

INTRODUCTION

NIGHT AND DAY

I BEGAN THIS PROJECT BY WALKING INTO A BAR. Like most people, I always considered bars to be places for relaxation, socializing, and fun. They are places where people go to set aside the stresses and obligations of their everyday lives; where, removed from their work and home they can temporarily step out of normal roles (and perhaps step into different ones). The bar is an “unserious” setting, a place people generally agree is for “play.”¹ Bars are also unique sites for interaction and community. Some of their patrons confront one another as strangers, while sometimes exclusive groups call the local bar their second home. Many people have a story of the time they struck up a conversation with a random person at a bar, or when they mistakenly walked into a place that was not “for them.” As fixtures in neighborhoods, they are repositories of local memory and sources of identity. A bar that is old enough has walls that can tell the history of its surrounding neighborhood and the people who live there, while its regular patrons will spin yarns about local lore. And for some residents, bars are intertwined with their sense of community—of who they are and where they fit in their neighborhood.

There have been many studies and books on bars as important places of sociability and community.² Revealing the important roles that these urban institutions play in the lives of many urbanites, authors have focused on social life in neighborhood bars, what bars mean to their patrons, and what cultures get produced in them. In writing this book, I wanted to examine bars not just as places for socializing and relationships. I wanted to use them as windows for understanding how downtown neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, East Village, and Bowery have transformed from disinvested slums to upscaling destinations with nightlife scenes, how disparate groups react to such a dramatic change, and how they either help make it happen or struggle to stop it. More generally, I wanted to provide an understanding of the role and impact of nightlife’s rise in the postindustrial city by examining how bars have become symbols of neighborhood change, specifically gentrification, that different groups experience, interpret, and act upon in a multitude of ways. If we look beyond their brick-and-mortar buildings and the social life within them, we can see bars as part of a larger social ecosystem—an urban context of resident groups, community organizations, government agencies, politicians, consumer subcultures, and entrepreneurs—that contributes to our understanding of the nature and

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consequences of the massive reinvestment in the downtowns of today's cities.³ The interrelationships between different elements of this social ecosystem affect life not only within bars but also within neighborhoods. Specifically, an examination of these interrelationships provides us with a new way of understanding tensions and conflicts that people in gentrified neighborhoods experience.

By looking at bars as more than just “unserious” settings or places for sociability, and by using them and their surrounding social ecosystem as an analytical lens for understanding how culture and the economy combine to transform social, political, and community life in neighborhoods, this book explores how fundamental urban processes like city growth and gentrification influence local communities, how the role and nature of commercial establishments in neighborhoods have changed as the latter have become destinations, and how aspects of everyday urban life, such as local identity, public forms of social control, and collective action, have altered as these changes occur. I conduct this analysis from the neighborhood's ground level—the spaces where people live, work, and invest in a community: the places where they cultivate social bonds, the public forums where they display collective action, and the bars where they gather. In other words, after walking into a bar for a drink, I walked out years later with a story to tell of life in today's postindustrial city.

NEIGHBORHOOD BARS IN THE POSTINDUSTRIAL CITY

Once peripheral to the city's economic engine of production and manufacturing, consumption, services, and culture have become significant contributors to the growth and vitality of the postindustrial city. Many cities feature all three in entertainment districts, where locals and visitors alike go for action, distraction, and fun. Ideally, entertainment districts provide people with safe amusements that hide the problems of daily urban life behind their glow and noise.⁴ Times Square, for instance, the bustling beacon of light and sound, represents New York City's most famous entertainment district. A true “twenty-four/seven” destination, Times Square is a place where people can find amusement at nearly any time of the day.⁵ But the district's true spirit comes alive at night, when bright lights guide thousands of visitors through the streets on an unparalleled urban stage. Today, concentrations of bars, restaurants, nightclubs, theaters, and hotels are often located at the heart of a city's center or downtown. More than just amenities for an area's daytime economy, nighttime attractions lure visitors to the city's core and promote it as a place for safe fun.⁶ So important has leisure become in the postindustrial era that some scholars have come to refer to the city as an “entertainment machine.”⁷ According to

this model, consumption, amenities, and amusements, rather than the more traditional factors of production and work, drive urban growth and its policies. Bars and other establishments anchor the city's nighttime economy at a time when these forms of consumption play an important role in its economic and social vibrancy.

At the neighborhood level, bars are also important to the process of gentrification. The "return to the city" of middle- and upper-class professionals has transformed many working-class and low-income neighborhoods and districts. Along with familiar residential changes like increases in real estate prices and rents, gentrification also has a commercial dimension.⁸ It is common for young artists and musicians who often move into a neighborhood at the start of the gentrification process to either go to existing working-class bars or open their own.⁹ In search of places for going out, these newcomers learn the culture of their new neighborhood at its existing bars, while hanging out among the local population. With the new bars they open, they put their own stamp on the neighborhood.¹⁰ New establishments play an important role for artists who use them for socializing, for displaying and performing their art, and for employment. This transformation occurred in these downtown Manhattan neighborhoods from the start of their gentrification. Herman, for instance, told me how he visited downtown as a teenager in the 1970s and went to "Bowery bars" (skid-row bars for homeless men) like Milano's, as mentioned in the preface. He eventually became a member of the East Village's punk-rock music scene and began performing and working in the new bars that were opening. He described a bartending job he had at one of these places:

Neighborhood people, regulars, some older jazz guys, and some rock 'n' roll visitors. At that time, there was maybe eighty bars in the neighborhood instead of 300, so there was still a packed bar during the week. I made a fantastic living working there two nights a week. Fantastic, it was great! Perfect rock 'n' roll life. I could leave, go play shows, come home, still have a job.

New bars gave newcomers like Herman places to hang out and flexible employment to sustain their lifestyle. But bars also encourage gentrification. New, hip commercial establishments generate local buzz in a neighborhood and signify that it is transforming. Bars have a mutually reinforcing relationship with gentrification: new businesses like bars accommodate the needs of middle-class residents at the same time as they attract new ones. They are both signposts and catalysts in the process when a neighborhood gentrifies.

Downtown neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, East Village, and Bowery exemplify how local bars are an important piece of these larger stories of

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postindustrial urban life. After a long period as slums, gentrification has turned them into part of an upscaling downtown: coveted places to live for wealthy urbanites, destinations for visitors, and among the largest and most popular bar and nightlife districts in the city. As contemporary urban entertainment districts, their nightlife scenes provide their visitors with a wide array of safe amusements and consumption options to choose from.¹¹ But bars have caused problems for many people in the neighborhood. Rather than places for socializing or sources of community, some residents see bars as threats to the social fabric they have built. As Virgil, a longtime resident in his early fifties who moved to the East Village in the 1970s, explained to me,

My concern is really about the transformation of this neighborhood. Gentrification has done a lot of this work, but the nightlife scene is a subset of gentrification—but it's a special one, like gentrification on steroids. It's just wild and uncontrolled, and it's faster than any other kind of gentrification. And it doesn't just bring in upscale people to reside here. It brings in all these nonlocal folks.

Residents most commonly complain that bars have diminished their quality of life. In community meetings and in my interviews with them, they regularly spoke about the noise that bars cause. For people with bars in their building's storefront, vibrations from sound systems travel through the brick of the old tenements into their apartments, while the voices of patrons hanging out and smoking on the sidewalk rise up to their floors and enter through their windows. For people with bars on their block, passersby constantly carry on conversations to and from their destinations. Cars behind taxis blast their horns as passengers settle fares. If residents return home from a night out of their own, they have to navigate through a sea of young revelers who crowd the sidewalks. These conditions last in some cases until after 4 a.m. and sometimes occur on a nightly basis. The next morning, residents often awake to find vomit on their doorsteps and their property damaged (e.g., broken car mirrors, defaced front doors) that they attribute to the previous night's activities.

But as Virgil's quote shows, residents' problems reflect the social as much as the environmental impact of bars. It is not just the depleted quality of life that concerns existing residents but the fact that young newcomers and new establishments signify to them that their home is no longer theirs. Bars, restaurants, cafés, and other expensive stores like boutiques replace their beloved local shops and hangouts (some of which are older bars). White revelers with no stake in the neighborhood and who use it merely for consumption and fun replace a diverse array of creative local characters whom they admire. Even

more frustrating to them is that these young folks were not around for the days when the neighborhood was a disinvested slum. They remember when the now-trendy section of the East Village called Alphabet City—so named because of the west-to-east Avenues A, B, C, and D—could be summed up with the following verse: “Avenue A, you’re all right. Avenue B, you’re brave. Avenue C, you’re crazy. Avenue D, you’re dead.” Existing residents take pride in having invested themselves and their sweat equity into a place that had been abandoned, and for having remained in the neighborhood throughout its depressed period. To them, the East Village is a special place, and they are a special population living there. Meanwhile, hovering above these issues is the omnipresent threat of rising rents that could displace them. As a result, residents have formed many community groups to protest bars and nightlife and mitigate its harms.

Other people in the downtown neighborhoods, however, disagree. Nightlife owners and younger residents argue that new people and businesses are signs of an area’s improvement and success. Entrepreneurs and investors see places like the Lower East Side, East Village, and Bowery as viable locations for such establishments as luxury boutique hotels, where hip guests will pay in excess of \$400 a night to stay and where nightlife spaces attract visitors from around the city. They also know that the neighborhood’s reputation for bars and nightlife will mean their large nightspots will attract revelers in general. To new bar owners, opening a bar in these neighborhoods is a wise investment.

On a smaller scale, bar owners maintain the attitude that their establishments have made positive contributions to these neighborhoods. They argue that without the taxes, employment, and places they provide for the community, these areas would still be depressed, crime-ridden slums. Comparing today’s East Village with that of the past, Dave, a new bar owner in the neighborhood, said to me, “What makes people comfortable to come here, venture here, and eventually start moving in here is going to make it a safe place, and it *is* now.” Older owners who opened bars during the neighborhood’s early stages of gentrification and who managed to stay open despite shifting clienteles and increasing commercial rents have profited from the nightlife scene’s emergence and the new crowds it brings. No bar owner I studied or observed sought to deliberately bother existing residents. Rather, each felt in their own way that by owning a bar they were doing their small part to improve the neighborhood. Young revelers meanwhile, who either live in these neighborhoods or visit their bars, also regard their nightlife scenes as positive to downtown’s revitalization. For them personally, going out reinforces the social bonds they have already formed with their friends and satisfies their desire to live in a vibrant downtown neighborhood, where the action is.¹²

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Along with gentrification, these conflicts between downtown's daytime communities (residents, resident groups, community organizations) and nighttime communities (bar owners, revelers) emerged as a result of "growth machine" or, we can say, "entertainment machine" policies.¹³ Like those of other urban entertainment districts, downtown Manhattan's nightlife scenes developed with the influence of local government and the presence of certain institutional actors, with mediation from key political figures.¹⁴ Liquor license laws vary state by state, and they often have provisions that control the density and concentration of licensed establishments. Recognizing the importance of entertainment for urban growth in the 1990s, New York State lawmakers ensured that bars could open in dense concentrations to form nightlife scenes. Officials of the New York State Liquor Authority (SLA), the state government's agency in charge of liquor license regulation and enforcement, regularly makes licensing decisions that encourage nightlife development in the name of urban growth, as was the case downtown. In addition, the steady institutional expansion of the expensive private school New York University (NYU) eastward from its Greenwich Village base through the opening of large dormitory buildings since the 1990s has provided the neighborhood's bars with thousands of young student consumers seeking the pleasures of living in an urban campus in a hip downtown. Students also rent tenement apartments in these neighborhoods, sometimes forming groups of four or five for a one-bedroom apartment to cover the high rents.

The conflicts over these policies and the expansion of bars in downtown neighborhoods have involved other areas of government, namely politicians and the police. Representatives in the New York City Council and the New York State Legislature face the dilemma of having to balance the imperatives of urban growth and the needs of their constituents while constantly intervening on behalf of residents in various forums. As I found, they regularly speak against nightlife on behalf of the local populations and draft, push, and pass legislation that targets bar owners for various violations. But they do not address the scale and density of the local scenes. Instead they maintain a discourse of neighborhood growth that includes nightlife. The police, meanwhile, must deal with the frequent complaints that residents make against bars and ensure that nightlife scenes remain safe without overtaxing their resources. The "quality-of-life policing" policies that have characterized the regulation of public spaces in the postindustrial city often target groups like the homeless and other vagrants.¹⁵ While not their intended focus, these policies require officers to do something about crowds of loud, young, money-spending revelers and bars that are profitable but noisy without disrupting the scenes' vibrancy. Faced with this task, the police also hold individual owners accountable for their own spaces and the street and encourage the use of private solutions to handle their issues.

THE BARS OF AN UPSCALING DOWNTOWN

The conflicts over downtown bars represent symptoms of the postindustrial urban process of advanced gentrification that is transforming its neighborhoods into destinations for visitors and tourists, not necessarily for local residents.¹⁶ There are many examples in New York, as well as other cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles, of bars, restaurants, hotels, music venues, dance clubs, clothing boutiques, and art galleries that attract new residents and visitors.¹⁷ As gentrification progresses in a neighborhood, new businesses begin appealing directly to visitors and newcomers and not necessarily existing locals, while old businesses either begin attracting new clientele or suffer. I understand this to be an “upscaling” process, whereby gentrified neighborhoods become destinations for increasingly elite forms of consumption. The new commercial amenities that have opened in downtown Manhattan are increasingly high end in nature, with expensive items and specialized offerings and themes that distinguish them from their competition. They match the area’s new luxury housing developments, such as the Avalon Bowery and Chrystie Place complexes, with a swimming pool, fitness center, the largest Whole Foods on the East Coast, a restaurant owned by the world-famous chef Daniel Boulud, and studio apartments with rents starting at \$3,300 a month. When gentrification progresses to an advanced stage in neighborhoods, new elements—housing types, residents, commercial establishments, public activities—become more socially and culturally distant from the existing examples. Bars themselves exemplify this neighborhood-wide transformation.

Many of the tensions over this upscaling process arise from the fact that the commercial life in downtown Manhattan is becoming homogenized in terms of the type of establishments opening and the socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural preferences of their patrons while overall its demographics remain diverse. In my own street-by-street, block-by-block counts of businesses in this book’s geographic focus,¹⁸ I found that 29 percent of all businesses in the neighborhood are nighttime establishments, either bars, restaurants, music venues, or nightclubs (605 out of 2,097 total businesses).¹⁹ On some blocks, bars and nightlife completely dominate commercial life, such as on Avenues A and B, two narrow fourteen-block streets, where bars and restaurants represent 35 percent of businesses (45 out of 122 total businesses and 30 out of 85, respectively), and on a three-block stretch of Ludlow Street, a narrow one-way street, where they represent 44 percent (17 out of 39 total businesses). Downtown Manhattan features several highly dense mixed-used neighborhoods. Businesses often operate on heavily residential streets and occupy the commercial storefronts of tenement buildings. Most

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residents thereby constantly pass nightlife establishments of some sort every time they leave home.

In addition to these vast numbers, many of the new bars no longer represent community hangouts that bring together diverse clienteles or integrate strangers.²⁰ Their themes are often highly specialized, focusing on specific products (natural wines, craft beer, handcrafted cocktails, mescal), nighttime experiences (DJs, crowds, live music, dancing), and subcultures (indie rock fans, foodies, burlesque performers). Their ambience promotes entertainment over casual socializing, and they only open after typical work hours and sometimes only on nights when people most often go out. Their customers often live in the metropolitan area or visit from afar. Downtown Manhattan has historic neighborhood bars that still maintain regular clienteles and a sense of community (such as Milano's) but are regularly overrun by tourists and visitors. The greatest example of these is McSorley's Old Ale House in the East Village. Opened in 1854, when the neighborhood had a large Irish immigrant population, "New York City's oldest bar" today is written about in popular tourist guidebooks and international media sources as a must-see destination for visitors.²¹ Right down the street from McSorley's, however, are Burp Castle and Standings, two new bars that are also regularly featured in local media and beer guides for specializing in Belgian and American craft beers, respectively. These bars attract a more discerning clientele than places with typical Budweiser-like fare, and beer aficionados seek them out for their rarefied offerings. They are community institutions, but the communities that seek them out are based on taste, rather than locale, race, or ethnicity of the romanticized neighborhood bar.²² The New York City Homebrewers Guild, a leisure group of beer lovers who make their own concoctions at home, holds its monthly meetings at Burp Castle. They are not cheap, however. Belgian beers can cost \$10 a glass. Patrons at these and other bars have the money to spend on such items, and the cultural wherewithal to know where to go for what they want in a night out.

Despite these patterns, these downtown neighborhoods still have diverse populations. As 2010 census data indicates, 32.4 percent of their residents are white, 33.8 percent are Asian, 6.9 percent are black, and 24.6 percent are Hispanic.²³ Only whites, however, who represent a strong majority of downtown's revelers and recent residents, have increased in population since 2000, in their case by a substantial 14 percent, while blacks have decreased by 2.9 percent, Asians by 4.6 percent, and Hispanics by 9.1 percent. In addition, these neighborhoods are rather residentially segregated. Data shows that census tracts with wealthier and whiter residents are located in the northwestern, western, and central areas of the Lower East Side and East Village; tracts with more Hispanic and African American residents and lower incomes are in their northeastern,



MAP 1



eastern, and southeastern areas, which feature dense concentrations of large public housing projects; and tracts with low-income Asian residents are in the southwestern area, where Chinatown is located.²⁴ Advanced gentrification and an upscaling process, then, do not mean existing populations, such as people born in the neighborhood and earlier waves of newcomers, and their businesses

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and cultures disappear from a neighborhood. But a neighborhood's residential and commercial patterns put them at risk. These different racial and ethnic populations contain their own subgroups—for example, lifelong ethnic-white residents such as Ukrainians and Jews of Eastern European descent; longtime white residents who moved into the area at the start of gentrification as artists or students; Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Chinese immigrants of the first and second generation; bohemians, the homeless, and new wealthy members of the professional classes—each of whom have their own material and nonmaterial interests in their neighborhood. Their interests vary by such factors as their social class and the amount of time they have lived in the neighborhood. These groups must coexist with one another within the context of a large, popular, and densely concentrated nightlife scene and endure the transformations of advanced gentrification. Their myriad interests are compromised in different ways by the threats caused by bars. While the primary concerns of most groups are rents and local amenities that are affordable and a decent quality of life, they each have their own unique, symbolic connections to their neighborhood that new bars threaten to sever. The tensions that bars and nightlife cause, I argue, have wider consequences for any community that has been transformed into a popular destination with hip forms of consumption while retaining elements of its past.

EXAMINING TAMED FRONTIERS

Two scholars have famously used the old American frontier as a metaphor to describe phenomena that I examine in this book. First, Neil Smith argued that real estate and government actors saw dilapidated areas like the East Village of the 1980s as similar to the “Wild West”: untamed, unpredictable, and dangerous.²⁵ The downtown slum was full of marginal characters—the working-class, racial and ethnic minorities, the homeless, gays and other sexual deviants—who had to be removed from the (potentially profitable) land to develop it. Groups like middle-class artists served as gentrification's “shock troops,” who ventured into the uncharted frontier. The success or failure of their settlement among “native” populations would determine the further investment of capital and the displacement of unwanted groups. Smith saw the East Village as analogous to the American West, with its existing inhabitants treated as the Native Americans were. As gentrification continued, the “frontier line” of investment and displacement progressed deeper and deeper into the neighborhood.

An element of the gentrification process that Smith did not examine invokes Murray Melbin's work on the night.²⁶ Melbin considers time to be

like space, or like a container that we fill with activities and meanings. As daytime has become too packed with work and other obligations, society has gradually started filling up the time of the night. Nighttime has historically been perceived as similar to the frontier: wild, mysterious and unknowable in its darkness, and inhabited by strange creatures. It is also different from the productive day as a time of rest, relaxation, and leisure.²⁷ But these meanings of night and day are mere social constructions, subject to change. Melbin observes that society is becoming more and more incessant, as companies seek to make goods and provide services at all hours of the day, with profit serving as a key explanation: “A land frontier is turned to for what can be extracted from it, a nighttime for what can be produced in it. The underlying motive is the same, an incentive to exploit the region for economic gain.”²⁸ Meanwhile, people have become more demanding of obtaining anything at any hour, and are shifting many of their daytime responsibilities to the night. As it became colonized, the night would become tamed, or more organized and regulated, less homogeneous in terms of activities and inhabitants, and less tolerant of lawless and deviant behavior.

As we will see, an important aspect of downtown Manhattan’s gentrification was the control of its nighttime spaces, including disreputable and illegal bars. But Melbin argued that common daytime phenomena—work, production, order, schedules, services—would gradually seep into the night and replace the behaviors and meanings that typically characterize it. He did not consider how nighttime institutions and their affiliated meanings of leisure and consumption would become significant to the everyday world of the postindustrial city. Smith was also not concerned with what the tamed frontier of gentrified neighborhoods looked like. New bars, as examples of urban nighttime leisure, played an important role in making downtown a place for investment and a destination for upscale consumption. Entrepreneurs and young revelers have successfully occupied its nighttime hours, but these phenomena neither completely resemble nor are completely separate from those of the day.

A central story of nightlife’s role in the upscaling process in downtown Manhattan is how the nighttime economy influences the people of the daytime community. This story is about how bars impact the thoughts, actions, and inactions of a group of residents who interpret them and their patrons as real threats to their sociocultural worlds. It tells how old neighborhood bars undergo transformations from local community hangouts to popular destinations. And it concerns local urban growth policies and enforcement agencies whose agendas have become intertwined with the nightlife scene’s development and public safety. These are the tensions of everyday social, political, and community life in the neighborhood that bar patrons and visiting revelers rarely see

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when they are out at night. They are conflicts that reveal the underside of what appears to be successful growth in a postindustrial neighborhood.

But this story of advanced gentrification is also about how bars and their social worlds of the night operate in ways that the daytime communities of residents do not see. It tells how neighborhood bars have changed from places for local social gathering to destinations for revelers and subcultures. It deals with how upscale forms of experiential entertainment have replaced earlier working-class and avant-garde forms of creativity in the neighborhood.²⁹ And it tells about the strategies that today's nightlife entrepreneurs use for their bars to survive in the nighttime economy. The social worlds of the nighttime economy are far more differentiated than protesting residents imply.

In this book I examine how these two worlds of the day and night in downtown Manhattan neighborhoods conflict with and influence each other. I show how tensions between them emerged as a result of growth policies that favored nightlife development. And I explain how local politicians, the police, and community organizations attempt to mediate between their conflicts, and how they fail to do so.

To tell the story of the impact of the changing role of bars on neighborhood life downtown, I studied people from four general categories:

- 1 **RESIDENTS** (lifelong and longtime residents, community activists, bar regulars, new wealthy members of the professional classes, college students, and the homeless),
- 2 **VISITORS** (revelers from outside the neighborhood and tourists),
- 3 **PUBLIC OFFICIALS** (local elected officials, representatives of the State Liquor Authority, and the police), and
- 4 **NIGHTLIFE ACTORS** (owners of bars, hotels, and restaurants; bartenders; landlords; real estate agents; and attorneys who specialize in nightlife).³⁰

Each group holds a stake in these neighborhoods and has a different position in relation to the upscaling process, bars, and nightlife scene. As I will show, people within each group often vary and differ from one another. Longtime residents who collectively organize to protest bars, for instance, have more in common with older owners of small bars in terms of how they understand upscale nightlife development than they do with wealthier newcomers and students, with whom they regularly conflict. Likewise, older bar owners have little in common with hoteliers or new owners of dance clubs. The neighborhoods represent the terrains upon which each group lays claim in some form, and the groups' struggles over bars, the nightlife scene, and the upscaling process drive the following analysis.

OUTLINE OF THIS BOOK

Looking at the local social ecosystem surrounding bars in the downtown Manhattan neighborhoods of the Lower East Side, East Village, and Bowery, this book examines six aspects of neighborhood life in the postindustrial city that have been affected by the growth of their nightlife scenes. These aspects are all found in these neighborhoods because of their transformation into upscaling downtown areas with large nighttime economies and dense concentrations of diverse groups with competing interests. Each of the following six chapters features one of these aspects as its central theme, with elements of others in the background. In each I also form a dialogue between the dichotomy of the daytime and the nighttime people and phenomena found downtown. Throughout the book I weave the overall story of the consequences that neighborhoods face when they transition into upscale destinations based in part on a large nightlife scene. The different, conflicting material interests and stakes that disparate groups have in these neighborhoods serve as a common thread.

Chapter 1 serves a dual purpose. First, I provide a brief social history of the Bowery as told through the transformation of its bars and nightlife. I discuss how bars and nightlife corresponded to and helped along its eventual gentrification. My goal here is to situate the area historically and demonstrate the different roles that bars have played for people there over time. Second, I focus on how new bars and contemporary nightlife development have shaped community life in downtown neighborhood bars. I begin the chapter with a vignette of the people at Milano's Bar, a bar that has evolved alongside the changes occurring in the area and the nightlife scene. Through an analysis of its multiple generations of customers, its bartenders, and its owners, I examine the tensions that have arisen from its own transformation as a refuge for the homeless to a public gathering place for residents to a "dive bar" for young visitors. The reactions of the people at Milano's to these changes echo many of the book's main themes while demonstrating how urban forces have shaped a fundamental aspect of life for people in these downtown neighborhoods, namely, community socializing.

In chapter 2 I examine the role of the local government in influencing economic development and diminishing civic power in city neighborhoods. It starts with an episode from a public forum on quality-of-life issues held for downtown residents. The vignette shows the open hostility that residents direct at the CEO of the State Liquor Authority (SLA), the government agency that they blame for the development of nightlife in the neighborhood in spite of their protests. The chapter then discusses the policies behind the growth of downtown Manhattan's nightlife scenes, especially the SLA's liquor-licensing

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decisions that facilitated the proliferation of bars. I show how this policy, which represents “urban entrepreneurialism,” or how local governments directly influence private development, created local unrest and led residents to organize and protest bars. Residents understand the SLA and bar owners as complicit perpetrators in the destruction of their neighborhood and sense of community, and understand themselves as victims of these policies.

Building from this point, chapter 3 looks at the social reasons behind collective action against economic development. I focus on how and why residents continue to protest bars despite recognizing their powerlessness to prevent nightlife growth and occupying a role as its victim. I start with a profile of a longtime resident named Bob, who moved to the East Village at the start of its gentrification and spends weekend nights photographing new nightlife activities on a street corner with other characters from the neighborhood’s past. With diminished civic power to combat dominant economic development in today’s upscale downtown, early gentrifiers like Bob who stayed in their neighborhood through its rough years rely on their own past experiences and definitions of community to contest them as “theirs.” This chapter examines how early gentrifiers construct a “nostalgia narrative,” or a tale of authentic community that weaves together their experiences with their neighborhood’s abandoned spaces, its diversity, and its creativity into a coherent representation of place. Through this narrative they create a community ideology and a new self-identity as their neighborhood’s “symbolic owners” that serve as bases for collective action. Since it draws on a past that is both imagined and personal, the residents’ narrative presents its own internal contradictions while their sense of community and organized protests exclude certain groups, such as the neighborhood’s existing low-income residents, who express different attitudes of how their neighborhood has changed from early gentrifiers.

Chapter 4 analyzes entrepreneurialism in the form of small-business ownership as an example of local place making. It starts with an episode from a community board meeting that shows how residents use their community ideology to act against a Lower East Side bar owner named Sasha. I then segue into the story of my first visit to Sasha’s unique, upscale cocktail bar. From there the chapter proceeds to examine who has opened bars in these downtown neighborhoods since the start of their gentrification, how owners understand their role in their neighborhood, and how new bars reinforce preexisting social bonds among groups while supporting rarefied taste communities. Bar owners represent “place entrepreneurs” who collectively construct an image of downtown as a destination for nightlife. While all new bar owners see themselves as purveyors of community and benefits to their neighborhood, they define community differently depending on when they opened their bars. However,

in spite of their best intentions, downtown bars mainly attract young clientele who visit the nightlife scene. Other owners, meanwhile, deliberately open bars to appeal to well-heeled, money-spending revelers. I show how new downtown nightlife has transformed from being for communities of newcomers in the area to being for groups of visitors to the area.

In chapter 5, I examine the issues that arise for policing nightlife scenes. It begins with an episode from one of the special meetings that the police occasionally hold at the precinct for bar owners, at which owners receive tips from officers on how to reduce quality-of-life complaints from residents and prevent crime in their bars. To enhance the quality of life in neighborhoods and provide a sense of safety on streets, leaders of postindustrial cities have enacted policing strategies that target “broken windows,” or signs of public disorder. This meeting and other initiatives signify the police department’s effort to curb quality-of-life complaints (e.g., noise, litter, and damage from revelers) as well as crimes inside and outside bars by making specific owners responsible for the structural conditions of dense nightlife scenes and targeting those who are “bad” and irresponsible. While residents often petition their local lawmakers to help them in their efforts to fight bars, I also show how elected officials espouse a growth discourse that targets individual bar owners and maintains density and proliferation levels. I then show how bar owners understand these efforts as well as other initiatives by the police and the local state (i.e., new laws and increased pressure and additional responsibility to monitor public space) to be excessive encroachments on their businesses and threats to their entrepreneurial identity as beneficial sources of community in their neighborhood.

Focusing on a final aspect of life in the postindustrial city, chapter 6 examines the limitations of local participatory democracy. It specifically looks at how the competing definitions of community and conflicting understandings of the appropriate use of the neighborhood that residents and bar owners hold play out in community board meetings. In recent years many cities have enacted policies that provide citizens with greater authority over local public affairs, while increasing the accountability of government agencies. My aim in this chapter is to demonstrate the limitations of participatory democracy by analyzing it in action between conflicting groups. I start with one of several episodes featured in the chapter of residents and bar owners debating liquor license applications and quality-of-life issues in their immediate area and surrounding neighborhood. I then examine the strategies that both residents and bar owners use against each other to push forward their definition of community. Early gentrifiers and the community board rely on their past experience in their neighborhood, with the SLA, and with bar owners to hone their arguments and reshape their policies to protest bars. Bar owners, who describe early gentrifiers

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as irrational for being nostalgic and selfish for not wanting the neighborhood to change, are either frustrated and react emotionally to residents or counter them with their own assurances that they will be different from their predecessors, neither of which changes the image residents have of them. These meetings construct and reinforce the perspectives that each group has towards the other. By documenting these confrontations in a political context of weakened local civic power, this chapter reveals the limits of neighborhood-based democratic processes.

A NOTE ON BOUNDARIES, DEFINITIONS, AND PERIODIZATION

People normally consider downtown Manhattan to be the section of the island south of Fourteenth Street. In addition to the Lower East Side, East Village, and Bowery, downtown Manhattan includes Greenwich Village, the West Village, NoHo, SoHo, Little Italy, NoLiTa, Chinatown, TriBeCa, the Financial District, Battery Park City, City Hall, and the South Street Seaport historical district.³¹ Historically, the Lower East Side and East Village neighborhoods and the Bowery area combined to form the “Lower East Side” of Manhattan: between Fourteenth Street and the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges and between Broadway and the East River. Over the centuries, numerous immigrant groups have divided this “Lower East Side” area into their own smaller ethnic social worlds (e.g., Little Italy, Chinatown, Little Germany, Little Odessa) while coexisting under the general name “Lower East Side.” The boundaries between these sub-worlds have expanded, contracted, and shifted over time, and many have all but disappeared except for scant architectural traces of their onetime existence. But the overall status of the “Lower East Side” as an immigrant, working-class area—until recently—has remained constant.

In the late 1960s, real estate actors coined the name “East Village” to make the area east of Bowery between Fourteenth and Houston Streets more attractive and distinct from the “Lower East Side,” which always carried the negative label of being a place for immigrants and the working class. They borrowed from the names of the nearby Greenwich Village and the West Village neighborhoods, which had more middle-class residents and tonier images. The name change succeeded in branding a new neighborhood and limiting the Lower East Side to the area south of Houston Street and east of Bowery. But it failed to prevent the East Village from turning into a slum like Bowery and the Lower East Side. While this nomenclature predominates, some people still use other names for these neighborhoods. Puerto Ricans, who moved to the East Village and Lower East Side in great numbers in the decades after World War II, refer

to the area as “Loisaida,” a Spanglish or “Nuyoricán” pronunciation of “Lower East Side.” However, given advanced gentrification, much of the Hispanic presence in terms of businesses and street life is disappearing from most streets (although Avenue C’s official alternative name remains Loisaida). Some residents, real estate agents, and media sources call the far-eastern section of the East Village “Alphabet City,” in reference to Avenues A, B, C, and D. This name has obscure origins, although it emerged at a time of high crime activity in that section of the neighborhood. Today the western section of the Lower East Side features part of Chinatown, which stretches west through Little Italy to the border of TriBeCa. Finally, Bowery, which I discuss in great detail in the next chapter, has always represented both a street and an area of the “Lower East Side,” most especially a skid row area. In short, the various sections of the “Lower East Side” of Manhattan have their own histories and cultural connotations that, as Christopher Mele points out, indicate the struggles of representation that have taken place among the various social actors who have had a stake in them over the past few decades.³²

The three areas that I focus on in this book make up Manhattan Community District 3, which Manhattan Community Board 3 represents. Jane Jacobs would describe Community District 3 as a “district” in the sense that it mediates between the streets and places in a neighborhood and the larger city.³³ Most important for this book, Community Board 3 serves as the forum for liquor-licensing matters, which I discuss in chapter 2. Compared with other neighborhoods and areas in downtown Manhattan, the Lower East Side, East Village, and Bowery share a similar historical trajectory as places for immigrant and working-class groups that became slums and then underwent gentrification. Throughout the book I carefully examine the uniqueness of different sections within the district and delineate the meanings behind “neighborhood” and “community” and the phenomena they reference when different people use such terms.

In choosing downtown Manhattan as my case, I do not argue that it features representative neighborhoods that resemble gentrified neighborhoods or downtown areas in other cities. I find support in Mario Small’s statement that qualitative researchers should not look for “average” cases such as neighborhoods in their research to make generalized statements about their empirical findings.³⁴ Such selections do not meet statistical standards of representativeness, and qualitative researchers should therefore neither seek to achieve external validity in their work nor use such quantitative language.³⁵ Qualitative scholars rarely select neighborhoods from random samples, and furthermore their analyses remain based on samples of one. Downtown Manhattan is a “unique case,” or an opportunity to make analytically logical inferences on

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“an idiosyncratic combination of elements or events which constitute a ‘case’” through a revelation of contextual processes.³⁶ Scholars have identified the processes I examine in this book occurring in cities around the world. They have shown how new nightlife scenes and gentrification can look different from place to place, feature different groups, and occur at different paces depending on specific spatiotemporal contexts.

I see downtown Manhattan as an example of an area in a top-tier global city with neighborhoods at an advanced stage of gentrification and undergoing an upscaling process. I examine what happens to neighborhood life under these conditions through an analysis of the conflicts over its many bars to deepen our theoretical understanding of these processes. Perhaps only a few neighborhoods in such cities feature all of these conditions that arise from such densely concentrated diversity, economic developments, and conflicts and actions among their local populations. As the postindustrial transformation advances in other cities, neighborhoods may come to resemble those in this book in terms of the nature of their transition and the conflicts between their local groups. I hope that readers will find my approach of examining the social ecosystem surrounding bars useful for understanding how people experience life in a neighborhood that has become a destination for visitors and a place of upscale consumption.

Finally, I began my fieldwork for this book in early 2004 and completed it at the end of 2008, when the recession that affected the United States had begun. Although I followed the effects of the recession on nightlife in these neighborhoods and conducted several new and follow-up interviews after formally exiting the field, I end the analysis in 2008. I offer several observations and comments on the impact of the recession on the neighborhoods and their nightlife scenes throughout the book.