

*Policy Brief:*

## **When a Neighborhood Becomes a Revolving Door for Dominicans:**

Rising Housing Costs in Washington  
Heights/Inwood and the Declining  
Presence of Dominicans



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## INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s and the early years of the twenty first century, observers of New York City's demography expected the seemingly inexorable increase in the number of Dominicans in the city to continue unabated into the foreseeable future. With all of the recent excitement proclaiming Dominicans the largest Latino group in New York City, and with the Dominican population in the city nearing 1 million, it is indeed easy to forget that the presence of Dominicans in New York City, and particularly in the historic Dominican ethnic enclave of Washington Heights cannot be taken for granted. This policy research brief will caution against complacency regarding the place of low-income, immigrant, and working-class individuals, including Dominicans, in New York City. The report will do so by stressing the effects of gentrification in Washington Heights/Inwood, a neighborhood that is increasingly attracting the affluent at the expense of its long-term, working class, and immigrant residents.

Gentrification, defined as the phenomenon of increased demand by young professionals for housing in a convenient, well-located neighborhood and the resulting rapid increase in rents that displaces poorer longer-term residents,<sup>i</sup> is a problem all over New York City. Washington Heights/Inwood, has not been immune. According to the Furman Center, Washington Heights/Inwood is rapidly gentrifying; threatening its poor with displacement because of the escalating rents.<sup>ii</sup>

Gentrification has been a fact of life in Washington Heights/Inwood since at least the late 1990s. Following in the footsteps of similar neighborhoods that have gone through gentrification, Washington Heights/Inwood has slowly witnessed a growing population resurgence fueled by the arrival of high-income, upper-middle class newcomers. Unfortunately, the resurgence has come at the expense of long-term, poorer residents, who are having trouble paying the high rent increases and are unable to find housing that they can afford in the neighborhood.

The present study adds to the consensus about gentrification in the literature. Many New York City housing experts agree that as gentrification has taken hold of one desirable neighborhood after another, and as higher-income individuals have moved more and more into such neighborhoods, low-income families and individuals have consequently been displaced in alarming numbers from the places they had long called home.

Despite the fact that gentrification has been on the agenda of many policy-makers as a priority, currently, the process of gentrification still continues unabated. Low-income working class people who live in such neighborhoods that have become attractive and desired by the affluent are unfortunately bound to experience displacement from their homes, and if immigrants, find themselves forced to move once again.

Because Dominicans have been the poorest and the single largest ethnic, immigrant group in Washington Heights/Inwood for decades, they have been hit the hardest. Gentrification

has pushed some people out and has brought other people in. As expected, these changes are transforming the character of the neighborhood. In the case of displaced Dominican families, those who leave also take with them their cultural belonging and the continuity of their historical legacy.

If the current trends continue, the displacement of people will likely worsen. It will also mean the further erasure of the neighborhood's long-standing cultural identity. This will be a loss not only for the Dominican people, but for all New Yorkers as well.

***When a Neighborhood Becomes a Revolving Door for Dominicans: Rising Housing Costs in Washington Heights/Inwood and the Declining Presence of Dominicans***, a policy brief on Dominicans, gentrification, and affordable housing, aims to draw attention to the worrying trends in Washington Heights/Inwood regarding the lack of affordable housing, skyrocketing rents, and the increasing exodus of Dominicans from Manhattan to other places, including out of the city and state, in search of cheaper housing costs. The report rings an alarm bell to enlist the support of community leaders, activists, academics, and all Dominicans to press upon policy-makers and elected officials to put into practice a plan of action that addresses both short and long-term solutions to ensure the permanency and stability of working-class and low-income Dominicans and others in the neighborhoods they have called home for a half century or more. The report outlines fast increasing rents and how the increases have affected the different groups residing in the neighborhood; it also describes increasing rent burdens for poor long-term residents, a severe lack of housing that low-income residents can afford, as well as the decline of the Dominican, working-class in Washington Heights/Inwood.

## **METHODOLOGY**

For this brief CUNY DSI employed the use of various institutional datasets in order to profile the state of housing in New York City. Primary analysis focused on the Manhattan neighborhoods of Washington Heights/Inwood but some data is presented for other boroughs. Datasets that were used included the New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (NYCHVS) occupied household's files (1999 to 2014), as well as harmonized U.S. Census and American Community Survey data via IPUMS (1990 to 2015). Datasets utilized range from 1990 to 2015, however the majority of tables present data which were enumerated using the NYCHVS datasets for 1999 and 2014.

As stated above, for this analysis we primarily utilized the occupied household datasets available from the NYCHVS. Thus, data presented throughout this brief, unless otherwise indicated, represents the household unit. Racial/ethnic designations, nativity status and other characteristics that vary from person to person were based solely on the householder's status. For example, if the householder was Dominican and the householder's spouse was Puerto Rican the household was classified as Dominican. In addition, numerous tables/graphs throughout this brief depict changes in monetary variables overtime. All monetary values have been adjusted to 2014 dollars.

### **This policy brief is divided into three sections:**

**Section I:** Presents briefly a comprehensive review of studies about displacement, gentrification, and affordable housing in Washington Heights;

**Section II:** Presents new data and additional analysis about Dominicans and housing in Washington Heights/Inwood; and

**Section III:** Presents a conclusion and makes policy recommendations to alleviate the lack of affordable housing in Washington Heights/Inwood and prevent the exodus of Dominicans and other low-income residents from the neighborhood.

## SECTION I

### Research on Gentrification in Washington Heights/Inwood and in New York City

There is a wealth of research published by academics, housing activists, non-profit community-based organizations, and various government agencies on the issue of housing affordability (or lack thereof) in New York City.<sup>iii</sup> This research points to gentrification as a major culprit for the lack of affordable housing for low-income New Yorkers.

There is consensus in this literature about some worrisome trends in New York City's ability to house its low-income citizens and to keep long-term low-income residents in gentrifying neighborhoods in their homes.

Research has found that Washington Heights/Inwood is one of the most rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods in New York City.<sup>iv</sup> The Furman Center, for instance, has found that the price of all housing in Washington Heights/Inwood has appreciated six-fold between 2000 and 2015, placing the neighborhood second among all New York City neighborhoods.<sup>v</sup>

In addition, it has been also found that gentrifying neighborhoods experience an influx of high-income urban professionals who contribute to rapid increases in the cost of renting and owning. Gentrifying neighborhoods also have insufficient construction of low-income housing and inadequate rent-regulation laws to control rent prices.<sup>vi</sup> In New York City in particular, gentrification is further exacerbated by an insufficient number of affordable rent-regulated and unregulated housing units available for low-income individuals. The number of these housing units has decreased dramatically between 2002 and 2015.<sup>vii</sup>

In "Destabilized Rents: The Impact of Vacancy Decontrol on Low-Income Communities," the Community Service Society of New York points out that the ongoing displacement of low income residents from gentrifying neighborhoods is currently not being addressed by the existing rent-regulation laws, thanks to several loopholes that can be exploited by landlords. In addition, current rent regulation laws apply to a good number of households, but they often cannot prevent unaffordable increases in rents or reduce a low-income household's rent burden. This is to say that, overall, rent regulations as they currently stand are inadequate in shielding low-income, long-term residents from market forces and from ever-increasing severe rent burdens.<sup>viii</sup>

## SECTION II

### Gentrification in Washington Heights

#### *Cost of Rent, Household Income, and Rent Burden*

**Table 1** compares the cost of housing in Washington Heights/Inwood in 1999 and 2014. A straight, uncomplicated comparison of housing costs in the last fifteen years shows that the cost of rent has indeed increased dramatically. As indicated in **Table 1**, the median out-of-pocket rent expense in the whole neighborhood was \$777 in 1999 and \$1,040 in 2014, indicating an increase of 33.8%. “Out-of-pocket rent” is the rent a household pays after any housing subsidies it may receive are applied. Median total contract<sup>1</sup> rents have increased at an even steeper level: 43.4% between 1999 and 2014. The median total contract rent for the whole neighborhood was \$837 in 1999 and \$1,200 in 2014.

Median household incomes in Washington Heights/Inwood for the same years is also displayed in **Table 1**. While the median incomes in the whole neighborhood increased from \$34,182 in 1999 to \$43,256 in 2014, indicating a 26.5% increase, the income increase did not apply equally, across all racial/ethnic groups residing in the neighborhood.

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**Table 1**  
**Median Changes in Rent Expenses and Income in**  
**Washington Heights/Inwood**  
**1999 and 2014**

<b>Rental Type</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>%Change</b>
Median Out-of-Pocket Rent Expense	\$777 <sup>2</sup>	\$1,040	33.8%
Median Total Contract Rent	\$837	\$1,200	43.4%
<b>Median Income</b>	\$34,182	\$43,256	26.5%

Source: NYCHVS 1999 & 2014; Author’s tabulations.

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1 Total rent amount as it appears on the lease.

2 In all tables and figures with dollar amounts, all values have been adjusted to 2014 dollars, taking into account rate of inflation

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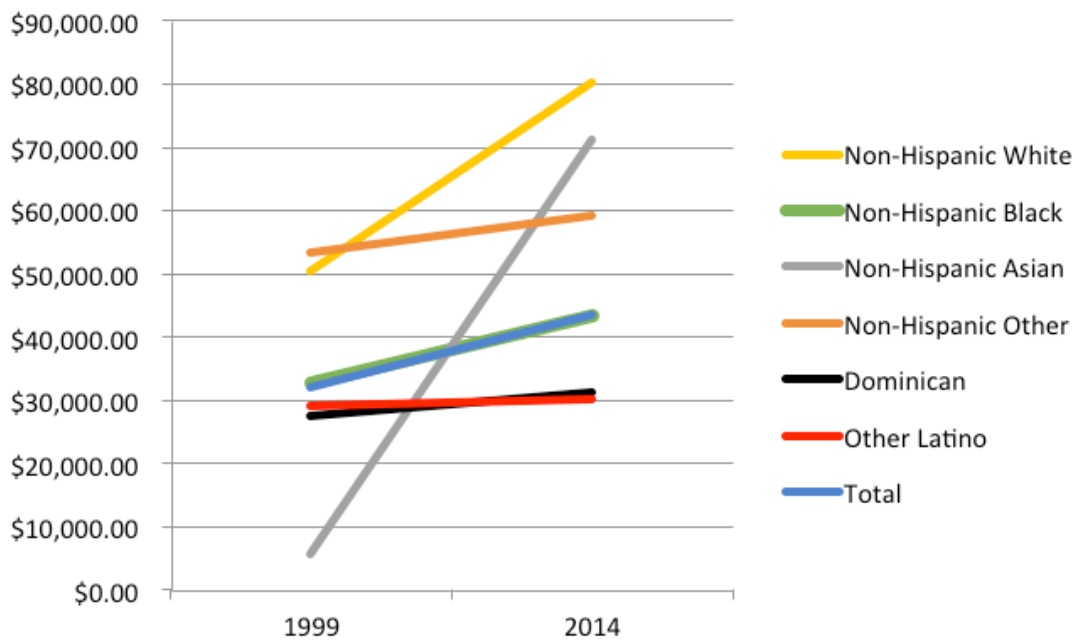
*“One notes a wide income disparity among racial/ethnic groups residing in the neighborhood”*

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**Graph 1** details the median household incomes for the whole neighborhood disaggregated by select racial/ethnic groups for 1999 and 2014. One notes a wide income disparity among racial/ethnic groups residing in the neighborhood. While Non-Hispanic Whites’ median household income was \$50,227 in 1999, Dominicans’ median household income was roughly half that, or \$27,445 during the same year. By 2014, the median income for Non-Hispanic Whites in Washington Heights/Inwood had reached \$80,000. Yet, the median income for Dominicans had increased to only \$31,000 during the same period, remaining the second lowest in the neighborhood. The growing income disparity present in Washington Heights/Inwood can have serious implications, including the impact on the capacity of each group to make their monthly rent payments. It also exacerbates economic inequality while laying the grounds for the eventual exodus of low-income residents whose incomes remain stagnant in a neighborhood where the cost of living continues to rise.

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**Graph 1**  
**Median Income for Selected Racial/Ethnic Groups in**  
**Washington Heights/Inwood**  
**1999 and 2014**



Source: NYCHVS 1999 & 2014; Author’s tabulations.



Given the fact that the number of people who comprise an individual household varies, examining per capita household annual income allows for a more accurate description of the economy of a household. **Table 2** displays the average per-capita household income of the neighborhood’s residents. While these statistics point in the same direction as those presented in Graph 1, they offer a bit more insight, as these measures take into account household size when examining income discrepancies across racial/ethnic groups. As can be seen, it is Dominican households on average that have the fewest amount of dollars to go around in 2014.

As reflected in **Table 2**, despite the fact that the lowest-income groups have seen moderate income increases, these have not been enough to offset the impact of rent increases. In the two years compared here, Dominicans have had the lowest and second lowest income in the neighborhood and have been one of the most vulnerable groups as it relates to rent increases. In other words, Dominicans’ rent burden has increased.

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**Table 2**  
**Average Per-Capita Household Income in Washington Heights/Inwood**  
**by Race/Ethnicity**  
**1999 and 2014**

<b>Group</b>	<b>1999 (in 2014 dollars)</b>	<b>2014 (in 2014 dollars)</b>
Non-Hispanic White	\$ 36,696.95	\$ 63,245.46
Non-Hispanic Black	\$ 27,355.00	\$ 34,124.70
Non-Hispanic Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	\$ 9,197.71	\$ 40,635.23
Non-Hispanic Other	\$ 10,659.35	\$ 44,151.88
Dominican	\$ 12,786.77	\$ 16,912.69
Other Latino	\$ 17,056.75	\$ 19,151.90

Source: NYCHVS 1999 & 2014; Author’s tabulations.

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*“Because Dominicans’ income is lower compared to other racial/ethnic groups and because their income increases have been at a lower rate, it is much harder for working-class Dominicans to afford the rent increases in Washington Heights/Inwood than it is for more affluent groups with higher annual median incomes.”*

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Rent burden measures the proportion of income a household spends on rent. When the proportion exceeds 30% the household is said to be rent burdened. With this measurement in mind, rent burden assesses how difficult it is for each household or racial/ethnic group to afford their rent. Because Dominicans’ income is lower compared to other racial/ethnic groups and because their income increases have been at a lower rate, it is much harder for working-class Dominicans to afford the rent increases in Washington Heights/Inwood than it is for more affluent groups with higher annual median incomes.

**Table 3** depicts the percentage of each racial/ethnic group that was rent burdened in Washington Heights/Inwood in 1999 and 2014. In 2014 a solid 63% of Other Latinos and 48% of Dominicans were rent burdened. Similarly, the rent burden for the neighborhood overall increased by approximately 10% over the 15 year period. Dominicans experienced a 10% increase, non-Hispanic Blacks experienced a 20% increase and Other Latinos experienced a 36% increase in the proportion of the population that was rent burdened. While these groups were becoming increasingly rent burdened, non-Hispanic whites and Asians saw a decline in the proportion of their populations that were rent burdened.

The comparatively lower rent burden growth experienced by Dominicans as compared to other groups is likely related to their longevity in their apartments and New York City housing regulations that prevent landowners from increasing the cost of rent to current lease holders beyond a certain threshold, currently between 1.25% and 2%. New lease holders, however, typically do not enjoy the same protection. As we will see later, many Dominicans have been living in Washington Heights/Inwood for 20 years or more.

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**Table 3**  
**Rent Burdened Households for Selected Racial/Ethnic Groups in**  
**Washington Heights/Inwood**  
**1999 and 2014\***

<b>Group</b>	<b>1999 Rent Burdened</b>	<b>2014 Rent Burdened</b>
Non-Hispanic White	36.64%	31.10%
Non-Hispanic Black	21.66%	42.70%
Non-Hispanic Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	100.00%	26.20%
Non-Hispanic Other	0.00%	40.00%
Dominican	39.55%	48.20%
Other Latino	27.02%	63.10%
Total	34.82%	44.30%

Source: NYCHVS 1999 & 2014; Author's tabulations

**\*Note:** Does not include households that are owned or are occupied rent-free. Also, does not include households where either monthly out of pocket rent or annual income was not reported. Calculation used monthly out of pocket rent not monthly contract rent.

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*“Dominicans have the lowest rate of homeownership in Washington Heights/Inwood, despite their long-time presence in the neighborhood. Of all Dominican households in Washington Heights/Inwood, only 5% owned their own homes in 2014”*

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### **Ownership, Regulated and Unregulated Housing in Washington Heights**

**Table 4** depicts data that help to further explain the housing structure in Washington Heights/Inwood. By all accounts, Washington Heights/Inwood is a neighborhood of renters with a little over eleven percent of households owning their housing. This is particularly true for Dominicans who have the lowest rate of homeownership in Washington Heights/Inwood, despite their long-time presence in the neighborhood. Of all Dominican households in Washington Heights/Inwood, only 5% owned their own homes in 2014. Conversely, 8% of Other Latino, 12% of Non-Hispanic Asian, 16% of non-Hispanic Blacks, and 22% of non-Hispanic Whites households owned their housing unit.

**Table 4**  
**Proportions of Household Units in Washington Heights/Inwood that are Owner-occupied by Selected Racial/ Ethnic Groups 2014**

Group	Owner-Occupied
Non-Hispanic White	22.00%
Non-Hispanic Black	15.80%
Non-Hispanic Asian	12.60%
Dominican	5.10%
Other Latino	8.00%
Total	11.70%

Source: NYCHVS 2014; Author’s tabulations.

**Table 5** displays the median *out-of-pocket* rent expenses for regulated and unregulated housing for selected racial/ethnic groups residing in the neighborhood in 1999 and in 2014. As noted in the table, the median out-of-pocket rent expenses between 1999 and 2014 have

increased dramatically for both regulated and unregulated apartments for all groups residing in the neighborhood. Though the rent has increased for every racial/ethnic group, this does not mean that all groups have the capacity to afford such increases, irrespective of how small the increases may be.

*Regulated* apartments are meant to shield low-income, long-term residents from the whims of landlords interested in increasing their return. Despite the good intentions behind the legislation to control the price of rent for low-income renters, as shown in **Table 5**, the median out-of-pocket rent Dominicans paid in the neighborhood for *regulated* apartments has gone up from \$748 in 1999 to \$913 in 2014, or an increase of 22%. Again, this occurred in a period when working class wages have not increased much, let alone kept up with inflation. The out-of-pocket rent figure for Dominicans in *unregulated* apartments, which are fully exposed to the whims of the housing market, was \$991 in 1999, jumping to \$1,500 in 2014, or a 51% increase, representing an even more dramatic rent increase for groups of people whose annual median income continues to be one of the lowest both in the neighborhood and in New York City overall.

**Table 5**  
**Median Out-of-Pocket Rent by Selected Race/Ethnicity by Housing Type**  
**in Washington Heights/Inwood**  
**1999-2014**

	1999- Unregulated	1999- Regulated	2014- Unregulated	2014- Regulated	% Change- Unregulated	% Change- Regulated
<b>Group Overall</b>						
Non-Hispanic White	\$ 1,325.00**	\$ 914.00	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 1,300.00	89%	42%
Non-Hispanic Black	\$ 848.00	\$ 587.00		\$ 904.00	---	54%
Non-Hispanic Asian	\$ -*	\$ 879.00	\$ 2,700.00	\$ 1,664.00	---	89%
Non-Hispanic Other	\$ -	\$ 767.00		\$ 1,325.00	---	73%
Dominican	\$ 991.00	\$ 748.00	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 913.00	51%	22%
Other Latino	\$ 872.00	\$ 745.00	\$ 930.00	\$ 926.00	7%	24%

\*Sample too small.

Source: NYCHVS 1999 & 2014; Author's tabulations.

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*“in 1999 Dominicans paid a median contract rent of \$991 for unregulated apartments. In 2014, the median rent was \$1,600 for an unregulated apartment, representing a 61.5% increase in rent.”*

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In turn, **Table 6** looks at the median total contract rent paid by selected racial/ethnic groups residing in Washington Heights/Inwood for both regulated and unregulated apartments. The data in Table 6 indicates a pattern similar to the one found in Table 5. In 1999, the median contract rent paid by Dominicans for regulated apartments in the neighborhood was \$818. By 2014, the median rent had increased to \$1,025, a 25.3% increase. Similarly, in 1999 Dominicans paid a median rent of \$991 for unregulated apartments. In 2014, the median contract rent was \$1,600 for an unregulated apartment, representing a 61.5% increase in rent.

**Table 6**  
**Median Contract Rent for Selected Race/Ethnicity by Housing Type**  
**in Washington Heights**  
**1999 and 2014**

<b>Group</b>	<b>1999- Unregulated</b>	<b>1999- Regulated</b>	<b>2014- Unregulated</b>	<b>2014- Regulated</b>	<b>% Change- Unregulated</b>	<b>% Change- Regulated</b>
Non-Hispanic White	\$ 1,046	\$ 907	\$2500	\$1400	139.01%	54.36%
Non-Hispanic Black	\$ 848	\$766	---	\$1100	---	43.60%
Non-Hispanic Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	\$ 5,325	\$879	\$2700	\$1664	-49.30%	89.31%
Non-Hispanic Other	---	\$767	---	\$1325	---	---
Dominican	\$ 991	\$ 818	\$1600	\$1025	61.45%	25.31%
Other Latino	\$ 949	\$780	\$930	\$1200	-2.00%	53.85%

Source: NYCHVS 1999 & 2014; Author's tabulations.

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*“Dominicans made up the majority of the poor, reflecting 60% of the population in poverty in 1999 and 61% in 2014.”*

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### **Poverty in Washington Heights/Inwood**

**Table 7** displays the percentage of households in Washington Heights/Inwood that live in poverty. As noted, of all the households in Washington Heights/Inwood who lived in poverty both in 1999 and 2014, Dominicans made up the majority of the poor, reflecting 60% of the population in poverty in 1999 and 61% in 2014.

The comparison of poverty levels among the selected groups included here reveals that the poor in Washington Heights/Inwood are mainly comprised of Dominicans and that this group in particular *is the most affected* by increasing prices in the neighborhood.

**Table 7**  
**Racial/Ethnic Composition of Households in Poverty in Washington Heights/Inwood**

Group	1999-2014		
	Total 1999	Total 2014	Total % Change
Non-Hispanic White	13.28%	15.35%	15.61%
Non-Hispanic Black	8.89%	4.86%	-45.35%
Non-Hispanic Asian	1.7%	2.82%	59.06%
Dominican	59.89%	61.11%	2.04%
Other Latino	16.17%	15.86%	-1.90%
Total	100%	100%	0%

Source: NYCHVS 1999 & 2014; Author’s tabulations.

**Table 8** displays the percentage of households in Washington Heights/Inwood who receive some form of public assistance. Public assistance here includes: public assistance or welfare payments, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), family assistance, safety net assistance, supplemental security income (SSI), or some other form of public assistance as defined by the respondent in the NYCHVS survey. Clearly, public assistance has increased

among all racial/ethnic groups compared here. Yet, there is a familiar pattern in this table, as seen in other data on poverty in the neighborhood: Dominicans had the largest percentage of households who received public assistance in 2014 (42.3%), and Other Latinos trailed Dominicans as the second largest group to require public assistance (33.0%). This table lends further credence to the argument that Dominicans in the neighborhood disproportionately suffer from poverty and are exceedingly vulnerable to displacement.

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**Table 8**  
**Households in Washington Heights/Inwood by Race/Ethnicity and Receipt of Public Assistance or Welfare Payments<sup>3</sup>**

<b>Group</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2014</b>
Non-Hispanic White	6.7%	8.8%
Non-Hispanic Black	22.0%	28.8%
Non-Hispanic Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	12.6%
Non-Hispanic Other	0.0%	0.0%
Dominican	35.6%	42.3%
Other Latino	16.0%	33.0%
Total	23.2%	28.3%

Source: NYCHVS 1999 & 2014; Author's tabulations.

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*“The combination of income from public assistance and wages in Washington Heights/Inwood is likely to be a reflection of workers who earn minimum wages that are incapable of meeting their households’ basic needs and are, therefore, eligible to receive government assistance.”*

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We further examined households receiving public assistance in Washington Heights/Inwood. **Table 9** depicts households in the Washington Heights/Inwood neighborhood that were receiving some form of public assistance and also receiving income from wages, salaries,

<sup>3</sup> Defined in the HVS as receiving Public Assistance or Welfare Payments, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or Family Assistance.



commissions, or tips. Both non-Hispanic Whites and Dominicans saw an increase over the period in the number of households who received both public assistance and other income simultaneously. Among non-Hispanic Whites the proportion grew from roughly 20% to 37% but among Dominicans, the group with the largest representation among those with both types of income in 2014, it grew from 45% to 65%. The figure among non-Hispanic Blacks remained relatively stable for the two time periods examined with 49% in 1999 and 45% in 2014 receiving both public assistance and wage (etc.) income. Perhaps most notable was the large decrease among Other Latinos, in the proportion receiving both types of income, with 73% in 1999 and 39% in 2014. The combination of income from public assistance and wages is likely to be a reflection of workers who earn minimum wages that are incapable of meeting their households' basic needs and are, therefore, eligible to receive government assistance.

**Table 9**  
***Selected Households in Washington Heights/Inwood  
 Receiving Some Form of Public Assistance and Income from  
 Wages, Salaries, Commissions or Tips***

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2014</b>
Non-Hispanic White	19.9%	36.7%
Non-Hispanic Black	48.6%	45.1%
Non-Hispanic Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	N/A	100.0%
Dominican	44.9%	64.8%
Other Latino	73.0%	39.1%
Total	47.0%	56.8%

Source: NYCHVS 1999 & 2014; Author's tabulations.

***The Declining Presence of Dominicans and Other Poor, and Working Class Immigrants in Washington Heights/Inwood***

The socioeconomic life and the cultural fabric of a community are highly influenced by its residents, particularly by those who have lived there for a long time, have raised their children and have grown old in the same community. It is those long-term residents who, with the passing of time, take ownership of their neighborhood, and create organizations and cultural entities to ensure the safety, the survival, the endurance, and the preservation of their legacy and their history as a people who have made and transformed a space into one that is their own and distinct from others.

Demographic weight, longevity, and Dominicans' active involvement in the life of Washington Heights slowly renovated and energized the neighborhood. Dominicans developed a striving business sector that contributed to the tax structure of the city; they also created community and cultural organizations, fought for safe streets, for building new schools, and for the provision of vital services. In time, public places—schools, parks, streets, baseball fields—were baptized with names distinctively Dominican and Washington Heights became imagined as “Platano Town”, “Quisqueya Town”, and “The Heights,” alluding to the vibrant immigrant group that had laid roots, converting that neighborhood into their permanent home.

**Tables 10** and **11** illustrate longevity of an individual household in an individual housing unit. Data in these tables highlight what percentage of each population group has lived in their current residence in the neighborhood *continuously* since various points in time. As clearly reflected in these tables, by the 1970s, Washington Heights/Inwood was slowly transforming from a non-Hispanic White and Black neighborhood into a predominantly Latino, particularly Dominican neighborhood. By the mid-1980s, the percentage of Dominicans and “Other Latinos” moving into their current apartment surpassed non-Hispanic Whites and was closing the gap with Non-Hispanic Blacks. For instance, 8% of Dominicans moved into their current apartment between 1980 and 1984, compared to 6% of non-Hispanic Whites and 15% of and non-Hispanic Blacks. By the mid-1990s, Washington Heights had completely transformed into a predominantly Dominican neighborhood, as Dominican newcomers surpassed by far all other new-comer groups settling into their current apartment.

**Table 10**  
**Percentage of Householders who moved into Current Unit for Selected Race/Ethnicity**  
**Washington Heights/Inwood**  
**1999**

	<b>Non-Hispanic White</b>	<b>Non-Hispanic Black</b>	<b>Dominicans</b>	<b>Non-Hispanic Asian</b>	<b>Other Latino</b>	<b>Total</b>
1995-1999	42%	28%	36%	100%	39%	38%
1990-1994	17%	17%	30%	0%	19%	23%
1985-1989	7%	7%	11%	0%	7%	9%
1980-1984	6%	15%	8%	0%	9%	8%
1970-1979	12%	18%	14%	0%	16%	14%
1969 & Before	16%	15%	2%	0%	11%	9%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: NYCHVS 1999; Author's tabulations.

Yet, the same table shows that the second half of the 1990s paints a different picture when looking at all movers into their current apartment. For instance, 42% of Non-Hispanic White households, 28% of Non-Hispanic Blacks, and all Asian households moving into their current apartment came during this five-year period, as compared to 36% of Dominicans and 39% of Other Latino households. The large percentage of non-Hispanic groups moving into their current apartment in the latter part of the 1990s seems to suggest that these groups are the newest residents in the neighborhood.

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*“In 2014, almost two-thirds of Dominicans residing in Washington Heights/Inwood moved into their apartment before 2000. In contrast, less than half of the total population of Washington Heights/Inwood had moved into their apartment before 2000”*

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**Table 11** examines how long individuals from each racial/ethnic group have lived in the same unit continuously as of 2014. One noticeable pattern here, consistent with patterns seen in **Table 10**, is that Dominicans are overrepresented among households who have lived in their current residence ever since the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s relative to the total neighborhood population. As more and more people moved into Washington Heights in the 2000s, one finds that Dominicans were much less likely than the average resident of the neighborhood to have moved into their current residence in the year 2000 and later. Data in **Table 11** suggest that Dominicans are largely long-term residents rather than newcomers. *In 2014, almost two-thirds of Dominicans residing in Washington Heights/Inwood moved into their apartment before 2000. In contrast, less than half of the total population of Washington Heights/Inwood had moved into their apartment before 2000.*

Taking a deeper look at recent movers, one finds that a full third of non-Hispanic White households had been in their current apartment for only 2 years as of 2014, the time when the Housing Survey Vacancy we are currently using was conducted. In contrast, in the same year, new movers accounted for only a tenth of Dominican households.

**Table 11**  
**Percentage of Householders who moved into Current Unit**  
**in Washington Heights/Inwood**  
**Selected Race/Ethnicity**  
**2014**

	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Dominican	Non-Hispanic Asian	Other	Total
2012-	33%	17%	11%	52%	17%	21%
2009-2011	15%	29%	14%	0%	12%	15%
2006-2008	10%	6%	9%	18%	16%	11%
2003-2005	6%	3%	3%	9%	2%	4%
2000-2002	3%	0%	8%	9%	10%	6%
1995-1999	13%	10%	14%	0%	12%	13%
1990-1994	7%	5%	19%	0%	5%	11%
1985-1989	3%	7%	5%	0%	12%	5%
1980-1984	5%	6%	7%	13%	2%	5%
1970-1979	2%	12%	8%	0%	4%	6%
-1969	4%	6%	2%	0%	9%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: NYCHVS 2014; Author's tabulations.

Because Washington Heights/Inwood has historically been an immigrant neighborhood, we looked next at its foreign-born residents. **Table 12** shows an analysis of the foreign-born population in their current apartment. This data points to the longevity of the immigrant residents in Washington Height/Inwood. In 2014, for instance, two-thirds of Dominican immigrants, had moved into their current apartments between the 1960s and 2000. That is, in 2014, 58% of foreign-born Dominicans in Washington Heights had already been living in the neighborhood continuously between 15 and 60 years, while the rest had moved into their current apartment more recently, or after 2000. This is reflected in **Table 12**.

**Table 12**  
**Percentage of Foreign-Born Householders who Moved into Current Unit**  
**in Washington Heights/Inwood,**  
**Selected Racial/Ethnic Groups**  
**2014**

Year	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Non-Hispanic Asian	Dominican	Other	Total
2012 or later	16.90%	0.40%	41.10%	6.00%	12.00%	8.70%
2009-2011	13.30%	47.50%	0.00%	14.90%	11.10%	14.90%
2006-2008	0.00%	0.00%	17.40%	9.40%	22.10%	10.10%
2003-2005	10.40%	0.00%	0.00%	4.20%	5.00%	4.80%
2000-2002	0.00%	0.00%	17.40%	7.70%	11.10%	7.10%
1995-1999	7.80%	14.80%	0.00%	15.00%	4.70%	12.50%
1990-1994	27.90%	23.60%	0.00%	21.70%	10.90%	20.60%
1985-1989	4.20%	0.00%	0.00%	4.60%	4.60%	4.30%
1980-1984	4.30%	13.70%	24.10%	7.20%	4.70%	7.20%
1970-1979	4.20%	0.00%	0.00%	7.00%	4.40%	5.90%
1969 or Earlier	10.90%	0.00%	0.00%	2.30%	9.50%	3.90%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100%	100%

Source: NYCHVS 2014; Author's tabulations.

We turn next to trends in the number of *total* as well as *foreign-born* households in the neighborhood, given the prominence of the foreign-born population in Washington Heights/Inwood.<sup>4</sup> **Table 13** disaggregates households in Washington Heights/Inwood further by looking specifically at the total number of households as well as the number of foreign-born households. Clearly, some racial/ethnic groups have increased the number of their households while others have seen theirs decrease. Non-Hispanic Whites and Asians, for instance, have seen the number of their households increase exponentially by 19% and 235% respectively, while Other Latinos, Dominicans, and Non-Hispanic Blacks have experienced declines in the number of their households.

<sup>4</sup> Households are designated foreign-born or not based on the nativity status of the head of the household.

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*“the future of immigrant residents in Washington Heights/Inwood is uncertain at best, given that the number of immigrant households has declined by 21% over the past decade and a half (1999-2014)”*

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Moreover, the percentage of immigrant households in the neighborhood has declined dramatically. For instance, in 1999, six in ten households in Washington Heights/Inwood were immigrant households, or 44,856 foreign-born households out of 75,937 total households. By 2014, however, the number of foreign-born households had declined to less than a half of all households in the neighborhood. This is to say that the future of immigrant residents in Washington Heights/Inwood is uncertain at best, given that the number of immigrant households has declined by 21% over the past decade and a half (1999-2014).

**Table 13**  
**Number of Households in Washington Heights/Inwood,**  
**Selected Population Groups by Nativity Status**  
**1999 and 2014**

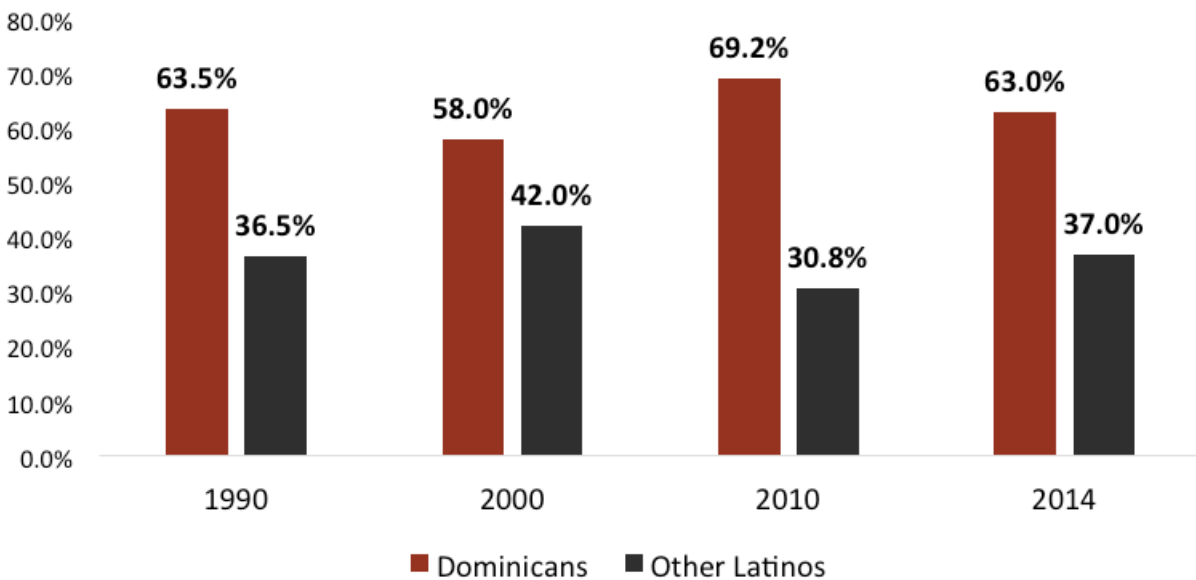
<b>Group</b>	<b>Foreign-Born 1999</b>	<b>Foreign-Born 2014</b>	<b>Foreign-Born % Change</b>	<b>Total 1999</b>	<b>Total 2014</b>	<b>Total % Change</b>
Non-Hispanic White	5,646	4,252	-25%	18,549	22,070	19%
Non-Hispanic Black	1,567	1,197	-24%	8,877	5,853	-34%
Non-Hispanic Asian	373	971	160%	557	1,865	235%
Dominican	30,644	24,989	-18%	34,366	30,938	-10%
Other Latino	6,449	3,920	-39%	13,411	9,690	-28%
Total	44,856	35,527	-21%	75,937	71,317	-6%

Source: NYCHVS 1999 & 2014; Author’s tabulations.

**Graph 2** represents a breakdown of the total Latino population in Washington Heights/Inwood by national origin. The graph shows that the percentage of Latinos in Washington Heights/Inwood who is Dominican has dramatically declined from 69.2% in 2010 to 63% in 2014, representing a 6% decline in the Dominican share of the Latino population. Similarly,

one observes that over the long term the Dominican share of the population has stagnated, stuck at 63% between 1990 and 2014. Furthermore, while the Dominican share of the Latino population has declined, the share of Other Latinos (non-Dominican Latinos) has increased from 31% of all Latinos in 2010 to 37% in 2014. These numbers remind one that Latino does not equal Dominican in Washington Heights/Inwood, or in any other place for that matter, and that merely looking at the percentage of the neighborhood that is Latino will conceal the extent of the decline in the number of Dominicans in Washington Heights/Inwood (see graph 4).

**Graph 2**  
***Dominicans and Other Latinos as a Percentage of the Latino Population in Washington Heights/Inwood 1990-2014***



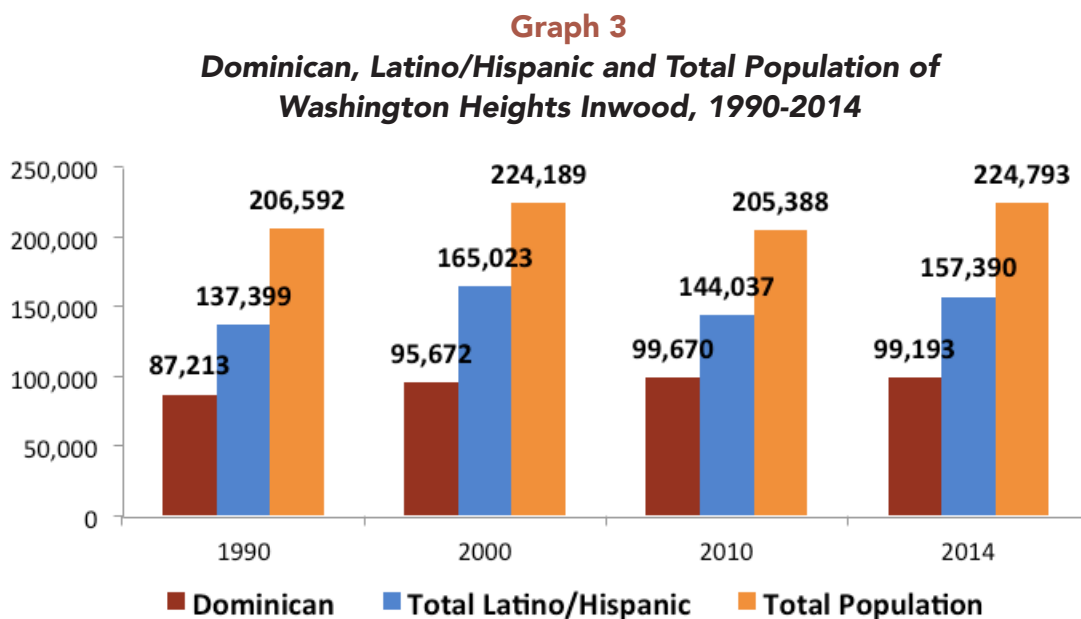
Source: IPUMS 1990 and 2000 5% Sample; 2010 and 2014 1 Year ACS Sample.

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*“Time will only tell whether the Dominican population has already hit its peak. However, we know for certain that the number of Dominicans in the neighborhood shows a small decline from 99,670 individuals to 99,193 within the four-year period, from 2010 to 2014. Conversely, graph 3 also shows that the total population of the neighborhood grew by 19,390 individuals during the same four-year period”*

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**Graph 3** provides a tally of the changes in the Dominican, Latino, and total population of Washington Heights/Inwood between 1990 and 2014. It shows that while the total population of the neighborhood has grown from 206,592 to 224,793 in that period. Overall, the total Latino population has experienced a similar increase, growing from 137,399 to 157,390 between 1990 and 2014. Conversely, the growth of the Dominican population in the neighborhood has grown much more slowly increasing from 87,213 to 99,193, about a half of the absolute growth of the others. Only time will tell whether the Dominican population has already hit its peak. However, we know for certain that the number of Dominicans in the neighborhood shows a small decline from 99,670 individuals to 99,193 within the four-year period, from 2010 to 2014. In contrast, **Graph 3** also shows that the total population of the neighborhood grew by 19,390 individuals during the same four-year period.



Source: IPUMS 1990 and 2000 5% Sample; 2010 and 2014 1 Year ACS Sample.



Over the past 25 years, there has been a visible dispersal of Dominicans in New York City from their historic neighborhood of Washington Heights in Manhattan to the more affordable areas of the city such as the Bronx and Queens, or even beyond, to New York City suburbs and exurbs with cheaper housing. **Tables 14** and **15** depict the growth of the Dominican population in the different boroughs. While the number of Dominicans increased in every borough from 1990 to 2015, the increase in the number of Dominicans in Manhattan has slowed to a crawl, as reflected in **Table 14**. Yet, during the same period, the number of Dominicans in the Bronx has almost quadrupled, has doubled in Brooklyn and Queens, and has grown six-fold in Staten Island. Similarly, as reflected in **Table 15**, examining the rate of growth of the Dominican population in all boroughs, shows both aggressive and anemic growth, depending on the borough. The Dominican population in the Bronx and Staten Island, for instance, experienced an aggressive growth in the magnitude of 278% and 545% respectively between 1990 and 2015. Manhattan was the exception where Dominicans experienced an anemic growth of just 23% during the same 25 year-period.

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**Table 14**  
**Dominicans**  
**New York City Borough**  
**1990 – 2015**

<b>County/Borough</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>
Bronx	89,326	139,011	250,472	338,450
Brooklyn	52,885	65,762	96,715	105,571
Manhattan	135,220	148,754	164,188	166,399
Queens	50,039	72,612	100,029	101,287
Staten Island	1,164	1,649	3,396	7,513

Source: 1990 IPUMS 5%; 2000 IPUMS 5% Sample; 2010 IPUMS ACS 1-Year Sample; 2015 IPUMS ACS 1-Year Sample.

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**Table 15**  
**Dominican Population Growth in Each Borough**  
**New York City**  
**1990 -2015**

<b>County/Borough</b>	<b>1990-2000</b>	<b>2000-2010</b>	<b>2010-2015</b>	<b>1990-2015</b>
Bronx	55%	80%	35%	278%
Brooklyn	24%	47%	9%	99%
Manhattan	10%	10%	1%	23%
Queens	45%	38%	1%	102%
Staten Island	41%	105%	121%	545%

Source: 1990 IPUMS 5%; 2000 IPUMS 5% Sample; 2010 IPUMS ACS 1-Year Sample; 2015 IPUMS ACS 1-Year Sample. DSI's Calculations

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## SECTION III

### Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Many studies on gentrification have looked at how to stop it or ameliorate its effects through the creation of specific policies. In New York City, a problem we see is that many of the current policies were enacted after War World II, at a juncture when city government counted within its ranks an array of elected officials that professed liberal ideologies; when the labor unions ruled many of the labor markets; and when a wave of optimistic, and utopian, anti-war youth reigned in the streets of New York City. Today, we have many more people than we had in the 1950s, many of whom are low-income individuals and many of whom are immigrants. Despite its need, however, we have fewer policy makers who are willing to invest in the working class. Similarly, though the regulations put into place during the 1950s (Section 8, rent control, etc.) are good regulations,<sup>ix</sup> they need to be reviewed and improved upon to reflect the vicissitudes we have gone through as a society.

As publically announced, Mayor de Blasio's affordable housing plan, with its ambitious goal of building or preserving 200,000 units of affordable housing over 10 years, is a great step in the right direction. The consensus is that the supply of affordable housing is not keeping up with the demand. While there are about a million New York households earning less than 50% of the federally determined "area median income," there are only 425,000 rental units that these New Yorkers can afford.<sup>x</sup> Moreover, while New York City provides about 90,000 New Yorkers with the federal Section 8 voucher,<sup>xi</sup> a full 54% of all New York households are rent-burdened.<sup>xii</sup>

Thus, despite the city's current housing plans, more remains to be done. The shortage of affordable housing, as reflected in this brief, worsens with each passing day, as rent inflation and housing demand far outstrip New Yorkers' income growth (or lack thereof). This means that we must *construct* many more affordable housing units as well as *preserve* the current stock of affordable housing.

Though the blunt impact of gentrification today is felt mostly by the economically disempowered, if not regulated or controlled, gentrification will likely drag most sectors of society into its orbit. Today, it is working class neighborhoods that are being affected by gentrification. Yet, the profit-making generated by gentrification will not be appeased by the limited number of such neighborhoods alone. It is likely, then, that the next neighborhoods in line are those that house the middle class. Many middle class New Yorkers rent or have a mortgage hanging over their heads and they do not have a guarantee that their income will keep up with the rising cost of living. This is to say that regulating/controlling gentrification is a local and, we propose, a national imperative.

We have reviewed carefully many of the policies proposed by other studies and we have selected those that we think are practical, doable, and that can be effectively implemented in a timely fashion. We are also making some original policy recommendations.

## Original Policy Recommendations from CUNY DSI:

- **Set aside a quota for immigrants in public and subsidized housing in immigrant neighborhoods.** Immigrant neighborhoods are defined here as a neighborhood where immigrants make up at least 40% of the population. Currently, immigrants are heavily underrepresented in public housing;
- Rather than merely relying on federal dollars for a direct housing subsidy such as Section 8, both **the State and the City of New York should create their own funded housing voucher programs** (a) to expand the current coverage of Section 8 and (b) to create a safety net that protects/maintains such housing subsidies in the event of further federal cuts or even the end of the program. Funds for New York's own funded housing voucher program can come from the funds recouped from ending the 421-A and J-51 programs (see below).

## Selected Policy Recommendations from Other Research:

- **Reform existing rent regulation laws** to (a) reduce, (b) eliminate, (c) or undermine the effects of loopholes that make these laws inadequate/ineffective in the protection of low-income renters. A major loophole, for instance, is what has been baptized as "the eviction bonus" or the right that an owner has to increase the rental price by 20% (or more) of a purportedly rent-stabilized unit when a renter moves out;<sup>xiii</sup>
- **Increase housing subsidies for low-income individuals** provided by the local, the state, and the federal government to help low-income residents keep up with rent increases to prevent displacement;<sup>xiv</sup>
- **More affordable new housing must be built**, especially in areas such as Washington Heights/Inwood where the housing stock has not grown much in recent decades.<sup>xv</sup> **Use vacant publicly owned land** to build more affordable housing;<sup>xvi</sup>
- **The city should give incentives to owners of currently affordable units** in return for forgoing some future rent increases, so as to maintain the stock of affordable housing. This might also encourage other owners or developers to join in and provide affordable housing;<sup>xvii</sup>
- **Access to legal counsel** must be improved for low-income New Yorkers in order to limit evictions;<sup>xviii</sup>
- **End inefficient subsidies such as 421-a** (even in its reformed incarnation, Affordable New York) and **J-51**, which create few affordable units at enormous taxpayer expense, and redirect the relinquished funds to housing vouchers for low-income New Yorkers, particularly to fund more subsidies for public-private partnerships that create more affordable housing.<sup>xix</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- i** Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2010: 1-3.
- ii** NYU Furman Center 2016: 1, 6. See also Correal 2017 and Regional Planning Association 2017: 12.
- iii** See Bach and Waters, Community Service Society of New York 2009, 2011, 2016; Bloom 2009; Bloom and Lasner 2015; NYU Furman Center 2016, 2016b; Regional Planning Association 2017; New York City Comptroller 2017; Goodman 2017; Correal 2017. See also Lees et al. 2010, among many others.
- iv** NYU Furman Center 2016: 6; Bach and Waters, Community Service Society of New York 2016: 8; Regional Planning Association 2017: 17; Correal 2017.
- v** NYU Furman Center 2016: 85.
- vi** Bach and Waters, Community Service Society of New York 2016: 6-9; NYU Furman Center 2016: 18.
- vii** NYU Furman Center 2016: 1.
- viii** Bach and Waters, Community Service Society of New York 2009: 3, 9.
- ix** Bloom 2009.
- x** The City of New York, Office of the Mayor 2014: 6.
- xi** New York City Housing Authority n.d.
- xii** Woo and Salviati 2016.
- xiii** Bach and Waters, Community Service Society of New York 2009: 9; Bach and Waters, Community Service Society of New York 2011: 16; Bach and Waters, Community Service Society of New York 2016: 24; Navarro 2016; NYU Furman Center 2016: 1; Regional Planning Association 2017: 29.
- xiv** Regional Planning Association 2017: 29.
- xv** Bach and Waters, Community Service Society of New York 2011: 17.
- xvi** Regional Planning Association 2017: 30.
- xvii** NYU Furman Center 2015: 8.
- xviii** Regional Planning Association 2017.
- xix** Bach and Waters, Community Service Society of New York 2012, 2015.

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