

## "AT RISK"? THE FED UP HONEYS RE-PRESENT THE GENTRIFICATION OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE

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*I was standing behind, I was walking down Columbia or something, and there were these three white frat boys in front of me and they were like (she imitates their voices) "Look at these people they totally don't understand like the value of the space around them. Like they got a lot of real estate value here. They don't know what they got." And I'm like yeah we do. We just value it differently—it's a different kind of value. You see dollar bills when you see that building. I see that that's my grandmother's house, you know. That's like, this is my history! This is my place! You know, and you just want to step in because you think I'm stupid because I'm living in the projects—Riverfront property! You know, "prime real estate." —Fed Up Honey*

While gentrification is often represented within the framework of real estate capital as evidence of urban progress, this emphasis loses sight of not only its role in processes of community transformation, but also how it is experienced within a broader context of disenfranchisement by working-class communities. In this essay I consider the experience of urban economic restructuring from the "inside" perspective of young working-class women of color who have grown up in the neighborhood of the Lower East Side in New York City in the 1990s, a time of intensive gentrification, witnessing their neighborhood change while still living in it. In a participatory action research project titled "Makes Me Mad: Stereotypes of Young Urban Womyn of Color" (2005; see <http://www.fed-up-honeys.org>), six young women researchers (the Fed Up Honeys) investigated the relationship between the disinvestment and gentrification of their community, public representations, and their self-understanding.

Questioning the valuation of the economic over the personal, of dollar bills over her connections to place, of profit-making over communitarian ideals, one young woman researcher conveys a sense of

moral outrage that her history, her grandmother's house, is now considered "prime real estate." Why do the rights of property ownership trump her rights to stay in the neighborhood (Mitchell 2003; Harvey 2003)? Challenging the commonplace perception of gentrification as an inevitable or natural process, this young woman foregrounds the contested status of her neighborhood. Just like the signs neighborhood activists carried proclaiming, "Lower East Side—not for sale. This land is ours!" as they marched on city hall more than twenty years ago to protest the city's auctioning off properties to private interests (Abu-Lughod 1994), she expresses ownership—"This is *my* place!"—of the community where she has lived her whole life. After weathering years of disinvestment, now her family is threatened with social and spatial exclusion as the Lower East Side is gentrified.

If gentrification is "the new urban form of globalization" (Smith 2002), then its analysis is vital to our understanding of how neoliberalism reconfigures the urban scale and processes of exclusion. Critical is the role of representations that legitimate the contradictions of the new urban geography of inequality (Wilson and Grammenos 2005). My research focuses upon what Robin Kelley identifies as "the culture wars in urban America," "the ongoing battle over representations . . . and the significance of the cultural terrain as a site of struggle" (Kelley 1997, 8). This is not just a matter of theoretical interest, Kelley argues, as the culture wars "continue to rage each day in the streets of urban America" (8). For young women living on the Lower East Side with whom I did research, the issue of public representations was of the utmost concern. If stereotypes of the underclass and risk travel widely, distributed and produced at national and even global scales, they are also experienced as viscerally local and intensely personal. The representation of risk cuts both ways, justifying both the disinvestment and reinvestment of the Lower East Side, and are experienced by the young women as both a social betrayal and a public assault on their subjectivities. In this essay, I consider how discourse functions as a mechanism of control that is both symbolic and material, managed through neoliberal state policies and processes of self-discipline (Rose 1999).

The "Makes Me Mad" project was developed in 2002 as part of a participatory action research project focusing on the everyday lives of young women in the city. Our research was broadly conceptualized at the outset in order that it would be open to and follow the lead of the

young women involved. The participatory action research (PAR) project engaged six young women (aged sixteen to twenty-two) who lived in the Lower East Side neighborhood in a collective process of looking critically at their social and environmental contexts and trained them in social research methods. The young women researchers were involved with and shaped all aspects of the research project, from framing the questions, designing the research, and analyzing the data, to developing the research products (for more information about the research process and the PAR approach see Cahill, under review; Cahill, forthcoming; Cahill 2004; Cahill et al. 2004; Rios-Moore et al. 2004). While many issues of concern were raised by the young women, they decided to focus their research on stereotypes. Specifically, they formulated questions having to do with how the community's lack of resources (disinvestment) feeds into both stereotyping and young women's well-being and self-understanding (see Rios-Moore et al. 2004).

For the "Makes Me Mad" project, the Fed Up Honey's developed a few different ways of presenting their research findings, including a Web site (<http://www.fed-up-honeys.org>); their report (Rios-Moore et al. 2004), which they distributed to youth organizations, schools, and community centers around the neighborhood and to policy makers; and the stereotype sticker campaign (Fig. 1) (to be discussed further below). Confronting head-on representations that construct young women of color as a "problem," they follow in the footsteps of W.E.B. DuBois (1989), who reframed "The Negro Problem" as "the problem of the color line," which he identified as the most significant issue facing American society in the twentieth century. Richard Wright, however, was more explicit, when he stated that "there was never a Negro problem, only a white problem" (1957, 99, cited in Singh 2000, 39), turning attention to the ways in which structural racism and poverty maintains white privilege. Following Loretta Lees (2000), who argued that more attention needs to be paid to complex issues of race in understanding the "geography of gentrification" in the context of U.S. cities, I look at the connections between public representations of young working-class women of color, white privilege, and privatization as they play out on the "color line" of the gentrifying/still-disinvested Lower East Side.

My essay begins with a discussion of the neoliberal context and gentrification of the Lower East Side. This provides a context for an analysis of the social and spatial exclusion of young women of color. Central to



Fig. 1. Stereotype Stickers. Credit: Copyright © Fed Up Honeys, www.fed-up-honeys.org. All Rights Reserved.

my argument is that the subjectivities of young working-class women of color are both a focus of, and for, global urban economic restructuring (Marchand and Runyan 2000, 18, cited in Nagar et al. 2002). Confronting stereotypes of young women that accompany processes of gentrification (Wilson et al. 2004) provides a productive opening for understanding both how globalization is worked out on the ground and in the intimate and everyday spaces of young women's lives. The bodies of young working-class women of color are key sites in the political and cultural

struggles surrounding global economic restructuring at the urban scale (Wilson and Grammenos 2005; Nast and Pile 1998). My discussion will trace the downscaling of state responsibilities for social reproduction in order to understand how social problems at the intersection of race, class, and gender are defined and wrapped around real and hypothetical bodies (bodies that become even more prominent in a neoliberal context), revealing the pressures placed on young women and their families as a result of economic restructuring at the urban scale. The demands that young working-class women of color negotiate include historic and contemporary pressures to reform (assimilate—here holding up whiteness as the normative ideal), to move out (displacement), and to render their selves invisible (even while their bodies remain hypervisible in the public sphere). In conclusion, I engage the political possibilities of the *Makes Me Mad* study in the “struggle for interpretative power” in challenging the inevitability of processes of global capitalism.

#### THE NEOLIBERAL CONTEXT AND GENTRIFICATION

The processes of contemporary capitalist globalism represent a shift from an industrialized Fordist economy based around manufacturing, strong centralized government, and the liberal welfare state. This has had a profound impact on the occupational structure and spatial organization of the urban environment. The dislocations associated with transnational capitalism are well documented, as industries relocate “off shore” to capitalize on cheaper labor costs and a lack of regulation, leaving the unemployed deskilled and marooned (Katz 2004; Sassen 1998). The disinvestments and resulting urban decline bear witness to the uneven effects of global restructuring at the urban scale. New York is a “paradigmatic global city,” a marketplace of global finance, corporate headquarters for global capitalism, and also home to poor and working-class people of color whose exploitation contributes to the success of the new economy (Sassen 1998; Lipman 2002).

This is nothing new. Throughout history, economic urban restructuring has been “marked by extreme bifurcations of wealth and poverty, dramatic realignments of class relations, and dependence on new streams of immigrant labor” (Smith 2002, 430). What is distinct, however, are the revanchist discourses that justify social inequities and produce new subject positions such as the welfare queen and the teen mom. New too, is the geography of neoliberalism that, while still reflective of social

inequalities, reveals new forms of segregation and dislocation. What this means for young working-class people—and young working-class women of color in particular—growing up in the wake of urban disinvestments and abandonment, and now in the throes of neoliberalism, is not as well understood (cf. Katz 2004; Lipman 2002).

Characterized by deregulation and privatization, neoliberalism entails a retreat from the social wage and a shrinking of “the public.” Within the neoliberal context a premium is put on autonomy, choice, self-government, personal accountability: “each person should be obliged to be prudent, responsible for their own destinies actively calculating about their futures and providing for their own destinies” (Rose 2000, 324). Lepofsky and Fraser argue (2003, 127) that “the meaning of citizenship has shifted from being a given status to being a performative act”; citizenship is now conceptualized as conditional upon the activation of individual commitments to civil society and appropriate “conduct,” rather than as an entitlement to rights (Rose 1999; 2000). The neoliberal discourse of “personal responsibility” and the corresponding revanchist rhetoric of “lazy and on welfare” or “likely to become teen moms” are not coincidental to, but constitutive of, global economic restructuring, the transfer of state supports to the private provision of services, dramatic shifts in the labor force, and the gentrification of neighborhoods. As David Wilson (2004) points out, neoliberal governance is a contingent process that is anything but a “top-down” imposition, but instead should be understood as differentiated, historically and geographically specific, and negotiated. He argues, “Neoliberal governance, then, is not prior to situated individual or collectivities but creations from their ongoing initiative within deeply textured social and political life” (773). Following Wilson, in this essay I argue that how young women are constructed is crucial to neoliberal restructuring and its resistance.

### THE LOWER EAST SIDE

Because of its choice location in downtown Manhattan, near the financial and corporate center of one of the world’s most powerful “global cities,” the Lower East Side neighborhood has been under intense pressure to gentrify over the past twenty or so years. The contentious history of the Lower East Side gentrification is well documented (Mele 2000; Smith 1996; Abu-Lughod 1994). If it was once one of the poorest communities in New York City, today the neighborhood might best be characterized as a

one in transition, its future still contested. The area of the Lower East Side that was of concern for our research is, in fact, still undergoing dramatic changes. This area, which is below Fourteenth Street, east of Avenue B, and above the Williamsburg Bridge, has been identified with communities of color in recent history. This is the area where most of the researchers lived. It includes Loisaida, the public housing projects, and the areas adjacent to them. Not coincidentally, this is also the area of the neighborhood that experienced the most disinvestment and neglect in the 1970s and 1980s, and which only in the past ten years or so has been visibly undergoing processes of gentrification.

Although the causes and consequences of gentrification are the subject of scholarly debate, it is clearly a process that works on both global and local scales (Slater et al. 2004; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Smith 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002). Alternately characterized as an "invasion" of the middle-class or higher-income groups in previously working-class neighborhoods (Glass 1964), or understood as a process of "refurbishment" or "conversion," gentrification is defined as a transformative physical, social, and economic class-based process that is associated with the displacement of existing residents (Slater et al. 2004; "Gentry in the City"). On the Lower East Side, this takes shape in the form of renovated housing, small "bohemian" retail outlets, and a proliferation of expensive restaurants and chic bars. The corner bodega is replaced by a wine bar, the ninety-nine-cent store by a designer boutique. The new urban gentry is typified by a white young urban professional (disparagingly referred to as a yuppie), who works in a highly paid position in the communications industry (the other end of the service economy), and has disposable income. Most significant, the middle- and upper-class newcomers are characterized by their consumer lifestyles (see Mele 2000 for a discussion of the East Village as a place for consumption).

Constructed as a threat of social and spatial exclusion, as one of the researchers explained, "the more of them who come in, the more of us are forced to leave," whiteness is the face of gentrification on the Lower East Side, as imaged by the cover of the spoof magazine the *American Gentrifier* (Fig. 2). In contrast with the presumed invisibility often associated with whiteness, here it is marked and conspicuous. From this perspective white people are identified as "the embodiment of rapid urban change" (Ramos-Zayas 2001; Patillo-McCoy 1999) and portend displacement as highly educated and highly paid, "different" (usually

white) people replace existing Latino and African American residents and transform the neighborhood culture (Wilson et al. 2004; Mele 2000). As Jasmine, another researcher, wrote in her journal: “Racial differences in the neighborhood: White vs. everyone else,” adding, “our neighborhood needs a place to keep track of all the changes it goes through, to keep a record of what race lived here and when.”

The geography of gentrification is deceptive. If in quantitative

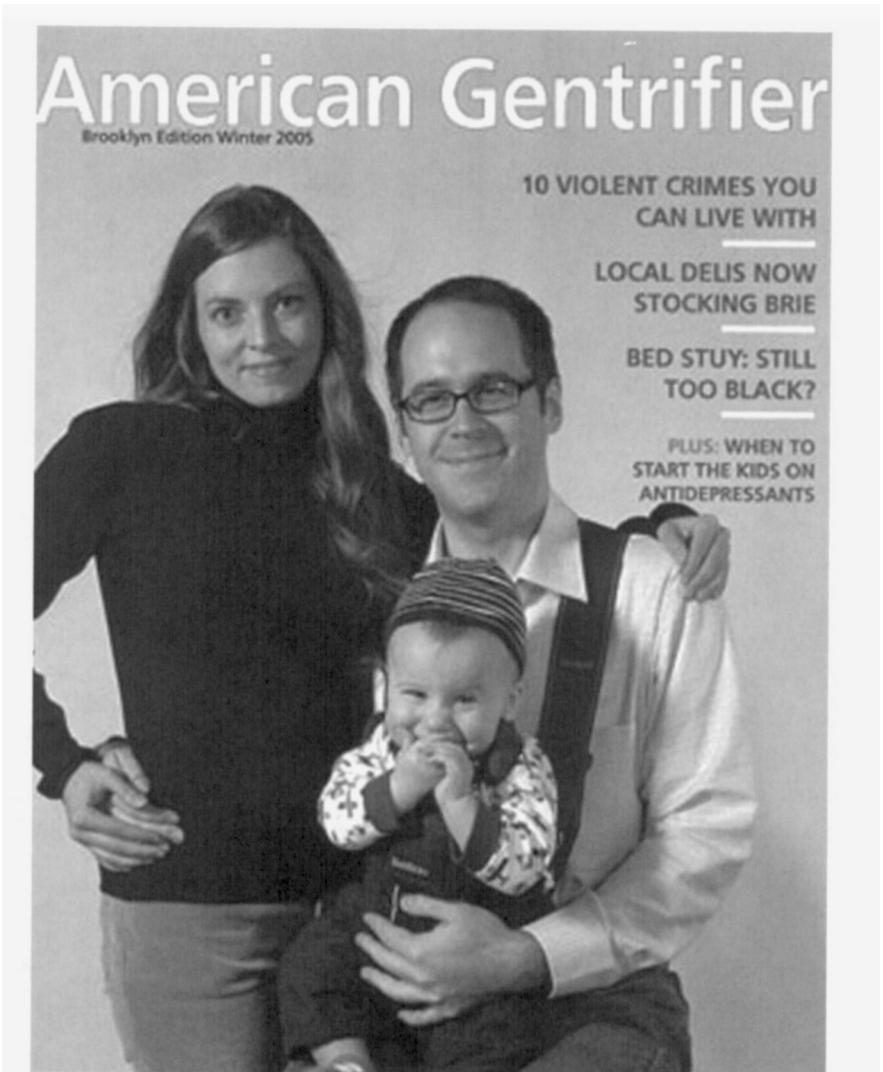


Fig. 2. This was the gag cover of the magazine appeared on the back of *Stay Free*, Issue 23, Fall 2004. [www.stayfreemagazine.org](http://www.stayfreemagazine.org).

terms the demographic changes associated with gentrification might look like the integration of previously segregated (Freeman and Braconi 2004), separate and unequal spaces that characterize American cities, qualitative analysis suggests the contrary. While not as clear cut as the contours of segregation "drawn" by planners, city officials, and banks in the forms of redlining and neighborhood covenants (Massey and Denton 1993), gentrification is nevertheless a very visible process, although its geography is more complex (Wyly and Hammel 2004; Hackworth and Smith 2001; Goldberg 1998). The boundaries are drawn point to point in the "new urban frontier," from new condo, to deregulated housing, to a threatened community garden. Swathes of investment and wedges of privatization are straddled by disinvestment, a hip boutique next to a falling-apart playground, a trendy new restaurant next to a dilapidated tenement building, across the street from a crumbling public school.

The gentrification of the Lower East Side is a long, slow, "messy, fleshy" (Katz 2001, 711), inchoate process, more accurately described as *gentrifying* and disinvested (rather than using the past tense, *gentrified*, suggesting completion). In fact, the young women researchers, all born after 1980, have grown up in the material conditions of disinvestment/gentrification, a shifting process that has proceeded in fits and starts over the course of their lives in the wake of state and private abandonment in the 1970s (Hackworth and Smith 2001). As their neighborhood has been transformed, they have remained in place, "grounded" in disinvestment, as Cindi Katz suggests (2004, 163), giving "new meaning to the term, long associated with punishment." Or as one researcher put it, "I am an interesting young woman who bores herself to delirium. Because there's nothing to do. I'm bored. . . . It's like that I'm interesting is going to waste because I have nothing to do with it." Using the language of waste, she brings to mind the metaphor of urban decay. Just as her neighborhood is disinvested, so is she. Foregrounded in the young women's stories of growing up in the Lower East Side is their negotiation of disinvestment and the violence of poverty (Solis 2003). As Janderie, one of the researchers, explains: "[T]he whole spirit of what we don't have affects our inner being." Throughout the research project, the young women swapped war stories of disinvestment, revealing a sense of pride at having "survived it" coupled with feelings of injustice and shame.

Even if the borderline is not so defined, zigzagging through the neighborhood, the demarcation between the structural disadvantage and

privilege reveals itself to be distinguished along the lines of public and private. The public may be defined as the institutions regulated by the state, including schools, hospitals, public housing developments, and public spaces such as parks. Included in this definition are state or community protections such as housing regulations that maintain affordable housing, limited-equity cooperatives, or land trusts. Or the public may take the shape of those organizations whose mission it is to serve the general public, including the health clinics, social service organizations, and youth centers (on the Lower East Side these institutions are slowly disappearing as rents go up, replaced by market-oriented establishments). The private is defined by its exclusivity. This may take the shape of upscale restaurants that cater only to a minority, deregulated housing that serves selected affluent audiences, or private development that is not accountable to the needs of the community. Unlike Jim Crow segregation, which identified unmistakable boundaries between black and white, or the apartheid geography of suburbia and the ghetto that marks separation by space, time, and urban infrastructure, here gentrification is a diffuse process of class and race stratification. Janderie describes the shifting "frontier line" of gentrification in her neighborhood: "It's starting to look less like a ghetto and more like confusion! . . . Everyday I found something else that hadn't been there before, like the annoying little boutique that sold hand-crafted figurines. And even more annoying was the tea shop that seemed to never have a customer inside. All I could think to myself was 'can't wait to see how my neighborhood looks in 10 years.'" The boundaries of social and spatial exclusion are clearly visible to longtime residents, even if newcomers are sometimes oblivious of the geography of inequality that divides their neighborhood.

The gentrifying context of the Lower East Side could be compared to tracking in supposedly desegregated schools, where the smaller gifted and talented programs have more resources, better teachers, and "better" students (who are often whiter and wealthier), while the rest of the school contains overcrowded classrooms with lower expectations (Fine et al. 2004). But in fact, the white return (as opposed to the white flight) to the neighborhood has not translated into better schools (Lipman 2002, 2003) or more job opportunities for the working-class communities of color as some scholars had hoped it would (Patillo-McCoy 1999; Freeman and Braconi 2004). As Sonia Sanchez reminds us (2004), "integration is not just putting bodies next to each other," or living next door to

each other. It does not involve "creating racial harmony without a fundamental transformation of the social and economic order," in other words, sharing power (Kelley 1998). By contrast, the urban geography of the Lower East Side is a highly differentiated, striated landscape, parceled into exclusionary spaces of investment packaged for a "new and improved" audience, while the leftover spaces of the "ghetto" are inhabited by longtime residents who are slowly but surely being pushed out by landlords and eroding state protections. One researcher wrote about learning to name the process of gentrification while she was experiencing it:

One day . . . while engaged in a deep discussion about what has become of the Lower East Side of our childhood, we spoke of how little boutiques and trendy bars were popping up all over the place of the small businesses that used to be owned by locals. I shared that since this had been happening the building where I lived had come under new management and every few months my mother was forced to pay a higher rent. Suddenly I hear one of girls say the word "gentrification." I had never heard the word before in my life so naturally I asked "what's that mean?" She explains to me that these yuppie ass, money having, culture seeking, white people are buying us poor people out of our neighborhood in part because they want a taste of our culture rich environment and the more of them who came in, the more of us are forced to leave because we can no longer afford to live here. Oh! My! God! That's what was happening to me!

Five months after the research project began she was displaced from the Lower East Side neighborhood where she had grown up, gone to school, and still worked. While many of the young women were already familiar with the term, to consider the ways in which gentrification has informed their well-being personally and collectively represents a qualitatively different way of knowing. Like the word *diaspora*, which Kathleen Cleaver argues "is such a polite word to describe such a brutal process" (Cleaver 2004), the discourse of gentrification as urban progress masks the violence of this process as experienced by young working-class women of color. Gentrification is interpreted as a betrayal, what Crosby and others (1986) identify as a sense of "relative depri-

vation,” an inconsistency between what the young women believe they deserve and what they receive, coupled with an awareness that “others” have what you do not. For young women growing up in a gentrifying neighborhood the sense of relative deprivation is heightened when the “other” lives in the new condo across the street. The experience of privation contributes to a sense that young women feel they are not worthy of public investment coupled with feelings of anger at what seem to be obvious social and economic inequities: “For those of who don’t know the history we just see the results of the disinvestment. We just see the results of the degradation and all we feel is that crater and that we’re just sinking deeper and deeper into it.”

In the *Makes Me Mad* report the researchers focus on the resources their neighborhood lacks in the areas of health, employment, education, housing, and finances. Gentrification is thus articulated by the young women as part of a convergence of deepening inequalities; as one aspect of a broader social context that jumps scales, including the scarcity of jobs, poor quality of education (discussed below), cutbacks in social services and devolution of state responsibilities, assaults on the gains made through the civil rights movement, a shortage of affordable housing, the growth of the prison-industrial complex, the lack of financial security and support, and the fragmentation of communities. In short, the young women identify the gentrification of their community as one part of the processes of neoliberal economic urban restructuring as it takes shape in their everyday lives.

### THE EXCLUSION OF YOUNG WORKING-CLASS WOMEN OF COLOR

Conflicts with the police and protests over public space have brought critical attention to processes of gentrification in the scholarly literature and popular media (Mitchell 2003; Smith 1996). Notably absent from the gentrification literature is the role of young women (Bondi 1999; Mufiz 1998), in part, perhaps, a result of the invisibility of young working-class women of color in their neighborhood spaces (even as their bodies are on public display). The Fed Up Honeys aim to “lift the veil of misinformation about the lives of young womyn of color in the city” and “make the voice that is so often ignored the central perspective through which our community, the Lower East Side, is viewed” (Rios-Moore et al. 2004). Saddled with responsibilities for the household and caretaking, young women are more likely to be at home than on the streets, where

they might be subject to the disciplinary actions of the state (like their brothers, cousins, or boyfriends).

While much has been written about the urban dystopia, the "militarization of urban space" and the "urban panopticon," designed "to command, protect, socialize and dominate" and "police social boundaries" at the expense of urban social integration (cf. Davis 1992), little is understood about the less visible but more intimate forms of surveillance that regulate the everyday lives of young working-class women of color and their families. In concert with the stepped-up police force and electronic security systems that monitor gentrifying neighborhoods, representations of the underclass patrol the boundaries of social identities. Like technologies of state surveillance and discipline, the discourses of risk that construct young working-class women of color as "a burden to society" play an important role in facilitating processes of gentrification and related displacements.

### THE GEOGRAPHY OF RISK

Pointing to young working-class women of color as "the problem," the discursive construction of risk is "grounded" not only in disinvestment, but now also in the reinvested Lower East Side. The stereotypes cut both ways. On the one hand, as part of the underclass discourse they justify the shrinking of the public, constructing young women of color as the "anticitizen," public enemy, blaming young women for their poverty. Now, in addition, the discourses of risk serve to threaten and discipline young women into "docile bodies" who must regulate themselves through the "right choices" to attain financial security and stability (Foucault 1975). Young women are "at risk" in a neoliberal context of being pushed out of the "circle of deservingness" (Fine 2004), and also out of their neighborhood, which is now up for grabs, sold (or rented) to the highest bidder. The stereotypes are critical in securing the consent of members of the public, who witness the transformation of the community and accept the "social costs" of gentrification as inevitable (Atkinson 2003) and even as a sign of progress (Freeman and Braconi 2004).

If gentrification is defined as a process of "upscaling" the neighborhood, resulting in increased property values and in displacement of the poor (Slater et al. 2004), then its success depends on the removal of young working-class women of color and their families from the Lower East Side. Representations play a critical role in this process. Racialized

stereotypes serve to “place” young working-class women of color in the “inner city,” a location constructed in the American imaginary in the shape of a teenage mother, gang violence, homeless people, and other vestiges of urban decline and structural inequities. Building on the discourses of the culture of poverty (Moynihan 1965) and the underclass (Borchert 1999), which displaced concerns about structural inequities to the family structure and gender roles in working-class communities of color, the “ghetto” is projected onto the body of the young woman of color, which functions as a site of accumulation, loaded with historical representations of “tangles of pathology” and the welfare queen. Women of color, and in particular the single mother, are constructed as the crux of the problem, responsible for “perpetuating the cycle of poverty and deprivation” (Moynihan 1965, 76; cf. Briggs 2002), as expressed by the stereotype stickers (see Fig. 1). Just as whites have historically accumulated white privilege, people of color have historically accumulated disadvantage (Aspen Institute 2004). The raced and classed representations of young working-class women of color exemplify what Bobo and others (1997) identify as “laissez-faire racism,” reflecting the contradictions of the new political economy in which, on the one hand, the state advocates for antidiscrimination and color-blind public policies. And on the other, structural economic disparities in labor, housing, and status reflect and produce raced and classed inequities. This is what the Fed Up Honey focus on in the *Makes Me Mad* project (Rios-Moore et al. 2004); they demonstrate the relationship between stereotypes and the disinvestment in their community. In particular, they highlight “what the stereotypes leave out” in order to call attention to the personal stories that are erased in stereotypical profiles and to place emphasis on the role of social and structural inequalities in the production of stereotypes.

But just as gentrification is made possible by a disinvestment in real estate, deficit representations of young working-class women of color as a “burden to society” can also generate “value.” As Melissa Wright argues: “[A]s with any process of devaluation, there is value still to be gained from her, if her image as value’s antithesis can be put into motion towards the production of more value. . . . By representing what value is not, she establishes the contours for what value is. In her opposition, therefore, we find value’s positive condition. And following this logic, we find progress in the places where she once worked, in the spaces she once occupied, in the city she once inhabited” (2004, 371). Similarly, on

the Lower East Side, the upscaling of the neighborhood involves scrubbing "clean the working class history and geography . . . its class and race contours rubbed smooth" (Smith 1996, 26-7), rendering invisible traces of the community established by the families of the young women. Aligned with the disinvestment of the "ghetto," the social and spatial exclusion of young women becomes necessary for the improvement of the neighborhood. In their place new establishments catering to young, trendy twenty-something-year-olds with disposable incomes reflect the shifting resident base of the neighborhood. Their presence marks prosperity, just as the absence of young working-class women of color does.

### GOVERNING RISK

Key to the governance of the young working-class woman of color is her designation of "at risk." The discourse of risk works on several levels, capitalizing on its ambiguity and multivalence. While the term "at risk" is unclear, it is geographically specific in its reference to poor and working-class young people of color living in the "inner city" (a racially coded term for disinvested, urban communities of color, marking it in contrast to the "vanilla suburbs" that ring the city). At the neighborhood scale, young working-class women of color are identified as either "a danger" to their communities, in need of being saved from their dangerous neighborhoods, or both. Just as the investment in her neighborhood, the "inner city," was once flagged as a financial risk in the redlining of poor communities of color (Massey and Denton 1993), now in the context of gentrification, the greenlining of previously disinvested neighborhoods, the "ghetto," is identified with the bodies of young women. Discourses of risk "constitute both the subjects of marginalization and the spaces to be purified" (Wilson 2004, 774). The "at risk" designation is framed euphemistically within the discourse of improvement and reform (Cruishank 1994). The discourse of assimilation and the rhetoric of "at risk" both play on the specter of upward mobility. For young urban working-class women of color this can be both an external pressure from the outside and an articulated desire to achieve one's goals. As Rose argues, citizens in a liberal democracy self-govern "by way of persuasion inherent in its truths, the anxieties stimulated by its norms, and the attraction exercised by the images of life and self it offers to us" (1999, 10). External demands/truths may take the shape of the apparatus

and technologies of power (Foucault 1980, 194–6), of urban development strategies, institutions (i.e., schools), programmatic strategies, and public policies (as in the case of welfare reform or the No Child Left Behind legislation), demanding and enforcing change to suit political and economic agendas and new requirements of citizenship (Rose 1999).

The predicament of a disinvested public education system exemplifies the dilemmas young women confront when navigating the production of desire and risk. Schools were a constant subject of discussion and debate between members of the Fed Up Honeys. Although the public school represents a neighborhood institution currently under assault in the neoliberal context (Lipman 2003; Fine et al. 2004), the young women nevertheless affirmed the democratic promises of education to lead to future opportunities, and to deliver them from their impoverished circumstances, which put them “at risk.” As Annis explains, “All of us in order to get our goals what do we say? ‘Well I need to go to college.’ We don’t question that. ‘I have to go to college in order to get that.’” Or as Ruby puts it in even blunter language: “I want to hurry up and get this degree so I be making my \$50,000 a year. . . . Yes Ruby is going to college. Yes Ruby is going to college and I am going to be a college student. No matter what I practice when I get out I’m going to be making my own fucking money. I’m going to be doing what I believe I have to do to fucking survive.” Schools were identified as key to their personal success, whether imagined as a version of the American Dream or even just “getting to average” (Gates 2004), getting through school and getting a job. Schools are embraced as key sites of reform and “sold as the exit ramp out of poor communities and into the middle class” (Fine and Burns 2003, 844).

However, when sharing their personal experiences, the young women articulated painful stories revealing school’s function as a site of social reproduction and offer an opening on how Foucault’s conceptualization of power/knowledge is worked out on the ground (Foucault 1980). Their comments illustrate the everyday ways stereotypical subject positions of “uneducated” and “ambitionless” are reproduced and negotiated in the institutional context of school:

**Ruby:** I just don’t feel educated. The right way. The way I’m supposed to be. . . . ‘Cause they think we’re so stupid they give us a lower level of education. And we only supposed to use cer-

tain books that just gives us the basic idea of what happened in history or whatever. Right? And I think that I deserve more 'cause in the real world its just so much more complex. . . . I don't think that's fair. That's why you get bored. In eleventh grade I was like, what the hell is this? I was just failing a few of my classes because I just stopped going because it was just too fucking easy. I didn't see it leading—I need a challenge. I need someone to push me.

**Annissa:** It's all about a cat eating its tail. They set it up so you get damn bored so you don't go to school. Then you wind up failing out looking like an idiot. That's some deep shit—that they could set up a system that is so condescending that no one wants to go so they just reassert the system that's already in place. That is deep!

The image of the cat eating its tail hints at the disorientation of young women in an educational system that not only delegitimizes their efforts but also has students blaming themselves for their inability to succeed. Evoking Paul Willis's (1977) theory of cultural forms and social reproduction, the "cat eating its tail" analysis points to the ways in which the performances of bored students faced with low expectations serves to reassert structural hegemony. Although the young women acknowledge their role in reproducing stereotypes, in contrast to Paul Willis's analysis, the "cat eating its tail" places responsibility on how the institution "sets them to fail," as opposed to the students. In fact, the zoned public high school on the Lower East Side that Ruby attended was on the list of the top-ten worst schools in New York City and has since been shut down. Through the process of sharing their individual stories, the young women collectively developed a critique of the ideology of meritocracy. As the researchers point out in their report (Rios-Moore et al. 2004), "[T]oo often young women take responsibility for failing institutions that underserve and undereducate them, leading to a personal sense of failure." The violence of structural poverty and racism is most insidious when young women own or internalize the deprivation. While taking responsibility is laudable, feeling accountable for structural inequities can contribute to a sense of worthlessness and a diminished sense of capacity to effect change. Disinvestment coupled with the discursive

framework of risk is not, therefore, only about material resources, but also about how agency is regulated.

Unlike the rhetoric of assimilation that suggests the possibility of inclusion, of becoming one of Us, the discourses of risk are not so optimistic. Implied in the construction of risk is jeopardy. There are economic consequences to the “risky” behaviors that young working-class women of color are allegedly “at risk” for, which include, among others, dropping out of school, sex, recreational drug use—related to the stereotypes they identified in their research such as “uneducated,” “promiscuous,” “likely to become teen moms,” “delinquent,” “out of control,” and “uneducated” (see Fig. 1).

But if *risk* refers to the probability of a young working-class woman of color’s own personal economic failure, it also intimates her failure to become a productive contributing citizen. She is constructed as a risk to society—or as the stereotype stickers state—“a burden to society.” From this perspective, to invest in her is a calculated risk.

While it operates in a similar fashion to representations of the underclass or the culture-of-poverty thesis in terms of conflating behavioral and economic characteristics (Briggs 2002; Collins 2000; Kelley 1997), the discourse of risk reveals not only an overwhelming individual responsibility, but also surveillance. The identification of “at risk” marks “inner city” youth as in need of control and regulation, young people who must be closely monitored by state authorities, within spaces of school, work, the public, and even the home (in the new public housing regulations) (Rose 1999; Lipman 2003). In addition to the “dignity harms,” the “daily slights to humanity” of feeling “too black” or “too loud” and not belonging (Reitman, under review), stereotypes serve as a form of surveillance where the behavior of “at risk” young women is scrutinized.

Representations of risk function as threats that discipline through “spectacle” (Foucault 1975). Critical to the spectacle is “the observation of the few by the many,” young women are framed by the “subjectifying gaze” (Hall 1997b). The stereotypes constitute a public display of the potential and probable failure of young working-class women of color. The spectacle operates through a “complex inter-play between presence (what you see, the visible) and absence (what you can’t see, what has displaced it within the frame)” (Hall 1997b, 59). Young women’s bodies are hypervisible on display in static representations highlighting pathol-

ogy and promiscuity. Invisible are the fluid, complex, and layered realities of their everyday lives. While examples of "the silent but invisible majority" of young women who stay in school (Fine and Burns 2003), who are hardworking, who don't have children, are readily apparent if one only looks, the cardboard cutouts of the underclass figure prominently in the public imagination. In the twenty-first century the public spectacle is circulated globally in new information technologies and forms of mass communication. The prevalence of stereotypes in the public imagination evokes the fear of exclusion through creating a state of insecurity and anxiety among the young women (1). For example, the public humiliation of the teenage mother or the high school dropout serves as a warning to others near and far in a topography linking young women across the nation living in the material conditions of disinvestment. The researchers reflect: "Out in the world being manufactured and emphasized in the media, music, magazines, etc., young womyn begin to see these stereotypes as their only options for projecting themselves and they become the axis around which everything revolves. Young womyn define themselves against and/or through stereotypes" (Rios-Moore et al. 2004).

The government of young women takes place at the intersection of their private selves and the public sphere (Rose 1999), on the edge of desire and fear, and is "part of a broader reworking of the public/private split, in that as the public sphere diminishes, increased regulation occurs in the sphere of interiority" (Harris 2004, 125). The power of the discourse resides in this blurred boundary. Engaging the bifurcated perspective of being the Other (Pratt 1999), young women scrutinize and make sense of themselves through these representations: "What is expected of us is very little and when we are constantly faced with these negative stereotypes there is a danger that we will become exactly what they want us to become. These stereotypes keep us down, and then our mind set is 'If that is what they think I am, that is what I'm going to be.' . . . This cycle of reinforcing stereotypes leads to the ways we as young womyn begin to explain and understand ourselves, and feeds a struggle that has some resisting stereotypes and others using them to interpret the world around them (Rios-Morre et al. 2004)."

Deficit social constructions are intimately bound with how young women both understand their selves and govern their behavior. The young women "subject" themselves by regulating themselves through

the “right” choices (Hall 1997a). For example, in their report, the researchers highlight and analyze Shamara’s self-description, which poignantly exemplifies her painful position as she negotiates the spectacle of risk and public scrutiny: “[I am a] bearer of life, lover, fighter, mad, mad, mad, self-involved . . . a member of an African-American family, a slave’s great, great granddaughter, troubled, angry, thoughtful, Black, stereotypical, a statistic.’ By combining words that are contradictory and connected she simultaneously sheds and uses the stereotypes to describe the way she views herself and the way she thinks she is viewed from the outside. By doing so she acknowledges the connection of perceptions with the way she constructs a self-image” (Rios-Moore et al. 2004). Governance is not, thankfully, ever a seamless, smooth, or complete process. Shamara’s self-description reveals the intertextual and slippery character of discourse and the possibilities for reworking and complicating “at risk” urban identifications.

#### THE CANARY’S CRITIQUE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR INTERPRETIVE POWER

*What ultimately has to change is the way we view each other. Period. And I want to have an influence on that. . . . Because ultimately my great grandma, and my great grandchild, and my great grandma and I will suffer for my great grandchild. But ultimately I don’t want my great grandchild to have to have any differences in her life because she is black. Period. There’s no fucking negotiation! I don’t care whether she has a mansion or whatever, whatever else. She’s still going to be black! And if our society decides its still okay to fuck her because she’s black then nothing’s changed. What if she has all the money in the world?—Annisia, Fed Up Honey*

The critical insight the young women identified in their research is that power lies in controlling how you are defined. The young women decided to focus their project on contesting stereotypes and changing “the way we view each other” because they know that how they are classified and marked is deeply implicated in operations of power. The stereotypes function as part of a discourse by which young working-class women of color are managed and produced—politically, culturally, ideologically, economically, and *geographically*—in the neoliberal context of the gentrifying/still-disinvested Lower East Side. In the Makes Me Mad project the young women engage in the “culture wars,” the collective struggle over representation, in order to unsettle, disrupt, and contest

the stereotypical profiles that fix them in a particular location; the "inner city," the "ghetto," and so on. As the inner city is "cleaned up"—gentrified—the young women are threatened with exclusion. The young women's "struggle for interpretive power" is not, however, only about the threat of social and spatial exclusion, but also addresses what Mary Louise Pratt identifies as the "control over the terms and conditions under which they will develop their relations with the nation-state, the global economy, the communication revolution, . . . and other historical processes" (1999, 39). The struggle for interpretive power is a contestation that takes place at both local and global scales.

Like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, in Argentina, who protested the disappearances of their children, marching silently every Thursday in front of the state capital (Torre 2000), or the sex workers of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, who resisted the attempts of the police to rid them from downtown public spaces in the name of urban progress (Wright 2004), the Fed Up Honeys protest the invisibility of young women of color in the city (while at the same time challenging the public spectacle of stereotypical profiles). Similar to the Tompkins Square "riots" of 1988, the much publicized confrontations between squatters, homeless people, housing activists, and the police over the right to public space (Mitchell 2003; Smith 1996), the Makes Me Mad project is also a demand for the right to the city, the right for people to not be excluded from their home communities. But while their project is also engaged in the politics of place and the transformation of their neighborhood, the young women do not "take to the streets" to overthrow or challenge the dominant social order. Instead they engage the politics of representation.

The Fed Up Honeys begin their analysis by focusing attention on their own bodies as a principal site of discursive work. This emphasis is exemplified in the stereotype sticker project. The stickers feature a female body, whose hand-on-hip stance expresses defiance, on top of which the stereotypes are printed in bold letters—"Uneducated," "Lazy and on Welfare," and others (see Fig. 1). They engage a strategy that Stuart Hall identifies as "through the eye of representation," working within the complexities and ambivalences of representations of young working-class women of color (1997a, 274). In the Makes Me Mad project the young women collectively developed new critical discourses that subject in different ways, suggesting a basis for a transformative politics (Gibson-Graham 2002, 36). Gibson-Graham propose feminism as

a model of politics transmitted through a language and a set of practices: "one that started small and personal and largely stayed that way, that worked on cultivating new ways of being, that created new languages, discourses, and representations that built organizations, and that quickly (albeit unevenly) encompassed the globe" (36). But the young women do not only negotiate stereotypes, they also struggle within and against the material conditions of structural racism and poverty. Significantly, while the *Makes Me Mad* project foregrounds the critical role of representations, it highlights the relationship *between* discourse, agency, material practices, and space. Again, the stereotype stickers are illustrative. Plastering the stickers all over their neighborhood and other parts of the city, the young women engage in a very public spatial practice.

"Most advertisements seen on public transportation and around the city are discriminatory and sexist, so what we created is something mocking those ads but instead of selling you sex, we're making you think" ("*Makes Me Mad*," 11). In the stereotype stickers, the researchers adopt and play with the stereotypes as Jackson suggests (2004, 263) "as a way to rob the discourse of its power . . . undermining and destabilizing racist stereotypes" and confronting the public with an "in your face" strategy. The stickers posted around the Lower East Side call attention to how representations are worked out on the ground, and specifically in their neighborhood.

Including excluded perspectives in the development of new knowledge production points to new political possibilities. Inspired by the insight of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "that freeing black people from the injustices that circumscribe their lives, America will be freeing itself as well" (Guinier and Torres 2002, 293), Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres argue that the experiences of marginalized people of color can be the basis for social transformation. To this end, challenging the issue of racialized stereotypes of young working-class women of color includes "a desire to liberate *everyone* who is ensnared within hierarchies of power that ostensibly name them as individuals yet trap them within fixed social locations" (289; emphasis in the original). If young women are analogous to the miner's canary, which would alert the miners of poison in the air, their distress "the first sign of a danger that threatens us all" (12), we need to listen to them. The metaphor of the canary suggests the need for systemic critique and also points toward the possibility of social change. Similarly, Geraldine Pratt asks us to consider the political implications of

theory-building from the standpoint of the socially excluded, or legally abandoned, as illustrated by the case of political refugee (2005).

### YOUNG WOMEN AND THE "RIGHT TO THE CITY"

In challenging assigned scripts of what it means to be young, female, of color, and working class, the Fed Up Honeyes assume positions as engaged agents and created an opening for reconsidering the role of women in the transformation of cities (Torre 2000). The young women argue, "It is a priority to have young womyn who can feel connected and have a desire to contribute and be involved in their community" (Rios-Moore et al. 2004). Taking control of one's self-definition is also about staking out a position in the community. As one researcher explains: "People, most importantly young women, do not feel invested in their community or connected to it if they don't have the positive aspects of their community, their lives and their personal strengths reinforced to them." This is why the Makes Me Mad project is so critical. The Fed Up Honeyes develop an interpretative framework for affirming the right to self-represent (the right to their bodies, identities, and subjectivities) and their right to the city as mutually constitutive. The "right to the city" (Mitchell 2003; Harvey 2003; Lefebvre 1996/1968) implies not only an entitlement to housing, but also a right to assert a public presence within urban space. It "demands the redevelopment of the city in a manner responsive to the needs, desires, and pleasures of its inhabitants, especially its oppressed inhabitants" (Mitchell 2003, 21). To this end, the Makes Me Mad report concludes with a list of "[c]ommunity building needs from a young womyn's perspective" that emphasizes their unique standpoint as working-class young women of color, and that proposes a vision for a community that is responsive to their desires. "Rights," Mitchell argues "establish an important *ideal* . . . and an institutionalized framework, no matter how incomplete, within which the goals of social struggle can not only be organized but also attained" (2003, 25; emphasis in the original).

As the history of the civil rights and women's movements demonstrate, rights are not simply bestowed on people but are won in the course of struggle. The advancement of social justice is achieved through contestation and defiance of the social order. Prying open a space in which to express their perspectives to the public, the Fed Up Honeyes entered the fray. In the act of taking up the issue of their public

identifications, the young women produce space. Mitchell explains that “representation both demands space and creates space” (2003, 35). The ideal vision the young women collectively propose is based on self-directed community change and racial equity. The young women argue to be included in decision-making processes that affect them and to have an opportunity to influence outcomes:

The ultimate and most beneficial means to an end of the negative effects of such a stark lack of resources is *a community that is self-sufficient and self-concerned*. It is a priority to have young womyn who can feel connected and have a desire to contribute and be involved in their community . . . (our) research has identified several important ways to build a stronger and more positive community, one that is able to stand in the face of the stereotypes that its children have been pegged with. (Rios-Moore et al. 2004, emphasis in the original)

Central to the young women’s proposal for building a strong community is the project of challenging stereotypes of young people of color, and structural racism more broadly. According to the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, a racial equity perspective on community change addresses the ways that public policy, institutional practices, and cultural representations work individually and collectively to normalize racial disadvantage and reinforce inequities (2004). Securing young working-class women of color’s right to the city must, therefore, be a project of triangulation. While there is a well-developed body of scholarship in the field of community participation and community development that is relevant to the project of challenging gentrification (cf. Saegert et al. 2001; Medoff and Sklar 1994; Rose 2001; “Policy Link”; “Fifth Avenue Committee”), not enough attention has been given to the role of material social practices of identification, agency, and cultural representations (Wilson and Grammenos 2005; Wilson et al. 2004; Rinaldo 2002). Wilson and Grammenos suggest that a successful antigentrification platform must challenge “the assault of real-estate capital on youth bodies head-on and effectively confront virulent constructions of identity and neighborhood” (2005, 309). This is the gap the *Makes Me Mad* project addresses.

The *Makes Me Mad* project offers an opening for imagining an alter-

native, inclusive, and more democratic vision for the city, grounded in racial, gender, and class equity. This is a worthwhile starting place, as David Harvey suggests: "If our urban world has been imagined and made, then it can be re-imagined and re-made. The inalienable right to the city is worth fighting for" (Harvey 2003, 941). Contesting the discourses of risk that construct young working-class women of color as a "burden to society," the Fed Up Honeys question the valuation of the economic over their personal well-being and challenge the inevitability of gentrification and the rights of property. In so doing, the young women announce their sense of belonging and their right to not be socially and spatially excluded from their neighborhood and the city. To this end, the *Makes Me Mad* project reframes the public conversation about gentrification as a way of jump-starting a dialogue that involves us all.

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#### NOTES

1. See Pain 1991 for a discussion of how sexual harassment works in similar ways as a mechanism of social and spatial control.

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