



Prospectus Project: Hamilton Heights

Hamilton Heights is located in the upper part of Manhattan in New York City. Like many other neighborhoods in this city, this one is rich in its history and cultural diversity. Hamilton Heights is home to immigrants from many different parts of world and it's where I have lived all my life. My parents moved to this neighborhood when I was born because it had a significant Ecuadorian presence, which was comforting for my parents since they migrated to the US no less than three years before I was born. While we never had our own place to ourselves, we still live in the same place I have lived in all my life by having other neighbors or family members rent out other room in the apartment so that we wouldn't have to pay the full rent [it sounds crowded; it also conveys very well the kinds of survival strategies that immigrant families deploy to live in cities]. As a child, I didn't have much pride in the neighborhood I lived because I preferred to live in a suburban house with a living room, garage, a back yard and my own bedroom [I know that feeling well]. I've always felt so cramped and insignificant living in a small apartment like everyone else did. But the older I got, the more I realized I took my neighborhood and its offerings for granted. As I began to visit the rest of the US, especially living in Brunswick as a college student, I began taking the phrase "no place like home" to heart. One cannot find another neighborhood like Hamilton Heights or its surrounding communities anywhere else in the U.S. It truly is a unique and special place [a very interesting and touching introduction].

The qualities of my neighborhood are what compel me to stay there even after I graduate after college. What's special about my community is the lively and vibrant environment that it maintains daily. The people are not shy and love to have conversation. In fact, many love to relax outside their building sitting on foldable chairs playing dominoes and *Bachata*, Merengue music all day with other

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buddies. The corner delis play the same music. There is always music on every street. In the summer, it becomes more active as children decide to take over the narrower streets with less traffic and play basketball on them. It is frequent in the summer to see many local people try to open the fire hydrants in the street so the everyone can cool off; they're almost successful in opening it every time. While there are some townhouses, the majority of the structures are six-story buildings built around the early 1900s that still have the outdated fire escapes [it sounds like the kind of invasion-competition-succession model described by the Chicago School]. Many local vendors sell fruits and vegetables on huge foldable tables along the sidewalks with their vans parked behind them. Food trucks are appearing more often [what kind of food trucks?]. The majority of the stores are Latin American restaurants, hair salons/barbers, some small clothing stores, or 99 cent stores. But in reality, one can find anything they want in just a few blocks of walking [the community is not at all isolated socially or economically]. The metro subway is close by, there is a local library, and a fully equipped state park with a pool and football field [this sentence needs revision]. The neighborhood is also really close to the Hudson River, so residents frequently visit the shore for great views of the New Jersey coast in the distance. In addition, the train can take one to Times Square in half an hour or less. Because of my neighborhoods accessibility, its resources, its vibrant environment, and its unique Caribbean culture presence, I find my neighborhood extremely appealing and important to me [there is such thick description here; you could really take your reader there by using more active verbs instead of linking verbs].

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Hamilton Heights' history dates back to the American Revolutionary War. Prior to the war, the land was not habited by people and there were only small roads. But battles between the American and British armies did happen on some parts of the land (Harrington). After the war, Alexander Hamilton, for whom the neighborhood is named, resided there in a twelve-bedroom mansion with views of New Jersey across the Hudson River, Long Island, and the Bronx across the East River.

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George Washington had land north of Hamilton's land, hence why the neighboring community today is called Washington Heights. Between Hamilton's migration and the mid 1830s, the community was a rural one and farming was common. But a few years afterwards, the first water pipes that brought clean water from the Croton Reservoir to the city were installed under Hamilton Heights on what is now known as Amsterdam Avenue. The completion of the pipes made the road above it the easiest and most convenient road in Upper Manhattan for travelers and commerce to pass through, so it quickly became a busy route and allowed Hamilton Heights to quickly turn from a rural to a suburban neighborhood (Postal, 7). [this is fascinating; the neighborhood is imbued with a rich American history]

The expansion of public transportation made the neighborhood even more accessible and appealing to New Yorkers living south of Manhattan. New forms of transit, including a cable car train running down Amsterdam Avenue and an elevated train running down 8th avenue all by the 1880s, made Hamilton Heights a gem for real estate vendors and upper middle-class white families (Postal, 8). The appearance of row houses for single families began underway during this time to accommodate for the growing population the neighborhood was experiencing. But the real transformation for the neighborhood didn't take place until the construction of the Interborough Rapid Transit system, the first underground subway for the city (which is still in service today). Conveniently placed in Hamilton Heights 145th St and Broadway, construction began in 1900 (service was later expanded to the Bronx). Throughout and after the construction of the first subway line, building tall apartment houses became the norm and the construction of these skyrocketed in the 1900s and 1910s. Many businesses also began appearing around the subway line, making the neighborhood more vibrant than ever before. Because of these features and a great growing wealth tied into the neighborhood, Hamilton Heights became known as "Sugar Hill" (Postal, 18). [Great history; the taller buildings suggest that perhaps a

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different class of residents selected into the neighborhood. Do you have any sense about whether European immigrants settled here?

In the 1920s, during the time of the Harlem Renaissance, many affluent African Americans began moving into Hamilton Heights to get a piece of the “Sugar Hill” lifestyle the upper middle class white families were experiencing (Harrington). Many successful black doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and musicians began living in Hamilton Heights for this reason and due to its close proximity to the epicenter of Harlem. Some white families, seeing the influx of African Americans into their neighborhood, decided to move out and resulted in even more African Americans moving in. Notable African Americans, such as Thurgood Marshall, W.E.B DuBois, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. & Sr., Langston Hughes, and Duke Ellington all either lived or hung out in the neighborhood quite often. Life for the affluent African Americans in Hamilton Heights was well and strong until the 1950s, when the neighborhood began “deteriorating” according to a magazine at the time [which magazine?] (Postal, 23). Affluent African Americans began moving elsewhere, which gave space to the growing Dominican population in the 1960s when many immigrants from the Caribbean island migrated to the U.S after the fall of the Trujillo regime. The Dominican population exploded over the last forty years, and they remain the largest immigrant population in the neighborhood to this day.

According to information provided by the 2010 Census, the population of the neighborhood and its demographics are as follows. Approximately 56,438 people live in Hamilton Heights 04011 zip code area. People of all different age groups live in the area, but the biggest age groups are between 20 and 29 years old, approximately 21% of the neighborhood population. The median age of all the people is about 34 four years old. Male and female populations are almost equal coming at 48.7% and 51.3%, respectfully. 93.2% of the population only identify with one race. Among this percentage, almost 25% identify as white (14,020 people), 33.5% identify as black (18,908 people), 1.3% identify

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as American Indian or Alaska Native and 2.5% identify as Asian. 31% identify with another race about 7% identify with more than one race.

Approximately 58% identify as Hispanic or Latino (32,984 people). Among the entire neighborhood population, Dominicans make up 32.3% (18,238 people) followed by Mexicans at 8.1% (4,575 people) and Puerto Ricans at 5.5% (4,575). Central Americans make up only 1.5% (828 people) of the entire population while South Americans make up 5% (2,787 people) of the population. Even though both of these demographic groups have smaller population groups of less than 1% based on country of origin, Ecuadorians are the only other group that stand out from the rest. They make up 3.7% of the community population (2,060 people) [good use of data].

Based on information from 2015, the average household income in the neighborhood is \$39,774. 2.8% (596 people) of the population make above \$200,000 a year while 15.5% (3,275 people) make less than \$10,000. Individuals below the poverty line ranked at 25%. 21.5% of all the families in the neighborhood had incomes of below the poverty level at some point in the last twelve years. 68% of people 16 years or older participate in the labor force. The people of Hamilton Heights participate in all sorts of occupations, including manufacturing, transportation, and construction. But the biggest sectors are in the educational, health, and social services, which is 27.3% (8,348 people). The next biggest sector is in the arts, entertainment, and food service at 19.7% (6,029 people). The unemployment of the population is roughly 10.7%. 72.1% of the population have a high school diploma or higher. 31% of the population holds a bachelor's degree or higher. An interesting pattern to note is that starting with 25-34 age groups, the older the age group, the less likely they will have a high school diploma or higher.

Having provided all this information, I aim to examine the effects of gentrification on Hamilton Heights caused by the expansion of Columbia University next door. While a lot of New York City is already being gentrified, the influx of college students moving in to the neighborhood

along with new university facilities being built in the area is accelerating the gentrification process. I hope to understand what the long-time residents think and feel about this changing process. Are they afraid or do they feel indifferent? How has this form of gentrification at all affected their way of life if possible? In addition to researching and documenting people's opinions, I also hope to examine ways in which long-time residents try to resist against the changing dynamics and demographics of Hamilton Heights. What small actions or resistance are they doing in order to maintain the current culture of the neighborhood alive? What are activities that the citizens continue to do in the streets? I've already mentioned some activities in the second paragraph that the people of the neighborhood take a part in daily that can be viewed as forms of resistance. But I also hope to capture other actions as forms of resistance that I may overlook as a resident of the area. I hope to report my findings in the form of a website.



Overall, this is a lovely discussion of Hamilton Heights. Not only do you provide a rich history of the neighborhood, but you also give the reader a very good sense of the contemporary neighborhood on the ground. Hamilton Heights seems to have quite a bit going for it; from its connection to Hamilton and Washington to its reputation as a black middle class stronghold, to its contemporary location as a gentrifying Immigrant enclave. Your own story adds important context to the survival strategies of the lower and working class residents in the neighborhood. Finally, I really like your project. Studying the effects of gentrification from the perspective of local residents will enable you to consider how, despite the efforts of Columbia to extend its reach into the neighborhood, residents are nevertheless determined to use their resources to preserve their culture. As we discussed in our meeting, there are a variety of sources from the second half of the semester that will benefit your engagement, from the discussion explicitly on gentrification to the classes on contemporary urban citizenship.

The writing is generally clear, but I think you have a eye for thick description that loses some of its effectiveness when you are using linking verbs and passive voice. I would encourage you to use more action verbs to make these scenes come alive.

Please keep me posted on how you will proceed and what you will find; I would love to help you develop and maximize the potential of this exciting project.

Nice work!

Grade: 9.3/10 (A)

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