

# Introduction

No subways take you directly to its doors. But leave any station on 34th Street (33rd on the east side) and you will find, towering above you and dominating the nearby skyline, perhaps the most iconic of New York City's skyscrapers, the Empire State Building. New York elites who sank their millions into this construction project at the outset of the Great Depression did so as a symbolic assertion of the power of capital to rise again.

The Empire State Building sits on property formerly owned and developed by the Astor family, New York's first real estate moguls. At their height, Astor family holdings included properties on eleven Manhattan avenues and at least ninety-eight streets, including the entirety of what is now the west side of Times Square, from 42nd to 51st Streets west of Broadway. Little surprise that the Astor name lives on across the city—at Astor Place in Manhattan's East Village, along

Astor Row in Harlem, and in the neighborhood of Astoria, Queens.

Construction on the Empire State Building began in March of 1930 and was completed on International Workers Day, May 1, 1931. Built in fourteen months under the direction of New York's former governor and 1928 Democratic presidential candidate Al Smith, the Empire State Building represented, in Smith's words, the "brains, brawn, ingenuity, and the muscle of mankind." In the building's lobby, above the doors, are platter-size brass medallions that salute the building's "Masonry," "Heating," and "Electricity" that were the marvels of the age. Its difficulty finding tenants in the Depression's first years earned it the nickname "the Empty State Building"; the 1933 film *King Kong*, which featured the giant ape climbing to the top of the radio tower, helped turn its fortunes around. Soon hundreds of businesses, many of them connected to the fashion and garment industries whose base was in the neighborhood, located to the building.

---

Formerly the Wigwam bar, now a beauty salon, 2021.  
CREDIT: CAROLINA BANK MUÑOZ



But who built this soaring tower? Thousands of workers piled millions of bricks, hauled tons of steel, limestone, and marble, and installed miles of pipes and wires. Their frenetic pace surely helped contribute to the five official deaths recorded during construction, but as one worker recalled decades later, they were “glad to have the work” in those grim years.

And among the thousands of European immigrants and their children who formed the core of the construction workforce were hundreds of Mohawk ironworkers who immigrated to the city from Kahnawake, a reservation town outside of Montreal, Canada. These “skywalkers” were the riveters, also known as the connectors: they bolted the steel beams together after they had been put in place. Working with portable furnaces, red hot rivets, and heavy mallets, theirs was the highest, hardest, and most dangerous work in construction, and also the best paid. Mohawk ironworkers had come to New York during the building boom of the 1920s, and over the following years hundreds made the journey. They helped to build not only the Empire State Building, but Rockefeller Center, the United Nations, and, later, the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge and the World Trade Center. Today, there are still around two hundred Mohawk ironworkers in New York, comprising around 10 percent of the workforce.

To consider the lives these ironworkers led in mid-twentieth-century New York, you could take a train from the west side (the 2 or 3) or the east side (the 6 to the 4 or 5) to Nevins Street, Brooklyn. Nev-

ins Street begins at the edges of Brooklyn’s ever-expanding downtown, heading south off Flatbush Avenue. For a few blocks, it would barely qualify as a commercial strip. The large buildings that line these blocks show their backs here, opening their freight entrances and little else. Yet as Nevins approaches Atlantic, you will notice a quick change in the character of the street. Suddenly you will come across two- and three-story residences, smaller shops, honey locust trees, and the occasional Callery pear.

75 Nevins Street, between State and Atlantic, is a hair salon today. Over half a century ago, it was a bar called the Wigwam Club. Here, and in the streets to the south, you are in what was once the heart of “Little Kahnawake.” For a few decades, most of the Mohawk ironworkers in the city settled in the ten square blocks of Brooklyn known then as North Gowanus, today as Boerum Hill. Surrounding the Gowanus Canal, it was an industrial area, described in 1949 by the writer Joseph Mitchell as “old, sleepy, shabby,” but it was also filled with red brick and brownstone residential buildings. The ironworkers moved there for its proximity to their union hall on nearby Atlantic Avenue, Local 361 of the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental, and Reinforcing Iron Workers. The hall served as a community center for the Mohawks and other ironworkers in the area, where they could find jobs and travel quickly—on the train you just left, which was only a nickel until 1948—to the construction sites of downtown and midtown Manhattan. Their wages assured them a decent living, and

many moved their families to Brooklyn or married local neighbors; Mitchell observed that the Kahnawake lived “in the best houses on the best blocks.” A Presbyterian minister on Warren Street learned enough of the Mohawk-Oneida language to translate the Gospel of Luke and to preach to his Native Canadian immigrant parishioners once a month. The Nevins Bar and Grill, a neighborhood bar, became the Wigwam, where walking in one could find tomahawks and feather headdresses, and a sign over the door that read “The Greatest Iron Workers in the World Pass Thru These Doors.”

Like weeds, condominiums and new office towers have sprung up to the north, west, and east of what was once the Wigwam. But from across Atlantic Avenue, looking north, you can still see the top of the Empire State Building rising above the midtown skyline in the distance. As you contemplate this symbolic center of the Big Apple from afar, you might consider some defining social contrasts that help to make sense of New York, stories concealed in the footprint of the tower and in the steel beams that help it fly to the sky.

You will likely encounter mention of the Empire State Building and the Astor family elsewhere in your journey to New York City, and many other guidebooks will draw attention to their prominence and legacy. But if you know where to look, and how to listen, different stories can be found as well. We can see soaring evidence of fortunes piling on fortunes, how city investments help the wealthy increase their wealth. Yet with some imagination, as you walk the quieter Brook-

lyn streets, you might still hear the communities formed by immigrant First Nation workers. And certainly, all around the city, we can see the fruits of their labor.

*A People's Guide to New York City* is the fifth in a series of books that seek to create a “deliberate political disruption” of the ways we know and experience the urban environment. As the authors of *A People's Guide to Los Angeles* observed in their introduction, “Guidebooks select sites, put them on a map, and interpret them in terms of their historical and contemporary significance. All such representations are inherently political, because they highlight some perspectives while overlooking others. Struggles over who and what count as ‘historic’ and worthy of a visit involve decisions about who belongs and who doesn’t, who is worth remembering and who can be forgotten, who we have been and who we are becoming.”

As told by most guidebooks, the story of New York City lingers on the stories of people like the Astors, or celebrities and artists who made their fortunes here and shared their fame with the city itself. The everyday citizens of New York are not necessarily forgotten in these guidebooks. Indeed their diversity and hardiness, their capacity for invention and overcoming adversity, their toughness, tolerance, and fast-talking hustles are often celebrated. New York is a global city, an immigrant city, a rags-to-riches city, a mecca for money and artistry. New York has created or refined dozens of cultural motifs that leap beyond its boundaries, and fortunes that span the world as well. Even the radicals agree. Leon Trotsky noted in

his autobiography, describing his brief 1917 residence in New York: “Here I was in New York, city of prose and fantasy, of capitalist automatism, its streets a triumph of cubism, its moral philosophy that of the dollar. New York impressed me tremendously because, more than any other city in the world, it is the fullest expression of our modern age.”

Over a century later, New York City continues to represent, in many respects, the fullest expression of our modern age. That is, it is a city of intensive and uneven capital investment; tremendous labor power, employed and not; vaunting ambitions and crippling inequality; and a myriad of peoples struggling to get by, creating communities, and establishing their very right to the city they live in. Guidebooks will often narrate aspects of this city of contrasts. But in capturing such contrasts as spectacle, such accounts do not make sense of the manifold relationships between the glitz and the glamour on the one side and the grit of the people and the grime of the streets on the other. Guidebooks, by their very nature, must freeze dynamic urban processes at a point in time.

*A People’s Guide to New York City* makes the straightforward proposition that the life and landscape of New York are products of social power and its attendant struggles. The streets, the buildings, the institutions, the people, tell a story of movement and countermovement. It is often a story of the prerogatives of great wealth; a story of government invention, intervention, and repression; a story that is also of people’s demands, creativity, and self-organization. It is

a story of standoff and of compromise; battles won, lost, avoided, celebrated, forgotten.

To see this, you have to see the whole of the city. As such, *A People’s Guide* brings you to the five boroughs. We present them from north to south, and we also organize our sites from north to south and by neighborhoods, moving from Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx to the Lenape Burial Ridge in Staten Island. We selected sites that tell different parts of the stories of the people of New York City over time and today; not just who they were and are, but how they have made and remade the city around them. Our sites should change how you view the city itself—its physical landscape and the places that are most significant in its history and ongoing development. By making visible the invisible social dynamics that undergird the city, we hope to shift how the reader determines what and who are important to the Big Apple.

## The Past and the Present

Like the ironworkers of Gowanus, *A People’s Guide to New York City* is necessarily a story of disappearances. With its limited space, large crowds, real estate profiteering, and constant need for an edge, the built environment and streetscapes of New York are always under erasure. The writer Colson Whitehead observed that you become a New Yorker when, as you walk around the city, you begin to say “That used to be . . .” He explains, “You are a New Yorker when what was there before is more real and solid than what is here now.”

To many, New York today is in fact haunted by *what was there before*, as the dizzying city we witness at this writing, with its hyper-gentrification and skyscraper homes for the world's billionaires, eclipses a scrappy city where, if you could "make it there," you'd "make it anywhere." Jeremiah Moss, an astute observer of the city, has described a *Vanishing New York*, in a popular blog and book by that name. Natives and more recent transplants wonder whether the transformations of the first decades of the twenty-first century—the explosion of high-end development and big-box stores; the closing of hundreds of small cafes, bars, theaters, galleries, and all kinds of mom-and-pop storefronts; the presence of a vast police force and other visible security measures—represent a moment when the sheer *quantity* of change augurs a true *qualitative* change to the very nature of the city. The devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the concurrent economic crisis promise still more upheaval, in directions that continue to unfold. Behind the changes to the buildings and their street-level occupants lurks a greater injustice: the mass displacement of middle- and lower-income residents from neighborhood after neighborhood, most often people of color or ethnic minorities, due to rising real estate costs and the city's un- and underemployment. Those living in New York City neighborhoods are no strangers to residential transformation. But such churn is never a "natural" process. Social forces push people out and pull people away; others draw people in; and sometimes others compel them to stay when they might otherwise leave.

The sites in this book tell many tales of the whys and wherefores of such neighborhood transformation. "Booms" lure job seekers and "busts" forcefully expel them. Employment and opportunity are constants in New York's push-pull, but the laws, investments, decisions, and costs surrounding real estate are perhaps the overriding determinants of the city's physical and social landscapes. In the twentieth century, racially discriminatory "redlining" devalued homes in multiethnic, interracial communities and encouraged racist mortgage lending practices, further spurring segregation and white flight from the city. Urban renewal and "slum clearance" displaced hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, frequently leaving shattered neighborhoods or under-supported housing in its wake. Continually, bohemians and artists lay claim to cheap housing or abandoned industry, building galleries and creating new "hip" areas, and, wittingly and not, as geographer Neil Smith observed, often serving as shock troops for gentrification, which in turn can displace the very artists who helped begin the process. Anti-gentrification activists call this "art-washing" and are urging that community residents in places like Bushwick, Brooklyn, and in the South Bronx push back to "decolonize the hood."

Twenty-first-century displacements are widespread and, seemingly, as permanent as the titanic shifts of the past. Laws limiting rent increases were radically weakened in the early 1990s, and since that time to this writing New York City has lost close to half a million units of affordable housing. Aggra-



vating this problem, since the financial crisis of 2008, a swarm of predatory investors in rental housing, seeking profits beyond what legal rents would bring, have tried to drive away renters who pay below-market rates by harassing tenants and neglecting buildings. Home values have doubled and tripled and more, again depending on the neighborhood. Were it not for public housing and other subsidies, overcrowded living spaces, and the remaining rent control and stabilization laws, Manhattan would not have any working-class or poor residents. All the boroughs are growing more expensive. Adding to the flux and churn, the COVID-19 pandemic has unsettled real estate patterns, with economic instability promising evictions and foreclosures at the same moment that the city itself becomes a less desirable place for many whose jobs have been lost, or who are concerned with the medium-term viability of office districts and dense, urban centers. The gulf between the “haves” and “have-nots,” always profound, continues to foreshadow a future where a city organized around the needs and wants of the rich might fully eclipse the vibrant city of the people.

To a degree, *A People's Guide* shares this perspective. We draw attention to many of these vanished sites and peoples, highlighting their ongoing importance to what the city and its people have become. Many of the stories related in this guide touch upon the shutting out and shutting down of the people's city, and highlight those losses that mark erosions of community power, or that stifle and derail the bottom-up creativity and expression of the city's citizens.

But we don't think that vanishing is the whole of the story of New York. In *A People's Guide*, we also make visible the ongoing presence and assertion of the city's people to claim their city, build and defend neighborhood institutions, and make the streets and homes their own. Throughout its history, despite the larger social forces that buttress the city, the people of New York have inscribed and re-inscribed their own meanings on the places that make it up, and have asserted their rights to continue to live here. In fact, it is that ever-unfolding, persistent tug of possibility that helps to attract and retain so many for whom New York is otherwise such a difficult place to live. Today, when the city is once again in the grips of profound uncertainty, we have seen dozens of neighborhoods self-organize to help their neighbors; businesses retool to provide essential sustenance, products, and services for the city's common good; and communities create safe and playful opportunities for their residents to connect and come together. In times of crisis, the people's city emerges again after hiding in plain sight.

Many “baked-in” structural factors contribute to New York's capacity for renewal. Cramped living spaces, the relative availability of public transit and public space, and the density of commercial districts have all contributed to much of New York City life being lived outside, creating a constantly innovating street culture. Certainly, developers, marketers, landlords, city planners, and the police play outsized roles setting the structural parameters, prices, and tone of the city. But neighborhoods also

change from the bottom up, revitalized by new migrants and immigrants who create new businesses, art, homes: again, it is New York's peoples that continually reimagine it. Such revitalization is repeated across time and across the city, and offers the possibility of a home, at least for a while, for new and thriving neighborhood cultures.

At the same time, people's movements have demanded and won rent control, public and other affordable housing, access to public space and more of it, housing subsidies, and sustainable urban planning. In fact, the very rent laws weakened in the 1990s were given new life and expanded in 2019 after years of concerted pressure from dozens of housing and community groups and thousands of tenants across the city and state. Time and again, the public and private spaces of this city have been contested turf. Apartments and all kinds of buildings, parks, streets, and schools are designed with one social class in mind and then inhabited by another. Such back and forth has always happened, and what we see around us is a landscape still shaped by class and cultural struggles. Despite the great power of real estate and the city's new financial princes, this story will continue.

## City of Contradictions

Beyond New York's bottom-up creation and often obscured urban processes, the sites and tours of the *People's Guide* highlight dynamic tensions that take their own peculiar shape in this city. By drawing attention to these shifting contrasts that have shaped and

continue to shape the city, it is our hope that even as the city changes around us, the very few sites we've chosen will still help to reveal and explain the very many possible sites that could be in this book, as well as potential sites that have yet to emerge.

New York's earliest days were similar to other North American territories seized by the Europeans. Early colonizers killed and displaced the Native American peoples who lived across the five boroughs through fortified occupation of their lands, disease, and a century of warfare. The Lenape were the most extensive group to be "bought" and forced out of what became New York City, among others including the Wappinger in the north, the Matinecock in the east, and the Carnarsie in the southern parts of what is now the city; further east and south, the Merrick and Rockaway tribes met similar fates. By 1800, none of New York's local tribes maintained settlements within the confines of what was to become the city.

The shorthand story of the eviction of native people was taught to every New York schoolchild: the Dutch West India Company "purchased" what was called "Mannahatta" from the Lenape for sixty Dutch guilders—popularly described as twenty-four dollars—in 1626. The first dynamic tension we trace thus lies with the social geography of the city itself and the history of its settling and growth: from the start, the story of New York affirms the prominence of the narrow island of Manhattan. But here we note that the classic urban relationship of core to periphery has long been a complicated one in New York City.



What eventually established the five boroughs of “Greater New-York” (as the press described it in the years leading to its creation) was the uniting of New York City (by that point, Manhattan and the Bronx) with Brooklyn, most of Queens County, and Staten Island in 1898. Using language of benevolent colonial expansion, in 1894 the *New York Times* imagined a glorious future for this soon-to-be vast territory:

If Greater New-York becomes an established fact, it will be in a position to increase in value and population to rank with the greatest city in the world within a few years. Its increase will be greater than that of any cities of the Old World, as it will have facilities for developing its wealth such as no city now commands. . . . It will include within its limits a waterfront such as no city in the world has or can by any possibility ever obtain. It will have land for manufacturing interests, with cheap homes for employes [sic] far from the tenement districts, that will develop a stronger, healthier, and more industrious manhood than it is possible to develop in the closely-packed sections of the city where cheap homes only are now obtainable. The many obvious advantages that New-York will derive from the annexation of this territory were undoubtedly recognized by her voters. The advantages that she will derive will be fully offset by those that she will confer upon those whom she accepts as her citizens under the consolidation plan.

From the beginning, there was little room for doubt about which part of the city would be considered “central” and which

would be considered “outer.” Of the five boroughs that make up the whole of the city, Manhattan has the most documented and celebrated history. It has the highest population density and the greatest concentration of the city’s landmarks, wealth, and famous cultural attractions. More people—a million and a half—commute into Manhattan every day than into any other place in the country. And more people leave the boroughs of Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx each day than any other place in the country, while Staten Island has some of the country’s longest commuting times. Even within New York City, Manhattan is usually referred to as “the city.” This idea of a center was in fact also at the heart of the city’s own tourist marketing, guidebooks, and maps, which for many years provided visitors with maps and advice that took you only as far north as 96th Street in Manhattan, excluding uptown along with all of the other boroughs. The twentieth century hollowing-out of the urban core, typical of many other United States cities, never quite affected this vertically dense borough to the same extent.

Yet the urbanization of the New York area has, like other cities, produced additional “centers” beyond Manhattan’s downtown and midtown, including some like downtown Brooklyn and Long Island City, Queens, that are within the city itself. Real estate prices in north and west Brooklyn, western Queens, and even parts of the city’s poorest borough, the Bronx, are approaching Manhattan’s stratospheric heights, as are many of the new buildings. As locals say, these areas are becoming “Manhattanized.”

At the same time, the “outer boroughs,” as they are referred to, are still separate counties in New York State and once contained their own towns—in the case of Brooklyn, its own large bustling city. Unifying Greater New York into one city in 1898 was a political struggle, not a foregone conclusion—for example, Brooklyn’s Republican Protestants were concerned about losing their political autonomy, especially to Manhattan’s Democratic Catholic immigrants. Staten Island is still not sure whether it was a good idea to join “the city,” voting to secede as recently as 1993 (the popular will of the borough was ignored). Today, the city’s immigrants live in the outer boroughs in much greater numbers than in Manhattan. The boroughs, differently and unevenly, have maintained and further developed their distinct characters, customs, accents, and even sports teams (the 1957 departure of the Brooklyn Dodgers for Los Angeles notwithstanding). The more you know the city, the more difficult it is to see it as “revolving around” a center.

Meanwhile, if the thesis of a “vanishing New York” can be anywhere decisively proven, it is along many streets of Manhattan. There, eclectic neighborhoods, as well as decades, even centuries, of cultural accumulation have been resettled or bought out or torn down and rebuilt. In some areas, walking past the chain stores, upscale malls, bank branches, and uninspired architecture of vast stretches of Manhattan, one could be in nearly any North American city. To find “authentic New York,” one increasingly looks to the outer boroughs. In fact, in

this century, the upsurge in global tourism encouraged NYC & Company, the city’s official marketing arm, to begin promoting the “outer boroughs” and their neighborhoods, emphasizing ethnic enclaves and hip-hop, to attract tourists from diverse national and cultural backgrounds.

So while the “core” of the city merges with its periphery, the “periphery” more often retains its own unique identity (and has never fully been only peripheral). We urge our readers to see the places in this city through this taut balance—a center that is not fully or only a center, an outer ring that is arguably more often expressive of the city’s historic essences and possible future dynamism.

Another tension we would draw attention to, following historian Josh Freeman, is New York’s contradictory cultures of cosmopolitanism and provincialism. In strange contrast to their renowned worldliness, New Yorkers’ outlooks and attitudes are often bounded by much more local experiences and allegiances.

Since its founding, New York has played a role in global commerce, first as a trading post for the Dutch West India Company and, later, as a valuable port for the British. By the middle of the eighteenth century, enslaved Africans comprised nearly a fifth of all New Yorkers. After the American Revolution, New York (and Brooklyn) families who had grown wealthy from trade and agriculture started New York’s banks, and the city became a center of finance and trade, a center for dry goods, and a site of increasing property values and real estate speculation.

Despite the abolition of slavery in New York State in 1827, New York fortunes remained deeply integrated in financing and insuring the sea voyages that propelled the slave trade, while the city continued to buy, store, process, and distribute the raw goods and commercial products made possible through slave labor. New York was a manufacturing city for over a century, stretching from the nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth, and as late as World War II fully a third of its workers were connected to the production or transportation of goods, with garment reigning supreme but joined by many other industries well-served by New York's density and location. Its global importance only increased as the tide turned more aggressively toward financial and other services in the postwar era. Today, New York City's position as a leading stock market and corporate headquarters, as well as a capital of media, marketing, and a burgeoning tech economy, continues to elevate it to the status of the leading global city in the United States.

From its earliest days, then, New Yorkers gathered by choice and by force from all over the world. Fostering a sophistication that crossed social classes, the ships and sailors visiting from all ports brought the news, fashions, and cultures of the world to New York. And New York has been the world's foremost "city of immigrants" for most of its history. Nineteenth century waves of immigration swelled the city from small town to major metropolis in a matter of decades. Remittances from and connections to new arrivals helped more families to

come—for example, emptying Irish villages during the potato famine and Jewish shtetls and cities in the Pale of Settlement and other parts of Eastern Europe—joining thousands from dozens of nations who came to New York's shores fleeing oppression and seeking economic opportunities.

Today, at over 3 million, there are more foreign-born residents within New York City than any other city in the world except London; as a metropolitan region, New York outranks the world's diverse regions by a margin of over 1 million. Hundreds of languages are spoken within the city's limits. The Dominican Republic, China, Mexico, Jamaica, Guyana, Ecuador, Haiti, Trinidad & Tobago, Bangladesh, India: the leading countries of origin for NYC's contemporary immigrant population give some sense of its diversity. New York expressions and accents were born with the transmission of Dutch names and words ("stoop"; "boss"; possibly even "Yankee") learned by the British, who "taught English to," by speaking with, the Dutch, enslaved Africans, free Blacks, Irish, and Germans, who in turn introduced New York's English to Italians and Jews from across Eastern Europe and Russia, who then worked with Hungarians and Poles and Ukrainians who . . . and so it goes on to this day. The neologism "Nuyorican" developed in Puerto Rico to describe their compatriots who came and stayed in New York, and today it is both used to describe the culture of New York Puerto Ricans and the "Spanglish" spoken by thousands across the city.

And yet for all its global integration, melding, and worldliness, it is a city of

neighborhoods and enclaves, including millions of people who rarely leave their borough and even more rarely the city itself. For some New Yorkers, New York, or their part of it, is the world, and they don't need to know much more than what they learn here, thank you very much. Its diversity even lends itself to neighborhood-specific insularity: as you walk in Queens past the sari shops and jewelers along 74th Street in Jackson Heights, or by the dim sum houses and Chinese supermarkets of Flushing, or alongside the manicured lawns and spacious houses of Forest Hills, you could be worlds, not subway stops, apart. These neighborhoods are an essential part of identity and culture for many New Yorkers. One might identify as being from New York but just as often refer to smaller geographic areas: I'm from Brooklyn; I'm from Williamsburg; I'm from Los Sures (the Southside of Williamsburg). In some places, such identification spans generations, and is taught to newcomers—along with neighborhood or borough-based accents, dialect, and slang. Such insularity is sometimes chosen, as communities choose to live close to others who share a common language, history, or culture. Other times, through both “top-down” institutional mechanisms (housing covenants; bank-lending practices), or “bottom-up” community attitudes and intimidation, the common identities, insularity, and segregation that typify many neighborhoods are forced. Rather than a “melting pot,” communities are often divided from each other by power, race, background, or culture. In all, the sites we describe display the ways in

which daily life within New York's borders is made porous to events around the world, punctuated by and responsive to global crises and far-flung events. New Yorkers' reputation for tolerance and multicultural fluency are certainly earned. At the same time, segregation and clannishness abound; subcultures and enclaves are constructed and enforced. Some of this makes for deep ties, traditions, and rooted cultures; some of this makes for deep suspicion of difference, fear of the “strangers” who live across the avenue or down the street, racist and xenophobic stereotyping, and, at times, violence.

Another contradictory tension that is perhaps, for the United States, uniquely expressed in this city, is between the competing powers of the private and public sectors. As one of the wealthiest large cities in the country, the economic power that New York elites wield to shape the city is nearly unparalleled, and the voice of the private sector is constant. For the first twelve years of this century, the city was governed by its richest citizen, Mayor Michael Bloomberg. From the names emblazoned on the buildings of the city's leading cultural institutions to every square inch of the subways and buses festooned with advertisements, wherever you look you find reminders of the reigning “moral philosophy of the dollar.” The workers of New York City have experienced the brunt of the dollar's power, too, from New York's early days as a center of slavery, through its sweatshops and dockside shape-ups, to today's underpaid service economy of dishwashers, home health aides, and retail clerks. Official poverty in the city has