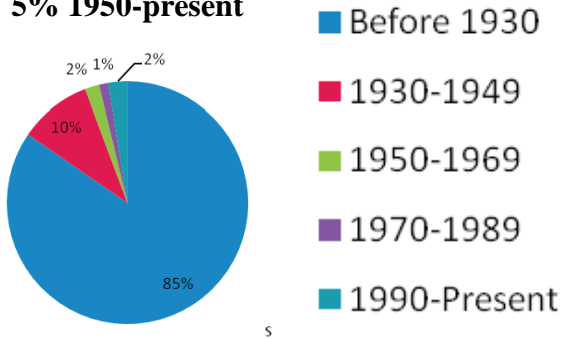


New York City has always stood as a symbol of opportunity and diversity. But in recent decades, the long reach of real estate moguls has jeopardized the livelihood of small businesses and neighborhoods. Family owned restaurants and shops are being strong-armed by building owners with exorbitant rent hikes. Families who have lived on blocks for generations watch as their neighborhoods undergo a cultural metamorphosis due to gentrification. We will read about a nearby neighborhood, Manhattan Valley and about two organizations that are trying to help preserve economic, ethnic and cultural diversity in that neighborhood, just north of RNA House.

The Story of Manhattan Valley

Since the 1960s, the 40 square block section of the UWS from 100th St and 110th St, between Broadway and Central Park West has been known as Manhattan Valley. What makes Manhattan Valley special is, for one thing, the large variety of housing, **85% built before 1930, 10% 1930-1949, 5% 1950-present**



The housings includes upscale apartments along CPW, fashionable tenements along Manhattan Ave, tenements and small businesses along Columbus and Amsterdam Aves, more than 40 low and moderate income limited equity co-ops on the side streets and, built in the 1950s, the Frederick Douglass Houses. The well-constructed pre-war buildings add character to the neighborhood. Most of the residents in Manhattan Valley currently rent, and a large portion of these units (45%) are subsidized

by NYC tax abatements as stabilized rentals or as limited equity co-ops or by Federal Section 8 vouchers. Manhattan Valley also stands out on the Upper West Side due to its distinct economic and ethnic diversity, despite gentrification pressures over the past decade which threaten this diversity.

A Little History

Before 1800, most New Yorkers lived south of Houston St. The period between 1800 and 1900 was marked by explosive growth parallel to major improvements to infrastructure. Central Park was completed in 1859 and displaced residents to the Manhattan Valley neighborhood. Development in that neighborhood in 1870s and 1880s included institutional care for the ill or aged, like the Home for Respectable Aged Indigent Females built in 1883 between 103rd and 104th Sts on Amsterdam Ave (which was saved by local community people from demolition planned for 1974 and is now the IAYH). Also the New York Cancer Hospital was built in 1887 near 105th St and Central Park West (Then NYC's first cancer hospital, now luxury condominium apartments in what looks like a castle).

The extension of the Ninth Ave El in 1879 and the improvement and opening of Broadway in 1899, made the UWS including the Manhattan Valley area easier to reach. Beginning in 1904, the IRT 7th Ave/Broadway subway, connected Manhattan Valley to the rest of downtown. The development of housing and jobs brought new residents to the area, Irish and German immigrants and workers along the avenues and more middle class families along the side streets. During WWII and into the late 1940s, the population shifted, more Black Americans and many Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans and South Americans began settling there, adding a new layer of international and ethnic diversity.

The 1950s marked the period of urban renewal. NYC built the 17 building, 2,056 apartment Frederick Douglass Houses completed in 1958. Then in 1965 added the 16 story Douglass Addition, home to 306 residents. But also, community concern for adequate housing for moderate income people

led to the formation in 1968 of the Manhattan Valley Development Corporation, a community-based non-profit corporation with a mission to improve and develop housing.

When the city entered a fiscal crisis in the 1970s, many people fled the city, abandoning properties and left institutions vacant. Much of Manhattan Valley deteriorated. From the 1970s through the mid-1990s, newspaper articles mentioning Manhattan Valley were most often about crime and drug gangs, sometimes along Manhattan Avenue but more often along the parallel portions of Columbus and Amsterdam Aves. The neighborhood, like much of the Upper West Side, was less than desirable. There were abandoned buildings and being out at night was unsafe.

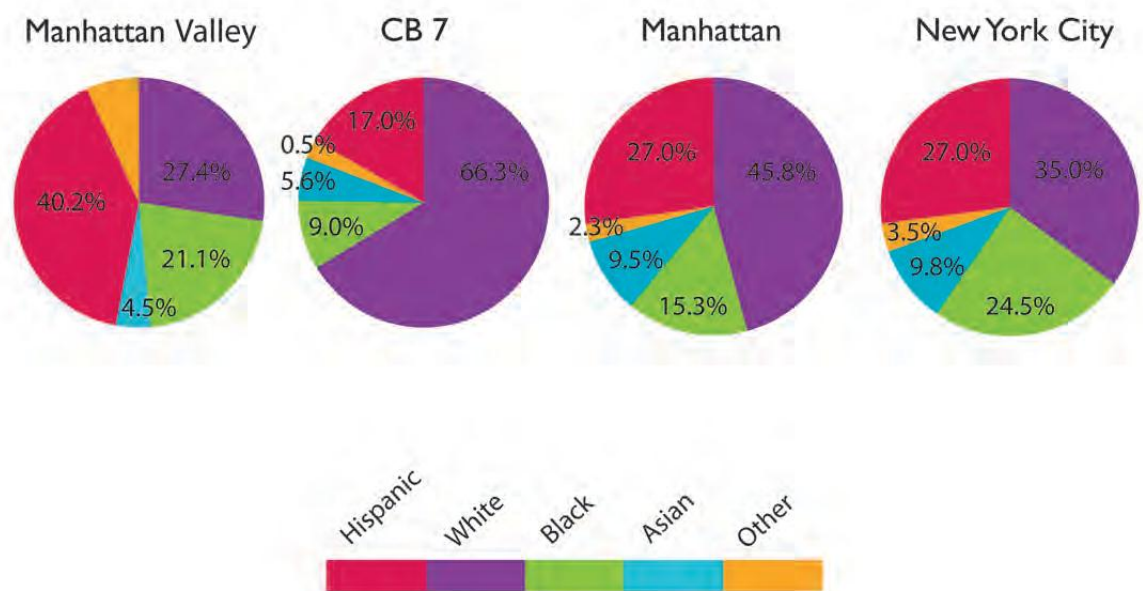
A cross section of people organized to protect their neighborhood. For example, groups of tenants took over buildings in disrepair and rehabilitated them. Eventually the City helped some of them become owners. Many buildings became limited equity co-ops based on the investment of “sweat equity” especially along 105th and 106th Streets.

As the community continued to organize around tackling the housing crisis, in 1979 the Valley Restoration Local Development Corporation a nonprofit was formed that now helps manage co-ops and other buildings as rentals while supporting small businesses to stay in the neighborhood.

Much renovation and some new building in the '80s and '90s occurred as neighborhood involvement created positive trends to keep Manhattan Valley an affordable place to call home. As middle class people “rediscovered” the city, Manhattan Valley was attractive because of its relatively more affordable housing. In the last few decades, it has maintained its diverse population, diverse income levels and diverse housing options making Manhattan Valley a unique neighborhood compared to the adjacent communities on the Upper West Side where gentrification and has had more of an effect.

Gentrification pressures that challenge the diversity of the area are not unique to Manhattan Valley. All over the city, neighborhoods have been losing affordable housing units. For instance, despite the fact that Mayor Bloomberg's administration created 94,000 affordable units throughout New York City between 2002 and 2013, 200,000 units were lost during the same time period. But even in a difficult housing market, a neighborhood like Manhattan Valley may have an advantage because of the historic investment and the residents’ interest in maintaining diversity and a wide variety of affordable housing options.

Manhattan Valley Diversity Today,
 Manhattan Valley with a population of a little under 50,000 people is diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, age and socio-economic composition of its residents.



Manhattan Valley has an ethnic population that mirrors the ethnic make-up of NYC as a whole, except for a higher concentration of Hispanic and Latino people. According to the 2000 US Census: 40.2% Hispanic, 27.4% White (non-Hispanic), 21.1% Black, 4.5% Asian and 6.8% other(?) This makes Manhattan Valley more ethnically diverse than all or most of NYC's other neighborhoods.

There are very few areas in Manhattan with as high a percentage of senior citizens as Manhattan Valley. According to the 2000 census, the population of seniors ages 65 and up was 5,540. With an influx of recent retirees, the population is more than 20% seniors. Similarly, the youth population is also very high relative to other parts of the Borough. In 2000, 27% of the area population was under the age of 24. These high concentrations of youth and seniors are almost 60% of the population.

Another aspect of Manhattan Valley's diversity relates to the socioeconomic makeup of the community. Manhattan Valley residents tend to have lower incomes in relation to the rest of the Upper West Side. When compared to Community Board 7, Manhattan Valley residents' median household income was about \$20,000 less than that of their Upper West Side neighbors in 2000.

Just South of Columbia University, close to Central and Riverside and Morningside Parks, with many substantial pre-war buildings, served by two subway lines and many convenient mom and pop stores, what is the chance that Manhattan Valley continues to resist the up-classing called gentrification?

How has Manhattan Valley defended itself so far?

The history of two Manhattan Valley non-profit organizations, the Manhattan Valley Development Corporation (MVDC) and the Valley Restoration Local Development Corporation (VRLDC) can give some help to understand how Manhattan Valley has maintained its diversity and affordability for some low and moderate income people who live there.

50 Years Strong : Manhattan Valley Development Corporation

based on a 2013 blog post by [Leah Etling](#) (updated to 2018)

<https://www.yardi.com/blog/people/manhattan-valley-dev-corp/6398.html>

The [Manhattan Valley Development Corporation](#) will mark 50 years of providing affordable housing in Manhattan at the end of 2018. Since 1968, MVDC has maintained a focus on one vital goal: providing and maintaining affordable, safe housing in Manhattan's upper Westside. Over the years, MVDC rehabilitated and developed more than 1200 housing units, including affordable ownership projects that were sold to residents at below-market prices. Today, MVDC oversees 784 apartments in 47 buildings, serving around 3,000 residents.

The ongoing challenge of maintaining affordable housing in New York City, one of the nation's priciest apartment markets, and serving an aging resident population are two priorities for MVDC. In 2013, then Executive Director Lucille McEwen (left), said: "There are market forces and gentrification and pressure to create more high-end living in this immediate area, but we've always maintained affordable housing and that's our real focus." In 2013, McEwen was an attorney who had a passion for affordable housing and was also a lifelong Manhattan resident. "We are reaching out to other like-minded individuals and organizations to see what we can do collectively," she is quoted as saying.



"One of the things we're trying to figure out is: How do we get more housing that's targeted towards low-income seniors? That's a great need in the community. They can't afford to move, and they can't afford these new construction co-ops and condos that are going up. They need the accessibility ramps to get into buildings, and elevators, and other things that help when you have limited mobility."

Many of MVDC's residents have been living in their apartments for years, even decades. McEwen knew of one man who had been in his apartment since 1962. And since most of the 47 buildings are walk-ups, access for senior citizens is a pressing issue. Vacancies are almost unheard of. Out of 784 units, just two were empty in 2013, McEwen said. And the waiting list to receive an apartment could take years to exhaust.

In addition to affordable housing, MVDC has a social services component to its organization, which has been part of its programming since the early days. Volunteers and staff assist residents with the application process for social security benefits, subsidized health care, metro transit access and food assistance.

Another one of McEwen's goals was to expand the volunteer program that assists MVDC residents and add an immigration assistance component to help legal residents who would like to obtain U.S. citizenship. She hoped to attract college students from New York's many universities to participate as volunteers.

McEwen said, "Our community is very diverse. It includes Latinos from the Dominican Republic, from Puerto Rico, from Mexico, many Haitians, and recent immigrants from other countries. There are many that would benefit from assistance in gaining full citizenship and receive all of the additional economic benefits that would come with that."

MVDC is known for a high degree of resident involvement, and profiles of some of its employees and board members highlight the affection they have for the community. Board member [Mildred Dweck](#), an activist since the Civil Rights movement, assists MVDC seniors with obtaining social services. [Rhina Mercedes](#), a bilingual property manager who lives in a MVDC building, assists immigrants from Latin America. Board Member [Tyrone Green](#) grew up in the neighborhood and benefited from MVDC summer programs, and was recently employed at a local elementary school. [Eleanor Pettaway](#), also on the Board, volunteers teaching neighborhood kids to read. They are just a few of the staff and volunteers who make MVDC a vibrant community.

"Everyone wants a safe, affordable place that they can call home, and that's the passion for most of us," said McEwen. Ensuring that such places maintain affordability, and offer expanded services for seniors, will be the goal as MVDC heads into its 51st successful year.

History of the Valley Restoration Local Development Corporation

The Valley Restoration Local Development Corp. (VRLDC) is a private non-profit organization servicing Manhattan Valley. It has been in existence since 1979 and takes as its mission to respond to the needs of the businesses and to the community of Manhattan Valley at large.

In 1979 a coalition of community organizations banded together into what became known as the "Coalition to Save Manhattan Valley." This came about when the deterioration of the neighborhood reached a point where 22% of the housing units were lots or landlord-abandoned buildings. The population was declining and buildings were being demolished. In contrast to this destruction, elsewhere in the UWS in the 1980s gentrification was taking place. Small businesses were being replaced by trendy shops and chain stores, local residents were being removed by landlords who saw the changes taking place and due to the lack of housing in the city were able to charge exorbitant rents. Seeing this, the Coalition to Save Manhattan Valley organized an intensive campaign to prevent the removal of small businesses and long term residents. As a result of this effort, VRLDC came into being and became the business advocate for small merchants in the area.

In the beginning, VRLDC was funded by the Commercial Revitalization Department of the NYC Office for Business Development (now known as the Department of Business Services). VRLDC used the funding to provide business loans or grants, for tree plantings, new facades, new sidewalks and new signage. All in the effort to help small businesses.

All of Valley Restoration LDC's programs were related to its central missions, which were and still are to improve the economic base of Manhattan Valley, to increase the job opportunities for the community's low- and moderate-income residents and to assist in the provision of low- and moderate-income housing in Manhattan Valley. Valley Restoration Local Development Corporation developed programs to strengthen the area's commercial corridors of small neighborhood businesses, to attract outside resources into the community as a source of jobs, to strengthen the economic foothold of the

residents and merchants by encouraging locally-owned proprietorships and business cooperatives One goal is to provide additional affordable housing for Manhattan Valley's low- and moderate-income residents and to create projects that will provide Valley Restoration LDC with revenue.

VRDLC ACHIEVEMENTS, CURRENT PROGRAMS & FUTURE GOALS

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN YOUTH HOSTEL

VRDLC played a substantial role in the preservation the building on Amsterdam Ave between 103rd and 104th Streets that today is the NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN YOUTH HOSTEL The building is on the National Register of Historic Places and a designated NYC landmark. This building was designed by one of our country's eminent architects, Richard Morris Hunt, who designed the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty and the façade of the Great Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was abandoned and vandalized for 16 years and was set to be demolished. Through the efforts of neighborhood people, the VRDLC, and Columbia University students, it was saved and converted into the largest youth hostel in the Americas able to accommodate 672 guests. This project created jobs and increased business in the surrounding area. With the development budget in excess of \$14 million the project was financed with a combination of public and private resources including bonds, tax credits and government and private loans.

COLUMBUS/AMSTERDAM BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

In 1985 VRDLC organized a Business Improvement District which was finally established in 1987. This Business Improvement District (BID) was among one of the first BIDs to be established in NYC and is known as the Columbus/Amsterdam BID, aka as the Lenape/Bloemendael District Management Association.

105TH STREET HOMESTEADERS, SECURITY LIGHTING, STREET FESTIVAL

One of VRDLC's achievements was the sponsorship of the 105th Street Homesteaders. Forty-four families through sweat equity renovated eight buildings over a period of 10 years and today reside in a low income cooperative. VRDLC kept all the records, did the bookkeeping and provided other services and guidance for these families at no cost to the cooperative.

Valley Restoration initiated a security lighting program in partnership with Con Edison. The model block was so successful the Columbus/Amsterdam BID adopted the program for the area of the BID. Lighting fixtures installed on building exteriors remained illuminated from dusk to dawn. This program was subsequently adopted by other City BIDs.

Valley Restoration sponsors a Street Festival every year, alternating between Amsterdam and Columbus Aves from 96th to 106th Streets. The latest street fair was Saturday, June 9, 2018.

VALLEY'S THRIFT STORE

VRDLC owned a thrift store at 949 Amsterdam Avenue but it was closed in March 2015 after 17 years in business, as the shop was no longer earning enough to cover its expenses. The board of directors made this decision reluctantly, but as a small nonprofit VRDLC could no longer support the store as it had been losing money for years

WORKING WITH PS 165

VRDLC has been working closely with the administration of PS 165 and the gardeners of the West 111th Street People's Garden at the corner of Amsterdam. Children planted daffodils in the fall of 2017 and returned in the spring of 2018 to see them bloom. Also VRDLC has been working with the PS 165 PTA toward the establishment of an uptown **FLEA MARKET** in Manhattan Valley to benefit the PTA, as well as local and community entrepreneurs with an opportunity to sell home-made crafts, vintage clothing, jewelry, plus food and drinks. One more project, VRDLC is working with the NYC Tree Trust and local elected officials to organize an effort to replace over 100 trees missing in Manhattan Valley

Summary

Manhattan Valley is a uniquely diverse neighborhood with an architectural and cultural history that makes it a microcosm of New York City's development. It stands out on the Upper West Side due to its distinct economic and ethnic diversity. But also, compare Columbus Ave south of 100th St with Columbus Ave in Manhattan Valley or even the same with Broadway and Amsterdam Ave. So far basically no big box chain stores have replaced the smaller businesses which serve the neighborhood. Also, notice that many of the buildings are 90 years old or older but still in good repair. There must be a lot to learn from the Manhattan Valley community about supporting and preserving affordable housing, small local businesses and diversity.

During a study in 2010, the importance of maintaining this diversity within the community's historic context was reiterated by community members at every step of the research and visioning process. There is a concern that gentrification pressures over the past decade have threatened this diversity. Moreover, because of its location on the Upper West Side, where the neighborhood is surrounded by more affluent, less diverse communities, there is a concern that some of the central needs of Manhattan Valley may not be being met in terms of appropriate services, programming and funding. Pinpointing strategies through which this community can build upon its key strengths in order to bridge gaps in these areas was a central focus for the recommendations for Manhattan Valley. The study found that diversity is Manhattan Valley's key strength, and difference, variety, inclusion and cooperation are the powers that have so far been harnessed to keep up community interaction and keep strong the fabric of a community built on diversity.

We at RNA House can also contribute to our bigger neighborhood by supporting and preserving affordable housing, small local businesses and diversity.
