

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER

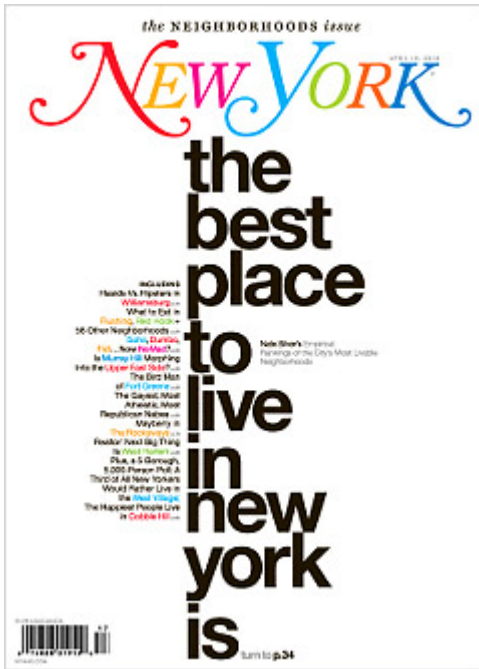
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URBAN SOCIOLOGY 8779

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3. Sunnyside

Greenpoint Ave. and First Calvary Cemetery to Northern Blvd. (along the census tract), 44th St. and Locust to Van Dam St.

CATEGORY	SCORE	RANK
Housing Cost	83	15th
Transit	76	30th
Shopping & Services	77	22nd
Safety	81	17th
Restaurants	73	33rd
Schools	80	16th
Diversity	90	1st
Creative Capital	72	32nd
Housing Quality	72	40th
Green Space	67	55th
Health & Environment	72	43rd
Nightlife	73	33rd
TOTAL SCORE	78.00	3rd

Romancing Sunnyside

For the past thirteen years of my life I have moved from one country to another. I have pedalled the streets of Vietnam, took my children to Mandarin class in Singapore, bargained in the markets of Malaysia and opted out of the blue waters of The Maldives. It was a priveledge to witness strange cultures so different from my own. However, one cannot help but feel exhausted and frustrated knowing that just by the time I loose the feeling of strangeness, somehow, something does not fit.

It was the Fall of 2003 when we finally migrated in the US. Two weeks after our arrival, a broker led us to a block of tree-lined family houses. It took me only a few minutes to decide and declare "Alas! This is it. I'm home". That is how my love affair with Sunnyside began.

Was it the uniformity of the brick houses or their architectural facade? Was it the red rose manicured front gardens? Was it the smiles the residents offered even to a stranger? Or was it the comfort it exuded, making it look like a refuge from the noise and crowd of the city? Perhaps it's all of the above or perhaps it's just my imagination but that was how Sunnyside first welcomed and allured me.

At first I thought it was just physical attraction but as I explored the beauty of the area the fondness of my new home got deeper. Its history is a compilation of stories of hardworking people determined to rise above every occasion. Sunnyside in the 1700 was originally a landscape dotted with swamps, marshes, woodlands and farms. Legend has it that Sunnyside was named after the hilltop farm of Richard Bragaw, an American Patriot who was imprisoned by the British. The estate was called 'Sunnyside Hill' because it presents breathtaking views of the sunrise and sunsets. Literature says that its first inhabitants were German, Irish, Czech, Dutch and other Europeans. The Sunnyside Hotel which was built in 1800 to accommodate patrons of the "Fashion Race Course" in Corona opened the door of Sunnyside to its development. Decades later, many of the farms in the vicinity were subdivided into lots and a small hamlet was built between Northern and Queens Boulevard and became known as Sunnyside.



Sunnyside Hotel circa 1870 (photo from the Sunnyside Chamber of Commerce)

The opening of Queensborough Bridge in 1909 and the extension of the elevated subway now known as the 7 train paved the way for middle class workers to take interest of the area. The industrialization of Long Island City certainly brought more jobs and families to occupy empty lands giving birth to more communities. From the 1920s to the 1960s, Sunnyside was made up of predominantly Irish, Italian, and Jewish residents. In the 1980's an influx of immigrants came from Asia and Latin America. Today, with

a population of a little more than 42,000, it has become one of the most diverse neighborhoods in Queens. According to 2000 Census data, 61% of Sunnyside residents were born outside the US.



*Sunnyside, Queens, New York – circa 1915
Skillman Avenue (looking south) between 45th Street and 44th Street (photo from the Sunnyside Chamber of Commerce)*

Today our community is a melting pot with immigrants from Ecuador, Columbia, Korea, Mexico, China, Dominican Republic, Philippines, Romania, India, and Ireland showing its diversity. The buildings, shops and restaurants around each block will tell you stories about the neighborhood. Celtics Park, long before it was a housing development with a narrow courtyard, was a sprawling track and field facility. It was the home of the Irish-American Athletic Club; the dominant club in Olympic track and field competition for the United States prior to World War II. When it comes to arts, we boast of the award winning Thalia Spanish Theatre, the only Hispanic theater in the borough of Queens. Their plays and programs will quench anyone who has passion for tango or flamenco.



Library of Congress
A steeplechase is held at Celtic Park on May 27, 1912



Celtic Park was torn down in the early thirties.
Now it is the home of the Celtic Apartments

We have a list of active community groups including the distinguished Sunnyside Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis and Lions Club, Sunnyside Community Service, United Forties, and Graffiti Removal, just to name a few. The newly renovated Sunnyside Public Library offers (not so) quiet escape for readers and researchers alike. Just in front of it is the fun filled Thomas P Noonan playground; a haven for young and the not-so-young. And how about our schools which not only educate our youth but also babysit them for free with our afterschool programs so that working parents like me can still make ends meet. By the way, our after school counselors are mostly volunteer high school and college students who went to the very same school choosing to offer community service.

Sunnyside is home to many place of worship from Catholic and Protestant churches to synagogues and mosques. Towards the East border lies Calvary cemetery which is the largest and one of the oldest cemeteries in the country listing 3million graves as of 1990. If Queens population as of 2010 is 2.3 million, does it mean that there are more dead people than living in the whole of Queens?



Map of [Blissville](#) in the early 1900s, showing Calvary Cemetery, from the [Greater Astoria Historical Society](#)



A view of the cemetery showing Manhattan skyline in the background.

Whole Foods anyone? Yes, we have it. Our farmers market is evidence to our health conscious neighborhood. When it comes to restaurants, pick your choice of ethnic cuisine. We can offer saucy delicious pasta, authentic phad thais, homemade tacos, hot empanadas, deep fried calamari, fresh sushi,

spicy sarmale, crunchy baklava, crispy fish and chips, or sizzling burgers and steaks. Butchers Block, which caters to British and Irish palates has attracted clientele from the five boroughs. If you want to decompress after a day's work, we have coffee shops that bakes unbelievable French pastries that makes you forget that you're so underpaid. However, if you want to take it to the next level, Irish pubs will always be there to support you in all your heartbreaks and pain. After all, who doesn't need the luck of the Irish?



And of course, one cannot miss Sunnyside Gardens. Built in the 1920's, it was the first planned Garden City community of houses in New York City and has achieved international recognition since. Our local Utopia covers 16 blocks of tree lined private houses with front and rear gardens and matching landscaped central court. Diane Miller, who moved to Sunnyside Gardens when it was still unfinished and now spends her days gardening, recalls the days in the 40's and 50's when the community was called the "maternity ward of Greenwich Village" because so many artists and writers moved to Sunnyside to start families. Sunnyside Garden is now listed as a historical district in the National Register of Historical Places.



Sunnyside Gardens (unknown circa)



Sunnyside Gardens Circa 2000 (photos courtesy of NY curbed.com)



The first time I caught a glimpse of this lovely oasis was when my kids and I were strolling along Skillman Avenue towards Northern Boulevard. It was autumn and the streets were full of falling leaves but there were pine trees that smugly protects the neighborhood. In their gardens you can catch a glimpse of evergreen plants and some brave flowers battling the cold winds and refusing to wither. You can also see wooden swings and benches inside the compound which probably brought together plenty of neighborly talks. The fence covers the private playground, tennis court, basketball courts and wading pool. You can see from afar a variety of willow, sycamore, and cherry trees. From the streets you can smell the freshly baked cookies and the thickly stirred hot chocolate coming from their kitchens. The scent is very welcoming and like Pavlov's dogs, I will always associate Sunnyside gardens with that delicious aroma.

A resident of Sunnyside Gardens himself is our newly elected Councilman, Jimmy Van Bramer. Before he was appointed, he served as the Chief External Affairs Officer of the Queens Public Library. His portfolio includes commitment to Civil Rights, Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations, Health Parks & Recreation, Transportation and Public Housing. Despite the tough economy, Van Bramer has secured funds for two local parks, libraries and firehouses that the Bloomberg administration planned to slash. Recently, he was very proud of restoring funds for the after-school program of one of our grade school (PS 150). In my opinion, this was a battle well fought, for the program provides free after-school services to more than 200 children. He also generated funds for an anti-graffiti campaign; our "community eraser" which is one of my favorite volunteer group.

Sunnyside's art deco co-op buildings have become very popular to preppies from other boroughs. Many Manhattan-rent refugees moved to Sunnyside because they feel far removed from the hustle and bustle of the city yet it is only a few minutes away. The ongoing gentrification of Long Island City resulted in an increase in real estate and property values. Many households have been affected by this and alongside the current economic downturn it has been a struggle for many. Several homeowners and tenants who cannot keep up with the staggering taxes and mortgage bills have opted to find a more practical place to live. It is only fair to say that in this society, clearly there's a price to pay with beauty.

The old residents have mixed feeling about the city's modernization. Some of them appreciate the change but some express disgust. According to them, "Our old neighborhood did not have all the amenities we have today but we were very happy and got along so well". Ruth Paniela, a 96 year old resident, who spent all her life in Sunnyside, said "That's why I love going to church because it reminds me so much of yesterday". St Raphael church was built in the 1800s and is still standing firmly up to now. Many of the old residents have moved to Long Island and upstate New York looking for more rural areas that were more like the early beginnings of the neighborhood they grew up in.

The development of the community has been evident not only by sight but by historic documentation. The accreditation of Sunnyside Gardens as a landmark status on 2007 sparked numerous controversy from residents. The ongoing rezoning around the community is causing plenty of confusion and inconvenience. Last April traffic signals were retimed and bicycle lanes were installed along Skillman and 43rd Avenue by the Department of Transportation. This action caused a dramatic reduction in the number of crashes resulting in injury. Renovation of Greenpoint Avenue Bridge is scheduled to start toward the end of the year. As of March 2010, New York City Planning Department's preliminary recommendations for Sunnyside would appear that between 39th Place and 48th Street on Queens Boulevard changes would make way for some significantly bigger buildings. It looks like the urbanization of my neighborhood may hurt me more than I have expected.

As I look around my adopted home for the past seven years, I find this place very interesting and nurturing at the same time. Just a stone throw away I could see the 7 train from my front garden. It reminds me of my city life were I go to work every day. As I walk around the block, I noticed that outside the brickhouses may be designed identically but inside they are home to families of different cultures. My neighbors make me feel that I belong whenever they return my son's skateboard wherever he left it. I feel safe and protected when I see the firehouse just a block away, or when I spot the Catholic church that I attend every Sunday or when I catch Debby, the crossing guard, holding little children's hands as they cross the street. The streets are tidy provided the sanitation workers picked-up everything. If you don't mind driving a few miles you can still find nice beaches and (not so) white sands. It's a mixture of all the places I have ever lived throughout my young adulthood. It's my home now and probably will be for the next few years.

But then again, don't take my word for it. You don't need an invitation. All you have to do is come, and let Sunnyside seduce you.

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