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People's City Report Card 2016

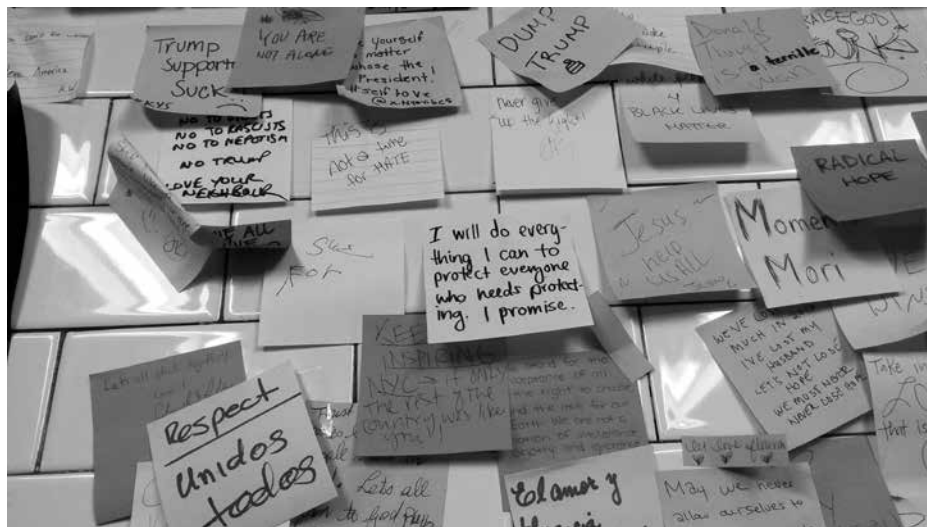
BY MOLLY GARFINKEL WITH STEVE ZEITLIN AND ELENA MARTÍNEZ

COMMENDABLE

Union Square Post-It Notes

Throughout our recent history, New Yorkers use words on walls in public spaces to express a variety of views and emo-

from hope and support of unity to mobilization and outrage. This project was begun by artist Matthew Chavez, who goes by the moniker Levee, as a way to vent emotion, which grew out of his earlier project, “Sub-



Union Square Post-It Notes. Photo by Elena Martínez.

tions—grief, protest, anger. There were the 9/11 memorials, such as the “Missing” posters and the tiles on a wall in the Union Square subway where family members could write personal messages to lost ones. In December 2016, displays included the “Mi Casa No Es Su Casa: Illumination Against Gentrification,” a resistance art project that protests neighborhood gentrification in Bushwick by creating slogans out of strings of Christmas lights; and the construction wall turned Guerilla Gallery on 116th Street between 2nd and 3rd Avenues run by the Harlem Art Collective, where East Harlem residents used words and images to voice concerns over immigrant rights and the tragedy of the 43 students who disappeared from the Rural Teachers College in Mexico. For several weeks, in effort to give voice to the despair, anger, sadness, and for some, the excitement, of the outcome of the presidential election, Union Station subway station was turned into a forum. Several tiled walls were covered with post-it notes with messages and quotes, ranging

way Therapy”—a way to de-stress through conversation in NYC’s subways. The post-it notes began to go up the day after the election when he posted “Express Yourself.” At Union Station 10,000 messages were amassed. The post-it notes—quick memos in office settings—provided an ephemeral, cathartic release in a new context, and we are pleased that the New York Historical Society will be collecting and archiving the notes.

Jim Power’s Mosaic Trail and the Alamo Reinstalled at Astor Place

In 2016, with the Village Alliance and City Lore taking lead roles, friends and allies rallied hard to help artist Jim Power restore his magnificent light pole mosaics, New York City’s longest-lasting guerilla art. Jim teamed up with Julie Powell to refurbish the poles, which were installed, now as totems, in the reopened Astor Place in November. Happily, seven of Jim’s poles will be permanent, vibrant features of the Astor Place landscape. On November 1, Bernard (Tony) Rosenthal’s beloved sculpture, “Alamo,” aka “The Cube,” was also reinstated at Astor Place after a two-year absence.

Bronx Music Heritage Center’s New Home

The Women’s Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDco) is ready to begin building the Bronx Commons, an arts-based, mixed-use development project. The development, located in the Melrose Commons neighborhood of the South Bronx, on the west side of Elton Avenue, between East 162nd and East 163rd Streets, will house the permanent home of the Bronx Music Heritage Center (BMHC), including a theater, gallery, and classroom space. Their goal is to set aside some units for elderly musicians. The ceremonial groundbreaking took place on January 13, 2017.



Plan for the Bronx Common, future home of the BMHC. Photo courtesy of WHEDco.

Designation of NYC's Historic LGBT Sites

In March, the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project nominated Julius' Bar to the National Register of Historic Places. Julius', which celebrated its 50th anniversary in April, is often referred to as the oldest gay bar in New York City, and is perhaps best known as the site of the April 21, 1966, "sip-in," a significant event staged to counter the illegality of serving a drink to a gay person in New York. In addition, this June, President Barak Obama declared the Stonewall Inn the country's first LGBT National Monument.

Cultural Plan

In 2015, Mayor de Blasio signed legislation requiring New York City to generate CreateNYC, the first-ever comprehensive cultural plan for the city. In 2016, the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs launched a variety of opportunities for the public to participate in the planning process and offer feedback for overall issues to be addressed in the Cultural Plan. See <http://createnyc.org/show-up/>. We hope that CreateNYC reflects a nuanced, inclusive roadmap for the future of New York's cultural sector when the Plan is delivered to the Mayor's Office in July 2017. City Lore is seeking to ensure that groups that we call Community Anchors—religious institutions, small businesses, and social clubs—that serve as hubs for community-based arts, but operate largely outside of the philanthropic world, are included in the plan.

MIXED

A New Garden

In 1989, two weeks after the Central Park attack, Donald Trump spent a reported \$85,000 on advertisements in the city's newspapers, a headline of which read, "Bring Back the Death Penalty. Bring Back Our Police!" In the message, Trump wrote, "I ... hate these muggers and murderers. They should be forced to suffer and, when they kill, they should be executed for their crimes. They must serve as examples...." On Monday, November 7, 2016, the day before the presidential election, we spoke with the

father of one of the Central Park Five, teenagers who served five years in prison before they were exonerated, about his motivation to open a community garden in his native East Harlem. He did not talk about the case, or the boys' lost childhoods, or the miscarriage of justice. He spoke only about how he, his family, and community had to carve out safe space, a sanctuary, in their own city after being targeted and harassed.

Gardens vs. Low Cost Housing

Time and again, New York City has proposed low cost or mixed-use housing on the sites of beloved community gardens. This year, the Elizabeth Street Garden between Spring and Prince streets is battling the de Blasio administration, asking them to select an alternate site for mixed-use housing and not to destroy or drastically diminish the beautiful garden, which is one of the few open spaces of parkland in Lower Manhattan. More than 5,500 letters have been written in support, and you make a donation to help save the garden at <http://elizabethstreetgarden.org/fund-the-fight/>. Funds will go to printing banners, protest posters, color copies, public relations, and legal advice.

Street Vendors

Sean Basinski, director of the Street Vendor Project, says it's too soon to tell how street vendors fared in 2016. On October 13, the Street Vendor Modernization Act was introduced by City Council members. The Act would double the number of food cart and truck vendor permits over the next seven years. The city capped the number of permits at 3,000 in the early 1980s, but so many more have sought them, and many are on 20-year waiting lists. On October 27, the City Council Consumer Affairs Committee held an eight-hour hearing on the issue, wherein the Mayor effectively said that he did not know if the city would be increasing the number of street vending permits. According to Basinski, the City Council is ready to make this change for increased equity. However, businessmen like Donald Trump do not support the small vendors,

no less the idea of more of them. Basinski says that the change could and should happen as soon as possible, while the iron is still hot. For the moment, many vendors are afraid to work for fear that they might be arrested for vending without a permit and, under the new rules, deported.

TROUBLING

Trump Tower Barricades

The barricades, trucks, security guards, and bomb-sniffing dogs clogging Fifth Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets, the high-traffic area around Trump Tower, are costing the city nearly \$475,000 per day. Members of the press are quarantined in corrals across the street, and two lanes of Fifth Avenue traffic have been closed. On Monday, December 5, Mayor de Blasio asked the federal government to cover the total \$3.5 million burden that the city has incurred for protecting Trump's midtown apartment since election night. Taxpayers and city council members alike have signed and circulated a petition to charge the US government the estimated \$1 million-per-day fee of guarding Trump and his family in Trump Tower during his four-year term. Trump's decision to maintain his family's primary residence in New York threatens to undermine city's security, circulation, and economy.

Sanctuary City

In November 2016, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio issued a statement in response to a Trump campaign promise to withhold federal funds from "sanctuary cities," cities that limit their cooperation with US immigration authorities seeking to hold illegal immigrants in detention. On November 10, de Blasio stated, "We are not going to sacrifice a half million people who live among us, who are part of our community." Sadly, the new federal administration has followed through on Trump's campaign pledge to deport millions of illegal immigrants. In early February 2017, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers swept through six states, arresting hundreds

of undocumented immigrants. Unlike the Obama administration, which focused ICE raids on undocumented immigrants with convictions of violent crime, Trump has expanded ICE's purview to round up undocumented immigrants who have ever been accused of any crime, even in cases where the charges remain unresolved. Immigrant advocacy group Make the Road New York has offered "Know Your Rights" trainings, but 41 arrests were made across the five boroughs during the week of February 6, 2017. Mayor de Blasio has reaffirmed his intention to embody the spirit of sanctuary for all of New York City's residents, and has stated that city officials and police will never ask for an individual's immigration status. However, he has also indicated that he will consider adding more offenses to the list through which the city cooperates with ICE.

Federation of Black Cowboys

In the summer of 2015, the Federation of Black Cowboys, a group of African

Americans who have found a way to ride horses and keep Black cowboy traditions alive in New York City, put in a bid to renew their license for Cedar Lane Stables, the 20-acre, city-owned parcel that they and their mounts have maintained and called home since 1998. Historically, the Federation was the only organization to respond to the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the site, and have always won the bid by default. This time they were one of three bidders. In February 2016, they were informed that they hadn't made the cut. The experience of the Federation of Black Cowboys, as well as other sites City Lore has advocated for, makes it clear that most allocations go to large organizations and high bidders. In addition, the sites are often subject to blind bidding, in which current users have to bid to keep their space without knowing the bids of their competitors. Assignments for the use of city-owned property should be preceded by a survey to assess the value of the organization and the space to the community.

Terraza 7

Terraza 7 is a bar and music venue located at 40–19 Gleane Street, near the Elmhurst/Jackson Heights border. Opened on June 20, 2002, Terraza 7 hosts live music five nights a week and features bands playing a range of sounds, from Afro-Peruvian, Afro-Colombian, and modern Latin jazz to bolero, salsa, timba, and jarocho. Part of Terraza 7's mission is to break the self-isolation and lack of political participation of immigrants within their local communities. Rather than merely recreating immigrant traditions, founder and owner Freddy Castiblanco maintains that, in order to empower people in diverse communities, Terraza should foster a dialogue among cultural memories, based on immigrants' places of origin and the cultural elements that exist in their new city. Yet Terraza 7's lease was up at end of 2016. For the moment, Castiblanco's landlord is waiting for a permit to demolish the building, so Castiblanco is operating month to month, but he will soon be forced to find a new home for the musicians and neighbors who have become his family. Castiblanco is currently searching for alternative venues, but finding the right space at a fair price is proving extremely difficult. He would ideally prefer to stay close to the Jackson Heights/Elmhurst community of which he has been a leading member for over 16 years, but the same sized space available for \$27,000 per month in Queens' 82nd Street Partnership Business Improvement District (BID) runs \$3,000 per month in Crotona. Relocating across the city may be Castiblanco's only real option. ▼



Federation of Black Cowboys. Photo by Molly Garfinkel.

Steve Zeitlin, City Lore's founding director, is interested in family stories, children's rhymes, subway stories, oral poetry traditions from around the world, and the poetry of everyday life. Elena Martínez, City Lore folklorist and co-artistic director of the Bronx Music Heritage Center, specializes in urban folklore, material culture, Puerto Rican culture and folklore, and Latin music. Molly Garfinkel, director of the Place Matters program, researches community and public history, urban traditions, and perceptions of space and place.

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