



# CENTRAL PARK

Central Park is almost certainly already at the top of your NYC bucket list, so we'll start by providing some historical context to consider while you're checking out all that the park has to offer.

Location, location, location! This is probably a phrase you've heard with regard to the arduous process of apartment hunting in NYC, but the premium placed on location extends far beyond conversations around where New Yorkers live. In the 1850s when the plan for what would become Central Park was decided upon, the question of where to actually put it remained a difficult one to answer. Eventually the park board selected the site that still houses the park today, despite the fact that at the time, the land was already home to a community.

The construction of Central Park on the chosen site was made possible only through the demolition of Seneca Village, a predominantly African-American settlement whose residents experienced a more autonomous and prosperous way of life than other African-Americans in the city at the time. The village itself was destroyed, its residents displaced, representing a consistent pattern wherein race- and class-based inequality is produced and reproduced by the built environment.



# TIMES SQUARE


Times Square, sometimes called “The Crossroads of the World” or “The Center of the Universe,” is a New York landmark needing no introduction. However, you might be surprised to learn about its past as one of the city’s most notable hubs for gay street culture and male prostitution beginning in the 1920s. As the visibility of this (and other) street culture increased, Times Square’s reputation transformed into one of depravity and obscenity. This reputation persisted through the 1980s, when Times Square was a city hotspot for the sex market, the drug trade, and crime in general.

The reputation described above was derived from portrayals of Times Square featured in mainstream media, circulated and reinforced by the city’s more ‘respected’ groups.

Below, you’ll find a quote from Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940, describing the same place and time period.

“The shifting spatial and social organization of just one aspect of Times Square’s gay street culture – that of male prostitution – highlights the extent to which the apparent chaos of the most active street scenes masked a highly organized street culture, whose boundaries and conventions were well known to the initiated.”

The recognition that specific locations may seem fragmented to those unfamiliar, yet conceal intricate, structured networks accessible only to select individuals, is a prevalent concept in queer, feminist, indigenous, and similar approaches to examining urbanism. Consequently, exploring urban environments through these perspectives frequently uncovers significantly more vibrant and multifaceted truths than what might initially be perceived.



# RESOURCES & FURTHER READING

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# NEW YORK CITY

*Hidden Stories.*

*Honest Maps.*





## LOWER EAST SIDE

The Lower East Side has a reputation as one of New York’s “trendiest” neighborhoods, particularly with regard to its restaurant, bar, and art scenes. However, this ultra-trendy status exists alongside a complex history of gentrification, which Samuel Stein defines in his book Capital City as a political, economic, and social process “by which capital is reinvested in urban neighborhoods, and poorer residents and their cultural products are displaced and replaced by richer people and their preferred aesthetics and amenities.”

The LES of today’s New York reflects the drastic shifts in demographics, commercial fabric, and neighborhood investment that coincide with gentrification; in other words, to find one of America’s most prolific examples of this process and its legacies, look no further than the Lower East Side.



## SOHO

Tourists visiting New York City view present-day SoHo as a shopping haven akin to 5th Avenue. However, the current storefronts in SoHo merely signify the most recent phase in the neighborhood’s extensive history marked by distinct eras of change. From the home of a community of partially-freed enslaved Africans in the early 1600s, an area dominated by factories and industrial production in the 19th century, a microcosm of deindustrialization and urban renewal attempts in the 1960s and 70s, to ground zero for “The Loft Wars” through the 1980s (and notably its designation as a historical district in 1973), and a site of extreme gentrification and commercialization, Soho’s story is one of rapid and drastic change specific to the context of an industrial capitalist city, which has ultimately culminated in the creation of one of the whitest and wealthiest neighborhoods in NYC.



## BROOK PARK

Nestled amidst the urban landscape of the South Bronx lies the Brook Park Community Garden, a testament to resilience against the backdrop of environmental injustice and discriminatory urban planning. Understanding the significance of this green space requires a closer examination of the historical context shaped by the decisions of influential figures like Robert Moses, whose policies reproduced environmental racism in the built environment. Robert Moses, the “master builder” of New York City, imposed infrastructure projects and planning policies which deliberately neglected communities of color, reinforcing racial segregation and perpetuating environmental injustices. By targeting Black and Latino neighborhoods, many of Moses’ projects (like the expressways built in the South Bronx) caused the displacement of residents and subjected these areas to increased pollution, health hazards, and economic decline. The legacy of environmental racism perpetuated by Moses’s initiatives casts a long shadow over places like Brook Park. The emergence of community gardens like Brook Park stands as a powerful response to the neglect and the adverse effects of discriminatory urban planning. These spaces serve not only as oases of greenery but also as symbols of resistance, community empowerment, and environmental justice.



## BROOKLYN BRIDGE

At the time of its completion in 1883, the Brooklyn Bridge was heralded as the “eighth wonder of the world,” as it was the longest suspension bridge in the world and the tallest structure in the Western hemisphere for several years after its construction. Nearly a century later, New York City would be entrenched in crisis and on the brink of financial collapse. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, New York City mayors tried and failed to navigate the impending crisis with ineffectual policy measures, one of which being a budget proposal necessitating laying off tens of thousands of city workers. This widespread sense of abandonment, hopelessness, and anger among New Yorkers is particularly striking in leaflets circulated by police and other city workers in response to the 1975 budget announcement, which were entitled “WELCOME TO FEAR CITY.”

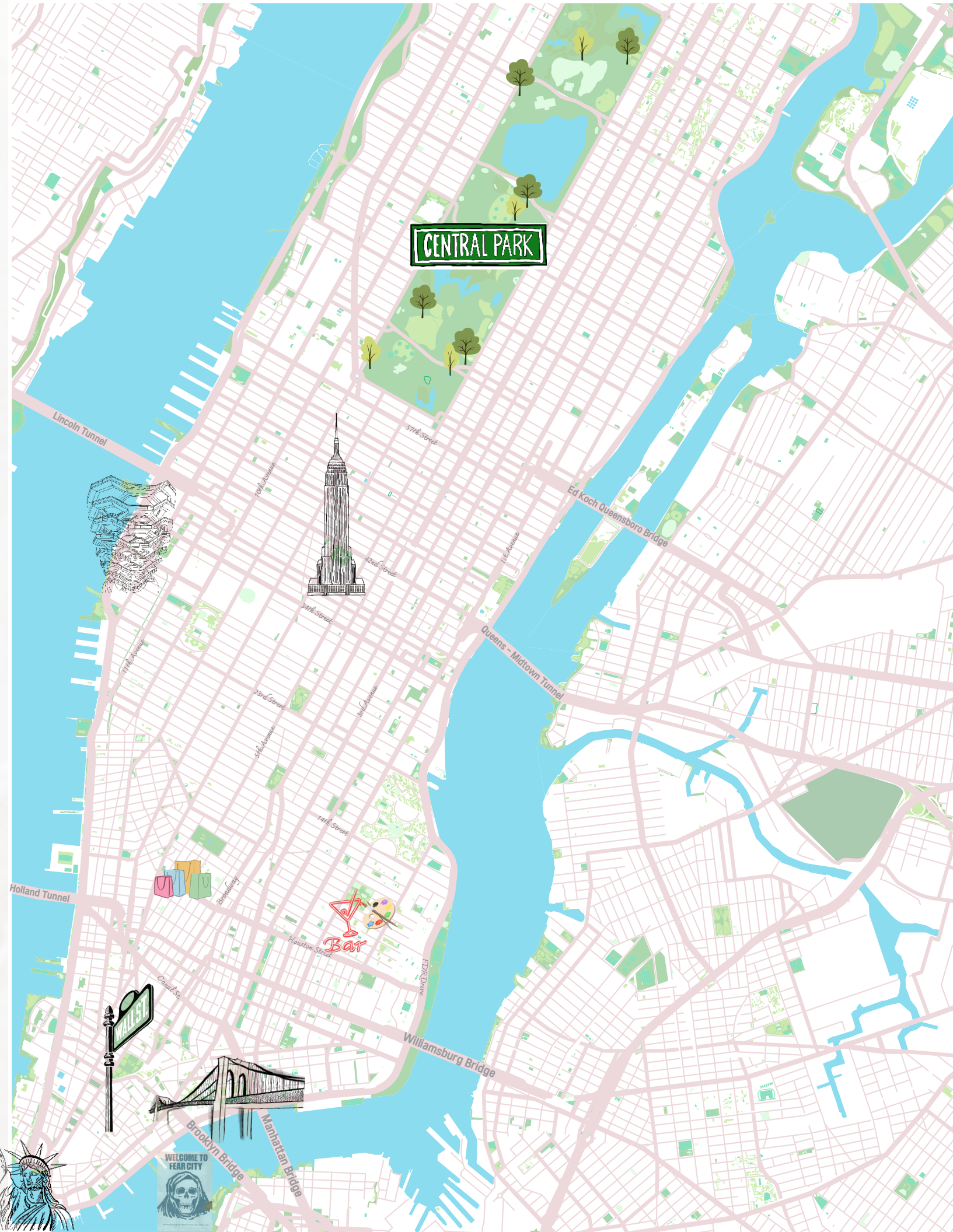
Tensions came to a head on July 1, 1975 when city workers across different sectors protested, walked out on their jobs, or went on strike. One demonstration involved over 300 laid-off police officers storming the bridge, blocking its entrance and exit ramps and halting traffic. From this period of crisis and unrest, a new New York City emerged, one “controlled by bankers and developers, run like a corporation, designed as a luxury product and planned by the finance sector” (Capital City).

The Brooklyn Bridge serves as a symbol of New York in transition, at one point the city’s transition to Greater New York City as Manhattan and Kings County were linked, and more recently, the city’s transformation into “the highly stratified metropolis it is today—a city of apartments bought as investment properties for the wealthy of the world even as almost 60,000 New Yorkers live in homeless shelters, a city that’s among the most unequal in a nation” (Fear City).



## HUDSON YARDS

Hudson Yards, a neighborhood that epitomizes the complexities of urban development, displacement, and gentrification in NYC. While this area may dazzle visitors with its modern architecture and luxurious amenities, a closer look reveals a story of significant social and economic shifts that have had profound effects on the local community. Hudson Yards exemplifies the historical trend of prioritizing economic interests over community well-being, as seen through rezoning efforts that led to the demolition of existing structures and displacement of residents. The pursuit of profitability has transformed Hudson Yards into an exclusive, high-rise complex, contributing to ongoing gentrification, altering the area’s original character, and raising concerns about affordability. As property values rise, the community becomes more homogeneous, with upscale businesses replacing local establishments, exacerbating the challenges faced by both existing and potential residents.



## YOU'VE FOUND YOURSELF A

### Critical Tourist Map

#### What is that?

Critical tourist maps have emerged as a form of counter cartography, seeking to **challenge** the carefully constructed portrayals of places.

#### What are Counter Cartographies?

Counter cartographies are “maps that break with the scientific tradition and specialization of cartography as well as with its mere technical or essentially positivist view of the world. This type of transgression goes against official geopolitical maps while **exposing relations of domination over & exploitation** of a territory as well as revealing concealed networks of power.”

This practice of **making the invisible visible** and using maps to highlight marginalized narratives makes power dynamics, spatial networks, political and economical mechanisms, social hierarchies, etc., more perceptible so that we might confront and change them.

A tourist map or an article with a list of “must sees” is a quintessential example of a **glamorized** version of history with all a place’s skeletons packed neatly into a closet. It’s a place’s best foot forward, the result of a branding and marketing campaign for the place itself. Even as a resident of a place you’re taught a very carefully curated version of that place’s history, and it’s not until you have more agency within your education that you might have the privilege or ability to seek out other narratives. For many, this opportunity never emerges within the formal education system at all.

Critical tourist maps like the one you currently hold undermine this rose-colored glasses approach to exploring the history of a place, instead opting for a more **honest, revealing picture**. With these values guiding us, we’ve made such a map for none other than New York City. We hope this map serves not only as a tool for helping you think about this city in a new light, but also as a reminder to travel as a critical tourist, looking beyond the incomplete, misleading narratives that are served to you by tourism industries and those in positions of power.