CEN
TRO



AFTERLIVES

OF SAN JUAN HILL

A PROFILE OF THE RESIDENTS

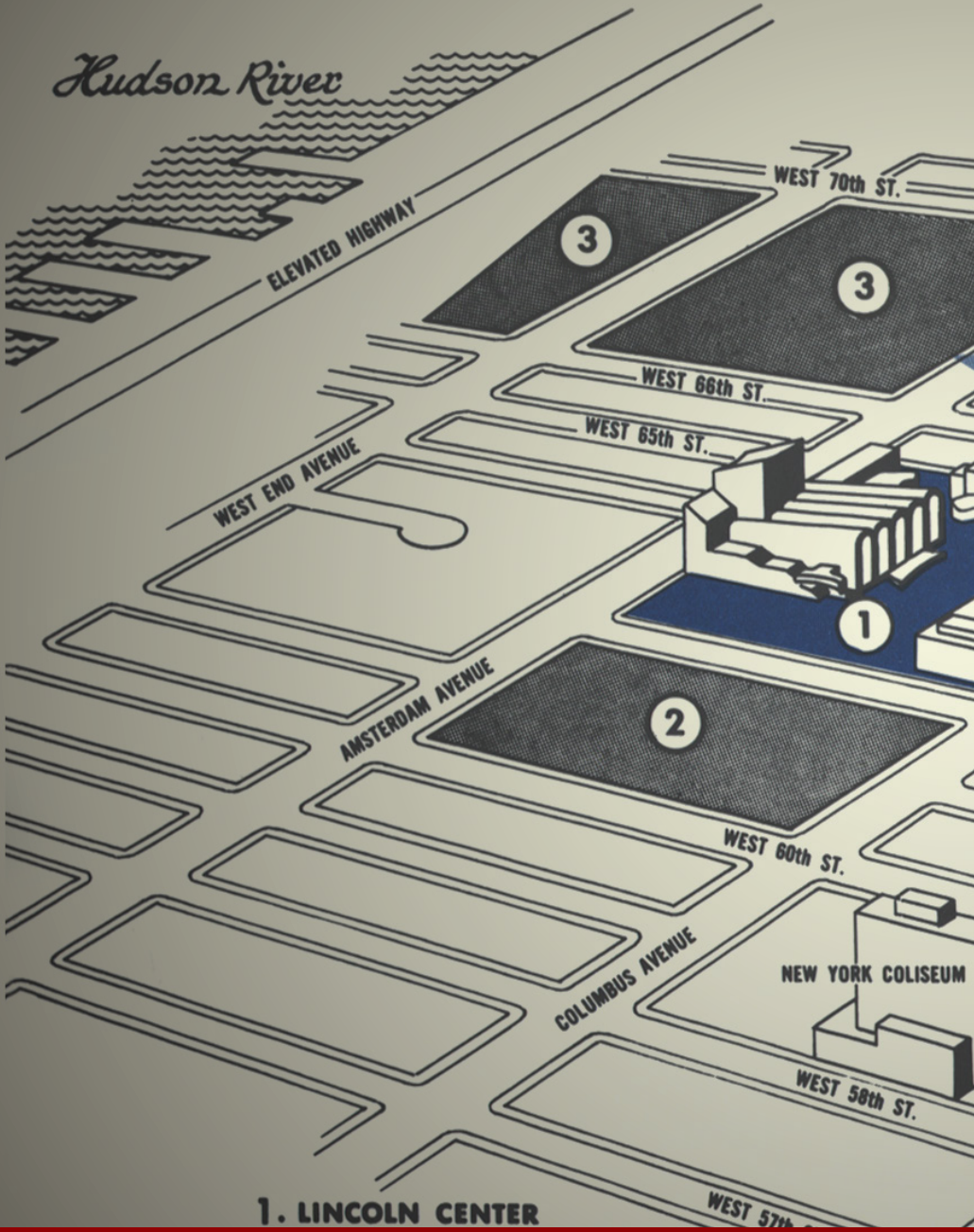


LINCOLN CENTER SITE DURING CONSTRUCTION, VIEWED FROM THE SOUTHEAST.
Stills from the film, Lincoln Center: The Legend Is Born, a public relations tool created by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, 1959.
© Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

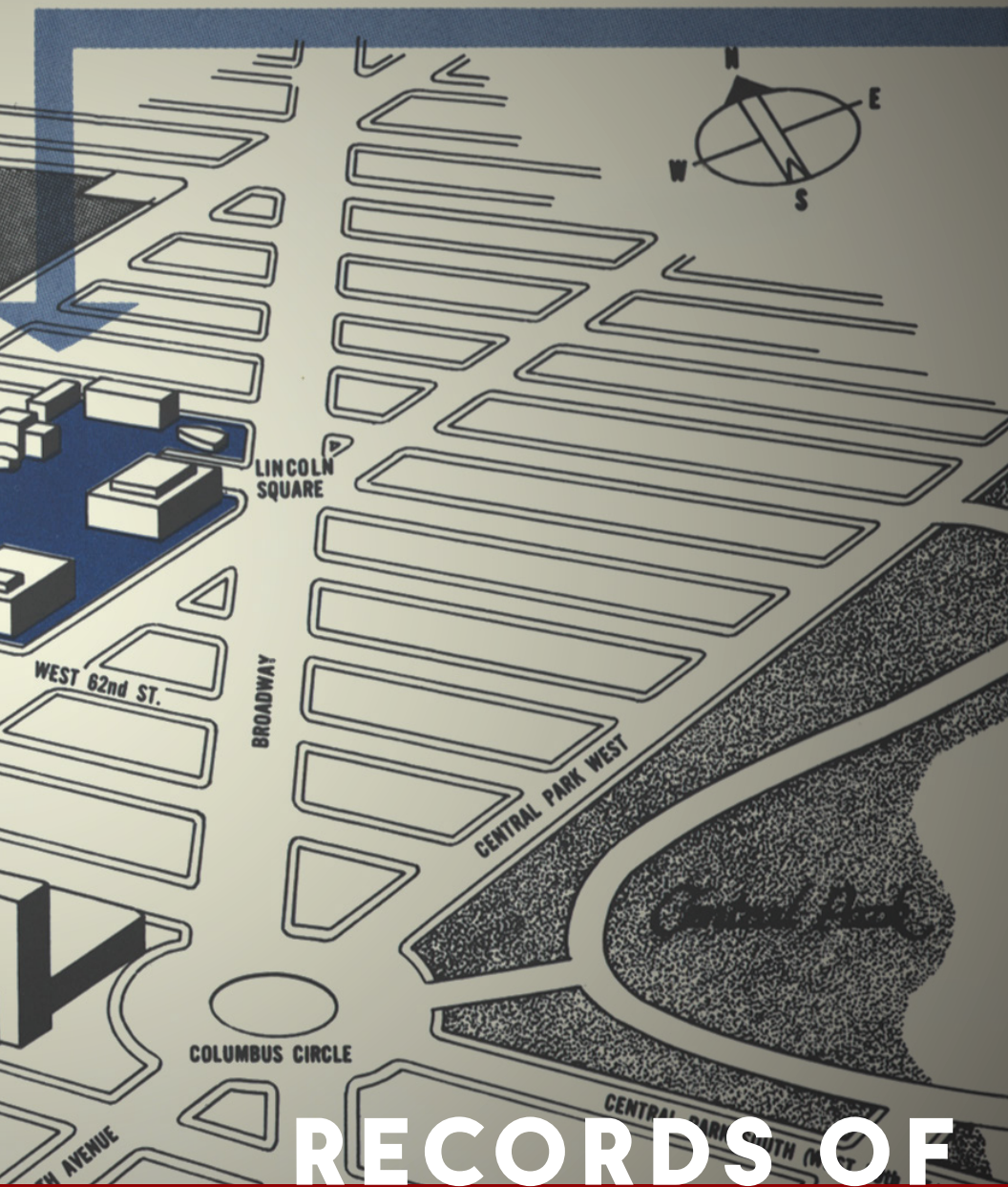


LINCOLN CENTER CONSTRUCTION SITE.

In 1958, an emerging Puerto Rican community was displaced from New York City's Lincoln Square and San Juan Hill neighborhoods to make way for the construction of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and Fordham University. Infamously called a "Puerto Rican Slum" and "the worst slum in New York" by the architect of New York's Urban Renewal Process, Robert Moses, Lincoln Square and San Juan Hill were home to approximately 2,000 Puerto Rican families. Utilizing never-before-seen archival documents made available to CENTRO by the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and other archival materials from that time period, this exhibit delves into the larger history of the Lincoln Square Urban Renewal Project and traces the process through which these families were disrupted and displaced. These records invite us to engage in a necessary reframing of the scripts that bolstered dispossession in the name of development across New York City in the mid-20th century. By delving into the lived experiences of the community's residents, ***AFTERLIVES OF SAN JUAN HILL*** highlights the individual stories of Lincoln Square residents during this pivotal time.



PAGE FROM FUNDRAISING BROCHURE FACTS ON LINCOLN CENTER, 1958.
Courtesy of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts Archives.



RECORDS OF DISPLACEMENT

Personally identifiable information has been redacted to protect individual privacy in accordance with the guidelines of the Society of American Archivists. Race information was not originally gathered or was obscured at an unknown date by unknown parties.

As part of the relocation process, **Braislin, Porter & Wheelock** (BPW), a real estate company, was hired to serve as property managers and relocation agents for both the Lincoln Center and the Fordham University sites. BPW was responsible for supervising management and maintenance of all buildings on the relocation sites. They were also responsible for interviewing families and businesses that would be relocated from the site.

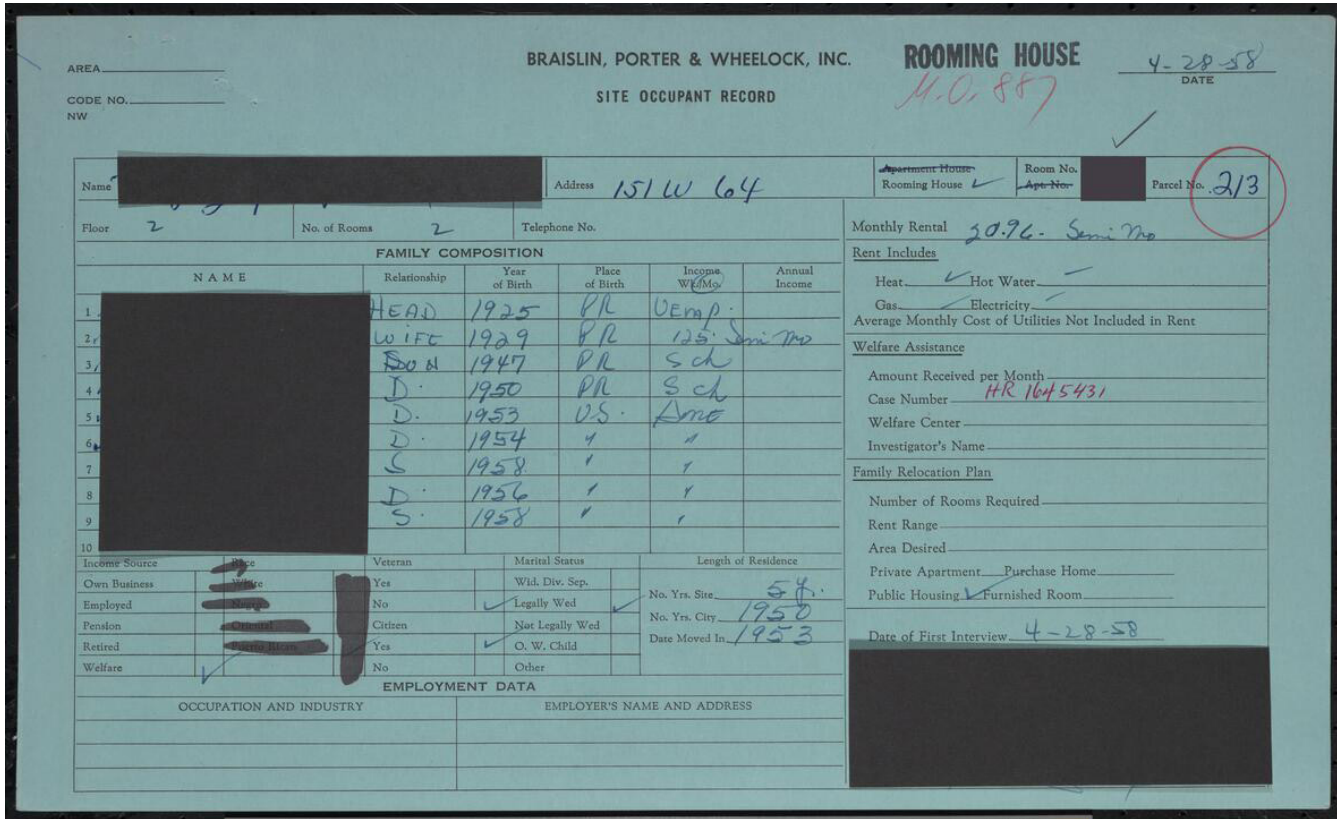
CENTRO was granted access to never-before-seen records from those interviews by the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts Archives.

For over a year, members of CENTRO's Data Hub analyzed a total of

2,130 site occupation records belonging to families in the Lincoln Center site.

Information tabulated and processed for analysis includes:

- FAMILY COMPOSITION
- HOUSING CONDITION
- RELOCATION



BRAISLIN, PORTER & WHEELOCK, INC.

SITE OCCUPANT RECORD

ROOMING HOUSE

M.O. 887

4-28-58
DATE

AREA

CODE NO.
NW

Name [redacted] Address 151 W 64

~~Apartment House~~ Rooming House ✓ Room No. ~~Apt. No.~~ [redacted] Parcel No. 213

Floor 2 No. of Rooms 2 Telephone No.

Monthly Rental 20.96 - Semi Mo

Rent Includes
Heat ✓ Hot Water ✓
Gas ✓ Electricity
Average Monthly Cost of Utilities Not Included in Rent

Welfare Assistance
Amount Received per Month
Case Number HR 1645431
Welfare Center
Investigator's Name

Family Relocation Plan
Number of Rooms Required
Rent Range
Area Desired
Private Apartment Purchase Home
Public Housing ✓ Furnished Room

Date of First Interview 4-28-58

[redacted]

FAMILY COMPOSITION

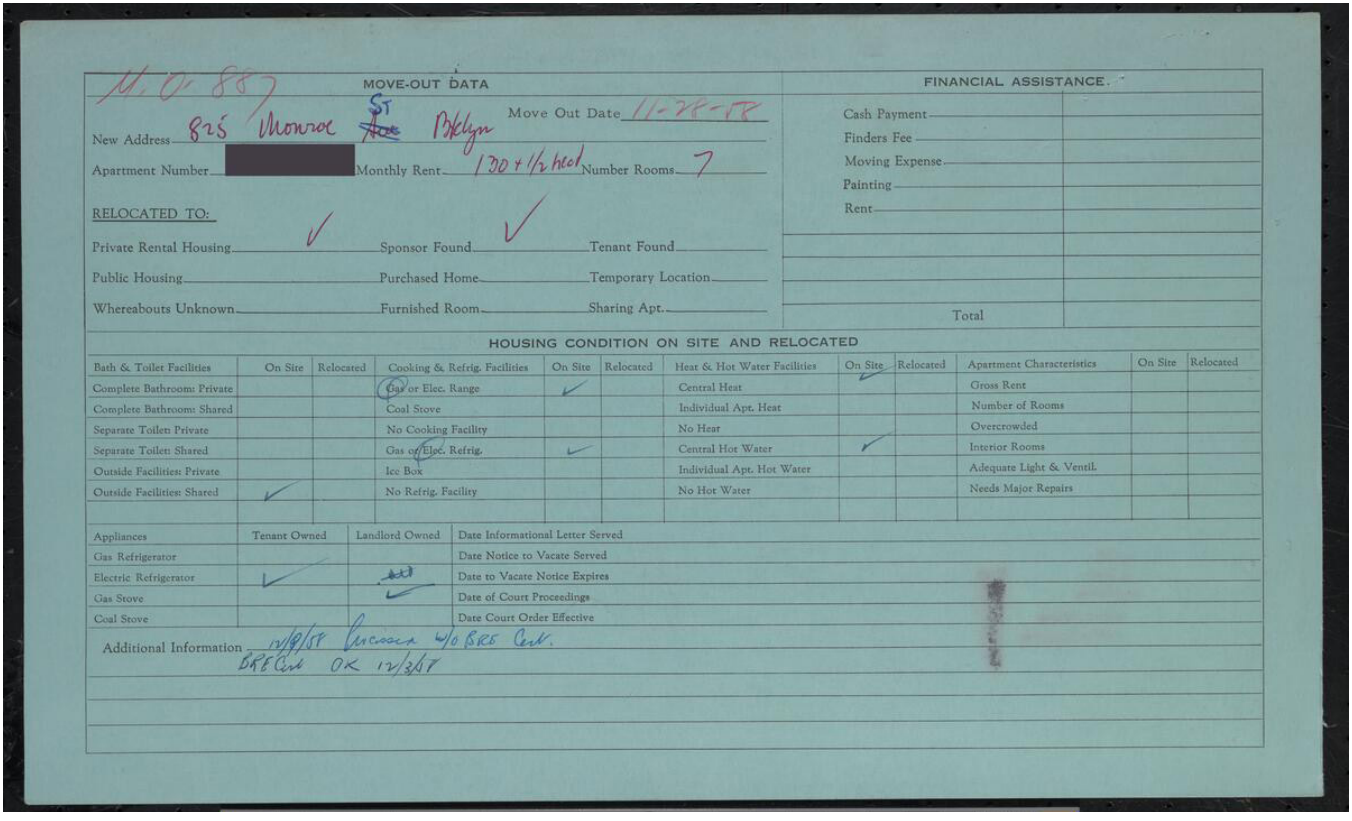
	NAME	Relationship	Year of Birth	Place of Birth	Income Wk/Mo	Annual Income
1	[redacted]	HEAD	1925	PR	Unemp.	
2		WIFE	1929	PR	125. Semi Mo	
3		SON	1947	PR	Sch	
4		D.	1950	PR	Sch	
5		D.	1953	U.S.	Sch	
6		D.	1954	"	"	
7		S	1958	"	"	
8		D.	1956	"	"	
9		S.	1958	"	"	
10						

Income Source	Race	Veteran	Marital Status	Length of Residence
Own Business	White	Yes	Wid. Div. Sep.	
Employed	Negro	No ✓	Legally Wed ✓	No. Yrs. Site 5 ½
Pension	Oriental	Citizen	Not Legally Wed	No. Yrs. City 1950
Retired	Puerto Rican	Yes	O. W. Child ✓	Date Moved In 1953
Welfare ✓		No	Other	

EMPLOYMENT DATA

OCCUPATION AND INDUSTRY	EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS

BRAISLIN, PORTER & WHEELOCK SITE OCCUPATION RECORD FOR 151 WEST 64TH STREET, 1958 (FRONT).
Courtesy of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts Archives.



M. O. 887

MOVE-OUT DATA

New Address 825 Monroe St Brklyn Move Out Date 11-28-58

Apartment Number [redacted] Monthly Rent 130 + 1/2 heat Number Rooms 7

RELOCATED TO:

Private Rental Housing ✓ Sponsor Found ✓ Tenant Found

Public Housing Purchased Home Temporary Location

Whereabouts Unknown Furnished Room Sharing Apt.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

Cash Payment	
Finders Fee	
Moving Expense	
Painting	
Rent	
Total	

HOUSING CONDITION ON SITE AND RELOCATED

Bath & Toilet Facilities	On Site	Relocated	Cooking & Refrig. Facilities	On Site	Relocated	Heat & Hot Water Facilities	On Site	Relocated	Apartment Characteristics	On Site	Relocated
Complete Bathroom: Private			Gas or Elec. Range	✓		Central Heat			Gross Rent		
Complete Bathroom: Shared			Coal Stove			Individual Apt. Heat			Number of Rooms		
Separate Toilet: Private			No Cooking Facility			No Heat			Overcrowded		
Separate Toilet: Shared			Gas or Elec. Refrig.	✓		Central Hot Water	✓		Interior Rooms		
Outside Facilities: Private			Ice Box			Individual Apt. Hot Water			Adequate Light & Ventil.		
Outside Facilities: Shared	✓		No Refrig. Facility			No Hot Water			Needs Major Repairs		

Appliances	Tenant Owned	Landlord Owned	Date Informational Letter Served
Gas Refrigerator			Date Notice to Vacate Served
Electric Refrigerator	✓	✓	Date to Vacate Notice Expires
Gas Stove			Date of Court Proceedings
Coal Stove			Date Court Order Effective

Additional Information 12/8/58 Lincoln w/o BRE Cert.
BRE Cert OK 12/31/58

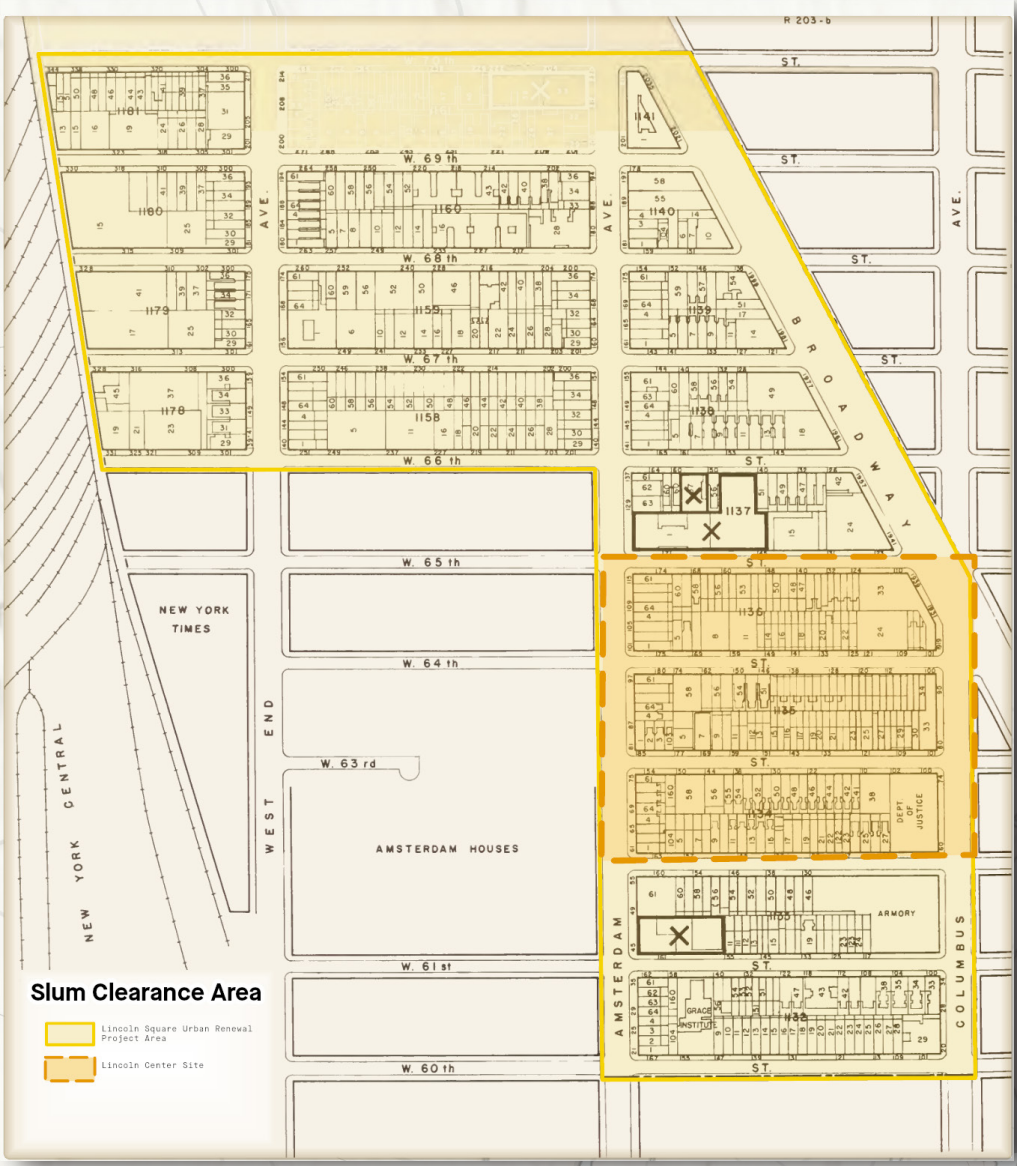
BRAISLIN, PORTER & WHEELOCK SITE OCCUPATION RECORD FOR 151 WEST 64TH STREET, 1958 (BACK).
Courtesy of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts Archives.

The quality of the information collected by BPW in these records was inconsistent across the board. This yielded a volume of **missing data** that hindered the team's capacity to provide a full panel of the conditions tenants of the Lincoln Center were living in. Because of this, extra steps were taken to ensure maximum information could be obtained, particularly of the Puerto Rican population.



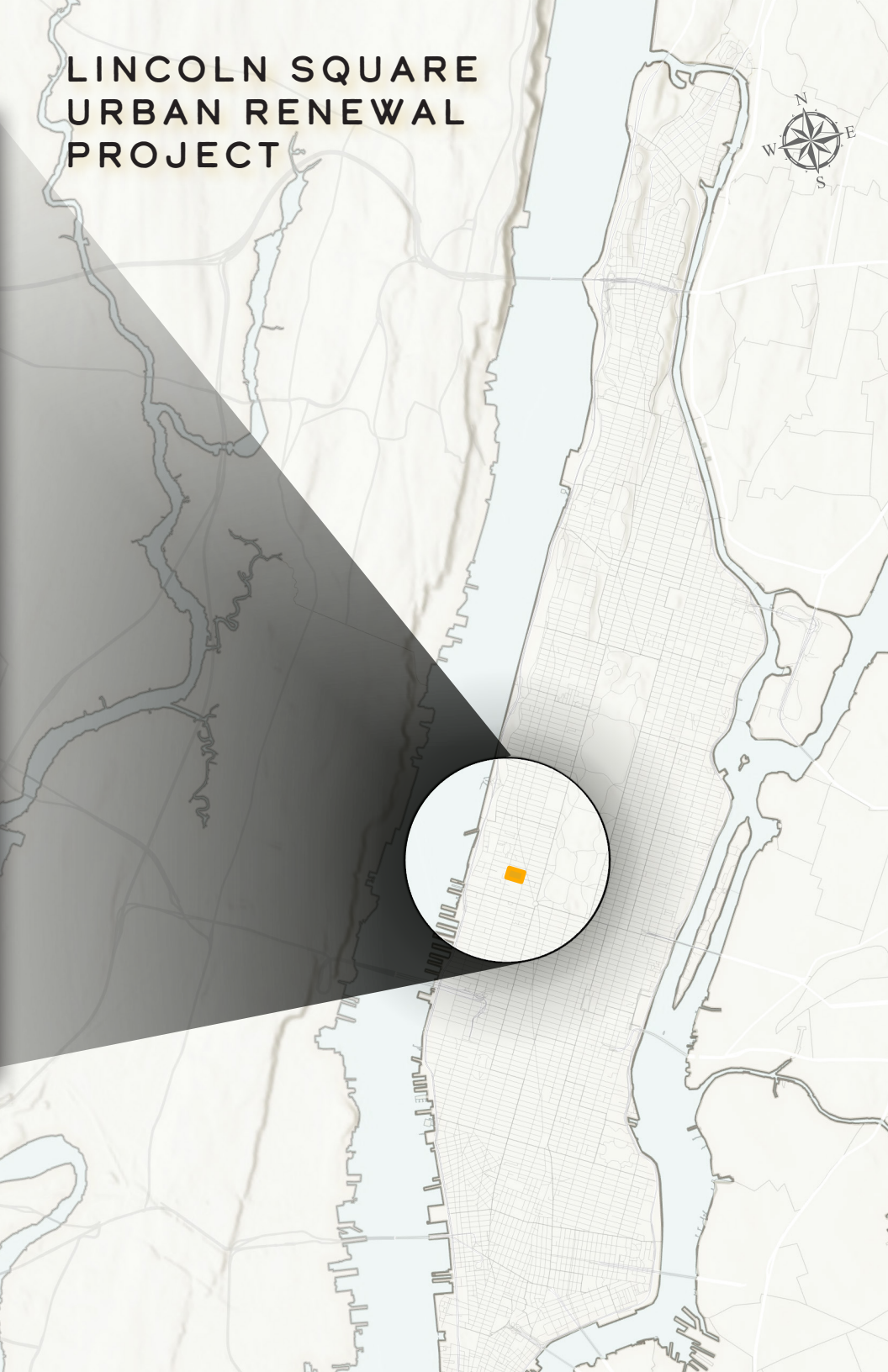
For the most part, this exhibit references the **"PUERTO RICAN HOUSEHOLD"** when addressing Puerto Ricans. This distinction is made to encapsulate households where at least one member was born in Puerto Rico or where tenants indicated their race to be Puerto Rican.

The data contained throughout the exhibit highlights the abrasiveness of the displacement and dispossession of the families living in the area while also providing a snapshot of a growing Puerto Rican community.



0 0.75 1.5 3 Miles

LINCOLN SQUARE URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT





LINCOLN SQUARE. INTERIOR VIEW OF RESIDENCE WITH WOMAN AND CHILDREN. UNDATED. Image Source Attributed to NYC Parks' Archived Collection.



WHO WERE THE RESIDENTS OF SAN JUAN HILL?

Data based on 2,130 occupation records provided by the Lincoln Center

PLACE OF BIRTH

FIGURE 1. Place of Birth

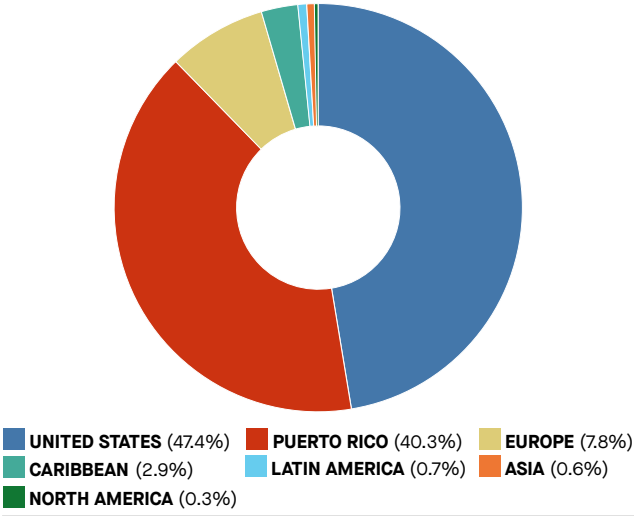


Chart: Damayra I Figueroa-Lazu • Source: Braislin, Porter & Wheelock site occupation records, 1958.

Most of the 2,130 site occupation records included the place of birth for at least one household member. We retrieved birthplaces for 5,546 individuals in 1,643 (77.1%) records.

47.4% WERE BORN IN THE U.S.

40.3% IN PUERTO RICO

Place of birth was retrieved for 3,175 individuals in 755 (97.9%) of the 771 Puerto Rican households. Among these individuals,

- **70.4%** were born in Puerto Rico and
- **28.5%** in the United States.

RACE

FIGURE 2. Race

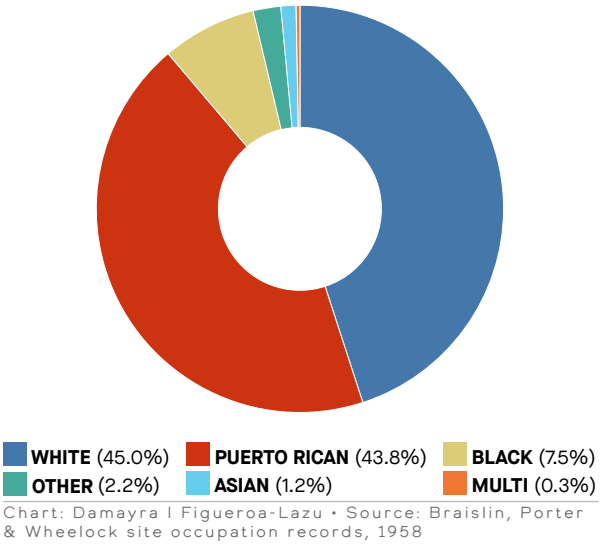


Chart: Damayra I Figueroa-Lazu • Source: Braislin, Porter & Wheelock site occupation records, 1958

Race data was collected for tenants being relocated but it was often obscured or inconsistently marked. Although it is uncertain by who or why the information was distorted, among the records where race was identifiable (1,252), 45.0% were marked "White" and 43.8% were marked "Puerto Rican".

BLACK FAMILIES MAKE UP ONLY 7.5%

The rest included Asian families, mixed-race selections, and other races.

AGE

We calculated the age for 5,592 individuals across 1,649 records.

FIGURE 3. Average Age

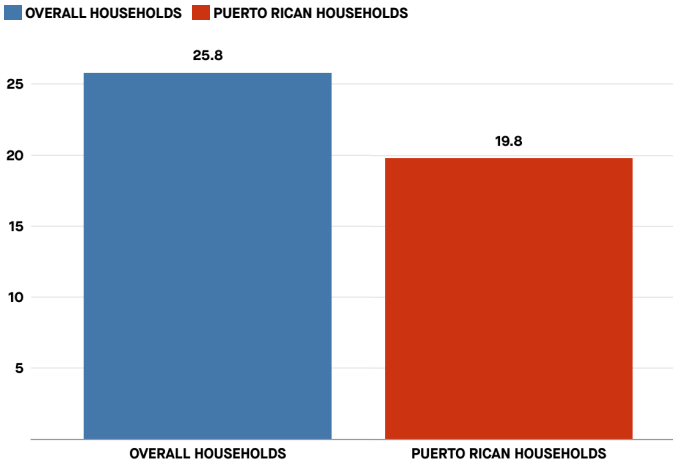


Chart: Damayra I Figueroa-Lazu • Source: Braislin, Porter & Wheelock site occupation records, 1958

The Lincoln Center site had a relatively young population. Of tenants for which age was calculated, 43.9% were under 18, including 18.3% who were 5 or younger. Only 4.2% of individuals were over 65. **The average age was 25.8 Years.**

In 742 **Puerto Rican household** records, age was estimated for 3,144 individuals. These individuals were much younger compared to the overall population. Over half (52.9%) were under 18, 23.7% were 5 or younger. Only 1% were over 65. **The average age was 19.8 Years.**

TIME SPENT IN THE CITY

Puerto Ricans at the Lincoln Center site had spent less time in New York City when compared to all tenants.

FIGURE 4. Median Time Spent in City

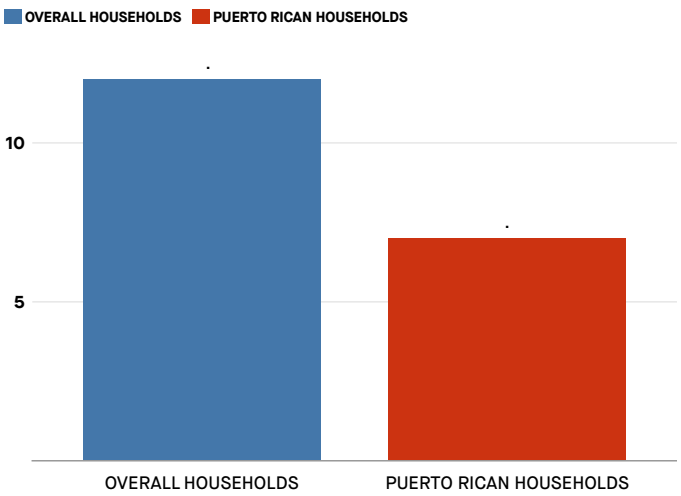


Chart: Damayra I Figueroa-Lazu • Source: Braislin, Porter & Wheelock site occupation records, 1958

Half of the Puerto Rican households for which we have data (638 records) had spent **7 years or less in the city**, with an average time spent in the city of **9 years**. Half of all households for which we have data (1,404 records) had spent at least 12 years in the city, with an average time spent in the city of 20.8 years.

The Puerto Rican population at the site was relatively new to New York City, likely part of the migration spurred by Operation Bootstrap. Operation Bootstrap prompted the rapid industrialization of Puerto Rico which triggered a mass exodus of Puerto Ricans to the United States.

TIME SPENT AT THE SITE

Puerto Ricans, when compared to all tenants, were newcomers to the Lincoln Center site.

FIGURE 5. Time Spent On Site

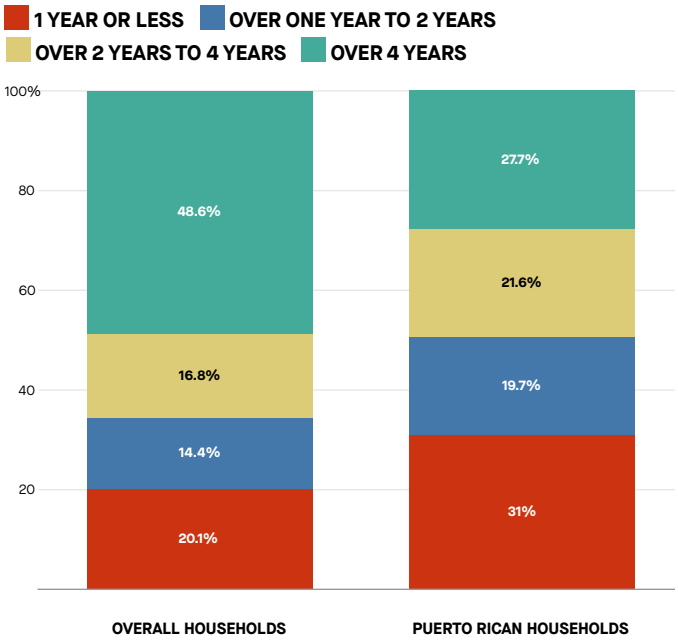


Chart: Damayra I Figueroa-Lazu • Source: Braislin, Porter & Wheelock site occupation records, 1958

Half of the Puerto Rican households spent 2 years or less at the site, with an average of 3.7 years, before having to relocate.

Half of all households for which we have data (1,460 records) had spent at least 4 years at the site, with an average time spent at the site of 8.3 years.

HOUSING TYPE ON LINCOLN CENTER SITE

FIGURE 6. Housing Type on Lincoln Center Site

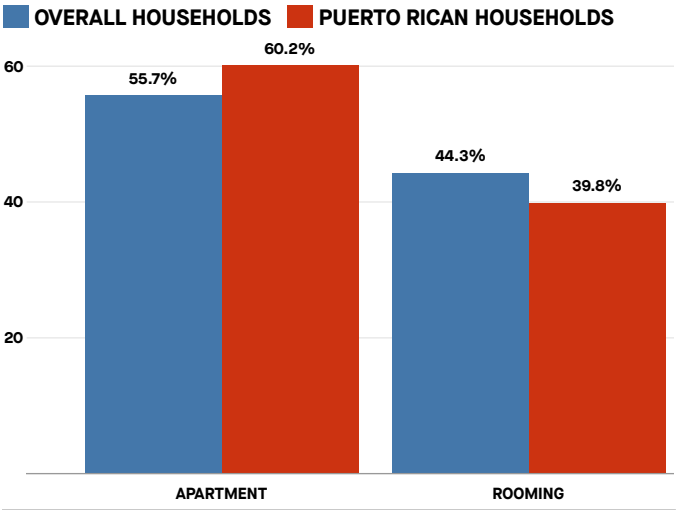


Chart: Damayra I Figueroa-Lazu • Source: Braislin, Porter & Wheelock site occupation records, 1958

Of the 1,861 records with housing type data,

55.7% WERE APARTMENTS AND

44.3% WERE ROOMING HOUSES.

White families predominantly lived in apartments; other families were distributed more evenly between apartment dwellings and rooming house dwellings. Non-white tenants made up most of the rooming house tenants at the site.

Among 641 Puerto Rican households with housing type data,

60.2% LIVED IN APARTMENTS AND

39.8% IN ROOMING HOUSES.

OVERCROWDING

FIGURE 7. Overcrowding

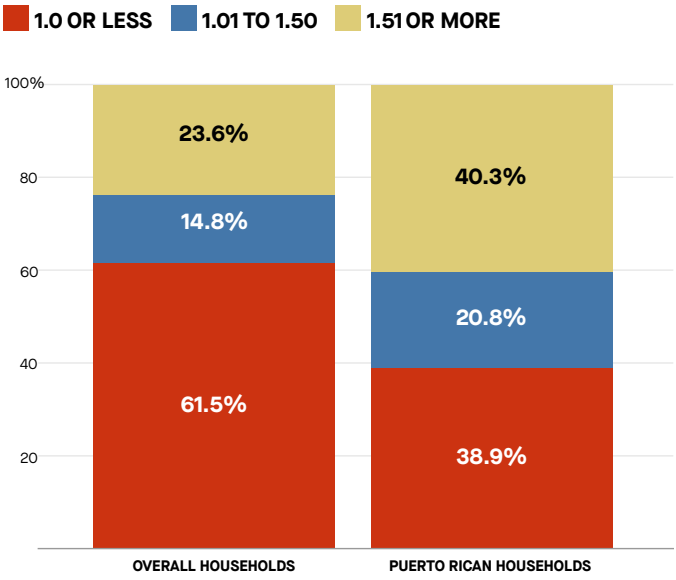


Chart: Damayra I Figueroa-Lazu • Source: Braislin, Porter & Wheelock site occupation records, 1958

The mean occupancy rate for families at the Lincoln Center site was

1.26 PERSONS PER ROOM (N=1,798)

For Puerto Rican households, the mean occupancy rate was

1.7 PERSONS PER ROOM (N=746)

A total of **61.1%** of these Puerto Rican households were **overcrowded** or had an occupancy rate of more than 1 person per room. Moreover, 301 (70.8%) of 425 severely overcrowded households, those with an occupancy rate greater than 1.5, were Puerto Rican households.

INCOME SOURCE

FIGURE 8. Income Source

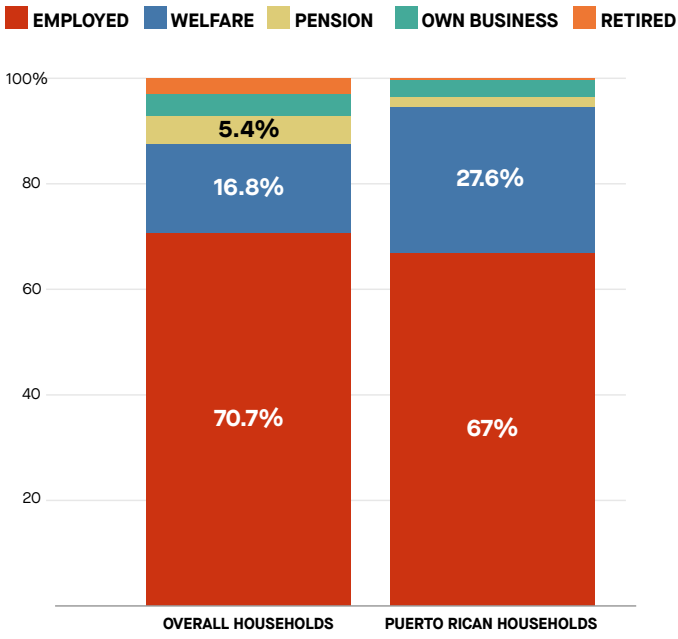


Chart: Damayra I Figueroa-Lazu • Source: Braislin, Porter & Wheelock site occupation records, 1958

The majority of Puerto Rican households with income source data list "employment" as an income source (67% of households), similar to the overall population of households (70.7% households). However, proportionately, more Puerto Rican families listed "welfare" as at least one income source (27.6%) compared to the overall population (16.8%). Out of the 233 records that list "welfare" as at least one income source, 168 cards belong to Puerto Rican households (72.1%).

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

FIGURE 9. Median Annual Household

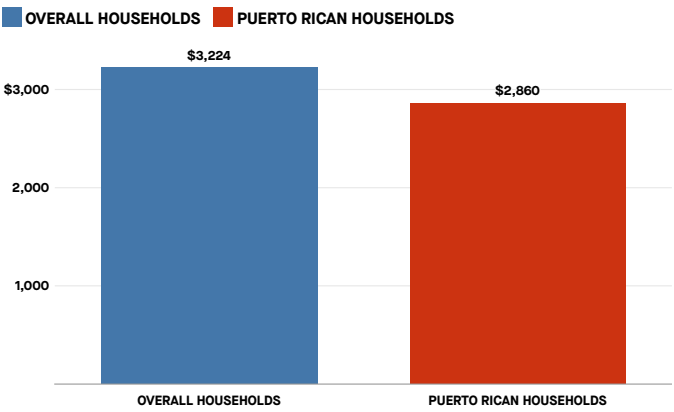


Chart: Damayra I Figueroa-Lazu • Source: Braislin, Porter & Wheelock site occupation records, 1958

In 1958, the median annual household income in the U.S. was **$5,100**

The median annual household income for tenants at the Lincoln Center site was **$3,224**

For Puerto Rican households, the median annual household income was **$2,860**

MONTHLY RENT

FIGURE 10. Monthly Rent

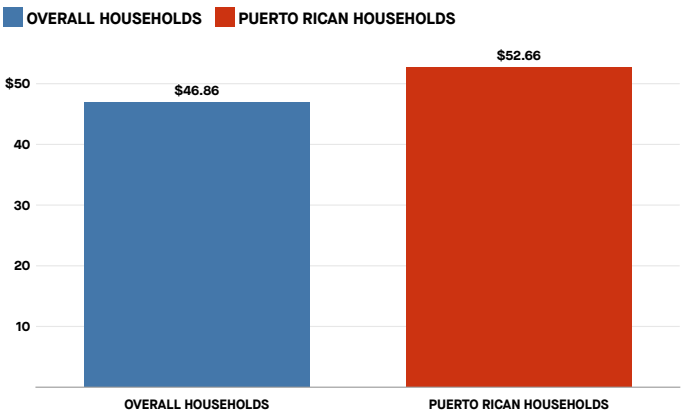
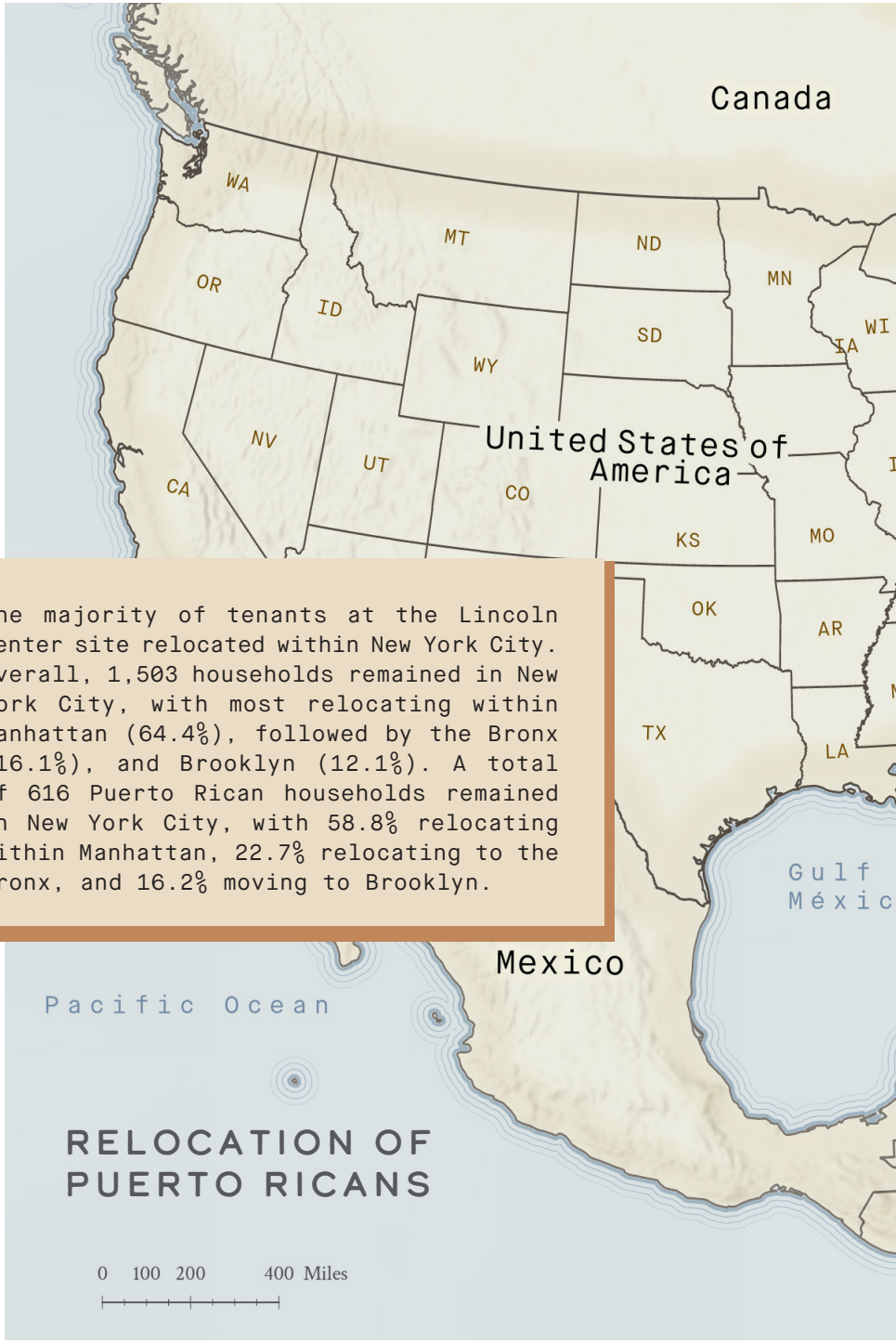


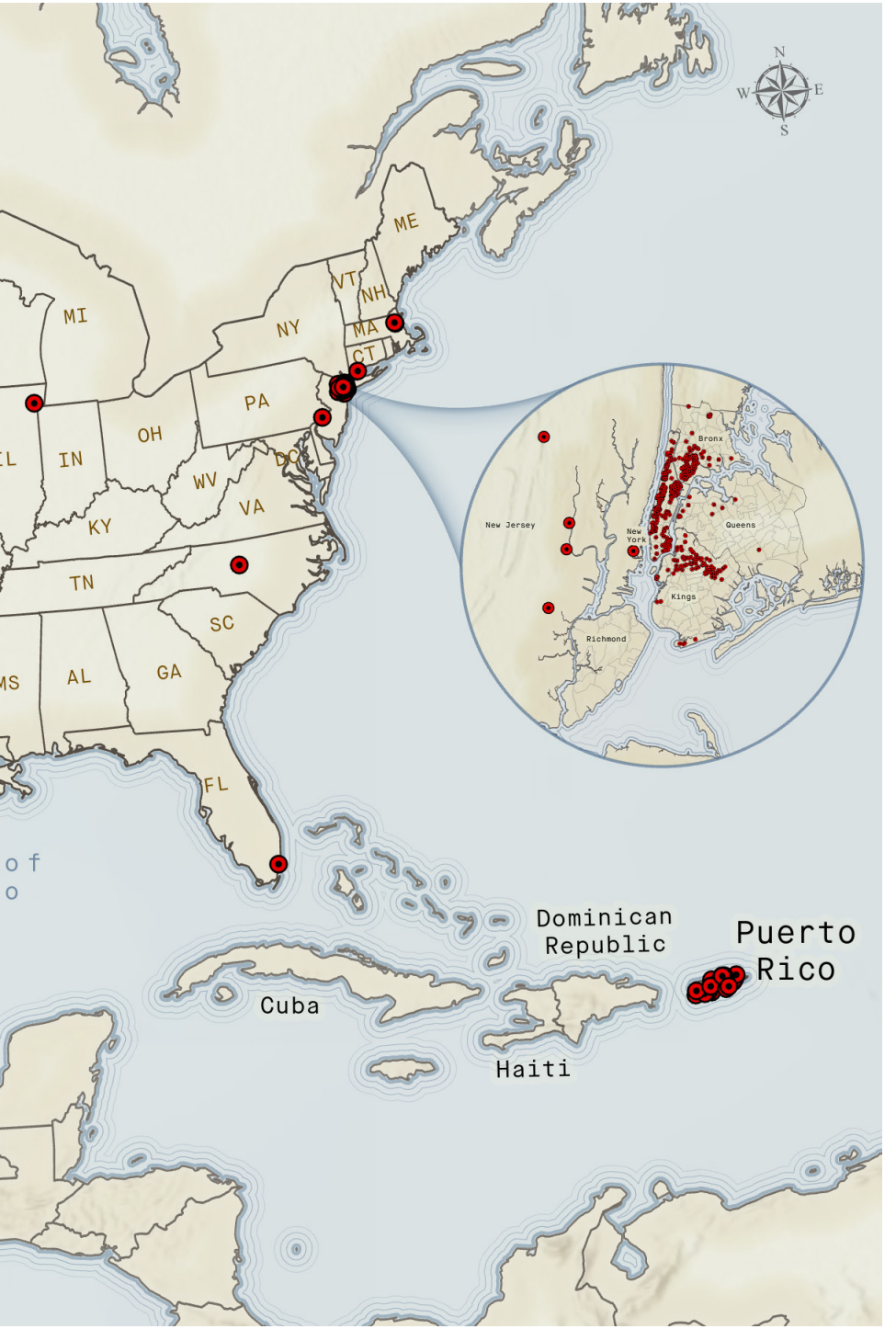
Chart: Damayra I Figueroa-Lazu • Source: Braislin, Porter & Wheelock site occupation records, 1958

The average on-site rent, excluding utilities, for tenants at the Lincoln Center site was **$46.86 per month,** computed with data for 1,768 households.

For Puerto Rican households, the average on-site rent was **$52.66 per month,** computed with data for 667 households.



The majority of tenants at the Lincoln Center site relocated within New York City. Overall, 1,503 households remained in New York City, with most relocating within Manhattan (64.4%), followed by the Bronx (16.1%), and Brooklyn (12.1%). A total of 616 Puerto Rican households remained in New York City, with 58.8% relocating within Manhattan, 22.7% relocating to the Bronx, and 16.2% moving to Brooklyn.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New Jersey
New York
Queens
Kings
Richmond
Dominican Republic
Puerto Rico
Cuba
Haiti

RELOCATED PUERTO RICAN HOUSEHOLDS BY NEIGHBORHOOD IN NYC

Considering relocation type, 190 out of 1,447 households for which we have this data relocated to public housing. Out of 570 Puerto Rican households with relocation type data, 108 relocated to public housing—56.8% of all the households identified to have relocated to public housing were Puerto Rican families.

FIGURE 11. Relocation in New York City by Borough

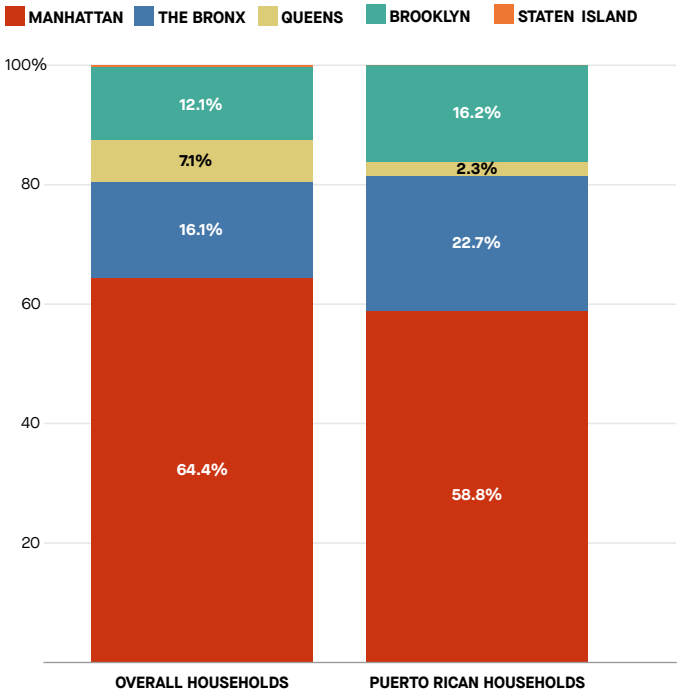
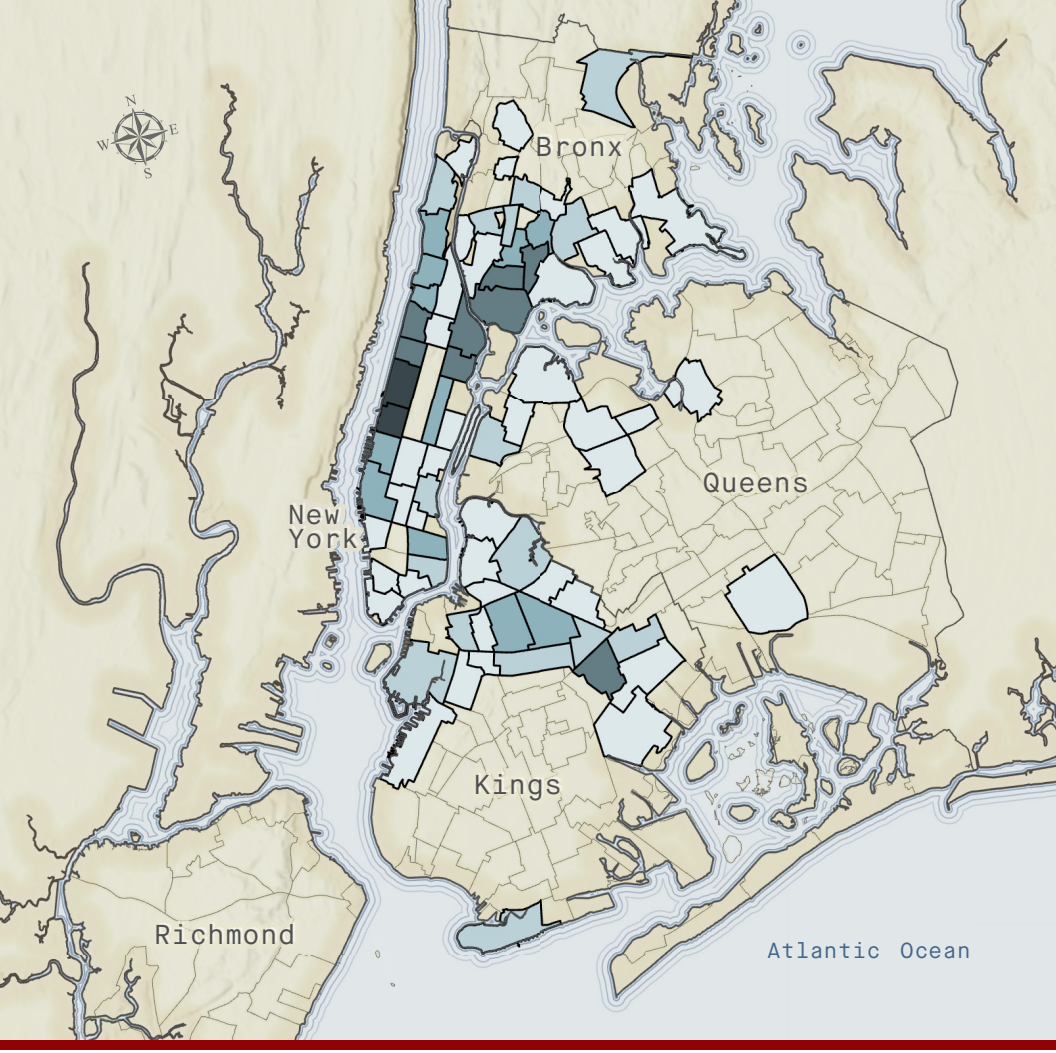


Chart: Damayra I Figueroa-Lazu • Source: Braislin, Porter & Wheelock site occupation records, 1958



DISTRIBUTION OF PUERTO RICANS BY NYC NEIGHBORHOOD

The distribution of Puerto Rican household relocations by neighborhood points to large concentrations of relocations in and around the Lincoln Center site. Many of these were tenants who relocated to the Amsterdam Houses, right behind the Lincoln Center, or to the Frederick Douglass Houses, a few blocks north of the site. Some of the neighborhoods receiving relocated tenants were neighborhoods with long-established Puerto Rican communities. Approximately 10% of Puerto Rican households were relocated to East Harlem, the most established Puerto Rican enclave.



LINCOLN SQUARE. WOMAN AND CHILDREN ON STOOP. 1956.
Image Source Attributed to NYC Parks' Archived Collection..



AFTERLIVES...

Dispacement, dispossession, and the
untold stories of organized abandonment

The data collected from these site occupation records has allowed us to challenge historical narratives and gain new insights into the lived experiences of those who were displaced by the Lincoln Square urban renewal process. The goal of this exhibit is to create visual accompaniments to our research and to underscore the human element of New York City development projects that lead to the displacement of families and communities. The histories of San Juan Hill and Lincoln Square remain salient. In suturing the data with archival research, oral histories, photographs, and ephemera, we hope to make visible the afterlives of urban renewal projects beyond the dismissive narrative that rendered these communities disposable. Lincoln Center and Fordham University were indeed built in the wake of organized abandonment and on the backs of thousands of families who dreamt of bettering the lives of their descendants. Please visit our project site for more in depth analysis, information about our exhibit, and additional educational resources about San Juan Hill and Lincoln Square urban renewal project.

LINK TO THE PROJECT PAGE

Cover Image:
LINCOLN SQUARE. A CROWD GATHERED ON A STOOP. 1956.
Image Source Attributed to NYC Parks' Archived Collection.

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