

Reflection on Brooklyn Gentrification

Kenneth Pimentel

I don't know how to feel about the changes taking place in Brooklyn. Part of me is proud and excited that others see in Brooklyn what I always saw in it. The fun, the beauty, and the diversity of people in its neighborhoods. I feel jealous because this wave of newbies didn't have to deal with the drugs and the violence, the segregation of neighborhoods, and the stigma of being ridiculed only because you claimed Brooklyn as your borough. I'm angry because they didn't pay their dues, they didn't get their sneakers taken at the bus stop, or have a family get together end with cops and a shootout. There were no bars for coffee or cocktails. The only bars I knew of were on my windows, with the real heavy bars saved especially for use on the window that led to the fire escape. Yes, the fire escape, it was secured with a lock and chain to keep anything and everything out, no matter what the cost.

I'm sad because some will never know about just hanging on a stoop with your friends and laughing till the sun went down and sometimes till it came back up. Opening the fire hydrant on a hot summer day, and buying homemade ice pops from the lady across the street. Impromptu BBQ's. Throwing a party in a vacant apartment. Playing sports on the sidewalk till you graduated to play in the street with the bigger kids. Hopping the turnstiles on our way to Rockaway Beach with nothing but sweat and sand to look forward to. Rivalries with other neighborhoods, from sports to girls to just neighborhood pride.

But I am also excited to see the changes happening right before me. I don't have to tuck in my chain or hide my cell phone on the train while I'm headed to eat Thai food at Sea. I see the new green spaces and watch as kids and adults enjoy them without any fear whatsoever. I'm hopeful that we can find a balance of the new and old, that to rebuild doesn't necessarily mean to destroy, and that future generations won't have to get their Brooklyn edge from a website.

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