records that restrict them from housing and job opportunities. All the while the turbulent changes unfolding in the area will induce feelings of alienation and disillusionment amongst the people who think of it as home. *But urban policy can change.* There is still time and space to campaign against market-based housing laws, to fight for tenants’ rights, and lay the groundwork for community welfare relief. There is no reason why Columbia can’t build new classrooms without aggressively reshaping the entire neighborhood. Collaboration and compromise are possible, but only if the voices of local residents are *empowered* to actualize their own visions for the future.

II. Timeline: [In preparing this piece, we are primarily indebted to the research and activism of the Coalition to Preserve Community (‘CPC’, 2003 -), and the Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification (‘SCEG’, 2003-2011). We have adapted a few essential points in [SCEG’s own timeline](#) (2007) for our purposes. About a quarter of the information cited here draws from the work of Professor Steven Gregory, published in his 2013 article, “[The Radiant University: Space, Urban Redevelopment, and the Public Good](#)”, for the journal *City and Society*. See citation in section IV. In the timeline, we will reference specific passages from Professor Gregory’s article, annotated with page numbers. We have also relied extensively on the work of investigative journalist [Jeff Mays](#), as well as that of [Daryl Kahn](#) and [Josmar Trujillo](#).]

(1991) Community Board 9 (CB9), the economic planning agency for the neighborhoods of West Harlem between 110-155th Street, begins to formulate a new development model. CB9 commissions urban planners from the Pratt Center to write a document for submission to the NYC Department of City Planning. The result of their work is Plan 197-a (referring to section 197-a of the New York City Charter), revised in 2001, and approved by the Department of City Planning in 2005. Plan 197-a includes the outlines of a job, housing, and school infrastructure intended to mitigate the growing problem of tenant displacement spreading throughout greater Harlem. The area of Columbia’s proposal for a new campus, already the site of 1,600 jobs in manufacture and retail, is envisioned as a central nexus for the plan as a whole, drawing from public transit and housing facilities in the immediate vicinity to offer expanded employment opportunities (Gregory, p. 50).

(1994-2002) Columbia University, then under the leadership of President George Rupp, begins to pursue their aspirations for a new campus in West Harlem more aggressively. They start by purchasing properties in Manhattanville from those willing to sell, in the hopes of acquiring most of the land they need for their designs.

(2002) Lee Bollinger is appointed President of Columbia University, after making a commitment with the Board of Trustees to realize the campus expansion in Manhattanville during his tenure.

(January 2003) Columbia introduces their ‘General Project Plan’ (GPP) to Community Board 9, which contains two major revisions to Plan 197-a. These revisions, proposed under an alternate

Plan 197-c, stipulate the seizure of 17 acres of land through the use of eminent domain, and the rezoning of 18 further acres to make room for campus housing, administrative, and research facilities. ‘Eminent domain’ is a legal procedure that allows public institutions to forcibly remove private property in the name of the ‘public good’. In New York State, private corporations like Columbia University may exercise eminent domain with the oversight of state authorities. In the meantime, Columbia continues to purchase as many properties as they can within the intended expansion zone (Gregory, p. 50).

(Spring 2003) A group of longstanding residents found the [Coalition to Preserve Community](#) (CPC), with the stated purpose of fostering local participation in planning future changes affecting the neighborhood. The CPC holds monthly meetings in St. Mary’s Church (on 125th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam) to write proposals for housing, education, employment, cultural, and environmental policies, curated by tenants living in the community. Their meetings draw an average of 200 participants between 2003 and 2005, and the results of their labor reshape and clarify much of Community Board 9’s 197-a Plan. Although the relationship between CB9 and CPC is communicative and respectful, many members of CB9 remain weary of planning processes so deeply immersed in rank-and-file discussion, and some will eventually be receptive to bargaining with Columbia University at the expense of their constituencies.

(October 2003) Several student groups at Columbia cohost a panel on “The Ethics of Expansion”. Their initiative produces a new organization called the [Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification](#) (SCEG), which continues to operate until 2011. SCEG will play a significant role in winning promises of welfare relief on behalf of Columbia University to West Harlem residents (information from SCEG timeline, see hyperlink above).

(January 2004) The Columbia administration constructs three advisory boards, designed to assess future expansion plans and procedures.

(Spring 2004) The Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC), New York State’s chief economic planning body, commences dialogues with the Columbia administration over their intentions for the future of West Harlem.

(June 2004) Columbia contracts a planning and engineering consultant, Alee King Rosen and Flemming (AKRF), to deal with the legal, bureaucratic, and structural mechanics of the expansion (Gregory, p. 56).

(June 2004) Columbia’s advisory boards express their support for Community Board 9’s 197-a Plan, rather than the administration’s own 197-c alternative. In response, President Bollinger dismisses the advisory boards. During the same month, two administrators involved in coordinating the expansion resign from their posts (information from SCEG timeline).

(April 2005) The Coalition to Preserve Community and the Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification build a tent city called [“Bollingerville”](#) in the middle of ‘College Walk’, to promote dialogue between University affiliates and West Harlem residents (information from SCEG timeline).

(Spring 2005) The Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification releases [an open letter](#), cosigned by 54 Columbia University professors, demanding that President Bollinger and the Board of Trustees accept the limitations of Plan 197-a in the construction of the Manhattanville campus. Their demands are ignored by the administration.

(June 10, 2006) Hundreds of local tenants march from Central to West Harlem in opposition to Columbia's scheme. Organized under the umbrella heading, '*Nos Quedamos*' ('we're staying'), the protestors draw from community groups like the Harlem Tenants' Council, the Coalition to Preserve Community, the Mirabal Sisters, and the Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification. Their activism nourishes a vibrant political atmosphere throughout the neighborhood. The atmosphere is captured in [a short video-summary](#) of the conflict posted online by the Mirabal Sisters in 2008 (Gregory, p. 50-54).

(September 2006) The ESDC hires Alee King Rosen and Flemming (AKRF), the same company Columbia contracted to coordinate their expansion, to conduct a 'neighborhood conditions study' in Manhattanville. AKRF, in turn, subcontracts Thornton Tomasetti, Inc., a structural engineering enterprise, to actually carry out the details of the investigation. The Chairman of the Tomasetti firm is Richard Tomasetti, Adjunct Professor of Civil Engineering and Mechanics at Columbia University. In this dizzying web of conflicting interests, the state authority designed to investigate the ethics of eminent domain hires an engineering firm *profiting from Columbia's expansion*, which then proceeds to contract the company of a *Columbia Professor* to write their report. The outcome will deem whether or not Manhattanville is 'blighted', or in such economic disrepair that it requires complete overhaul, rather than further development. Without the ESDC's designation of 'blight', eminent domain is not an option for Columbia (Gregory, p. 56, 60).

(March 2007) Business owners operating on the expansion site learn of the potentially corrupt ties between the ESDC, Columbia University, and the consultancy firm AKRF. They form a coalition called the 'West Harlem Business Group' to file a freedom of information petition (FOIL) to the New York Supreme Court. Their hope is to delegitimize claims of economic blight by uncovering conflicts of interest in the correspondence between the ESDC and its clients (Gregory, 61).

(June 2007) The FOIL petition gains access to 117 messages and communiqués that reveal the underlying complicity of AKRF in Columbia's project. According to New York Supreme Court Justice Kornreich, "while acting for Columbia, AKRF has an interest of its own in the outcome of the respondent's action (i.e., the ESDC's), as AKRF, presumably, seeks to succeed in securing an outcome that its client, Columbia, would favor" (Gregory, 61).

(Summer 2007) SCEG publishes [an impressive research guide](#) on the University's activity in West Harlem.

(August 2007) Community Board 9 [holds a public hearing](#) to debate the use of eminent domain and the rezoning of 35-acres in Manhattanville by Columbia University, as stipulated in plan

197-c. Tenants, students, politicians, urban planners, and academics raise concerns of rising tenant displacement, community disenfranchisement, and adverse health effects from the residues of the construction process. Troubled by the influence of the Coalition to Preserve Community, Lee Bollinger founds a pro-expansion lobbying group, dubbed the 'Coalition for the Future of Manhattanville'. The group features former New York City mayor David Dinkins, and is lead by Dinkins' then deputy mayor, Bill Lynch. Lynch receives \$40,000 a month from the Columbia administration as compensation for his efforts. During the five-hour meeting, 73 speakers testify against plan 197-c, 22 in favor. [President Bollinger is booed](#) as he addresses the audience. Several other members of Harlem's political establishment campaign in favor of Columbia's expansion, most notably Charles Rangel. Community Board 9 votes 17-1 against Columbia's proposal (Gregory, 63).

(November 1, 2007) Alee King Rosen and Flemming (AKRF) release their neighborhood conditions study of Manhattanville. They conclude that the area indeed suffers from problems of urban blight. The study contains photographs of several unused buildings on the expansion site, *vacated after their sale to Columbia*, which prove that the area shows no economic promise. In essence, the report justifies Columbia's expansion by analyzing its own casualties. This perverse logic further vindicates claims that the triangular relation between the ESDC, Columbia University, and AKRF is corrupted (Gregory, 56).

(November 7, 2007) The Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification [commences a hunger strike](#), led by Bryan Mercer (CC '07), Emilie Rosenblatt (CC '08), Victoria Ruiz (CC '09), Aretha Choi (BC '10), and Sam Barron (BC '10). They are inspired by the hunger strike of April 1996, which, along with an occupation of Hamilton Hall, eventually led to the opening of Columbia's Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race (CSER). The strikers' hope to call attention to corrupt practices behind Columbia's pursuit of eminent domain, and foment political opposition to the coercive nature of the expansion project. On November 11th, after four days of continuous neglect by the Columbia administration, the Coalition to Preserve Community calls on SCEG to end the hunger strike, out of concern for the health of the students involved.

(November 26, 2007) Despite the grievances expressed by Community Board 9, the New York City Planning Commission approves Columbia's Plan 197-c to rezone large swaths of Manhattanville, and exercise eminent domain on the 17-acre lot between 125th and 133rd street. The commission's refusal to represent the interests of residents in Community Board 9 illuminates their financial and political ties to the corporate real estate sector. Natasha Florentino and Tamara Gubernat analyze this relationship in their 2008 documentary, [Rezoning Harlem](#). In an effort to placate the public outcry of West Harlem tenants, the commission demands that Columbia University dedicate \$20 million dollars to fund affordable housing for those who suffer *indirect displacement* (who are priced out of buildings surrounding Columbia's expansion). The concession is the precursor to the 'Community Benefits Agreement', on which more below.

(December 12, 2007) Mercedes Narciso, the leading planner behind the 197-a document, [testifies](#) at the City Council against the removal of eminent domain restrictions, and affordable housing regulations in Manhattanville:

"We urge the City Council to correct this serious omission. Passing the 197-a plan without these provisions will not only substantially change the neighborhood without regard to the needs of the community; it also sets a dangerous precedent in which powerful interests can invalidate plans created by citizens under the City Charter ... Residents of this community have invested years of their lives crafting a plan for their future. The City Council must take decisive action to realize the City Charter's promise of a meaningful role for citizens in shaping the future of their communities".

(July 15, 2008) The Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court responds to an appeal by the ESDC, who claim that the AKRF in fact acted independently of Columbia's interest when conducting their investigation. The Court upholds the earlier decision. Justice Chatterson argues "that AKRF has worked to promote ESDC's adoption of Columbia's GPP [i.e., General Project Plan]. AKRF has been participating in project planning since at least June of 2004 through meetings with ESDC. While in Columbia's employ, AKRF has studied technical engineering and environmental issues, helping thereby to determine the size, shape, and configuration of the proposed project. AKRF has consistently acted as an advocate for Columbia in seeking ESDC's adoption of Columbia's proposal" (Gregory, 61).

(July 17, 2008) Unphased by the Court's ruling, the ESDC approves Columbia's General Project Plan. Because the AKRF report has been delegitimized, the ESDC cites a second plan by a firm called 'Earthtech'. The Earthtech report uses fashionable language to argue that Manhattanville is doomed to economic failure, simply because one has troubling *seeing it*. Their claim is that the area does not have developmental potential because it lacks 'transparency' or 'coherent design'. The Earthtech study replaces methodical corruption with opportunistic jargon (Gregory, 62-63).

(October 8, 2008) Elizabeth Dwoskin [publishes an article for the Village Voice](#), which reveals that Columbia Professor and leading geophysicist Klaus Jacob had been systematically ignored by the University administration when criticizing the environmental impact of their proposed expansion plan. As part of their justification for the use of eminent domain, since 2003 Columbia had cited their intention to build biochemical research facilities in an 80-foot basement below the main Manhattanville campus. According to Professor Jacob, the 125th street corridor is both a flood plain and an active fault line, that could put students and residents in danger if it were to house subterranean chemical research labs. In 2014, Columbia will drop their digging aspirations, suggesting that the whole idea may have just been a ploy to better their chances of acquiring eminent domain rights. Instead, they decide to raise the height of the buildings on the new-campus to free up the desired space.

(December 18, 2008) The ESDC formally announces the employment of eminent domain to remove the remaining property owners from Columbia's expansion site.

(January 21, 2009) In a last effort to turn the tide, the two remaining business on Columbia's future expansion site - a Tuck-it-away storage facility owned by Nick Spreyregen, and a gas station owned by Gurnam and Parminder Singh - file individual law suits challenging the designation of blight, and the invocation of eminent domain. The Supreme Court rules in their favor. Justice Chatterson remarks that "the blight designation in the instant case is mere sophistry. It was utilized by ESDC years after the scheme was hatched to justify the employment

of eminent domain but this project has always primarily concerned a massive capital project for Columbia". The ESDC challenges the ruling at the level of the New York State Court of Appeals, the chief legal body of the state, above the Appellate Division of the New York Supreme Court. There Judge Carmen Ciparick decides in favor of Columbia: "the indisputably public purpose of education is particularly vital for New York City and the State to maintain their respective statuses as global centers of higher education and academic research" (Gregory, 64). Columbia overcomes the last juridical hurdle in their pursuit of eminent domain.

(May 18, 2009) Columbia University signs a '[Community Benefits Agreement](#)' (CBA) with the West Harlem Local Development Corporation (WHLDC). The WHLDC had been formed in 2006 to oversee Columbia's charitable donations to the neighborhood. The 2009 agreement designates \$150 million to affordable housing, employment opportunities, public education, and legal assistance for lower-income tenants. It also leaves aside \$76 million in trust to offer philanthropic grants to be determined over a period of 16 years. The concessions finance the opening of a new public school managed by Teacher's College at Columbia University. They also cover the costs of Columbia's public housing initiative at 148th street and Broadway, which, as mentioned in the introduction, will house residents *directly displaced* by the expansion project.

While these donations provide urgent relief, there are several lingering problems that call for criticism. Firstly, the 148th street provides housing only for those tenants displaced by the campus buildings themselves, *not for those who are threatened with indirect displacement over the next two decades, as a result of rising property values throughout the entire neighborhood*. This contradicts Columbia's agreement with the City Planning Commission (see above, November 26th, 2007) to accommodate the needs of the *indirectly displaced*. As a model, relocation to new developments does not satisfy the demand of those at risk in the coming years to make a livelihood for themselves *in their own neighborhood*. Legal assistance for the victims, albeit valuable, can only go so far against rents rising beyond the financial means of residents living in poverty. If the Community Benefits Agreement fails to address these long-term dangers, it will have the pernicious effect of cloaking the steady dismemberment of the neighborhood with a blanket of individual philanthropic gestures.

Secondly, in 2007, Bollinger promised to bring 6,000 new jobs to neighborhood residents. But the CBA uses relative rather than absolute terms when quantifying its employment promises. 40% of those employed in the construction process are to be 'women, minorities, and locals'. Whether this means that the individuals represented in this percentile will fit *all three* categories, or *at least one* category, is not specified in the CBA. 30% of those employed on Columbia's Manhattanville campus after its completion in 2030 are to be 'locals'. Five years later, there is no data available for Columbia's employment practices in the area, and stories have proliferated of maltreatment, rejection, and disrespect amongst local residents who have sought job opportunities with the University.

(June 2010) Gentrification throughout greater Harlem reaches unprecedented levels. During this summer, Harlem loses its African American majority.

(September 2010) State Senator Bill Perkins, appointed to help oversee Columbia's Community Benefits Agreement, resigns from the West Harlem Local Development Corporation, citing his lack of faith in the transparency and accountability of the organization.

(December 2010) President Bollinger [assumes the position of Chairman of the Board at New York State's Federal Reserve Bank](#), where he will remain until December of 2012.

(January 2011) The demolition of the expansion site begins.

(February 25, 2011) Jeff Mays, investigative journalist with New York's *DNAinfo*, [reports that Community Board 9 has called for the disbandment of the West Harlem Local Development Corporation](#) (WHLDC). Since March of 2009, the WHLDC has not consulted neither the Community Board nor local community organizations about its proceedings or leadership structure. Officials in Community Board 9 suggest that the WHLDC transfer its funds to an institution with more robust ties to activists, individuals, and families living in West Harlem, who are themselves affected by the gentrifying process.

(March 14, 2011) The West Harlem Local Development Corporation transfers its assets to another group, called '[The West Harlem Development Corporation](#)'. What seems to be only the difference of a word, in fact has profound implications. With this reform, the organization in charge of administering Columbia's philanthropy transitions from a city institution respondent to the limited oversight of Community Board 9, to a private 'non-profit' under the protocol of the federal tax exemption program, 501(c)(3). This brings about two major changes in the organization's status: (1) it can now be directly managed and controlled by Columbia, without any interference from external governing bodies in the city, and (2) it is permitted to create a stock portfolio that reproduces the corporation's assets into perpetuity (whether or not it has taken advantage of this privilege we are still unsure). The Community Benefits Agreement now consists of philanthropic expenses determined independently by the University. Again, while the West Harlem Development Corporation's activity may provide valuable assistance to individual projects, the organization's new status under the 501(c)(3) guidelines deepens its institutional separation from West Harlem's political process, acting as a potential facade against the long-term incompatibility of neighborhood conditions with the needs of lower-income tenants.

(December 8, 2011) [Jeff Mays of DNAinfo](#) reports that Columbia has allocated nearly half of the \$700,000 dollars actualized in the Community Benefits Agreement since 2009 *to pay private consultants with close connections to New York politicians publically supporting the University's expansion*. In an interview with Mays, Community Board 9 member Walter South calls out Columbia's corruption: "They've paid these people \$300,000 dollars, and what do we have to show for it? The money should go for community improvement, not hiring the politically connected". South explains that he himself has applied to handle the West Harlem Development Corporation's affordable housing fund, only to be rejected without explanation.

In response, State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman conducts an investigation of the West Harlem Local Development Corporation. He forces the group to adopt an explicit

clause against investments with underlying conflicts of interests, whether they be of a personal, familial, or political nature.

(March 22, 2012) 69-year old construction worker [Juan Ruiz is killed while helping to demolish a century-old warehouse on Columbia's expansion site](#). While clearing fragments from the building, he is fatally struck by a beam which has not been sufficiently secured. 60-year old King Range, and 30-year old Sakim Kirby are buried in rubble, but extracted quickly enough to survive, although with near-crippling injuries. We do not know anything further about their present condition. Ruiz's grandson, 29-year old Leis Colon, considers filing a law suit, but in the end decides against it for lack of resources.

(March 24, 2012) 'Students Against Columbia University Displacement' and 'The Coalition to Preserve Community' [stage a week long occupation of one of the last buildings standing on the expansion site](#), with the aim of condemning unsafe working conditions and the University's negligence in fulfilling the Community Benefits Agreement. Their efforts lead to valuable dialogues between Columbia students and neighborhood tenants (dialogues without which this document would have never been written), but fail to win the serious attention of the University administration.

(March 22, 2013) A year after Juan Ruiz's death, Community Board 9 [petitions the Empire State Development Corporation to audit Columbia's performance in fulfilling the Community Benefits Agreement](#). More specifically, CB9 members like Larry English and Walter South fear the University has released grossly exaggerated and misleading employment statistics to conceal their neglect of local workers. Although Columbia claims that West Harlem residents make up over 50% of the expansion laborforce, they have not included any figures for the construction of the buildings themselves, a task they argue is too highly specialized for job-seekers in the area. Instead, their data ostensibly accounts for other more peripheral chores surrounding the campus development itself. We are yet to receive the results of this audit from the ESDC, the very authority that permitted Columbia to invoke eminent domain in the first place.

(January 2014) Bill De Blasio is elected as New York's 109th mayor, inheriting a 46% poverty rate, homeless shelters swelling with over 50,000 people in need, 9,000 incarcerated on Riker's Island prison without formal charges, working class communities coming apart at the seams under the weight of gentrification, and [a city budget](#) that invests twice as much in police equipment than it does in combined welfare services (see page 35 of hyperlink attachment). To the surprise of much of his voting base, the new mayor appoints Bill Bratton as Police Commissioner, whose aggressive policies of 'pre-emptive policing' during the Giuliani administration laid the foundations for 'stop and frisk'.

(Spring 2014) The first scaffoldings of Columbia's new campus are erected on the Manhattanville expansion site.

(May 2014) Bill De Blasio releases [the city's proposal](#) to combat the crisis in affordable housing. *Housing New York: A Five-Borough, Ten-Year Plan*, introduces new tax-exemptions and low-interest rates for developers interested in producing affordable housing. The vacant lots dotting New York City are suggested as potential sites for these initiatives. From the perspective of Manhattanville, the plan has little to offer. What the neighborhood needs in terms of housing policy is the protection of tenants living in apartment complexes that have already been built. While De Blasio's proposal contains novel tactics in vacant land-use, it neglects the crisis of corporate subsumption in many previously existing housing infrastructures.

(June 3, 2014) New York City District Attorney, Cyrus Vance Jr., [delivers a lecture](#) at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health, in which he argues that urban policies in criminal justice and welfare are failing young people.

(June 4, 2014) The District Attorney's Criminal Enterprise Unit and the NYPD's Gang Division conduct the largest 'gang raid' in the history of New York City. The operation uses four years of investigative work, nearly a hundred million dollars, and thousands of hours of surveillance observation to indict 103 teenagers and young adults for charges of conspiracy and assault. The defendants are all residents of the Grant and Manhattanville public housing projects, in the immediate vicinity of Columbia University. In actuality, the indicted are not members of formal gangs. Rather they are either involved or loosely affiliated a violent inter-project rivalry that claimed two lives from 2011-2014. For years parents had organized to find community-based solutions to problems in their neighborhood, from family brokered truces, job counseling, school reform, and the construction of a welcoming playground and community center. They are dismayed to learn that all the while the city had spent millions spying on their children [to criminalize even the most tenuous connection to the violence](#).

[In an open letter to University affiliates](#), Vice President of Columbia Public Safety, James McShane, celebrates the raids as a moment of progress for West Harlem. He claims that the affair is the result of a "long-term collaboration between local law enforcement agencies". What this means precisely, is left unclear. McShane himself has deep ties to the NYPD, having held positions of leadership in four different precincts in the Bronx. During the 1990's, he was also on the staff of then Deputy Police Commissioner Ray Kelly (one of the masterminds of stop-and-frisk, and later head Commissioner of the NYPD under Mayor Bloomberg).

In addition, McShane promises in his letter that the University will significantly increase its surveillance and patrol operations throughout Manhattanville. This initiative is to include plain clothed police squads, sky watchtowers, "an extensive system of video cameras", and an escort service for Columbia students. The document does not so much as mention the hardships endured by local families. Nor does it reveal that the University is responsible for robbing West Harlem of thousands of employment opportunities, on a site immediately across from Manhattanville Houses. Manhattanville public housing, much like the rest of the New York City Housing Authority, [suffers from a 27% unemployment rate](#). When neighborhood parents critique the city's strategies in addressing issues of criminal justice, Columbia offers more of the same, only on an expanded scale.

Yet Columbia's involvement in the plight of West Harlem's public housing projects runs even deeper. In June of 2013, the only two tenants to actually lose loved ones to murder since the rivalry began, Taylornn Murphy and Derrick Haynes, set out to rid their neighborhood of its ills. Out of a firm belief in the potential of local youth, they decided that the best way out of their predicament was through employment and education. Murphy and Haynes reached out to young people from both projects, inviting them to unite to consider an alternative. They succeeded in attracting 40 youths to meet with a Columbia administrator and a representative of the construction company building the new campus about possible job opportunities on the expansion site. [Theodore Gershon](#), Vice President of Columbia's Workforce Development Office – the body charged with navigating the expansion project's relationship to local labor – agreed to register those present for an Occupational Safety and Health Administration course application (OSHA), in order to prepare them for construction jobs. The prospect of a joint project had the effect of producing a de facto truce between what had at times been opposing groups representing the Grant and Manhattanville houses. The tension plaguing the neighborhood effectively receded for as much as three months following the meeting. *But Theodore Gershon did not follow up on the proposed employment program*, and Columbia's Office of Community Affairs refused to return the phone calls and letters of Murphy and Haynes as they desperately sought further guidance and information. Instead, Columbia's Public Safety Program collaborated with the NYPD as they finished their multi-million dollar surveillance operation to formulate the last of their criminal indictments.

(September 16, 2014) At a Public Meeting, residents of Grant and Manhattanville Houses find out that Columbia's 2009 Community Benefits Agreement includes \$3 million in welfare funds for their buildings. [Yet only \\$85,000 has been distributed thus far](#), and under rigid restrictions (reserved only to buy air-conditioners at the outset of winter) . Information also surfaces that Columbia has bought shares in the ownership of Manhattanville Houses. But the University's intentions and the details of their investment are kept secret, as is the case with over 90% of Columbia's endowment. The key administrator handling Columbia's financial relationship to the Grant and Manhattanville Houses is [Maxine Griffith](#), of the University Office of Government and Community Affairs.

(September 30, 2014) The chairman of the board of the West Harlem Development Corporation, Donald Notice, [resigns from his position via email](#). The board has just decided to invest half of the University's \$20 million dollar affordable housing fund in a non-profit whose New York branch is run by Notice's sister, Denise Scott. By resigning in a hurry, Notice wants to make sure to avoid the watchful eye of the State Attorney General, who had made a point to purge personal conflicts of interest in Columbia's philanthropy. Scott will retain \$600,000 out of the \$20 million for her management services, and the rest of the money will be administered by her Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). The affordable housing investments are now twice removed from the oversight of West Harlem tenants.

III. Key Questions Moving Forward:

(1) How does the Columbia administration intend to navigate its relationship to the Grant and Manhattanville Houses from now until 2030? Have Lee Bollinger and the Board of Trustees planned that far ahead? The two projects comprise 15 buildings and a total of 7,275 residents. The Manhattanville Houses lie directly across from Columbia's expansion site. What we know as of now, from James McShane's letter to University affiliates, is that Columbia intends to erect a comprehensive surveillance apparatus around the houses. This will increase the disparities in law enforcement practices already prevailing on the University campus. Today, while Columbia's own serial rape epidemic goes unreported and unpunished by the administration, Public Safety publishes routine photographs of suspected robbers and assailants - consistently people of color - who have yet to be criminally prosecuted. With the University's observation equipment fueled by an assignment of increased scale, this racial inequality in the juridical process will likely deepen.

Furthermore, we must ask ourselves why Columbia held all but \$85,000 of \$3,000,000 promised to the Grant and Manhattanville houses during a period which saw a sustained outcry for infrastructural support by public housing residents. Why has the administration purchased shares in the ownership of the Manhattanville buildings? Is Bollinger intending to increase the University's shares in the houses until he's able to manage their affairs?

(2) What are the limits of the Community Benefits Agreement? How can students work to maximize its positive effect on tenants in West Harlem? How does the leadership structure of the West Harlem Development Corporation function? How many jobs has Columbia actually given to local residents since signing the agreement in 2009? How can we pressure the administration to release this information?

(3) What have been the effects of Columbia's expansion since its official approval in November 2007? How many residents have already been displaced? What is the best way to document this trend without up-to-date census data? How have these changes affected the tenants in 3333 Broadway, who lost public protection when the Mitchell Lama program expired in 2005?

(4) What strategies can Columbia students adopt to mobilize in support of neighborhood residents who wish to remain in their own homes, and improve their living conditions? Is there any hope of resurrecting the housing codes proposed in plan 197-a? If not, are there grassroots tactics that can successfully thwart the growing crisis of tenant displacement? What campaigns are residents leading today, and how can we help?

IV. Sources and Research Materials:

(1) Essays on Columbia's Expansion

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<http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/assets/Uploads/20130425ciso12011.pdf>

(b) Alexandra J. Hain, "The Manhattanville Project: Urban Renewal on the Capitalist Agenda", (Kent: Brussels School of International Studies, 2011),

http://www.academia.edu/1119464/The_Manhattanville_Project_Urban_Renewal_on_the_Capitalist_Agenda.

(c) Brian Paul, "Columbia's Manhattanville Expansion: Community Planning Confronts Institutional Elitism", (New York: Hunter College, 2010),

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/ccpd/repository/files/Columbia-Manhattanville-V4.pdf>

(2) Research by the Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification (SCEG)

(a) Student Coalition on Expansion and Gentrification (SCEG), *Columbia's West Harlem Expansion: A Look at the Issues*, (New York,

2007), [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cssn/expansion/infosheets/scegbooklet\(short-edge\).pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cssn/expansion/infosheets/scegbooklet(short-edge).pdf).

(b) Website of SCEG: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cssn/expansion/>

(3) Map of Community Board 9, comprising Morningside Heights, Manhattanville, and Hamilton Heights: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/mancb9/downloads/pdf/cb9m-detail.pdf>

(4) Economic and Social Statistics on Manhattanville, from City-Data, 2008: <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Manhattanville-New-York-NY.html>

(5) Economic and Social Statistics on Community Board 9, from the NYC Department of City Planning: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/neighbor_info/mn09_info.shtml

(6) Community Board 9 Plan to Section 197-a of the City Charter ('Plan 197-a'):

http://www.prattcenter.net/sites/default/files/cb9m_final_24-sep-07.pdf

(7) Testimonial by Urban Planner Mercedes Narciso on the revisions to Plan 197-a introduced by Columbia University, filed to section 197-c of the City Charter:

<http://prattcenter.net/news-events/news/manhattan-community-board-9-197-plan>

(8) Transcript of the Proceedings of Community Board 9 Public Hearing, August 15th, 2007, to Consider Columbia University's Plan 197-c:

http://www.nyc.gov/html/mancb9/downloads/pdf/8-15_public_hearing.pdf

(9) Columbia University's Official Website on their Expansion into Manhattanville:

<http://neighbors.columbia.edu/pages/manplanning/>

(10) The West Harlem Community Benefits Agreement (CBA):

http://gca.columbia.edu/files/gca/content/pdf/CBA_Agreement.pdf

(11) Columbia University and NYC Department of City Planning's Environmental Impact Study (EIS) on the potential affects of the Manhattanville expansion:

http://home2.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/env_review/manhattanville.shtml

(12) Report of the Columbia University Senate's Campus Planning Task Force on the Manhattanville expansion, June 6, 2010:

http://senate.columbia.edu/archives/reports_archive/09-10/tfcp_report_6-7-10.pdf

(13) Website of the West Harlem Development Corporation (WHDC), formerly the West Harlem Local Development Corporation (WHLDC):

<http://www.westharlemdc.org/whdc/>

(14) Webpage of the Manhattanville Houses, from the site of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA):

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/developments/manhattanvillehses.shtml>

(15) Articles on the Context and Execution of the Police Raids of June 4th, 2014:

(a) Daryl Kahn, "Manhattan DA: Young Defendants Hurt by Broken System", *Juvenile Justice Information Exchange*, June 4th, 2014, <http://jjie.org/manhattan-da-young-defendants-hurt-by-broken-prosecution-system/>.

(b) Daryl Kahn, "We Asked City for Help, We Got a Raid Instead", *Juvenile Justice Information Exchange*, June 5th, 2014, <http://jjie.org/harlem-residents-we-asked-city-for-help-we-got-a-raid-instead/>

(c) Geoffrey Mullings, "Why NYC's Largest Gang Raid was a Big Waste of Time", *The Blinker*, June 9th, 2014, <http://theblinker.com/mainpage/2014/06/09/why-nycs-largest-gang-raid-was-a-big-waste-of-time/>

(d) Jeff Mays, "District Attorney Cast Net too Wide in Harlem Gang Crack Down, Critics Say", *DNA Info New York*, October 6th, 2014, <http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20141006/west-harlem/vance-cast-too-wide-net-harlem-gang-crackdown-families-say>

(e) Nikole Gellineau interviewed by Marilena Marchetti, "Why did the NYPD invade a Harlem project?", *Socialist Worker*, June 24, 2014, <http://socialistworker.org/2014/06/24/nypd-invades-a-harlem-project>

(f) Josmar Trujillo, "Militarized Policing, Gentrifying City: Doubting NYPD's Reforms", *City Limits*, June 3rd, 2014, <http://www.citylimits.org/conversations/254/the-nypd-reforms-for-real>

(15) Columbia University Vice President of Public Safety James McShane's Letter to University Affiliates Following the Police Raid in West Harlem, June 4th, 2014: http://facilities.columbia.edu/files_facilities/imce_shared/_VP_for_Public_Safety_James_F_McShane_6-5-14.pdf

(17) Mayor Bill De Blasio's, *Housing New York: A Five-Borough, Ten-Year Plan*: http://www.nyc.gov/html/housing/assets/downloads/pdf/housing_plan.pdf

(18) New York City Budget, Fiscal Year 2014:
http://www.nyc.gov/html/omb/downloads/pdf/sum5_13.pdf.

(19) Sources for Statistics on Broader Problem of Tenant Displacement throughout New York City:

(a) The Community Service Society of New York:
<http://www.cssny.org/issues/entry/affordable-housing>

(b) The Facebook Page of the Citywide Campaign, 'Real Affordability For All':
<https://www.facebook.com/RealAffordability>

(20) Information on Professor Tom Angotti's 2009 Book, *New York For Sale*, which traces the disenfranchisement of Community Planning in NYC since the fiscal crisis of 1976:
<http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/new-york-sale>

(21) Information on Stefan Bradley's 2012 book, *Harlem vs. Columbia University*, an analysis of the black student movement at Columbia that halted the administration's construction of a new gym on the site of Morningside Park, in 1968-69. The protests against 'Gym Crow' reveal the long history of political conflict between the University and its neighbors.
<http://www.press.uillinois.edu/books/catalog/69erx5xt9780252034527.html>

V. Contacts for Organizations Fighting against Tenant Displacement in West Harlem:

- (1) The Mirabal Sisters Cultural and Community Center: <http://www.mirabalcenter.org/>
- (2) The Harlem Tenants' Council: <http://www.harlemtenantscouncil.com/>
- (3) St. Mary's Church: <http://stmarysharlem.wordpress.com/>
- (4) Congressional Campaign in the 13th District for Green Party Candidate, Daniel Vila: <http://wcuw.wordpress.com/>
- (5) The Coalition to Preserve Community: <http://stopcolumbia.wordpress.com/>

For further information and updates, refer to our website at:
<http://coalitionagainstgentrification.wordpress.com/>