

Historic Preservation Studio 1
Significance Assessment

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The Significance Assessment of 204-210 West, 122nd Street



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The building chosen for the significance assessment is located at 204-210 West, 122nd Street. It is a row of row houses. The report will include four parts to analyze the buildings, which are the basic information, the building design, the reflection of Harlem history, and the potential intervention. The significance of the building is mainly represented by the building design, especially the material, and the reflection of Harlem history.

Basic Information

According to the Department of Building, the Block number is 09127, and the lot number is 38-40.¹ This row of houses only has a single New Building Number, which is 1421-86 for 210 West, meaning that the row houses were built in 1886. On March 27th, 1886, Phebe Smith bought the lot 38-40 from Daniel R. Kendall and Jennie C. Kendall.² Phebe Smith and her husband Addison P. Smith were real estate brokers. After they bought the lots, they developed five row houses on the lots. Each house cost \$ 13,000 in 1886. Then they divided the lots into smaller ones, and sold the houses to individual owners. The Smith family lived in 202 West themselves, which looked very different from others in the row. Phebe Smith died on May 2nd, 1888.³ The second day after she died, the house was granted to their daughter, Evelyn Smith. Mr Smith lived in the house until he died.

¹ <https://a810-bisweb.nyc.gov/bisweb/PropertyProfileOverviewServlet?boro=1&house=210&street=west+122nd+street&go2=+GO+&requestid=0>

² Register New York County Abstract Deed. Block 1927, Lot 31-58. Department of Finance, New York.

³ <https://www.ourfamtree.org/browse.php/Addison-P-Smith/f491691>

These houses don't have an alteration number in the Department of Building files. Based on the tax photos in 1927, 1941, and 1980, the houses lack changes on the exterior.

In addition to these houses, the row houses opposite to and in back of them, which are located at 205-209 West 122nd Street and 203-211 West 121st Street, were also developed by the Smith couple, with the same architect.⁴ The architect was George Brown Pelham, who lived from 1831 to 1889. He opened an architectural practice in New York in 1875, and served as an architect with the City's Department of Parks. His son, George Frederick Pelham (1867-1937), was a well-known architect contributing to lots of prestigious buildings in New York.⁵

Building Design

The houses have many different materials on the facade.(Figure 1) They have brick walls, sheet metal cornices and bay windows, wood door and windows, Ohio sandstone trim, brownstone basements, terracotta decoration and stained-glass windows. The paint on one building (206W) has been almost removed, leaving remnants of the coating. Other buildings are well painted recently and appear to be in good condition.

The trim of 204 and 208 West are probably Ohio sandstone, because they seem to be the same stone with the ones on 207 West, 122nd Street. (Figure 2) An 1886 article in the *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide* described it as "the upper stories with Philadelphia pressed brick

⁴ New York. Index to the Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide. Vol. XXXVI. 1885. Vol. XLII. 1885. V. 38, No. 972: October 30, 1886.

https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/lweb/digital/collections/cul/texts/ldpd_7031138_002/ldpd_7031138_002.pdf

https://rerecord.library.columbia.edu/pdf_files/ldpd_7031148_002_5.pdf

https://rerecord.library.columbia.edu/document.php?vol=ldpd_7031138_004&page=ldpd_7031138_004_00000494&no=7

⁵ New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District Designation Report Volume I: Essays/ Architects' Appendix April 24, 1990.

and Ohio Stone”.⁶ It’s not sure whether the painted trims on 206 and 210 West are Ohio sandstone, but they look like sandstone.

Brownstone is used on the basement, stairs, and pediment. The areas of peeling paint of 204’s basement clearly show the texture of brownstone. Because the houses are all well painted, it’s not clear if all the basement or stairs are made of brownstone.

The stone of the 208’s pediment under the paint looks like brownstone, while the light colored stone of 204’s pediment seems to be bluestone.

The windows on the second floor and third floor are almost all replacement windows. One window on the second floor and one on the first floor retains its stained-glass transom but not the original carved wood mullion. Another window on the first floor retains the original carved wood mullion but not the stained-glass transom.

As mentioned before, the row houses opposite to and behind the study building were designed by the same architect. The three houses located at 205-209 West 122nd Street were built in 1885. The five houses located at 203-211 West 121st Street were built in 1888.(Figure 3) They use some of the same materials, such as brownstone, Ohio sandstone, and have several similar window types, such as the double-hung sash window and the window with curved transom. However, the buildings have different cornices. 205 and 209 West 122nd Street have terracotta cornices, while those at 203-211 West 121st Street have sheet-metal cornices without pediments. Houses at 203-211 West 121st Street don’t have projecting porches. Although the study houses of 204-210 West 122nd Street are a little smaller in terms of length and depth,

⁶ Same as Citation 4.

they are more decorated than the other two rows. Perhaps they are intended to appear to wealthier buyers and the Smith family planned to live in one of them.

The row houses at 205-209 West 122nd Street were listed as a model row in the article in the *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide* in 1886, saying that they are striking in the contrasts of color and in all respects.⁷ The study houses are more contrasting, in the material, color, and style. A book about the row houses in New York said that 1873-1893 was “the Eclectic Decades”.⁸ A variety of styles appeared in the two decades following the Panic of 1873, including Neo-Grec, Queen Anne, and Romanesque Revival.⁹ The variations were welcomed even in one row of houses. There are many examples, one of which is the houses at 10-18 Arlington Place, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, which were also built in 1886. (Figure 4)

In terms of floor plan, except for the basement, all of the study houses have 4 floors.¹⁰ (Figure 5) Now 210 West 122nd Street has been used as an Airbnb hotel and others are residential houses. The owner of 210 West 122nd Street hotel added a kitchen on the first floor, and made some changes to the bathroom, to make sure that every bedroom has its own bathroom.¹¹ (Figure 6)

The Reflection of Harlem History

The row houses were built in 1886, a time when row houses and residential buildings boomed in Harlem. They are on the northwest side of the study area, which was the earlier part to develop because at that time, the 125th Street elevated station and the business district of Harlem had

⁷ The Record and Guide: V. 38, No. 972: October 30, 1886.

https://rerecord.library.columbia.edu/document.php?vol=ldpd_7031138_004&page=ldpd_7031138_004_00000494&no=7

⁸ Lockwood, Charles. 2003. *Bricks and Brownstone: The New York Row House, 1783-1929*. New York: Rizzoli. P217.

⁹ Lockwood, Charles. 2003. *Bricks and Brownstone: The New York Row House, 1783-1929*. New York: Rizzoli. P218.

¹⁰ The floor plan of 210 West, 122nd Street. Department of Building, New York.

¹¹ <https://www.cityrealty.com/nyc/harlem/210-west-122nd-street/apartment-/wztehzZMOvo>

been built in 1876, which are within 1 mile from 204-210 West 122nd Street. Harlem was developing rapidly. The row houses attracted middle-class and upper-middle class buyers from Midtown. Before the house boom, those coming north were poor and Jewish or Italian.¹²

From 1890-1925, residents living in 204-210 West 122nd Street were almost all white. In 1925, the residents of the houses suddenly became black. (Table 1.) From table 1, it is clear that this trend is earlier than the whole area where it primarily happened from 1930 to 1940. At that time, many Black people moved from the South, the Caribbean, or Midtown and Downtown New York to Harlem. The increased number of Black people and the overbuilding of tenements resulted in many owners of the house having to rent it to the Black families.¹³ People living in 204-210 West 122nd Street were almost all Black residents.

From 1910 to 1940, the number of lodgers was continually increasing. Many houses transformed from single family houses to multiple family houses in the 1910s and 1920s. In the 1930s, all of the houses were multiple family houses. (Table 2-3) From 1940 to 1990, the proportion of Black people was quite steady. Some Asians moved to Harlem in the 1980s, and from 1960, the number of white people increased a little.

New York suffered from a crisis in the 1980s. Therefore, Harlem had deep rooted racial and poverty problems. The 1970s and 1980s were an era of disinvestment in Harlem and huge numbers of South Harlem buildings were vacant.

In the 21st Century, lots of efforts were adopted to develop Harlem, such as the 2003 Frederick Douglass Boulevard Rezoning plan. Tourism in Harlem developed rapidly. Under this

¹² Ellis, Edward Robb (1966). *The Epic of New York City*. Old Town Books. p. 100.

¹³ Dolkart, Andrew, and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin. 1999. *Touring Historic Harlem: Four Walks in Northern Manhattan*. P15.

background, the house at 210 West 122nd Street was converted to an Airbnb hotel by its private owner. According to the owner, Mrs Doungrat Eamtrakul, a Thai who has lived in 208 West 122nd Street since 2001, she bought 210, which she could rent 6 rooms, in 2006. She thinks that “ It is located in a great location, considering finding free parking spots, and for public transportation to go anywhere in the city near 6 subway major lines and more than 6 buses in walking distance to Manhattan and New York City.”

The number of tourists in New York has kept increasing in the 21st Century, and the private short term rentals booked in Central Harlem also kept increasing. However, according to a study about gentrification in New York in 2017, the fancy hotels became an important incentive to gentrification.¹⁴ Neighborhoods like Harlem, with its iconic history and atmosphere, are changing to accommodate the patrons of hotels, high-end restaurants, and expansive retail shopping outposts. These projects, obviously, aren't meant for its poor residents, but the middle class and the increasing tide of visitors both international and domestic to the area.¹⁵ Undergoing this process, Harlem has become a magnet for tourism and the development of businesses like hotels and restaurants catering to the international leisure class. From Figure 7, in 2017, Central Harlem has become one of the most gentrifying areas in New York. The average rent from 1990 to 2010-2014 has increased 53.2% in Central Harlem, but the average household income is only \$34210 in 2020, with a 36.4% poverty rate. By contrast, the price of a single bedroom in the Airbnb hotel per night is more than \$200.

¹⁴ <https://skift.com/new-york-city-tourism-and-gentrification/>

¹⁵ <https://skift.com/new-york-city-tourism-and-gentrification/>

Potential Intervention

The potential intervention is based on the will of the residents, the suggestion of the guests in the Airbnb hotel, and my own experience.

The owner of 204 West 122nd Street said in the email: "I would like better roof access, a renovated basement, and potentially an additional floor which we are entitled to build according to zoning. We really would just like equal treatment by the New York City Department of Sanitation. You can see from the trash piling up that they don't service our neighborhood as well as they do the Upper East Side, for example." The house is in the R7A Zoning District, the regulated Floor Area Ratio of which is 4.0, and above the base height of 40 to 60 feet. If the additional floor will conform to the regulated Floor Area Ratio and height, and will not affect the integrity and beauty of the building from the street view at the same time, the owner can build the additional floor, because the owner thinks there a lack of housing in the area with the children growing up and a small addition would resolve it. Since the unique facade represents an important value of the building, it should not be changed.

In terms of improvement, the owner of the 210 West 122nd Street Airbnb hotel wrote in the email: "We like to complete the railings in front of the house and front door which is very unique. The Community and New York City should help homeowners to try to keep the Historic Homes in this area because the costs of repairs are tremendous and lack of skilled labour etc. Harlem could be an incredible tourist spot and landmarks for all historic reasons. I think the city could try harder to reduce the crime and rehab the Drug Users and Mental patients to protective areas where not disturbing decent, hardworking and visitors who felt offended and scared to see. (Such as seeing people injected drugs or buy sell drugs on the streets.)"

When I visited the hotel, I found the stairs are pretty high which could cause trouble for the old and disabled, and the garden behind the house could be improved. Although the hotel got 5 stars on Airbnb, there are some guests showing their concern about the stairs, for example, “Anyone who struggles to climb stairs should probably request a different room on a lower floor.” “Since the guest rooms are on the 2nd and 3rd floor, guests might have trouble going up steep stairs.”¹⁶ Therefore, the hotel can take efforts to solve the problem. The owner of the 210 West 122nd Street Airbnb hotel said in the email that they found one unit was sufficient for demand from guests who had mobility problems. The Manhattan Unit which has a few steps down and has a separate entrance has been kept for the special demand. This problem is also very common for the historic row houses, which have steps or other barriers that prevent people in wheelchairs from entering into the building and going upstairs and downstairs. The staircases are accessible for the able-bodied people, but not the disabled ones. Therefore, wheelchair ramps for homes could be added to these buildings.

Conclusion

The significance of the row houses at 204-210 West, 122nd Street mainly lies in three aspects. Firstly, except for the windows and doors, the houses largely retain the original materials and façade, and almost have not been modified. It is important that the original materials have been retained because it is the mix of many different materials, colors, ornament types that gives the buildings a significant character. Secondly, the houses can be an excellent representation of what was going on at a certain period of time. It embodies the style popular in the 1880s in New York row houses. Thirdly, the houses can be seen as a representative of Harlem history, witnessing the boom and bust of the area.

¹⁶ https://www.airbnb.co.uk/rooms/16812429?set_bev_on_new_domain=1639448693_ZDQ5NGY5YWJmMzI2&source_impression_id=p3_1639752960_NHM9XclSnmAjo%2BoU&quests=1&adults=1

Based on the interview with the residents of the houses and my experience, the potential interventions are listed below:

- (1) The building at 204 West 122nd Street can have better roof access, a renovated basement, and an additional floor which accord with R7A zoning regulations and will not affect the building facade.
- (2) The Airbnb owner could consider the stairs problem and beautify the garden.
- (3) The New York City government should better serve the community, cleaning the trash in time and improving security.

References:

NYC Department of Buildings Property Profile Overview of 210 West 122nd Street

<https://a810-bisweb.nyc.gov/bisweb/PropertyProfileOverviewServlet?boro=1&house=210&street=west+122nd+street&go2=+GO+&requestid=0>

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How Gentrification Powers New York City's Tourism Industry

<https://skift.com/new-york-city-tourism-and-gentrification/>

The Reviews of 210 West 122nd Street Airbnb Hotel

https://www.airbnb.co.uk/rooms/16812429?_set_bev_on_new_domain=1639448693_ZDQ5NGY5YWJmMzI2&source_impression_id=p3_1639752960_NHM9XclSnmAjO%2BoU&guests=1&adults=1



Figure 1. Material

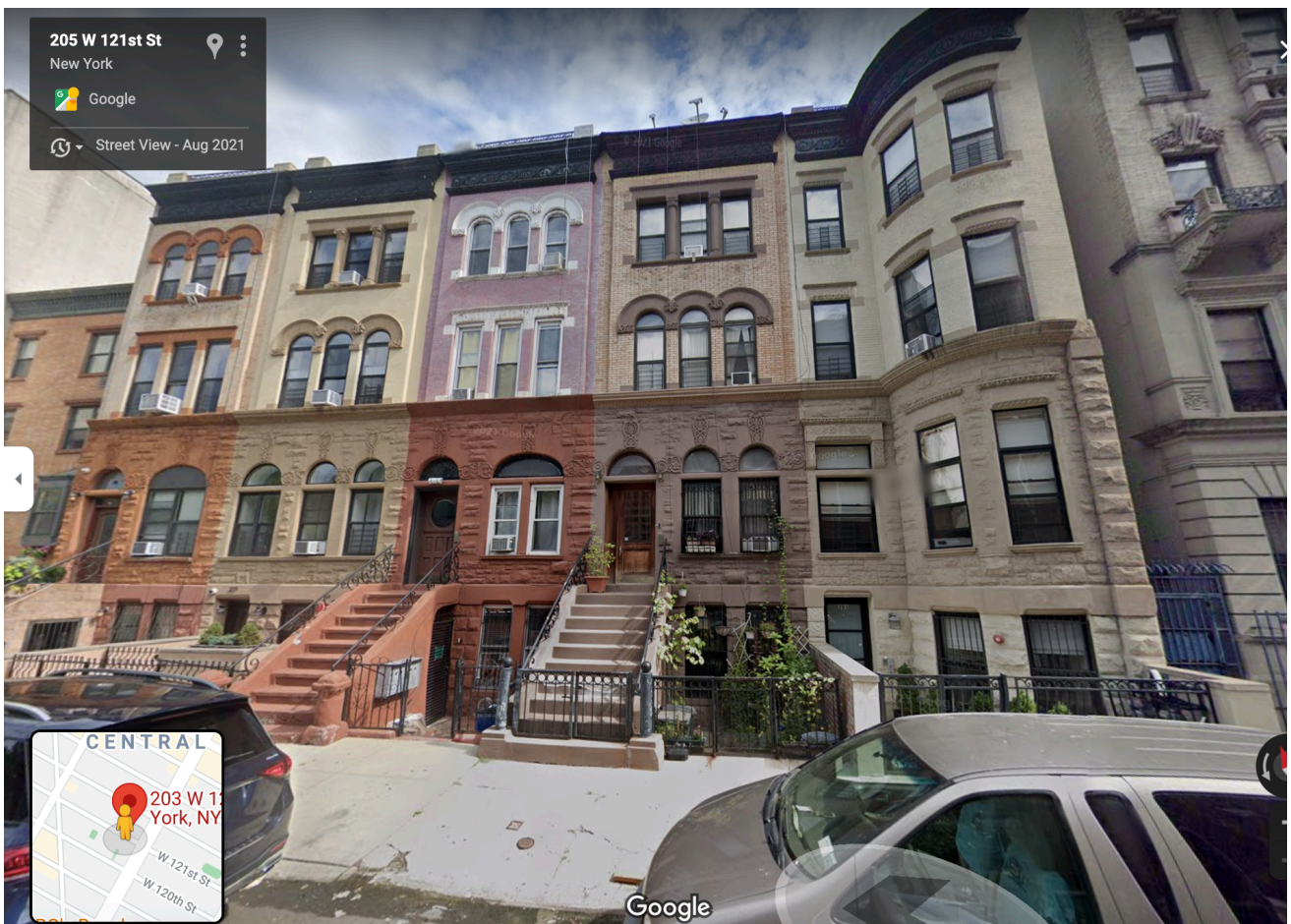


Figure 2. 205-209 West, 122nd Street



Figure 3. 203-211 West 121st Street



Figure 4. The houses at 10-18 Arlington Place, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn

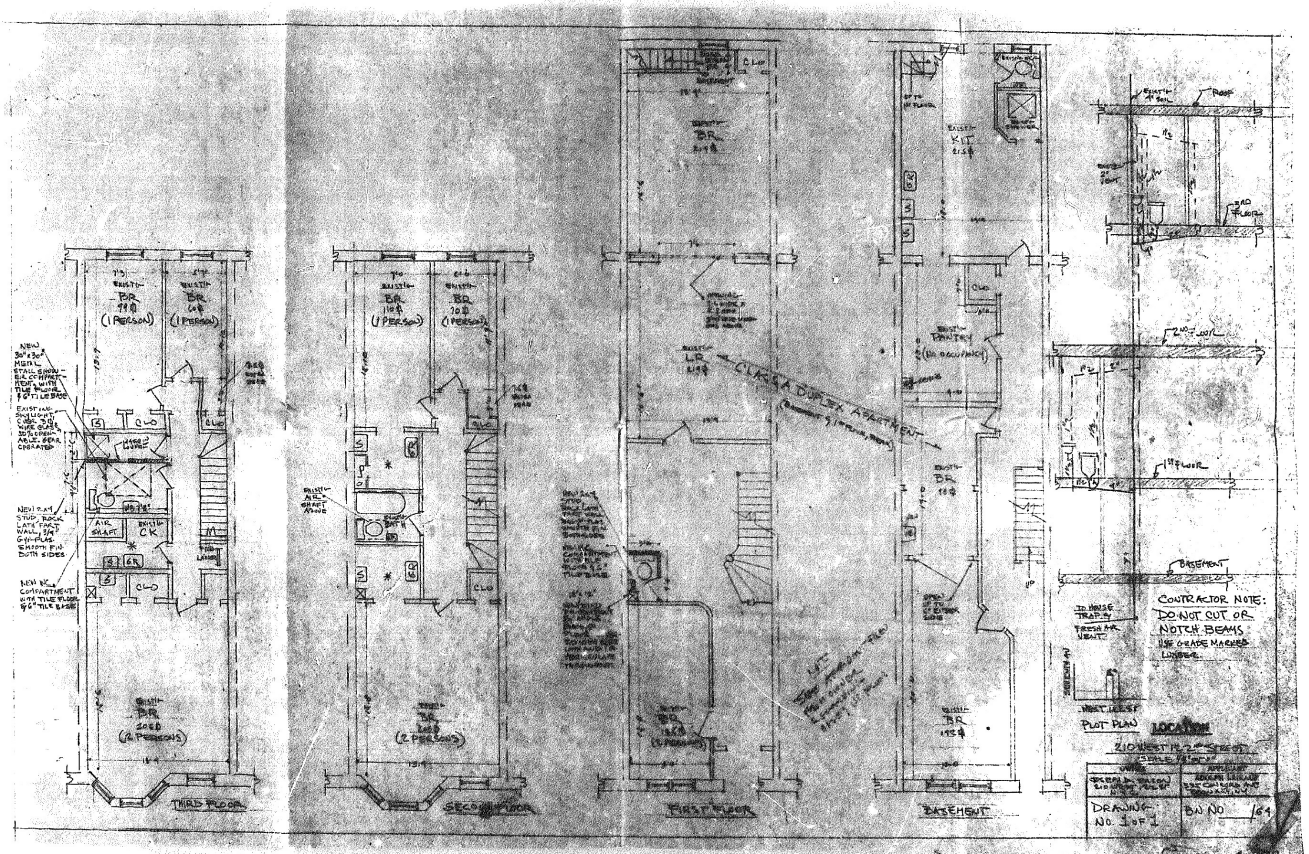


Figure 5. 1970s plan of 210 West, 122nd Street



Figure 6. 2021 plan of 210 West, 122nd Street

Classification of New York City's Sub-Borough Areas

from the State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods in 2015

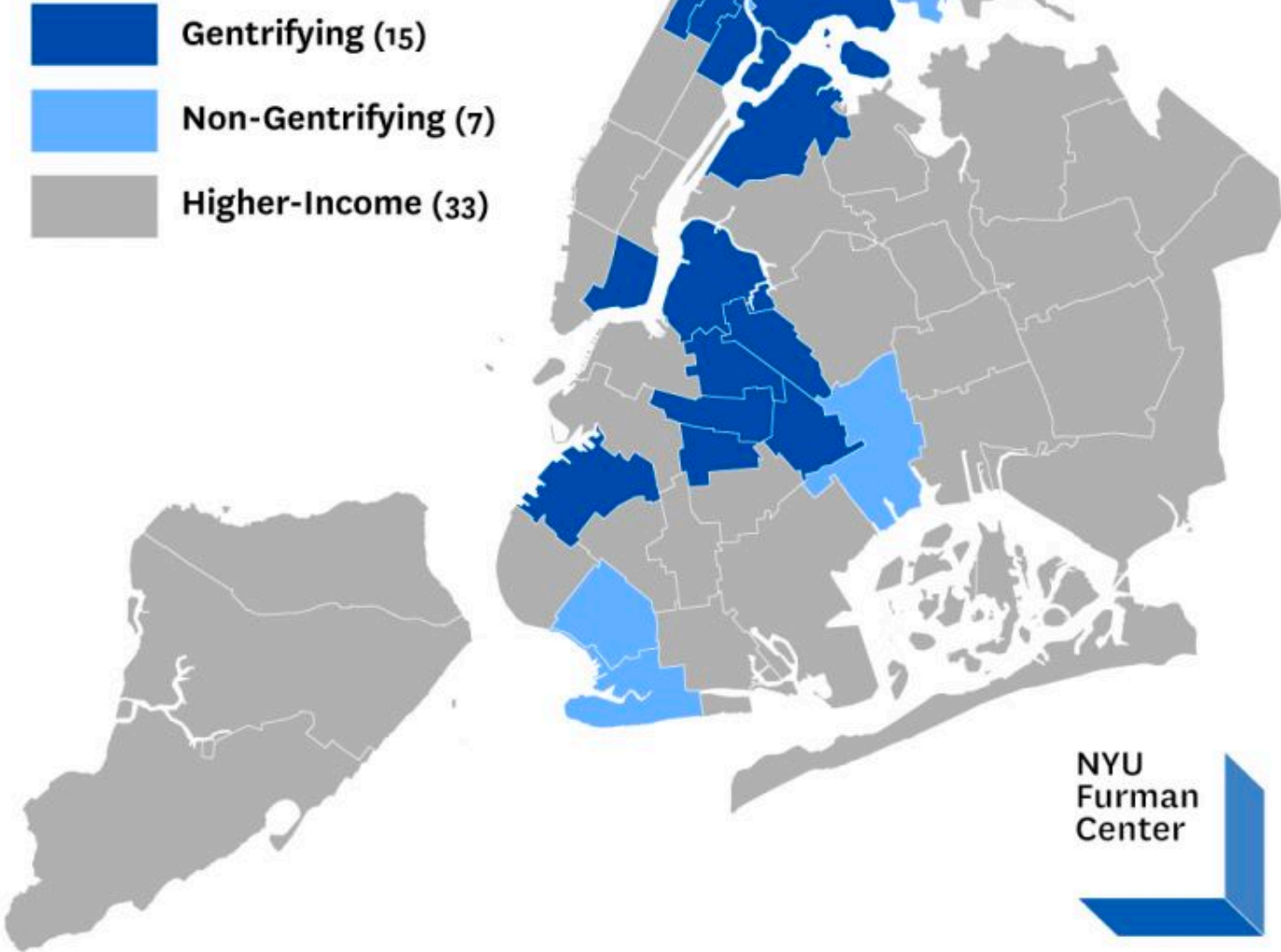


Figure 7. Gentrification Situation in New York City in 2015

White and Black

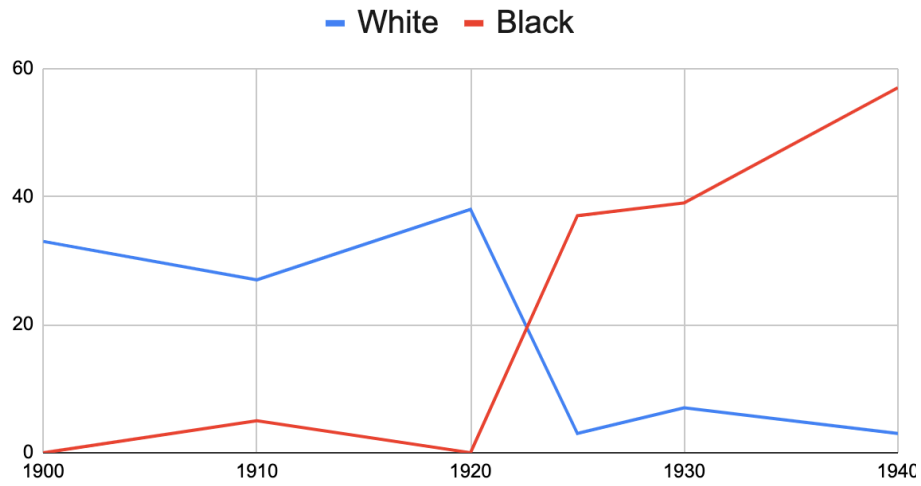


Table 1.

Family Member (Servant) and Lodger

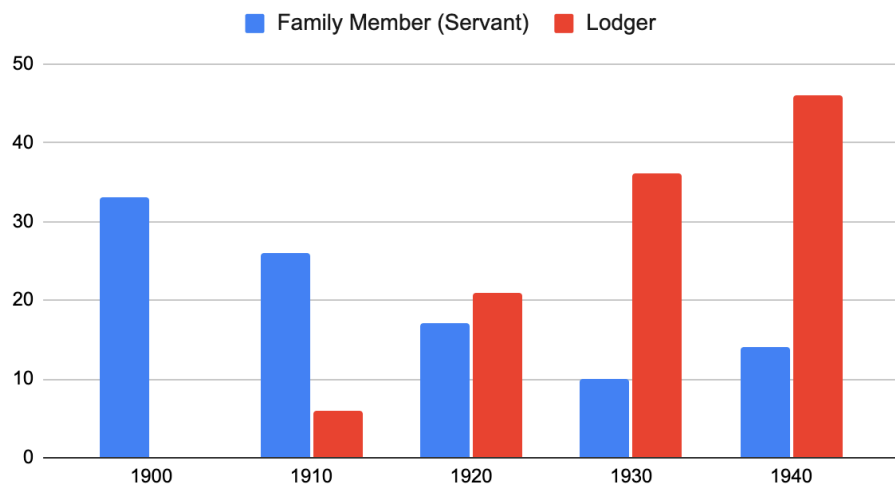


Table 2.

Single Family House and Multiple Family House

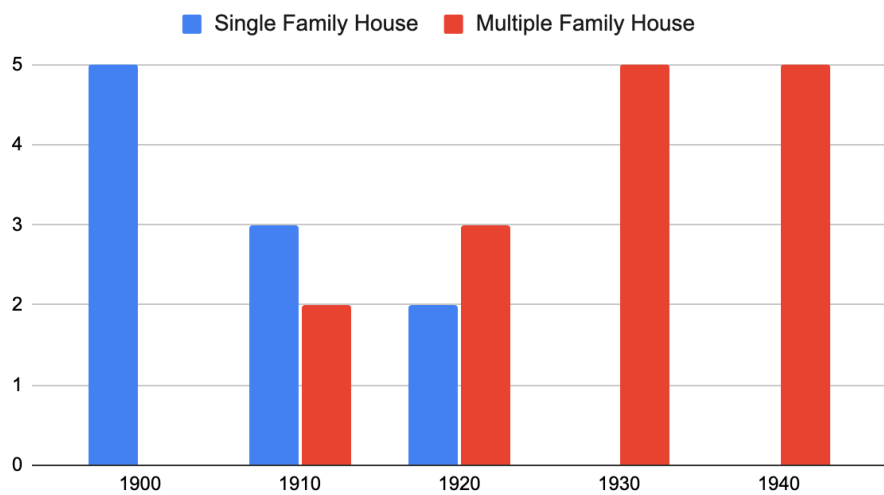


Table 3.