THE PUSH AND PULL
DYNAMICS OF WHITE FLIGHT:
A STUDY OF THE BRONX
BETWEEN 1950 AND 1980

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Note about the Author and Methodology

This paper focuses on the changing racial demographics of The Bronx between 1950 and 1980. In order to understand why the white population left the borough so quickly, interviews of white men and women who grew up in The Bronx were conducted. Of the five people interviewed, I knew four prior to beginning this project. As the daughter of a former Bronx resident, who left in 1980, I was especially intrigued by this topic and used my mother and many of her friends and acquaintances as interview subjects. The only interview subject that I did not personally know prior to this project was Dr. Peter Derrick, the Archivist and Editor at The Bronx County Historical Society. I met Dr. Derrick when I went to the Historical Society on the advice of Fordham professor Dr. Mark Naison to access the oral histories conducted by The Bronx African American History Project, which is a joint effort of Fordham University’s Department of African and African American Studies and The Bronx County Historical Society.

All interviews were conducted during the month of November 2008. Interviews with Brian Werner and Elvira Werner were conducted over the phone. Interviews with Dr. Peter Derrick, Kathleen Roby, and Vincent Montemarano were conducted in person. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions of the interviews cited in this paper are available for research by contacting Dr. Peter Derrick at The Bronx County Historical Society. Each interview subject was asked similar questions, however I tended to follow any openings provided by an interview subject and as a result, there are different topics covered in each interview.
While local demographics and neighborhoods are undeniably subject to change, it is rare for a location to experience a major transformation in racial demographics in less than 50 years. Yet this is exactly what has happened in The Bronx between 1950 and 1980. As indicated by the 1950 census, the ethnic makeup of The Bronx was predominantly white. The borough’s most recent census information (for 2000) indicates that whites (that is, what the U.S. Census labels “white, non-Hispanic”) now compose a distinct minority in The Bronx. The explanations for this remarkable change are complex. When speaking with The Bronx’s former white citizens, it becomes clear that the lure of the suburbs, coupled with the borough’s increase in drug use and crime in the 1970s, created a “push-pull” effect that drove many long term white residents of the borough to abandon it forever.

The demographics of The Bronx at the mid-point of the 20th century are indicative of the overwhelming presence of white ethnics. Of the roughly 1.45 million Bronx residents counted in the 1950 census, only approximately 97,700 identified themselves as “black.” An additional 2,000 residents identified themselves as “other races.” The statistical data provided by the census information indicates that approximately 1.30 million people, over 90% of the population of The Bronx, identified themselves as white in 1950. However as time progressed, the data began to shift significantly. Even as early as 1960, just ten years and one census removed from 1950, changes are apparent in the racial demographics of The Bronx. The 1960 census indicates that of approximately 164,000 of the 1.42 million Bronx residents were black. Therefore the percentage of black residents in The Bronx nearly doubled in 10 years, increasing from roughly 7% of the total population of The Bronx in 1950 to approximately 12% of the total population in 1960.2

The trends in population changes first seen between the 1950 and 1960 censuses continued throughout the 1960s and can be seen in the 1970 census. The black population of The Bronx had again increased from roughly 164,000 black residents in 1960 to 357,000 black residents in 1970. In addition to this change, the white population of the borough decreased from 1.26 million to 1.08 million, respectively.3 The changes between the black and white populations in The Bronx between 1950 and 1970 indicate that the white population was slowly leaving at approximately the same rate that new black residents were moving into the borough. In the 10 years between 1970 and 1980, however, this rate of exchange would change dramatically. The 1970s marked the greatest out migration of the white population that had called The Bronx its home for many years.

While the reasons for this so-called “white flight” are varied, the one thing that is clear is that by the end of the 1970s, The Bronx was no longer the white ethnic stronghold it had been in 1950. The 1980 census reveals
that the white population in The Bronx dropped nearly 50% from 1.08 million in 1970 to only 554,000 in 1980. While the black population did not increase dramatically during this time period, rising by only approximately 14,000 new residents, many other ethnic groups appeared on The Bronx census for the first time. Included in these new groups were ethnic minority groups such as Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, Cubans, Dominicans, Hondurans, Ecuadorians, and Salvadorians. These new ethnic groups, together with minority groups already present in The Bronx, like blacks and Puerto Ricans, composed over two-thirds of the population of The Bronx in 1980, or 745,000 people.

In order to understand the startling statistical information presented in a comparison of the census data from 1950 to 1980, it is necessary to speak to former white residents of The Bronx who witnessed the changing demographics of their borough. By speaking to people who grew up in The Bronx, it is possible to understand the thought processes and motivations of many of the white residents who fled The Bronx, particularly during the 1970s. Five white former residents agreed to be interviewed and discussed their early memories of The Bronx in the 1950s and 1960s and the changes that their neighborhoods went through in the 1970s. The five interview subjects grew up in four different areas of The Bronx. Vincent Montemarano is a former New York City Police detective who lived in Parkchester until 1969 and continued to work throughout The Bronx until 1985. Dr. Peter Derrick is a historian who grew up in the Fordham section of The Bronx and continues to live in Riverdale and work in The Bronx today. Kathleen Roby is a physical therapist who was born and raised in Parkchester and now lives in Valley Stream, Long Island. Finally, Elvira Werner grew up in the Northeast Bronx and her husband Brian was raised in the South Bronx. Mr. and Mrs. Werner live in Oceanside, Long Island today. Of the five white former residents that were interviewed, only one, Dr. Derrick, still resides in The Bronx today.

When asked to describe The Bronx during his childhood, Derrick recited a poem by writer Ogden Nash: "The Bronx? No, thonx!" When Nash composed that poem in 1930 (and lasting into the 1960s), The Bronx was considered a very tranquil and even boring place, causing Nash to lament about the borough because he saw it as not being a very exciting place. The sentiments of Ogden Nash were shared by many of The Bronx’s white residents in the 1950s and 1960s, yet while Nash criticized the apparent tranquility and peace of The Bronx, it was celebrated by its inhabitants. When asked to describe The Bronx of the 1950s and 1960s, every subject interviewed focused on the peacefulness and apparent safety of their neighborhood. Dr. Derrick talked about how his family often left the door to their apartment ajar to provide fresh air with no apparent worry for their safety. His parents even felt so safe in the neighborhood that they often sent him outside at a young age to play unaccompanied. He recalled:
The bandstand in Poe Park, 1930s.
In the background is 2544 Valentine Avenue, a walk-up apartment house built in the mid 1920s, in which Peter Derrick grew up.

_The Bronx County Historical Society Collections._

I grew up on the street, which is to say that people sent their kids on the street when they were four or five years old. So I was on Valentine Avenue playing on the street when I was four years old. My mother told me to go out and play; she wouldn’t take me out, she just said go out and play. By five years old I was allowed to cross the street and go to Poe Park; so we would play all sorts of games over at Poe Park.

Dr. Derrick went on to comment about his first job as a paper boy for _The New York Post_ in 1956. He said that on the whole of his paper route there was only one building that had an outside door that was locked. As a paper boy, he remembers this fact vividly because he had to get into that building to deliver the papers. According Derrick, every building in that same area is locked today, including the building that he grew up in.⁷

Derrick’s sentiments were echoed by Kathleen Roby, who grew up in the Parkchester section of The Bronx in the 1950s and 1960s. Mrs. Roby described growing up in “a very, very safe neighborhood.” Like Derrick,
she went on to speak about playing outside and unlocked doors as evidence of the apparent safety and tranquility of the neighborhood. According to Roby, children often left their bikes and scooters unattended in Parkchester with no fear of theft. She also spoke in great detail of the freedom afforded to her as a young child:

In fact, for me, as a first grader going to school, I took a city bus, alone. Nobody took me to the bus stop, I would leave my apartment, wave to my mother, go down the elevator by myself, walk up the steps to the main avenue, wait in line with everybody else, as a first grader, seven years old, with my bus pass and ride the city bus and travel. Now it wasn't a far distance, it was four or five stops but it was from one end of the development to the other. Get off the bus and then walk out of the development another four or five blocks to this Catholic grammar school I went to.8

For both Dr. Derrick and Mrs. Roby, the independence that they were granted as children, and the willingness of their parents to allow them to roam the neighborhood unaccompanied, is the ultimate illustration of the safety of The Bronx in the 1950s and 1960s.

According to many residents of the borough, the apparent peace and safety of The Bronx of the 1950s and 1960s began to fade away in the late 1960s and 1970s. For many white residents of The Bronx, the end of the peacefulness of the '50s and '60s coincided with the arrival of black and Hispanic residents to areas of The Bronx that they had never before inhabited. Black and Hispanic residents, however, were not a new phenomenon in the 1960s and '70s; research has indicated that The Bronx began changing demographically right after World War II. The first influx of black and Hispanic residents was into the South Bronx after World War II, as former residents of Harlem were attracted to The Bronx because of its rent controlled apartments. Many of these blacks and Hispanics moved into neighborhoods such as Morrisania and Hunts Points, following the subway and elevated trains for easier transportation. The arrival of many of these lower income tenants was made easier by the continued construction of public housing projects throughout The Bronx, first begun during the Great Depression.9 Relatively soon after many Hispanics and blacks began to move into The Bronx, a rapid increase in crime and drug use swept the borough. For many white residents, these two phenomena signified the danger that minorities represented to their neighborhoods, prompting one of the greatest migrations of residents in New York history.

As black and Hispanic residents slowly trickled into the South Bronx after World War II, the older white residents noticed the changing demographics. As a resident of the South Bronx, Brian Werner remembers seeing his neighborhood, around 167th Street and Sherman Avenue, change as early as the late 1950s, when there was an influx of new Puerto Rican and black residents. According to Mr. Werner, the increase in minority
residents in The Bronx created a very segregated community, as the new black and Hispanic residents seemed to live in small segregated areas, while the white community continued to live together in the rest of the neighborhood. Mr. Werner noticed this segregation where he lived, as the local junior high school became the unofficial dividing line between the races. On one side of the school, Werner recalled, the local population was between 80-90% white; however just beyond the junior high school, the population of the area changed dramatically and was 80-90% Puerto Rican or black.¹⁰

The changing racial make-up of the community of the South Bronx was coupled with a rise in crime and drug use. For Mr. Werner, it was the increase in crime that he remembers most vividly. The increase in crime seemed to begin slowly, but before long Werner describes how it was considered unsafe to walk through the park at night to go to Yankee Stadium and was even threatened with a knife by a classmate and mugged on the Grand Concourse. Werner felt, however, that evidence of this rise in crime was most apparent with the frequent use of so-called “zip guns” which he says were frequently carried by Puerto Rican gangs. Gun violence even came to touch the life of Werner personally as he witnessed the shooting of a classmate while in school. He says:

> When I was in junior high school we had an incident where these kids got a hold of a rifle and there was a kid shot right in my class two seats in back of me, they actually fired a gun from the roof across the street. They weren’t deliberately trying to hit a person, the shades were drawn, they couldn’t really see who they were aiming at... it was front page all over the news, this woman, Eleanor Kaplan, this girl, I remember. She was literally two seats in back of me, we were taking an English test and she was shot; luckily she was okay.

While the shooting of Eleanor Kaplan was apparently not intentional, examples of this type of violence, including Werner’s own mugging on the Grand Concourse, prompted Werner and his family to move from the South Bronx to the Kingsbridge section of The Bronx in the mid-1960s.¹¹

The rise in crime in the South Bronx began in the early 1950s, but by the 1960s, areas of predominantly Hispanic and black concentrations had slipped into a state of seemingly perpetual violence, drug use, and gang warfare. As former Hunts Point resident and later Secretary of State Colin Powell recalled, his neighborhood went “from gang fights to gang wars... from marijuana to heroin.”¹²

While crime was on the rise throughout the city, the increasing numbers in The Bronx were astounding. For example, the number of “reported assaults in the borough increased from 998 in 1960 to 4,256 in 1969.” The trend of increased crime was also apparent in burglaries as the number of reported incidents rose from 1,765 in 1960 to 29,276 in 1969
in the South Bronx alone. For many residents of the South Bronx, however, the increase in crime reached its peak in the late 1960s and 1970s, when gangs seemed to have complete control of the South Bronx and apartment buildings began to burn throughout the area. By the early 1970s, gangs such as the Black Spades, the Turbans, and the Savage Nomads seemed to control the streets of the South Bronx both day and night.

In addition to the gang violence, residents and business owners began to watch their properties burn at a rapid pace, as landlords began to burn buildings in order to turn a profit from insurance companies. Many whites throughout The Bronx felt that this physical destruction of the South Bronx represented the beginning of the deterioration of the borough. By 1974, the entirety of Charlotte Street area in the South Bronx, and the majority of the buildings on the surrounding streets, had burned and there had been an estimated 33,465 fires in the South Bronx. Whole areas of the South Bronx had essentially been burned to the ground and residents and city officials were at a loss as to how to stop it. An investigation by The Bronx Arson Task Force in 1974 confirmed that the fires were being set by paid arsonists as part of an insurance conspiracy, however, it was difficult to hold any one person responsible the arsonists often refused to name their employers. The chaos reached its peak in 1977 when a July blackout brought a dramatic increase in crime, looting, and arson. In September of that same year, the burning of The Bronx, seen from a blimp over the Stadium, was televised and commented on by sports announcer Howard Cosell as the Yankees played in the 1977 World Series.

While the changes in the South Bronx may not have been recognized by most of the country until 1977, by then most of the borough was well aware of the deterioration of the South Bronx. Residents of the Northern Bronx, like Mrs. Roby and Elvira Werner, were aware of the increased violence, drug use, and acts of arson occurring on a daily basis in the southern part of the borough. Both Roby and Werner were warned of the area by their family. Yet, because of their jobs in the healthcare field, they both wound up working in some of the most dangerous sections of the South Bronx during the 1970s.

Mrs. Werner spent several months working in the South Bronx in 1974 and 1975, as she finished her nursing clinical at Morrisania Hospital. Morrisania was one of the areas of the South Bronx that had been hit the hardest by gang violence and arson and Werner's family feared for her safety while she conducted her clinical. According to Werner, her family always seemed to have "geographic borders" in their minds that dictated which areas and neighborhoods were safe to be in. As neighborhoods throughout The Bronx began to change, Werner says the so-called "geographic borders" of the approved areas also changed and her family was greatly concerned when her clinical took her into one of the so-called dangerous areas. The fear was so great that Werner's then-boyfriend often
accompanied her to her community health clinical where she had to do outreach medical care in the community surrounding Morrisania Hospital. Her boyfriend would drive her to her clinical sites and would wait for her outside in his car because he was afraid of her walking alone in the community.  

Elvira Werner's family and boyfriend's fears were not isolated. Kathleen Roby also experienced concerns from her friends and family as she began to commute through the South Bronx for school, and later when she worked in the South Bronx. Much like Werner, Roby was taught by her family and friends that there were certain areas that were acceptable and safe for her to travel through and other areas that she was advised to avoid at all costs. After Roby graduated from high school and began to venture outside of Parkchester for the first time as an independent adult, she had to travel through the neighborhoods that she had been warned of throughout her teens to attend Hunter College and later, New York University. Roby recalled a sense of fear on the subway as it stopped at stations like Hunts Point Avenue, Brook Avenue (at 138th Street), and Third Avenue, all of which she says, she had been "ingrained from hearing people say, 'they're bad neighborhoods.'" Her friends and family began to worry even more when she graduated from New York University with a degree in
physical therapy and was hired at Misericordia Hospital on 233rd Street in the Northeast Bronx. While at the time Misericordia was not in a section that was considered extremely dangerous, Roby was quickly sent down to Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx, because of labor shortages in the emergency room.

According to Roby, the violence in the neighborhood was apparent from the start as Lincoln's emergency room often had patients who had suffered gunshot wounds. For her, the violence of the South Bronx was epitomized in an experience she had in the physical therapy room of Lincoln Hospital in which rival gang members were receiving physical therapy because of paralyzing gunshot wounds. Roby tried to provide physical therapy for these teenage boys but was unable to because they were trying to attack each other in their wheelchairs. Even with paralyzing and permanent injuries, these teenage boys remained focused on hurting members of rival gangs.

The increase in violence and change in neighborhoods was not isolated to the South Bronx and it was not long before Dr. Derrick, Mrs. Werner, and Mrs. Roby noticed that their neighborhoods were also changing. In the 1970s, many of the neighborhoods beyond the South Bronx that had been considered “safe” in the 1950s and 1960s began to experience rising crime and drug rates. While the fires that plagued the South Bronx never traveled to the rest of the borough, white residents, like those interviewed, began to experience or hear of petty crimes, like robberies and muggings, which often seemed to signal a changing neighborhood. As the 70s progressed, Derrick began to notice changes in crime and safety in his Fordham neighborhood. For Derrick, examples of how the neighborhood changed were seen in the mugging of his mother near a subway entrance and the robbery of her home. These examples of petty crime prompted him and his family to move his mother to another section of The Bronx. Additionally troubling for Derrick and his family was the treatment that his sister endured at the local public high school. Even though Dr. Derrick had attended the same school just 14 years before, he says that the environment of the school had completely changed and his sister was harassed to the point that she left the public school and had to enroll in a private school. The increase in petty crime and harassment experienced by members of his family signaled that his neighborhood was not the same one that he had grown up in during the 50s and 60s.

Instances of petty crime like those experienced by Derrick's mother in the 1970s spread throughout The Bronx, as both Elvira Werner and Kathleen Roby also commented on an increase of petty theft in the 1970s. Werner first remembered crime touching her neighborhood in the mid-70s when there were a series of three break-ins on her block. Werner's community was composed of single family homes and the rapid succession of break-ins frightened many of the long term residents.
Roby also commented on a rise in petty crime in the mid-to-late 1970s. During this time, her mother was mugged twice while going to the neighborhood laundromat and there was a rash of petty crime in her Parkchester neighborhood that included the theft of children's bikes, scooters, and even the heavy mahogany doors to the apartment house. For many white residents of The Bronx, these instances of often non-violent crime were a marked departure from The Bronx of the 1950s and 1960s in which children were allowed to play outside unaccompanied and apartment doors were left open for ventilation.

The rise in petty crime throughout The Bronx was often accompanied by a rise in drug use. According to former New York City Police Detective and Parkchester resident Vincent Montemarano, drugs were "running rampant" throughout The Bronx in the 1970s. Mr. Montemarano, who worked in The Bronx in the narcotics division of the NYPD during the 1970s and 80s, said that heroin was the drug of choice during the 1970s and was easily found on street corners, particularly throughout the South Bronx. As a police officer fighting against the abundance of drugs making their way into the borough, Montemarano was assigned to go after the big drug dealers who were responsible for bringing in large shipments of heroin and later, cocaine. The police often focused on the larger drug rings because the neighborhood drug dealer was often a drug addict himself, selling drugs to support his own habit.

Montemarano believes drugs and crime went hand in hand, as many of those addicted to drugs committed acts of petty crime to support their drug habit. As with crime, early drug use was first seen in the South Bronx but before long had spread throughout the borough. Other interviewees, such as Elvira Werner and Kathleen Roby commented on the increase of drug use in their neighborhoods. Werner remembers seeing syringes in the street as heroin use became more widespread and rumors that neighborhood stores were actually fronts for drug dealers. Similarly, Roby recalled rumors of neighbors who were addicted to drugs; however the details were rarely talked about in public.

The deterioration of The Bronx, seen with the increased rates of crime and drug use, was exacerbated in the eyes of many residents by a decline in services and building quality in apartment buildings throughout The Bronx. This trend first began in the South Bronx and is often seen as the first step to the organized arson of the late 1960s and 1970s, as landlords began to limit services because they did not feel that they were making an appropriate profit. As a result of the decline in services, many buildings began to fall into disrepair. This was a trend commented on by all interview subjects who lived in apartment buildings. Derrick, Roby, and Montemarano in particular focused on this change within their apartment buildings. All three recalled that by the late 1960s the electrical wiring in their apartment buildings had gone bad and was not equipped to handle the increasing requirements of new technology. The major item that
caused a problem was air conditioners. As Roby explained, when her apartment house in Parkchester was built there were no air conditioners, so the building's original wiring could not handle the electrical load required to run an air conditioner. Montemarano and Derrick's buildings also suffered from the same problem, and all three commented on how the landlords would not change wiring because they felt as though they would not recoup the cost. The wiring in Dr. Derrick's childhood apartment building on Valentine Avenue was so weak at one point that residents could not even use toasters because it would blow a fuse.

The decline in the physical condition of the buildings was not the only change; services offered by the landlords and management companies also began to be limited. Derrick recalls simple services like garbage pick-up within building and the washing and waxing of the floors becoming less and less frequent, until it stopped all together. Roby recalls the end to services like the daily polishing of the floors, doors, and nameplates in buildings throughout the Parkchester complex. While these changes may seem small, when joined by the weakened structure of the buildings and rising drug use and crime rates, many white long-term residents of The Bronx began to feel as though their neighborhoods had changed for good.
Many of the white ethnic residents who had called The Bronx home in the 1950s and watched it change in the 1960s and 70s were quick to blame Hispanics and blacks for the apparent downward spiral that their neighborhoods were experiencing. As the South Bronx burned, many black and Hispanic communities in the borough were lost or significantly damaged. The South Bronx had represented a stronghold of both black and Hispanic communities since their large migration into the borough after World War II. By 1969, however, before the turmoil of the 1970s and the 1977 blackout riots, a quarter of all The Bronx’s rental units were deemed "dilapidated or deteriorating" by city officials. Many of these units were in the South Bronx and as a result, the Hispanic and black residents that had called this area home for almost 20 years were forced to look for new homes and communities as early as 1970. Many of these individuals and families began to migrate north within The Bronx, into communities that had typically been strongholds of white ethnic families, particularly Jewish, Irish, and Italian families.

At the same time that these families moved into white neighborhoods beyond the South Bronx, crime and drug use began to creep into these same areas. For many white ethnicics who had seen the safety of their neighborhood disrupted with the arrival of these new minority groups, the cause for The Bronx’s new problems was obvious. Many whites began to blame the new Hispanic and black residents for the increase in crime and drugs. While this answer to the question of crime was seemingly obvious for many, in reality, today many historians, and even former white residents themselves, recognize that the causes of the increase in crime and drug use were extremely complicated and had a great deal more to do with economics than race.

The 1970s was a rough economic time for the city of New York and The Bronx in particular. The economic problems began early after World War II but would not be felt until years later. "Between 1947 and 1976, the city lost 500,000 factory jobs," and after 1960 civil service jobs were opened up to those who did not live within the city limits, allowing increased job competition within the city as suburban residents could now apply. The influx of poor minority families in the 1950s and 1960s were thus met with a deteriorating and poor job market and limited employment opportunities. The declining job market continued into the 1970s when approximately "300 companies employing 10,000 workers went out of business or moved out of The Bronx" between 1970 and 1977. Many of these businesses were industrially based and the work force was dominated by minorities, low income, and unskilled workers. By 1976 the long-term economic problems had taken their toll and the mayor's office estimated that between "25-30% of the city's eligible work force [was] unemployed." The economic problems seen in The Bronx were not isolated occurrences, and by 1975 the entire city was engulfed in an economic crisis. It
was in this year that it became public knowledge that the city had been paying its bills using borrowed money and its capital was subsequently frozen. This economic action had left the city penniless and unable to pay its employees. In order to prevent the collapse of the city's government, the federal government in Washington and the state government in Albany facilitated a transfer of the city's economic power to independent bureaus and agencies who, it was hoped, would monitor the funds of the city in a more objective way than they had previously been. A report later issued by the Congressional Budget Office would claim that the primary source of the economic burden that resulted in the 1975 collapse was the influx of poor black and Hispanic residents after World War II, who often turned to welfare after businesses left The Bronx or closed and unemployment rates soared.\textsuperscript{30}

The number of minority families living on welfare in The Bronx was astounding. During the city's financial crisis in the 1970s, the mayor's office projected that approximately "one in every three residents" in the Fordham section of The Bronx was on welfare. As the economic crisis worsened and more and more city residents applied for welfare, particularly in The Bronx, the city simply reached its financial breaking point.\textsuperscript{31} With welfare payments not coming through and unemployment on the rise, some of the poor turned to crime to solve their economic problems and drugs to escape. As a result, crime and drug rates skyrocketed at the same time that the borough was plunged into economic despair. Because many of those in the lower income bracket in The Bronx were black or Hispanic, many of the white residents of The Bronx made connections between race and the rise in crime and drug use throughout the borough. It was the economic turmoil, however, that was the real motivation behind crime and drug use, not race.

At the time the assumption was made by many older white residents that there was a direct connection between race, crime, and drug use. But today some former white residents of The Bronx recognize that the economy was the real source of the borough’s problems in the 1970s. Vincent Montemarano, a former resident of Parkchester who no longer resides in The Bronx, commented on the connection between the borough’s economic downturn and the rise of crime and drug use. According to Montemarano, proof of the connection can be seen in the fact that the city’s crime rates did not begin to decrease again until the mid-1990s when Rudy Giuliani was elected as mayor. Montemarano is quick to clarify that the decrease in crime was not the work of Rudy Giuliani alone, but that the economic turmoil that had gripped the city in the 1970s and early 1980s, followed by the national recession of the 1990s, was beginning to ebb. Montemarano believes that the decrease in crime can be attributed to the rising standard of living and economic opportunities throughout the city in the late 1990s, when the city’s economy was no longer suffering.\textsuperscript{32}
Statistics do show a relationship between the crime rates and the economy. The crime rate in New York City rose consistently throughout the time period between the late 1960s and early 1990s. The city’s murder rate reached its peak in 1990 when there were 2,245 homicides. That number was astronomical when compared with the number of murders in 1963, the first year when data was recorded, of 548. Between 1963 and 1990 the numbers rose annually until they reached their peak during the economic recession of 1990 and 1991. New York City’s homicide rates then began to decline throughout the mid-to-late 1990s as the nation entered into a time of economic prosperity, ultimately reaching the same levels of 1963 in 2007. Kathleen Roby and Peter Derrick also offered explanations similar to those provided by Montemarano. All three recognized, however, that while the economy was most likely the actual cause of the increasing crime and drug rates throughout The Bronx, in the eyes of many of the borough’s white population, race was seen as a major cause of the increased crime and drug rates.

The tension between whites and minorities was also exacerbated by an apparent culture clash when many blacks and Hispanics began moving beyond the South Bronx. Many of the white ethnic groups that had been living in The Bronx in the 1960s had been there for years and seemed to live similar lifestyles. When new Hispanic groups and African Americans moved beyond the South Bronx, seeking to avoid the crime and drug use that had already seized the South Bronx, however, their lifestyles often seemed to clash with those that were already there. These cultural differences often created a tension between the new minorities and the older white residents that only exacerbated the suspicions many whites already had regarding the perceived connection between race and crime rates.

Derrick and Roby both commented upon the apparent culture clash that was felt in their Bronx neighborhoods when minorities began to move in. Derrick first noticed the racial demographic of his Fordham neighborhood changing in the early 1970s when he returned from two and a half years in the Peace Corps. It was at this time that he moved into an apartment house next to another one with several Hispanic families on University Avenue, near Fordham Road. While Derrick did not attribute any crime or violence to these Hispanic residents in the neighborhood, he did comment on the different cultural backgrounds that separated the new Hispanics from the old white ethnic groups that had up to then occupied the neighborhood. In particular, he was struck by the loud music that his neighbors played at all hours of the night and their tendency to throw garbage out of their windows. For Derrick, a graduate student at the time, the difference in lifestyles between him and his new neighbors became too much, and he eventually moved out of the apartment on University Avenue because of the behavior of his Hispanic neighbors.

Like Derrick, Kathleen Roby also noticed cultural differences between
the new Hispanic and black neighbors in her Parkchester neighborhood in the 1970s. For Roby, the differences between the behavior of the new minority groups and the old Jewish, Italian, and Irish residents was clear, especially given the unique rules that governed her Parkchester community. Parkchester was originally privately owned by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, and the company instituted very specific rules that the residents of the community were expected to follow. These rules covered everything from not walking on the grass to parking and noise regulations. The company even employed a private police force to ensure that the rules were being followed. For Roby, who grew up being told to listen to this private police force and follow the development’s rules with the same seriousness as the city’s police and laws, the ease with which new residents disregarded and violated these rules was shocking.

As new minority residents moved into the Parkchester developments in the 1970s, Roby claims that they often did not follow the strict rules of the development and at times felt that there were some that even flaunted violations of the rules, making no secret of violating restrictions on owning washing machines and even destroying or damaging apartments in order to get a larger one. Mrs. Roby and her family, along with many other
whites who had lived in the development for many years, were shocked by the behavior of the new, often minority, residents who seemed to have no regard for the rules and the lifestyle that had been established long ago by Metropolitan Life. As a result, the tension and anger felt by many whites towards the minorities grew, as they felt as though their lifestyles and apartment buildings were being disrespected.36

The suspicions regarding the connection between crime, drug use and race and the apparent cultural clash that developed between the new minority residents and the old white residents drove many whites to leave The Bronx as the borough was seen to deteriorate in the 1970s. Nearly half a million white residents left The Bronx between 1970 and 1980, as indicated by the 1980 U. S. Census.37 Many of those interviewed left during this time period and cite the increase in crime and drug use as the prime motivating factor for their departure. Brian Werner, Elvira Werner, and Kathleen Roby all moved out of The Bronx during the 1960s and 1970s, and describe crime and the changing neighborhood as major influences in their decision. According to Elvira Werner, her predominantly white ethnic neighborhood in the Northeast Bronx began to change racially in the 1970s as more and more white families moved out, particularly after there were a series of break-ins on her block. Mrs. Werner and her siblings left The Bronx in the mid-1970s but her parents remained in their single-family home until the 1980s. Like Mr. and Mrs. Werner, Kathleen Roby left Parkchester as she saw crime rates increase throughout The Bronx. For Roby, the neighborhoods around the hospitals that she worked were a motivating factor in her decision to leave. Mrs. Roby reported feeling “unsafe” as she was working night shifts and had to drive through what she felt were dangerous neighborhoods alone at night. In order to protect herself, she began running red lights because she was afraid of being stopped for too long in certain sections of The Bronx. After her tires were stolen repeatedly while at work, Mrs. Roby moved to Long Island in 1980, where her sister already resided.38

While the push of the crime and drug rates certainly contributed to the large numbers of whites that fled The Bronx in the 1970s, there was also a pull effect that had a great effect on the changing racial demographics of The Bronx between the early 1950s and the late 1970s. Following World War II, the growth of the suburbs and the building of many new highways, as well as the existence of older commuter rail lines that allowed people to commute to work in New York City from the suburbs, prompted many white residents of The Bronx and other boroughs of the city to move to Long Island, Westchester, and other suburbs in search of the American dream: a private single-family home. The opportunity to own a private home was something that became a real possibility for many working and middle-class families in the years immediately following World War II. Following the war, there was a suburban housing boom, as developers sought to build in previously sparsely populated areas. In the metropolitan
New York area, these areas included Long Island and Westchester County, as well as northern New Jersey. The ultimate example of this new development was Levittown, Long Island, a tract community developed immediately after the war. Homes in new communities like Levittown were relatively inexpensive. For example, in 1948, the going rate for a home in Levittown was $8,000, which, if paid for using a low-interest 30-year mortgage, resulted in a monthly payment of approximately $38. These prices were made even more affordable with new financing that was first offered in the late 1940s. The Federal Housing Authority and the Veterans' Administration programs helped many first-time home buyers acquire mortgages at low rates which increased the demand for this new housing. These low prices and the transportation infrastructure that allowed many to keep their jobs in the city enabled many renters to become property owners for the first time.

The "pull" of the suburbs had a major effect on the demographics of The Bronx and other boroughs of New York City. Census data and analysis of the changing demographics of the city and its surrounding counties indicated that there were significant changes going on within The Bronx and New York City as a whole. According to a 1961 study on the New York Metropolitan region, New York City lost approximately 1.4% of its population between 1950 and 1960. Yet while the City's population declined, the counties surrounding the five boroughs were experiencing a population boom. The closest counties to the city, including Nassau, Westchester, and Richmond (Staten Island, within New York City) counties in New York and Bergen, Essex, Passaic, and Union counties in New Jersey, experienced a 35% population growth in that same 10 year period. Beyond that, in what the study designated as the "outer ring" counties, there was a 56% population growth. Included in this outer ring were Suffolk, Rockland, Orange, Putnam, and Dutchess counties in New York; Morris, Somerset, Middlesex, and Monmouth counties in New Jersey; and Fairfield County in Connecticut. Some of these counties experienced particularly high rates of population growth, like Nassau County. Between 1950 and 1960, the population of Nassau County increased by approximately 93%, from 673,000 residents in 1950 to 1.3 million residents in 1960. Incidentally, Nassau County is where three of the former Bronx residents interviewed now reside: Brian and Elvira Werner and Kathleen Roby.

Within The Bronx, many white residents chose not just to leave for Long Island and Westchester County, but also to re-locate to other areas of The Bronx. One of the largest forces in this change was the opening of Co-op City in the late 1960s. Co-op City was built on the northern border of The Bronx, and was advertised as the best of both metropolitan and suburban life in that the apartments in the complex were still located in The Bronx yet they were privately owned, not rented, and like Parkchester, had their own security force. Co-op City opened approximately 15,500 apartments in 35 buildings throughout the 1960s, opening
fully in 1971. For many white residents of The Bronx, Co-op City offered a solution to their problems. It provided private ownership and was a protected enclave within The Bronx. The opening of Co-op City prompted thousands of families to leave other areas of The Bronx, particularly the South Bronx, where white residents were eager to leave the deteriorating neighborhoods.

For residents of the South Bronx who did not leave for Co-op City, like Brian Werner, the opening of new apartment complexes represented the end of the white majority in the South Bronx. Werner felt that nearly half of the white population of the South Bronx moved into Co-op City and as a result, more and more minorities moved into the neighborhood to occupy the now vacant apartments. Other former residents from The Bronx also commented on the effect of Co-op City on The Bronx. Vincent Montemarano remarked that many white residents considered it a "Utopia." When he and his wife made the decision to move out of Parkchester in 1969, however, they dismissed the idea of moving to Co-op City because of their desire to own a single-family home.

The "pull" to the suburbs and Co-op City and the "push" of the increased minority presence within The Bronx and increased crime rates worked together to cause much of the white population to move out of The Bronx by 1980. These two forces, the "push" and "pull" worked together to change the racial demographics of The Bronx. While many historians and former residents of The Bronx often point to the increased crime rates and the presence of minorities as what prompted whites to leave the borough, it should be noted that the white population began to leave the borough years before. This early movement of whites to suburbia, between the end of World War II and the 1960s, provided empty apartments for many minorities to move into throughout The Bronx.

This became particularly important in the mid-1960s and the 1970s when the minority stronghold of the South Bronx began to rapidly deteriorate, and many Hispanics and blacks left the South Bronx for the same reasons that whites ultimately left The Bronx entirely: increased crime and drug use. Because many of the white residents of the South Bronx left first, going to the suburbs or Co-op City, and there were already some minorities present, this section of the borough was the first to experience the influx of minorities as whites left, leaving room for new residents. This "push" and "pull" effect worked together to cause the racial change in The Bronx. This mutual relationship, moreover, was present from as early as the late 1950s and early 1960s, when it was noted in a 1961 study on the changing population of the city that "the social forces which motivate low-income families to move into the central city also function to drive the middle-income families, long-time residents of the city, into the suburbs."

The changing racial demographics of The Bronx created a great deal of tension between whites and minorities. The stories told by the different
groups, however, often reflect a similar understanding of the changes and the time period of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Many of the sentiments and explanations of the changing Bronx offered by white residents are confirmed by black and Hispanic residents who lived in the borough at the same time. Like the white residents interviewed, black residents of The Bronx have commented on the safety present throughout the borough in the 1950s and the deterioration of the borough as crime and drug rates increased. Jacque Smith Bonneau moved to the South Bronx in the mid-1940s as part of the first major migration of African Americans to the borough and, like many of the white residents interviewed, commented on the safety of The Bronx in the 1950s and spoke of leaving the apartment door open on warm days. As time progressed, however, Bonneau reported an increase in drug use in the neighborhood and a rise in crime. According to Bonneau, these factors made people in the neighborhood move — first to Co-op City and then to other sections of The Bronx. These changes began very slowly with drug use and robberies and before long, Bonneau said that gangs had entered the area and made it unsafe to walk alone from the subway. Bonneau eventually moved within The Bronx to escape the violence.46 The story offered by Jacque Smith Bonneau echoes those of white residents of The Bronx like Peter Derrick and Kathleen Roby, who also commented on the safety of their neighborhoods growing up. Roby and Elvira and Brian Werner who also discussed the desire to move when drug use and violence became more widespread in their neighborhoods.

The sentiments offered by Jacque Smith Bonneau were shared by many other African Americans who were asked to comment on their lives in The Bronx during this time period. Like Bonneau, Hetty Fox, who moved to The Bronx in 1940, commented on the gradual increase in crime and drug use.47 Also like Bonneau, Joan Tyson Fortune, a former teacher, spoke of Co-op City and the large amount of people who moved there as the apartments opened and fear of crime and drug use spread.48 Many of the interviews echo similar experiences and rationale for the changes in The Bronx throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Additionally, the solution to the problems of drugs and crime offered was also the same regardless of race: moving. The difference between white and African American accounts, however, is in the locations that each choose to move to when the borough changed. African Americans like Smith, Fox, and Fortune, chose to stay within The Bronx when their neighborhoods began to deteriorate and eventually, burned. These individuals were not alone in their decisions. There are several interviews that have been compiled by The Bronx African American History Project that demonstrate this trend. Among them are interviews with Daphne Moss49 and Ronald and Sara Davis.50 Many moved to the Northeast section of The Bronx, the Fordham section of the borough or Parkchester. These are the same areas that were eventually vacated by whites like Elvira Werner in the Northeast Bronx, Derrick’s family in the Fordham section of The Bronx,
and Kathleen Roby and Vincent Montemarano in Parkchester.

Today, all of those interviewed have left their childhood neighborhoods in The Bronx and only Derrick remains in the borough. Many, like Kathleen Roby and Elvira Werner, feel much removed from their former communities and rarely go back. Mrs. Werner feels as though it is not "the same community that I knew growing up — the flavor really changed from being the safe neighborhood we used to know." Peter Derrick spoke about how while the neighborhood physically looks the same, the atmosphere is different. He said:

Well I go to Poe Park, I say to myself, well isn't this funny to sit here. I can see all the buildings that are still there — there were very few burnouts in that area. They're all the same apartment houses, but they're occupied by different ethnic groups and different cultural groups. I used to play stickball in this park. It's safe to sit here — I don't feel unsafe sitting here. I can walk around the neighborhood and all the physical structures are the same, but the whole world has changed. And it's funny because I live two miles away, I live in Riverdale. I can drive to my old neighborhood in less than 10 minutes.

Roby and Montemarano, however, view their old Parkchester neighborhood differently than Mrs. Werner and Derrick. While the racial demographic of Parkchester has changed in the same way that Mrs. Werner and Derrick's neighborhoods did, both Roby and Montemarano commented on how the spirit and pride in Parkchester that was lost in the 1970s and 1980s has been revived as professionals such as doctors and lawyers have moved into the area and purchased their apartments. Roby feels as though home ownership has forced today's residents to have a stake in the community that was lost in the 1970s when Parkchester's white residents left the neighborhood.

The white flight that first began because of "pull," or lure, of the suburbs and home ownership and was then exacerbated by the "push" of crime, drug use, and changing racial demographics, completely changed the racial make-up of The Bronx. In 1960, there were approximately 1.25 million white residents in The Bronx but in 2000, only 40 years later, there were only 398,000. This number, moreover, includes white Hispanics, or Latinos. In 2000, the number of people that the Census calls "White, not Hispanic or Latino" was 194,000, or 14.6% of the borough total. Most non-Hispanic whites living in The Bronx in 1960 had left by 2000, taking the white population from the role of a strong majority to that of a distinct minority within the borough.

The "white flight" that forever changed The Bronx is still present today. Changing economic times and racial tensions are causing many of those who left The Bronx and other New York City boroughs for the suburbs to consider leaving their newer strongholds today, as more minorities
are entering their neighborhoods. Discussion of white flight in the suburbs of Nassau County has been particularly prevalent in recent years. In fact, Kathleen Roby, a resident of Valley Stream, commented on the current pressure being applied by her fellow neighbors to sell to white families in order to "protect the neighborhood." Many of these same neighbors are former residents of The Bronx and Brooklyn who fled to Nassau County when the racial demographics of their boroughs changed in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.56

It is clear that the effects of white flight are long lasting and given the changing economic times, it is quite possible that we may see a sequel to The Bronx in 1970s in the suburbs, as crime and drug use may escalate as people try to cope and get by in dire economic times. Unfortunately, should we follow the path of The Bronx from the 70s, many whites may again blame race on the deterioration or change in neighborhoods and not the economy and the flight of whites, that provides a place for minorities to move in. It appears as though the "push" and "pull" effect of white flight is still in effect today.

NOTES

1One additional interview of a Jamaican immigrant was also conducted; however because the interviewee, Sharon Cummings, moved to The Bronx in the late 1970s and very young at the time, her interview was not used in this paper.
4The Bronx Data Center.
6Derrick, Dr. Peter. Personal interview. 19 November 2008. The Ogden Nash poem appeared in the July 12, 1930, issue of The New Yorker.
7Derrick.
8Roby, Kathleen. Personal interview. 27 November 2008.
9Gonzalez, 109-111.
10Werner, Brian. Personal interview. 8 November 2008.
11Werner, Brian.
12Powell quoted in Gonzalez, 119.
14Gonzalez, 129.
16Roby.
17Derrick.
18Werner, Elvira.
20Werner, Elvira.
21Roby.

22Roby.
23Montemarano.
24Derrick.
25Derrick.
26Roby.
27Gonzalez, 109-110.
28Jonnes, 199.
29Gonzalez, 118-120.
31Gonzalez, 119.
32Montemarano.
34Derrick, Montemarano, Roby.
35Derrick.
36Roby.
37The Bronx Data Center.
38Werner, Elvira and Brian; Roby.
39Jonnes, 95.
40Gonzalez, 111.
42Gonzalez, 116, 149.
43Werner, Brian.
44Montemarano.
45Tough and MacDonald, 329-331.
47Fox, Hetty. Oral history interview with Dr. Mark Naison, Richard Richardson, and Mark C. Smith, no date. Bronx African American History Project. Transcript at BCHS.
48Fortune, Joan Tyson. Interview, no date. Bronx African American History Project. Transcript at BCHS.
51Werner, Elvira.
52Derrick.
53Montemarano.
54Roby.
56Roby.