

# **TENEMENT TALES: THE FASHIONING OF 97 ORCHARD STREET**

Elissa J. Sampson

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Approved by:

John Pickles

Nina Martin

Scott Kirsch

Yaakov Ariel

Timothy Marr

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Elissa J. Sampson: Tenement Tales: The Fashioning of 97 Orchard Street** (Under the direction of Nina Martin and John Pickles)

New York's Lower East Side Tenement Museum reflects its famed immigrant neighborhood's history in tours of 97 Orchard Street's reconstructed ethnic household apartments. The Museum interprets its landmarked building to let visitors experience a past multi-ethnic Lower East Side, oscillating among different scales of representation to harness Jewish collective memory pointing to an American immigrant place of origin. One message is that for today's newcomers as well as those of the past, hardship precedes multi-generational success.

I examine the Museum's discursive and material practices in its acquisition and interpretation of 97 Orchard Street to tell a history of American immigration through the personal stories of past building residents. More broadly, this thesis uses 97 Orchard Street to trace how history is produced, displayed, received and interpreted spatially through a Lower East Side building where narratives stick to place, eventually coming to seem inevitable. Interpretive layers expose how stories accrete and get reused, making them harder to dislodge in a building whose commodified tours re-inscribe collective memories today. I trace how a poor tenement building was transformed into an American national landmark (touching on the role of the state in promoting museums, heritage and citizenship), as a new site of memory at a

time when gentrification permits the tenement to be newly presented as precious and authentic.

The Museum's use of history involves interdisciplinary debates about migration, memory, representation, historicity and heritage, and urban immigrant acculturation in space and time. One claim I make in conclusion is that its initial interpretive schemes for its building—including its earliest residential stories—simultaneously failed to give full voice to a fuller range of the Lower East Side's groups (historic and post-1935) and undercut its Jewish specificity of place. An activist museum subsequently found it hard to cordon off a local immigrant present from a historic past re-created in place expressly for visitors. I also claim that the question of whose story gets told in 97 Orchard's privileged spaces has again shifted as a post-9/11 Lower East Side further hollows out into a place of memory, with hyper-gentrification accompanying Downtown's shift into a destination.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AHW	American History Workshop (headed by Richard Rabinowitz)
ATSS	Association of Teachers of Social Studies (part of the UFT)
BID	Business Improvement District
CB3	Community Board 3
CSWA	Chinese Staff and Workers Association
COS	Charity Organization Society of New York (Tenement House Committee)
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESDC	Empire State Development Corporation
ESL	English as a Second Language
HPD	New York City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development
HUD	Housing and Urban Development (federal)
IDA	New York City Industrial Development Agency
ILGWU	International Ladies Garment Makers Union
IMS	Institute of Museum Services (predecessor to IMLS) (federal)
IMLS	Institute for Museum and Library Services (federal)
JGSGB	The Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain
Landmark Filing	Department of Interior filing to apply to be a National Historic Site. New York City Landmarks has its own process. Both require first being listed on the National Register which requires serious vetting as to a building's historical and social significance
LESTM	The Lower East Side Tenement Museum
LMDC	Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (a 9/11 HUD funded agency for investing in Downtown)

Museum	The Lower East Side Tenement Museum
The Museum	The Lower East Side Tenement Museum
Tenement Museum	The Lower East Side Tenement Museum
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts
NEH	National Endowment for the Humanities
Neocon	Neo-conservative
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board
NPS	National Park Service
NYANA	New York Association for New Americans
NYC	New York City
NYCHA	New York City Housing Authority
NYSCA	New York State Council for the Arts
National Trust	The National Trust for Historic Preservation
PBS	Public Broadcasting System (U.S. government and listener-sponsored network of affiliated public TV stations)
PR	Public Relations
PSA	Public Service Announcements (done pro bono by mainstream and other media)
TB	Tuberculosis
The Times	<i>The New York Times</i>
UFT	The United Federation of Teachers

UJA/Federation	The UJA is the United Jewish Appeal. The Federation is the Jewish Federation, also a consolidated Jewish charitable organization. In New York City, they eventually merged as part of a broader consolidation of Jewish philanthropic appeals.
VOA	Voice of America
WNET	NYC's public PBS station, a.k.a, Channel 13
WTUL	Women's Trade Union League
WPA	Works Project Administration (A Depression era Federal Agency established by Franklin Delano Roosevelt)

## **Prologue**

People who think the past lives on in Sturbridge Village or Mystic Seaport haven't seen Fredericksburg [Texas]. Things live on here in the only way the past ever lives--by not dying. –William Least-Heat Moon (1982), 144

...living history museums do not merely represent the past; they make historical "truth" for the visitor. –Scott Magelssen (2007), xii

### **Want to See the Building?**

The Tenement Museum tells the story of its humble building, its immigrant residents and their historic Lower East Side. “We tell the stories of 97 Orchard Street,” the Museum announces in its “About Us” website page (2010c). These stories in turn define the Museum, allowing it to draw on popular associations with Lower East Side immigrant life. Thematic guided tours are an essential commodity to be purchased by visitors, since they provide the only way to enter the Museum’s historic building. Interpretive constructions of past immigration are re-inscribed daily as guides uncover the building’s physical layers and changes while presenting the personal stories of selected prior building residents. The Tenement Museum is a national landmark open almost every day of the year, and its standardized tours are repeated sometimes up to seven times daily. Yet 97 Orchard’s resurrected residents are real not just to visitors; their larger-than-life stories are kept alive in the Museum’s culture. The use of costumed interpreters for some tours further abets this sense of “reality,” as does having employees other than guides sometimes giving, and taking, tours.

After noticing that a tour change by the Museum’s new management was now reflected in an apartment’s furnishings (see table with challah and candlesticks), I asked, “When did the

Rogarshevskys stop sitting shiva [mourning] and start observing the Sabbath?” The Museum’s



archivist answered “two months ago” without missing a beat.

In this exchange, we both were speaking of the residents in what anthropologist Johannes Fabian (2002) refers to as the

“ethnographic present—” as though they somehow actually

lived in this diorama, unaffected by the passage of time except

insofar as the Museum makes it so. Today, the personal stories of families such as the

Rogarshevskys are recounted to the Museum’s over 200,000 annual visitors. Inevitably

questions arise as to how these particular 97 Orchard residents were picked to represent an

immigrant past. The Museum’s internal training document 97FAQ conveniently explains:

The Museum selects particular family stories that are substantially documented by historical records, to demonstrate the building’s ethnic and religious diversity ... chronological span of its habitation and, most importantly, their ability to raise pressing and sometimes controversial contemporary issues (2005, 2010) (8). Hence residents’ familial stories depict social issues relevant to current immigration, explicitly framed by ethnicity, religion, era, and the building’s official dates of residence (1863-1935).

Table 1 - 97 Orchard Street Original Residential Apartments by Family

Family	Gumpertz	Baldizzi	Rogarshevsky	Levine	Confino	Moore
<b>Ethnicity/ Religion</b>	German Jewish <sup>1</sup>	Southern Italian Catholic	E. European Jewish	E. European Jewish	Greek Jewish <sup>2</sup>	Irish Catholic <sup>3</sup>
<b>Opens</b>	1994	1994	1998	2002	1998	2008
<b>Setting</b>	1879 (dressmaking) Depression	1935 (eviction) Depression	1918 (mourning shiva and TB)	1897 (birth) sweatshop	1913 (chores)	1869 (mourning a baby)

The Museum’s stories offer visitors an entry into the history of the Lower East Side through a building whose apartments speak vividly of earlier immigrant life. Residents’ stories

are interwoven with those of the tenement itself so as to continually mark how tenants were affected by code changes requiring hall toilets, lighting and cold water sinks. Apartments are referred to by the name of the family whose tenancy is now represented there, with each apartment staged to support a familial story told by a guide, educator or costumed interpreter. The Confino apartment is where a “Vickie” gets to interpret a teenage Victoria who dispenses advice. Family days also produce “Bridgets” and other past residents. Although a chosen few past tenants have been reanimated in some fashion, the stories of its numerous unnamed residents reside obliquely in set aside apartments referred to simply as “Ruins.” The overall result is a building and Museum so identified with the telling of these stories that its narrative connections seem inevitable, as if they have always been in place and actively define it.

Visitors see apartments re-created by historians and interior designers who chose furnishings to align interiors with an envisioned familial scenario as well as era. There is a very short list in the Museum (2005, 2010) of “actual” family objects; a few replicas are on display but most furnishings were bought as period pieces.<sup>4</sup> Despite differences that denote religion, era or changes ensuing from building code, anecdotal evidence suggests that, to visitors, the tiny familial apartments—although not the stories—appear somewhat similar.

The stories of 97 Orchard Street’s selected past residents are told inside the tiny apartments re-created to once again house them. These affective narratives of immigrant hardship and collective memory get constructed to stick in place, even if their use and reception cannot be fully controlled (Michel de Certeau 1980, Patraha 1996, Benjamin 2002). Their transmission and reception are critical to probing how history is produced, displayed, received and interpreted through a Lower East Side immigrant building. Initial Museum visitors

were most likely to be heritage tourists who intersect with a contemporary neighborhood in looking for their own past (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998c). The Museum's use of tours to impart its various historic lessons spatially highlights the narrative joints ostensibly holding its building's and residents' stories in place. One historian's academic review of its 1997 exhibits provides a useful account of how its stories were then being told and received:

New York City's Lower East Side remains today much as it was during the era of its greatest fame: an ethnically diverse, economically depressed area in which new immigrants get their start in the United States..., the Lower East Side Tenement Museum is the brainchild of Ruth Abram..., [who] decided to promote greater social tolerance from a historical perspective. Built in 1867 [sic], 97 Orchard Street is a six-story, Italianate brick building that originally contained twenty-two three-room apartments and two stores. During its close to seventy years of operation, it was home to as many as ten thousand people.

To date only the first and second floors have been opened to the public, and for insurance reasons all visitors must be accompanied by guides. A visit begins, then, down the block at 90 Orchard Street, a former corner store that houses a scale model of the tenement, small exhibits, and orientation video and slide-tape programs. The tour of the actual tenement starts in the dark first-floor hallway, remodeled in 1905 to impress prospective tenants with a pressed tin ceiling, tile floor, Lincrusta wall treatments, and hand-painted murals....

Restored to how it might have looked in 1878 when Natalie Gumpertz was working as a dressmaker to support her children, the front room has been set up as a workroom.... Fifty years later, the Baldizzis lived in the apartment next door... and helped their neighbors, the Rauchenbergs, by turning on the lights on the Jewish sabbath (Charles Hardy III 1997) (1019-1011)

Like the Museum's own depictions, Hardy's starts with the area's sameness, reinforcing a message that the Lower East Side remains a fascinating but difficult stage on an immigrant's journey. Equally interesting, Hardy gets a number of things wrong;<sup>5</sup> I suspect he is mainly honing in on information, understandings and rationales provided to him before certain Museum narratives were fully locked down. Today the Rauschenbergs are supposed to be the

Rogarshevskys, and Museum guides are supposed to be there to make for an intimate touring experience. The Museum's former "ten thousand people," is now less than 7,000 occupants.

Hardy apparently doesn't realize that the Gumpertzes were placed in the "wrong" apartment since the Museum's Director wanted to start with a German [Lutheran] family and the second floor was most convenient. Nor would the casual visitor at the 1998 Rogarshevsky apartment opening—displaying a sweatshop story of TB [tuberculosis] and of a family's mourning—guess at Hardy's 1997 description of "A third-floor apartment will tell the story of the Rogarshevsky family, devastated by the great influenza epidemic of 1918" (1012).<sup>6</sup>

Some later changes in the Museum's stories are seen as acceptable by Museum management since they still get the familial "history" right, as when the observant Rogarshevskys eventually start celebrating the Sabbath. Tours get tweaked to emphasize certain themes and for logistical reasons. But their broad outlines and many of their older affective elements just stick: the story of a Baldizzi child helping a Jewish [Rogarshevsky] family observe the Sabbath is broadcast and distributed twenty years later on a Voice of America English language lesson.

Tracing the Museum's earlier stories of its building and tours provides a material window into discursive practices of place, exposing layers in which narratives accrete and get reused, making them harder to later dislodge. That window shows an active reshaping of geographies of Lower East Side memory through narrative and material practices. Not least, it shows the multiplicity of representative possibilities that were once in play when its earlier interpretive schemes had not yet been tied to the stories of former building residents.

## A Short Tour

An old tenement entry is tiny and there is only one narrow central staircase. So squeeze in, since here, two of the Museum's earliest public apartment tours are on display. Tenements are technically a type of multiple dwelling for three or more unrelated families but they were used to house large families in tiny rooms. Telling stories in such intimate apartments amplifies an empathy induced by stories of immigrant hardship. Designed to interpret larger themes relevant to past and present immigration, two key building tours were given names like *Getting By: Immigrants Weathering Hard Times, or Piecing It Together*.<sup>7</sup>

In *Getting By*, visitors are prompted by guides to discuss the German Jewish Gumpertz family's problems ensuing from the Panic of 1873. Visitors are asked, "What happened to Nathalie?" so as to bring attention to the economic fragility of life for someone who is now a female head of household since her husband's disappearance (2005e) (8). An informal intimacy ensues from guides cultivating their audiences' use of residents' first names. Visitors then movingly hear the recorded voice of an aged Josephine Baldizzi describing her childhood. In a rapidly evolving museum destination and entertainment culture, Museum tours were shaped so as to encourage sensory engagement as a needed experiential aspect in promoting a personal connection. Visitor interaction is encouraged but carefully time managed since scripted tour narratives are reiterated on a strict schedule: guides need to constantly move groups along to make room for the next group.

The color-coded outline for its garment trade tour *Piecing It Together* (now Sweatshop Workers) tells guides: "Location- Text in red let[s] you know where you should be located and how much time you have in that area ...The purple, underlined text ... is reserved for relevant

questions ...to promote discussion.” The Group Management section offers tips: “If you turn out the [hallway] light in order to demonstrate the darkness of the space ... Pause, allowing visitors a moment of silence to react, and then ask one of the visitors to turn the light back on.” A little later, the guide is prompted to “**Lead visitors up the stairs to the 3rd Floor Ruin Apartment parlor (5 minutes)** and then ask “How does this building or apartment make you feel?” (2005e) (1-2)

These tightly structured tours encouraged a carefully induced empathetic identification not only with named past residents but with anonymous current immigrants.<sup>8</sup> In the *Getting By* tour (now called *Hard Times*), visitors compare the choices poor immigrant families needed to make in ways that resonate with contemporary issues. The “Tour Objectives” section prompts the guide to: “Help visitors compare the Gumpertz and Baldizzis with the experiences of immigrants today” (2005e) (2). Tours doubly encourage personal connections: first, to the historical families portrayed, and second, to “the experiences of immigrants today.”

*Piecing it Together* interpreted the Levine and Rogarshevsky families in 2002 for a garment trade tour. While shopping and clothing manufacture declined precipitously in Lower



Manhattan in 9/11's aftermath, Museum attendance rose when this tour added the Levine apartment (see photo) as an attraction in a downtown museum, which remained open as a public site. These apartments of two East European Jewish families from different eras tell a

story of sweatshops, piecework and workers. The Levines' home sweatshop (see photo) is

interpreted to show the intimate familial and work adaptations required in 325 square feet or less. Portrayed almost twenty years later, the Rogarshevskys are in mourning for a father who died from the tailor's disease (TB). Differences are seen in how they lived since by 1918 garment work had mainly moved to factories. The guide's tour outline (2002, 2005b) points out past and current continuities in immigrant work and housing seen through the neighborhood:

The Lower East Side ... has been home to immigrants, the garment industry, and tenements for years. Lower East Side streets, like Orchard and Broome, have provided homes, workspaces, and community connections for immigrants from around the world. In 2000, the City's population was 37% immigrant. (2)

In memorializing the immigrant role in the garment trade, the tour stresses affinities in New York as an immigrant city, now and then.

Museum tour scripts (officially outlines) from its first two decades provide a window onto how a historical agenda is conveyed experientially, spatially, and emotively. The Museum's paid guides (most of whom are part-time) are given training, literature, timing cues, and most importantly, an old building to deploy as a cherished centerpiece prop to aid in making these connections compelling. Even so, Ruth Abram (2007)—the Museum's founder and Director—apparently did not think its earlier tours sufficiently emphasized contemporary connections.

I thought that once connected to the depth and breadth of the courage of their immigrant ancestors, contemporary Americans would draw connections between the forebears they admired and the newest arrivals....

It became clear that in order to be able to draw connections, for instance, between assistance offered nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigrants and that available today, visitors had to know something about that assistance then and now. To compare and contrast the conditions in the garment industry past and present, visitors needed information on the conditions in both periods.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, tours were restructured. Today, the museum's "Getting By" tour ... includes discussion of what sort of assistance was available for each ... The "Piecing It

Together” tour ... begins with a recording of people in all sectors of the industry discussing present conditions from their various vantage points. (67)

Abram redid these tours to further reinforce such connections through more data and dialogue. Yet Museum visitors come and pay good money primarily to see and learn about an immigrant past; importantly, reviews on sites such as Yelp and TripAdvisor indicate that what most visitors see of that past makes them feel personally connected to it. A once anonymous tenement now serves as a visible marker of times long gone, as a site of Lower East Side memory for visitors where familial stories are re-enacted. Today, that tenement building is tasked to represent its own story and that of the neighborhood which housed many of the seventeen million immigrants who came through New York’s port as part of a mass migration that ended when quotas were imposed shortly after World War I. The Museum’s business is making that past place come alive, for an hour or so, and then doing it again and again, seven days a week, eight hours a day.

## **Introduction: The Tenement Museum**

The tenement building represented the common ground of immigrants from everywhere. Through a tenement museum, the general public ... could be invited to consider this question: How will we be one nation and at the same time enjoy, appreciate and certainly not be afraid of the profound differences we bring to the table based on background?—Ruth Abram, 1991<sup>10</sup>

“We tell the stories of 97 Orchard Street.”—Tenement Museum website, 2011

## **Welcome to New York’s Lower East Side**

In the late 1980s, I noticed the Tenement Museum when it first opened for business in a relatively classy part of a fading Orchard Street. Located at 97 Orchard Street, it was just down the block from Klein’s of Monticello, a store whose unquestioned taste in clothing still attracted upscale bargain shoppers to a once thriving Jewish thoroughfare. Its Lower East Side block, which bordered historic Chinatown, was beginning to shift residentially from Latino to Chinese, but that was not possible at number 97. While 97 Orchard’s ground level and first floor stores had remained part of the street’s commercial and ethnic fabric, its upstairs apartments had been officially closed to residents since 1935.

The Museum used its newly-rented storefront to depict historic Lower East Side immigrant life. Its liberal politics were visible in exhibits about sweatshops such as “Beads of Sweat” and other displays. Eventually, the Museum offered lively tours of residents’ re-created upstairs apartments in what had become its re-habilitated tenement building. Although local children went on school trips, overall the Museum seemed a place that few locals visited, even as it grew into a major destination that attracted mostly Jewish visitors from elsewhere.<sup>11</sup>

As a long-time neighborhood resident, I was aware that the small and largely Orthodox local Jewish community was ambivalent about a museum solely displaying a Lower East Side that “once was.” Indeed it’s hard to live in the shadow of an area called “the Great New York Ghetto” that in 1911 was simultaneously seen as the world’s largest Jewish city and as possessing the world’s densest urban population.<sup>12</sup> As an urban dweller, I only became seriously interested in the Museum when, in 2001, I first saw protest signs and began to think about the Museum’s relationship to other groups in the community. By early 2002 a slippage of past and present seemed particularly visible in its real-estate dealings: the Museum’s attempt to expand into its neighboring next-door tenement had evoked protests from local immigrants.

I walked by on a Sunday to see Museum visitors watching Fujianese migrants holding Mandarin and English signs on 99 Orchard’s stoop, demanding an end to “Eminent Domain Abuse.” A photo later showed a sign that said “Don’t ERASE real history with artificial history.” To accommodate doubling its visitors, the Tenement Museum had invoked eminent domain to acquire an inhabited next-door tenement that also had a restaurant employing Fujianese workers. Ruth Abram (2002)—the Museum’s founder and Director—claimed that “The preservation of the Museum's landmark tenement at 97 Orchard Street is crucial for the Nation.” The Museum’s expansion was “part of a plan to secure a partnership with the National Parks Service-administered- Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, bringing thousands more people to the museum... 200,000 to 250,000 more visitors annually” (Keys 2002).

To Abram’s dismay, this controversy facilitated accounts of the Museum’s re-creation of historic immigration as operating at the expense of a contemporary immigrant neighborhood. The protests offered a rare media opportunity to comment on the behavior of a museum of

immigrant history whose mission was devoted to “promoting tolerance.” Here, a museum had chosen to make its case for tolerance and diversity through showcasing past immigrant lives. Yet, the tangible benefits of its advocacy for new immigrants seemed unclear even as the Museum’s public visibility expanded in Lower Manhattan’s post- 9/11 landscape. After six months of protests, Abram (2002) suddenly offered to put a Chinese apartment into the new building if the expansion went through. I will revisit this purposely unfinished Tenement Tale in my last chapter by highlighting its intersections with a moral economy of expected local norms, expressly articulated in the course of dealing with a Lower East Side museum officially dedicated to representing multi-ethnic stories of immigration.

### **Representing History Now**

This story offers but one of many entry points into the framing and historicity<sup>13</sup> of immigration by a Museum deeply interested in history’s experiential, transformative pull. My project documents how a museum of past ethnic immigrant life tells stories in a present that shapes and is shaped by that past history. While researching the Museum’s archives in 2010, I saw this controversy presaged in early documents that discussed what sort of museum it should be, and how best to interpret its building and neighborhood when connecting past and contemporary migration. Ideally, visitors to 97 Orchard Street could see a past ethnic immigrant history that would “speak” to them in a personal, experiential fashion, while at the same time engage them in thinking about a new immigrant present.

In 1994, when the Tenement Museum began offering visitors tours of 97 Orchard Street’s apartments, it re-created a famous historic immigrant experience in the midst of a neighborhood full of migrants. Given that the Lower East Side had absorbed more immigrants

than anywhere else in the United States, important Museum figures such as architectural historian Andrew Dolkart<sup>14</sup> saw the neighborhood as “the most appropriate and meaningful setting” to show the story of past immigration and demonstrate its contemporary continuities.<sup>15</sup> Yet as Dr. Richard Rabinowitz (1986), founder and president since 1980 of American History Workshop, had earlier noted in starting this project: “The challenge of doing so in the midst of the Lower East Side itself poses powerful questions about the integration of history into our daily lives and contemporary environments.” The quote shows that Rabinowitz was aware of challenges inherent in situating a “living history” site within a living neighborhood. His caveat seems prescient not least because of an uncertain coupling of that particular history to the area’s then contemporary communities. Indeed, an activist museum found it hard to safely cordon off the present as it worked to recreate a historic past in place expressly for visitors.

The Museum’s reconstructions of immigrant spaces are cultural geographies of a neighborhood, interpreted by liberal historians as an intimate domestic reflection of the Lower East Side’s past ethnic enclaves. Its apartments, each of which purports to show how it might have looked when occupied by an immigrant family known to have actually lived in the building, provide a window onto how the past is actively used to create new geographies of migration, memory and heritage. The Museum’s overt uses of history pertain to larger interdisciplinary debates about migration, the urban-built environment, and immigrant acculturation in space as well as time.

I have found myself in this research increasingly reaching back to the Museum’s earlier days when it was securing its tenement building and debating what to do with it. All of this

happened under the Museum's first Director and founder, Ruth Abram, who started in 1986 and resigned in 2008. That is likewise the period mainly considered here, during which only four public tours were developed as six apartments opened for view. I analyze these building tours here as a spatial, affective performance of history, scripted by the Museum.

Today the Tenement Museum sits at the center of an area that has rapidly gentrified as the Museum has come into its own. Once considered a troubled "inner city" neighborhood, the Lower East Side is now viewed as conveniently located between the central business districts of Midtown and Wall Street. As a growing destination in an "iconic neighborhood," the Museum has come to encompass far more buildings and visitors. Even so, touring 97 Orchard Street remains at the heart of the Museum's visitor experience and its *raison d'être*.

### **A Building for a Nation of Immigrants**

The Tenement Museum is an affiliated, but lesser-known part of a National Park Service trio that also includes Ellis Island (its associated late-nineteenth-century immigrant portal) and the Statue of Liberty. 97 Orchard Street is an unusually old tenement retroactively ennobled as a landmark by the Museum's depiction of it as a humble survivor bearing witness to the neighborhood's past and the ethnic groups that once lodged in its building.<sup>16</sup> Thus the Tenement Museum navigates its local situation at the gentrifying intersection of a formerly Jewish Lower East Side and contemporary Chinatown, even as it presents itself as an U.S. National Landmark and National Park Service affiliated site.

These three national visitor sites mark an era of controversial mass migration when over twenty million "New Immigrants" came to the U.S., primarily from Europe.<sup>17</sup> That era ended when emigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, was forcibly curtailed by 1924 (the

Johnson-Reed legislation also included the Asian Exclusion Act).<sup>18</sup> These national sites are important for many immigrant descendants, a group that includes four fifths of America's Jews. Historically the Museum has seen its role as depicting a Lower East Side that is a shared place, as part of a universalized story of diverse American multi-ethnic immigration and of hardship, both then and now. As the Museum's footprint and public voice become larger, and as an increasingly gentrifying environment makes it harder to find other stories its representation of that immigrant life grows more salient in shaping views of the Lower East Side.<sup>19</sup>

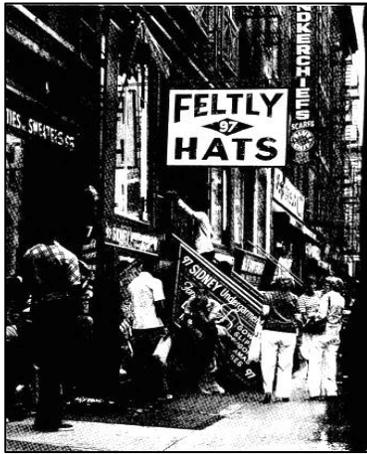
Rabinowitz (1990b) had proposed a Conceptual Plan to Abram that stated: "One would have difficulty identifying a building more suitable than 97 Orchard Street to represent the ethnic diversity which has always characterized the Lower East Side." (5) The Museum's (1990n) earlier interpretive schemes had included Black and Chinese historic composite families (Abram 1987c). In an interview, Abram confirmed that Black New Yorkers were to be part of its story:

...living next door, we found a freed slave [Mr. Douglass]. So we've decided to use the building to tell the story of the Settlement of the Lower East Side by the major groups that settled here and not to confine our interpretive work only to the people who actually lived here....The truth is that as early as 1820 the area is over twenty-percent freed slaves ...we're determined to tell this story...blacks are very much associated with the tenement experience (Kugelmass 2000), (190-191)

As late as 1992, Abram seemed sure that the Museum would use its earlier "heritage" scheme to interpret the history of "the major groups that settled here." By 1994, the Museum's mission called for interpreting "the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side," implying that the Museum's professionals thought that they would be telling a larger Lower East Side story. Yet its 1993 decision to solely interpret the lives of known building residents meant that its successful tours became virtually synonymous with the stories of 97 Orchard's erstwhile tenants. Put more plainly, the stories directly represented

in its upstairs apartments became those of “real” European immigrants from a past “Age of Mass Migration.” Mr. Douglas’ story was shunted aside. The Museum’s institutional knowledge of and interest in prior residents shifted in the course of acquiring and interpreting a Lower East Side building.

### **The Tenement as American Immigrant Experience**



**Figure 1 – 97 Orchard, 1970s** My research traces such discursive and material interpretive shifts in 97 Orchard’s re-employment in a neighborhood that kept on living long after that building’s official residential closure in 1935 (see Sanders, 1979 photo of 97 Orchard). Tenements are deeply associated with a densely habited past for an immigrant neighborhood whose population peaked circa 1910. The Museum’s eventual choice to interpret its building through the lives of past residents also marks what is deemed historic for the Lower East Side by setting an end date that coincides with its building residential closure in 1935.

When the Museum’s transformed upstairs apartments opened to visitors in 1994, number 97 with its brisk ticket sales was reinserted into Orchard Street’s commercial environment. The first floor, which the Museum had taken over when initially renting in 1988, had first become commercial space in 1905; until then the building only had two basement storefronts and its top five floors were solely residential.

When the Museum opened, the first and bottom floors were used so that paying tourists could see exhibits, shows and costumed interpreters. While landmarking required a preservationist aesthetic for its exterior and apartment tours, the building’s interior commercial

space was largely used for performances, meetings and classrooms. The rapidly growing Museum expanded to nearby buildings for its Museum Shop and administrative needs. By 2008, it had attracted over 130,000 paying visitors annually, including 44,000 school children, already making 97 Orchard the Lower East Side's largest visitor destination (Pogrebin 2008). Its 2012 expansion almost doubled its visitor numbers.<sup>20</sup>

The Museum works to harness an American "immigrant experience" in defining that history, yet it also negotiates the Lower East Side's legacy as a topos of specifically Jewish diaspora. While the Museum particularly attracts visitors interested in the Lower East Side's impact on American Jewish life, its overall founding narratives portray a somewhat static historic Lower East Side in which immigrant acculturation processes across time similarly foster American identity and mobility for an ongoing series of groups who pass through the neighborhood as they begin to overcome hardship. Hence, it is not a Jewish museum but a museum of American immigrant life that relies on and recruits Jewish collective memory within a context of heritage tourism.

Ironically, the universalizing impulses expressed in the Museum's building tour narratives can be seen as representative of a specifically Jewish political legacy associated with late twentieth-century liberal politics. In a further twist, the museumification process demonstrates how being in place becomes harder as place hollows out. It is precisely within 97 Orchard, its poor immigrant tenement expressly reconstructed for upscale, heritage tourism, that the ironies and virtues of the Museum's presence and stories are most sharply felt.

Today urban center-city ethnicity provides local color and commodified authenticity at a time when globalizing cities have "reclaimed" inner cities. The neighborhood's hip grunge

“tenement chic” ethos relies on the authenticity of its tenement buildings. As Lower Manhattan goes upscale (Mele 2000), its endangered ethnic communities are also part of its appeal. While the Museum’s blog protests gentrification’s ravages, arguably gentrification attracts tourism particularly where busy “revitalized” and relatively intact streetscapes allow accreted collective memories to be invoked as buildings are “restored.” The Museum’s relationship to its neighborhood is shaped by a larger downtown economic restructuring, in which rezoning in a changing built environment not only attracts but relies on tourism and gentrification.

### **Questions: The Fashioning of 97 Orchard Street**

Geography concerns itself with experienced and represented spaces: 97 Orchard Street serves as a useful lens for tracing—during the Museum’s first two decades—how past ethnic immigrants are represented, produced and reproduced in its tenement, and to what historic ends. This research shows how narratives of place—and their discursive and material practices—are implicated in the collective memory of immigrant pasts and presents in ways that affect newer migration. The appearance of inevitability surrounding the Museum’s overall narratives of place reinforces 97 Orchard Street’s current identity as a building whose one-time residents tell stories of Jewish, Italian, German, and Irish migration. These inquiries can be described as addressing the following broad concerns:

1) Historicity and Representation: How do the Museum’s uses of history in interpreting and representing an ethnic immigrant urban past connect it to the present, including to its contemporaneous neighborhood, and vice versa?

2) Narrative and Place: How do the Museum's discursive and material practices change and persist in the course of acquiring and interpreting a tenement building to tell a history of American immigration? How do its various incommensurable narratives stick to place?

3) Spatial Politics of Memory: How and where do the Museum's stories of local "historic" ethnic and living communities get told? How do its multi-directional narratives point to the stakes involved in its politics of collective memory and ethnic representation at different scales?

As these questions imply, authenticity, a much sought after commodity (Zukin 2010), is quite endangered on the Lower East Side. The Museum's setting is as "authentic" as anything is, due to its deep association with a densely habited immigrant past. As Michel de Certeau (1980) reminds us, "the places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences" (108). If place evokes an absent reality in drawing on memory, nostalgia is also invoked in the neighborhood's continuing production as a destination and place of memory. The trope of Lower East Side nostalgia concerns its intensity and uniqueness of place as disappearing or gone.

The notion of "nostalgia" originally referred to the pain associated with a journey of homecoming or the desire for home, making its transformation into a longing for that lost past especially relevant for geographies of Lower East Side memory. Nostalgia for the Lower East Side, in various formulations by those who know the neighborhood as well as by those who have never been there, belongs to a landscape of longing for reconnection to a place and identity shaped from a perceived common past (Diner 2000).<sup>21</sup> History is the glue that binds the storytelling needed for heritage and destination tourism at its historic sites, channeling a broader nostalgic curiosity into an immersive and intimate encounter with a past place.

As a growing visitor destination in a rapidly gentrifying area, the Museum's success arguably comes from providing visitors with a sense of briefly touching that disappearing past. Thus the next sections offer a brief overview of the Museum and of the Lower East Side, followed by a short literature review, and a recap of the thesis' organization and chapters.

### **Representing Immigrant Ethnicity**

In a neighborhood with Fujianese, Cantonese, Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Black communities, fateful repercussions for representation are made when only some groups are represented as "historic" and displayed (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998c). Being chosen as historic also speaks to a choice of intended audience. Contemporary communities may well be ambivalent about being relegated to the past, or on the contrary, view such representation as an honor.<sup>22</sup> Or they may see it as irrelevant given more pressing concerns.

By 1993—at a point when Museum leadership had chosen to only directly interpret past building residents—commemorative and other agendas were already visible in the capital campaign to purchase 97 Orchard Street. Given its commemorative focus, it is far too facile to propose that the Museum's (2004) representations of the past solely serve the future as advocacy for immigration, or "use the past to build a better future." Issues of representation and reception are also important in approaching how historic immigrant ethnic groups now considered to be "white" are exhibited to contemporary publics, presenting a flip side to how contemporary neighborhood communities are exhibited to heritage tourists.

Much is thus at stake in how these stories are told and about whom. These tensions are already visible in documents from 1987, when Ruth Abram proposed a walking tour of the neighborhood that would emphasize its historic and present diversity. Abram (1987f) explained

to Rabinowitz how she envisioned a “Lower East Side Heritage Trail” designed to interpret the living yet historic “heritage” communities outside of its building.

I had a grand time dreaming up the trails. We meet a pigtailed Chinese chef in a chop suey house in 1900. That tour starts over noodles. The Italian tour starts in a pasta shop. The Jewish one starts in a sweat shop. And so it goes. I think we could get various managers to let us use their restaurants, shops ... this way. (1)

Abram’s concept seems almost startling in its eagerness to use living places and people in ways that knowingly speak to the past exoticization of ethnic enclaves (ghettos) already viewed voyeuristically in Jacob Riis’ (1890) time.<sup>23</sup> There is something more than a little audacious in marrying living history in this fashion to a museum situated in the Lower East Side. The neighborhood at large becomes a living set for ethno-tourism. What seems playful to a Museum director or entertaining to a visitor could offend community merchants and residents precisely because contemporary lives are exoticized and tied to past stereotypes.

Although clearly excited by the Museum’s potential, Rabinowitz seems far more cautious about living history’s projected intersections with local residents than Abram was. A report on local gentrification pointedly noted in 2008: “Chinatown ... is more than just a tourist destination, it is also a home. Its people, tenements, and shops are not merely eccentricities to be enjoyed” (CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities 2008) (12). If heritage tourism intimates traveling to a place to temporarily travel back in time, it can imply that people who stay in place remain in an exoticized or timeless past, and are fair game to represent, display, and view.

The Museum’s choices in materially and discursively recreating a particular Lower East Side past have led me to query how its tenement functions spatially and discursively in relation to memory and collective identity. Its representations of ethnicity—as seen through its acquisition and interpretation of 97 Orchard—were initially in flux and then fixed in place. Not

only was Chinese and Black representation in residential apartments set aside, but the Jewish “nature” of its building was initially obscured even though the site functions as a place of Jewish heritage tourism. I argue through using archival documents and tour scripts that the initial display of Jewish residents was in tension with a critical Museum goal: telling a multicultural story of shared place and hardship by successive immigrant waves as leading eventually toward successful Americanization. Interviews also bore out how this affected the Museum’s efforts to instill its messages, fund apartments and create narratives of futurity.

The Museum’s agenda ties a project of shaping the Lower East Side’s history to a type of multi-ethnicity seen as a necessary part of American immigrant acculturation. Archival materials also bear out that, as historians, the Museum’s founding figures sought to generalize what were seen as shared lessons culled from earlier Jewish and ethnic European immigrant tenement life. Despite its inherent hardship, the Lower East Side experience was perceived by the Museum as a foundation for a successful (albeit improvable) model for American citizenship and mobility. The Museum’s approach has been to endorse rhetorics of tolerance and democracy in ways that emphasize American commonality and mutuality, allowing for sufficient but not overwhelming ethnic difference.

Abram had studied public history in graduate school. By the mid-1980s, she had already brought in Rabinowitz—who had interpreted Old Sturbridge Village, a leading Living History site—to guide the Museum’s interpretations, designs and tours.<sup>24</sup> Rabinowitz brought in American History Workshop (AHW) historians to do research and create interpretative settings. Abram wrote grants and then hired more historians, forming a Scholarly Advisory Committee. By the early 1990s, Dolkart as an architectural historian became an important Museum

interlocutor in interpreting the building's older "fabric" before and during renovation by discerning its changes over time.<sup>25</sup> This allowed the Museum to draw the lesson from its building that its residents were helped by others; Dolkart had paid particular attention to how Reformers had inscribed their own social history upon the building's doors, windows, sinks and toilets through their advocacy for building codes (Dolkart 2001, 2006).

### **A Past for the Present**

The ability to induce a rapid intimacy with the past relies on recognition. Immigrant narratives associated with ethnic apartments straddle the fine line of remaining recognizable in collective memory even as they invite comparison with experiences from other eras. Families residing in the building from 1863 to 1935, the years in which it was officially residentially occupied, were placed in reconstructed ethnic period apartments.<sup>26</sup> During the Museum's working hours, its residents from the 1870s live down the hall from newer arrivals from the 1920s, in a spatial and narrative juxtaposition that renders all contemporary.<sup>27</sup> Some of the families represented are thus separated by large gaps in their respective periods of migration. Hence, at 97 Orchard Street new virtual next-door neighbors have been created, a social term once so meaningful to Yiddish speaking immigrants that the neologism "neksdorike" ("the lady next door") became part of the neighborhood's lexicon.

Past residents (including those who collectively inhabit those apartments known as Ruins) create a virtual alumni chain consisting of those who have left for better parts. Ruth Abram (1990d) described in a Conceptual Plan draft "... a museum about how immigrants constructed ladders up and out." Hence "the Lower East Side experience" is a foundational journey, with 97 Orchard Street providing a virtual shared place of both origin and socially

mobile transience for visitors who are immigrant descendants. The Museum's juxtapositions offer for consideration the question of just how different and separate any group's temporary, associated experiences really was/is, including the implied space of current immigrants living in surrounding tenements.

That implied visible space has broadened to encompass immigration generally. For many years, the "About Us" page in the Museum's blog explained that it is a museum where "visitors view restored apartments and learn about the struggles of past generations in the hope of providing historical perspective on the experiences of today's newcomers" (2009a). The museum's current slogan of "Revealing the Past, Challenging the Future," implies a purposeful engagement with the unveiling of history to change contemporary understandings of future immigration. That "activist" perception of the Museum's purpose is widely shared:

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum of New York City, which opened in 1994, has restored the apartments of dwellers of a historic tenement on Manhattan's Lower East Side, but uses the heritage of these people to connect visitors and New York City residents to contemporary concerns of affordable housing, single parenthood and living conditions in present-day tenements. (Wali 2005)

This quote, from the anthropology curator of Chicago's Field Museum, asserts that pressing contemporary concerns are successfully addressed by the Tenement Museum's use of the past. I argue that it is important to look both ways here: "[T]he heritage of these people" can be used for many goals, even unintended ones. Nor should the narrative weight and success of the historic interpretations on view in its apartments be underestimated, not least because most visitors come to hear, expect and experience those stories.

How collective group memories adhere to sites in their intersection with Museum narratives is instructive. Museum narratives of thin ethnicity and social mobility that presume

the successful acculturation of future generations (often in suburbia) are relevant to views of how (inner city) ethnic enclaves function as a step on Abram's journey of "up and out." I suggest that it is productive to also probe the tensions concerning past representation serving as commodity, commemoration, and fodder for future advocacy in looking at 97 Orchard Street. Given the Museum's founders, location and visitors, it is unsurprising that a discernible undercurrent taps into Jewish collective memory.

## A Universal Great Ghetto

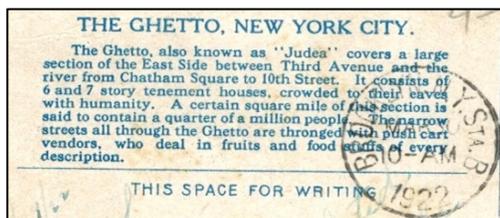


Figure 2 – The Ghetto, Postcard  
(Andrew Dolkart Private Collection)

The Lower East Side is particularly associated with Jewish migration. History and literature typically acknowledge the neighborhood as a place where most

residents were Jews when the neighborhood reached its population height.<sup>28</sup> By 1910 the area described as the densest place on the planet had approximately 500,000 residents. That legacy has left its own spatial concentration of “collective memory” and identification (Diner 2000) (131).<sup>29</sup>

No other ethnic group in America, with the exception of the African-American construction of Harlem, has so thoroughly understood, imagined, and represented itself through a particular chunk of space. The phrases 'Lower East Side' and 'Harlem' do not need ethnic adjectives to precede them and identify the group that occupied that space (Diner 2000) (50).

Historian Hasia Diner conveys the Lower East Side's magnetism as a space of memory even as she pulls in Harlem as a similarly marked space. Historian Ronald Sanders (1994) also pursues that analogy: “Similarly, for a long time to speak of the ‘Lower East Side’ was to speak of Jews (although the area was never exclusively Jewish, even when the Jewish community there was at its height)” (1). An East Side story was seen as quintessentially but not uniquely

Jewish. As Diner (2000) points out, this spatial concentration adds to the image of the Lower East Side as a particularly Jewish place: "In addition to the simple numbers and percentages of Jews in lower Manhattan and in New York as a whole, the memory of the Lower East Side derived much of its power from the physical concentration of Jews on those streets" (132).

Although the mass immigration of "new immigrants" and Asians had fully stopped by 1924 by an act of Congress, New York City was a quarter Jewish on the eve of World War II.<sup>30</sup> A third of East Europe's Jews had "voted with their feet" to rapidly migrate from 1880-1914, bringing approximately 2.5 million people almost exclusively to urban areas, especially New York's Lower East Side. While by World War I the area no longer remained the preferred first-stop destination, it retained enough of a Jewish presence even after World War II to remain an ethnic hub with commercial, residential and institutional components.

The tension in interpreting the Great Ghetto (see postcard) is palpable at the Museum, in part because the "Old East Side" was in fact "home" to a number of groups. The area's past is marked, among others, by Jewish, Irish, German, Slavic, Hungarian, Bohemian, Italian, Chinese and Black settlement.<sup>31</sup> Its building's story is marked by, but hardly limited to, the Jewishness of past tenants and current tourists. It is marked by the presence of German and Italian prior residents and of a more diffuse New York tourism, not necessarily tied to ethnicity. And it is marked by an overlapping but distinctive



Figure 3 – Ghetto Postcard, Hester and Orchard (Andrew Dolkart private collection)

diversity in regard to its commercial life. In 97 Orchard, the Tenement Museum chose a symbol that speaks deeply to a particular past yet is open to broader readings.<sup>32</sup>

Anthropologist Karen Brodtkin (1998) views rubrics such as Irish, Jewish, Slavic and Mediterranean as racialized designations prior to a post-World War II shift into white ethnicity. "European races were visible, seemingly a natural phenomenon, when one looked at where Americans worked. Immigrants were visible not least because they were concentrated in urban industrial centers" (56). The Lower East Side was exactly such a place where immigrants worked at home, or locally in garment factories, light manufacturing, retail venues, peddling or at nearby docks. Immigrants not only worked in such urban centers but lived in differentiated enclaves in them. The area's past has been unevenly interpreted in relation to ethnicity, race, labor, immigrant acculturation, social mobility, and Americanization. As a site of U.S. immigration, the Museum's representations reflect larger academic, ideological and generational divides as to the putatively voluntary nature of immigrant "first" destinations, Jewishness, Americanization and future social mobility.

Abram had a strong sense of what the neighborhood and its tenements popularly represented: "The Lower East Side is associated in the public's mind with immigrants. Most people link the area only with Jewish immigrants, when, in fact, Jews have had no longer a history in the area than immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Africa, China, Italy, and many other nations" (Abram Summer 1991). It appears that she wanted to re-balance its Jewish past association by making the history of other groups more salient, as seen in the inclusive, if inappropriate, use of the term "immigrant" for enslaved or free Africans. As it negotiated these tensions in composing a multi-ethnic story, the Museum's liberal founders agreed on the

necessity of broadening and universalizing—that is Americanizing—its narratives. The problem was the building’s residential history. In responding to Abram’s initial plan to render its first residents’ apartments as German (Lutheran) and Italian (Catholic), Dolkart (1992) wrote:

I realize that the Tenement Museum is making a concerted effort to be seen as an organization that does not deal exclusively with Jewish issues. I think this is correct since the immigrant tenement experience is much more universal. However, for the longest period of occupation in this building it was largely inhabited by Eastern European Jews. In addition, as far as I know, funding and visitation have largely come from people of Jewish descent. It seems odd, even perhaps perverse, that the Eastern European Jewish experience (so closely connected with the lore of the Lower East Side and the history of 97 Orchard Street) is being overlooked (2).

Although Dolkart agrees that a prior understanding to universalize the “immigrant tenement experience” is correct, he argues it is “perverse” to leave out the building’s most important historical narrative. Dolkart’s complaint implies a distortion of the building’s history by a Museum unwilling to acknowledge how Jewish its own story was. His memo is written just when the Museum’s interpretive schemes were shifting, as personal information was becoming available about the Baldizzi and Gumpertz families. The Museum would eventually claim that it was showing “the stories of 97 Orchard Street” (2011), but here Dolkart cited the building’s actual history as a corrective against the direction the Museum’s evolving narrative was taking.

For many years, the Museum has described itself as a museum of immigrant social history, or in a more recent website formulation (2009) as “A New York City Museum that tells the stories of immigrants who lived in 97 Orchard Street.” Yet as Dolkart pointed out in 1992, it is hardly surprising that the Museum’s building has become identified with telling Jewish stories. Anthropologist Jack Kugelmass (2000) saw this tension as problematic for a museum whose official self-understanding is that it more broadly addresses American immigrant life.<sup>33</sup> I

argue that further narrative complexity ensued in this regard once the Museum finally settled on its decision to highlight the personal stories of ethnic past building residents.

### **Searching for the Lower East Side**

The rapid changes in the local built environment and economy, changes in which the Museum participates, affect its evolving narratives of place, as well as interactions with and depictions of current immigrants and migrants. The Museum's uneasy relation to heritage tourism is framed in that context for a number of reasons, not least due to its importance in shaping 97 Orchard Street's interpretations and impact. The Museum's intimate connection to a shifting local economy in a gentrifying area is connected to how tourism and real estate intersect in a valorization and commodification of past history. At the same time, community relations are seen as critical for public museums. Foundations and governmental entities expect museums to do community outreach, and redefine themselves through connections to living communities and by modeling engaged citizenship (Hanchett 2013). These vectors come together in Museum grant-writing and programming.

The Museum's interpretations reflect its unsettled relationship with an earlier Jewish past, since the Museum initially sought to build a historic Lower East Side for a needed audience: visitors who are putative descendants of those who have left. Roediger (2005) and Brodtkin (1998) see the post-World War II shift into ethnicity that enabled previously racialized groups to "whiten" as linked to suburban social mobility and Americanization. In New York, a vast post-war population shift into private single family housing was subsidized by federal FHA, VHA mortgage and transportation policies that encouraged suburbanization to Levittown and beyond (Harvey 2009, Mele 2000, Brodtkin 1998). For Jews among others, this meant moving

away from urban centers and second generation urban enclaves.<sup>34</sup> For the Museum, such socially mobile Jews are hovering in the background, with Lower East Side antecedents serving as an assumed but unmarked default and baseline for generalization.

The Lower East Side of the 1930s on was marked by tear-the-slum-down urban renewal. Governmental agencies, insurance companies and banks had also redlined the neighborhood to the point that its next decades were equally marked by increasing disinvestment, arson and further depopulation (Brodkin 1998, Mele 2000, Abu-Lughod 1994, Hackworth 2001). That early post-war period also saw a brief inbound population shift into tenements and new tower block public housing “projects.” Some European immigrant populations such as Jews, Italians and Slavs stayed, or moved to local projects or eventually to Mitchell-Lama middle class co-op housing. The projects built by Robert Moses on the neighborhood’s periphery primarily became home to Latino/a (Puerto Rican and then Dominican) and Black residents. Tenement housing abandonment marked the 1960s and 1970s. Even so, largely commercial Orchard Street remained largely Jewish through the 1980s, retaining customers from the metropolitan area even as local residents, clientele and proprietors changed.

The relationship of each group to the living neighborhood and to its past differs in terms of documented citizenship, numbers and remembered presence. When the Museum was founded, its local “ethnic enclaves” were primarily Latino and Chinese, referred to respectively as Loisaída and Chinatown – Lower East Side, with a notable Black, Jewish and Slavic community area presence. Since then, a further shift has taken place as new migrants, primarily from Fujian province, enlarged historic Chinatown’s borders.<sup>35</sup> Today these southern parts of the Lower East Side have belatedly joined the rest of the area in a process of rapid

gentrification that has put increased pressure on these poorer communities.<sup>36</sup> That housing pressure is now blamed for Chinatown's net population loss in the last decade, as newer Fujianese and other Chinese migrants go directly to less expensive parts of Brooklyn.

The Museum's website specifies that 97 Orchard Street is uniquely located in the Lower East Side, "near other great neighborhoods. By foot, it's 5 minutes to Chinatown, 10 minutes to Little Italy" (2010g). Although the Museum positions itself more generally as a Lower East Side and New York historic resource, its Museum Shop and website until recently overtly invited visitors to browse and shop an area labeled as "Of Jewish Interest."<sup>37</sup> While it describes its choice of past residents as diverse, its gradual inclusion of the Confino, Levine and Rogarshevsky families into 97 Orchard Street—in addition to the Gumpertz family—has effectively reinforced its identification as a Jewish site.

The Museum anticipates and negotiates its elided identification as a Jewish institution, one that is largely responsible for the Museum's initial popularity. Its universalized but still recognizable ethnic narratives attract heritage tourists who may not share its liberal agenda even as they look to "reconnect" with a past Jewish neighborhood. The Museum's insistence about the neighborhood's multi-ethnic past adds to its official sense that it provides a historical corrective to heritage tourist expectations of a Jewish Lower East Side by attempting to "deromanticize" it.<sup>38</sup> Diner (2000), who did research for the Museum as a historian prior to becoming a NYU professor, has written that "tours organized by synagogues, Jewish community centers, and other Jewish groups from around the country dominate the prearranged visits to the Museum. The largest number of 'off-the-street' visitors also happen to be Jews" (118).<sup>39</sup>

However, Diner has protested "But the Jewishness of the building and its residents emerges despite the efforts of the staff to present the historically more accurate take of what happened within its walls" (118). Diner's statement is intriguing since the Museum has not resurrected 97 Orchard's residents as a mere reflection of prior occupancy. If it had, the building's stories would be even more predominantly Jewish. Here, Diner seems invested in using "accurate" as a reflection of the Museum's stress on not just telling a Jewish story.<sup>40</sup>

That the Tenement Museum is seen as a Jewish destination may be borne out in a number of ways. Anthropologist Jack Kugelmass (2000) identified the Museum's visitors as mainly suburban Jews (199). *New York Magazine's* "A Jewish Tour of the Lower East Side" includes the Museum along with sites such as synagogues and eateries. It starts its description of the Museum by asking: "So, wondering what those teeming tenements actually looked like?" (Appelton 2004). This rhetorically assumed ignorance on the part of the magazine's reader and potential Museum visitor doubtless extended to then contemporary Lower East Side tenements teeming with "real" residents. Unusually, the article alerts readers that the Museum's "apartments have been furnished to mimic the lives of former residents." That same (2004) article emphasizes that walking around was important since "beneath the L.E.S.'s everchanging identity, remnants of a gritty, tumultuous, and Jewish past remain."

In a sign of the times, a recent Tablet magazine piece titled "How to Give Your Kids a Taste of the Jewish Immigrant Experience" featured a visitor who wrote "Even though it's just a few blocks from our home, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum gave my girls a chance to time-travel" (Ingall 2013).

## Community Space

As I will discuss in more detail later, 97 Orchard Street's story has long been positioned in relation to nearby tenements occupied by Fujianese and other migrant residents. In Museum apartment tours the implied presence of non-represented groups is acutely felt as guides point out connections to contemporary immigration. As groups enter from the outside to tour the building, nearby poorer tenements are pointed out. For the Piecing It Together Tour, guides were prompted to say: "Even though the immigrant groups have changed, the experience of tenements and the garment industry are much the same" (2002, 2005b) (3). A Lower East Side story of a shared experience in a shared place—cutting across groups and time—became available for a type of tourism in which living communities flesh out historic ones.<sup>41</sup> The neighborhood's teeming tenements framed a newer migration as obliquely illustrating a past historical imagery.

The Museum's focus on the past makes it susceptible to rendering the spaces of living communities visible through a lens of prior immigrant experience, sometimes seen as necessary for visitor understanding. It also poses an uneasy relationship between groups perhaps best described in a critical literature on model minorities (Zhou 2004). In building tours, the presence of nearby immigrants is summoned when the persistence of hardship in current immigrant tenement life is highlighted. Outdoors, "sweatshops" as well as tenements are invoked as a common shared trope. At a time when museums are charged with the task of community outreach, the area's residents have mixed and not always favorable points of view about the Museum's role in an intensely gentrifying neighborhood.

The ethnic mix of the neighborhood remains diverse. Community outreach is further complicated for the Museum given its various interpretive categories. The Museum's narrative construction, with its hardwiring of stories and place, constrains the histories told in 97 Orchard's upstairs apartments in relation to its neighborhood. That this affects community interactions with the Museum is seen in its difficulty of directly interpreting "newer," that is mainly but not only post 1935 groups.

Thus the neighborhood's more contemporary migrant groups have so far been only directly interpreted outside of 97 Orchard Street's apartments: in window displays, multi-media presentations, theater spaces, Shop Life exhibit, or outside, in streets, websites, gift shops, or, most recently in newer Museum buildings. Community groups are most directly featured in the Museum's outdoors tours, whether in discussing waves of immigration, gentrification's impact on the built environment, or through eating tours featuring local "food ways." For a time the Museum displayed art work about "new" immigrants in its street-level Windows of 97 Orchard (Tenement Windows) program (2010h) as an adjunct extraneous to apartment tours.

Once its residential scheme was locked into place in 1993, the Museum implicitly used its building's official 1935 residential closure as the basis for drawing a line between the "historic" past and the present. The Museum cannot easily take back its stories now that they've been fixed in place. Its current management has had to work backwards from this state of affairs to introduce new and old groups into 97 Orchard's previously un-interpreted downstairs commercial space, previously reserved for visitor orientation films and classrooms.

The appeal of the Museum's stories for long-time neighborhood residents is affected by its role as the Lower East Side's main outside visitor attraction. As it expands its visitor space, it

is introducing broader stories of immigration into newer buildings. Even so, this perception cannot be entirely decoupled from the question of how local communities are served by its historicization and representations. If distance brings nostalgia and paying heritage tourists who feel drawn to the Lower East Side as a place of origin, proximity breeds its own knowledge of tenement life for residents. In a neighborhood still primarily composed of tenements, there can be a marked lack of interest (and ability) to pay over twenty dollars a person to go to a museum that shows, in Jacob Riis' (1890) formulation, "how the other half lives" (or, as it may be, lived). In advocating for newer immigrants through showing difficulties faced by previous immigrants, the Museum interpreted 97 Orchard into a place whose defining stories are largely, but incompletely, protected from a post-1935 changing Lower East Side.

## **Literature Review**

As part of a newer breed of history museums, tours of 97 Orchard Street are meant to provide visitors with a strongly felt, potentially transformative experience, albeit one carefully crafted through a tightly woven intersection of discursive and material practices that interpret the built environment. This work draws on several discourses in geography and critical theory to frame these broader issues. The Museum's practices offer a window onto scholarly debates about how history is produced and consumed. Spatial practices can be glimpsed in regard to the roles of materiality, narrative, and memory as a Lower East Side building was transformed into a historical destination. De Certeau's observations (Michel de Certeau 1980, Certeau 2000) concerning the importance of space and place in defining the past and present, seem critical to constructing "history as narrative."

De Certeau's work speaks to the importance of contingency, commemoration and reception in an accounting of how a building's stories are told as history. His broader sense of stories as spatial practice also points to how stories of place attract extraneous elements.

Stories about places are makeshift things. They are composed with the world's debris... heterogeneous and even contrary elements fill the homogeneous form of the story. Things extra and other... insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order. One thus has the very relationship between spatial practices and the constructed order. [Emphasis in original] (Michel de Certeau 1980) (107).

Stories of place, though ostensibly fixed, static or dead, are rendered here into somewhat fragile collages through the accretion of things other and extraneous into a given framework. Spatial practices actively render the constructed order permeable; in de Certeau's analogy, stories of place become leaking sieves. Such narratives of place are necessarily implicated in historical retellings and their varied elements also adhere to place.

De Certeau's work points as well to the uncontrollable nature of "consumer" reception of prepared narratives of place intended to offer up known collective tropes. More generally, de Certeau's critical analysis serves as a corrective to master narratives, through an insistence on contingency in human agency, multi-vocality and variability in local conditions. Memory and heritage share history's narrative tensions; they don't stand outside of history.

Equally, stories of place are a spatial practice whose discursive formations are integral to depictions of tourism, museums and heritage, gentrification, urban immigrant acculturation, and modeling U.S. constructions of race and ethnicity in "enclaves." These debates intersect in the ways that place is used in collective/social memory, not least in regard to studies of sites of Jewish heritage. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) defines "heritage [as] ... a mode of cultural production that gives the endangered or outmoded a second life as an exhibit of itself"

(56). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's work on representation—especially in exhibits of Jewish and other “ethnic” life—explicitly draws attention to how museums function as visitor attractions in a type of destination tourism that provides heritage for consumption. Her analysis of the museum as an evolving global travel destination that encompasses entertainment and heritage, neatly ties back to an emphasis on visitor revenue.

I also draw on Walter Benjamin's approach to place, and of course, urban space. His work illuminates how the rhetorics of authenticity and nostalgia are invoked in the continuing production of the Lower East Side. My interrogation of the Museum's narratives here draws on Benjamin's insights (Benjamin 1955a, b, 2002) on the politics of memory, modern urban identity, and history. Benjamin uses material objects such as buildings to read against the grain of historicism, noting how such objects become increasingly imbued with the meaning they accrue in their past provenance, including reception. The ultimate “snag” is to see an object just before it is destroyed, recuperated or restored as a re-used commodity with a narrative; that is before it falls out of its time to be captured as historic and recuperated into heritage or relegated to a ruin. Benjamin warns also of efforts to perfectly recreate and sense the past through an attempt to immerse or lose oneself in it. That compelling illusion can also be read as a prescient call about the problematic character of embodied “living history” that has been echoed not only by historians but in performance studies (Magelssen 2007, Schneider 2011).

My focus on the ambivalent uses of Jewish heritage and place in the context of museum tourism, performance and narrative owes much to work by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Vicki Patraha and Jack Kugelmass. It has inspired me to use touring and docent scripts to illustrate the ways in which history is transmitted and inscribed spatially through narratives of place. It is

a process of transmission that references and reshapes collective memory. Not least, like a Museum's interpretive schemes for a building, tour scripts offer an aperture into how history is made for public consumption—a topic of deep concern especially to scholars of “living history.”

### **Center City / Inner City Gentrification**

Consumption is the operative word in reviewing local and broader dynamics of inner city gentrification in the 1980s and 1990s. All work on Lower East Side gentrification is indebted deeply to two figures who disagreed profoundly fifteen years ago, Neil Smith and Janet Abu Lughod. They primarily wrote about the East Village—the northern end of the neighborhood—at a point when that area had already gentrified much faster than the rest of the Lower East Side. Both had a good deal of interest in arguments about the tenement as a representative type of housing.<sup>42</sup> For Smith in particular it was about the rent gap, the cycle of prior disinvestment and speculative investment once there were no rents left to milk. His analysis of the production side of gentrification remains powerful, especially with respect to how state intervention and economic cycles have affected different stages of New York's gentrification.

Smith's work is flat however on the subject of ethnicity; both he and Abu Lughod were both far more interested in the squatters and Tompkins Square Riots (1988) than in such local self-understandings, past and present. Abu-Lughod's work on the northern Lower East Side assumed that ethnic enclaves as a shared commonality were a past artifact that she dismissed as an “urban village.” She wanted to focus on urban communities whose commonality was not apparent. Yet research on the Museum's community interactions suggests that the theoretical applicability of Abu-Lughod's work needs to be refined through re-thinking ethnic

neighborhoods in ways that show their agency vis-a-vis gentrification's strategy of "selling the past" (Kwong 2009, Lin 1998, Purcell 2002, Logan 2000, Mele 2000).

In terms of the matrix of authenticity, community and gentrification, Sharon Zukin's (2010) insights feel sharpest on consumption sensibilities. She probes a commodified recycling of past history to brand areas such as the East Village as authentic and iconic, just as they lose the economic and ethnic diversity that made them initially appealing to newcomers.

### **Audience**

I see my work on the Tenement Museum's first two decades as drawing on, and addressing a number of disciplines. Life is necessarily "interdisciplinary," as is any analysis of a building and of attachment to place in an urban setting of migration. Ideally, I hope to broadly engage students of geography, history, architecture, preservation, museum studies, urban studies, Jewish studies, memory and performance studies, ethnicity, race, gentrification, migration, and urban immigrant space, in touching on questions of place in historical narratives.

An institution's foundational history necessarily raises issues of what it can usefully learn from its own past. I truly hope that those affiliated with the Museum—which very graciously gave me access to its archives—will find this to be a worthwhile exercise in that regard. There has been a paucity of work by senior scholars on the Tenement Museum; almost all recent work has been primarily and usefully done by graduate students. A few have problematized the Museum's entertainment goals as being incompatible with those of historic seriousness. Some have taken a serious look at its preservation practices. Almost all however, take for granted the history that the Tenement Museum recounts, not least by accepting the Museum's claims that there is an inherent, relationship of its familial ethnic residents' stories to

its building.<sup>43</sup> My approach also differs since in tracing institutional claims and the work that they perform, I neither treat 97 Orchard Street as a “site of prior abandonment” nor as a newly stirring “site of conscience.” The Museum’s affective historicity and heart-felt advocacy is noticeably discursive.

My desire, rather, is to situate myself in a broader dialogue with the Lower East Side’s numerous lovers /mourners about the many ways its deeply multi-faceted history could / should be told. Tracing and interpreting the Museum’s practices helps open a space for different claims, encouraging competing alignments of place and narrative. Interrogating how its stories are created and told are told is important, not least because in doing so narrative spaces open up for alternatively describing the Lower East Side’s past and future.

## **Methodology**

My work uses an interdisciplinary approach to the Museum’s archival materials and other sources of information. I use a multi-method approach to analyze the Museum’s institutional narratives of its building and neighborhood’s relationship to immigration, ethnicity and citizenship. Most documents quoted are primary sources from the Museum’s own archives such as letters, memos, reports, board meetings, tour scripts, research and materials on apartments and households.<sup>44</sup> Other Museum materials referred to relate to publicity, Smithsonian conference speeches, advisory bodies, coalitions, and funding proposals, publications and joint publications. Some documents are publicly available online, including media reportage and required IRS 990 (financial not-for-profit) reports. Methods used in critical cultural history and studies to analyze sources such as docent scripts, news media, museum conferences, and literature have been employed here.

Thus, a mix of issues regarding the representation and reception of its various messages can be seen in the Museum's pronouncements, archives, publications, news coverage and in a Museum-commissioned visitor study. Reviews, tour books, and general visitor destination sites offer additional insight into the power of the Museum's story and experience. In New York, which prides itself on being America's immigrant and tourist city par excellence, the Museum's government and other funding provides clues as to how it sought to expand its visitor numbers and its rationales for its presentation of historic immigration.

My observations about its archives primarily reinforce a sense of the selective nature of what gets saved from an organization's own history and projects. Those who ran Museum projects could choose to archive any relevant materials five years later. In other words, they chose what, and if, to archive. Since paid research by historians usually involved a document as part of the deliverables, it was more likely to be saved.

How history is produced by a museum—that is the literal construction of "History Making"—necessarily forces an engagement with the cultural politics of museums and broader interdisciplinary issues of history and narrative practices in relation to place. My ethnographic material thus comes primarily from interviews with historians who have been involved with the Museum as well as from participant observation. I have also availed myself of a large relatively well-known body of literature (and rich media) on the past Lower East Side, much of it written by immigrants, Reformers or Museum historians. I have also used historical and recent census and map data sources, primarily from governmental agencies. Some scholars might describe this approach as complementary to that of a backstage study of how public history messages are produced.

## Definitions and Usage

I provide here a few useful definitions. Hackworth (2002) astutely defined gentrification as “the production of urban space for progressively more affluent users” (815). My framework relies on Kaplan and Li’s (2006) analysis of ethnic enclaves, and Brodtkin’s (1998) of ethnicity and race, while assuming that Lower East Side residents may not use any of these terms. ‘Ethnic enclave’ as defined by Kaplan and Li (2006), entails that enclaves are spatially grounded in the particularities of given contexts, interact with their built environment, are affected by city policies such as those that encourage tourism and development, and “evinced a geographic concentration of ethnic economic activities within an ethnically identifiable neighborhood with a minimum level of institutional completeness” (5-6).

Brodtkin’s (1998) musings on the difficulties of separating ethnicity and race led her to invent the term ‘ethnoracial’ as an alternative to using them as entirely discrete formulations (189).<sup>45</sup> I have used ethnic, since it is the term deployed by the Tenement Museum; likewise my use of the term immigrant. In navigating the Museum’s multiple formulations for historic Blacks who were called immigrants but were clearly not (or were sometimes referred to as freed slaves, or Free African in some Museum documents), other than in quotes, I usually choose African American so as to reflect the usage of that time period.

Since my work is informed by what might be thought of in the Lower East Side as the right to belong and stay in place, I also offer Shlay and Rosen’s (2009) definition of the concept that informs that sense. They describe *inhabitation*, or “*the right to the city*” as “an argument for democratization of urban development decisions and placing power over how space is used with ‘citizens.’ Within this framework, the idea of being a citizen is not rooted in one’s passport

or country of origin but in local residency.” These terms and ensuing debates owe much to Henri Lefebvre’s various works on urban space (Lefebvre 1974, 1984) and to Mark Purcell’s (2002) interpretation of them.

## **Thesis Organization**

My chapters thematically connect the Museum’s early interest in the Lower East Side as a place of attested past multi-ethnic diversity and Americanization to its acquisition and interpretation of its 97 Orchard Street building. The use of the Lower East Side as a stage for such stories speaks to the power of place and to the appeal of tapping the collective memory of past migration and ethnicity into a shared American frame.

This thesis interrogates how—in a gentrifying living neighborhood deeply associated with past and contemporary migration—a Museum’s historical (re)construction of past Lower East Side residential households, in an Orchard Street tenement, has become a major New York visitor destination. An appearance of inevitability now marks its rehousing of the “real” personal stories of past ethnic immigrant residents in 97 Orchard Street’s apartments. As the probability increased that the Museum would be able to purchase 97 Orchard Street, that materiality affected its interpretive goals and actions. Hence the question of a desired Lower East Side multi-ethnicity becomes increasingly salient once a final interpretative choice was made to tell only the more compelling, but less diverse stories of that building’s residents.

Tracing the Museum’s multiple initial interpretive schemes shows other options in play before its narratives become “stuck in place.” This tension is still felt today since its leadership in pursuing a story of diversity was not interested in telling one of a Tenth Ward building whose

residents were overwhelmingly Jewish. Nonetheless, particularly in its beginnings, it recruited Jewish funding and heritage tourists who visited the Lower East Side as a place of origin.

In this introduction, I have pulled together these themes to articulate implications of the Museum's activist agenda. While a prescriptive urgency of making connections to contemporary migration is seen in the Museum's depictions of an immigrant past, its attempt to seal off the present when it chose to solely "tell the stories of 97 Orchard Street" belied its need to point as well to the living immigrant neighborhood around it.

Hence, tracing the Museum's interpretive practices means seeing their evolution from a point in time before the building and Museum became so identified with particular stories that its interpretive framings came to seem as if they always existed. It requires probing other early Museum agendas, such as the commemoration of the original New Immigrants (sometimes called urban pioneers) through an unwavering focus on elevating its tenement building onto a national stage, as a fully accepted National Landmark in a larger, prestigious landscape of American heritage.

In the following chapters, I address my key questions by using 97 Orchard Street as a prism for interrogating the Museum discursive and material practices. The first chapter, "Presenting an 'Immigrant Neighborhood,'" asks how the Museum historicizes and figures an immigrant past to speak to the present, including a contemporaneous Lower East Side. In the first section, "The Past is Present," I show how the Museum used tours to draw connections between the Lower East Side's history and contemporary groups. The history told on these tours does not carefully distinguish between people living in tenements in 1899 or 1999; rather those in 1999 flesh out the 1899 story. Success is primarily for future generations, which means

hardship is the price that immigrants pay, however unfair. In “Building Presentism,” I discuss questions of historicity regarding its narratives. In “Noblesse Oblige,” I discuss the Museum’s generally commemorative tone in its depiction of Reformers as role models.

A theme explored throughout is how the Museum’s varying narratives accrete to place. Hence, I start probing connections between narrative and place such as how does the Museum re-spatialize collective identity and memory to extend its activist agenda? ““Introduce LES as Immigrant Neighborhood Past and Present”” documents how an neighborhood is depicted as a place of continuous, similar immigration acculturation in depicting hardship as a [necessary] tie that binds its groups over time. “Affectively Packaged” and “Good and Bad Immigrants: Imperfect Descendants” probe the creation and reception of Museum tours that attempt to shape descendant responses and politics. “Modeling a Migrant Future?” and “Using the Past to Build the Future” interrogate how narratives are harnessed to advocate for a future sociality.

In the second chapter, “Building Ethnicity,” I ask how the Museum’s founders attempt to tell a story of past immigrant multi-ethnicity and tolerance through its tenement building. “The Tenement as a Common Place” examines how the Museum’s choice of a tenement as a representation of America is openly tied to discourses of nation, immigration, class, ethnicity, diversity and assimilation. “Composite Heritage” tells an earlier history of a Museum that had already committed to telling the stories of the six “historic” groups it deemed to have Lower East Side heritage. In theory, the Museum’s heritage groups offer an equalizing approach to Americanization and the role of collective memories of origin and neighborhood attachment. Yet its very reliance on an immigrant framing creates its own incommensurable narratives.

“Ethnic as Past Perfect” and other sections discuss how that multi-ethnic Lower East Side, present and past, is displayed. Interpretive choices are made as to which historic groups are to be represented in 97 Orchard Street and how historic is defined through a building’s dates. The Museum’s eventual interpretive solutions have their own spatial politics of representation, which determine and are shaped by which groups’ stories are displayed in its residential apartments.

In a “Jewish Pitch,” I probe contestation and contingency on how to represent neighborhood ethnic diversity in interpreting tenement apartments in a building whose residents were predominately Jewish. Through universalizing a Jewish immigrant story, the Museum generally portrays its Lower East Side tenement as a unifying symbol of diverse immigrant life. But salient differences are seen when the Museum recruits and relies on Jewish fundraising and heritage tourism. I use various Museum audio-visual scripts and other sources that show its fundraising for Jews was pitched in a very particular register, one quite different from its pronouncements as to didactic goals. So was its use of social ethnic networks to fundraise. Its successes and failures with various groups—much like the building’s own demographics—affected the Museum’s ability to simply choose residential households.

The third chapter, “Building Stories,” displays the underpinnings of the Museum’s first two apartments. The difficulties seen in introducing the “real” Baldizzi and Gumpertz family stories into 97 Orchard Street are related through documents such as early tour scripts for these apartments. An increasing stress on affective storytelling and on the personal, “real,” and “authentic” to reach the public can be seen in a six-year process marked by the tensions of funding and acquiring a building and interpreting it for touring. The storyline for these

apartments changes, delaying their incorporation into the building's fabric as historical schemes, research and tour scripts collide with an insistence on particular readings of ethnicity, language and place, diversity, American commonality and social history. What happens when the residents of its Kleindeutschland apartment turn out to be Jewish?

The third chapter concludes with a discussion of how prior heritage interpretive schemes (rooted in "Living History") persist once the Museum chooses to solely interpret the stories of building residents. Although Chinese and African Americans are not represented at 97 Orchard, a prior neighborhood heritage scheme that includes those groups resurfaces a decade later. Neighborhood boundaries get stretched to include the Five Points, Little Africa, historic Chinatown, Greenwich Village and Little Italy, as the raw materials of a retrospective and selective multi-ethnic story for a Lower East Side heritage walking tour book, and website.

In the fourth chapter, titled "Building Americans," I look at how 97 Orchard Street has been conceived and recognized on a national scale to index a dense urban immigrant neighborhood associated with an era of mass migration. I ask how its building became critical to the Museum's search for a useable past to incorporate into an American heritage narrative that could successfully insert those immigrants into the U.S.'s founding stories of national memory and commemoration. I interrogate the Museum's representation as a national landmarked site in which the collective memory and identity, symbolically and otherwise of erstwhile "new immigrants" become re-spatialized into a once anonymous [Ghetto] building.

While the Museum's narratives of its search for a Pre-Law tenement are tied to the multi-ethnic dimension of its interpretation, its vocabulary depicts a Lower East Side whose tenements are valorized generically as American "homesteads and urban log cabins," even as

past ethnic immigrants are referred to as “urban pioneers” in an odd echo of early gentrification. 97 Orchard, representing a building, a neighborhood and U.S. immigration, plays on so many different scales that the Museum’s incommensurable narratives and mixed messages inevitably rub up against each other.

The Museum’s founding story as to how it “discovered” a “time capsule” at 97 Orchard Street is critical to its re-construction of a building meant to transport visitors into a past Lower East Side. As I question the sense that the choice of 97 Orchard Street was inevitable, and inseparable from the Museum itself, I especially ask about what work is done through a depiction of its building as a newly precious symbol of an American immigrant past. How do its narratives provide a sense of the stakes involved in its politics of memory and representation at different scales? Here, I treat its mission of “tolerance” as a multi-directional discourse, aimed at lowering urban tensions, ideally with the potential to shift its object as needed from new migrants and “minorities” to Jews and other ethnic European groups.

The fifth and last chapter, “Growing Pains in a Moral Economy of Tourism,” attempts a judicious account of how recent Fujianese migrants, among others, effectively frustrated the Museum’s attempt to acquire the building next door. The story picks up from the Introduction, as the Museum’s community relations and politics of representation unravel for a while in its post 9/11 real-estate dealings. I focus on how this played out ethnically, framing the account within a neighborhood’s moral economy of tourism, and demonstrating how local agency affected this Museum’s proposed interpretive regimes for its future buildings. Within this contested context, a policy of only interpreting 97 Orchard’s residents receives new visibility in intersections of representation and gentrifying real estate with living community.

Chapter Five brings together the stories of the Museum's proposed controversial expansion to attract more visitors into 99 Orchard with the stories of its actual expansion (and continuing build out) of 103 Orchard, where it is updating its ethnic household formula to fit a new tenement. The Museum has sought to expand rapidly as a post-9/11 Lower Manhattan visitor destination. I thus explore how it attempted through state agency to extend 97 Orchard's Street aura of uniqueness and landmark status to other Museum buildings. An uneasy shifting back and forth of scale has not only left contradictory narrative loose ends, but situates the Museum's overall real estate politics in a context where the acquisition of other buildings potentially interferes with, and facilitates, its representation of past immigration.

As a neighborhood resident who tells stories of immigrant life, I have become a stakeholder in how the Tenement Museum tells its stories. I argue here that the power and use of the Museum's narratives deserve serious attention as they grow in tandem with a hollowing out of place. The official imprimatur of its National Park Service (NPS) affiliate status adds to the Museum's authoritative status as a historic destination, augmenting the sense that 97 Orchard's story is indeed the Lower East Side's saga. Unsurprisingly, the Museum's voice is growing as it once again plans a new expansion, having just recently successfully lobbied for special legislation to render its latest building retroactively part of its NPS site (Butnick 2014).

The Tenement Museum's voice is amplified as its stories are heard by increasing numbers of heritage and other tourists drawn to a remaining visible place of memory in a rapidly changing Downtown. The lessons that the Museum teaches about immigrant acculturation, grounded in its reconstruction of a historic Lower East Side tenement, need scrutiny and debate in a world increasingly characterized by globalizing cities with large migrant

populations. At the very least, its building's re-emplacment as a museum serves as a prism for issues of representation and inclusion that arise out of efforts to simultaneously commemorate, harness and smooth over the past, in a re-telling of history for presumed heirs and other audiences.

## Chapter 1: Presenting an “Immigrant Neighborhood”

...narrative-wise it always borrowed from the Jewish experience, it always visualized some Jewish upper middle class person driving through the Lower East Side and saying ‘my parents came from here.’ It is a type of ownership. I guess some Chinese from New Jersey can do that too today. The history is almost incidental.—A historian

To promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a gateway to America.—Museum Mission (1994-2010)

### Faith’s House

I’m at an academic soiree where obligatory, long introductions are being made. When it’s my turn, I say to the host that I study urban geography and my research focus is on migration, globalization and gentrification in New York’s Lower East Side. My spouse exclaims, “Elissa, tell her what you **really** do. You study the Tenement Museum.” “Oh,” responds the host. “It’s my son’s favorite New York museum!” I ready myself and politely reply, “That’s nice, how old is he? Did he take a tour with an interpreter? What did he like?” She answers enthusiastically, “He was 16. We loved it; we lucked out, we must have been on some sort of private tour because it was full of museum people and we got to have a frank discussion afterwards about the Museum itself and what we had seen.”

After another steady breath, I answer, “Well, the Museum has one hour and two hour tours. It sounds like you might have taken the two hour tour. The second hour is a discussion with Museum staff about democracy, immigration and what you felt about what you saw.” She answers: “But it was a very frank conversation.” I respond that it’s likely then that she was there after 2007 but before 2010. She says: “Yes, it was around then.”

I heard what I often hear. People who know that I am studying the Museum expect me to love it much the way they do. It's not obvious to them that people who live in its neighborhood may have a different vantage point than that of visitors. In this sense, I'm an especially privileged observer. As a neighborhood resident, I've seen the Tenement Museum grow over the years, have done research in its archives and talked to people who worked there. Not least, I have given neighborhood tours for over twenty years, although not at the Museum.

In this particular account, a guest ungracefully introduces herself by deconstructing someone else's account of a personal experience, a tour. After all, deconstruction is what academics do to objects or processes that may need careful and critical scrutiny. Rarely does that include institutions and performances understood to embody liberal ideals recognizable from life, including my own. Yet a personally affirmative, trans-generational experience of an ideal Museum viewer can also be seen as an expected response to an unspontaneous, designed product: a commodified tour of past immigrant history affectively staged in a building expressly re-created for tourists. When that visitor experience is placed into the context of an institution's 362 day a year impact on a living neighborhood and its residents, I find myself cautious in regard to its claims to interpret the past as it expands in the present.

All of this leads me to conclude that the person I am talking to represents the Museum's ideal visitor, especially since she brought along her teenage son. How the Museum pitches historic stories and to what end implies an ideal visitor, one whose distance from tenement life and allegiance to a thin suburban ethnicity is married to progressive politics. That is the kind of visitor especially willing to spend over \$20 a person to transmit the right "ancestral" lessons to offspring. Archival research supports the assumption that the Museum's management had

initially looked to attract non-urban Jewish tourists, even as its founders made a point of describing the immigrant tenement experience as universal.

As someone who agrees that this history is important, I understand that the Museum represents many good things, not the least of which is a concern for a progressive Jewish legacy, although this concern may not be explicitly acknowledged by the institution per se. Arguably this concern is at the heart of why the Tenement Museum tells a Lower East Side story; in collective memory the neighborhood is largely associated with a triad of Jewish immigration, labor and tenement life (Irving Howe 1976). Like all legacies, this one needs heirs, a need that becomes ever more acute as its elements (including Jewish identity) become increasingly disassociated from descendants' daily lives. That the Museum founders' initially attempted to decouple the Jewish part of that connection can arguably be read in part as an effort to generalize that legacy.

The Museum teaches visitors important lessons about poverty, housing, labor activism and the larger relevance of the past through tours that offer an almost palpable sense of experiencing history. Critical to that sense is its anonymous tenement building, painstakingly shepherded through a national landmarking process that successfully valorized a poor urban immigrant residence as part of America's official architectural "heritage." Museum tours are particularly inspiring for people whose identity and progressive politics are not discretely sorted out, although its stories are good enough to attract people whose politics may differ.

I still know too much. I've read what Ruth Abram, the Museum's founder and Director, wrote about why she wanted to offer the tour that Faith took. "Kitchen Conversations" was designed to encourage heritage tourists to relax and talk openly about immigration. After an

upstairs tour, the group would sit around a large kitchen table with mismatched chairs in a downstairs setting reminiscent of a familial virtual hearth.<sup>46</sup> Abram saw this as a way of using facilitated democratic dialogue to deal with a generational disjuncture of past and present:

The impetus for 'Kitchen Conversations' grew from... overheard visitor remarks. Emerging from the restored dark, cramped 325-square-foot tenement apartments, where immigrants lived from 1863 until 1935, some visitors commented, 'But those were the good immigrants. They came here for freedom. They worked hard, very hard. They didn't ask for anything. They learned English. They wanted to be Americans. Today, those people are just coming for the welfare. They don't want to work. They don't care about learning English or being American.' (Abram 2007) (62-63)

Abram described a phenomenon spatially and politically: heritage tourists were insufficiently sympathetic to the Museum's message that current and previous immigrants were similar. Presumably, Faith's family would have proven reassuring to the Museum's guides/facilitators.

In this first chapter, I assume that a post-1993 Museum is already in place with its initial interpretations locked down. I argue that the Lower East Side is represented as a repeating space of immigrant absorption, serving as laboratory and proof source for connecting past and current immigrants. I outline how that immigrant past is being fashioned through interpreting a building—97 Orchard Street—to speak to the present precisely in a place, the Lower East Side that connects various immigrant groups over time. Hence, I ask how the Museum's interpretations of that past connect it to its contemporaneous neighborhood. I am concerned here with the Museum's planned and unplanned uses of history; indeed of the how and why such stories are being harnessed, a theme touched upon in subsequent chapters. In all of my chapters I will be asking how its various messages are transmitted and received.

## **The Past is Present**

The Museum's ethnic household stories were conceived to illustrate issues representative of immigrant life writ large, in a unifying narrative of immigration that echoes the present through a retelling of a coherent past. Its guided building tours produced a new set of stories about a storied past: the Lower East Side, which remains the largest historic site of U.S. immigrant absorption. In 1911, the "Ghetto" was deemed the world's most over-crowded slum, home to most Jewish arrivals (Risichin 1977, Diner 2000). The 1994 re-creation of an old tenement dwelling into a museum with public tours interpreting that immigrant past immediately attracted visitors.<sup>47</sup> Costumed living history interpreters and tour guides depicted a historical Lower East Side literally brought to life at 97 Orchard Street. Re-created residential apartments showed a recognizable ethnic neighborhood, in miniature, in a building situated in a living ethnic neighborhood. Tour guides pointed out parallels to contemporary immigration even as they told stories of the building's former residents.

A decade later, a National Park Service (NPS) (2004) report of a conference at which the Museum presented noted: "The staff at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum believe history has a purpose." That same NPS report used Abram's wording to describe the Museum as having "set a precedent in using history as a tool for addressing contemporary social issues."<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the Museum's (2006a) "About Us" webpage explained, "The Tenement Museum's programs make conscious use of history to address contemporary social issues" and that it "interprets historic immigrant experience to illuminate the present." Such wording implies an instrumentalist view of history as a device knowingly wielded in debates about the present for the sake of the future. Yet these discursive formulations are intriguingly vague: in tracing them,

just how did the Museum propose to use the past to “address contemporary social issues,” a question I will return to later.

Arguably, the Museum’s interpretations and practices in its use of history in its first two decades primarily concern connections of history, place and social memory. Abram wanted visitors to think about today’s “new immigrants,” a term conventionally applied to the unwelcome immigrants from Eastern Europe and Southern Italy who were barred from immigration by restrictive Congressional legislation in the 1920s. This term was now re-appropriated by the Museum to refer to contemporary immigrants in an older setting seen as eliciting a sense of familial similarities. Although today’s new immigrants were not directly represented, the Museum’s interpretations attempted to channel their presence through its lessons. One interviewer noted:

This is no ordinary museum; it has a mission. Ruth Abram founded the institution with sociological goals .... “I wanted to create a national conversation among Americans,’ she says. ‘Most of us are descendants of working-class immigrants, and we hold our forebears in high regard. But we might not relate to the newest wave of immigrants or realize how similar their experience is to our own families. I thought that if I could bring Americans home to meet their own ancestors before they were ‘acceptable’ or economically comfortable, I could build that understanding.” (Horn 2000)

Abram initially assumed that the presentation of immigrant ancestors as poor tenement dwellers would by extension generate political empathy for newer immigrants.<sup>49</sup> In highlighting re-creations of how ancestors of “white” ethnic Americans “actually” lived, the Museum not only intervened in the self-understandings of immigrant descendants, but intentionally inserted itself into a national dialogue on immigration. Although an activist historical agenda shapes the Museum’s interpretations, the reception of its lessons varies. An otherwise rave review by a

*New York Times* columnist makes clear that he remains annoyed by its didactic tone years after

Ms. Abram's [2008] departure:

The museum declares that its purpose is to 'promote tolerance and historical perspective' by presenting a 'variety of immigrant and migrant experiences.' ... initially Ms. Abram seemed to have a more polemical perspective.... But even now there is sometimes an edge, as if we were being offered a lesson that we should be more welcoming and tolerant of contemporary immigrants. But is that really an issue? (Rothstein 2013)

Mr. Rothstein's response to that particular lesson may be somewhat uncharitable. Yet he correctly notes that the Museum's leadership portrayed its mission (1994–2010) as a form of liberal advocacy for contemporary immigrants.<sup>50</sup> Although

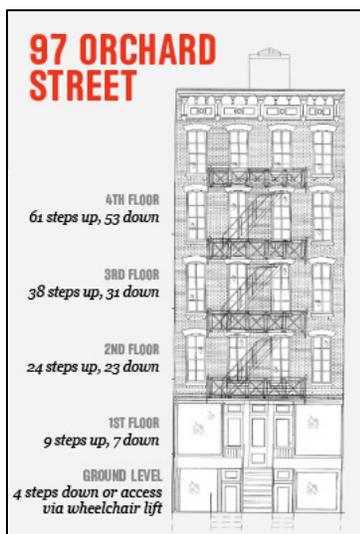


many visitors come to see a past immigrant experience rather than to learn about current immigrants by analogy, such heritage tourists (and critics) are part of the Museum's bread and butter. Their politics may not be liberal, nor are they all suburban and secular. But they too are inspired by stories of immigrant hardship and tenacity although they may not agree with all of the Museum's lessons.

Like, Mr. Rothstein I also find myself thinking about how that older mission connected the Museum's first two decades of interpreting a neighborhood and a building. I wonder about its institutional self-understandings regarding appropriate uses of history, its depiction of a past Lower East Side as a shared place, and how its views shaped the Museum's representation of "variety of immigrant and migrant experiences" in its building's stories. Such questions are urgent: as the area's ethnic enclaves have diminished, the Museum's presence as a site of

Lower East Side memory and tourism has become stronger and increasingly, the Tenement Museum has become enshrined as a highly visible source for “history.”

A future Lower East Side is glimpsed in Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s (1998c) depiction of nearby Ellis Island tourism: “...more tourists will pass through Ellis Island Restoration, located on a small island off the tip of Manhattan, than did immigrants ... in its heyday at the turn of the century” (373). As a re-created place of memory, 97 Orchard Street functions as a spatial lens displaying what is gained, elided, lost and prescribed in telling history for contemporary purposes. As intimated by Richard Rabinowitz—who as the head of the American History Workshop (AHW)<sup>51</sup>, worked with Ruth Abram to interpret the building—new contextual questions of contingency, contestation, negotiation and community relations emerge when history is powerfully told in a living place. Its presentist/activist scrim in interpreting historical Lower East Side migration through its building tours, begs a larger question of how the Museum’s stories do justice to past or present.



As a Museum building, 97 Orchard Street has succeeded in becoming a topos much like the Lower East Side itself, serving as a shorthand reference to New York’s immigrant history. 97 Orchard is the name of a recent cookbook best seller that mixes recipes with immigrant history and which in turn is promoted at the Museum Shop’s Tenement Talk series. Metaphors get mixed in describing a tenement building that has been used as a

metonym for a type of food, a museum, a neighborhood, a city, immigration at large, and even a nation state in a reprise of America as “a nation of immigrants.” This range of symbolism

suggests the value of probing how a tenement was re-made to tell these stories, and how, in turn, the Museum's goal of connecting historic Lower East Side immigrant life to the present through its building affects its material and interpretative practices in regard to its neighborhood.

### **Building Presentism**

Early on, Abram (Summer 1991) wrote: “History is a powerful tool for . . . developing a strategy for the present” (11). A Museum’s Director—and key historians—viewed the pursuit of activist contemporary goals as an appropriate aspect of professional engagement, an approach visible in its early as well as later programming. The Museum’s leadership initially assumed that its lessons on immigration would be successfully transmitted through tours and stories, which after all, were designed to resonate with contemporary issues. I will be arguing that the narrative consequences of a liberal activist presentism of the 1980s –1990s when intertwined with the material and interpretive choices for its building, created outcomes that were neither fully controllable nor reconcilable with earlier goals.

A very early example is seen back in the year when David Dinkins launched his successful campaign to become the city’s first black mayor. Richard Rabinowitz (1988) then first wrote to Abram to propose a mission for the Museum:

To devote ourselves to the histories of all the immigrant groups that have shared the Lower East Side as a gateway community[,] a vital commitment that can only help heal the strains in this city and the nation, where ethnic and racial distinctions more often pull us apart than bring us together... using all the performing and communications arts we can bring to bear ... we will be interpreting much more than the physical surrounds of American immigrants but the living, day-to-day process by which they constructed new lives in the new land. The links to the ongoing issues of immigration and acculturation in contemporary American life will make the Tenement Museum into an important forum for redefining what any and all of us mean by being American. (2)

Here Rabinowitz invokes a gateway of shared Lower East Side space to underscore how a common past heals by uniting groups in shaping an American future. But the very differences apparent in disparate histories and eras in regard to race, ethnicity, migration, social mobility, class, and collective memory inevitably complicate the Museum's rendering of shared Lower East Side origins as a necessary, yet temporary, stage for successful multi-ethnicity.

As a package, this appears as an activist historical agenda, as does the Museum's (2006a) slogan: "Using the Past to Forge the Future." The Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology defines historicity as "the use of an understanding of history as a basis for trying to change it." Certainly this seems an apt description of the Museum; its (2004) phrase "to use the past to build a better future," seems to fit the definition of historicity. 97 Orchard Street thus appears as a bid to trump time, by capturing a place. An inherent temporal confusion as to the Lower East Side's identity emerges in the use of a building whose narratives are fixed in a past era as a device for timelessly describing the neighborhood in which it is situated as a visitor destination.

The Museum's narratives have typically stressed the continuity of the neighborhood's function as a place of immigrant acculturation over a large swath of time, one in which equivalent experiences of place unify different eras and groups.<sup>52</sup> When told in place, such messages have resonance and staying power, especially if recognizable details are fleshed out convincingly amidst the use of generic themes. Historicity, much like living history at its best, can rely on place and narrators to provide affect. A larger three dimensional sensory meta-narrative allows visitors to virtually touch the past in an attempt to channel their engagement.

The issue is the larger than that of the "didactic tone" that offended Mr. Rothstein. I echo historian David Roediger's (2005) concern that care need be taken in depicting similarities

between prior and contemporary groups and migrations. Indeed, the risk is to the past as much as the future. Though memory studies have shaped an awareness of the situated nature of narrative and history (Kansteiner 2002, Zelizer 1995), such historicity or more bluntly put, presentism, is often seen as a way of writing history backwards. Merriam-Webster more kindly defines presentism as “an attitude toward the past dominated by present-day attitudes and experiences.” It is a danger for historians to avoid since it elides different earlier understandings into present ones (Livingstone 2003, Livingstone 1992). When the Museum announces it “uses history,” its activist agenda arguably slides into a type of presentism particularly apparent in its claims of contemporary relevance in doing public history programming.

Complicating this picture is how its various narrative interpretative layers—including its claims as to the use of history—accrete in place, hard to disengage once lodged. These layers include telling the story of past, anonymous, residents to make the point that they are now important to history precisely because they have enabled the Museum to make use of the past.

Abraham Rogarshevsky ... would seem to be an insignificant face in the crowd. Yet when one carefully pieces together the historical record, one realizes that this one life and death touched hundreds perhaps thousands of people. ...he has helped the Tenement Museum make use of the past (2004) (1)

Abraham Rogarshevsky becomes important precisely through being viewed by visitors. This memorialization inverts a conventional social history model in which “insignificant” people are contextualized and given importance within their own time. But more confusion ensues. Which history do building residents tell that allows the Museum to make “use of the past” and for whose sake? Its stories in its early interpretive schemes and scripts differ. Did Abraham die from tuberculosis [TB] or from the 1919 Influenza? Does the Rogarshevsky apartment represent a story of the Progressive Era as well as of sweatshops? Is the Gumpertz apartment a period

room showing a 1870s story of a Depression and eventual upward mobility, or does it stage a story of an abandoned female head of household? Or does it tell an earlier story of a German Lutheran Kleindeutschland neighborhood family eventually inflected (and re-decorated) to indicate a Jewish presence? Does it disrupt storylines and notions of authenticity to install the Gumpertz family in a different apartment than the one in which they lived? The Museum's various narrative accretions can appear seamless or quite jarring.

One difficulty, as Wulf Kansteiner (2002) has pointed out, is that "[m]emory studies offer an opportunity to acknowledge that historical representations are negotiated, selective, present-oriented, and relative, while insisting that the experiences they reflect cannot be manipulated at will" (195). If the creation, use and reception of historical narratives cannot be fully controlled, a warning is given that history is not simply malleable. A building's fabric has been re-stitched discursively with little thrown away. The re-use of older narratives reflects the impossibility of a pristine, perfect building restoration of its residents' stories as history.

The Museum's historicity and heart-felt advocacy is noticeably discursive. Although its tours and classes educate, persuade and inspire, in its twenty year mission of tolerance on behalf of "new immigrants," the Museum did not engage in direct political advocacy on their behalf.<sup>53</sup> Its "moral values" activism is clearly not of that sort. Arguably, Museum tours are designed to experientially prick the contemporary conscience in a building that stands as a lively, engaging and sometimes thought provoking monument to the past. The same web page (2009a) that touts an instrumentalist view of the past, shifts into a commemorative tone in invoking the Museum's "flagship tenement building" where it tells "the stories of immigrant families who struggled, against all odds, to make their way in America." It's very hard to

separate its historicity from its commemorative work in pronouncements and performances that reflect its mix of founders, audiences, and donors. Moreover, its commemorative work often proposes that older activist political legacies should be assumed and continued by new heirs, or that the Museum itself is actually their heir.

If my usage makes it appear almost as if the Museum itself gives voice here, I suggest it useful to acknowledge an institutional presence and voice as created and socially recognizable artifacts that purport to speak authoritatively. Although narratives strands can sometimes be neatly disentangled to make discrete voices audible, at other times it is an institutional stance that is most usefully discerned through sanctioned material and discursive practices:

Of course, the Tenement Museum believes that images, objects, and literature can tell us a great deal about the past — so it's not surprising that our educators regularly employ photographs from Riis's book in tours of our landmark tenement building at 97 Orchard Street. (2012b)

As the above shows, agency is attributed to the Museum by the Museum. With 97 Orchard Street serving as a synecdoche for immigration that has now become eponymous with an immigrant food book, it seems fair to point to a represented and felt institutional presence, or to a building's ability to apparently speak (and be represented) in multiple registers.<sup>54</sup>

As Barbie Zelizer (1995) notes: "Museum-related activities have become themselves a paradigm for remembering" (223). This Museum's narratives appear marked by a multi-directional urgency to relate the social memory of a past immigration—as rendered in its interpretation of a historic Lower East Side—to contemporary migration and Americanization.<sup>55</sup> It invokes difficulties faced by current immigrants by emphasizing prior immigrant hardship, tenacity and mobility. It inspires by gesturing to an implicit American promise of a better future.

The Museum thus models a past mass urban migration as having been successfully integrated into social and national frameworks, albeit at a real cost. In other words, it remembers an immigrant past in ways that justify antecedents and outcomes for descendants even as it proffers a future model for others. While Museum pronouncements and internal documents indicate that its use of history is for the sake of contemporary immigrants, its uses, overt or unplanned, appear to be far broader. I will discuss later how it draws lessons for current immigrants, but first here's yet another 97 Orchard Street lesson, one that arguably has far more to do with immigrant descendants.

### **Noblesse Oblige: Reformers as Social Activists**

Tours reference local, municipal, and national scales in showing how past efforts by immigrants, reformers and government greatly improved the lives of East Side residents. Hence tours need to first show just how bad it was. The "Objectives" for the *Piecing it Together* Tour state: "Appreciate how work and housing conditions on the Lower East Side and in Tenements [sic] like 97 Orchard Street sparked national discourse and reform" (2002, 2005b) (2). The impact of municipal building codes enacted by New York's Progressive era Reformers is shown through tours highlighting 97 Orchard's 1905 mandatory plumbing, light, ventilation and safety changes. Reformers gain credit as past "activists" in current collective memory by 97 Orchard serving as an example of the over-crowded inadequate housing that they worked to address.

Visiting school children can reenact the Reform agenda by getting to play "tenement inspector" with adult costumed interpreters playing the roles of a 1906 landlord and tenant.<sup>56</sup> Tours and websites mention Lawrence Veiller's (1903) mainly uptown Protestant tenement housing reform movement, ensuring that it receives due credit in accounts of improving

immigrant life.<sup>57</sup> A model of 97 Orchard (aka, the dollhouse) became a visitor exhibit in an explicit reference to Veiller's famous model tenement exhibit of 1899.<sup>58</sup>

Unlike previous codes that grandfathered conditions in older tenements, 1901's code was legally deemed applicable in 1905. Hall toilets, interior windows for back rooms, and an airshaft all needed to be retrofitted. The impact of building codes gets re-presented on a national scale where 97 Orchard serves not only as an exemplar of all that was wrong but as a motivating inspiration for Reformers to get it right. In the *Getting By Tour* (2005e), the guide states: "When Lucas Glockner prepared to build 97 Orchard Street, there were almost no codes governing how the building should look and what it should contain" (5). The guide then says:

.... in the late 19th century, reformers started lobbying for a law that would apply to all buildings—to make water, air and light human rights for all New Yorkers.... the law set a precedent for how governments could set standards of living for their citizens, one that was replicated by cities all over the United States. The housing laws in these cities, that establish the right to water, light, and other amenities, are due to the changes people wanted to make in apartments like those of 97 Orchard Street. (2005e) (10)

As a worst case "Pre-Law" tenement built in 1863, 97 Orchard Street is offered up as proof that reformers improved the lot of poor immigrants nationally by forcing governments to enact building codes (Dolkart 2006).<sup>59</sup> Guides point out the hall bathroom and explain that in 1901 the city required the installation of shared indoor hall water closets, although the landlord only obliged in 1905. Voluntary or non-required features are pointed out as well. The building's 1935 residential closing is explained by the landlord's unwillingness to invest to bring it up to 1929 code, which required fireproofing the staircase and putting toilets in apartments.

Arguably, that narrative is a bit more complicated since the 1929 Multiple Dwelling Act mainly affected new housing. Like prior municipal codes, its applicability to older tenements was legally contested (which the tour information notes). Its eventual enforcement by 1935

served as an incentive to shut down older poorer quality housing, arguably a slum clearance goal (Wasserman 1994, Mele 2000).<sup>60</sup> One Yelp reviewer noted that his guide did not “get” that certain laws to improve tenement life diminished available housing stock for the poor. 97 Orchard’s landlord could afford to residentially close down the building since a still busy Jewish Orchard Street provided viable storefront income even during the Depression. The Museum’s historians documented this in materials on Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia that managed to nicely convey a certain overall cynicism about the motives of Reformers. Yet nuance can be lost in a distillation of history transmitted to guides especially on tours performed for visitors over time.

A Columbia University architectural historian and preservationist, Andrew Dolkart’s (2006) book “Biography of a Tenement,” displayed his abiding interest in tenement housing reform. His research, done prior to and during 97 Orchard’s renovation in the early 1990s, showed how 1905’s mandatory changes were retrofitted into a pre-Law building to provide light, air and indoor plumbing. He wrote a prior draft for a joint WNET (PBS) Museum program.

97 Orchard Street ... [is] a fitting site for the physical commemoration of the immigrant experience in urban America. The building stands as a survivor... through its many alterations, [it] illustrates the effect that tenement reform laws had on older tenement apartments and the quality of life of their residents. (Dolkart 2001) (1-2)

A commemorative tone ties the building to Reform efforts, suggesting historic preservation’s moral mandate to protect a lonely historical witness’ physical testimony that Reformers had truly aided immigrants.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, since Reform-sponsored building codes from 1867 and 1879 did not affect older tenements, the reference only applies to 1901’s mandated changes.

Yet, how does the Museum’s enthusiastic use of a Reform narrative get connected to contemporary U.S. migration in relation to its building? In portraying the social history of

housing, Environmental Reformers were positioned as “real” Americans who had helped past immigrants. Reformers offer an inspirational modeling by analogy for American immigrant descendants who can acknowledge and repay a debt by helping newer immigrants in turn. Older models show proof of what can be done by demonstrating how immigrant housing, labor, health and education conditions were once ameliorated.

Ironically, the Museum knows that its tours—which portray appealing families in meticulously clean (if dark and cluttered) apartments—somewhat undercut its association with Reformer Jacob Riis.<sup>62</sup> Riis’ (1890) iconic photos used at the Museum emphasized the squalor of what he called the “Jewish quarter,” “Jewtown,” or the “Hebrew quarter,” (and of other parts of Lower Manhattan such as the Mulberry Street “Bend” near Five Points).<sup>63</sup> As did his words:

THE tenements grow taller, and the gaps in their ranks close up rapidly as we cross the Bowery and, leaving Chinatown and the Italians behind, invade the Hebrew quarter. ...No need of asking here where we are... their unmistakable physiognomy, betray the race at every step. Men with queer skull-caps, venerable beard, and the outlandish long-skirted kaftan of the Russian Jew, elbow the ugliest and the handsomest women in the land...

So thoroughly has the chosen people crowded out the Gentiles in the Tenth Ward.... It is said that nowhere in the world are so many people crowded together on a square mile as here. The average five-story tenement adds a story or two to its stature in Ludlow Street and an extra building on the rear lot....

.... dark hallways and filthy cellars, crowded, as is every foot of the street, with dirty children... (Chapter X, Jewtown, sections 1-3)

Given Riis’ view of Jews and others, it is more than ironic that the Museum’s implied modeling of an end-of-twentieth-century liberal ethos became wedded to this particular Reformer.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps this lack of nuance is symptomatic of a more general flattening of history for public consumption since equally confusingly the Museum combined radicals and Reformers

(including Riis) alike in proposing role models of activism. Anthropologist Jack Kugelmass (2000) recorded a 1990s living history performance that showed a slide with this text.

At times the refugees [that is Jewish immigrants] must have felt they had traded one misery for another. The physical and social conditions under which they labored on the Lower East Side attracted the attention of reformers who became legends in their own time. People like Lillian Wald, of the Henry Street Settlement, Emma Goldman, who organized the sweatshops, Baron de Hirsch, the charitable banker, Margaret Sanger, of Planned Parenthood, and Jacob Riis, the famous photographer. **Together they documented the conditions and they fought for change.** [Emphasis added] (180)

Anarchist Emma Goldman (expelled from the U.S. in 1919) would roll in her grave if she found herself “together” in the virtual company of a wealthy French Jewish banker, or of American Protestant Reformers like Margaret Sanger and Jacob Riis, whose views on politics, sex, and immigrant Jews differed so widely from hers. A confusing political terrain ensues when Reformers are simply combined with Jewish radical leftists, philanthropists, and settlement house founders. Although later, a similarly odd ahistorical mix appeared on various Museum (2007) blogs and its web sites for teenagers under the slogan, “Be An Agent for Change.”<sup>65</sup>

In other words, the Museum has promoted a generic social activism directly modeled on a broad blend of disparate figures, by encouraging dialogue even as it carefully shies away from being an activist organization. Its stories of Reformers work to create a newly amalgamated social memory of how real change requires the help of allies from above. Adam Steinberg (2014) —a Museum employee—offered in his thesis an understanding of the Museum’s policy as one of “inspir[ing] support” for current immigrants without endorsing specific stances.

The Museum’s mission is to change people’s minds, to encourage people to appreciate diversity and, by doing so, to make life easier for immigrants today. This tolerance inspires support for certain public policies, including immigration reform that offers a clear pathway to citizenship for law-abiding residents, labor policies that empower immigrant-dominated labor unions, and housing policies that alleviate the housing crisis endemic to immigrant communities. However, the Museum has long had an unofficial

non-endorsement policy; it never publicly endorses any of these policies. Rather, support for these policies is implicit in how it presents the stories of the immigrants who once lived at 97 Orchard Street. (3)

Yet, it is unclear how in mining the past to offer an inspirational model, its Reform narratives of immigrant housing *per se* (or of 97 Orchard's residents) get supportively linked even implicitly to current issues. Although 1950s discrimination against African Americans in Levittown, PA has engendered Museum blog commentary, the current use of housing codes and zoning restrictions to discriminate against Mexican migrants in nearby Farmingdale, Long Island is not on the Museum's radar.<sup>66</sup>

### **“Introduce LES as Immigrant Neighborhood Past and Present”**

Tours of 97 Orchard's historic ethnic households were updated during Abram's second decade at the Museum to emphasize connections to local contemporary immigration. Guides were expressly told in the *Getting By* Tour to “Introduce LES as Immigrant Neighborhood Past and Present” (2005e) (2). Much earlier, Rabinowitz (1985) had already tied the understanding of past Lower East Side immigrant life to observing its perceived continuities.

On the Lower East Side, the life of the city--and the dynamic of its change--goes on. Here there is not the slightest chance that the tenements are going to be sanitized or made prettier... In fact, the same tenements are still occupied by immigrants. ...[this] offers an opportunity to bring historical interpretation into a world that has not been antiquated, but is still with us, still powerfully conveying its political and social puzzles. (6)

He saw a then contemporary Lower East Side with immigrant tenements as offering a continuing window into an older, incompletely understood story of mass immigrant absorption. Rabinowitz (1986) also thought the Museum would be uniquely positioned to interpret New York's centrality to immigration. “Despite the panoply of cultural institutions in New York, no other group has undertaken responsibility for interpreting the city's world-historical role as a

gateway for immigration and a laboratory for ethnicity.” (1) New York’s importance is immediately felt through Rabinowitz’s concatenation of phrases familiar to students of immigrant absorption. Their combination implies a mass funneling of diverse groups into an urban experiment of creating new Americans out of rawer “ethnic” material on an unprecedented scale. In viewing the Lower East Side, visitors and historians who cared enough to see how their own families had once lived, could readily glimpse an ongoing, living laboratory of ethnicity.

The very gesture of paying money to take a tenement tour as an exploration of past life implies social and physical distance from the tenement as a place of daily life. Most visitors, who pay over \$20 a person per tour, have presumably rarely experienced tenement life first-



hand or even seen an apartment such as my friend’s (see photo) in which the bathtub in the kitchen does double duty as a table. But not all transmission is through a Museum guide. Many visitors come in family groups. School classes, which initially were mainly local, now come from all over. Hence tour groups potentially provide older relatives and teachers with a valorized platform from which to explain the unfamiliar material physicality of tenement life (and familial origins) to different generations. That the material physicality is unfamiliar does not mean it is unexpected; images of tenement life from photos and movies abound.

Telling the Museum’s stories “in place” in the Lower East Side makes that past more powerful. In the 1990s, telling them *in situ*—surrounded by migrants living in tenements—underscored that past world even as it emphasized 97 Orchard’s continuity and contemporary

applicability. I use *in situ* here as a known method of displaying fragmentary museum objects, human or material, meant to point to a whole. “The notion of *in situ* entails metonymy and mimesis: the object is a part that stands in a contiguous relation to an absent whole that may or may not be recreated” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998b) (386). Laboratory and backdrop came together in framing a contemporary immigrant neighborhood to fill and stand in for a past Lower East Side expressly evoked through the stories of selected 97 Orchard families.

In a gentrifying area where tenements occupied by Fujianese and other migrants define nearby streetscapes, visiting a museum of historic immigrant life can create for visitors a comfortable sense of briefly stepping back in urban time. The living neighborhood can be read as an overlay, allowing contemporary immigrant life to be glimpsed through a prism of tenements past. The positioning of a Tenement Museum amidst residential and commercial tenements adds to a temporal elision, promoting the effect of time travel accomplished through simply remaining in place once arriving at the Museum destination. “Living history” villages with older buildings referred to as “time machines” offer visitors a temporal shift to a past place since these buildings powerfully invoke a sense of travel. 97 Orchard also works as a time machine, but one that relies on an urban neighborhood for its setting.

The very process of museumification implies that tenements are part of a historic past. The current Lower East Side’s busy streetscapes full of migrant, hipster, and upscale life also resonate with past neighborhood images especially since many new stores and restaurants give a deliberate visual nod to that past. A type of visual prophylactic memory segues from Ghetto to an iconic contemporary immigrant neighborhood, usually bypassing what is now viewed as the area’s transitional “inner city” days. This message is echoed by the Museum’s earlier choice

of a 97 Orchard Street location in a shrinking Jewish commercial area still seen as part of a Lower East Side visibly “next to” what was then a growing Chinese population.

A Museum that exists because already there was a sense in the 1980s that a humble older building needed to be preserved as a remnant of an earlier time now finds itself officially troubled by the disappearance of its surrounding immigrant area. Census figures confirm that the expansion of Chinatown – Lower East Side has stopped as the area continues to lose its migrant population to outer borough neighborhoods (Kwong 2009, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) 2013). Gentrification has speeded up as a once poor neighborhood is now caught up in a larger reconfiguration in which Lower Manhattan has become a cultural and entertainment hub, a major visitor destination in which museums play performing roles.

The Museum’s myriad re-constructions invoke a historic Lower East Side popularly memorialized in novels, photography, and collective cultural memory. They are contemporary creations. The Museum Store stocks Lower East Side and New York classics alongside touristic souvenir mugs and upscale gifts. The Museum’s web site, and especially its blog, feature iconic photographs alongside newer ones, accompanied by a constant stream of information about past and present. Though it is far, far harder today to “Introduce LES as immigrant neighborhood past and present,” to do so is part of a balancing act for tours that depend on a semi-static built environment. While older tours reference a larger meta-story of immigrant absorption in the same place over time, newer tours, in a different process of museumification, now get created to show both the “ravages” of gentrification and to partake in food tastings at newer, more upscale ethnic eateries.

## A Timeless Lower East Side

Ruth Abram delivered the keynote address at a National Parks Service (NPS) (2004) conference on “Opening Historic Sites to Civic Engagement.”

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum story is largely focused on immigrants. The stories told are of hardships and successes; assimilation and retained heritage; exploitation and contributions. Ruth described the surrounding community as not terribly unchanged from the history told at the Museum. The new immigrant community surrounding the Museum is one in which the neighbors often do not speak English and frequently live at or below the poverty line.

The NPS (2004) posted its official conference account of her talk “Harnessing the Power of History” on its website. A revealing litotes validated the Museum’s representation of a past Lower East Side as a timeless setting for stories of successive immigrant “waves,” generalizable indeed to the present neighborhood. Visitors taking its *Piecing it Together* (2002, 2005b) tour were explicitly asked, “By looking around, which immigrant groups currently live on the Lower East Side?” (2). Contemporary residents from nearby buildings were thus used to authenticate 97 Orchard’s virtual residents from a distant past. Guides used stories, discussions and gestures to point out buildings that housed migrant residents and/or workers. The living conditions faced by the neighborhood’s newest Chinese residents seemed all too recognizable as a slightly updated and therefore more outrageous version of those endured by previous groups.

The Museum’s building and walking tours pivoted on 97 Orchard’s emplacement as a tenement amidst immigrant tenements. One historian said to me: “The Museum should just take them [visitors] outside and let them look.” Nonetheless, the Museum added in reminders for good measure and guides were prompted to underscore historical parallels. While first standing outside with a *Getting By* Tour group on the corner Broome Street, the guide was prompted to note. “As of 2002, the median household income in the section of the

neighborhood that the Museum stands in is just over \$25,000. In the neighborhood as a whole, more than ¼ of the people live below the poverty line...” (2005e) (2). The Museum thus foregrounded the very real persistence of neighborhood ethnic poverty even as its narratives of American commonality portrayed past immigrant hardship as a shared, expected experience.<sup>67</sup>

The Museum’s (2002a) press release for the Levine apartment opening was titled: “First Permanent Sweatshop Exhibit in the U.S. Opens at the Tenement Museum.” Ethnic sweatshops—sometimes referred to by the Museum as garment shops or makeshift factories—invoked similarly ambivalent indignation as seen in a much later Museum blog entry.

97 Orchard’s own Harris Levine ran a garment shop out of his apartment... (Learn more on our Piecing It Together Tour.) There were at least 23 such makeshift factories on ...[that] stretch of Orchard Street ... 180 still operate in the entire Lower East Side today (you can recognize them by the steam coming out of pipes near windows) and though demographics have shifted ..., the shops continue to rely on immigrant labor. (2009d)<sup>68</sup>

The quote proposes that 180 sweatshops *still* exist in the “entire” Lower East Side (whatever those boundaries may be) precisely when a lack of post 9/11 manufacturing made that number quite questionable.<sup>69</sup> Sweatshops provide an ideal soapbox for Museum visitors gazing at Chinatown – Lower East Side. The tug on collective memory here is big since three-quarters of East European Jewish immigrants (male and female) labored in the garment trade, usually under miserable conditions. A similar story can be told about Italian female laborers.

The irony of a Tenement Museum museumifying a sweatshop to show its continuity and current urgency is not lost. The Museum promotes a message in direct tension with its investment in representing a resolved common immigrant past. As Laura Hapke (2004) writes:

The ... tenement house that is now the Orchard Street Museum makes a point of emphasizing the fond memories of the families who lived there. And ... Ellis Island ... makes similarly rosy-hued use of immigrant ephemera. With renovated labor sites becoming such contested ideological terrain—“a commodified cultural product,” to use

Wenger's expression for the Lower East Side—the [National] Register of Historic Places elevates the ethnic subjects to almost mythical status and thus blocks off ways of knowing the shop historically. As ethnic suffering transmogrified into the successful struggle of immigrants to achieve a better life for their children and grandchildren, even the sweatshop may be reborn as “packaged, safe, and colorfully exotic.” (12)

Hapke sees the sweatshop saga promoted as an accepted stage of ethnic immigration in an emphasis on immigrant sacrifice for future generational success. Similarly, one historian explicitly portrayed Abram's depiction of current local hardship as expected dues for the future:

Abram used to say to me that the second generation is always going to be fine just like the Jews... Maybe... but we're talking about mobility with immigrant history which might be very different in this post-industrial time; nevertheless the issue is the exploitation that these people are suffering now and you are telling me that it doesn't matter because their kids are going to be fine.... Abuse against the first generation is not horrible in today's lives. It's expected and something that people forget. You pay your dues and then your kids make it; the sacrifice of the first generation is saluted. We don't give immigrants agency today or then and instead we emphasize their sacrifices.

That immigrants are commemorated as the sacrificial vehicle enabling descendant success is thematically woven into the Museum's stories of first Americans, past and current. Yet a decoupling of an immigrant past also needs to grapple with past agency not least since the Museum is looking to propose activist immigrant role models to round out its roster of Reformers. A depiction of the inevitability of hardship then and now is tension ridden: the same Museum tour recounts a history of earlier immigrant labor struggles. The *Piecing it Together* Tour (2005f) instructions insist that the guide “Conclude the tour by making a final connection between immigration past and present” in offering an empathic finale (4).

Conclusion (3 minutes)

After Fannie moved out, the next generation of immigrant laborers moved into the neighborhood. Ask visitors to look out the windows. Note Chinese signs, indicating their presence in the neighborhood today. Like the immigrant groups that preceded them, many Chinese and Latino workers labor in sweatshop-like working conditions, continuing to struggle for decent pay and working conditions. (2005f) (4)

A gaze reinforces a sense of local immigrant continuity in its focus on sweatshops. The neighborhood itself is made to be the “same,” the names of the groups changing as one migration follows the next in undergoing hardship and acculturation, and achieving mobility. The Museum’s commemorative narratives of hardship feature a past Lower East Side as a place of continuity and change. Immigrant life itself is produced as a space of persistence marked by a constant turnover of groups exposed to similar processes in the built and social environments. Contemporary issues ostensibly can be brought to the fore through the presentation of past life. Conversely, describing past hardship and success mainly suffices for the present.

### **Sharing Hardship and Assistance**

Visitors to 97 Orchard Street were meant to experience connections reinforced by the neighborhood’s historic built environment being home to newer migrant communities. While immigrant hardship is locally situated, its uses are generalizable and work in multiple directions. The Museum’s stories



**Figure 4 – Laundry on Fire Escape**

of past hardship were both reinforced and channeled when visitors saw hand-washed laundry on nearby tenement fire escapes, a signifier associated with new immigrants. By its second decade, *Getting By* Tour groups standing outside were told by guides that all immigrants need assistance including from “the government for help in tough times. Today, there are over 200 family and social welfare organizations serving the neighborhood’s Chinese community alone” (2005e) (2).

A recognizable similarity of older and newer immigrant support networks (Jewish and Chinese) is reinforced by a liberal underpinning that marries government obligation to communal self-interest. In an echo of the hometown societies (*landsmanshaftn*) that once proliferated throughout the Lower East Side, 97 Orchard and the neighborhood are positioned as a new shared place of origin for visitors and current immigrants having undergone a common “gateway” experience. The urgency of local Chinese immigrant need is pointed out at the same time a responsible communal stance is highlighted. This formulation nods to a well-known trope of Jewish collective memory often voiced as “we take care of our own,” an ambivalent phrase used by many groups—which relied on, or continue to rely on communal assistance.<sup>70</sup>

Hardship, as portrayed in 97 Orchard’s tiny apartments, becomes a rite of passage, with the tenement a critical stage for immigrant residents. The Gumpertz (1870s) and Baldizzi (1935) families shared something in common. In an earlier, period-based interpretive scheme, one



represented the impact of the “Long” Depression and the other, the “Great” Depression. Guides are instructed to “Emphasize the importance of social welfare networks that help immigrants in ‘getting by’” (2005e) (2). Visitors are asked to compare the choices faced by poor immigrant families after the guide explains that being ineligible for outdoor relief (city distributed food) meant that the Gumpertz family was initially sustained by relatives and by a German Jewish aid society, and then by Nathalie Gumpertz’s work as a custom dress-maker. The Italian Baldizzi family survived primarily through government relief and part-time work, and

was evicted in 1935. These familial revelations allowed the guide an opening for posing more contemporary questions. Museum narratives stress families overcoming hardship and struggle in ways that resonate with collective memories of everyone pitching in during hard times even as they show that poor immigrants needed aid and were sometimes helped.

### **Affectively Packaged**

A narrative sameness of place and process can be conveyed visually within a building. Although an enormous amount of research went into re-creating individual apartments and stories, the net result of these visual narratives is of similarity despite the differences portrayed in domestic interiors. Each apartment is tiny, clean, crowded, dark yet dignified, almost painstakingly *gemütlich* (see early Gumpertz Museum photo).<sup>71</sup> Although distinguished by period and by telling ethnic details (a crucifix, map or candles), as a group the staged apartments appear familiar as well as familial, serving as a bulwark that surmounts tragedy. Tours show how families successfully coped despite poverty and familial tragedy through an orderly, intimate sense of tenement and home life that readied these families for the future.

Social historian Suzanne Wasserman who had worked at the Museum in 1993 when the apartments were just opening, poked fun at herself when she noted: “The thing about social history is that there is always something sad happening; the Gumpertz abandonment and the Baldizzi eviction.” As to the settings: “The empty space was much more evocative and eerie; I did tours there all the time; I thought that was my job; the furnished interpretation of the apartments was almost sterile.” While there is a wide range of reactions to these tiny re-created period apartments furnished primarily from catalogues, auctions and vintage shops

(with a few familial replicas), most visitors find them quite moving in depicting a previously unimagined cramped poverty.<sup>72</sup> But then most visitors have not spent time in tenements.

Lower East Side social mobility implied transience, a perfect metaphor for visitors whose Museum trip marks a return to a virtual home for part of the day.<sup>73</sup> Certainly in emphasizing past hardship, the Tenement Museum is involved in a project of commemoration that broadens and legitimizes ethnic immigrant history into mainstream accounts of nation-building even as it retroactively celebrates the success of descendants. Immigrant perseverance is tied to generational success—not just as heritage, but as a central part of an aspirational American message that is in theory potentially equalizing for immigrant descendants, past and future.<sup>74</sup>

One historian interviewed took exception to the Museum's stress on immigrant success:

... 'We suffered, but we succeeded.' The ... emphasis is on the 'winners' and their ultimate success—not on the countless thousands of individuals who faltered and failed to thrive in this nation's immigration experiment—all seemingly lost in the dustbins of Tenement Museum history. [Ultimately,] the stories are geared to appeal to the children and grandchildren of those who did succeed and did move up the economic ladder.

### **Good and Bad Immigrants: Imperfect Descendants**

Many Museum narratives and practices emphasize through its building that immigrant hardship and sacrifice is an expected, if unwelcome, initial stage of becoming American. Dolkart (2001) wrote that: "In 1988, 97 Orchard Street was rediscovered by the Lower East Side Tenement Museum ... [its tenement is] a powerful testament to the resolve of its many residents to make new lives in a new land" (43). Though the Museum's materially enshrined stories resonate in different ways, they were designed to evoke an emotive political and commemorative response to the harshness of that immigrant life.

A different, oft repeated later Museum (2009a) formulation shifts that message by explicitly looking to harness this history in support of current immigrants: "Visitors view

restored apartments and learn about the struggles of past generations in the hope of providing historical perspective on the experiences of today's newcomers."<sup>75</sup> The value of the past in teaching about prior struggles is relegated to its utility in connecting to present ones.<sup>76</sup>

Tours package past daily life into meta-narratives chock full of messages that explicate and entertain. While their resonance has to do with how visitors view past immigration, it is not inevitable that encountering sympathetic stories of prior hardship creates an empathetic jump. Abram had started the "Kitchen Conversations" program to push the Museum's "bad" heritage tourists towards engaging with the Museum's post-2002 messages on newer immigration. Her opinion of these visitors was quoted due to the media coverage afforded by the Museum's uneasy relations with its own Fujianese immigrant neighbors in its fight over 99 Orchard Street.

"We want people to understand how hard it must have been to come to America and live in such small apartments," Abram said. "But I worry that a lot of the people who come away moved by the experience of Jewish and Italian families leave the museum and then look down on the Chinese and Hispanic people who live in the same neighborhood today." (Getlin 2002)

Here Abram implies that the Museum's task and [future] purpose is to correct the attitudes that such visitors may hold toward neighborhood residents. On these newly extended tours, the past—that is the upstairs apartments—becomes explicitly connected to the present—a first floor virtual "kitchen" designed so as to evoke older immigrant values of home. The Museum's virtual kitchen with its old unmatched chairs and oil cloth covered tables was seen as a safe familial place to discuss how tourists felt about newer immigrants after having met 97 Orchard's prior residents.<sup>77</sup> The program explicitly used a contemporary vocabulary to describe past immigrant life so as to join present challenges to past ones.

Many of the challenges immigrant families confronted in the past are similar to those new immigrants face today, such as maintaining language and culture while adapting to

a new place, negotiating the welfare system, surviving as a single mother, working in sweatshops, facing racial discrimination, and struggling for better housing. (2010b)

In this write-up of the Museum's former "Dialogues for Democracy" program (aka, "Kitchen Conversations"), past immigrant social ills are recast as current U.S. immigrant issues. By 2010, extended versions of its tours were offered that added in an extra hour of facilitated conversation. The description for the 2010 *Getting By* Tour option explained:

During this two-hour tour, get an in-depth look at *Getting By: Immigrants Weathering Hard Times*. Using the stories of two immigrant families from Germany and Sicily as a starting point, explore and discuss how housing and social welfare have changed over the years. Spend extended time inside two restored apartments and join in a conversation about the themes arising from the tour. You are encouraged to share your own experiences, thoughts, and family histories with a trained educator and your fellow visitors. Don't miss this unique opportunity!<sup>78</sup>

In an open room overlooking Orchard Street, the past connects with the present with visitors discussing their own stories while bearing in mind those of the upstairs residents.

### **Modeling a Migrant Future?**

The importance of the neighborhood's institutions and spaces in regard to American acculturation is well documented. In its 1993 National Landmark filing, the Museum treated its building's past residents as transitory, and explicitly tied their future success to assimilation.

Ultimately, the forces of assimilation almost always prevailed... While the tenements were continuously inhabited, the families residing in them constantly changed. The great majority of residents of 97 Orchard Street, if they were anything like the other residents of the Lower East Side, ultimately succeeded in America. They surmounted the undeniable hardships and obstacles they faced. (October 8, 1993) (16)

Here, Dolkart (its main author), like Abram, takes Lower East Side transience as a given, concluding that successful families rapidly Americanize and leave, to be replaced by others. His commemorative tone suggests that the building was meant to represent a particular Lower East Side imaginary that imbues hardship and loss but signals ultimate immigrant success. In

addressing the building's historical significance, 97 Orchard Street's anonymous residents [understood to be primarily Jewish] are generalized as representative of a neighborhood rendered as a hard but indispensable stage on the road to Americanization.

Nonetheless, the National Landmark filing takes this much further by describing the arrival of new groups as effectively pushing previous groups out and up as a "characteristic phenomenon of displacement which has been associated with immigration" (Andrew S. Dolkart 1993) (10). Here it is immigrant success that generically propels groups out to open up space for the next.<sup>79</sup> In this scenario, group difference and differences within groups become muted as one group marches in and another marches out. Along these lines, some of the Bowery's musicians were singing a 1902 popular song: "If it Wasn't for the Irish and the Jews." That very same year, New York's press was unpleasantly reporting about a riot that ensued at a local funeral: the police were called in as Jewish mourners and Irish factory workers clashed. Edward O'Donnell (2007)—a Big Onion walking tour company founder who became a historian—has argued that the riot at Rabbi Jacob Joseph's funeral had far more to do with the area's German [Christian] population, and notes *inter alia*:

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider this question of conflict due to ethnic succession on the Lower East Side. If any immigrant group threatened the place of New York's Irish, it was the Italians who poured into areas indisputably Irish, where they competed for the same low-skill, manual labor jobs and fought bitter battles over the Catholic churches they came to share. (31)

A more nuanced view of displacement posits that it is competitive between overlapping groups. In other words, each Lower East Side ethnic group had its own enclaves, sub-enclaves, and contested overlaps with others.<sup>80</sup> Its various groups and residents did not necessarily have shared equivalent neighborhood experiences, collective memories and social trajectories.

In its National Landmark filing, assimilation into American notions of citizenship and democracy becomes inextricably tied to generational social mobility. The Museum's founders interpreted the neighborhood's unusual continuity of settlement houses, schools, clinics, charities, and housing to mean that multiple groups learned the same massive civics lessons while living with others in tenements, the harshest of housing. The tenement as teacher appears when historian Kevin Jackson (2002) describes the Museum as "clarif[y]ing how 'the places we call home' shape our identities and participation in civic life." Certainly tenement life requires intimate proximity to others in private and public settings and knowledge of other groups. Equally, the Lower East Side's density, housing and labor conditions served as fertile ground for its large scale immigrant political involvement.

Nonetheless, the culling of desired lessons from any shared ancestral experience of place is a dicey proposition that is far harder to sustain in a broad sweep that includes multiple groups and eras. While the Baldizzi story of an Italian child helping a Jewish family keep the Sabbath gets continually recirculated as proof positive of inter-ethnic connections, Museum narratives do not tightly demonstrate Tenth Ward groups as "sharing" housing, communal institutions or public space.<sup>81</sup> Nor is 97 Orchard Street itself representative of a multi-ethnic story even though it is interpreted to demonstrate one. Hence, I worry that the Museum's public presentation of a tenement neighborhood as a multi-ethnic space providing lessons in democratic citizenship and tolerance implies an undocumented high level of voluntary past intra and inter-ethnic cooperation.

The Museum's reliance on a broadly conceived multi-ethnic historic Lower East Side that acculturates immigrant groups and "waves" in similar ways over time raises numerous issues of

commensurability among past groups. Likewise, it inherently raises issues of economic and racialized difference with present groups, including the impacts of the varying legal and social status of immigrants and migrants. Given the persistent lack of upward mobility that characterizes the economic path of local Puerto Rican, Dominican and black neighborhood residents who live in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) “projects,” the Museum’s past insistence on assimilation appears as a particularly odd prescription. Projects—mostly Robert Moses post-war tower blocks—are unlikely to evoke nostalgia or become tourist destinations, although approximately ten percent of all NYCHA housing is located in the Lower East Side.<sup>82</sup> If anything their open spaces are now being targeted by developers for “in-fill” luxury projects.

### **“To Use the Past to Build a Better Future”<sup>83</sup>**

Thus, this research takes note of a related set of stakes in presenting a past, immigrant Lower East Side as successfully overcoming the strains of a new expanding multi-ethnic urban sociality. The Museum’s stories offer potential topical lessons about the difficulties and ultimate successes of prior urbanization and immigrant absorption in an industrial era. In a 1993 education proposal, the Museum argued forcibly for the funding of its apartments by portraying 97 Orchard Street’s lessons as broadly applicable to contemporary urban problems:

The creation of an interpretive program at 97 Orchard Street comes at a moment of renewed national attention to the problems of the urban poor and intergroup relations in the United States. Scarcely a day passes when the museum's "core curriculum" is not on the front pages of the newspapers. The museum [sic] can provide a significant historical context for the examination of such vital contemporary issues as housing and housing reform; bilingual education, "multiculturalism," and Americanization programs; patterns of employment in relation to the economic development of the surrounding city and the nation; the stability of families, subethnic and ethnic community ties, and their ability to sustain life in a new country; violence, crime and the role of the police in shaping public order; the access to health care, recreation, and cultural facilities; and the remarkable creativity of new Americans in forging complex cultural identities out of their experiences of immigration and acculturation. (Jacobson 1993)

Eighty years after the Lower East Side's population peaked at over half a million people, interpreting its social history through 97 Orchard Street is positioned as directly relevant to addressing an urgent inventory of current urban ills. Such Museum interpretations convey a larger sense that its building exists to distill urban lessons to be learned from the historic neighborhood writ large, most explicitly to convey an awareness that America has dealt with the problems of immigration in the past and "succeeded."

### **Commensurable Neighborhood Framings**

As a practical matter, the Museum's use of its 97 Orchard Street building and of immigration as its overall framing reduces its commensurable narrative choices. That framing makes it harder to incorporate racialized stories of U.S. indigeneity and enslavement in its building although it can be potentially stretched to encompass [undocumented] migrants. But race is also salient in describing future immigrant opportunity and mobility. For the last few decades, New York has remained the United States' largest port of entry, increasingly becoming an Asian, Caribbean and Latin American city.<sup>84</sup>

Urban migration and racialization have evoked different responses and opportunities across economic eras (John H. Mollenkopf and Manuel Castells 1992, Logan 2000, Peter Marcuse et al 2009). In negotiating that past and future terrain, Roediger has opined that both similarities in racialized employment and current differences in the treatment of immigrants are both ignored.<sup>85</sup> Roediger (2009) has also put forth that "the demographic trends and the loose idea that U.S. history shows that assimilation of immigrants is just a matter of time can lead ... the optimists among us to minimize issues of anti-immigrant racism" (43).<sup>86</sup> At issue here is

whether the Museum's interpretations exemplify "the loose idea" that the assimilation and success of past immigrants is a model that still serves today's immigrants and migrants.

Debates about commensurability connect to how shifting U.S. social constructions of race and ethnicity were reframed in the 1960s –1970s following African American projects of reclamation and identity. Certainly some of the Museum's messages were designed to disabuse visitors of the notion that familial exemplars could have bootstrapped themselves into success solely through an ethos of family and education. This question deeply concerns a Museum whose mission and tours were understood by its liberal founders to explicitly combat self-congratulatory readings of history by immigrant descendants. Its founders saw the Museum as serving as a needed corrective to American immigration politics and to neo-conservative renderings of Jewish collective memory.

But even at their best, the Museum's "corrected" liberal narratives of immigrant hardship remain germane to this larger debate. In its second decade, some staff such as Maggie Russell-Ciardi—its former Director of Education—indeed pushed Abram to take more of an active interest in new immigration. Yet despite having re-crafted tour narratives to stress how prior immigrants needed assistance to rise from poverty, the Museum's stories mainly exude a message of how immigrants strove to overcome adversity to achieve eventual success for future American generations. Its various incommensurable narratives are now so stuck together that in effect messages collide in commemorating past immigrant hardship and struggle.<sup>87</sup>

### **Spatializing New Stories**

The Museum's "corrected" interventions thus appear as incomplete gestures given an institutional insistence that apartment spaces could solely tell the stories of selected 97

Orchard Street ethnic immigrant residents. After the Museum redesigned its tours in 2002 to more strongly emphasize new immigration, a decision apparently was made as to where to admit “contemporary” stories into 97 Orchard.

Another ... step the museum took to engage new immigrants in making meaning of the history of 97 Orchard Street **was to use the spaces in the building that were not used for historical representation to interpret the stories of contemporary immigrants...** the museum decided on a compromise solution: ... they would use them for art about the contemporary immigrant experience. The museum would curate rather than develop the art programs and would invite immigrant artists to submit proposals for presentations in the museum space. The storefront windows of the tenement were used for changing art exhibits... The artists ... were asked to create work that was primarily about contemporary immigrant experience, but that also reflected on the history of 97 Orchard Street and the connection between immigrant experiences past and present. (Russell-Ciardi 2008) (46) [Emphasis added]<sup>88</sup>

The spatial aspects of the Museum’s representation of contemporary immigrants afford insight into its overall interpretive practices for 97 Orchard Street. Interviews indicate that soliciting art—much of which was quite good—could be contentious: for one thing, the Tenements Windows immigrant arts program did not offer to pay immigrant artists.<sup>89</sup> Submissions needed to be reviewed by an “image conscious” institution that wanted to reinforce connections of past and present immigration with contemporary art addressing its building’s history. A welcoming gesture of bringing newer immigrants into a street window display sent a public message belying its interior spatial prioritization of apartments of past ethnic households. Immigrant art—as window dressing—was literally cordoned off from touching the building’s historic core.

According to Russell-Ciardi’s (2008) account, telling the story of new migration **“was more challenging because the museum’s building was only open as a residence from 1864 to 1935; how could the museum, in that space, interpret the stories of immigrants who had**

**entered the country after 1935?"** [Emphasis added] (45). The interpretation of stories of post-1935 immigrants as part of a broader historic Lower East Side multi-ethnic imaginary became unimaginable in a building. A prior choice to explicitly emphasize the date of 97 Orchard's residential closure is seen as inherent. A consequence of its once contested 1993 interpretive scheme for 97 Orchard Street was to literally preclude the introduction of other stories into its apartments. What is deemed historic, constrains how the Lower East Side's history is told.

Subsequent chapters detail how—in a hardwiring of story to place—apartments became the prized space for the historical representation of certain building residents and groups. An all-encompassing sense of place accretes and competes with the on-going complexity of a historical storytelling which is always in the present. The Museum's stories and tours partake of its overall historicity, not least by distilling larger lessons of commonality from the past that flatten difference and stress shared circumstances. The Lower East Side, of today or yesteryear is not neatly contained in a static formula of place from which new migrants emerge, primarily stamped by the same transformative experience.

Today, newer Museum management is cautiously extending the older formula with which 97 Orchard Street is deeply identified, so that the interpretation of its building's commercial space admits the more varied stories of those tenants. One historian said to me, "It's a pity the way that it becomes hard to update narratives once they become official." Financial success is also hard to argue with: the tours are extremely popular. As the Museum seeks to encompass a broader swath of immigration stories for its 210,000 annual visitors, it is extending its interpretations of story and place to its newer buildings (a topic to which I return).

Indeed, national narratives provide a poor vehicle for portraying nuance and deep difference, especially if what is at stake in past portrayals is the emergence of a shared future American identity. The same holds true for the Museum's commemorative work of broadening the incorporation of the original new immigrants into mainstream definitions of American national heritage. That such narratives were assembled is suggestive of a past generational changing of the guard that culled its own lessons as to what was needful to transmit from an immigrant, primarily Jewish legacy. Yet, the collective memory that its founders relied upon for support of their project is at once deep and fickle; right now it is being mined deeply just as the Lower East Side's past dissolves into its new identity as an iconic Manhattan neighborhood. All of which suggests that the Museum will need new heirs, not just more visitors.

## **Chapter Two: Building Ethnicity**

The museum effect works both ways. Not only do ordinary things become special when placed in museum settings, but also the museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its walls....Bleeding into the ubiquity of the common-sense world, the museum effect brings distinctions between the exotic and the familiar closer to home.

—Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, (1998b)

The Museum's original commitment was to show the Lower East Side's history as one of multi-ethnic diversity in an 1863 Pre-Law tenement. Chapter Two addresses the initial intersections between the messages that the Tenement Museum conveyed as to the Lower East Side's multi-ethnicity, heritage and diversity as it sought publicity, funding from donors and visibility in the museum world. Once the materiality of acquiring 97 Orchard became material in 1990, the Museum's interest in obtaining funding and visitors abetted an evolving narrative interest in promoting its building's uniqueness by interpreting the specific history of 97 Orchard's ethnic groups and residents. Thus I interrogate the difficulties of deciding "whose stories can be told" in a building that needed to be bought and re-constructed so as to become the Museum that is seen today as a model of personal and affective storytelling in place.

I argue in this chapter that the Museum's final decision to focus on building residents shifted its messages and future choices. Once the interpretation of residents' lives became central, an institutional insistence on multi-ethnicity became complicated by 97 Orchard's very own history. The Museum's final interpretive decisions made in 1993-1994 locked in its basic interpretive format for 97 Orchard Street even as its newer interpretive choices only partially displaced older schemes as narratives began to accrete in place. In this chapter, I begin to show

how an institutional self-understanding that its building represents past historic diversity (and promotes contemporary diversity) abetted a reluctance to acknowledge its building's own demographics even as its interpretations begin to exclude some prior groups.

The Museum's earlier claim to represent the Lower East Side's past diversity by interpreting its neighborhood's history through its choice of six historic groups needed to be balanced with its increasing focus on 97 Orchard Street. A question of scale constantly played out in its interpretive approach to apartments for ethnic households as various schemes were proposed that were either more representative of its building or of its larger neighborhood. As a result, the Museum's new interpretive schemes and initially planned residential stories simultaneously failed to give full voice to a fuller range of the neighborhood's groups (historic and post-1935) even as they undercut its earlier Jewish specificity of place.

Once the Museum prioritized engaging visitors with ethnic narratives associated with the building's privileged spaces—the apartments—its stress on historic multi-ethnic diversity was in tension with research that showed its residents to be overwhelmingly Jewish. One net effect was to displace earlier Museum familial apartment narratives for two of its groups—Chinese and African Americans—without interrupting its claim that it promoted a story of neighborhood diversity. Other narrative consequences ensued as the Museum's leadership solicited Jewish social funding networks and visitors, thus reinforcing its connection as a new visitable place of memory associated with an older Jewish Lower East Side.

Although the Museum often referred to its representation of an urban immigrant experience as portraying authentic historic diversity, its increasing need to craft compelling “real” stories emerges as ethnic interpretative choices narrowed. Its earliest interpretive

schemes were based on the use of “composite” ethnic immigrant families from its six historic “heritage” groups.<sup>90</sup> But the representation of a larger immigrant Lower East Side tenement experience as a display of 97 Orchard residential “ethnic households,” required creating more personal tour narratives. All of the above intersected with its larger commitment to fund-raise to renovate, buy, interpret and operate a building. Each section addresses these intersections.

My intention is to construct a non-linear narrative that looks at multiple junctures without making any one choice retroactively determinate. The Museum’s various messages were contested, negotiated and shaped with Abram and many historians. One historian said to me: “Different places tell different stories. The tenement is confining in a number of ways; the code violations, the types of stories you can tell, whose stories can be told; it’s always been limiting.” Personally, I am far less sure as to what is inherent in constructing stories that use a historic building to provide access to a past place. I am much surer as to how various effective techniques that combine place with personal narrative are constructed. After all, visitors to historic buildings designed as “time machines” hear stories that are constructed by people.

In documents and interviews, I see various contested negotiations as to how to narrow down choices already visible to the participants in these debates on story and place. Their consequences, as in many things, were far less visible but there is also an uncanny persistence in that which appears to be jettisoned. At 97 Orchard, older interpretations accrete as layers; they stick unevenly since they also have a narrative strength that connects heritage to place, if not to the building proper.

## **Navigating a Past Lower East Side**

About ten years ago, a friend and I were walking toward Essex Street after having attended Saturday morning Sabbath services at a local synagogue. Outside a closed store, we heard a Big Onion<sup>91</sup> tour guide intone: “Jews used to live around here; they left the neighborhood by 1920.” This remaining Lower East Side store in the area’s cemetery Monument District wasn’t actually shut down; it was closed precisely because it was Saturday, an irony lost on the guide. But it was the date that really captured our attention. My friend was born in 1950 and raised in the Lower East Side by European parents and grandparents; likewise my mother was born two blocks from where I currently live since that’s where her Polish Galician parents first settled upon arriving in 1935. True, my friend and I are statistical anomalies; indeed most Jews moved out. But it is precisely in those interstices that a community has persisted until now. The pre-war and post-war periods have blurred into one another as later immigrants and descendants mixed with newer generations of early gentrifiers who often had existing family ties to the area (I arrived in 1978).

So we stopped, something tour guides typically like if they see it as offering their group an opportunity for local interaction. It’s arguably less likeable if it’s seen as contradicting what the guide has just said. New Yorkers on the tour would likely recognize from our clothes that we were Jewish and dressed for the Sabbath. Since such groups rarely get to see building interiors or communal life, I piped up cheerfully in my best “local interlocutor” mode: “We’ve just come from Shul; it will reopen at 4:30 for services, and you’re absolutely invited to join us.” While people clearly wanted to talk to us, I saw that the guide was less than thrilled.

We cut against the narrative grain. One issue with the metanarrative of the Lower East Side as a Jewish place of memory is that the neighborhood is read as no longer Jewish at all. Any counter-narrative that highlights living community is also problematic, not least because such community is attenuated at best with its remaining communal sites disappearing due to the escalating prices of real estate. Yet visitors are understandably eager to see places that speak to them personally, and sometimes specifically as Jews. The past history of the Lower East Side is constantly cited and re-created in the present for, and by, visitors, guides and residents in overlapping ways. I navigate these dynamics in my daily life. So do Museum staff, but on a very different scale.

### **Ethnic as Past Perfect**

The Tenement Museum is built around the tours that provide the only means of access to its building. The acquisition of 97 Orchard Street and the subsequent interpretation of its residential life from 1863 through 1935 reshaped the Museum's focus and mission. Its final interpretive scheme featured the stories of two selected ethnic pre-1935 immigrant households who had lived in the building. The eventual interpretive choices selected for 97 Orchard Street's residential apartments, proved to be both popular and financially remunerative. Yet they also posed complications since the representation of the "variety" called for in its mission statement was challenged by its own rules of engaged, *in situ* story-telling based on its building's residential history. Its interpretive schemes prior to its 1994 opening negotiated this very issue in relation to the area's historic African American and Chinese communities, since those earlier schemes had included those groups.

The Museum's schemes demonstrate the interplay of the ethnic with the spatial, as 97 Orchard's apartments first slowly evolved into a privileged space for telling the stories of ethnic groups—rather than tenants—with proven building residency. The very existence of its multiple interpretive schemes that were in play from 1987-1993 undermines the inevitability of its subsequent interpretation, and opens up for inquiry how and why different groups were included in particular spaces. Not least, these schemes reflect an evolving and unsettled relationship to the acquisition and interpretation of its building, and knowledge of its tenants. These issues surfaced when the Museum leased a 97 Orchard storefront in 1988, as it first sought to portray the six Lower East Side “heritage” groups who, in the words of Ruth Abram (1987a), formed the “constituencies whose history will be interpreted.”<sup>92</sup>

For Abram, Lower East Side heritage initially encompassed African Americans, Chinese, East European Jews, Germans, Italians, and Irish. Heritage is certainly hard to pin down, but the Museum associated it with a cluster of six chosen groups it deemed to have an important local historic presence, thus rendering them as stakeholders in its shared memory project.<sup>93</sup> In a type of Museum shorthand, I refer to a “heritage” interpretive scheme for these groups who ostensibly shared a historic claim to the Lower East Side, or an area which preceded it, as a shared place of American origin. In 1987, this enlarged notion of heritage, helped articulate the organization of the Museum's original board of governors, fund-raising, advisory committees, and programs that were drawn or based from these “constituencies.”

The process of constantly interpreting and financially supporting 97 Orchard affected how the Museum promoted its heritage constituencies as representative of the Lower East

Side's past diversity. For a short while, it made the creation of "Ethnic Advisory Committees" its "high[est]" objective. Abram (1990m) outlined:

We will begin with six committees, representing the ... communities whose histories the Museum has begun to explore: African, Chinese, German, Jewish, Irish and Italian....The Committees' roles will be to: 1. Represent the Museum's commitment [sic] to the history of each group to the public at large .... Identify funding sources...

Through forming Ethnic Advisory Committees expected to help produce money, the Museum in effect undertook to represent the heritage groups it was already actively researching with NEH, Rockefeller and Ford Foundation grants. I will return to the heritage interpretive scheme later in this chapter and note in the meantime that the Museum's actual choices for its six upstairs apartments eventually conveyed the Lower East Side experience of five rather different groups: Italian Catholics, German Jews, Sephardic Jews, East European Jews, and Irish Catholics. Installed in this order over a fifteen year timeframe, the chosen families did not return to their building in a way that mapped onto when their associated group initially arrived in the building or more generally to the Lower East Side. Each ethnic family household has its own story of how it was returned to its building. Thus probing the Museum's evolving variety of interpretive schemes for 97 Orchard's residents—that is before and after they are locked into place in 1993—opens a door into its broader representations of ethnicity.

The Museum has strained hard to depict 97 Orchard as multi-ethnic, diverse and representative of a historic Lower East Side. Nonetheless, its eventual interpretive choices meant that nineteenth-century historic groups on its original heritage list such as African Americans and Chinese were not eligible for its residential apartments and appear instead only on heritage trails, slide shows or in plays. Hence given those choices, in this chapter I also

interrogate how its building interpretations reflect a fraught intersection of its claim of multi-ethnic diversity in its re-telling of its tenement's residential [largely Jewish] history.

### **Building Diversity at the Start**

The Museum's early theme of historic diversity may be best expressed in an oft-repeated formulation in use from its beginnings: "97 Orchard Street was home to an estimated 7,000 people from over 20 nations from 1863 to 1935" (2009a). Earlier versions typically cited 10,000 people from 25 nations.<sup>94</sup> By enumerating building residents and nations in this fashion, the Museum simultaneously conveys the transience and ethnic diversity of its building and neighborhood. A current Museum (2014a) list of building residents (aka, alumni) confirms transience but fully supports Andrew Dolkart's (1992) claim that the vast majority of 97 Orchard's tenants were Jews from two pre-World War I empires (Russia's Pale of Settlement, Russian Poland, and Austria-Hungary).<sup>95</sup> The cited numbers of nation-states leaves a skewed impression of representative past "national" and other diversity in this Tenth Ward building.<sup>96</sup>

When the Museum first rented 97 Orchard in 1988, Ruth Abram, Richard Rabinowitz and others started thinking through how the Museum's building affected its earlier mission of interpreting the social history of housing.<sup>97</sup> A Winter Report to Trustees (1990n) neatly shows a shift taking place: "The Museum will use the history of 97 Orchard Street to interpret the history of housing to illuminate larger issues in urban, immigrant, and social history." A mission on housing was thus tied back to the building even as it was broadened to incorporate a social historical interpretation of urban immigrants.<sup>98</sup>

Abram (1990b) wrote to Rabinowitz on January 23rd 1990 to respond to an American History Workshop (AHW) draft of a Conceptual Plan for the Museum. In reference to

“authenticity,” Abram noted that: **“The building's own history embraces Irish, German, Chinese, East European Jewish and Italian immigrants... Who knows what other groups we will find?”** [emphasis added] (3). By February, Rabinowitz had incorporated her comment into the AHW’s revised “Proposed Conceptual Plan” (1990b) that now stated: **“One would have difficulty identifying a building more suitable than 97 Orchard Street to represent the ethnic diversity which has always characterized the Lower East Side”** [emphasis added] (5). The building was thus positioned as an ideal platform for launching a diverse story of immigrant waves in the area that would become known as the Lower East Side.

Things moved fast. By June, Abram (1990h) had written to Rabinowitz that the Museum had reached a deal with the landlord that guaranteed an option to purchase and permission to proceed with renovations in the meantime.<sup>99</sup> By December, Abram (1990k) had written to the AHW: “When to our surprise we actually located and secured a tenement building it became clear that it had its own history ...[which]... could be used to develop and interpret a significant case study.” The building as a case study and the option to buy were secure.

These memos—read in conjunction with earlier interpretive schemes—suggest an institutional investment in promoting an unproven hypothesis: that 97 Orchard provided proof of past diversity, reflective of a standard chronology of ethnic immigrant waves.<sup>100</sup> That an older Pre-Law tenement would necessarily tell that story is expressed in an internal Museum (2005a) FAQ document describing why Abram especially wanted 97 Orchard Street: “Most early tenements had either been razed or renovated and those [other] tenements that remained weren't old enough to tell the community's entire multi-ethnic history” (1).

But what does it mean to be diverse at 97 Orchard and to “tell the community's entire multi-ethnic history”? In an odd paradox, the highlighted personal stories of Irish and Italian families who are not representative of its building are produced by the Museum as evidence of 97 Orchard’s diversity.<sup>101</sup> Only one Irish family with children [the Moore apartment, 2008] is documented as briefly living at 97 Orchard; and only two Italian families [the Baldizzi apartment, 1994] had households with children.<sup>102</sup> Early on, historian Thomas Kessner (1992) had noticed that in 1870 that “only one family [the Moores] was from Ireland, indicating how sharply the immigrants drew their ethnic turf boundaries.” (18-19). By 1880, Kessner saw:

Russian Jewish families appear on the census ... But no Italian families settled in the building, illustrating the pattern of succession that so struck Riis: eastern Europeans moving into German neighborhoods and southern Italians who were coming over at the same time moving into the Irish areas on the West Side. (Kessner 1992) (21)

Irish and Italian families were indeed scarce on Orchard Street; Kessner was clearly not surprised that the Museum’s Tenth Ward Kleindeutschland tenement reflected an already known pattern of ethnic succession. Nonetheless, a persistent sense of the importance of tying 97 Orchard to past diversity endures even in later historical understandings of the building. One example of a late claim to diversity is found in Abram’s (2005) article “History is as History Does.” A reviewer (Tisdale (2007)), in accepting Abram’s account of the Museum, offers a recap stating: “the Tenement Museum located on Manhattan’s Lower East Side tells the stories of the changing and ethnically diverse occupants of this single tenement.”<sup>103</sup>

More intriguingly, in a *New York Times* 2008 online forum, Steve Long (2008) —the Museum’s then Vice President of Collections and Education in charge of its archives— offered a novel argument that even the minimal presence of non-Jewish groups at 97 Orchard Street

shows wider diversity. The question posed to the *New York Times* was: “...What sources inform our understanding of the [historic] ethnic makeup of this part of the city?...”

A. We can gain an understanding of the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood by examining the information collected by census enumerators about race, as well as national origin, which the census began collecting in 1850. 97 Orchard Street’s demographics reflect the neighborhood’s majority ethnic group: according to the 1870 Census, 55 percent of the population was German, 28 percent were born in the U.S., with the remaining 17 percent hailing from Ireland, England, Austria, and Russia. **The 1910 Census lists the language for residents and since all families were listed as speaking Yiddish, the building’s residents were all Jewish.** Fifty-five percent of them came from Russia, 19 percent were U.S.-born, and the remainder came from Austria, Germany, Romania and Poland. Although they are not reflected in the 1870 and 1910 Census records at 97 Orchard Street, Italian, Chinese and other ethnic groups lived in other tenements in the neighborhood. **While we tend to think of one ethnic group dominating a neighborhood, e.g. Little Germany, Chinatown and Little Italy, the presence of other ethnicities at 97 Orchard Street makes us realize immigrant neighborhoods are far more diverse.**<sup>104</sup> — [Emphasis added] Steve Long (2008)

Long’s (2008) wording on diversity is misleading since there are no “other ethnicities” in 1910. But it’s worth looking at other years as well. At 97 Orchard, the only other population of significance is that of German-speaking non-Jews in the building’s first twenty years. Hence, it is interesting to compare Long’s response to that of the Museum’s Docent Encyclopedia (1994):<sup>105</sup>

About half the people living in 97 Orchard ... between 1870 and 1890 were Jewish, a higher portion than for the neighborhood as a whole. Between 1890 and 1920 virtually all the tenants were Jewish. But while the earlier tenants had been German Jews, those after 1890 were mostly from Eastern Europe. (47)

The German Jewish figures from 1870 - 1890 are interesting because Kleindeutschland was estimated at best to be twenty percent Jewish by another Museum historian, Stanley Nadel (1990).<sup>106</sup> As Dolkart (1992) had already noted, from 1890 – 1920, during the years when the building was most densely inhabited, all residents were Jewish.<sup>107</sup> Historian James P. Shenton (1994) had written in the Encyclopedia’s Appendix C that the subsequent arrival of tenants from the former Ottoman Empire, also meant in 1925 that: “the tenants were all Jewish” (26).

Long focuses the reader only on 1910 when East European Yiddish speaking Jews are expected to be living in the Lower East Side. His formulation is far too narrow since from 1870 - 1890, half of 97 Orchard's tenants are Jewish; and from 1890 - 1925 it was "virtually all" Jewish.<sup>108</sup>

Most puzzling—since the question posed in the Times was about the neighborhood and not the building—why even refer to 97 Orchard in making an argument in 2008 about diversity? Given the building's statistics, it's far easier to portray the neighborhood as historically diverse (with a notable Jewish presence) by carving out appropriate swathes of time and space. In other words, the Lower East Side, however defined, was not exclusively Jewish in 1910 and certainly not when looked at across time. Nor would anyone seriously argue that tenements are a story simply of Jews or even of immigrants for that matter.

Clearly, the Museum's liberal founders and historians initially saw these aspects of the neighborhood's history as insufficiently understood and deserving of attention. Yet, the larger impression is of the persistence of Museum promoted understandings that portray its building as diverse in a universalizing of the Lower East Side's story. The next sections (and chapter) show that as 97 Orchard's story is played out in the Museum's fund-raising, visitor and interpretive strategies, its contested Jewish "nature" tensely and unevenly emerged due to an increasing institutional insistence on telling stories tied to building residents. In committing to showcasing residential stories, its interpretive schemes and funding were unavoidably affected by its building's own demographics.

Hence, the Museum's decision to base diversity on its building became a shaky foundation for interpreting historic **and** contemporary groups. An investment in the portrayal of successful historic, immigrant diversity in its building remained a common thread in

articulations by Museum founders who looked to strike a contemporary multi-ethnic note in drawing lessons from the past. One corollary of this understanding of historic diversity is that Jews are similar to other American ethnic groups and do not own a more common, shared immigrant Lower East Side experience.<sup>109</sup> Another corollary was that current and past immigrants are not so different.

In making these arguments, Museum management was working with claims about 97 Orchard Street itself, and not just about the Lower East Side. To obtain a better sense of that balance, I asked one historian: “How did you regard the Tenement Museum’s story of a historic multi-ethnic Lower East Side and how do you regard it now? Also do you remember that the building was approximately 90% East European Jewish? The answer:

I don’t remember any time in which there [was]... a decision that, even though most of the people who lived in the building were East European Jewish, we would be doing something other than telling a multi-ethnic story. Given the mission of promoting tolerance, I can’t imagine that Ruth would want to undercut the mission of the Museum.

Somewhat inconveniently the Museum had begun to find a pattern demonstrated in its building’s history: East European Jews were pulled to live in the parts of the Lower East Side where German-speaking Jews had already clustered. It is likewise no surprise that Jews from various parts of the former Ottoman Empire lived in the Tenth Ward. Given that the area was at the center of an area called “Little Jerusalem” or “Little Judea,” 97 Orchard may at best show a sort of Jewish diversity. That its Jewish story was contested early on can especially be seen in documents written prior to the Museum’s 1994 public group tours of apartments. Number 97’s predictably overwhelmingly Jewish residency was indeed an embarrassment of riches.

## **Contestation and Contingency**

Rabinowitz (1985) asserted in his earliest AHW report to Abram that “The Lower East Side... in fact was never more than forty per cent Jewish.”<sup>110</sup> His reading lends credibility to a story of diversity in which Jews are just one of many groups to be interpreted alongside others with whom they shared a Lower East Side immigrant experience.<sup>111</sup> It is hard to know how Rabinowitz calculated a number deeply at odds with other historians’ accounts.<sup>112</sup> A different entry in the Docent Encyclopedia (2005d) (based on earlier work by Thomas Kessner and Moses Rischin), states “But many Jews remained and they still accounted for 39 percent of the neighborhood's population as late as 1930.”<sup>113</sup> Here forty [39] percent is a number from the 1930 census, not that of 1910. [The 39 percent figure dates from six years after Federal immigration quotas had effectively halted the incoming of new Jewish immigrants.] An earlier Encyclopedia (1994) entry prepared by the AHW’s own historians simply states: “By 1915, more than 320,000 [Jews] made their home here accounting for nearly 60 percent of the neighborhood's population" (37-38).

Historian Hasia Diner (2000), who also worked at the Museum, has written that: “In 1892, 75 percent of New York’s Jews ... lived in the Seventh, Tenth, and Thirteenth Wards. At the peak of Jewish residence..., in 1910, over 500,000 Jews lived in the streets that would come to be called the Lower East Side” (131). Census and other data allow us to see just how rapid this growth was. Diner, who writes in a larger attempt to “desacralize” the Lower East Side, first looks to explain its centrality in collective memory: “...the Lower East Side benefitted from ... being the largest Jewish community in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For a brief but defining moment ... in this place Jews outnumbered non-Jews.” (130)

Diner makes the larger point that this short but salient numeric majoritarian picture increasingly captures historic and collective memory in ways that blur such boundaries.<sup>114</sup>

While Diner (2000) notes that the percentage of New York's Jews living in the overall neighborhood declined as new first destinations such as Brownsville opened up (49), census data shows that in 1920, the Tenth Ward remained, a Jewish "micro-enclave." All of the above suggests taking a closer look at Dolkart's (1992) November 17<sup>th</sup> memo when he questioned Abram's and the AHW's planned opening interpretation for 97 Orchard Street.<sup>115</sup>

Why an 1880s German family and a 1930s Italian family? I am struck by the fact that these are unusual dates to have chosen to examine life at 97 Orchard Street through its evolving history... There seem to me to be three important periods in the history of occupation in the building: the twenty years or so from the opening of the building when it housed a primarily German population; the longer period (from c. 1885 until the 1920s) when the building was almost exclusively home to Eastern European Jewish households; and the final few years when a variety of ethnic groups (Eastern European Jews, Sephardic Jews, Italians) lived here. I can see that the 1883 date holds some interest because it is a transitional date when the Prussian (apparently non-Jewish) household would have had Eastern European (probably Russian-born) neighbors. I also realize that the drama of the Gumpertz abandonment must be attractive. However, it seems to me that the more important date of German occupancy is the period when the building opened and Lucas Glockner lived here. This not only reflects the growth of Kleine Deutschland (sic), but also, physical research can better pinpoint the original look of certain elements than the look in the 1880s....

Why have Eastern European Jews been ignored in these first two apartments? I realize that the Tenement Museum is making a concerted effort to be seen as an organization that does not deal exclusively with Jewish issues. I think this is correct since the immigrant tenement experience is much more universal. However, for the longest period of occupation in this building it was largely inhabited by Eastern European Jews.... Italians were after all, a major part of Lower East Side history, but only a minor part of the history of 97 Orchard Street...

I think for all the appeal of the various dramatic presentations (I personally find the presentation of the "mystery" of the Gumpertz family to be extremely contrived), this type of lengthy presentation will not ... work very well for the Tenement Museum....

I don't know how many meeting houses for free blacks there were on the Lower East Side in the 1830s, but I do know that most religious structures from this period were erected by and for white Protestant congregations....

The Gumpertz's neighbors were probably not speaking Russian. They were probably speaking Yiddish. (Dolkart 1992) (1-2)

Dolkart's larger comments as an architectural historian show a Museum's attempt to construct its two apartment stories—as historically representative of its building and residents—to be misleading and riddled with errors. It's not just that the building's main social narrative is being ignored when he says, "It seems odd, even perhaps perverse, that the Eastern European Jewish experience ... is being overlooked" (2). Issues of accuracy and credible authenticity as well as of representation surface in its basic historical accounts: the building's 1880s fabric couldn't easily be reconstructed; its German story should be earlier; its main 1880 residents, East European Jews from the Russian and Austrian empires were primarily Yiddish speakers; Italians did not have a significant building presence; and the existence of a nearby free black 1830s religious meeting house was undocumented.

Dolkart refers to the Gumpertz family story as "the Prussian (apparently non-Jewish) household" since his memo just predates the clear understanding by all of the Museum's staff and consultants that the German-speaking Gumpertz family was Jewish. [The census work also may not have been fully shared with him.] While Dolkart, along with other Museum founders and interpreters, had agreed to universalize its immigrant story, his main point of contention is that the building's predominantly Jewish stories are not even visible.<sup>116</sup> Ultimately, Dolkart's complaints suggest concerns about a distortion of the building's own history.

## Composite Heritage

In its earliest incarnation, the Museum began receiving funding as early as 1987, including through Jewish organizations. Abram (1987a) had then written to Rabinowitz it was time to start work: "We have been funded at a sufficient level to proceed with the planning process for THE TENEMENT. NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] turned us down, inviting us to reapply... But corporate America and UJA/Federation more than made up for that."<sup>117</sup> THE TENEMENT project was envisioned and funded to develop living history programs with multi-ethnic tenement households, prior to the 1988 "discovery" of 97 Orchard Street.

By 1990, a Winter Trustee report (1990n) touted that: "The Museum commissioned leading scholars to develop historically accurate composite profiles of members of six major immigrations to the Lower East Side, 1860-1935: Free African, Irish, Chinese, East European Jewish, German and Italian." Earlier Abram (1987a) had reported: "I have set the 18 historians working on the six tenement households in motion," meaning that the historians were to create a representative, "composite" household for each heritage group. These familial narratives were based on census and other data; outside readers (more historians) reviewed them for historical representativity and accuracy.<sup>118</sup> Abram's (1987d) early memo on the Jewish "Katzenstein" family conveyed some desiderata concerning that composite household:

If you feel that it is more historically correct to separate the religious and the secular families, rather than have someone at each end of the spectrum in one household, you will need to develop two whole households .... Another possibility is that you consciously leave out either the deeply religious/observant or the decidedly secular socialist.... Personally, I prefer to have the tension...

Each composite household (see Appendix) needed to have its own family drama ensuing over "real issues" of generational and political conflict (Kessner finally ended up putting both

into one household). The Museum's initial neighborhood research, proposed tour and theater stories, and funding were largely based on interpreting these six households. An early grant proposal (1988) that asked for additional funding gives a sense of its free Black family.

Supported by a grant from Philip Morris Inc., these scholars developed "The Washington Household," a **composite** carefully drawn to represent a "typical" free Black household in New York in the 1850's. Great care has been taken to select characters and family composition which both reflect the norm and raise a series of important social and historical issues. (1) [emphasis added]<sup>119</sup>

An overall dramatic historic periodization is conveyed in this work. A May 1990 profile of the composite "German" household concluded with: "Other interpretive devices might reveal to visitors that thirty years later, at least one member of the family will die in the Slocum disaster," a tragic event often portrayed as marking the end of Kleindeutschland (1990) (1). The AHW's Final Conceptual Plan (1990b)—now called only for the stories of "representatives of the immigrant communities which actually lived in the building between 1863 and 1935"—also called for "a family crisis (e.g., the father has lost his job; the son has become a socialist; the youngest child has diphtheria; a daughter wants to marry outside the faith)," a recap of the initial crises seen in six composite heritage households (6) (19).

This work proceeded apace as these historians eventually became consultants working on a Museum National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant (with interpretive consulting coming mainly from the AHW; some other historians became part of the Museum's Scholars Advisory Committee). Based on census data, these researchers knew that 97 Orchard's families were mainly East European Jewish (preceded by earlier non-Jewish Germans), but little was initially known about actual residents or their statistics.<sup>120</sup> This gap fed Abram's and the

Scholars Committee's sense that presenting composite families as tenement households with well researched stories would permit a historically representative approach.

These six original tenement households, now shadow families, were once literally in play. Heritage groups were once the Museum's erstwhile *raison d'être*, critical to its claims as seen in publicity, programs, fund-raising dinners and donor tours of representing a diverse and broad historic neighborhood constituency. Although these families did not make the final interpretive cut, heritage is sticky not least in the Museum's use of a dramatic family narrative approach that looks for contemporary resonance in regard to diversity. This earlier interpretive framing continued to be used in the Museum's heritage tours and trails.

Increasingly, a 97 Orchard Street framing shaped the AHW's concerns as to the appropriateness and authenticity of composite heritage households. By May, the AHW's interpretive planner, Amy Waterman (1990) wrote a cover memo to Abram on the NEH grant in which she included sketches of the six families. Waterman mentioned that it would be useful to explore with NEH "the pro's and con's of constructing generic families based on historical records" (1). Rabinowitz (1990b) had already attempted to address this in the February AHW Conceptual Plan when he had written: "We will acknowledge this diversity and, at the same time, select points of focus so that the interpretive experience can be specific, detailed, convincing and clear - rather than generalized or generic" (6).

To do this, the 1990 Plan called for a different interpretation in which: "The families whose belongings we display and whose stories we reveal will be based upon ones who **actually** lived in the tenement building, though we will provide pseudonyms for them" (18)

[emphasis added]. But this was harder than it seemed since as Kessner (1992) made clear, relatively little was still known by August 1992 about 97 Orchard's individual tenants.

But the citizens of Orchard Street also brought their own gifts: an ancient wisdom and a moral vision forged in a crucible of persecution and suffering; a respect for knowledge and the power of reasoned argument; an experience of considering remedies to social problems. The symbol of the tenement on 97 Orchard Street is less dramatic than the giant lady in the harbor ... but through this house thousands of people passed. Little is certain about them, except that many of them probably remained in this country, became citizens, took jobs and raised American families. The Statue reflects the skill and imagination of the sculptor, but 97 Orchard stands for nothing less than the complex fullness of the transitional life that marked America's immigrant communities. (42-43)

Kessner's essay (1992) "The Immigrant Ghetto as Symbol and Community," discussed the area's "new immigrant" populations. His description extrapolated from the neighborhood to the building: knowing most tenants were East European Jews, he was comfortable invoking Jewish ethnic tropes to describe building residents.<sup>121</sup> It did not give the AHW multi-ethnic diverse, authentic, compelling familial narratives associated uniquely with 97 Orchard Street.

### **This Group Goes Where?**

In 1991, Abram described for a public history journal how the Museum's visitors would be meeting the neighborhood's six historic heritage groups:

When complete, visitors will "meet" representatives of the immigrant communities which peopled the Lower East Side in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Plans developed with the guidance of the American History Workshop call for a variety of interpretive formats including visits to re-created period apartments with "living history" interactions... Current programs focus on the histories of Free-African, German, Chinese, Irish, Italian and Eastern European Jewish immigrants. (Abram 1991b) (4)

Yet just how this sort of Living History interaction was to be accomplished in "period apartments" needed to be addressed, since problems had already surfaced as to where these "representatives" should be housed. African Americans (Free-African) hadn't lived at 97 Orchard. Their representation thus becomes a sotto voce counterpoint to the building's

increasing interpretive centrality. Abram (1987g) had even staged a play about the Washingtons, a Free Black 1850s household that harbored a runaway slave. Yet in her January 23 revisions to the AHW Conceptual Plan, Abram (1990b) commented to Rabinowitz:

We feel it would be preferable to stay within the time framework of 97 Orchard Street in interpreting family and/or immigrant life. So, for instance, if the 'Washingtons' should be featured, they would be placed in 1863 (when the building opened) or later. (2)

To fit into 97 Orchard would have dramatically shifted the 1850s "runaway slave" history the Washington story purported to tell. That same memo shows how an emphasis on the building affected the spatial interpretation of its ethnic household period rooms.

... the question of multi-ethnic interpretation was raised. It is an approach to which staff and board is dedicated. However, that does not mean that all groups must be portrayed simultaneously in the Museum. This is a device we use now simply to show prospective donors that the final Museum will interpret many ethnic experiences. It may be simplest and more powerful, for instance, to let the building's own history inform the presentations within the apartments. The histories of any groups which were in the neighborhood but not in the building, may be handled in different ways. (1)

In interpreting ethnic households in apartments that had not yet been "re-created," the question of building residency competes with displaying an inclusive simultaneous diversity for its six heritage groups. Abram (1990b) also notes in this January 23 memo that "visitors often want to know who actually lived in the building... Once satisfied as to the 'real' story, visitors seem more willing to 'suspend belief'" (2). A corollary might be that if 97 Orchard serves as the initial framing of Lower East Side immigration for visitors, than what visitors perceive as "real" is understood in relation to the building. Abram then directly queried Rabinowitz as to:

Authenticity •. Please convey your thoughts on this dilemma.... Perhaps the core of our interpretive efforts in the building should be limited to the residents who were here. Any groups not actually in the building, but important to understanding the history of the neighborhood might be presented through walking tours, dramas, exhibitions, film, lectures or living history encounters but not in the tenement apartments (1990b) (3)

By February 5, Abram (1990e) wrote Waterman to confirm what was now in the Plan.<sup>122</sup>

The decor, furnishings and specific program (sound show, living history interpretation etc.) will focus on representatives of those families who actually lived in the building from 1863-1935. These came from over 25 nations.

The histories of immigrant communities which lived in the area but not in the building, will be interpreted by the Museum through a variety of formats.

I. Publications[:] Books Tenement Times [Museum Newsletter]

II. Dramatic Presentations

III. Walking Tours

IV. Roll Up Your Sleeves activities in the Museum

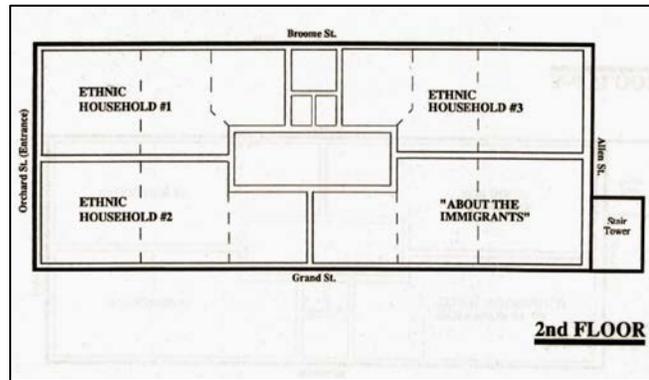
V. Pre-visit programs designed for schools

VI. Orientation Program at Museum

Abram lists publications, visitor orientation and school programs as venues to house the history of non-residential groups who are not to be interpreted in its core apartments. One way this played out can be glimpsed in a 1992 interview in which Abram described a "Freed Black" neighbor by stating "...we're determined to tell this story...blacks are very much associated with the tenement experience" (Kugelmass 2000) (191). Two years later, visitors are introduced to Mr. Douglass in slide four of the Museum's "Urban Pioneers" (1994e) downstairs slideshow: "According to the 1850 census, William Douglass, an African American laborer, lived at 93 Orchard Street with his wife and three children, all of whom were born in New York" (4).

The AHW's revised February Conceptual Plan diagram (1990b) shows the three living history "Ethnic Households" (12) as rotating groups in period apartments.<sup>123</sup> The January 24th, second draft of the Conceptual Plan (1990a) that Abram was responding to had still envisioned composite families on the second floor: "Three 'ethnic households' (e.g., the Reillys of the

1850s, the Schneiders of the 1870s, the La Torres of the 1880s) with “One ethnic household (e.g., several Chinese men living together at the turn-of-the century)” on the third floor (20). That



draft also mentioned: “our inclusion of an African American family” (30).

Nonetheless, as the Douglass story shows, Abram’s 1990 AHW correspondence on “representatives ... who lived in the building,” refers to those heritage ethnic groups whose presence at 97 Orchard is verified by census and other data. Although “25 nations” gives the appearance of translating into a variety of groups, as a practical matter, the Museum’s building residential “ethnic” choices were quite limited. But even as the interest in portraying the “real” increased, composite heritage families were not fully out of the picture, not least since Living History interpretation could be performed elsewhere in the building.

The Final February AHW plan (1990b) did explicitly assume that Chinese immigrants would be represented in an ethnic apartment (6). Chinese were not yet seen as one of the “*other* ethnic and racial groups, ones which have lived in the area but not in this building” (7). This is consistent with what Waterman (1990a) had written to Abram in January, namely: “we do know we had residents from China.” However, I have not turned up any other evidence of Chinese residents in archives, lists or census data (other than a circa 1900 Chinese laundry on nearby Broome Street), and do not know why Waterman made this confident statement.

The Museum represented Chinese as historic in outdoor heritage tours of nineteenth-century Chinatown or, as contemporary, in pointing out the latest group of Lower East Side

arrivals. Interestingly, it did not design a historic Chinese apartment per se. A rather different sort of inclusion was envisioned when Abram first asked historian Jack Tchen (1988) to craft a bachelor family exhibit for the composite Chew-Chin household (putatively living in a Mott Street tenement and working at the Lee Laundry). Abram then asked Tchen to turn that turn-of-the-century Chinese laundry into a 97 Orchard storefront run by the same family. His cleverly designed interpretation was discarded as was his compelling bachelor household, possibly once the AHW was no longer convinced that the building had Chinese residents.

Arguably, both Abram and the AHW saw broader ethnic representation in visitor orientations and walking tours as an inclusive, non-contradictory gesture. Perhaps because Rabinowitz and Abram believed the building itself to be appropriately diverse, the implications of the neighborhood's diversity getting increasingly divorced from its apartment interpretation were not initially apparent. Abram's (Summer 1991) article shows a Museum leadership wanting to be seen as telling a diverse engaging multi-ethnic historic story in invoking its heritage groups. Yet the Museum's increasing emphasis on personalized narrative with verifiable building residency was disruptive to its representations of composite African American and Chinese households.

Abram's February (1990e) memo reflects the shifts in the Museum's core interpretive schemes towards its apartments once its focus on ethnicity is increasingly framed by a building that its management is actively negotiating to purchase and renovate. Even so, the Museum's management, consultants and various historians did not fully agree as to whether the February "final" Conceptual Plan meant that composite families and/or Living History would only be used to portray certain ethnic households downstairs rather than in apartments. Abram (and others),

often changed their minds concerning both topics. Abram's vacillation demonstrates how the issue of diverse historic neighborhood representation increasingly comes in tension with the narrative centrality of building residents. On June 26, Abram (1990h) wrote to Rabinowitz that they were reversing direction:

Responding to further thinking that staff has done on the "Conceptual Plan." Essentially, I think we find ourselves returning to our original idea of using the Museum to interpret the history of the various groups who settled in the area, rather than limiting ourselves to those who actually lived in the building. Of course, we'll always have a permanent (though changing) exhibit on the history of the building itself. (2)

In re-constructing and interpreting 97 Orchard, the question of how to represent common ground and diversity through a building and a neighborhood is constantly in play from 1988-1994. By December 4, Abram (1990k) had insightfully written to the AHW:

Today, the Museum finds itself at a critical point, fashioned in large measure by the history of its own evolution. Before it found an actual tenement building, with a history of its own, the Tenement Museum staff envisioned a Museum which would provide a vehicle for interpreting the history of immigration and immigrant life and culture on the Lower East Side.... As a result, we have developed composite profiles of members of representative families whose lives will be interpreted in the completed Museum. And, we have material on the development of six 19th century immigrant communities which will become the basis for a walking tour book and other programs. (2)

The Museum was applying for a big NEH "Self-Study" grant and how to interpret its building was becoming critical to setting its future scope and scale. Its prior interpretive focus—based on the lives of "composite profiles of members of representative families" from the neighborhood's six historic communities—was created *sans tenement*. Abram wrote this memo by way of explaining that the Museum saw itself at a juncture now that 97 Orchard's particular history offered other ways for the Museum to envision itself. Abram (1990l) also wrote to the AHW later that month to say that it should focus on grant writing "since it's funds we need more than anything else right now." (1)

## Diverse Heritage

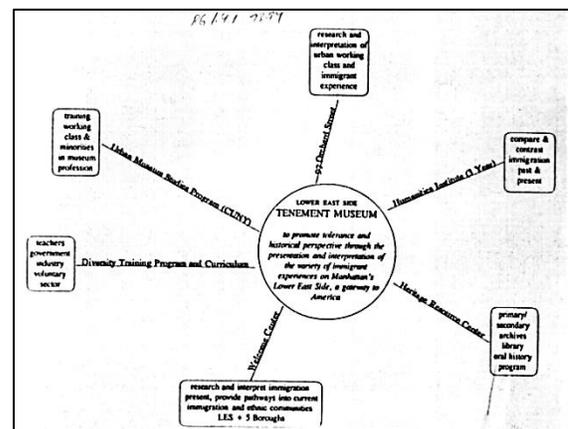
Telling a story of historic multi-ethnic diversity through its building appears central to early interpretive schemes and programming. The Museum's "History Recreated" (1991) program promoted its building's diverse heritage to the United Federation of Teachers' Social Studies Association, an audience with its own investment in touting educational diversity.<sup>124</sup>

Content: Highlighting German, Irish, Italian, Central European Jewish and Chinese Immigration and Afro-American Emigration to New York City

History Recreated at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum

Featuring an Exhibit "Meddling with Peddling", a Slide Show "House of Heritage" and a Musical Play: "It's Tough to Make a Nickel!", all in a 1853[sic]-1935 Restored Tenement

In "History Recreated," a small discursive move appears to signal difference in specifying "Afro-American emigration."<sup>125</sup> The six heritage groups that appear here are also seen in "House of Heritage," described in Museum (1993) grant proposals as: "A slide show recounting the history of 97 Orchard St. from 1863 to 1935 in a context of the history of the Lower East Side and its multi-



ethnic population"(13).<sup>126</sup> A diagram of 1993-1994 goals shows a proposed focus on earning income as a "Diversity Training" provider for "schools, government, industry, voluntary sector."

While 97 Orchard's perceived diversity seems central to the Museum's early institutional discursive self-understandings and promotion, those understandings varied. According to one Museum articulation: "97 Orchard Street and its neighborhood stand as symbols of a common and shared experience, while the individual stories contained therein stimulate discussion of America's diversity" (1994a) (7). Here, shared common heritage is

represented by a building and neighborhood, whereas the personal stories of the ethnic immigrants told in its apartments are apparently diverse like America itself. If this proposed scale renders the tenement and neighborhood as part of a common, national collective experience, it raises the basic question as to whether the diverse representation of 97 Orchard's non-residential neighborhood groups is vital. A different question of scale arises when the genealogical pursuit of 97 Orchard "alumni" is questioned by Museum historian Donna Gabaccia (1991):<sup>127</sup>

A most fundamental question really does have to be answered ... Why does the museum want to identify and trace all the people who lived in this particular tenement? How is that linked to the museum's general mission? (A cynic might conclude that it's just a way to identify potential donors!) Obviously, the museum intends to depict the experiences of people who lived in tenements all over Manhattan, not just at 97 Orchard. ...Why bother doing it? (2) [Emphasis in original]

Gabaccia, in reviewing a draft of "Genealogy of a Tenement (Dennis 1991), questions if 97 Orchard's past residents are even of interest since Manhattan is the assumed scale for tracking tenement life. This indication of contestation concerning a critical aspect of interpretation confirms a larger impression that the Museum's discursive formulations left some historians with disparate understandings concerning precisely where narratives of immigrant heritage groups and diversity fit into the neighborhood, and the building itself. This especially played out in interpreting "family" apartments as period room ethnic households.

Given its eventual insistence on telling the stories of selected building residents, there is an ambiguity as to whose diverse heritage the Museum (1994a) purported to represent in its mission of the "presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side." By way of comparison, Irish heritage tourism was originally structured to comprise diaspora descendants of a nineteenth century, largely forced,

emigration. It connotes that such tourists are coming home to see Ireland's heritage and partake of it. In the Irish diasporic context it is mainly revealing in connecting shared origin and history to memory although the term heritage tourism is also used more broadly to indicate a structured commodified "sharing" with visitors of Ireland's tangible and intangible heritage (e.g., Celtic archaeological sites, rural landscapes, museums and music festivals).

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998a) stresses heritage as a recycling of that which is no longer daily into a second life, "created through the process of exhibition (knowledge, performance, museum display)."..."Heritage is produced through the process that forecloses what is shown." (159). Hence, the Museum's reliance on heritage is itself revealing.<sup>128</sup> The past experiences of Lower East Side heritage groups are arguably foundational to the Museum's interpretation of a local shared American legacy of origin. Yet, as a grouping chosen by the Museum they don't fit neatly into 97 Orchard or even into an immigrant framing.<sup>129</sup> The Museum thus first became an arbiter of which constituencies are placed on an equal footing by having their history interpreted, and then of how and where to place them in its building. It assigned and authorized claims of place, origin, innate connection, pilgrimage and return as viable tropes of group collective memory, even as its historicization relegated groups to a past whose interpretive focus is primarily found in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. Yet not every diasporic group's collective resources are focused in searching for a Lower East Side origin as historic heritage, let alone a common one. Equally, the contemporary demands its own due.

The Museum made unforeseen tradeoffs on the neighborhood's representative diversity when it highlighted powerful personal residential stories tied to its building. Tensions appear in having the familial stories of chosen prior residents serve as a lynchpin to enable the

Museum to shift focus in portraying an immigrant past connected to the present. While its residents are portrayed as diverse, it remains unclear how 97 Orchard reflects neighborhood diversity, past or present. For the Museum's liberal founders, diversity, multi-culturalism, and the multi-ethnic in conjunction with tolerance appear as overlapping constructions that do much the same work in reading and rendering "the past as a usable tool" (Abram 2005) (24).

In telling a story of past Lower East Side immigration through its building, the Museum's founders primarily tell a universalized Jewish story of America's "great ghetto." In doing so, the Museum participates in a much larger, and often remarked on, post-War American dynamic of universalizing Jewish and other ethnic stories (Freedman 2008). Diversity is easiest to endorse in reference to relatively thin ethnic/religious identities viewed as part of being American. As Wendy Brown (2008) has suggested, thick identities (including ethnic and religious) can be seen as problematic since they test tolerance's limits.<sup>130</sup>

### **Building a Symbol — What's a Tenement?**

The Museum's founders were well aware of the appeal of the tenement as a symbol of Lower East Side immigrant life even as they worked to define it more broadly. I have argued that for the Museum, diversity is tied to immigration as a formative part of being and becoming American. As a "pioneering" institution of urban social history that made a lowly tenement into a landmarked National Park Service destination, the Museum's immigrant narratives of place intertwine deeply with the politics of collective memory, heritage and citizenship.<sup>131</sup> Abram's initial message that a historic immigrant multi-ethnic Lower East Side could inspire a desired contemporary American diversity seems to have worked well in fund-raising from foundations and state institutions. By its second decade, an emphasis on past diversity was increasingly

reshaped into formulations that drew more explicit parallels between historic and current immigrant experiences.

Yet if the Museum's use of the term "urban pioneers" falls short as an equalizer among immigrants, it fails equally in another regard: it does not broaden the inclusiveness of immigrants as a category. A tenement building that merely recapitulates John F. Kennedy's (1958) invocation of the U.S. as "a nation of immigrants" at best echoes an older claim that immigration is foundational to America as part of a national collective story.<sup>132</sup> Here, a tenement also serves as a common ground in representing a continuation of how immigration aids democracy in building diverse Americans. In conception and reception, 97 Orchard Street not only works to represent an American immigrant experience but is more broadly conceived to represent immigrant diversity as necessary to past and future American identity.<sup>133</sup>

### **The Tenement as a Common Place**

Abram (Summer 1991) saw the urban tenement serving as an symbol of a common immigrant history representing the Museum's message of diversity and citizenship on a national scale.

**The tenement building represented the common ground of immigrants from everywhere.** Through it, one could discuss the history of immigration and immigrant life, the role of reformers, of government, the history of housing and our changing views as to what was an acceptable life style. Through a tenement museum, the general public... could be invited to consider this question: How will we be one nation and at the same time enjoy, appreciate and certainly not be afraid of the profound differences we bring to the table based on background? (12) [Emphasis added].

A tenement, Abram suggested, should symbolize what diverse immigrants had in common, providing an opening for the public to explore what it means to be American. In his blurb for *Six Heritage Tours of the Lower East Side* (Limmer 1997), former New York City Mayor

Ed Koch described the Lower East Side as “the place where the ancestors of so many of us learned what it means to be an American.” Or, as critic Mario Maffi (2004) stated: “The building at 97 Orchard Street is a metaphor for the United States: or rather America” (68).

The Museum’s Landmark Nomination filing makes this point by tying immigration to diversity as a defining feature of being American. “Immigration, and the resulting diversity of cultural influences, has been—and remains—one of the central characteristics of American history and a key factor in defining an American identity” (Andrew S. Dolkart 1993) (9). The filing emphasizes immigrant assimilation as key to its recurring themes of Americanization. Diversity, citizenship, ethnicity, tolerance and class are linked to a 97 Orchard Street depicted as an integral part of a larger past and contemporary immigrant Lower East Side.

Within the context of its immediate neighborhood, which preserves much of the appearance it had during the period of peak immigration and retains its character as an ethnic working class neighborhood for newcomers to the United States, 97 Orchard Street forms a vital part of the backdrop against which the drama of assimilation was played out. This story, which lies at the core of the immigrant experience, is one of the broad national patterns of United States history, and one which helps define a distinctive American identity. Immigration and its consequent toleration of diversity, while frequently controversial, constitutes one of the great ideals of the American people. (Andrew S. Dolkart 1993) (8)

Positing a tolerated diversity as fundamental to Lower East Side life allows it to be read as vital to the successful Americanization. Unpacking this logic shows an America whose identity and values ultimately rest on a “toleration of diversity” that should not be taken for granted since ultimately, it is the continuation of immigration that brings toleration in its wake. Dolkart implies that by Americanization, assimilation, and integration can almost but not quite cancel out an ethnic immigrant origin. Americans, whose genius it is not to require that origins be fully relinquished, can understand a “thin identity” as fitting perfectly with being American.

The Museum thus also presents 97 Orchard as a building representing the pursuit of continued American immigration and diversity. While its residents' success in overcoming poverty serves as a source of pride, in situating tolerance and diversity within a discourse of assimilation, a strong hint is delivered to descendants that the ultimate destination is marked by a relatively thin notion of ethnic and religious diversity.

In an example of what might be termed "the self-interest of minorities," anthropologist Karen Brodtkin (1998) suggests that a Jewish progressive political tradition has a stake in portraying the outcome of prior immigrant struggles as the successful creation of better citizens in a more diverse, creative, tolerant and democratic America.<sup>134</sup> Abram's (2007) article on democratic citizenship, was titled "Kitchen Conversations: Democracy in Action at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum." When the Museum makes an argument about new immigrant others, its discursive formulations in the name of democratic citizenship should be understood as a multi-directional conversation that says as much about the past as the future. It also suggests a state interest in such formulations.

The Landmark filing makes clear that eventual success is the key narrative complement to the Museum's tales of hardship. Its multi-ethnic narratives of place are shaped by narratives of citizenship and economic mobility that show immigrants leaving behind blighted housing along with much else to become diverse Americans. This was also reflected programmatically. The AHW's Conceptual Plan (1990b) called for a visitor "program [on]... 'Becoming An American'" (21). The Museum met New York State's school curricula standards on citizenship by showing how America assimilates cultures and celebrates diversity.

Citizenship – Emphasizing how precious the idea of citizenship was to earlier generations of immigrants and to current immigrants...

Culture – Stressing the variety of cultural patterns and expectations which has assimilated a variety of immigrant cultures into an American culture...

Diversity – Celebrating the ethnic origins of the families at 97 Orchard Street who came from twenty-seven different countries. (6-7) (Mendelsohn 1993)

A focus on citizenship, assimilation and diversity aligns interests in a particular story of immigration then and now, in a tenement building interpreted to combine those messages.<sup>135</sup>

## **Common Ground**

Early on, Rabinowitz (1988) had written to Abram to propose a mission for the Museum:

To devote ourselves to the histories of all the immigrant groups that have shared the Lower East Side as a gateway community[,] a vital commitment that can only help heal the strains in this city and the nation, where ethnic and racial distinctions more often pull us apart than bring us together. (2)

The Museum's role would be to broadly show immigrant histories so as to bring groups together as common stakeholders in a past Lower East Side that provided a shared urban origin. Bollens (2007) touches on what the Museum founders envisioned when he describes contemporary Barcelona as "place-based and inclusionary (rather than ... ethnic-specific and exclusionary)" (238). Rabinowitz's formulation is an inclusive gesture that equalizes access to a past immigrant place in response to a need to create a more equal future. Yet its immigrant framing is a problematic fit for the inclusion of contemporary and historic non-immigrants including descendants of enslaved Africans.

Similarly, Abram looked for common ground in framing 97 Orchard as a shared experience. Her view of ethnic tenement dwellers as urban immigrants modeling tolerance required that 97 Orchard be seen as both diverse and common.<sup>136</sup> When directing her words to the museum world she wanted the Museum to be seen as cutting-edge in portraying urban

immigrant multi-ethnic diversity in a building whose very choice was “pioneering.” The AHW’s (1990b) Final Conceptual Draft from February stated that the Museum would:

... celebrate the distinctly American immigrant experience.... It will explore an experience which many diverse groups held in common - tenement life - and will use that experience as a jumping off point for considering forms of "common ground" today. The diversity among ethnic groups will be reflected in their stories, their furnishings ... (AHW Conceptual Plan) (1990b) (1)

97 Orchard Street is envisioned as bringing diverse American groups together to explore a future common ground through a contemporary visit of the tenement as a shared past. Drafts show the above words to be paraphrases of Abram’s mark-ups in which she wanted the immigrant tenement experience depicted in an urban vocabulary that mimicked national founding narratives.<sup>137</sup> The Final Plan also specifies that “The Lower East Side has, of course, been home to other racial and ethnic groups: African-Americans, for example...” (5). This supplementary wording suggests a concern with bringing African Americans into that commonality if not precisely into 97 Orchard’s apartments.

By the end of 1992, as soon as the Museum’s narrative admixtures of the real, the representative and authentic fully depended on finding residents who had demonstrably lived at 97 Orchard, its sought-after and newly-found mix of diversity shifted. The Jewish, Confino Rogarshevsky and Levine families moved back in between 1998-2002, following the footsteps of the Gumpertz and Baldizzi families. The Moores followed only belatedly in 2008 given the difficulty of finding an appropriate Irish household and funding.

People who worked for the Museum give every appearance of deeply believing that they were promoting diversity in bringing in these “real” families and that 97 Orchard itself shows diversity. I suggest, firstly, that this institutional self-understanding of diversity is a sticky

older formulation reflective of earlier Museum interpretations of immigrant waves and heritage groups. Secondly, diversity *per se* implies an initially homogenous baseline, here that of a solidly East European Jewish historic Lower East Side. Heritage is a negotiated arena in which the Museum's insistence on an initial narrative of historic diversity for 97 Orchard has been reshaped by its building's preponderance of Jewish residents.

The Museum's management and historians did not anticipate finding Ladino speaking Sephardic Jews or German-speaking Ashkenazic Jews representing a different sort of diversity. Lastly, it is worth considering how its later promotion of diversity in connection to new immigrants, is itself connected to its more attenuated representation (though not any less promoted) of past neighborhood diversity amplified by an insistence on using 1935 as the interpretive cut-off for 97 Orchard.

The Museum's articulations of the importance of past diversity and dates are often most revealing when its prior goals intersect with, and sometimes get challenged by the newer interpretations of 97 Orchard's residential families. An example is the figure of Fannie Rogarshevsky, who traded rent for work as the building's janitor. The Museum "used" the 1918 death of Abraham, Fannie Rogarshevsky's husband, in its "Sitting Shiva" (1998) tour to tell its story of tuberculosis [TB], Jewish death rituals, and sweatshops.<sup>138</sup> Now over twenty years later Fannie's widowed life has become more salient when an interpreter gets to be Fannie on Museum "family days." A Museum blog (2010d) entry about that interpretation provides an account of Fannie leaving 97 Orchard in 1941 accompanied by her son Philip and his wife who were still living with her.<sup>139</sup>

The 2008 Moore family, who lived at Number 97 for only a year, are another interesting case. Their very presence in an apartment that portrays them mourning a baby's death is an outgrowth of the diverse heritage scheme. The ability to represent an Irish family narrowed down to the Moores since in 1870, "only one family was from Ireland..." (Kessner 1992) (18-19). Although the Museum was insistent quite early on that it needed to tell an Irish Catholic (2008) and a German Lutheran (2012) story, these were staged relatively recently because appropriate familial narratives, spaces and money first needed to be found. As the next chapter shows, its first German Lutheran story was disrupted by the Gumpertz family turning out to be Jewish bringing to the fore numerous interpretive issues not least that of ethnic categorization.

I suggest it is worth attending to Abram's different messages and registers used in 1) pitching to Jewish donors and visitors; 2) articulating to the museum world what her institution represented. Based on the putative length of neighborhood historical residency, Abram was explicit in her public writing that the Lower East Side was not a particularly Jewish story:

Most people link the area only with Jewish immigrants, when, in fact, Jews have had no longer a history in the area than immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Africa, China, Italy, and many other nations. My objective was now clear... the establishment of a tenement museum. The tenement building represented the common ground of immigrants from everywhere. (Abram Summer 1991) (12)

A shared Lower East Side immigrant heritage in other words belongs to all immigrants.<sup>140</sup> That persistent message of common ground resonated with governmental entities looking to civic institutions to help shape immigrant absorption, citizenship and identity. This message was also well received by liberal media and foundations that shared this agenda.<sup>141</sup> Dr. Joelle Tutela (2008) tied the eventual January 1996 purchase of 97 Orchard to extensive media coverage as well as social connections, seeing one as reinforcing the other:

Interest generated through a series of articles in the New York Times not only secured the ability to purchase but also provided superb resources for generating press coverage. From 1988 to 2008, no fewer than 198 articles on the LESTM were featured in The New York Times. This steady provision of information and publicity over the past decade from a source as prominent as The New York Times was significant. (111)

This is suggestive of an anticipated overlap in donors, readership and visitorship. The New York Times Foundation was an early funder of various Museum projects that for a short while connected actual new immigrants with ESOL (ESL) classes and other activities.

### **A Jewish Pitch**

In offering an account of the Lower East Side as a shared multi-ethnic space that shaped each group's initial American experience, the Museum looked for financial and political affirmation from its assembled set of heritage constituencies.<sup>142</sup> Heritage was ideally expected to produce concrete resources in the form of diverse trustees, visitors, funders and volunteers who believed in its mission. It found affirmation in Jews; Italians appear as the other heritage group that responded to a fine-tuned pitch: some names in this regard are realtor John Zuccotti (of Occupy Wall Street fame)<sup>143</sup> and Richard Grasso (former chairman and chief executive of the New York Stock Exchange).

Fund-raising was also a way in which the Museum explicitly negotiated its building's Jewish presence. The Museum relied on Jewish social networks for tapping individuals, corporations, and foundations for money or grants; as Dolkart (1992) had noted in his memo "funding and visitation have largely come from people of Jewish descent" (2). Abram did not hesitate to draw on a Jewish sense of collective memory and attachment to place for funding 97 Orchard Street. One example of how the Museum (1994d) approached such targeted fundraising can be seen in a slideshow script oriented towards Jewish donors.

## When “Jews Predominate”

The Museum’s (1994c) fundraising slide show introduces a Lower East Side that remains the same even as its groups change over time.<sup>144</sup> The audience sees a photo of 97 Orchard as the speaker intones: “For in coming here, you return to the site which hundreds and thousands of immigrants have called home - at least at the beginning. And you come to a spot where history repeats itself;” a refrain repeated towards the end (1, 8). Tropes of shared home, American immigrant origins and an almost eternal Lower East Side frame the slideshow. Before it shifts to a more explicitly Jewish mode, a few contemporary images are shown followed by illustrations of nineteenth-century Irish immigrants, and photos of local Latino and Chinese life.

The voice then announces: “The year is 1890. Four-fifths of New York City is immigrant.<sup>145</sup> And in this area, swarming now with ... people, Jews predominate” (2). This voice-over is accompanied by a visual shift into a deep reminiscence of past Lower East Side Jewish life. An iconic Orchard Street bustles with Jewish pushcart peddlers. Images of the Eldridge Street Synagogue and of Educational Alliance’s [Jewish] settlement house appear. Novelist Anna Yeziarska (1925) and the publisher of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, Abraham Cahan (1917) are quoted; Yiddish music is played. Lists of residents from two different Eldridge Street tenements (a boarding house, and a building with solely Jewish residents) are shown to make the point that tenements can be both multi-ethnic and Jewish.<sup>146</sup>

Various Jewish affective buttons of heritage are pushed in this slideshow whether in showing synagogue photos or through using words such as “ancient” to describe tradition. Quite tellingly, the show ends with tying 97 Orchard fundraising to a religious injunction derived from a biblical decree: “Most of all it [LESTM] lives, because generations of Americans have and

will continue to respond to the ancient injunction: AND THOU SHALT TEACH IT UNTO THY CHILDREN” (11). The use of this well-known biblical adage (Deut: 6-7) overtly proposes the Museum as the way to teach one’s children to be Jewish.<sup>147</sup> An insistence on using the word Americans can be seen as a universalizing of Jewish tradition concomitant with having stayed long enough to produce distanced generations in a new promised land.

When asked about the 1994 fund-raising script, someone at the Museum laughed concerning a different aspect of the pitch and said “Research and Education Center sounds better than saying it’s for an office.” Indeed, Abram (1993a) had previously authored a letter soliciting large donations for what she had then termed a “Heritage Resource Center ...Featuring an Education Department, an Archives/Library, and a Museum Programming Department” (1). By June of 1994, that is three months before the Museum opened, Abram (1994c) had signed leases for 66 Allen and 90 Orchard for its “Archives / Library, Education Department, Exhibitions, Theatre and Administration.” While 97 Orchard was the primary focus of fund-raising especially during the capital campaign to buy that building, the Museum’s initial neighborhood expansion was funded in part through its Jewish “Heritage” pitches.

Although the Museum viewed itself as correcting Jewish claims of specialness in relation to the Lower East Side and immigration, Abram looked to communal connections for funding and visitation; if anything she expected that support. Certainly there is a recognizable resonance for Jewish visitors and donors in hearing a 97 Orchard story of past Lower East Side immigration. Yet this sort of fundraising moves beyond that by knowingly mining the same well-springs of collective memory that the Museum claimed to be correcting.

## **Tapping Heritage**

By 1991, Abram (1991a) had already asked her Board to: "Find co-chairs (Jewish: German, East.European [sic], Sephardic -, Irish, Italian, Chinese, German)" (4) for its Heritage Dinner series and tour. That her list drops African Americans and differentiates between German, East European and Sephardic Jews already hints at an updated knowledge of 97 Orchard's residents. It bears mentioning that Morris Abram, Ruth Abram's father, was the head of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations in the late 1980s. A well-known liberal litigator, his stance against affirmative action had made him a controversial previous leadership choice for the United Negro College Fund and Brandeis University. She used his wide social, business and political connections in New York and Washington to push for Museum funding and to obtain extensive pro bono legal and advertising support from firms connected with him.<sup>148</sup> Entrée into his world helped the Museum (1993c) as can be seen in a description of its heritage dinners and tours in that year's fiscal report:

Sponsored by friends of the Museum, these intimate tours are the Museum's most effective mechanism for expanding its network of supporters... the Museum hosted members of the Jewish Funders Network....Ambassador Morris Abram invited UN diplomats from nations represented by Museum 'alumni.' (7).

These private heritage tours for potential donors were central to the Museum's fund-raising.<sup>149</sup> Tutela (2008)—who wrote about the Museum's educational programs—viewed Abram's networking and fund-raising as critical to the Museum's initial success. Tutela thus conducted a series of interviews that touched on this topic. Rabinowitz's response in describing Abram emphasized: "...the importance of her social connections: 'Ruth, of course, knew a lot of people because of her father's connections; [a]... fundamental skill ... was that she had assets that she could bring to this endeavor'" (Tutela 2008) (170-171).<sup>150</sup>

One example can be seen in a Jewish fundraising circle that involved Peter Madoff who became a prominent board member (his grandparents had run a Lower East Side business).<sup>151</sup> Soon after he joined, Abram (1997a) wrote to trustees: “Peter Madoff's involvement of Lent and Scrivner in this process has proved invaluable” (4). As later reported on by *BusinessWeek* (Epstein 2008) and the *Los Angeles Times* (Andrew Zajac and Janet Hook 2008), the Madoff's business lobbying firm (now Lent, Scrivner & Roth) had successfully lobbied Congressional members to aid the Museum obtain special legal status as an independent National Park Service affiliate that included substantial annual allocations valued at over a million dollars.<sup>152</sup>

When Tutela (2008) asked Madoff why he had joined the board, he said: “It represents the difficult challenges early immigrants ... endured. It provides a benefit for present immigrants because it shows that people before them had similar struggles and have prospered” (103). Previously, Madoff (2001) supported the Museum's proposed expansion into 99 Orchard Street explaining: “It would benefit the area greatly as being the largest tourist attraction on the Lower East Side. The expansion would provide more jobs in the area and would benefit the local businesses.” The Madoff connection is of interest since the firm's clients came from wealthy Jewish social networks of trust, circles that he helped tap for the Museum. As a trustee, Madoff articulated the importance of providing current immigrants with a beneficial model demonstrating hardship bringing success, a message only somewhat at variance from the Museum's stated goal of increasing empathy for “new immigrants.”

Communal connections were critical to the Museum's social networking for fundraising. Abram had her own overlapping networks; nor were her politics on Israel identical to her father's.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, as one historian made clear, successfully courting his networks did

not mean that Abram changed her views: “She was not in any way going to turn this into a Jewish oriented museum; Ruth was an amazing fund-raising machine. She always hired the best people to do the apartments but she chose which groups and stories.”

A donor list that I’ve assembled from public sources of individual, foundation, governmental, corporate, and other funders, shows an early and continuous focus on pitching to Jewish donors and foundations. It is unclear how much Abram expected Jewish funders to endorse her broadening of heritage into one of a shared Lower East Side immigrant story, not least because Abram was adept at tuning her messages when marketing 97 Orchard as both a Jewish and larger legacy. In other words, given the Lower East Side’s symbolic importance in Jewish collective memory, the interest of Jewish heritage visitors and donors appears as anticipated and eagerly solicited by the Museum’s leadership, educators, and fundraisers.

### **Real Lives**

Although its residential interpretations were in flux, in 1992 Abram continued to enthusiastically describe the future Museum as multi-ethnic, diverse and housed in a building uniquely representative of the Lower East Side. Rabinowitz’s sense of what made for narrative authenticity prevailed by the end of a year in which the Museum’s leadership was increasingly concerned with raising the money to buy and renovate its building. As Dolkart found out, a decision was made to base its first two ethnic households on the stories of two “real” 97 Orchard residents. A sense that its residents’ historical reality was needed for its apartments to be seen as authentic came to haunt a Museum already committed to using costumed interpreters to tell the staged stories of historic families. (A need for perceived historical

authenticity by proving historical bone fides is a broader issue for Living History sites (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1993, Eric Gable & Richard Handler 2000, Magelssen 2007)).

Once she had reached agreement with 97 Orchard's landlord in June 1990 on an option to buy, Abram (1990h) was on a clock to start needed building renovations.<sup>154</sup> Hence, Dolkart's November 1992 contestation of its apartment interpretations arrived at a critical moment in the Museum's first attempt to tell a more personal, "real," yet universal immigrant story. By Spring/Summer of 1993, a deepening narrative shift towards interpreting residents' lives seems evident with debates ensuing as to whether expensive costumed Living History interpreters should be in all or some apartments or just in the downstairs theater.

Just as the building's residential demographics were becoming increasingly apparent, the Museum's shifting institutional interpretive priorities started to slowly reflect a lack of success in obtaining institutional and personal financial support from all of its Lower East Side heritage groups. Depending on the group, the Museum was arguably the far more invested party in portraying an attachment to a historic Lower East Side as can be seen from its plans.

In addition there will be two rotating exhibits. These will be apartments reflecting life from 1864-1904 and 1905-1935. Tenement Life: 1864-1904 will have changing installations... It might begin by interpreting Irish immigrant life in the tenement, followed by a re-creation of the apartment where Lucas Glockner, the German-born tailor who built 97 Orchard Street, lived with his family. (Abram 1994a) (8)

In planning next steps in 1994, Abram was still not realistic about the apparent funding and narrative difficulties of creating "real" Irish Catholic and German Lutheran apartments. Instead, the Museum's 1997 apartment marked the return of the Jewish Confino family.

## Meeting a Vickie

Once 97 Orchard finally opened for public tours in October 1994, the presence of the resurrected Jewish Gumpertz family aided the Museum to initially attract a core heritage audience for a Museum that also had other audiences in mind.<sup>155</sup> The 1997 appearance of the Sephardic Confino apartment proved equally serendipitous for a Museum wanting to provide programs for New York schools. Living History meant that school classes (and families) could hear Ladino [Judeo Spanish] inflected English spoken by a costumed interpreter playing Vickie, an impoverished Jewish 1913 immigrant teen-ager. When the Museum (2002) partnered with Lyndhurst (a National Trust mansion belonging to Gilded Age financier Jay Gould) to show schools contrasting economic groups from the same era, the Confino tour then became part of a popular “Net Worth” educational initiative that brought in grant monies and other income.<sup>156</sup> Ironically enough, the Confino family, had been well-off prior to immigration.

Other aspects of contingency appear for the Confino apartment. The initial research and interpretation was funded by the Jewish Federation and the [Sephardic] Amado Foundation with the help of CUNY’s Graduate Center for Sephardic Studies. But Victoria (Vickie) Confino was not meant to move in permanently: a memo from Abram (1995) to trustees confirmed that the initial funding simply meant that: “The first set of programs will be based on the Confino Family” (2).<sup>157</sup> The Museum planned on having a rotating “Family” apartment for costumed Living History interpreters to provide quality historical educational entertainment for children.<sup>158</sup> Once Victoria was installed in 1997, her clever first-person interpretation—staying in character by explaining to other children what they needed to learn as new immigrants—was

so popular that she got to remain on the first floor (the “real” Victoria was on the fifth). Adult tours were then added to the school and family tours.

Somewhat unwisely, the Museum’s (circa 1995) earlier, “Funding Proposal for the Tenement Family Apartment,” had pitched to donors the chance to support giving “millions of school children, their teachers and families ... an opportunity to experience tenement life as it was lived by scores of immigrant families between 1863 and 1935.” (1) Luckily, the Museum wasn’t proposing to teach mathematics to the contemporary children who were about to learn about Victoria’s old school lessons. Eventually outside donor funding did change an interpretive aspect. In 2010 a non-Jewish Greek foundation donated half a million dollars on condition that the Confino family, should be identified as Greek rather than as from the Ottoman Empire (Herald 2010, Stern 2010).<sup>159</sup> The Confinos had immigrated from Kastoria in 1913.

Although Vickies excel at interactively providing a sense of the past, contingency in performance can also undercut a seemingly inevitable coupling of story to place. Thus the variability of guides and an overall experiential stress on affect—of what it felt like to be an immigrant rather than on factual transmission—caught the eye of an NYU performance studies class (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2005).<sup>160</sup> A suspension of disbelief is far harder to maintain when catching the performance of a Vickie who can’t pull off a Ladino accent or greeting.<sup>161</sup>

The Vickies were the main Living History interpreters installed at the Museum for a long while. The Museum’s Family Days now offer a whole new cast of apartment Living History characters culled from “regular” tours, including Josephine Baldizzi’s mother. Either way, a building’s past history is represented as inherently diverse, its residential apartments as displaying a Lower East Side multi-ethnicity ultimately productive of tolerance and a shared

American identity. Now may I introduce you to our original heroines, Josephine Baldizzi and her new neighbor, Nathalia Gumpertz?

## **Chapter Three: Building Stories**

“Every story is a travel story —a spatial practice.” —Michel de Certeau (1980) (115)

### **Practicing Stories**

The Museum’s rapidly shifting priorities reflected the constraints on its interpretation of immigrant lives in a context focused on intensive fund-raising to purchase and renovate a tenement building. As Richard Rabinowitz (1990a) stated “...the key question [is]: how shall we interpret the heart of the Tenement Museum, the ‘restored ethnic household’ apartments” (11). From 1990 on, the Museum increasingly used its building to advantage to conduct a concerted, successful push for Congressional legislation, publicity, foundation and government funding, grants and donations. In doing so, its representations of immigrant ethnicity became increasingly tied to its building’s residence history, undermining its ability—though not its desire—to represent a Lower East Side multi-ethnic historic diversity.

This chapter further pursues what happens when the new “real” stories of residents are introduced into 97 Orchard. How is history produced into stories for tours? How do those storylines and institutional self-understandings shift when a supposedly German Lutheran family turns out to be Jewish? How do the Museum’s representations of a historic neighborhood composed of six heritage groups now fit with a building whose apartments can no longer house the narratives of two of those groups? Its multiple framings create a shifting terrain upon which to negotiate its residential interpretive scheme.

I use early tour scripts to investigate a transformation of the personal narratives to be portrayed in the Museum's first two apartments. Once building residents start to be chosen, various implicit assumptions concerning ethnicity, language, place and storytelling become visible. The Museum's residentially based interpretation of 97 Orchard's apartments displays the difficulty inherent in finding well documented, diverse, ethnically and chronologically "correct" immigrant tenants with compelling personal stories.

To emphasize the articulation between stories and tours, I offer Michel de Certeau's (1980) critical insight that stories necessarily spatialize: "every day they traverse and organize places they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them" (115). If for de Certeau stories are tours, then I suggest that tours repeatedly perform spatialized stories by animating their narrative movement. If storytelling is a practice, "space is a [very] practiced place" for guides who work with tour scripts (117). While stories may cut across the map (129), the very practice of repetitive storytelling in place—especially when offered as a standardized commodity—reinforces its association with set narratives.<sup>162</sup>

Yet like all performances that involve repetitive narrative and movement, retellings also open up potentially different shifts between place and space.<sup>163</sup> All of this raises questions of persistence and change. Do stories of place become unstuck? What happens when newer stories ostensibly fill the space of older stories? That older stories are fully replaced, subsumed, or displaced is not a given, especially in tours. Narrative accretion, resistance and persistence are also possible outcomes, since the performance of older stories may still be sustained by underlying interpretive schemes.

For the American History Workshop (AHW), the building's newer residential stories showed that apartment tours emphasizing personal storytelling in place had a strong credible and affective power. The question was how to craft and tell them with appropriate historic framings. By mid-1993 the AHW was already meeting on how to best train guides to interpret personal stories through effective storytelling. Performance pointers included:

Don't try to impose one story on these apartments... Each time a storyteller tells a story, you discover new things, and tell it differently to different audiences. Makes it exciting, when you have the interaction of your audience. (1)

Stay true to the history of the building in the building.... Need to get used to the stories, make them your own. (2) (Reaven 1993c)<sup>164</sup>

For AHW historian, consultant, liaison and project coordinator Marci Reaven, a spatial sense of Lower East Side life was critical to storytelling for tours:

One metaphor for describing life in LES's past is the contrast between life in the apartments and life out in the streets. Social geography and physical geography is intertwined. Don't get stuck in the architecture; focus on the social fabric. How intimacy in the home was different than interaction in the street? How and where did people draw boundaries? [sic] (Reaven 1993c) (1)

Reaven prioritized a tour geography that contrasts and connects indoor and outdoor spaces of neighborhood daily life in order to tell stories of the Baldizzi and Gumpertz households.

The following sections probe how interpreting these stories plays out as apartments are reworked to fit into older or newer framings. A constant churning of Gumpertz tour scripts written by the American History Workshop (AHW) elucidates a Museum's assumptions vis-à-vis language and place as it negotiates whether and how to portray the family as German-Jewish. Other documents offer insights as to how the Museum looked to historically frame its new stories. A handwritten edit scribbled onto an August 16th AHW (1994a) presentation strikes an oddly sequential chord concerning Nathalia Gumpertz's husband: "In 1870 Julius was a

shoemaker. In 1871 he was a clerk. In 1873 he was a merchant, selling wrappers. In 1874 he was gone. IN 1994, HE IS HISTORY [Handwritten].” Thus the Museum’s narratives literally transform the stories of those who lived at 97 Orchard into HISTORY.

The next section accordingly details the Museum’s attempt to chronologically fashion ethnic period apartments as an element of history and place. As the Gumpertz story shows, ethnicity does not disappear when personal stories appear; it becomes another necessary part of the frame, much like the building itself. The last section interrogates ethnicity as seen in a Museum guide book and website. The Museum took a decade to publish a walking tour book that continued to use its older heritage scheme to address the neighborhood’s historic diversity, even after its newer residential stories were installed. As its contemporary communities recede, a historic, diverse Lower East Side is granted an after-life that has no past boundaries. In these walking tours, immigrant heritage belongs to America, to once again be recycled in 2007 when the Museum wanted a historic district.

### **Building Neighbors**

The Baldizzi and Gumpertz apartments opened in tandem in October 1994 with a tour that showed immigrant life during two different, life-altering Depressions. Chronology is foreshortened or looped as eras get retroactively joined: the 1870s and the 1930s are seen side-by-side when Josephine Baldizzi and Nathalie Gumpertz become multi-ethnic next door neighbors whose stories are juxtaposed. The real and the authentic, surface differently as tensions in these co-joined apartments.

Historians interviewed Josephine Baldizzi about her childhood at 97 Orchard. The production of her story as an engaging and educational repeatable performance illustrates a

transformation from oral history to tour scripts designed for standardized tours. One historian offered two critical observations about place in relation to the Baldizzi story: “The building is frozen in time once they get evicted. [Yet] for the Baldizzis, it’s not about moving; they want to stay. It’s attachment to place.”

Natalia Gumpertz’s dramatic nineteenth-century story of abandonment was crafted with relatively little known about her. That its historical approach was problematic becomes evident in resurrecting her tour scripts: the Museum evinced serious difficulties in adjusting its narratives once it ascertained that 97’s first selected resident was not German Lutheran. Initial institutional assumptions as to ethnicity, language and place are thus illuminated through the inadvertent emergence and uneven rendering of a “Jewish” story.

### **Contingency’s Handmaidens**

The Museum had gotten its pro bono PR firm to run public service announcements looking for people with a connection to 97 Orchard Street. It also ran ads in the *Forward*, a newspaper that had long been a symbol of the Jewish Lower East Side (its iconic building now an expensive condominium). Yet contingency also played a large role in finding the stories that the Museum would use to portray an immigrant Lower East Side that successfully overcame the strains of a past multi-ethnic urban sociality. In 1988, the Museum had not initially planned on opening with an Italian apartment. In “real life,” an elderly Josephine Baldizzi Esposito showing up in 1989 eventually created interest in interpreting an Italian apartment with a family who had been evicted in 1935.<sup>165</sup> A genealogist who was working for another client inadvertently found the 1883 court documents attesting to Julius Gumpertz’s disappearance.<sup>166</sup>

An NEH grant had funded creating two ethnic apartments. Dolkart's (1992) November memo was written when the Museum's interpretive scheme had shifted toward interpreting an Italian Catholic family and a German Lutheran family with "real people." As Dolkart's feedback showed, the Museum's stories, history and apartments were not ready for prime-time. A few months later, Reaven (1993a) wrote an April 16<sup>th</sup> memo to other historians to officially explain that the Museum would be interpreting the stories of the Baldizzi and Gumpertz families.

This grant funds the "re-creation" and interpretation of two apartments on the tenement's second floor. We view these tiny apartments as containers for the tenement's human history ...we have decided to start by rooting the visitor experience in the stories of two families who actually lived here. The German-Jewish family of Nathalia Gumpertz lived in one apartment in the 1870s-80s; the Italian family of Rosa and Joseph Baldizzi lived in the other one in the early 1930s. (1-2)

... Both families lived at 97 Orchard St. during pivotal historical moments....what we know and can imagine about their lives makes for dramatic storytelling in its own right. ... it ... provides us with numerous opportunities to connect the Gumpertz and Baldizzi families to New York and to other New Yorkers —not only in their eras, but also in our own. ...The portrayals are not meant to serve as microcosms of the German-Jewish or Italian experience ... these are stories about real people who really lived in this building ... this ... positions the Museum as a "cauldron" of human experiences where exploration and discussion about many of New York's diverse peoples leads to greater understanding. (1993a) (2)

Here, the reality of the Gumpertz and Baldizzi families as past building residents with compelling period and personal hard-luck stories is emphasized over ethnicity.<sup>167</sup> Their stories inspire empathy and hope in showing how "real people" dealt with adversity. Reaven uses a cauldron metaphor to imply that the Museum's recognizable mix of stories of personal struggle will resonate for contemporary diverse New Yorkers. Though not quite as common as the highly-loaded terms "melting pot" and "crucible," cauldron metaphors are also associated with depictions of immigrant mixing and acculturation. Not least, Reaven put the AHW's imprimatur on the decision that the Gumpertz family was to be finally and officially interpreted as an 1870s

German-Jewish family. The Baldizzis are specified simply as being Italian since in New York at the time, the default understanding for “Italian” was that it meant Catholic, Southern Italian. These defining aspects of the family’s history were not well addressed in the initial Baldizzi narratives; Catholic objects and beliefs have only relatively recently received greater emphasis.

### **“Africa is not a Country”**

Reaven (1993f) held a May 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting to introduce the Museum’s Scholars Advisory Committee to the new interpretive approach of using “real” residents’ stories. When she invited the Committee, Reaven (1993a) had written on April 16th: “Our first meeting will focus on the Gumpertz family and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so I have enclosed a sheet describing what little we know about Nathalia and Julius Gumpertz...” (2).<sup>168</sup> She also raised the question of how best to connect familial stories to historical and contemporary concerns:

Connecting these family histories to broader issues and to our variety of visitors will create a “knowledge base”... We would like your help in identifying themes that are central to the historical experience, and evocative or provocative of today's.

On May 3<sup>rd</sup> these historians began by discussing how Nathalia Gumpertz’s life showed agency. Reaven’s (1993f) meeting notes then capture James Horton’s comment about the “Anne Frank Museum as an example of a place that explores a particular experience, then opens it up to a broader, more general exploration of racism, etc. Perhaps LESTM can use that approach” (1). Indeed, the Anne Frank House was the prevailing paradigm for associating a building with a personal narrative shaped so as to elicit larger lessons. But Anne Frank famously had a diary; for Nathalia, a biographical narrative had to be constructed. And then there was the question as to which larger lessons should be construed from this story. Horton, a specialist in “African American” history went on to note that:

Blacks are not immigrants in the same sense as Europeans. For one thing, Africa is not a country... .The possibility of coining the term 'African-American' implies the greatest melting pot the world has ever seen... (2).

Horton again saw a broader problem of commensurability not least in confusing a continent with a country. Indeed “Africa is not a country” is a well-known slogan, a campaign, and an app today, all fighting the idea that Africa is a homogenous place. The Museum’s framing of immigration is a poor fit for narratives of enslavement. Horton’s comments triggered a back-and-forth discussion among historians in which Peter Kwong suggested that: “We should talk not only about ethnicity, but also about race.”<sup>169</sup> For these historians, the Museum’s [unwelcome?] shift to representing the personal stories of building residents in its apartments [which meant that there would be no Chinese or Black households] did not mean it should be disinterested in race. Ruth Abram and Richard Rabinowitz also attended that meeting.

### **Josephine’s Moving Day: Out and Back Again**

A few years earlier—in fact, by 1990—Abram, the AHW and other historians started to conduct mainly private tours to bring in potential donors, create publicity, and hone a sense of audience.<sup>170</sup> Abram, Rabinowitz, Dolkart and Reaven and others had begun to note that visitors often asked about the building itself and who had lived there. As the Gumpertz and Baldizzi stories began to develop more fully, everyone needed to learn about what visitors saw as authentic. But an interesting gap in timing suggests that for Museum leadership the value of imparting a sense of personal authenticity in regard to the stories of residents evolved slowly.

That personal information, as mentioned above, had showed up quite early in the form of an elderly Josephine Baldizzi Esposito walking in and introducing herself; the Museum had contacted a childhood friend from 97 Orchard Street. A Museum (2000a) website virtual tour of

the Baldizzi apartment simply states: “In 1989 Josephine Baldizzi Esposito returned to her childhood home at 97 Orchard Street.”<sup>171</sup> Initial oral history sessions with her took place that summer. It was only as the apartment was being shaped that in-depth oral history sessions took place in 1993-1994, after a hiatus of more than four years.<sup>172</sup> An early AHW memo suggests that while navigating amidst its many schemes the Museum had initially envisioned the Baldizzis in another context.

BIOGRAPHY OF A TENEMENT 1863-1935, planned for the near future as a permanent exhibit, will focus on the history of 97 Orchard Street...To be permanently installed at the Tenement Museum, the interpretive formats will include [a] wall mounted exhibition, an architect's scale model of 97 Orchard Street, a computerized program containing information about former residents, owners and shopkeepers, a Memory Board ...and the Baldizzi apartment” (Novek 1990) (8-9)

In October 1990, a full-fledged 1910 Italian apartment was planned for the composite LaTorres household. The Baldizzi apartment was to be part of a smaller permanent exhibit on the specific history of 97 Orchard meant to serve as a counter-balance to its larger envisioned thematic interpretation featuring rotating exhibits and ethnic households.<sup>173</sup> The Biography of a Tenement exhibit was installed at its 90 Orchard Street Visitors Center over two years later. It featured only the “doll house” (see photo), a clever model of 97 Orchard known more officially as the “Urban Log Cabin,” that had its own afterlife in virtualized online tours.



This suggests that in 1990 while showing something about the Baldizzis as part of a building exhibit was desirable it does not necessarily imply an initial prioritization of interpreting Josephine Baldizzi’s personal story within the building. Nothing in the Conceptual Plan suggests that was envisioned. Josephine’s early 1989 interviews about being a child

resident were used to create an off-site “Trunk” program for local schools that Josephine could participate in.<sup>174</sup> Hence, an Educational Proposal (Mendelsohn 1993) touting the value of a 1994 apartment could note: “Josephine's memories of her family home and neighborhood during this period remain potent and an unmatched source for Museum research” (4).

By the time the Biography of a Tenement exhibit ended in 1993, a larger interpretive shift to personal stories of building residents had taken place. The Baldizzi story was now slated to be re-created into its own “stand-alone” apartment. Indeed the recorded interviews made for a compelling, intimate depiction of a child resident’s life.<sup>175</sup> Yet her recorded voice, a powerful personal part of the tour, was not installed until 1997, the year she died. A different narrative closure is initially emphasized in an apartment that was staged to show the family’s 1935 eviction, since officially 97 Orchard was not going to have remaining residents.

### **“Authentic Recreations”**

The challenge of authentic recreation was certainly an issue for Living History. Rabinowitz was clearly unconvinced that the Museum had the wherewithal to provide the in-depth, on-going training for Living History interpreters required for each ethnic apartment. Therefore, AHW scripts show a range of possible deployments of Museum teachers, staff, docents, guides, educators and interpreters. When the Museum opened on October 1994, it found staging short theater productions downstairs for visitors to be easier and less expensive.

Blithely ignoring difficulties in borrowing a term from a living history vocabulary, here is a Museum claim that “authentic recreation” had indeed peeled back a building’s layers to show two original immigrant households. Contingency is hardly given its due:

Authentic recreations of urban immigrant lives have never before been attempted. But now, at 97 Orchard Street, in the actual spaces in which they dwelled, the Tenement

Museum reveals precisely how two families—one German Jewish, one Sicilian Catholic—lived during the early years in America. (Limmer Fall 1994)<sup>176</sup>

Its Tenement Times Fall 1994 newsletter, edited by Ruth Limmer, portrayed the Museum as revealing two families' history in "the actual spaces in which they dwelled." Yet the claim is vague as to whether it is the urban immigrants' lives or apartments that have been re-created. The references to authenticity and precision are especially odd given that neither "real" family was housed in the correct apartment or floor. One person I spoke to explained one benefit of that prior calculation:

The ruined apartment that the Gumpertz family was in may actually have more value than the apartment they are actually placed in for restoration and touring purposes since in 1905 the airshaft and toilets are added to the building and those [back] apartments get smaller. So if we want to do an 1890s apartment [using the 1890s square footage], we need to put it on the other side of the building. I guess what is authentic is the space and the stories; the apartments are restored and not authentic and neither are the artifacts.

The Museum's archives suggest yet another calculation. Its earlier plans had called for starting with renovating the second floor apartments to emplace its first two rotating "ethnic households." While its initial generic "ethnic" households were to be on the second floor, the AHW had also wanted a third floor apartment. Shortly after its Conceptual Plan was vetted, Abram (1990i) told Rabinowitz that to obtain a certificate of occupancy, its architects wanted visitor traffic routed only to lower floors.

Pamela Keech (1994a) designed the new second floor Gumpertz front apartment in spring 1994, knowing that: “In 1870 the family moved to 97 Orchard Street, where they lived on the third floor [in the back]” (2). Nathalie did not originally have a front parlor window to



provide light for her dressmaking business (see photo below). A memo indicates that the new Gumpertz tenement wallpaper was to be provided by Scalamandré, one of New York’s most discriminating luxury firms.<sup>177</sup> Nathalie’s former apartment is now shown as a “Ruin” (see next chapter). Similarly, Josephine’s oral history indicated that the Baldizzis were probably across the airshaft from the Rogarshevskys on the third floor.<sup>178</sup> That staff knew the recreated apartment was not in the space where the Baldizzis lived, can be seen in a memo about the new Baldizzi apartment build out that asks: “How do you want the closet to look that is located in the parlor? The closet in the original Baldizzi apartment is in almost exactly the same condition as the recreation” (Epps 1994).

Overall, there seems to have been no concern that “real” people be placed in “real” apartments. Financial considerations and the need for a certificate of occupancy drove placing apartments on the second floor.<sup>179</sup> While what is viewed as authentic has shifted over time and varies for employees and guides, most visitors understand that they see authentic apartments that “real” people lived in. Although anything partaking of the authentic is highlighted on tours, the Museum (2005a) actually has a very small list of objects donated by its residential families (8). Almost everything displayed in apartments was bought; a few items are replicas.

Reaven (1993a) had correctly noted: “what we know and... can imagine about their lives makes for dramatic storytelling” (2). If apartments are tour props, so are stories told about their residents. An early article by Abram (1991b) about the Museum’s Living History interpretive approach for heritage groups also mentions the story of a real 97 Orchard “alumna:”

Josephine Baldizzi Esposito paused when she passed the two tiny toilet stalls in the center of the hallway at the tenement where she had lived as a child. “I spent my childhood in there,” she announced. “Why?” museum staff asked ... “Because,” Josephine explained matter-of-factly, “my mother believed in enemas.” [Josephine] ... is a member of one of hundreds of families from 27 nations which lived in the six-story tenement building at 97 Orchard Street, New York City from 1863 when it opened to 1935 when it was condemned.<sup>180</sup> (4)

This story re-appears in the Museum’s (1993b) earliest Gumpertz Baldizzi tour scripts.

We travel now forward in time, to the 1930's, and the time of America's second great economic depression. As we walk down the hall to the front of the building, please take a look at the two toilets, ventilated by an airshaft installed in the building in 1905 as the result of the passage of a major housing law. When Josephine Baldizzi, returning here for the first time in 50 years, passed those toilets, she screamed; “I spent my childhood in here. Why do you think she might have?” We'll discuss it in the apartment. (6-7)

A tour offers an all-too-knowing sense of dramatic historic intimacy in which Josephine, screaming, appears “real.” But in 1997, the Museum got it right in using a recording: it’s the untiring friendliness of Josephine’s repeating disembodied voice that makes her almost real.

### **Nathalie’s Gesundheit**

The Museum’s shifting understanding of the Gumpertz family was triggered by old court documents suggesting a meaty storyline. Nathalie was found serendipitously by Marsha Saron Dennis, a genealogist already familiar with 97 Orchard Street.<sup>181</sup> When working with Surrogate Court records for another client in 1992, Dennis stumbled on records of a Nathalia Gumpertz who attested in 1883—with the help of the building’s landlord and its saloon keeper—that her husband Julius had disappeared from 97 Orchard Street in 1874 and should now be declared

legally dead. (He had made custom leather shoes, a business hurt by industrialization). This would entitle her to receive an inheritance from her European father-in-law.

While the Gumpertz apartment can be retroactively positioned as the Museum's first Jewish apartment, in 1992 it had been planned as the German ethnic apartment, as the Gumpertz family originally was thought to be Lutheran. That an early apartment was meant to tell the story of a primarily Lutheran Kleindeutschland from 1863 on made sense, not least since Lucas Glockner—the building's builder and first owner—initially lived in the building with his family. The building also had a beer hall called Schneider's Pub (eventually interpreted in 2012). But Dolkart was correct: the 1883 dating was off for a story of an earlier Kleindeutschland.

Ideally a German apartment was to provide a story of immigrant waves, succession and displacement to contextualize a later East European Jewish migration in which the Lower East Side replaces Kleindeutschland. It would set the stage by emphasizing that all immigrant groups suffered from prejudice. Hence, stereotypes and prejudice against Germans were strongly highlighted in early Gumpertz apartment scripts. The guide was to:

**DELIVER WITH PASSION AND RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION:** "If this keeps up, we'll all be speaking, reading and writing German. They are very clannish, keep to themselves, don't bother to learn the language. They desecrate the Sabbath what with their beer gardens where they drink all of a Sunday and with the women and children too... They will NEVER assimilate. Mark my words. Please consider joining us to bar further immigration. ["] The anti-German society did not prevail. The 1990 Federal Census documented that the "average American" living today is of German descent. (American History Workshop for Tenement Museum 1993b) (6)

An even earlier draft script (1993a) using this evidently fictive newspaper quote added the comment: "[FIND A REAL QUOTE]" (4). Nonetheless, almost all early tours continued to use this same language even after the Museum realized that the Gumpertz family was Jewish.

In November, Dolkart (1992) had commented on the Museum's plan to feature an 1883 story of an "apparently non-Jewish" German household. Already "In 1992 [date unspecified], the Museum's geneologist [sic] located the great grandsons of Nathalie and Julius Gumpertz" (American History Workshop for Tenement Museum 1993a) (3). Dennis' 1992 work fed a gradual recognition that the Gumpertz family was Jewish: Nathalie's daughters had married people with Jewish last names and she was buried by a German Jewish benevolent society.<sup>182</sup> But it is only in 1993 that the fun really begins.

While Reaven rapidly saw possible implications, others were less ready to see how having a Jewish family could affect the interpretation of the Gumpertz apartment. My surmise is that the Museum's resistance reflected its prior narrative investment in place and ethnicity for Kleindeutschland and the Lower East Side. Historian Stanley Nadel's (1990) Museum research had already taken note of regional differences in Kleindeutschland to explain the Tenth Ward's distinctively Prussian residential pattern.<sup>183</sup> But Prussian Poland was literally not on the Museum's map. Its leadership did not initially anticipate or welcome the extent or variety of possible Jewish residents in its Tenth Ward Orchard Street tenement.

Institutionally there was no understanding that German-speaking Jews migrating from Prussian-conquered Posen, East Prussia, and Silesia could have different social and housing patterns than those of other Kleindeutschland residents.<sup>184</sup> Not least, the Museum had already envisioned that its sole Jewish apartment would represent an East European ethnic household.<sup>185</sup> A building that it assumed would match its vision of the Lower East Side's past diversity was turning out to be increasingly Jewish at the beginning and ending of its tenancy.

Hence whether and how to render the Gumpertz family as German Jewish was played out unevenly over eighteen months in a tug of war reflected in Museum memos, interpretive furnishings reports and tour scripts.<sup>186</sup> Early tour scripts often employed inapt descriptions of Germans as an ethnic group to describe a German Jewish family from Prussian Poland. The above paragraph about clannish Germans is just one such artifact showing the persistence of “pre-Jewish” versions. The line about the census documenting that the “‘average American’ living today is of German descent” is particularly obtuse not only in its confusing representation of census data but in assuming German as a non-Jewish category (American History Workshop for Tenement Museum 1993b) (6). Some early scripts simply didn’t mention that the family was Jewish or at best did so obliquely.

By June, Reaven (1993g) intervened again. She wrote: “Developed a research list for Daniel Soyer to investigate ... I want him to track the Gumpertz origins, and help us define the ways that the lives of the Gumpertz family members might have been shaped by their Jewishness.” Reaven brought in an expert on Polish Jewish landsmanshaftn after finding older maps showing where Nathalie and Julius were born.<sup>187</sup> Soyer’s (1993) December report noted:

By 1870 some observers referred to the neighborhood as “New Jerusalem.” And, in 1875, it was estimated that some three quarters of the stores on the main German shopping street were closed on Yom Kippur. The dual German/Jewish character of the neighborhood is illustrated by the fact that both B'nai B'rith's Covenant Hall and the German Turnhalle were located on Orchard Street. (3)<sup>188</sup>

Here Soyer is paraphrasing Nadel’s (1987) earlier scholarly work on this topic although not necessarily drawing the same conclusions (18) (28). Hence, some of the “surprise” of the Gumpertz narrative seems related to a lack of knowledge on the part of the Museum’s leadership as to its Kleindeutschland ward’s “dual German/Jewish character.”<sup>189</sup> By 1994

Reaven—with Rabinowitz’s backing—started having more success in using Soyer’s (1993) and Dennis’ (1993) work to “correct” the Gumpertz apartment staging, story and furnishings. Keech’s (1994b) furnishing report was updated to stage an 1878 German Jewish apartment.

### **Language Has its Place**

By 2003, Kelli Lucas was changing Keech’s work by doing a more thorough elaboration of the Gumpertz setting. After reading Soyer, Lucas (2003) incorporated Yiddish into the story.

Hailing from Prussian-controlled regions (located in present-day Poland), Nathalie Rheinsberg and Julius Gumpertz would have spoken German as well as Yiddish. These language skills allowed them to communicate with both Jewish and Gentile populations within New York’s proud German-American community, a versatility that would have opened doors both economically and culturally. ...German Jews and Gentile were surprisingly united across religion by an over-arching reverence for Germanic cultural traditions. Gentile German societies even frequently included Jewish members. (23)

Although Yiddish appears in Lucas’s staging, the Museum’s Virtual Tour (2000b) of the Gumpertz apartment instead asked rhetorically: “In what language did they chat? Not Yiddish. German Jews rarely knew it. Yiddish arrived with the East European Jews in the 1880’s.” Soyer’s (1993) prior finding that the Gumpertzes’ linguistic skills *possibly* included Yiddish was trumped in virtual life even as it was eventually established in the apartment (9).<sup>190</sup>

The Museum’s institutional resistance to narrative recognition and incorporation invites inquiry, since rapid Jewish internal and external emigration after the Prussian conquest is well documented (Prussia emancipated Jews in its Polish territories relatively late, Posen only fully in 1869). Soyer’s bibliography cites two Museum historians who had previously published on German Jews.<sup>191</sup> When Nadel was asked by Reaven (1993b) “Where would she [Nathalie] have lived in N.Y.?” he answered “Kleindeutschland; 10<sup>th</sup> ward most heavily Jewish.” James Shenton (1994) and others had noted by 1992 that the 1870 census data showed the building’s six

peddlers to be Jewish (6).<sup>192</sup> Further analysis of census and other data from 97 Orchard yielded the information that some other Prussian residents were Polish (hinterlander) Prussian Jews.

Most intriguing is that Gumpertz is a well-known Jewish name in history and genealogy circles (e.g., as in the anglicized Dutch Jewish name of Samuel Gompers).<sup>193</sup> Hence, I wrote to two historians familiar with Prussian Poland to ask what their assumptions would be if given the following information: “Nathalie Rheinsberg Gumpertz was born in 1836 in Ortelsburg, Germany, now Szczytno, Poland. Julius Gumpertz is from Prausnitz, now Prusice.”<sup>194</sup> One answer started: “Gumpertz as a name has a long history... This is a distinctively Jewish name.” The other answer made clear that both towns then had a mix of Lutherans, Catholics and Jews. In one, many of its Polish speakers were Lutheran.<sup>195</sup> Both answers underpin how assumptions about migration, language and identity have much to do with metanarratives of place.

This prior investment in the Gumpertz apartment being German is still evident in a Museum (2002a) press release on its new Levine sweatshop themed apartment:

This new apartment will join ... previously restored apartments: the Gumpertz family, Germans who made their home at 97 Orchard Street in the 1870s; the Sephardic Confino family from Turkey who came to America in 1914; the Baldizzi family, Italian Catholics who lived in the building in the 1930s; and the Orthodox Jewish Rogarshevsky family, who lived in the building for over 35 years.

A bit of a throwback, the press release just describes the Gumpertzes as “Germans.” Perhaps having three explicitly Jewish families got the Gumpertzes off the hook for a short while. It is also evident in a later *Getting By Tour* (2005e) script. Under the heading “How the Gumpertz came to call this home,” the tour offers the following information:

But some native-born, English-speaking New Yorkers were horrified at the growing German presence in the city. They feared that families like the Gumpertz would bring more and more German children in to the world who would never assimilate. They feared that soon everyone would be drinking beer on Sundays and sending their

children to kindergarten. On the other hand, many praised the Germans for being thrifty, industrious, and orderly, and considered them one of the most reputable immigrant groups. (2005e) (6)

There's something puzzling in this to a careful reader who knows—as the Museum itself knew in 2005—that the Gumpertz family was not just “German” but also Jewish. The phrase “like the Gumpertz” seems to represent the stubborn persistence of older scripts in which the Gumpertz are presented as “real” Germans, that is not as Jews. A sedimentary layer that did not assimilate is now seen in a toned-down emphasis on prejudice against “real” Germans.<sup>196</sup> That particular tour version never explicitly referred to the Gumpertz family as Jewish although a menorah on the mantle and the ticket description made it apparent to those who looked.<sup>197</sup>

### **Resurrecting Nathalie**

Here's yet another question: given what is known about Nathalie Gumpertz, how does one resurrect her story's creation from Museum archives? The Docent Encyclopedia (2005b) entry on the Gumpertz family candidly lets guides know that: “The interpretive program is based on a combination of known facts and informed speculation.” This seems an apt description for a weaving of bare bone fact into an initial interpretive narrative that becomes received history for visitors. Hence, I provide below my own brief tour of how the Museum's tours initially navigated around the question of how to describe the Gumpertz family.

A full year after Dolkart's (1992) memo and Dennis' first genealogical report, Rabinowitz (1993) sent Abram two incomplete Gumpertz apartment tour scripts dated November 19<sup>th</sup> that were written to evoke more of a sense of daily family life. After demonstrating how to use the stove, the Museum Teacher [adult tour] is first prompted to say:

...most of the people who have moved here have not been welcomed. [Give examples of old and new racial/ethnic stereotypes.] That's one of the reasons that newcomers have

stayed together, found each other jobs, married among themselves, and organized their own societies, churches, and schools. (Reaven 1993d) (3)

“Here” is the Lower East Side, although this introduction doesn’t mention Jews.<sup>198</sup> But two tentative allusions to Gumpertz Jewishness appear. One line explicitly proposes Nathalie as “preparing a Sabbath meal if she was observant (this might be the first time her Jewishness is mentioned)...” (2). Reaven’s (1993d) script then mentions that “Julius had paid dues to Joshua Widows and Orphans, of the Free Sons of Israel. But that only paid for a burial” (3).

The next AHW script (1993a) from November 23 is for a building tour. Abram marks up the Gumpertz part with the words “Sob Story.” The script invites visitors to:

Visit our scale model of this building at 90 Orchard Street and you'll meet [Louis] Glockner's son, Edward, a bookbinder, who lived here in 1870 along with many other German, Irish and English tenants. Our slide show, "House of Heritage," will offer you an overview of the history of the house and the area. For the next half hour, we'll meet two families who actually lived in this building ... (1)<sup>199</sup>

“Actual,” virtual and desired ethnicity all get mixed into this tour in reference to the building’s early demographics and dollhouse model. Surprisingly, just before reverting back to the unattributed “clannish” Germans quote (4), a very Jewish Gumpertz family appears:

Nathalie Gumpertz died in 1894 and was buried in a plot supplied by Joshua Widows and Orphans, a German Jewish benevolent society [LIGHT ON LITERATURE FROM JOSHUA WIDOWS AND ORPHANS] founded in 1849. She never lived to see her daughters marry -[LIGHT ON PICTURES OF THE DAUGHTERS, HUSBANDS, CHILDREN] Rosa at 26 to a Hungarian born cigar maker, Morris Stern; Nannie at 36 to Samuel Cohen, a New York born clerk; and Olga at [FIND OUT] to [FIRST NAME AND OCCUPATION] Fabian. Nor did she ever know her grandchildren...In 1992, the Museum's genealogist located the great grandsons of Nathalie and Julius Gumpertz. (1993a) (3)

This story of how the Museum found out that Nathalie was Jewish remains in play for at least a week. It is hard to ascertain when it was dropped. Perhaps most tellingly, a different, undated 1993 script titled “97 Orchard Street: Tours” describes the Gumpertz household as

being simply German (relying again on the “clannish” quote to support a story of discrimination).<sup>200</sup> Remarkably it addresses East European Jewish life: a reference to Allen Street (the back side of 97 Orchard) makes explicit that it was a turn-of-the-century red light district. The guide uses a flashlight to highlight 1890s photos of a Jacob Riis sweatshop and of a child with lice, and then shows an illustration of Allen Street’s El [elevated train line]:

LIGHT ON EL TRAIN. In the turn-of-the-century, this elevated train ran directly in back of this tenement on Allen Street, casting shadows on the City’s red light district and harboring the headquarters of NYC’s organized underworld. At the time, the majority of pimps, prostitutes and criminal leaders working here were Jewish, a fact of considerable concern to the organized Jewish community which feared open discussion of this would fuel the fires of anti-semitism. The fact is, each group has brought to America its share of triumph and trouble. No group owns all the good or all the bad. (American History Workshop for Tenement Museum 1993b) (4)

Thus an early Gumpertz tour featuring a husband’s 1874 disappearance from Kleindeutschland uses its building’s location to oddly telescope into a later Lower East Side morality story of a red-light district (each group having its “bad guys”). One historian casually mentioned: “Shining a light when showing a document is a Rabinowitz thing.”

This 1993 tour is also distinctive in setting the spatial itinerary used in all pre-1997 tours.<sup>201</sup> I eventually concluded that this script was a predecessor to the “OUTLINE OF TOUR OF 97 ORCHARD STREET” (1994) that made the final cut in September of that year. The reference to Allen Street’s red-light district gets expunged; the highlighting of prejudice against Germans is gone. Not least, the Gumpertz family is now Jewish although that word is used only twice in ten pages. “Nathalie Rheinsberg came to America when she was 22 in 1858 from Ortelsburg, East Prussia as a young German Jewish immigrant” (5). The second use, which follows closely, was anachronistic: “The Jewish Daily Forward would later publish a ‘Gallery of Missing Husbands’ column” (5). I am giving Ruth Abram the last word here.

Abram had commissioned AHW audio tour scripts so that docents could take visitors to apartments and just turn on a tour tape (these tapes were not actually used for that purpose). The final script in the Gumpertz family series suggests that Abram had finally agreed with the AHW (1995b) in October to emphasize the Gumpertz family's Jewishness. Abram is to say:

Have you noticed the candlesticks on the mantle? ... these are special, these are for the celebration of the Jewish Sabbath. We did not know that Nathalie Gumpertz was Jewish when we selected her story. But we found out when we found her buried by the "Joshua Widows & Orphans," a German-Jewish benevolent association, and when we discovered her daughters married to Jewish men by rabbis, and finally when we met Nathalie's great grandson. The great-grandson remembered the candlesticks, and the mezuzah on the door here. (Docent shines flashlight.) The mezuzah is a symbol of Jewish identity and is affixed, according to the scriptures, on the doorpost here. Inside it is a scroll with words of the Torah written on it. (4)<sup>202</sup>

In a dual register, Abram invoked her best heritage fund-raising mode even as on the next page she returned to stridently protesting that Germans are unfairly seen as clannish. Abram then characteristically ended her tour by answering a question that she just posed. "And what do you think that Nathalie did with the inherited money?"... "She moved just as fast as you can say *gesundheit*, up to Yorkville" (1995b). A "*gesundheit*" punctuates Abram's theme of "immigrant ladders up and out" after the Gumpertzes' fifteen years at 97 Orchard.<sup>203</sup>

## Dating Place

The Museum fashioned its tiny apartments in relation to periods and dates that intersect with ethnicity. Most basically, its narratives allow the stories of residents deemed historic within the confines of 97 Orchard to be privileged in the present. To "be historic" is an homage that simultaneously forecloses since being worthy of preservation and remembrance means being separated out from everyday experience. 97 Orchard's residents are housed in apartments that offer access to the historic through situated stories that cut across time in

connecting place, residents and visitors through a building. A spatial division of apartments into



**Figure 5 – Sniffing History**

period rooms categorizes and tidies up some of the messiness of history by providing a controlled access that connects and orders a contained essence of past eras (see photo of Parson’s student art project). A successful period framing provides an interpretive connective tissue that

coherently separates out group from group even as it sutures time to place.

The term “period room” surfaces only lightly in Museum documents but seems critical to internal debates as to how to best show a U.S. historical chronology matching ethnic immigration.<sup>204</sup> Period rooms share antecedents with natural history family dioramas and are particularly associated with house museums. Hence period rooms—in this case featuring ethnic households in residential apartments—are an older type of museum classification where selected human cultures are displayed and situated contextually with implicit spatial hierarchies (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998b).<sup>205</sup> Living History—a type of animated human diorama in a period setting—shares this provenance, augmenting it spatially through repetitive performance in designated places.

### **A Periodic Table**

Those who envisioned the Museum’s interpretations wrestled with the question of how to appropriately represent its historic households as period room exhibits. One historian explained that its period apartments were to ideally portray households with chronologically appropriate groups. To show the period, historians would choose group(s)

because they were considered representative by the planning group for the period they were focusing on: the Gilded Age (1870s) to the Progressive Era (1920s). This was the

major period in which this tenement was in active use and seen as representative of the groups that lived in the neighborhood then.

A naturalized association of an ethnic group's immigration with a historic era is gently proposed. In other words, ethnicity at 97 Orchard Street should be representative of Lower East Side immigration during these two major U.S. historic periods. Periodicity was critical to framing stories, rooms, and tours. This approach with its focus on both the Gilded and Progressive eras bolstered the incorporation of Reformers into building narratives of how the other half lived.

However, in theory, period rooms meant that former tenants optimally needed to live at 97 Orchard at an appropriate time. This was problematic since carving up eras into period rooms meant that the personal stories would not match up with peaks of group settlement. The eras thus needed to be readdressed not least since diversity relied on a broader use of residential dates. Period rooms had to fit in with an overall interpretive AHW framing requiring that ethnic household stories be diverse, dramatic, personal, intimate and compelling.

Once stories came from residents' lives, chronology, in effect became yet another element that needed rebalancing. The building's chronological scheme was continually stretched so as to match its residential life rather than the conventional dates for these eras. A certain pragmatic flexibility about dates is seen when Reaven (1993e) writes about the Baldizzi apartment in May: "Since we only have resources to program two apartments this time around, some important early twentieth-century developments probably should be integrated here."

An equally flexible thematic period approach is evident when Abram (1993c) stressed the appropriateness of its first pairing. "In 'The Gumpertz, 1870-1880,' [apartment] visitors will meet a German Jewish family in the midst of that era's Great Depression. 'The Baldizzis, Italian Catholics,' will be introduced during the second Great Depression of the 1930's" (7).<sup>206</sup> By

restaging the Gumpertz story from 1883 to 1878 (although no familial “event” happened then), both initial stories could be housed in ethnic period rooms associated with economic depressions.<sup>207</sup> This particular scheme powerfully persists in a Museum (2014c) website description of the *Hard Times* Tour: “Visit the restored homes of the German-Jewish Gumpertz family, whose patriarch disappeared during the Panic of 1873, and the Italian-Catholic Baldizzi family, who lived through the Great Depression.”<sup>208</sup>

### **Early Framings**

Quite early on, Abram (1987c) had written to Rabinowitz that there already was a dating problem: the composite households for its Lower East Side heritage groups ended in the 1880s.

... two new pieces: a German household by Stanley Nadel and an Italian household by Betty Boyd Caroli. I see we have come to our first interpretive question ... one of timing. If they had their druthers, this is how the scholars would date the households:

1850's late Irish

1850's Black

1870's German

1870's Chinese

1880's Jews [East European Jews]

1880's Italians

Thus we have some gaps.

Even prior to leasing 97 Orchard, there was an awareness of a mismatch among groups, eras and neighborhood tenements. For the Museum, matching a Lower East Side chronology implicit in the representation of ethnic groups was a critical interpretive issue. The “1850’s late Irish” and “1870s Germans” already represented the tail end of earlier migrations by those groups. Most tenements were built after 1879. By solely interpreting 1850-1890, the Museum

would be truncating the later-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century immigration most associated with the imagery of the Lower East Side.

Some groups needed to be moved up in time and space; the Reillys (the composite version of the Moores) eventually became very late 1870s Irish. By 1993-1994, a prior problem became further complicated since personal residential stories needed to be interpreted in a framing appropriate to its building and residents. Ultimately, the Baldizzi, Confino, and Rogarshevsky families were used to fill its later time span. Abram (1994a) wrote:

... there will be two rotating exhibits. These will be apartments reflecting life from 1864-1904 and 1905-1935. Tenement Life: 1864-1904 will have changing installations devoted to the first forty years of the building prior to the installation of plumbing. It might begin by interpreting Irish immigrant life in the tenement, followed by a re-creation of the apartment where Lucas Glockner, the German-born tailor who built 97 Orchard Street, lived with his family. (8)

Not only were the Moores twice late arrivals—in 1870 and 2008—but Glockner never even showed up. (Schneider's Saloon, planned from 1990 on, took until 2012 to build.) Abram's (1997a) subsequent write-up of the Rogarshevsky apartment shows East European Jews as now permanently occupying its last period space in a newly modified building periodization:

Sitting Shiva: EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWS ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE, 1901-1935 is the Museum's next historic apartment. Set in 1918 in the year Abraham Rogarshevsky died of TB ..., [it] offers opportunities for the exploration of ... issues including Eastern European Jewish history and culture, death and burial customs, history of American medicine and medical care, and Intergroup Relations. A proposal has been submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities and several private foundations. (4-5)

Here, East European Jews whose mass migration is often conventionally dated from 1881-1924 are slotted for 1901 to 1935 in a story of death, disease, and religious burial (it is unclear why Intergroup Relations appears on this thematic list). An end date of 1935 is specified

which is when the Baldizzis were evicted, not 1942 when Fanny Rogarshevsky left the building. It now starts in 1901; previously it had started in 1905 in order to reflect building code changes.

The periodization of its ethnic apartments as the privileged space for “real” historic narratives, whether at 97 Orchard or at its new building at 103 Orchard, suggests that David Lowenthal’s (1999) well-known formulation has a corollary: namely, that if the past is a foreign country, viewing it requires travel in place.

### **Housing Variations**

As seen above, another interpretive framing was based on a recitation of the housing codes evinced in 97 Orchard’s own biography. This tweak can be glimpsed in a February memo in which Abram attempted to rapidly shift the periodization used for the AHW Proposed Conceptual Plan (1990b) and for a pending NEH grant application. Abram (1990e) wrote: “The ‘living history’ apartments will be restored to reflect three periods of important architectural changes,” that is the changes ensuing from 1867, [1901] 1905, and 1929 building codes. While unsuccessful as an overarching scheme for periodizing apartments, this framing has continued to shape Museum accounts of the impact of housing reform on residents’ lives.<sup>209</sup>

Overlapping and colliding aspects of prior schemes, chronological or otherwise, remain visible as 97 Orchard’s interpretations shifted towards telling the personal stories of residents. The Museum’s continuing insistence that it was interpreting historic diversity amidst these changes fed its larger sense of interpreting an American shared experience. Long after its building stories changed, its older contradictory heritage scheme associated with its historic neighborhood remained the attenuated basis for later projects: a 1997 guide book, outside tours, heritage trails and a 2007 “community” website.<sup>210</sup> That guide book affords particular

insight as to how the Museum continued to construct a historic multi-ethnic Lower East Side with its six heritage groups, even after it chose to interpret only 97 Orchard's past residents.

### **Six Heritage Tours of the Lower East Side**

Defining the Lower East Side is slippery. For the Museum, the term Lower East Side arguably served as a sort of shorthand for ethnic working-class, immigrant, and tenement life, necessarily rendering it a place of elastic boundaries. An insistence on the area's quite real historic diversity made it attractive to fold contingent or overlapping areas such as the Five Points, Little Italy, [historic] Chinatown or Kleindeutschland into its historic definition. This was based on the loose idea that those areas would one day become included in a Lower East Side whose boundaries the Museum never stipulated. It is perfectly legitimate to query or posit how each of those areas may have become associated with the Lower East Side. But the Museum's heritage walking tour guide and maps went far further afield in claiming various communities within the Lower East Side's boundaries.

One historian attempted to retroactively explain the Museum's varying understandings of the neighborhood's boundaries: "It seems to me that the lower Manhattan working class/tenement district is often conflated with the Lower East Side even if geographically it wanders over to the west side. . . the Lower East Side stands as a kind of generic icon for immigrant life ca. 1900 and is often used as a brand, not as referring to a specific set of streets." Perhaps this explains why the sites depicted in the Museum's (1997) sponsored publication, "Six Heritage Tours of the Lower East Side: a Walking Guide," are located throughout Lower Manhattan.<sup>211</sup> Another historian candidly pointed out that these tours were literally "unwalkable" precisely because they were all over the map.<sup>212</sup>

While the Italian Heritage section correctly notes that most immigrant streets replicated Southern Italian regional and village differences (167), it does not refer to those named streets as part of “Little Italy.” That term is mentioned sparingly while the term “Lower East Side” is used throughout. The tour basically leads the reader from the historic Five Points to Little Italy to Greenwich Village, all of which are to the west of the Lower East Side’s traditional Bowery border.<sup>213</sup> Tellingly that section ends: “In sum, the descendants of New York’s Italian immigrants represent another success story arising from the Lower East Side” (193).

The African Heritage tour uniquely starts in the Dutch and English colonial periods. A map shows only four out of eighteen sites as inside a nineteenth-century Lower East Side.<sup>214</sup> Its historical preface fast forwards directly from Civil War Riots displacement to twentieth-century Harlem: “The timing was fortuitous.... Like New York, like America, Harlem too became ...multicultural. It too now had the ingredients which inspire intellectual and artistic activity” (8). While Harlem is celebrated as having attained creativity through critical mass and diversity, its relationship to the Lower East Side otherwise remains unclear.

The German Heritage Tour explains: “Like the Germans, every immigrant group struggles with the tensions between integration and separation. Ultimately the struggling makes little difference. All finally give in to the zest of American English and the lure of American ways” (Limmer 1997) (2).<sup>215</sup> Ethnicity is simultaneously celebrated and delimited in touring a shared gateway from which immigrants evolved into Americans. Just as other languages give in to American English, the re-use and disappearance of historic sites thus gets tightly tied to the inevitability of displacement and assimilation. Its heritage walking tours anchor a quest to find remaining original traces of a multi-ethnic American common identity.

The book's editor Ruth Limmer extensively re-wrote work by respected authors (mainly Museum historians). A review of these drafts left me curious as to how its heritage groups were being tied together. Peter Kwong, who wrote the Chinese heritage tour, immediately clued in his readers by explaining that the book included "the six major ethnic groups to have come to the Lower East Side before World War I ..." (Limmer 1997) (99). Its older heritage scheme had an end date tied to a peak of immigration rather than to a building.

Kwong managed to neatly highlight the salient legal differences among nineteenth-century racialized groups: "only two were set apart by the law: the Africans, who could be enslaved in NY until 1827, and ... the Chinese [who] specifically came to be excluded from entering the country" (Limmer 1997) (99). Drafts also show that Kwong attempted to insert a sense of contemporary life and attended to difficulties inherent in using an "immigrants and descendants" frame. Historic Chinatown's newer residents were not necessarily "the same" as the descendants of earlier immigrants: its nineteenth-century migrants mainly came from the Pearl River Delta region; contemporary migrants are likeliest to be Fujianese. While Kwong gets an acknowledgement, he is not the official author of record. Neither are the other historians.

### **A Back [Tenement] Story**

Touted as top priority, most materials were originally written in the 1980s; NEH grant money was used to fund the Museum's research on its historic neighborhood. But it is only in 1996—with a subvention from the J.M. Kaplan fund—that the manuscript was prepared for NYU Press.<sup>216</sup> In 1997, the book was published officially as "In Collaboration with NYC's Lower East Side Tenement Museum," with blurbs from Ed Koch and Daniel Moynihan. Yet ongoing mentions of the guidebook's slow progress appear in Trustee reports during a decade in which

97 Orchard, and tours of residential apartments, became increasingly central. Somehow, touting diverse neighborhood historic heritage was still seen as necessary; although sidelined, the guide was not killed off.

Each tour was first published in the Museum's Tenement Times quarterly publication that Limmer edited. The book was described "as an illustrated walking tour tracing the evolution of the African, Chinese, German, Irish, Italian, Jewish communities on the Lower East Side," (Abram 1995) (3). This evolutionary approach fit in with a notion of shared ethnic progress achieved by making it out of the Lower East Side. Yet Limmer's approach was not entirely congruent with Abram's goal of having the Museum become a profitable but respected source of scholarly and popular publishing. Limmer's (1992) earlier concerns had included:

What are we to call the free blacks? We won't be calling the Italians Italian- or Italo-Americans or the Jews Jewish Americans so I refuse to call them the politically correct African Americans. Does Doubleday have a policy? We'd better know now, in case we have to argue with them.

Limmer (1993) soon sought to change the Museum's editor at Doubleday, although the publisher had already paid the Museum a \$17,500 advance.

Unless you have already heard from Roger Scholl, I suggest strongly ...that we demand another editor... He wants history, even at the expense of tour stops.... [and] His lack of literary culture. This complaint is a personal one, not to be underestimated: I find it hard to take seriously editorial judgments from an English major/editor who admits never to having read Henry James [n]or to having heard of Louise Bogan. (And he may well harbor antipathy to an author who reads James and writes on Bogan.)

Even after that contract was cancelled, Abram remained convinced that they could do better. Someone who was aware of this ongoing saga pointed out the obvious to me by describing the guidebook as an issue of outside tours: "You can see that they devote all this time to this because they didn't have a building. It was a museum without walls; once they had

the building they didn't need those tours as much." Yes, but persistence is interesting. While external tours became less important, that balance has shifted back and forth. Moreover, the book did get published and was re-used for a later project.

## Trailing Heritage

The Museum provided (often outsourced) heritage walking tours of Chinatown, African American historic sites, and Lower East Side Jewish life from its earliest days. The Museum did not want to drop heritage tours—associated with historic diversity and heritage tourism—after 1994 since such tours complemented and/or supplemented building tours interpretively and financially. This implies that for many visitors walking and seeing the Lower East Side itself was, and is, important. I also think that today's expanded Museum offers a more “complete” historic destination whose broader encapsulation of the past refracts the rapid disappearance of the neighborhood's older built environment and associated communities. Those who walk today are often searching as much for a “new” Lower East Side where the old folds into the new destination, something which the Museum's newer outdoors themed tours look to provide.

In 2007, a decade after its delayed guidebook was published, the Museum was again reworking earlier walking tour materials on a short-lived, community outreach website for a



new “imMigrant Heritage Trail” (Hughes 2007) funded primarily by American Express.<sup>217</sup> Change and persistence can be seen in the use of a color photo of a 1970s Orchard Street, still serving as a Jewish ethnic shopping hub and overall “bargain

district.” Although Puerto Ricans were now listed along with the six original heritage groups for whom walking tour materials existed, new Puerto Rican materials were not included. An exercise in arrested development, this heritage trail website was meant to reinforce the Museum’s community visibility at a time when it was [unsuccessfully] advocating for a Historic District in its Orchard Street area.<sup>218</sup>

When Abram (1994b) had updated the Museum’s 1994 Strategic Goals diagram, “Heritage” was still a main spoke of a wheel whose center featured its mission: “to promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant experiences on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, a gateway to America.” The supplementary word “migrant” hadn’t been added quite yet although it is highlighted in this 2007 logo. Change and persistence are again seen in the official name and interpretation given to the Museum’s new 103 Orchard Visitors Center. The “Sadie Samuelson Levy Immigrant Heritage Center,” marks a shift to telling a broader story of immigration in a New Law tenement building whose apartments are being designed to tell the stories of post-War residential households representing three different ethnicities.

### **Storytelling Comes “First”**

From its earliest day, the Museum seems to have consistently interpreted the Lower East Side through an ideological scrim expressed not least in Abram’s views about history’s overall utility. Nonetheless, its earlier interpretive approaches seem far less aimed at shaping affect toward new immigrants per se.<sup>219</sup> I argue here that the Museum’s archives do not demonstrate a tight initial linkage of choosing families so as to explicitly illustrate contemporary immigrant social issues. Certainly, its later tours and internal FAQ (2005a) make that claim and

appear to do far more of that particular work.<sup>220</sup> Before then, evoking a larger contemporary resonance seems to have been a goal in the commemoration of immigrant forebears.

The *Piecing it Together* (2002a) and *Getting By* (2005e) tours with their emphasis on connections to current immigrants only got started after the Levine apartment's 2002 opening. 2002 is also the year in which the Museum lost its community fight to gain neighboring 99 Orchard. Its earlier public *1863 Tenement House* Tour interpreted the Gumpertz and Baldizzi apartments to tell moving, personal and ethnic Depression themed familial stories. Until repositioned into a sweatshop story joined to that of the Levines, the Rogarshevsky 1998 "Shiva" apartment tour had no explicit references to newer immigrants. Vickie Confino's earliest task was to imaginatively interpret for children the transitions of childhood immigration. Designed to convey a variety of messages, these personal stories of ethnic immigrant families—grappling with and overcoming adversity—offer an amplified sense of authenticity obtained by situating residents within a historic building where they lived.

All of the above reinforces a general impression of immigrant commemoration as an early and persistent goal to which historic preservationist and fund raising imperatives become tightly yoked. The building becomes hallowed along with the personal yet generalizable stories of ancestors. There is a real tension between the impulse to dramatically present these residents' difficult lives without nostalgic embellishment, and the impulse to commemorate and honor "our" immigrant ancestors. In the end, "Honoring Our Urban Pioneers" is the name of the Museum's capital campaign to purchase its building. Preservation thus starts to appear in various early schemes that stress the novelty and importance of preserving a vernacular building associated with immigrant ancestors featured as American "urban pioneers."

Dolkart's (1994, 1995, 2001) preservationist research was embedded early on into tours to show 97 Orchard's own authentic housing code biography. Even so, it is the Museum's iconic, apartment-based personal storytelling—framed within the history of the building—that has become the building's calling card. The Museum (2010c) website explains its building's identity: "We tell the stories of 97 Orchard Street... home to nearly 7000 working class immigrants. They faced challenges we understand today: making a new life, working for a better future, starting a family with limited means." Thus these past residents' linked qualities of gritty realism and heroism are given contemporary resonance. Although their stories were initially proposed as support for the narration of the neighborhood's and building's stories, now it is 97 Orchard that supports its residents' stories. Dolkart's (2006) "Biography of a Tenement" book was only published in 2006, by which time it wisely included those families' stories.

As seen in the Museum's "ethnic apartments," residents' stories were only slowly negotiated and re-inserted into 97 Orchard. Since acquisition of that building was considered pivotal and preceded its development of residents' stories, the next chapter takes a deeper look at how 97 Orchard is constructed into a past place. The thread traced in this chapter, of unwinding residents' stories from their building, suggests that comparable value may be gained from tracing how the building itself was acquired, interpreted and received before and after residential stories were fully inserted.

## **Chapter Four: Building Americans**

Theory reproduces the generative process...that is, moving continually back and forth between past and present. The historical and its consequences, the 'diachronic', the 'etymology', of locations in the sense of what happened at a particular spot or place and thereby changed it—all of this becomes inscribed in space. The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a present space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality. Thus production process and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects, not as two separable ideas.

—Henri Lefebvre (1996) (37)

Authenticity, then, is a cultural form of power over space that puts pressure on the city's old working class and lower middle class, who can no longer afford to live or work there.

—Sharon Zukin (2010) (xiii)

### **An American Tenement**

The Museum (1990h) negotiated its option to purchase its 97 Orchard Street tenement building in 1990, the very same year that Ellis Island reopened for tourists. The Museum's leadership selected the tenement as a powerfully coded symbol of a past Lower East Side immigrant experience that could finally be incorporated into an American heritage narrative. One strategy was to render the tenement as the first urban "immigrant homestead" in a successful effort to become a recognized national landmark and National Park Service affiliate in a consortium with Ellis Island. Entry into that American canon—at a time when greater "inclusivity" was sought—meant access to prestige and money through situating past Lower East Side immigrant life into a now officially visitable landscape of American social memory.

Poorer, multi-story buildings built for three or more unrelated families were known in nineteenth-century New York as tenements. As Plunz and Abu-Lughod (1994) observed:

The Lower East Side is almost synonymous with the term 'tenement,' ... The term itself conjures up in the American imagination a vision not so much of a building as of a way of life: teeming masses, foreign tongues, noisy streets cluttered with pushcarts, tired men in frayed undershirts and husky women in loose cotton housedresses, panting on fire escapes to gain a breath of air on fetid summer nights, children playing and weaving between horse-drawn carts that rumble through the streets. Nostalgia and curiosity linger ... as demonstrated graphically by the solid crowds that line up daily for the boat trip to visit the new immigrant museum on Ellis Island. (63)

The sheer weight of the images and memory alluded to here appears overwhelming, especially if the Museum's task was to distill that essence into a single six-storey walk-up tenement building. 97 Orchard was thus presented as survivor, witness, and container for the stories of immigrants who arrived in New York during its residential lifetime.

Another difficult task was to associate a new museum destination with a type of valued rarity hard to come by at a time in which tenements were still all too common. 97 Orchard's singularity and exemplarity played into its preservation and landmarking through a winnowing process that simultaneously selected buildings and narratives for the future.<sup>221</sup> To achieve the Museum's goals, a once common tenement building needed to be seen as uniquely precious in order to represent an American immigrant tenement saga. Thus even when proclaiming its bonds to sister tenements, the Museum takes pains to show how 97 Orchard is distinguished from them as a Pre-Law "time capsule" especially worthy of preservation.

Pre-Law buildings were erected prior to the 1879 building code changes that were promoted by Reformers, potentially providing an ideal showcase for immigrant hardship. The Museum (2012a) uses an earlier date for that definition: "97 Orchard is a pre-"Old Law" tenement, which means it was constructed before the passage of Tenement House Law of 1867 (the "Old Law"). Its Docent Encyclopedia (2002) describes tenements as "housing built specifically for multiple, working-class families from the mid-nineteenth-century until the

Multiple Dwelling Law of 1929” and then notes its building’s more unusual Pre-Law status: “Early tenements, such as 97 Orchard Street (built in 1863), represented some of the worst housing ever built in this country.” 97 Orchard was seen at once as historically precious and bad, and these very qualities recommended it as a symbol of immigrant life at large.

The choice of a Pre-Law building for the Museum’s own narrative proved fateful, since the building’s residential opening and closing dates simultaneously set the limits of its inclusion of Lower East Side groups and eras. The Museum’s leadership assumed early on that a Pre-Law tenement was essential to its telling a multi-ethnic story of immigrant waves. Thus, finding such a tenement theoretically would ensure that Irish and German immigrations were also represented in a panorama mainly associated with past “new immigrants.” In Museum narratives, the Lower East Side is seen as a place of origin as well as a point of departure in the journey to become American. The Museum’s founders wanted its building— and the Lower East Side for which it stands—to be a shared multi-ethnic symbol, integral to an American family story of immigration, heritage and home. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a former Harvard professor and co-author of *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1994a), stressed this in promoting his special bill to designate 97 Orchard as a National Historic Site (landmark):

From the first waves of Irish and German immigrants to Italians and Eastern European Jews to the Asian, Latin, and Caribbean immigrants arriving today, the Lower East Side has provided millions their first American home (1994a).<sup>222</sup>

If the Lower East Side serves as an immigrant’s first home, then a parallel construction can valorize the tenement, as a first American house or homestead. The Museum’s (2010c) website “About Us” page seems to suggest that showing a tenement as a first American immigrant home was likewise what Abram had in mind.

Ruth Abram wanted to build a museum that honored America's immigrants. New York's tenements were the perfect place for her museum: these humble, multiple family buildings were the first American homes for thousands of immigrants.

Even in this later construction, tenements appear as humble first abodes for the generic immigrants whom the Museum referred to as “urban pioneers,” by portraying their dwellings as urban log cabins. Yet the Museum’s commemorative articulations are not necessarily consonant with its didactic and historic goals, nor do such pronouncements necessarily make for good destination entertainment.

Guided tours of its Ruins which are integral to exploring its building seem, to function as a necessary performative bridge linking commemorative themes—including the discovery of 97 Orchard Street—to other Museum goals. They are part of a larger regime of affective connection between guides, interpreters and visitors that is evoked through tours. Here, a tenement building, which functions as a historic “time machine,” was designed to allow visitors to temporarily “jump time” by moving through a physical space. But the guides and interpreters who perform those jumps can discover that tours personally bring home labor lessons from that past.

Thus differentiating 97 Orchard Street from its residents’ stories is most difficult when probing how the Museum’s affective stories of the past are received, performed and absorbed by both guides and visitors. Likewise, the Museum’s own foundational story depicts 97 Orchard’s 1988 “discovery” as immediately central to its identity. Yet its leadership engaged in a hunt for another Pre-Law space prior to obtaining its option to buy, demonstrating that the use of 97 Orchard as its new home was not predestined. The Museum had even already created its programmatic template for interpreting “THE TENEMENT” prior to finding 97 Orchard.

This chapter starts with the Museum's landmarking narratives of 97 Orchard Street whose claims for a tenement's social and historical significance are grounded in the Lower East Side's past urban density and centrality to U.S. immigrant absorption. Although the narratives were written after its initial ethnic residential households were selected and ratified, these depictions do not attempt to connect 97 Orchard to the family stories with which it became intimately tied. Instead, they tie it to a narrative of assimilation and becoming American.

This chapter concludes with the Nation of Personalized Immigrants section, which considers the Museum's adaptive reuse of 97 Orchard as marking a generational transition. The desire to display and affectively transmit a political legacy associated with tenement life came at a moment when that life could just still be captured but its lessons needed reinforcement. Hence, a generation's projection of a flawed yet hopeful American past and future is not only an example to inspire newer immigrants but a response to Jewish neoconservative politics.

### **A Perfectly Situated Building**

97 Orchard's story illustrates the attempt to tie the interpretation of a building into a representative, unified narrative of diverse immigrants funneling toward the ultimate goal of "becoming American." To observers, the Lower East Side's intense immigrant life and cultures could seem like a world-famous serial experiment in mass immigrant absorption. Rapid urban change, industrialization, and massive overall population growth took place in a tiny, overpopulated area in which distinctions between public and private life often blurred.

The Lower East Side's unprecedented urban density, which by 1910 was estimated at 270,000 to 330,000 people per square mile, is critical to its tale of immigration.<sup>223</sup> To document 97 Orchard Street's broader historical significance—a requirement for recognition as a national

landmark—the Museum’s Landmark Nomination filing situated its building precisely within that context. Even so, architectural historian Andrew Dolkart (October 8, 1993) made an interesting move when he sought to secure the landmarking of the building by emphasizing the density of its block in relation to larger scales.

In 1903, the block containing 97 Orchard Street, with 2223 people on its 2.04 acres, was not only the single most crowded block in the 10th Ward, which in turn was the most crowded in New York City, but presumably anywhere on earth. (13)<sup>224</sup>

The statement of historic significance took its cues from social history in depicting Reformer Lawrence Veiller’s (1903) words concerning "The most densely populated spot in the world..." (8). The novelty of landmarking poor urban housing cannot be overemphasized. Dolkart claimed that in 1903 at a pivotal moment in industrialization—the City’s immigrant

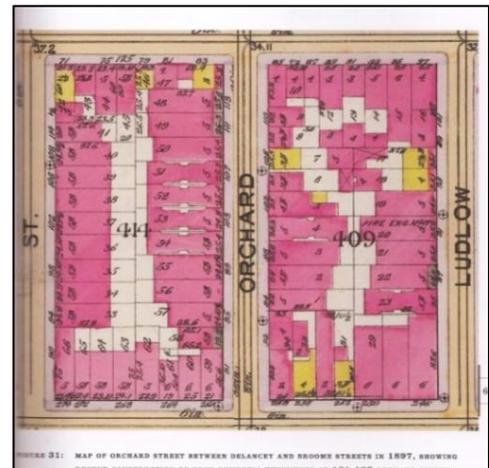


Figure 6 – Perris Insurance Map, 1853-56

population was over 41%—two-thirds of New York’s residents lived in tenements.<sup>225</sup> Yet Dolkart made clear that the neighborhood was not merely the sum of its housing: "... despite its blatantly visible defects, the Lower East Side provided a viable community that could sustain immigrants during the stressful period of transition" by providing cultural resources and housing proximate to work (15).

No famous residents lived at 97 Orchard Street. The Tenement Museum is not a conventional house museum associated with the lives of important people or a historical event.<sup>226</sup> In this filing, its anonymous residents’ importance lay in their capacity to represent and symbolize a mass migration that changed America. Moreover, buildings associated with

National Register landmarking and historic preservation often had prestigious pedigrees as exemplars of an architectural style, another criterion for significance. Tenement architecture however is vernacular, meaning it combines varied, once commonplace elements and styles. Relatively cheaply built, 97 Orchard lacked the terra cotta ornamentation and other decorative flourishes often found in newer tenements. Not least, the Museum's filing was for a building dedicated to touring rather than to exhibiting a collection.

### **The Pre-Law Tenement as Precious**

Even before Rabinowitz (1990b) authored the AHW's Conceptual Plan for the Museum, he had pointed to the task of making the ubiquitous New York tenement into something valued. Rabinowitz (1988) stated in an early memo to Abram that the Museum's plan to showcase a tenement's social history was novel, as it drew on performance rather than a collection to "make precious what was once common." By 1990—in a response to a draft of the Conceptual Plan—Abram (1990c) was asking him to specifically formulate: "How is 97 Orchard Street distinguished from other tenements? Why should it be a museum?" (1). That question is equally at the heart of landmarking and preservation as preservationist Sam Gruber notes.

Historic preservation must select those buildings and stories we want to save. These might include ...accidental monuments, survivors against all odds. Not every building can be saved, so those that are must balance their own singular qualities, while also serving as surrogates for what is lost. (Gruber 2008) (36)

If the process of choosing what is to be preserved entails distinguishing a building's unique qualities from those of lost peers, it necessarily requires representing their past presence. In her markup of a draft of the Conceptual Plan, Abram crossed out where Rabinowitz (1990a) had written "Old-Law," by scribbling in "pre-Old Law" to distinguish 97 Orchard from other tenements whose story it was telling. In a Lower East Side mainly

composed of Old Law (1879-1901) and New Law (1901-1929) tenements, older and smaller Pre-Law buildings were hardly seen as precious. Pre-Law buildings were and had been targeted for slum removal and were typically demolished, torn down like much of the older neighborhood.

The Museum's (2005a) FAQ explained that the Museum had needed a Pre-Law building because: "Most ... tenements ...that remained weren't old enough to tell the community's entire multi-ethnic history" (1). A Pre-Law tenement could potentially tell a more useful story in demonstrating hardship, rarity, and some past multi-ethnicity, although the choice of an Orchard Street Tenth Ward Pre-Law building also meant that Latinos, African Americans and Chinese were unlikely to have been residents. That very same year Abram (2005) wrote that:

Rejecting the rather compelling idea of using the building as a stage set for the stories of all the area's history and people, we decided to capitalize on the power of place by limiting the interpretation inside our tenement to the stories of the people actually associated with the property. (21)

Taken together, these two statements from 2005 suggest that "the community's entire multi-ethnic history" effectively meant demonstrating an Irish and German presence prior to the arrival of East European Jewish and Southern Italian new immigrants. Other groups, whether or not representative, were a presumed bonus. Thus, telling a broad multi-ethnic story that is constrained by the building's known inhabitants has required the Museum to juggle multiple agendas. 97 Orchard's opening and closing dates delimited which groups are historic and included. More broadly, retelling history as the personal stories of residents within its ethnically framed households could only be conceived of once the Museum literally bought into a building.

## Restoring History

The Museum inculcates and amplifies the impression of its building's rare and precious character in rhetorics of preservation and authenticity. Historic preservation was critical to social historians obtaining an "authentic" building to research and interpret for the future. That same aura drew visitors and donors: landmarking increased Abram's ability to purchase and continually renovate 97 Orchard, not least since it was a requirement for obtaining prestigious National Park Service affiliate status which entailed numerous special grants.<sup>227</sup> Noting that 97 Orchard Street was "as authentic as a tenement can get," Ruth Limmer and Andrew Dolkart (2001) described the building for a joint 2001 public TV (PBS WNET) special on the Museum:

In finding #97, The Tenement Museum located the perfect building in which to reveal the history of tenement life on the Lower East Side. **A pre-Law building, sealed from change since 1935, it stands as a monument to America's urban poor, to the architects and owners who designed and built their housing, and to the reformers who fought to improve it.** Today, save for the basement and first floor, renovated to greater and lesser degrees for Museum purposes, 97 Orchard Street is as authentic as a tenement can get, right down to [its] [sic] cramped but still useable water closet in the hall next to the exhibition space. Be our guest. [Emphasis added.]

As de Certeau (1988) warns, choosing dates shapes the contours of the historical meta-narratives that are wrapped around historical stories. A "pre-Law building sealed from change" implies that from 1935 on, changes did not occur until it became a Museum. 1935 is thus marked as #97's year of closure although it remained an active commercial building. 1935 is also somewhat misleading since Fannie Rogarshevsky had "continued to live and work in 97 Orchard Street even after the building was closed down as a residence in 1935" (Museum: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2004). Yet the quotation is all about the building; 97 Orchard's residents are oddly missing.

Instead, the text links the question of whom the building commemorates—in this case architects, owners, and reformers, as well as the generic urban poor—to that of authenticity in citing its pre-Law (1863) status and lack of change (1935). Yet the authenticity of a spatial practice in which commercial space was “renovated to greater and lesser degrees for Museum purposes” is not in question. All in all, a confusing, multiply-laden, and somewhat contradictory set of sentences, especially given that visitors could not really use that hall toilet.

The Museum’s claim to “reveal history,” is accompanied by a reluctance to document for the public what has changed through its own preservation process other than in restoration. Hence, preservationist Zoe Watnik (2013) noted apropos of 97 Orchard: “My concern is in regard to the denial of the extensive intervention program during tours.” (56). While its hallway was carefully restored, the downstairs was not since a continuous use of commercial space in street life was not seen as hallowed. The adaptive re-use of 97 Orchard into a museum tourist destination meant that its commercial floors with four stores were initially revamped to create a theater, visitor center, classrooms and exhibit space. Apartments were re-created and Ruins were frozen into time. Not least, renovations were expressly guided by the need for safety in bringing the building up to code.<sup>228</sup> The downside of preservation is compliance not only with building code, but with a variety of theoretically applicable standards that apply to renovations.

Cathy Stanton’s (2009) review of Dolkart’s (2006) book *Biography of a Tenement* notes that Dolkart usefully and beautifully depicts a history of changes in 97 Orchard’s building fabric except for those entailed by its transformation into a museum. Stanton then quotes Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998c) as to how the removal of an object from common circulation by

rendering it as “spectacular or extraordinary” creates a “museum effect” (54).<sup>229</sup> Dolkart (2006)

does drop a hint in quoting architect Judith Saltzman as to the Museum’s preservation goals:

The preservation of 97 Orchard Street is predicated on retaining the palpable sense of history contained within its walls, and on providing both the experience of the tenement as people lived there, and as it was found. To do so, it is critical to identify appropriate ways of treating the building’s historic fabric. The philosophy ... is based on several key goals: to provide safe public access to the historic resources; to respect the contributions of all periods of the site’s historic significance (1863-1935); to maximize the retention of the site’s historic character; to minimize the loss of extant historic fabric; and to integrate historic preservation with the interpretive program. (119)

Ideally, a doubling of dates was striven for to afford the visitor two very different senses: that of discovery circa 1988, and that of earlier dates associated with residential life.

Inside that framing, a diachronic layering of changes would be exposed in salvaging historic fabric. A somewhat different depiction of preservation goals at the nearby Eldridge Street

Synagogue Project (now Museum), portrays a decision-making process with ongoing choices.<sup>230</sup>

At Eldridge Street, the first preservationists had to stop the deterioration, and to justify their choice, to make the building safe for others. Thus, they chose (for some, grudgingly) to make the building evocative in a different way and to restore some semblance of its former appearance, if not fully to its former use...

But preservationists, even more than historians, have to make choices about where time, money and political prestige should be invested.... Each decision—to conserve, to restore, to replace or to ignore—was made as part of a process ... The result is a building that looks both old and new. (Gruber 2008) (38)

Preservation’s imperatives are clearest in the face of the anticipated disappearance of the built environment. Even so, preservation is not a simple re-creation of the past; constant decisions need to be made about which past gets restored and shown. As the Museum’s archives show, it was not initially obvious which household stories would be told. Thus, initial restoration plans envisioned installing a new interior tower staircase and just showing a few

apartments with rotating ethnic “residents.” Once that was vetoed, another issue arose as to whether the “new” Gumpertz apartment should be re-created to remove later code changes.

Until the introduction of its downstairs ShopLife (2012) exhibit, the historic authenticity of 97 Orchard was not perceived by the Museum to be affected or compromised by the removal of its commercial space from a shopping thoroughfare.<sup>231</sup> When the Docent Encyclopedia (2002, 2005a) cites Dolkart for stating “The original front of the building probably looked as 99 Orchard Street does today,” there is no hint that 97 Orchard should be configured that way (67); instead it was restored using 1905 as the date.<sup>232</sup> Restoration to a pristine state or one date is rarely possible and not always desirable.<sup>233</sup>

In other words, a storyline and aesthetic are needed to guide the many architectural and other choices in preservation and restoration that reinforce a building’s authenticity. In an article titled “Recalling the Urban Pioneers,” *New York Times*’ architecture writer Christopher Gray (1991) quite presciently inquired as to 97 Orchard’s future character.

And what, exactly, is its character? Is it the time-capsule quality, a secret discovery that only a few people share? Or is it the uniform decay – bulging ceilings, grottos of peeling paint, cascades of loose wallpaper? Is it the awful conditions – smells, noise, overcrowding – that its inhabitants endured? Or is it the apartments as they originally occupied them with hope and happiness?

Is it the near-bourgeois character of its original occupants or the more picturesque hardships of its later, poorer tenants? Does it need tour guides in period dress – or just silence?

Gray was asking what meta-narrative would serve as an overall interpretive rubric. The Museum did comprehend that to function as a “time machine,” its building needed to be perceived as an untouched time capsule, thus enabling visitors to take a leap back in time through navigating its physical space. Even so, Gray’s options may not be mutually exclusive.

The housing of commemorative stories calls for an interpretation generating silence, as the Museum's Ruins do today. As its narratives of place accrete and become attached to specific building places, 97 Orchard successfully tells more than one incommensurable story, including stories about itself.

### **Celebrating Tenements**

Celebration strikes yet another discordant note in tension with commemoration.

Rabinowitz (1990a) pointed to this by directly asking Abram in a Conceptual Plan draft: "Are we celebrating these kinds of housing conditions by our museumizing them?" (3) As preservationist

Ned Kaufman (1998) cautioned, that reaction can evoke resistance to landmarking tenements.

... people will resist the application of historic preservation in situations where they feel celebration to be inappropriate... Many New Yorkers, for example, will oppose overt attempts to preserve tenement buildings because they sense instinctively that this would be tantamount to signifying admiration of poverty and overcrowding. (39)

Both landmarking and museumification as processes seek to define, extract, preserve and extoll what is deemed precious. Abram's response was to circle "celebrating," and write:

"NO. Remembering yes!" Rabinowitz (1990b) blended their language in writing the Final Plan.

Like many museums, it will celebrate and preserve. It will celebrate the distinctly American immigrant experience, the experience of arriving, of learning, of adapting and assimilating, of maintaining old traditions while acquiring new ones, of rising above material circumstances. ...But the most important story we communicate will be the one shared by all who lived, owned or kept shop at 97 Orchard Street: the story of the dream of a better life.... (1)

The question of whether its tenement celebrates past immigrant hardship as well as success is a tension the Museum still struggles with in its attempts to offer models for current immigration.

## **A Gateway to America**

As of 2009, Fordham University's (2009) website celebrated the university's New York location, hailing the City's role as a gateway to the profound American urbanization of the once controversial new immigrants.

Between 1880 and 1919, 17 million immigrants passed through the Port of New York. Most of these immigrants settled in cities, including five out of six Russian Jews and three out of four southern Italians, and many remained in New York City.<sup>234</sup>

Fordham's story of urbanization notes the persistence of new immigrants in New York.

In contrast, the Museum's early stories reinforce the image of its neighborhood as a site of American urban origin, passage, and rebirth for generic immigrant ancestors who came through the Lower East Side to go elsewhere. That national scale—and exit strategy—was alluded to in its mission statement (1994a) that called “the Lower East Side, the gateway to America.”

97 Orchard and the Lower East Side are thereby designated as the first urban destination in an American immigrant journey (even if only to nearby Brooklyn or Westchester). Abram liked to ask rhetorically, “where did immigrants go once they got off the boat?”<sup>235</sup> Abram very much wanted to answer that question by having Ellis Island's visitors arrive at a new first destination: a tenement museum, representing an immigrant's first American home. Senator Moynihan (1994b) seems to have agreed that 97 Orchard represented the next step in a continuation of Ellis Island's story.

The Nation has with great pride preserved log cabins ... and other symbols of our agrarian roots,... recently reopened Ellis Island to commemorate ... the first stop for ... immigrants who arrived in New York City. For ... those who disembarked ... the next stop was a tenement on the Lower East Side, such as the one at 97 Orchard Street.

Moynihan's (1994b) words imply a tenement preserved as if it were a log cabin to symbolize immigrants' first urban American origins. The time had finally come to recognize the arrival of the humble tenement as urban immigrant homestead.<sup>236</sup>

### **Preserving National Affiliation**

97 Orchard Street's recognition as a national landmark on April 19, 1994 was a milestone in the Museum's campaign to broaden conventional categories of American national heritage by incorporating an earlier urban immigrant experience.<sup>237</sup> A National Park Service (NPS) Preliminary Reconnaissance Report was then issued for its landmarked building. Abram quoted this passage in her own report to her board.

The Tenement Museum and the tenement it inhabits form an integral unit. Few such structures survived for the last 60 years with their integrity intact, particularly relating to an important period in history. While the building stands alone on the National Register; its story would remain untold without the vehicle of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. For its part, the Museum's mission would lose much of its potency were it not housed in an artifact so central to its theme. Abram (1994a) (7)

The building's integrity—its unaltered historic character—stemmed from its minimal post-1905 exterior changes (the first floor became stores in 1901) and 1935 warehousing of apartments.

As previously related, the lobbying of Congressional committees was a highly orchestrated, socially networked affair. Two years prior to 97 Orchard's designation as a national landmark in April 1994, Abram (1992) had worked hard to lobby for a \$200,000 federal allocation for the Report. She knew that it was a prerequisite for the NPS to even consider an **already** national landmarked site as a potential affiliate. Abram (1992) had then written:

Congressman Bill Green has agreed to ask the House Interior Appropriations Committee for \$200,000 to enable the Park Service to conduct a study ... This is the first step in defining the relationship between the Museum and the Park Service.

Abram had previously deemed its outcome critical to ensuring the Museum's long-term success and financial stability. The Preliminary Reconnaissance Report and the National Landmark designation (1994b) only happened in the spring of 1994, that is before the Museum's October opening.<sup>238</sup> By 1997, the Senate (1998) had ensured that the Museum could take its next steps.

In a Special Resource Study Report [1997], the National Park Service found the Lower East Side Tenement Museum met the criteria for eligibility and suitability as a unit of the National Park System... there is no other site presently in the National Park System or National Historic Landmark Program that comprehensively interprets immigration and tenement life during the country's peak immigration period of 1880-1920.

This Special Resource study focused on the value of interpreting peak U.S. immigration in a tenement (in the years the Museum's historians had originally wanted to depict). Senators Moynihan and D'Amato (1997) could then introduce another Congressional special bill, this time to designate the Museum as an Affiliated Site Area of the National Park Service (NPS). This set-up would allow it to independently operate, obtain NPS federal funds, and contract and advertise with other immigration-related NPS operated National Landmarks: the Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island. In a report to Museum Trustees, Abram (1997b) again stressed the importance of this NPS relationship to the Museum's overall goals.

...achieving long range organizational stability including establishing formal affiliations with the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.... To increase the Museum's 1997-98 audience to capacity.... To raise a minimum of \$1 million annual operating funds with a substantial increase in earned income. (1)

97 Orchard gained further admittance into the pantheon of American heritage when it was designated an NPS Affiliate Site in November 1998.<sup>239</sup> That same year, the Tenement Museum became a prestigious National Trust Historic Site, a designation that brought its own long-term financial and other rewards.<sup>240</sup> Preservation has an intimate connection to the

showcasing of heritage especially in funding, demarking and animating national narratives of origin. An immigrant legacy was now safely preserved, officially included as well as contained, in the nation's first tenement landmark.

### **An Urban Log Cabin for a Nation's Urban Pioneers**

The Museum not only described how past immigrants first became urban Americans, but broadened and framed its story as one of American heritage. The tenement was re-fit into an American landscape through analogies drawn from a vocabulary and iconography of Western settlement in which Lower East Side immigrants became "urban pioneers" living in "urban log cabins." A general debt is evidently owed here to historian Richard Wade, whose book *The Urban Frontier* (1959) had notably inverted Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis on rural pioneers by portraying cities as the originary growth engine of the Western frontier.

Rabinowitz's (1990b) Conceptual Plan used Abram's language of urban pioneers. The Museum would "... preserve the artifacts of immigrants, and ... preserve our memories of those 'urban pioneers' .... visitors will come to understand that tenements were home to more Americans than log cabins ever were." (1) Yet, it is not obvious precisely how the memories of these generic "urban pioneers" were likely to be preserved by visitors who were unaware that they were descendants of this honored grouping. (Rabinowitz's use of smart quotes indicates that he knew that the term lacked recognition.)

The Museum did offer a few clues such as displaying its Urban Log Cabin model (aka, the dollhouse) in 1992–1993. The script for its Visitor Center audio video "Urban Pioneers Slide Show" (1994e) calls for showing a photo of 97 Orchard Street's updated facade with a voice over: "becoming a new symbol of America's heritage" (18). That was followed by: "Today, more

citizens trace the beginning of their American journeys to the urban frontier rather than to the rural frontier” (19). The commemorative finale:

The Tenement Museum serves as a living monument to the nature and quality of the struggles and strategies of these urban pioneers. It’s a monument to the triumph of their vision, to the validity of their hopes, and to the magnitude of our debt to them and all that they represent. (19)<sup>241</sup>

The slide show ends by tying its building as a site of American origin to a grouping of ancestral urban pioneers to whom it is dedicated. But earlier, the voice over was designed to strike a less generic note when displaying a photo of “Hebrew and Chinese signs on buildings:”

Today, many tenements still stand, but they house a new and different population...

With the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, forty years of immigration restriction based upon racial considerations came to an end.

The Lower East Side continues its historic role as an immigrant portal. Today, immigrants living on the Lower East Side are from China and Southeast Asia, ... (16)

A portrayal of urban pioneers is peppered with past images of a Jewish Lower East Side and earlier immigrant life, into which recent photos of Chinese (and other migrants) get mixed.<sup>242</sup>

Abram’s (1994a) successful campaign to purchase 97 Orchard was also ostensibly tied to the commemoration of generic urban pioneers, rather than to specific communities.

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum has recently launched a capital campaign ‘Honor Our Urban Pioneers,’ to raise three million dollars to purchase, renovate, and restore 97 Orchard Street. This 129 year old tenement building is the anchor and primary focus for all of the Museum’s educational programs and activities. (1994a) (1)

It is hard to know how this theme resonated with donors compared to the ethnic social networking heavily employed by Museum. In 1995, the Museum (1995) sent out urban pioneer themed (boilerplate) solicitation letters. This one was sent to a Jewish potential donor:

It is astounding but true that the Tenement Museum represents the only place any descendant of what Ms. Abram calls our “urban pioneers” can go with their children and grandchildren to demonstrate how the family’s first Americans lived and managed...

In documents such as this letter, the Museum's narrative simultaneously displaces, flattens and generalizes "the" immigrant experience into one of American heritage.<sup>243</sup> No attempt is made here to connect a past Lower East Side to a Jewish experience. All descendants are equally bereft of an American inheritance of home that the Museum is offering to provide.

## Pioneering On

In 2001, Dolkart and Limmer (2001) worked on a collaborative program and website with WNET (PBS) that featured a virtual online Urban Log Cabin. By 2002 the Museum's adoption of a pioneer motif already seemed far less earnest. Its website simply stated: "The heart of the Museum is its historic tenement building. Come share the stories of the urban pioneers who lived in the tenement." That



Figure 7 – Urban Log Cabin

same year, spokesperson Robin Marcato offered 97 Orchard's consecration to its chosen theme of urban pioneers as a justification for its expansion:

"There are buildings dedicated to the rich, the famous ..." she said. "There are many buildings dedicated to the pioneers out west. There's one building dedicated to urban pioneers and it's very sad that people don't see it as the treasure it is." (Keys 2002)

The Museum's proposal to take over 99 Orchard Street is oddly justified by rendering 97 Orchard as uniquely dedicated to a grouping it created. By 2005, the Museum (2005c) reappears as an immigrant urban homestead in a rephrasing of Senator Moynihan's metaphor:

...although most citizens trace the beginnings of their American journeys to the urban rather than the rural environment and most descend from immigrants, The Tenement's [sic] landmark tenement building ... is the first homestead of urban working class and poor immigrant people preserved and interpreted in the United States.

The metaphor is thinner but recognizable in this later, more fluent website rendition that renders a tenement as the first urban American homestead preserved for visitors.<sup>244</sup>

Overall, this displaced pioneer frontier language conveys that through 97 Orchard Street, the history of Lower East Side immigrants and descendants was being granted a long-delayed and much deserved recognition as an integral part of the American story. No matter how far a stretch it was for neighborhood residents to visualize a walk-up tenement as a log cabin, the Museum's administration viewed its metaphor of urban pioneers as needed for its stories to be recognized as American. Fortuitously—as reported by one visitor—some of the Museum's tour guides finally figured out how to better state its claim: “America's national building isn't the log cabin. It's the tenement.” (Sayrafiezadeh 2003).

### **A Dangerous Urban Frontier**

The Museum's language of urban pioneers willy-nilly shifts the American frontier to a setting often referred to as the “Great New York Ghetto” by the end of the nineteenth century. In its Landmark Nomination filing, the presumed relevance of the frontier to the Lower East Side was described in connection with the risks undertaken by early urban ethnic immigrants.

In human terms, the Lower East Side is thus something of an urban frontier. There is a parallel between the members of an ethnic group who first entered a new neighborhood and the people who opened a wilderness frontier: the later arrivals in each case shared individual difficulties of adjustment. ...like a wilderness frontier, it held the promise and adventure of life in a new land and represented the period of greatest stress and risk of failure to the participants. (Andrew S. Dolkart 1993) (12)

A depiction of past urban settlement is valorized here through a frontier parallel with the American West that oddly echoes a then-contemporary metaphor for urban gentrification. In real estate parlance, early gentrifiers were referred to as “urban pioneers” on an “urban frontier.”<sup>245</sup> Neil Smith (1996a) pointed out the speculative and metaphoric resonance of the

use of Wild West metaphors in newly trendy Lower East Side fashion and design.<sup>246</sup> If frontiers are places in need of claiming, settling, emptying and taming, the indigenous is of interest as trophy, adventure, local color, and surmountable obstacle. Both attract real estate attention.

The Museum's promotion of urban pioneer origins as an American symbol was formulated at a point when New York City had "come back" from the brink of 1970s bankruptcy and the Lower East Side was unevenly gentrifying (especially in the northwest East Village). Loisaida—as Puerto Rican urban ghetto—was seen as especially dangerous, alluring, and profitably disappearing (Mele 1994).<sup>247</sup> The Jewish Lower East Side—its doppelganger—was depicted as an empty abandoned ruin. Associated tropes of "bringing the Lower East Side back to life" ignore that it never died even after systematic redlining and financial disinvestment.

That the Museum (2010g) remained anxious to convey a message of coming home to a revitalized neighborhood, can be seen in a relatively recent website depiction of the area: "Explore ...You can easily spend a morning, afternoon or evening on the Lower East Side. It's a thriving neighborhood, full of shops, restaurants and sites." A message reassuring visitors that a historical destination is offering newly safe access to past and present is not discrete from a commodification reliant on a story of a new influx having once again tamed the frontier.

### **An Aura of Inevitability**

Like the residents' stories it houses, 97 Orchard's own identity became so tied to the Museum (2010c) that its role as interpretive centerpiece seems inevitable. An overriding message connecting these three aspects is conveyed in Museum self-descriptions such as "We tell the stories of 97 Orchard Street." Yet on March 19, 1988 after having first shown Rabinowitz the building that February, Abram (1988) wrote him to ask: "do you feel that

conceptual planning... should be or must be tied to specialized space?" In other words, it wasn't immediately obvious that 97 Orchard *per se* should shape its larger conceptual planning.

In 1987, Abram was already the co-founder of the Lower East Side Historic Conservancy (LESHC), whose main project was simply called "THE TENEMENT." A museum without walls, it didn't have a building of its own. Abram had started in 1987 to work on obtaining a Museum charter for THE TENEMENT, and putting together a board. Before 97 Orchard was a gleam in her eye, she and Anita Jacobson—*de facto* the Museum's first curator—were housed in the Eldridge Street Synagogue Project, busy operating the LESHC and planning THE TENEMENT.

Although the Museum opened up shop at 97 Orchard with a storefront lease in March 1988, it took until October 1994 for it to officially open its two apartments to the public for standardized group tours. Its choice of building, mission, stories, and interpretation were in play during much of that time. 97 Orchard's own story was told in ways discrete from that of residents' ethnic households, as the Museum's founding story of an ideal "discovery" conveyed: "In finding #97, The Tenement Museum located the perfect building..." (Ruth Limmer and Andrew S. Dolkart 2001). A Bruner Foundation (2001) award brochure includes this overview of the Museum's history written by Katherine Snider (Museum Vice President of Public Affairs):

In 1985, Abram joined Anita Jacobson and others in restoring the Eldridge Street Synagogue and in developing walking tours of the Lower East Side and theatrical productions based upon the Jewish immigrant experience. It was in the search for office space for this venture that Abram's vision of immigration as an "everyman" story found a home. The first floor of 97 Orchard Street had office space available. The upper floors of the building, however, had been mothballed since 1935, when the last residents were evicted so that the landlord would not have to make code-required upgrades to the apartments. The coincidental availability of space and relatively untouched urban history at 97 Orchard provided the impetus for the founding of LESTM. (41)

This story of the Museum finding and choosing 97 Orchard Street (year unspecified) attributes its desirability to the availability of office space as well as the building's relatively intact residential fabric.<sup>248</sup> "Abram's vision of immigration as an 'everyman' story [that] found a home" at 97 Orchard Street suggests that Abram moved from interpreting a particularistic experience to interpreting an inclusively American one, thus expressing the Museum's self-conception.<sup>249</sup> By specifying "this venture," it elides that before finding 97 Orchard, Abram (1987a) had already founded the LESHHC (as part of the Eldridge Street Synagogue Project), and took with her its TENEMENT, social history and theater projects.<sup>250</sup>

Hence, it is not obvious that 97 Orchard was the "impetus" for founding a tenement museum or even the LESTM. Before her organization leased a 97 Orchard storefront in March 1988, or obtained a state charter as the Lower East Side Tenement Museum that May, Abram had from 1985 to 1987 already been strategizing with Rabinowitz's AHW on living history "tenement" programs including work on NEH and other grant proposals.

In 1987, the Conservancy began planning **THE TENEMENT** a "living history" museum on immigration to the Lower East Side. **THE TENEMENT** will feature "living history" presentations in period apartments, a permanent exhibit which covers the entire history of immigration to the area, an ongoing **entertainment** series which explores the immigrant roots of American culture and an actor/**interpreter-led Lower East Side Heritage Trail**, a series of social history tours of immigrant life on the Lower East Side.<sup>251</sup> [Emphasis in original] (Conservancy 1988)

In this very early 1988 fundraising proposal, the outlines of familiar goals can be seen: to create a museum of living history with entertaining presentations featuring costumed performers in period apartments and tours.<sup>252</sup> A heritage trail based on its six heritage groups would interpret immigrant social history with an exhibit on the Lower East Side's "entire history of immigration."<sup>253</sup> In 1987, THE TENEMENT apparently did not require 97 Orchard Street per se

although its projects needed funding and a home. By June 24, 1987 Abram (1987a) had already written to Rabinowitz that she was applying for a Museum charter and trying to obtain a tenement building for free from the City of New York.

I have put together a grand Board of Governors. It is made up of leaders of each of the constituencies whose history will be interpreted and members of all spectrums of... Community Board Three. This is the political body which, with the City of New York will allocate the in-rem tenements on the Lower East Side. The Board's Housing Committee Chairman has agreed to help me locate the very best site for THE TENEMENT.... Praise the Lord as they say when they answer the Mariner's Temple's phone.

And the Chairman of the Board of Regents has offered to help us run through the process of incorporating as a Museum and also to help us find Regent and State Funds.

This memo shows Abram courting local Community Board Three (CB3) to obtain a free city-owned *in rem*<sup>254</sup> tenement by placing its members on a Museum Board that was to include "leaders" of its six diverse, chosen heritage groups.<sup>255</sup> In 1988—as Abram continued to look for other buildings even once 97 Orchard's lease was signed—she started staging at 97 Orchard the activities previously outlined for THE TENEMENT. On June 8, 1988, the Associated Press (Armstrong 1988) reported that Mayor Koch had attended the Museum's Living History storefront opening where "actors portrayed characters based on composites of real immigrant families," meaning the Museum's heritage households. Their dialogue captures that flavor:

"Each of the groups represented has been victimized by prejudice," said Ms. Abram.

"With my husband and four children, we live in this room," says the German character Erica Schneider, a tailor who strains to see her needlework beneath a dim gaslight.

"We have to go downstairs, use a spigot to bring water up here," explains the Chinese character, Chew Houg, who smooths laundry with an antique iron.

"I'm a cook, ma'am. I'm a cook and I sew and I wash. That's how I make my living," offers the character Elizabeth Washington, representing a free black family...

During a slide show at the museum's tiny theater, the character Etta Steinberg, based on a real Jewish immigrant, prayed over Sabbath candles, lamented her mother's harsh life, and confided that her brother wore a contraption designed to straighten his nose...

"Only truth-telling will make the history useful," said Ms. Abram... (Armstrong 1988)

Here the Museum's equally victimized heritage groups make a composite appearance on stage, looking for sympathy and claiming authenticity with a tenement serving as their prop.

### **Shifting Missions**

Between 1987 and 1994, as the Museum worked on acquiring space and developing a strategic plan that eventually focused on 97 Orchard Street, it developed its mission of promoting tolerance. Abram's (1990n) trustee report from Winter 1990 first shows its mission changing in relation to its building: "The Museum will use the history of 97 Orchard Street to interpret the history of housing to illuminate larger issues in urban, immigrant, and social history." (1) A mission previously focused on the social "history of housing" is beginning to incorporate interpretation of the tenement in which it is housed as part of its overall program.

By May 30, 1990, the Goals and Objectives Report from Abram (1990g) to Trustee Norman Keller demonstrates her interest in promoting tolerance: "To promote Tolerance and Historical Perspective through a Museum devoted to the Preservation and Interpretation [sic] of a variety of Urban Immigrant Experiences on the Lower East Side." For the Museum's 1990 Strategic Plan (Abram 1990o), the word "presentation" is substituted for "Preservation," thus making it a closer fit for the Museum's (1994b) formula for the next fifteen years: "To promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a gateway to America."<sup>256</sup> That May report also states that the Museum (Abram 1990g) is looking "to

purchase and restore a 19th century tenement building” (1) [Emphasis added]. By June 28<sup>th</sup> Abram (1990h) wrote to Rabinowitz: “We have at long last, negotiated an agreement with our landlord, giving the Museum an option to purchase the building.”

To broaden its audience and donor base at this time, its 1990 Strategic Plans shows the Museum as deciding to make “multi-ethnicity” a “high” priority. This entailed reaching out to the six heritage groups seen as settling in what became the Lower East Side. Abram’s (1990o) hand-written notes from a spring 1990 strategic planning fund-raising meeting show that she had already met with a consultant whose advice she encapsulated as: “1<sup>st</sup> have a plan; identified big problem in lacking multi-ethnicity in \$ and programs.” On a copy of her Spring 1990 Report to Trustees that prioritized creating Ethnic Advisory Councils, Abram (1990m) then jotted down: “Museum could go on forever as is – need to determine what extra effort ... needed to bring to point to purchase and renovate.” By June the outlines of its mission and an agreement on its building were in place; by October 1990, the Museum had indeed renewed its lease and obtained an option to buy with the right to immediately begin renovations. By 1994, when that option was renegotiated on even more advantageous terms, the supplementary word “migrant” and the term “gateway to America” had been placed in its final mission.

### **Flirting with Other Tenements**

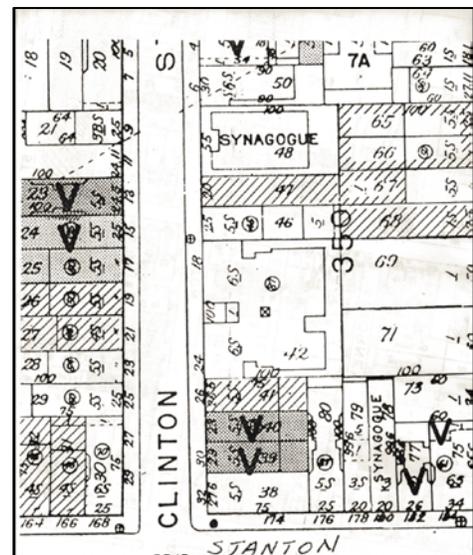
It is common knowledge at the Museum that Abram spent a considerable amount of time trying to find other buildings even after 1988. Abram pursued obtaining a free city-owned *in rem* tenement, an activity understood as a type of insurance, a contingency plan. In the 1960s – 1970s, New York City had become the largest local landlord as the neighborhood spiraled down in a cycle of disinvestment with landlords abandoning buildings and defaulting

on payment of taxes. By 1993, the Museum had already started investing extensively in the renovation of the second floor of 97 Orchard, even though it did not actually purchase the building from the Helpern family until 1996 [pre-closing December 15, 1995]. Abram is therefore seen and portrayed as actually having made a very early 1988 decision that this was to be the building. One interviewee said quite formally:

At the Museum, it is conventionally understood that this long time lag in its stories of finding and renting 97 Orchard Street in 1988 and fully purchasing it in 1996 was necessitated in part by the Museum not being entirely sure it would be able to buy the perfect building that it had found suitable in 1988.

Yet, it was the 1990 agreement that guaranteed the Museum's ability to purchase the building and also allowed for early restoration work to begin.<sup>257</sup> Capital fundraising then started in earnest, intensifying by 1993 with both cooperation and push-back from the Museum's board. This implies that cost was not the over-riding consideration since an *in rem* building would have been provided by the city free of charge.<sup>258</sup> The earlier hunt for such a tenement building in 1987–1989 seems to have been particularly intense in a more Latino part of the Lower East Side further east, again suggestive that the 1990 option to purchase 97 Orchard agreement was a turning point for the Museum.

Abram (1987e) initially focused her efforts on an *in rem*, empty Pre-Law double tenement building at 28–30 Clinton Street (see Museum map).<sup>259</sup> Her typed and handwritten notes indicate that she saw Clinton Street as



a multi-ethnic, visibly “immigrant portal,” a considerable plus. But she had concerns about visitors being “apprehensive” of “mean streets.” A lack of local parking would necessitate a

four block walk to a municipal garage or train.<sup>260</sup> Abram did not think that the block's two active but poor, historic synagogues would help create a suitable visitor "destination."<sup>261</sup> Certainly, those synagogues' elderly, mainly immigrant congregants—who I knew—were far tougher and poorer than any visitors Abram envisioned.<sup>262</sup> Eventually 28–30 Clinton was "re-hab'd" into affordable housing.<sup>263</sup>

If Abram's intention was to ensure another building in case 97 Orchard did not work out, it implies that the initial narratives of "THE TENEMENT" were then generic enough not to require 97 Orchard Street or its residents per se. But 97 Orchard made sense, once that option was in place. Abram was concerned with attracting visitors; a safe commercial area and bargain district such as Orchard Street had suburban and urban drop-in shoppers as well as name recognition.<sup>264</sup> And Orchard Street offered a recognizable iconography of pedestrian traffic, storefronts, and tenements as an available metonym for an older Jewish Lower East Side.

On December 4, 1990, Abram (1990k) had written to Rabinowitz and Novek. "When to our surprise, we actually located and secured a tenement building, it became clear that it had its own history and that history could be used to develop and interpret a significant case study." The Museum's shifting focus of its key narrative interpretations expressly on 97 Orchard (and its residents) seems to have less to do with its initial discovery in 1988 and far more to do with the increasing probability of its acquisition from 1990 on.

### **A Time Capsule's Foundation**

Let's travel back once more to that "Aha!" moment of 97 Orchard's discovery, as portrayed in another Museum (2010c) depiction of its 1988 coup de foudre, "Discovering a Time Capsule:"

She saw sheet-metal ceilings, turn-of-the-century toilets and an aging wood banister. 'It was as though people had just picked up and left', Jacobson recalled. 'It was a little time capsule...I called Ruth and said 'We have got to have this building.' It was perfect.'

#### DISCOVERING A TIME CAPSULE



Figure 8 – Time Capsule

It then adds, "The search was over." The same website page—under the heading "Reviving a Tenement"—describes renovating a tenement as a restoration project in which an intact time capsule is

brought back to life.<sup>265</sup> Yet dead or alive, this "little time capsule" cannot quite fully speak for itself or for those who lived there. Rather, reconstructing the immigrant sagas of those who dwelt there and no longer speak is an ongoing part of constructing the tenement as a social memory palace. The Museum's (1994e) "Urban Pioneers" slides alluded to this: "Like King Tut's tomb, this tenement is an archeological treasure full of the evidence of the everyday life of its time" (18).

97 Orchard is offered up as time capsule, unsealed tomb and Ruin in an archaeological excavation of past life for its guided discoverers. For its PBS program, the Museum (2001) described its findings by explaining: "97 Orchard Street was completely boarded up from 1935 through 1987. When the building was finally opened, everything found inside was exactly as it had been left when the tenement was sealed." A slight exaggeration since as its now renovated downstairs space shows (2012), 97's commercial tenants were part of its life as was Fannie Rogarshevsky. Similarly its Ruins are depicted on tours as undisturbed apartments, archaeological set-asides for posterity.

Christopher Gray was right: a building telling a story of death and passing demands silence rather than just a resurrection into lively re-created households. The Museum

eventually placed on each floor a Ruin—an evocative apartment that is neither re-created into a household nor truly left alone. Ruins were “selectively downgraded,” arguably to better symbolically house and contain the building’s unnamed tenants in a commemorative space meant to expressly evoke a 1988 experience of discovery.<sup>266</sup> Kathy Daly (2002) describes it:

...as a negative space, an empty stage that allows docents to show visitors what the apartments in the building looked like before they were restored by the museum. In the Ruins apartment, visitors encounter the building in the same way it was initially experienced by curator Anita Jacobson in 1988.”<sup>267</sup> (56)

A refracted quality is seen in the Museum’s restoration goals in which abandonment is expressly designed to support a 1988 time capsule moment. The Museum’s (2013) blog explains that stabilization is done for safety: “some visitors, ... are particularly fascinated with the tenement apartments that we call “stabilized ruins”—where the process of historical decay is visible in peeling wallpaper, bare wood, and faded linoleum, but the deterioration has been stopped to make the tour safe.” But as Watnik (2013) notes:

The theory of the stabilized ruin spaces straddles a fascinating interpretation of preservation philosophy. Stabilization has ... lock[ed] the apartments in the condition at the moment of the museum’s founding at the start of the 1990s. These spaces provide evidence of the last period of occupation by the residents. (53)

Unusually, the Ruins were stabilized but not to show 1935, the date of past use they reference. If tour groups take period room reconstructions as “history,” Ruins are depicted as pristine archaeological windows into the building as discovered (despite stabilization in the 1990s). Issues of the reception of authenticity in preservation thus surface in Museum tours:<sup>268</sup>

The building is always referred to as “original” and the “ruin apartments” are referenced as “archaeological spaces.” .... The museum remains rooted in the early model of recreated historic houses, with a veneer of scientific authenticity presented to the audience.... While 97 Orchard is a historic building in an original location, the insistence on using the vocabulary of the archaeological profession shades the discussion of authenticity associated with the site. ...the impression of the 97 Orchard taken away by

the audience is that the reconstructions accurately represent the tenement experience. Questions of authenticity arise when the audience is led to believe that the ruin spaces, ..., have been left as they were found. (Watnik 2013) (54-55)

Ruins serve as memorial and witness, metaphorical cenotaphs marking and mourning a past neighborhood and what its residents left behind.<sup>269</sup> Haunted and abandoned by invisible



immigrants, Ruins have their own life as an essential part of a narrative trajectory showing why people left. On tours, they offer a temporary, if sobering, pause since the trajectory of their anonymous residents is presumed to be one of future success. Ruins thus punctuate a journey circumscribed by tours of lived-in apartments by evoking the journey of

immigrant residents who moved on from a decaying building and a neighborhood that could no longer serve them.

Benjamin's fragmented—but actually stabilized—ruins evoke change and mortality for a building whose time has passed.<sup>270</sup> In freezing decay they lock in the time of someone else's discovery. Choices—including that of authenticity in preservation—present a moving storyline in unsealing a time capsule. Just as there is no one story, no time capsule has just one date. Story-lines intersect with financial and material trade-offs in restoration including those of present technology, code, and convenience, especially when renovation costs far more than the building's purchase price.

While a building has to be seen as authentic enough for time travel, some legerdemain can be tantalizingly exposed. A 2014 *New York Times* profile of "A Time Capsule's Mr. Fix-It" has a long-time Museum employee explain his job: "...they need an artist in here who can keep it looking old" (Kilgannon 2014). Here judicious artifice reinforces a larger sense of just how hard

and worthwhile it is to maintain 97 Orchard's rare, cherished past. Yet, it also shows how a distant, carefully framed past that is spatially marked off for visitors to safely claim once it is properly designated as historic (Wallace 1996), is hard to fully cordon off from the present. Indeed, like peeking behind the scenes, time travel is meant to be part of the fun for visitors (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1993, Richard Handler & Eric Gable 1997).

### **Touring in a Time Machine**

Sometimes, a lengthy headline does say it all. "How To Give Your Kids a Taste of the Jewish Immigrant Experience: Even though it's just a few blocks from our home, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum gave my girls a chance to time-travel" (Ingall 2013). The Museum has recently expanded its costumed live interpreters programs particularly for children by offering an entertaining, interactive smorgasbord of residents' lives. Visitors hop among period apartments in a building that works as a time machine for a type of theatrical time travel.

The Museum's Live! Program, with its "Meet the Representatives" family days, offers living history programs that can be attractive to hip urban "heritage" parents. As an increasing generational distance shifts the interpretation and reception of verisimilitude in accent and affect, these costumed immigrants are likelier to be recognized from images and stories than from lived life. A Museum (2010f) blog interview with interpreters shows attentiveness to using its spaces to advantage: "the spaces, the physical aspects of what they're looking at, ... we thought would be a great and easy tool for folks to use in order to jump to larger issues." By offering an immersive sense of learning about the past that is tied again to living history performances, the Museum mixes the "real" with the composite, albeit with quite salient

differences.<sup>271</sup> For its founders, living history not only offered an engaging visitor experience but a model for reconstructing Lower East Side daily life, including immigrant acculturation.<sup>272</sup>

But as mentioned previously, other than in the interactive Confino children's apartment, living history risked being both confusing and heavy-handed. Kugelmass (2000) described a scene in the 1990s—in which the Museum's costumed actors were mistaken for immigrants—as causing a “confusion of its audience between performance and reality ...[that was only] enhanced by meticulous attention to the accuracy of historic detail” (182). Today's parents are in on the joke. Yet in fleshing out characters, re-enactment poses real risks since the Museum's first person costumed interpreters—like many historical re-enactors—offer the sympathetic impression of re-creating history itself.

### **Guided Bodies**

All of this implies again that neither the building nor its apartments' re-created material culture can sufficiently speak for themselves when the goal is to create a compelling experience for visitors. They are a necessary but insufficient condition for a required suspension of disbelief. The use of guides as storytellers—as third person interpreters—facilitates consistent and interactive learning while personalizing the effect of the Museum's messages. Guides create an interactive spatial experience of touring by constantly pointing out the past uses of spaces that become reinscribed as groups move through their scheduled itineraries.

When guides showed visitors an unlit Ruin, tour instructions included: “If you turn out the light in order to demonstrate the darkness of the space, do not continue speaking... pause, allowing visitors a moment of silence to react.”<sup>273</sup> Guides gestured to show how material changes caused by housing code (e.g., indoor toilets or interior windows) affected residents'

lives. They posed evocative questions to elicit visitor comments about contemporary parallels with their own families. Living history's claim to accurately re-create the past shifted into tours where guides rather than costumed interpreters showed visitors copies of census documents.

Guides seem integral to a building only seen on guided tours. Yet, they too were a partial, last minute compromise that arose out of the question of whether a living history or museum educator approach was sustainable for each household. A focus on operating income, building renovation, and staff salaries meant that Abram initially was not able or eager to train and pay sufficient interpreters, educators, and guides. But tour groups needed to be escorted for insurance purposes. And welcoming a group to go hear tapes with Abram's recorded voice wasn't an engaging enough experience for a Museum with didactic goals and high ticket prices.

Hence, volunteer docents were also used including Abram's mother-in-law. Educators, historians, and management also gave tours; official Museum policy eventually required that most staff members provide tours. Over time more guides were hired, and this became the norm. By the Museum's second decade, they were called educators, to indicate a status difference from docents or guides per se that was consistent with the Museum's heuristic goals. Today, some part-time guides are actors, keyed to rapid script learning and engaging tour audiences in storytelling dynamics. They are not necessarily expert on the neighborhood and its history. While not all guides see themselves as "performers," I suggest that in a "tour as immersive learning" destination all of the Museum's guides perform, albeit differently than its costumed first person interpreters.

As historian Wulf Kansteiner (2002) observes: "The media of memory that help us construct and transmit our knowledge and feelings about the past rely on various combinations

of discursive, visual, and spatial elements” (190). The Museum uses all three in combination to get across its message and establish a bond of empathy with past immigrant lives.<sup>274</sup> In a building whose apartments serve as beloved and necessary props for the stories of people and times remembered, visitors and guides participate in residents’ stories as well as their own.

It’s a heady combination when performing, storytelling, and remembrance shift a time capsule building into a time machine. Eric Gable and Richard Handler (2000) have written that Colonial Williamsburg’s “museum pedagogy demands a certain affective identification between the visitor and the site’s regime of knowledge” and that guides and interpreters build a “three dimensional experiential approach” to create this affect (238). This embodied storytelling also affects Museum guides and interpreters, not least those who talk to visitors about labor and sweatshops. The *New York Times* reported on a 2008 Museum gala fund-raiser impeded by a costumed union-organizing protest on behalf of these mainly part-time, hourly workers:

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, which features stories of downtrodden immigrants exploited by employers and landlords, is now the subject of a unionization drive by nearly 30 part-time tour guides who say the organization has been blocking their efforts to organize.... The guides ... handed out fliers on Tuesday evening at a fund-raising gala... Not counting the tour guides, the museum has an annual budget of \$4.5 million and about 48 employees, including 13 managers and 8 part-time maintenance workers ...Of the 29 ... guides, [only] 9 work more than 20 hours a week ... (Chan 2008)

The Museum’s response was to impede recognition. When the majority of guides and interpreters signed support cards in 2007 agreeing to have UAW Local 2210 represent them, the Museum insisted to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) that it would only recognize a union that full-time employees would join.<sup>275</sup> The Museum may be on the side of past immigrant workers, but for its own part-time guides it’s the “boss.” An affective regime for those reciting its stories of labor up to six times daily can inspire and spillover to real life.<sup>276</sup>

## **A Nation of Personalized Immigrants**

Being an immigrant descendant is ostensibly a privileged position in a museum focused on U.S. immigration.<sup>277</sup> In Chapter One, I discussed how the Museum had dealt ambivalently with heritage visitors seen as uninterested in its message of tolerance for newer immigrants and a diverse future. A related tension persists as to its purpose in depicting the specificity of an immigrant past. A Museum (2009a) “About Us” website optimistically noted that “visitors view restored apartments and learn about the struggles of past generations in the hope of providing historical perspective on the experiences of today's newcomers.” But if the real point of learning about past hardship is to better understand a current immigrant experience, why was it necessary to attempt to restore the ethnic specificity of a previous Lower East Side experience? And why not directly show that current experience?

The Tenement Museum, like Colonial Williamsburg, undergirds its aura of authenticity by emphasizing the accuracy of its efforts and attentiveness to story and place.<sup>278</sup> Planning documents suggest that the AHW understood that interpreting 97 Orchard’s apartments required enough recognizable specificity to render the past credible. Rabinowitz (1990b) wrote in the AHW Conceptual Plan: “We will acknowledge this diversity and, at the same time, select points of focus so that the interpretive experience can be specific, detailed, convincing and clear – rather than generalized or generic” (6). For visitors to affirmatively respond to the Museum, a felt authenticity that included ethnic specificity for immigrants was needed to personalize the stories of “real” people—an issue seen in rendering the Gumpertz story.<sup>279</sup>

Ideally, a convincing recounting of the past can lend the present enough authority to justify its use for lessons and legacies. That such a personalized past can be all too real was

pointed out by consultants hired to gauge the Museum's post-tour transformative impact.

Randi Korn & Associates (2007) offered its advice on the need for a personalized representation of current immigrants so as to elicit better reception for a message of encouraging tolerance.

Before visitors can be receptive to a message of tolerance, they must be introduced to contemporary immigrant experiences and perspectives. . . . Contemporary immigrant perspectives need to be personalized, too, to compete with the power of the historical stories and to elicit strong responses from visitors (viii)

Since affective storytelling in 97 Orchard would be a very difficult act to follow, any contemporary stories would also need to be personal and ethnically specific. And like the lessons that those stories impart, their appeal may resonate in unexpected ways.

### **Building Reminders**

While the Museum's new management is understandably leery of the term tolerance, "teaching tolerance" was greatly emphasized until 2008 when Abram resigned. The very word tolerance invokes its binary opposite—the religious intolerance with which Jews wrestled in Europe. The 1988 founding of the Tenement Museum came at a time when some U.S. Jewish intellectuals were visibly moving to the right. Neo-conservative Milton Himmelfarb's quip that "Jews earn like Episcopalians and vote like Puerto Ricans" was finally gaining intellectual traction.<sup>280</sup> A growing distance from the conditions in which the immigrant generation lived and worked had contributed to their descendants' rightward drift. Italian and Irish voters had already shifted voting patterns *en masse*, giving a generational cast to this phenomenon.

Neo-conservatives (Neocons) who argued for a right-wing agenda also claimed the uniqueness of a Jewish immigrant saga. Not least, they opined that a liberal legacy was self-defeating inasmuch as it worked against Jewish self-interest and didn't buy friends amongst the disenfranchised. The Museum's leadership can be seen as proposing an experiential answer. As

an exercise in immersive learning, touring a building associated with Jewish immigrant poverty could transmit a newly enlarged version of tolerance as a valued political legacy. This is not to say that the Museum's less officially acknowledged goal of commemoration is any less relevant to a discussion of legacy and heirs. As Rabinowitz (Tutela 2008) indicated in an interview, "Most of the money, most of the thinking, comes out of a culture of liberal-democratic, left-leaning Jewish politics, ...That's where she [Abram] comes from..." (96). Rabinowitz and others who worked for the Museum, or were part of its leadership, held similar political views even if their families were usually less prominent.

While the Museum has attempted, somewhat successfully, to discursively channel an empathetic response to past immigrants—its stories of hardship are susceptible to being harnessed for unintended goals including its own. Given the Museum's celebratory attitude toward the way past immigrants overcame adversity, it's not surprising that heritage tourists were confused about an official "corrective" message indicating that earlier groups didn't just bootstrap their way to success. A similar confusion encompassed the Museum's official call for immigrant descendants on tour to grant the very tolerance, so greatly desired by their own ancestors, to the new American immigrants who need it now.

I suggest that the Museum's idea of tolerance can be seen as a multi-directional discourse capable of lowering urban tensions through its capacity to shift its object as needed from new migrants and "minorities" to Jews and other ethnic white groups. Ideally through the Museum's outreach, immigrant adults, heritage visitors, "minority" schoolchildren, and ESL (English as a Second Language) classes are all exposed to the concept that white ethnic groups were also once subjected to considerable prejudice and endured miserable living conditions.<sup>281</sup>

Accordingly, early fundraising proposals stressed the potential importance of these programs for Chinese or black schoolchildren and schoolteachers learning about earlier immigrants.

Here, the continuing production of tolerance involves positing multiple past and future subjects (2008). That posited commonality reaches back to a past—invoked by a tenement building—to indicate that previous hardship and prejudice can be overcome, and eventual acceptance in America is possible—even if only for future generations.

## **Chapter Five: Growing Pains in a Moral Economy of Tourism**

Who benefits from the city's revitalization? Does anyone have a right to be protected from displacement? These stakes, which the French social theorist Henri Lefebvre calls the right to the city, make it important to determine how the city's authenticity is produced, interpreted, and deployed. —(Zukin 2010) (xii)

In the early years of the twenty-first century, New York City lost its soul. Some people doubt that the city ever had a soul, because New York has always grown by shedding its past, tearing down old neighborhoods and erecting new ones in their place, usually in a bare-faced struggle for financial gain. Others just shrug because, today, all big cities are erasing their gritty, bricks-and-mortar history to build a shiny vision of the future.... [in] London, Paris, and New York artists and gentrifiers move into old immigrant areas...—(Zukin 2010) (1)

### **Welcome Again to the Lower East Side**

This chapter discusses a moment in the unsettled period after September 11, 2001—a time when local Fujianese demonstrators and allies started making themselves visible to Museum visitors (and locals) in protests staged at 99 Orchard Street. Like the protesters, my readers are going to have their own prior sense of the Museum's history at 97 Orchard Street. As I return to where I left off in this story, the opposition to the Museum's proposal to acquire that next-door building through eminent domain had started growing. The Museum's interpretation and representation of its ethnic neighborhood likewise had become salient during those 2001-2002 protests as seen in its intersections with real estate and tourism. All of this was happening as gentrification increasingly threatened to make finding local employment difficult and housing often impossible.

Fujianese migrants from China's southeast had become by then the largest, newest group of arrivals to the Lower East Side—Chinatown. Typically, they were aligned with different

politics and languages than those of Chinatown's existing Cantonese speaking community.<sup>282</sup>

Chinatown's economy was badly hurt after 9/11, and anecdotal evidence suggests that the Fujianese community was disproportionately affected. Local Fujianese migrants were viewed as "downtown" Chinese, an older formulation quite recognizable to Jews (Sanders 1999) that implied that the professional, social and linguistic skills, legal papers, and money all required for uptown living were unlikely to come their way.

The protests about the Museum's plan to increase its capacity for visits through expansion brought into focus longer-standing problems of representation and historicity. The Museum's growing pains as it sought to extend 97's Orchard's real estate footprint are thus framed by issues of local agency and representation. In a local moral economy of tourism, the Museum was seen as violating neighborhood immigrant moral norms invoked and articulated in the course of this controversy. The Museum was insistent on the overriding moral imperative of telling historic commemorative stories to more visitors in the name of contemporary immigrants. It was thus challenged morally and pragmatically to broaden its own claims of diverse multi-ethnic representation when local "unrepresented" immigrants/migrants said that the Museum was looking out for its own interests, not theirs.

In media coverage and more broadly, the historic and the contemporary, the authentic and artificial, the Museum newcomers and the immigrants, were cast as adversarial pairings. Arguably the Museum had reached the end of what could be done with its residential household interpretations at 97 Orchard, boxed in by its own insistence that its final interpretive regime only allowed for "real" stories to be told for the ethnic groups who had resided in that building. Therefore there was no apartment representing, for example, either

historic or contemporary Chinese communities. The Museum was simultaneously running into problems with 97 Orchard's visitor capacity and narrative limits. Its growing pains from its proposed expansion into other Orchard Street buildings eventually entailed the prospect of a re-balancing of its representations of historic and relatively contemporary communities.

### **Building Heritage Tourism**

Not least, to attract more visitors the Museum wanted to expand into another building that could partake of 97's Orchard's successful aura and claims to historical uniqueness. The Tenement Museum was highly dependent on the heritage tourists who constituted most of its adult visitors at that time, most particularly American Jews for whom the neighborhood is seen as a site of American origin for families that arrived before World War I. 97 Orchard Street's tours stressed the commonalities of hardship seen in tenement life to encourage descendants of past immigrants to feel a sense of ethical responsibility to newer immigrants.

In 2002, these tensions came to a head in the Museum's dealings with newer neighborhood migrants—precisely in the context of the Museum's plans for expansion. In effect, the Museum avowed that accommodating more visitors from outside the neighborhood was also advocating for new immigrants. For many visitors, the Tenement Museum is part of a Lower Manhattan immigration triad in which the Museum marks the first immigrant housing destination, in partnership with the National Park Services' better known sites of immigration, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. The Museum was especially interested in expanding its audience to encompass visitors of those other sites.

These neighborhoods—and their newly affluent visitors and residents—pay a high price for being conveniently wedged between Midtown and Wall Street. The Museum's tourism is a

small part of a blossoming local culture of consumption seen in the Lower East Side's and Chinatown's boutiques, hotels, restaurants, bars and clubs. The Lower East Side's northernmost section, now commonly called the East Village, had been gentrifying far earlier and more rapidly as attested by tensions with squatters and homeless protests that came to a head most famously in the 1988 Tompkins Square Park Riots (Abu-Lughod 1994, Smith 1996b, Zukin 2010). Now its southwestern border with Chinatown was gentrifying in a new Downtown destination economy whose growth was boosted by state support post 9/11.

### **Coveting Thy Neighbor: 99 Orchard**

In late 2001, the Tenement Museum attempted to expand beyond its 97 Orchard Street national historic landmark by having New York State acquire the building next door through eminent domain. The Museum hoped to double its visitor traffic by jointly selling tickets with Liberty National Park. 99 Orchard, its one-time twin and neighbor, was now a newly renovated and inhabited tenement whose street-level restaurant employed Fujianese workers.<sup>283</sup> In the ensuing controversy the Museum's re-creation of historic immigration was portrayed as happening at the expense of living immigrants. By 2002, this fight had generated significant national news coverage. The *New York Daily News* (Kates 2002) noted:

Local entrepreneur Liang says Congee Village's ... business has skyrocketed since he expanded it into Holtzman's cellar. Condemnation would put about 20 immigrant workers out of a job at a time when the Asian American Foundation estimates about 1,000 Chinese New Yorkers were left unemployed by the World Trade Center attack. (2)

Museum opponents made good use of spatial and immigrant-themed dynamics by posting Mandarin and English signs protesting "Eminent Domain Abuse," and holding solidarity visits and demonstrations at 99 Orchard. One sign read "Don't ERASE living history with artificial

history.” These 2002 events are a micro-history set in a storied topos of immigration— a tale rich with ironic juxtapositions of empathy, museumification, and gentrification.

All of this took place on an Orchard Street otherwise eerily quiet, since most shoppers were scared away after September 11, 2001. Residents and merchants alike were just becoming aware that the city planners wanted Lower Manhattan to be restructured as a visitor arts and entertainment area. The Lower East Side’s ethnic heritage tourism was poised to expand in tandem with an economic restructuring of a rapidly changing downtown neighborhood.<sup>284</sup> Its allure as a poor historic place of immigrant memory and culture now intersected with its increasing appeal as a gentrifying area.

### **Showcasing Past Life**

The Museum’s connection to its neighborhood’s ethnic enclaves reflects this commodification even as the Museum sought to combine tourism with the delivery of bundled moral lessons. Re-created tenements are morally exemplary and their lessons for outside visitors are mainly attuned to generations who have never lived in them. The Museum saw its messages as reinforced by connections between the sympathetic immigrant past shown in its apartments and a visible immigrant present surrounding its 97 Orchard Street location. Its liberal activist founders saw their project as harnessing history to advance an ethical political agenda of “tolerance” toward new immigrants through the portrayal of older immigrant life.

As Wendy Brown (2008) has dryly noted, liberal discourses of tolerance that evoke moral values can also be seen as producing and pointing to its discursive and social limits. Thus the Museum’s 2001 depiction of 97 Orchard raises a key moral question: How were local living

communities represented in (or occluded by) a building interpreted by a Museum (1994) of past immigrant life whose multi-cultural mission was one of “tolerance and historic perspective”?<sup>285</sup>

In short, the story of how a museum of immigrant life has attempted to exercise eminent domain is a case study in the moral economy of tourism. Andrew Sayer (2004) defines “‘moral economy’ [as] the study of how economic activities of all kinds are influenced and structured by moral dispositions and norms, and how in turn those norms may be compromised, overridden or reinforced by economic pressures.” (3) Here what is understood to be economically moral can be that which is seen as normatively appropriate behavior in a given context. As Sayer (2004) notes, “ethical valuation and economic valuation may sometimes be in tension.” Thus, use by host communities of the normatively moral in discourses of tourism may help community actors exercise agency by contesting economic pressure and framing institutional dynamics as contextually inappropriate (12).

### **The 99 ‘Story’**

By mid-2002 the Museum’s attempt at eminent domain had garnered enough opposition to prevent it from going forward. The Museum’s administrators had convinced a quasi-state agency—the Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC)—to use eminent domain to condemn 99 Orchard Street (after the Museum’s efforts to buy it at below-market rates were refused in fall 2001). The Museum’s arguments focused initially on its need to accommodate more visitors. In a public statement posted on the Museum’s website and submitted to the local Community Board, its director Ruth Abram (2002) stressed the importance of the Museum’s role as a National Park Service (NPS) affiliate serving visitors.

“We cannot accommodate any portion of the 5 million visitors who go to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty every year,” said Ruth Abram, president of the Lower East Side

Tenement Museum. “We’re already turning people away.” With 99 Orchard St., the museum would be able to accommodate an additional 200,000 guests a year.

National media were quick to comment on the irony of an immigrant history museum’s becoming the target of immigrant protest. The Museum appeared to be placing its own interests—getting more people through the door, increasing revenue—over those for whom it purportedly advocated. Accordingly the Museum was cast as violating moral norms associated with Lower East Side immigrant life and proper neighborly behavior as well as with violating its *raison d’être* of advocacy for new immigrants.

This criticism spilled over into a debate on the Museum’s authenticity that challenged its attested values due to its conduct in the very place that it termed the United States’ most important immigrant neighborhood. On January 4, 2002, the right-wing New York Post published an article titled “Museum in Bizarre Bid to Wreck Building” (Lehmann, 2002) that implied that the Museum was discrediting authentic historic national landmarks. The Museum’s proposal to tear down and re-create four of 99 Orchard’s tenement apartments was termed a touristic “Disney World Creation” by the building’s owner.

A *Wall Street Journal* editorial comment (2002) questioned the reality of the Museum’s reconstructed, ergo dead, presentation of history: “The two buildings on Orchard Street share a common past, but one is devoted to nostalgically ... invok[ing] the immigrant experience, while the other has real people living real lives in a real building” (A12). The moral value of the Museum’s commemorating and memorializing the past was thus relegated to an inauthentic state-supported nostalgia. An article that then appeared on February 6, 2002 in the *Jewish Daily Forward* went on to further quote the disputative Holtzman family: “‘They’re make-believe history,’ said Mr. Holtzman, motioning to the museum .... ‘We are history’” (Keys, 2002).

As the visibility of the Museum's re-creation of the past expanded so did concerns as to whether its expansion should have priority over contemporary uses. The *New York Times* noted, under the headline "Your Tired, Your Poor, Your Building?" that "The renters may not be the tired, poor and huddled masses of yesteryear. But there they are all the same" (Haberman 2002) (B1). The *Los Angeles Times* captured a local reaction voiced by Community Board 3's (CB3) manager: "They want to create a virtual tenement museum in a neighborhood that already has tenements" (Getlin 2002) (A.14). At a raucous Community Board hearing, a tenant at 99 Orchard asked, "What are they going to tell the tourists of 99 Orchard Street? This is the history of the people who lived here before we evicted them?" (Sayrafiezadeh 2003).

New York's *Daily News* chortled: "As one resident put it, 'It's the immigrant museum vs. the immigrants, the newcomers vs. the old-timers'" (Kates 2002). The tangible benefits of the Museum's advocacy for new immigrants seemed unclear even as more generally its moral right to prioritize the showcasing of past lives at the expense of the present was questioned. The appropriateness of its behavior undermined both its authenticity and moral claims in representing past and contemporary immigrant experience and interests. Five years later, a *Museum News* article still cited the Tenement Museum actions to explain why perceived authenticity and "realness" for museums necessarily depends on adhering to attested moral values (B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore 2007) (78–79).

### **Moral Lessons from a Storied Past**

The Museum's invocation of the public interest standard of eminent domain also raised issues about the moral appropriateness of the state's role as well as of how the Museum served the interest of the State. *The Villager*, a liberal downtown newspaper, commented, "The Lower

East Side Tenement Museum is good for New York. That is at least according to the Empire State Economic Development Corporation [ESDC] ..." (Jensen, 2002). As Caton (2012) notes, "tourism scholarship that demonstrates the economic benefits of resort development generally takes a particular definition of 'economic benefits' for granted" (1915). Likewise, state agencies often assume that a larger cultural attraction—such as museum expansion—means that more visitors will buy "local" products thus creating economic growth that includes employment. In that logic, tourism serves as an economic engine to fuel more local consumption.

Yet the working assumption that what was good for the Museum and its visitors was ultimately good for local immigrants and for the neighborhood at large was at the center of the challenge. Therefore, the Museum asked Kevin Jackson, then head of the New York Historical Society, to explain why the ESDC's action indeed served the public and State interest. Jackson (2002) did so by alluding to the historic importance of the Lower East Side immigrant experience in acculturation, politics, and citizenship, stating: "the museum, and its proposed expansion, also serves the larger needs of the state and the nation by clarifying how 'the places we call home' shape our identities and participation in civic life."

The Museum also strongly stressed the presumed benefits to local businesses and residents. Yet, its rationale as to providing local economic benefit was effectively undercut by the economic development agency that it had worked hard to convince that it should indeed invoke eminent domain. The ESDC's attorney stated: "'We see the [museum's] expansion as a worthwhile public objective,' he said. 'Economics is not the driving force. This is a civic project'" (Kates 2002). At a critical turning point, the local Business Improvement District (BID) had

agreed that the Museum's actions did not provide sufficient local economic benefit to justify the use of eminent domain and voted against it (Cynthia Silva and Kelly Wong 2007) (34).

Locally, the Museum's claim to represent the interests of newer immigrants and migrants seemed further vitiated by its lack of direct representation for residents belonging to groups who arrived in the area post-1935. But 97 Orchard Street also did not represent the neighborhood's earlier Chinese or African American residents.<sup>286</sup> In February, in the midst of the fracas, the Museum suddenly announced it would commit to telling both of these stories:

In 99 Orchard Street, the Museum will expand its interpretation to include stories of people in the neighborhood before and after those dates [1863–1935] including people from Africa, Latin America and Asia whose stories were not represented in 97 Orchard Street (Abram, 2002).

Abram had previously hinted that she thought the ruckus was about historic representation. On January 3<sup>rd</sup>, a local reporter had quoted her as saying:

If they do end up getting the building, Abrams [sic] said the museum would probably recreate tenement apartments inhabited by immigrants on the Lower East Side during the 19th century.... Since 99 Orchard St. has been nearly completely gutted and little of the original interior remains, Abrams [sic] said any new exhibit would be interpretations based on the history of immigrant communities in the entire neighborhood. "We would be free to interpret families who lived in the neighborhood but not necessarily in that building." (Jensen 2002)

Here, Abram presented the Museum as bound by inviolable rules as to how 97 Orchard Street could be interpreted—rules that did not apply to 99 Orchard. Abram stated that since 99 Orchard's interior fabric was not intact, preservation, and landmarking were not possible. This implied in turn that it was the relative intactness of 97 Orchard that compelled telling the stories of its actual residents (although not in their prior apartments). Hence, the Museum would be "free" to interpret neighborhood groups in its new building. The return of its previously excluded neighborhood "heritage" groups—nineteenth-century Chinese immigrants

and African Americans—would be feasible if not promised. By February, Abram had committed to broadening 99 Orchard’s interpretive dates from those constructed for 97 Orchard.

What Abram didn’t explain to the media was that 97 Orchard’s earlier preservation and landmarking process had not been tied to the interpretation of the building’s actual residents. Nor, is landmarking particularly tied to interiors; exteriors are prioritized. As discussed in earlier chapters, once the Museum had moved into 97 Orchard in 1988, its interpretive schemes for family apartments shifted rapidly from portraying stories of six historic heritage groups to only telling the stories of groups found to have lived in that building. By 1990, the Museum’s leadership was vacillating as to whether it was telling stories of composite or “real” households in a building whose residents’ much touted diversity was mainly representative of its local Jewish communities. Its interpretive schemes—with their attendant dates—evolved into rules that effectively bounded which groups’ stories were told where. The Museum’s agency in setting its own rules and declaring them inviolable was invisible.

### **A Pragmatic Morality**

Perhaps in response, the Fujianese community bolstered its opposition with yet another moral claim: that the Museum’s actions would take away housing in an area that didn’t have enough. Chinatown’s existence and growth had long been perceived as threatened by the impact of gentrification on affordable housing and business space (Lin 1994, Lin 1998, Kwong 2009). Given that this block was part of Chinatown – Lower East Side, it was thus plausible to depict the Museum’s proposed expansion as a reduction of Chinatown’s housing stock. Meanwhile 99 Orchard Street’s new upscale renters were described as neighborhood residents, and its owners, as local small business people. Locals, if only for the moment, were not

landlords. Ultimately tenant rights became the issue politicians cited in withdrawing political support from the Museum. Here moral, normative lines were drawn by invoking the need for state protection of tenants and the need for the protection of small businesses from the state.

Seemingly few (except for the restaurant's waiters) can fully claim the moral high ground regarding the financial and real estate stakes of commodifying the past in a tourist, gentrifying present. All parties—the building's owners, its tenants, the Museum's founders, and the heritage tourists—are involved with gentrification typically as immigrants, migrants or someone who explicitly identifies as a descendant. (I do not place myself outside of this non-virtuous circle.) Here the "higher ground," seen in the expression of moral issues explicitly concerning the representation of a broader view of neighborhood residents and migration, gained a political outlet due to threats of eminent domain and job loss. Visible moral outrage can be fed and triggered by actions deemed decidedly ill-advised, particularly if community fallout seems to be predictable.

The Museum clearly misread Chinatown's politics and its residents' sense that the Museum's stories of past Lower East Side life were primarily meant for outside visitors. Its actions triggered the rare involvement of both documented and undocumented Fujianese workers with local organizations who worked through business and ethnic associations to bring in communal support from Queens and elsewhere. The coalitions that led these protests were ethnic and political, local and city-wide, reflecting the increasing importance of New York's relatively new Fujianese community. The Museum, which had not cultivated ties with its local Jewish community, saw that community along with almost every other neighborhood organization siding in coalitions with Fujianese organizations. The Museum underestimated the

Fujianese community's ability to rally neighborhood and city-wide allies, including the Community Board, the local Business Improvement District, numerous politicians, and the most unlikely of Lower East Side bedfellows: landlords and tenants groups (TenantNet 2002).

### **Gazing Through a Past Prism**

The Museum's choice of an oblique gaze seemed meant in part to draw attention to what it viewed as similar harsh social processes of Americanization, even as it simultaneously pointed out future immigrant success. Interpreting the Lower East Side as a "gateway," the Museum emphasized the comparable circumstances of various groups in the same place. The experiences of earlier groups were portrayed as overcoming shared hardship to achieve upward mobility. By its second decade, difference was diminished by emphasizing a future diversity that further stressed strong parallels between past and present, between similar ancestors and potentially successfully acculturated new immigrants.

As already mentioned, Abram (2004) had later remarked at a National Park Service Conference "the surrounding community is not terribly unchanged from the history told at the museum." In 2001, a shrinking Jewish and Latino Lower East Side was proximate to what a Chinese population facing seemingly familiar issues. I wrote to one historian:

The more I have read of the Museum's materials, the more I think that your previous insight on Jews/Chinese as the paired, uneasy model minorities for the LESTM makes sense. There, the familiar and powerful shock of recognition, while positioned as sympathetic lends itself to reading things through a very particular lens. I see this in myself as well; my grandfather was a presser who came from Poland in the mid-1930s and lived on Ave D and E. 2nd and I grew up with that world.

Streetscapes may be read allegorically as though they were the place we would have liked to visit a century ago. Thus visitors may visually jump through time by reading Fujianese blocks as the bustling, abundant physical analogue to a past Jewish immigrant tenement

streetscape. People experience the past in the present, an obvious formulation but one that can challenge Museum history, guides, and neighborhood residents in different ways to articulate the stakes of visitors substituting visions of the past for the present streetscape. Arguments about commensurability in regard to ethnicity, race, and immigration, as they pertain to the Museum and the Lower East Side, need to be informed not only by the history of the neighborhood, but also by related debates such as those on Jews and Chinese as model minorities, and on the voluntary nature of first destination urban immigrant enclaves. (Lin 1994, Kwong 1998, Schwarcz 1998, King 2000, Zhou 2004, Roediger 2005, Wong 2006).<sup>287</sup>

The Museum (2002, 2005b) launched its *Piecing it Together* garment trade apartment tour even as its issues with 99 Orchard escalated in March of 2002. While the 9/11 attacks and its aftermath had caused an already declining downtown Chinatown garment trade to be devastated (Chan 2009), the Museum's tour content document prompts guides to say:

For immigrants, jobs in the needle trades are relatively easy to find. As you walk around the neighborhood, you might notice steam coming from a pipe near the window. That's a sign of a garment factory. Today, there are approximately 180 garment factories just on the Lower East Side. (3)

Where that figure came from is certainly not obvious. What the tour made clear was that indeed the Lower East Side's history was repeating itself: "Even though the immigrant groups have changed, the experience of tenements and the garment industry are much the same" (2002, 2005b) (3).

### **Heritage as Real Estate**

For the Tenement Museum's then primarily Jewish visitors, the Museum serves as a *lieu de mémoire*. In America's destination culture, it has become identified as a Jewish destination. By 1911, the densely settled Lower East Side—once known as the "Great New York Ghetto"—

was the world's largest Jewish city. The dynamic of its memory is complex, not least in relation to the disappearance of earlier European communities of origin, primarily through genocide. The neighborhood figures prominently in the collective memory of the American Jewish past as a place of origin (Rischin 1977, Diner 2000, Kugelmass 2000). As the visible public remnants of the Jewish Lower East Side have continued to shrink, the Museum has become a focus of what might fairly be called pilgrimage.

A general commodification of heritage (and of protest) is manifest on the Lower East Side as it is increasingly hollowed out as a place of memory in connection to ethnicity. It can be seen in practices of seeming resistance and commemoration. Pocketbooks and T-shirts adorned with Puerto Rican flags are commodified along with Jewish books and humor buttons. The Museum's garment trade tours tell visitors about the history of the Triangle Fire and ensuing street protests and rallies. Street art using a graffiti ethos brings visitors. Ethnic food is purveyed for local residents as well as for out-of-town visitors. And the local is leaky here, especially since so many residents—such as NYU students—are unlikely to stay long or to see themselves as living in an ethnic enclave.

But commodification is most salient where the stakes are highest: that is in real estate dealings. The Lower East Side's current ethnic communities all see their survival as dependent upon keeping and obtaining housing. Consumption and historic preservation are necessarily entwined in fund-raising and touring, as can be seen in contests for the moral high ground as to what is in the public or state interest. Frank Sanchis (2002)—the then president of New York's Municipal Art Society—stated in advocating for the Museum.

The uniqueness of this Museum lies in the authenticity and the integrity of its fabric, which merits, in fact demands, the highest degree of protection. The glory of the

Museum is the brilliance of its programming and interpretation to the public, which is without parallel in our nation .... The justification I feel for the use of eminent domain in this case, lies in the immediately adjacent nature of the space provided by 99 Orchard St. Because of this adjacency, both of these issues-the core quality of the Museum, the protection of its fabric and the enhancement of its programming are served. (1)

The irony that 99 Orchard Street was desirable for Museum programming precisely because it had been and could be further extensively renovated may have been lost on the writer. Its fabric had no integrity so to speak. Hence the Museum could do whatever it wanted to 99 Orchard, including making it handicapped accessible. Abram (2002) has explicitly noted that “The Museum needs 99 Orchard Street because it is a sister building and shares a party wall.” The relative ease and value of expanding next door was another part of the equation. Adjacency offered the hope of 99 Orchard Street sharing 97’s perceived authenticity in addition to its party wall, while removing any potential financial burdens, strictures and standards associated with landmark preservation.<sup>288</sup>

While much of the Museum’s funding, prestige and support depended on 97 Orchard being a National Historic Site, it is not obvious if it envisioned that 99 Orchard could potentially be included under that useful rubric. Not-for-profit institutions need visitors’ money both as a direct funding source (earned income) and as an inducement to crucial institutional and governmental support. Although the Lower East Side itself in 2008 was listed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of the eleven most endangered places in America, money has not come into the neighborhood for its own preservation. Instead, money has gone into remaking Downtown into a destination.

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation’s (LMDC) 9/11 funded allocations show that money has gone to support the development and expansion of cultural institutions

—including the Tenement Museum—so as to attract more visitors and residents to Downtown. For instance, in 2006, the Museum received a \$1,000,000 grant from the LMDC, a subsidiary of the ESDC, to fund exhibitions of its long-planned Irish apartment (the Moores), its downstairs (German) Schneider’s Saloon, and a courtyard renovation, allowing it to offer two new tours.<sup>289</sup>

Meanwhile pressure on housing and small ethnic businesses makes it increasingly harder for those who are already there to remain in place. Although Chinatown received very little in the way of post 9/11 allocations, money was allocated for a large Chinatown visitor kiosk (Chan 2009).<sup>290</sup> Jason Hackworth (2002) astutely defined gentrification as “the production of urban space for progressively more affluent users” (815). Gentrification in the Lower East Side has its own particular aesthetic—it is not just a question of Smith’s (1996) revanchist city cleaning things up for the benefit of visitors. As Chris Mele (2000) has shown, the neighborhood’s hip grunge ethos and the authenticity of its older tenement buildings and immigrant/migrant communities can form part of its attraction as the neighborhood goes upscale. That process was exemplified in the story of 99 Orchard Street, to which I now return.

### **Good Neighbors**

The Museum’s behavior in 2001 and 2002 seems related to an institutional insistence that its formula in salvaging the past and attracting more outside visitors translated into a growth in empathic moral thinking. Hence, the Museum’s moral norms were not seen as simply self-interested, but as representing a larger trade-off, prioritizing visitor sentiment and the commemoration of past immigrants over the livelihood and housing of local residents in whose name it ostensibly also spoke. As a sympathetic historical preservation report from a university graduate school of design program described it, “The increasing number of visitors has led the

museum to seek expansion, creating conflict with the community neighbors it seeks to represent” (Cynthia Silva and Kelly Wong 2007) (27).

Lower East Side residents and organizations deemed the Museum a bad neighbor in a neighborhood where neighborliness is a famously invoked value. Gendered neologisms such as “di neksdorike” (the next door neighbor, female) were coined locally in the past migration depicted by the Museum; they describe a new type of relationship that crowded urban life valorized. As historian Paula Hyman (1991, 1998) noted, “The historical experience of immigrant Jewish women embraced work and family, politics and social welfare, friendship groups and neighborhood” (330). Being called a good neighbor is high praise indeed, an articulation of a sought after standard that inspires trust in promoting daily understandings of conviviality (Gilroy 2004).

The moral standard of the “good neighbor” is important whether applied to everyday life on the Lower East Side or to the neighborhood as a topos of the imaginary. Hence, the wounding headline from the *Jewish Daily Forward* that said it all: “Immigration Museum Called Bad Neighbor in Expansion Battle” (Keys 2002). Seeking to invoke eminent domain against its own “neksdorike,” the Museum lost moral credibility as well as support from inside and outside of the area. Its authenticity as a museum with attested institutional values of advocating for immigrants and for its neighborhood could be contested due to the “un-neighborly” way in which the Museum violated publicly subscribed to norms.

### **Pragmatic Moral Benefits**

From this story, we might pragmatically conclude that empathy, or tolerance, or anything touted as a moral benefit may need to be readily evident to its ostensible beneficiaries

and to those in whose name it is articulated.<sup>291</sup> I return then to my related, first moral question: How are living communities represented (or occluded) at 97 Orchard Street? I follow Sayer (2004) in viewing the resort to moral discourses by actors as claiming no ground higher than that of seeking to do the “right” thing. In this view, “the normative” is understood as dependent on existing webs of relationships and obligations.

Moral norms are often articulated as though they were socially self-evident. Hence, the contextualized contestation of moral norms within economic dealings provides particular insight into the dynamics of the articulation of such norms. They are articulated and invoked precisely because contestation pushes such articulations to the fore, and thus their potential use in shaping economic discourses comes into play in a heightened fashion. Nonetheless, when most everyone—including myself—is an actor in a drama called tourism and gentrification, an ambivalence in regard to consumption and production may very much be in order as we attempt what Caton (2012) calls “an analysis of the importance of value-engagement in our field with regard to the ideological and political-economic realities that characterize our location as workers in the tourism academy” (1908).

Answers to such questions, may hinge to a large degree, on how contested moral norms become expressed and wielded locally—and to what effect. Pragmatic outrage may provide both an effective and affective resort allowing for local agency, particularly when calling institutions to task by pointing out contradictory aspects of their self-attested moral values. In this case, the issue of representation was raised to the foreground at 99 Orchard and its prioritization at 103 Orchard has remained an issue for the Museum.

## 103's Representations

But the Museum has come back. In 2002, the *Los Angeles Times* had hinted that the Museum had other choices: “While Abram insists she must have 99 Orchard St., others ask why the museum couldn’t have looked for tenement property elsewhere” (Getlin 2002) (A.14). Indeed, shortly after losing on 99 Orchard, the Museum bought a larger building on its block to mainly house its offices.<sup>292</sup> By 2007, the Museum had already fully embarked on the quiet acquisition of 103 Orchard—a far more expensive, much larger Old Law tenement building located down the block at the busy corner of Orchard and Delancey. Community opposition was negligible: it happened at a time when the block’s gentrification seemed all but inevitable. The Museum’s Sadie Samuelson Levy Immigrant Heritage Center (popularly known as the Visitor Center) opened at 103 Orchard Street on September 20, 2011. Nonetheless, one hundred percent smooth sailing is not guaranteed *a priori* for 103 Orchard, since the fate of the building’s remaining residential tenants will be of interest to community activists.

In another shift, the Museum’s current website and outdoor tours sympathetically point out gentrification as a threat to the built environment and residents, with the Museum portrayed as a stakeholder interested in preserving that past and in protecting low-income residents. Yet the Museum is increasingly an actor in this escalating neighborhood drama called “gentrification” as its footprint has grown. Museum-owned buildings are surrounded in turn by nearby upscale eateries, boutiques, art galleries, and chic condominiums—often housed in renovated tenements. That it goes mainly unremarked that tenements are now seen as historic and literally precious—to use Rabinowitz’s term—is also a sign of changed times.

Here then are some answers supplied by the Museum concerning its plans. What the Museum did clearly understand by early 2002 was that given its oblique approach, its vulnerability touched on the question of who represented today's immigrants. Therefore, in a press interview and letter, Abram (2002) promised that at 99 Orchard Street, the Tenement Museum would: "Fully integrate the interpretation of immigrants past with that of contemporary immigrants and migrants" (2). By 2009 after Abram had left the Museum, Vice President Barry Roseman softened that commitment by stating that for 103 Orchard: "we are going to consider telling the stories of immigrant groups that came to this country after 1935" (Lo-Down TV 2009).

Nonetheless the Museum seems to have made plans to do just this at 103 Orchard. By September 7, 2011 the LMDC had awarded it \$400,000 for "Exhibit development for three historic apartments; a Jewish Refugee Apartment, a Chinese Immigrant Apartment, and a Puerto Rican Migrant Apartment" (Bloomberg 2011). A visitor orientation movie now comfortably juxtaposes more recent Dominican and Cantonese immigrant stories with those of Jewish and Italian families. Other changes implemented by new Museum management have helped improve relations with local groups. As it becomes officially more responsive to the neighborhood's remaining ethnic communities, the Museum appears simultaneously to be more explicit about the area's Jewish past. Moreover, its immigrant theme if anything is becoming more universalized into an American narrative, all suggesting that the tensions between these various claims for articulation remain contingent rather than absolute.

Nonetheless, this contingency contains distinct echoes of the Museum's past. 103 Orchard's construction scaffolding was covered with bright posters confidently announcing its

then new slogan “Revealing the Past, Challenging the Future.” Interestingly enough, the Museum’s acquisition of 103 Orchard was also quietly supported by an ESDC entity that obligingly issued triple tax-exempt financing bonds to:

Enhance the quality of cultural life in the City. Currently, the Museum has approximately 125,000 visitors per year. Due to space constraints, it also turns away 10,000-12,000 visitors per year. The availability of tax-exempt bonds will allow the Museum to admit more visitors, as well as to expand the range of immigrant experiences interpreted by the Museum to include Chinese, Dominican and African-American. (New York City Industrial Development Agency 2007) (4)

That New York City’s cultural life would be enhanced by the addition of 12,000 visitors, who would be able to see representations of “Chinese, Dominican and African-American life,” suggests the continued interpretive centrality of ethnic households. It suggests that the Museum in yet another interpretive shift had envisioned quite different ethnic household priorities than it did in its 2011 LMDC grant.<sup>293</sup> Not least, it suggests that the Museum and state entities saw the value of tying economic support to a broader representation of immigration.

The Museum, of course, had run a large, successful “Orchard Street” capital campaign to fund the project that went ahead despite the economic downturn. As with 99 Orchard, New York City directly contributed money: in this case \$2,000,000.<sup>294</sup> The \$15,000,000 in tax free bonds was used for Museum mortgages, and the bottom floor Visitor Center and Museum Shop build outs. That money did not go to cover the cost of upstairs new apartments. By 2011, the Museum had 173,000 visitors; it was thus growing along the lines earlier envisioned by Abram.

103 Orchard did mark an important change, if not necessarily a challenge. As its November 11, 2011 opening day Museum Shop blog picture below shows, its aesthetic is not preservationist. The bottom floors were “reskinned” in glass to incorporate over 10,000 square

feet for the large Museum Shop, Visitor Center, and conference and class space. Since it was expressly bought to be renovated for those purposes, 103 Orchard was not landmark material.

Nevertheless, its architect did in fact attempt to retain much of the building's past look and feel on its upper floors and basement. When asked in an interview about the choices made in refurbishing the building vis-à-vis preservation, architect Nicholas Leahy, said "It's the idea of creating a sort of a portal."



In the same interview, David Eng, the Museum's vice president of public affairs, responded:

"The reality is it generates revenue for the museum'..., the original building will be preserved as much as possible, including the tenants living on the top three floors" (Hedlund 2011).<sup>295</sup> For 103 Orchard, a sense of a building functioning as a time machine was transferred into a renovation more visibly tied to upscale commodification. Apparently, without intending any irony, Leahy said in another interview: "It's a great opportunity to keep the regeneration of the Lower East Side going,' ... 'You can turn the city into a museum or you can keep it lively.'" (Bortolot 2011)

### **Updating a Formula for a New Tenement**

Two years ago, referring to its long proposed new ethnic family households, I wrote "I do think this will at long last happen in 103's new residential apartments, as well as in exhibits in 97 Orchard Street's commercial space ... that is once the Museum figures out where the money will come from" (Sampson 2014). That answer has now become far more obvious and is connected to state support for preservation and tourism to fund the Museum's expansion as a National Park Service Affiliate. The Museum is very close to getting a bill through Congress to

extend its landmarked 97 Orchard National Parks Site to include a 103 Orchard already re-constructed to suit growing visitor needs. An additional 10,000 square feet will then be added to accommodate the newly re-created apartments.

The Museum clearly wants it both ways: the proposed amendment to its earlier 1998 National Site designation (Public Law 105-378) bill cites 103 Orchard's landmark credentials by specifying that "103 Orchard was declared a contributing property in the Lower East Side National Historic District listed on both the National and New York State Registers of Historic Places."<sup>296</sup> Indeed, a federal Lower East Side Historic District was declared in 2000 (Dewan 2001). Since it had no strictures vis-à-vis development, demolition or district maintenance this meant that the Museum could "reskin" a once relatively intact 103 Orchard into a hybrid building that could no longer qualify as a contributing property.<sup>297</sup>

The already successful House bill (2013b) takes the preservationist language associated with 97 Orchard to extend its landmarking designations—and most especially its National Parks Site affiliation to 103 Orchard.

(b) Definitions.--Section 102 of Public Law 105-378 (112 Stat. 3396) is amended-- (1) in paragraph (1), by striking "Lower East Side Tenement found at 97 Orchard Street" and inserting "Lower East Side Tenements found at 97 and 103 Orchard Street"; ...

(c) Establishment... is amended by striking "the Lower East Side Tenement at 97 Orchard Street, in the City of New York, State of New York, is designated" and inserting "the Lower East Side Tenements at 97 and 103 Orchard Street, in the City of New York, State of New York, are designated" [a national historic site.]

In effect, the Museum chose to legislatively advocate for the extension of 97 Orchard's aura to a newer tenement that it had already turned into a visitor center. After years of promoting 97 Orchard's historic uniqueness, it wanted to legally add a non-landmarked 1888 building to its older 1863 tenement NPS affiliate site. Crain's then soon reported:

...the Lower East Side Tenement National Historic Site Amendments Act, will allow the museum's expansion, enabling the local cultural institution to better serve visitors.

The museum, currently located at 97 Orchard St., expects construction for the 10,000-square-foot expansion at 103 Orchard St., two doors from its current location, to begin in 2016. The expansion will cost approximately \$8 million, according to Mr. Vogel. The museum currently has \$3 million from the city of New York and private investors, and is in the midst of a campaign to raise the rest. (Iftikhar 2014)

To “better serve visitors” private, city and state funding have been made available for its further expansion. Unsurprisingly, many of the major cultural institutions seen as economic engines for Lower Manhattan are tied to a destination tourism in which both commemoration and entertainment are expected parts of a historic and contemporary mix. Local “real” stories thus are offered up as national stories for international and heritage audiences alike. Hence the question of whose local story is represented where does not disappear when that story becomes attenuated into a story of “all immigrants.”

The House bill introduced by Congressperson Nydia M. Velázquez (2013b) was approved on December 13, 2013. She then issued an official press release:

“Whether it is Chinatown, Little Italy, or émigrés from Germany, immigration has made New York a more vibrant place, offering invaluable economic and cultural contributions, while shaping the city's identity,” said Velázquez (D-NY). “The LES Tenement museum [sic] honors these communities and pays tribute to the challenges they overcame when arriving in a new nation and city.”

.... Morris Vogel, President of the Museum [stated] “We'll use the site to tell the stories of real Puerto Rican and Chinese families— and Jewish Holocaust survivors—who lived and worked toward the American dream on the Lower East Side. Their stories are a critical chapter in our nation's vibrant melting pot history.” (Velázquez 2013)

An older melting pot formulation, that tied overcoming hardship in the Lower East Side to achieving the American dream, has returned. This current validation of a past mass immigration seeks to incorporate a current era of migration on a flattened out, *quid pro quo*

basis. In that reformulation, migrants, immigrants, émigrés, and survivors are now all eligible to join a resurrected melting pot's celebration. Plentiful ironies abound, not the least of which is that it will have taken almost thirty years to open the Museum's apartment doors to a Chinese household. In 2016, an apartment will be interpreted to reflect the 1965 changes in U.S. immigration law that allowed Chinese immigration for the first time since 1882 (other than the strictly delimited 1946 Chinese War Bride Act). For the first time, "internal" (rather than cross-border) migrants are not merely supplemental as the inclusion of Puerto Ricans shows.<sup>298</sup>

Indeed, the introduction of "real Puerto Rican and Chinese families— and Jewish Holocaust survivors" at 103 Orchard represents a clever interpretive expansion of 97 Orchard's ethnic household formula into the post-War era, a sure sign that those years are now viewed as history by a new generation of anticipated visitors. Again, at 103 Orchard residential apartments will remain the prioritized space for telling the personal "real" stories of ethnic households associated with a building. Likewise, their American dream will require showing ancestors as surmounting initial hardship as a pre-requisite for the eventual success of descendants. As the pending Senate (2013a) bill shows, storytelling in place remains the necessary glue for visitors who tour one or more historic buildings framed by ethnicity:

...Congress finds that--

(1) the Lower East Side Tenement Museum ... was founded in 1988 and has, for the past 25 years, preserved and interpreted the history of immigration through the personal experiences of generations of newcomers who settled in and built lives on Manhattan's Lower East Side, the iconic immigrant neighborhood of the United States;...

(3) to interpret at the site the stories of Holocaust survivors, Puerto Rican migrants, and post-1965 Chinese immigrants;

(a) Findings- Section 101(a)(4) of Public Law 105-378 (112 Stat. 3395) is amended by striking `the Lower East Side Tenement at 97 Orchard Street in New York City is an

outstanding survivor' and inserting `the Lower East Side Tenements at 97 and 103 Orchard Street in New York City are outstanding survivors'."

I anticipate that the Museum will have little trouble finding the remaining funding for its expansion now that the Lower East Side has two "outstanding survivors" who have succeeded in outliving their erstwhile immigrant neighborhood by telling its story to visitors. After all, we're all finally "history."

## **In Conclusion**

This thesis has used 97 Orchard Street as a prism to trace and interrogate how history is produced, displayed, received and interpreted spatially through a Lower East Side immigrant building whose tours provide a material window into discursive practices of place. Among other things, I have argued that the Tenement Museum's various interpretations oscillate among different scales of representation to harness a Jewish collective memory that points to an American immigrant place of origin (and implicitly to the Great New York Ghetto). In probing how the Museum interpreted its neighborhood and building to provide a visitor experience that references a broader multi-ethnic, historic Lower East Side, I have asked how its mobilizations of history in representing that immigrant past connect the Museum to the present.

My work raises a number of issues. One claim I make in conclusion is that the Museum's initial interpretive schemes for its building—including its earliest residential stories—simultaneously failed to give full voice to a fuller range of the Lower East Side's groups (historic and post-1935) and undercut its Jewish specificity. I connect this in turn to the issues of representation that arose when an activist museum subsequently found it hard to cordon off a local immigrant present from the historic past it re-created in place expressly for visitors. As I have argued further, the question of whose story gets told in 97 Orchard's privileged residential spaces has again shifted, as a post-9/11 Lower East Side further hollows out into a place of memory, with hyper-gentrification accompanying Downtown's shift into a destination. And that

claim has much to do with the nature of state support for museums, as Downtown mixes entertainment and commemoration in the name of something touted as “revitalization.”

My work’s potential contributions depend on the interdisciplinary integration of different ways of thinking about how storied places intersect with stories as history. There is little inevitable in the determination of how stories are told about a building; if stories cut across the map, they can also sometimes get stuck in place. I see this work as a case study in the accretion of narratives in place, how they become hardwired in ways that close off the potential multi-vocality and contingency of what we call history. Narratives of landmarked buildings are expressly constructed to allow these structures to be carved out and placed in the past. This is part and parcel of the process by which they are made newly precious, in a recycling of heritage that often pulls unabashedly from formulas associated with collective memory in alignment with aspirational national goals.

Salvaged landmarks such as 97 Orchard Street assume the unbearable weight of representing a past world in its fullness, not least by explaining its contemporary relevance. In doing so, the Tenement Museum has re-created in 97 Orchard Street’s six upstairs apartments its own miniature historical geography of Lower East Side immigrant ethnicity. Although its powerful tours became popularly enshrined, its building’s narratives were not inevitable. Hence, I found myself wanting to de-mystify preservation processes and living history goals by describing how a historic building is constructed to function as a time machine that enables travel in place by allowing travel back in time.

In this work, I have used the definition of historicity that seems to most neatly capture Abram’s view of history. The Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology defines historicity as “the use of

an understanding of history as a basis for trying to change it.” 97 Orchard Street thus appears as a bid to trump time by capturing a place. There is a prevalent temporal confusion as to the Lower East Side’s identity. This confusion inheres to the mixed forces of nostalgia, tourist-oriented preservation, real-estate oriented gentrification, and larger capital flows. Nowhere, perhaps, is it more evident than in a building whose narratives are at once fixed in a past era, and intended as a device for timelessly describing the neighborhood where it is situated and which is now a visitor destination. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett says, the museum effect bleeds both ways, affecting real life. People who live in the Lower East Side increasingly describe it as a stage set.

New narratives are full of re-used if incommensurable elements and messages that become the stuff of place. If the performance on tours of these assembled parts—these twigs and feathers of de Certeau’s magpies’ nest—is not seamless, neither does it bother most visitors. To the contrary, the Museum is quite successful at what it does: offering tours that connect the public with the stories of erstwhile immigrants. While contestation potentially makes visible problems of conflation of past and present and various ensuing contradictions, its outcome is never inevitable.

The Museum’s underlying claim to be a practitioner of History necessarily involves questions of practices, of how history is made or produced, and in this case commodified as tours for public consumption. Thus, the Museum’s overt use of history opens up larger interdisciplinary debates about migration, memory, historicity and heritage, the urban built environment, and immigrant acculturation in space as well as time. My intention has been to

construct a non-linear narrative that looks at multiple junctures without making any one choice retroactively determinate.

The Museum's implicit policy of "Inspiring Support" for current immigrants is a key element of its self-understanding as a promoter of empathy and tolerance. Its descriptions of the past are prescriptions for the future. Yet, if tracing the Museum's archives affords insight into its activist project of making use of the past, I personally find it more compelling to read that liberal project of heritage as coexisting within a larger commemorative context, one that memorializes a mainly Jewishly-associated past Lower East Side by rhetorically encouraging its integration into American heritage narratives.

One Museum message is that "History Repeats Itself" on the Lower East Side, as seen in immigrant waves, housing, and labor. That synchronicity of place does not allow for multivocality concerning an underlying focus of the Museum's narrative emphasis: ethnicity. Issues of representation and the observer's gaze are uncomfortably visible in tour scripts. The fragmentary display at the Museum relied for its backdrop on the visibility of a very different migrant community that is under tremendous housing pressure. The Museum gives every appearance of taking seriously the claim that what it is doing is History. But much like a building, history is not something that stands by itself. Questions of context bring us back not only to the question of how history is produced for visitors in ways that not only flatten and wield considerable ideological and affective heft, but to the related question of how tourism itself is tied to gentrification. The story of the way the last and loudest voice has grown to serve more visitors is undoubtedly, in complex ways that have been detailed here, one that provides

visitors with a compelling sense of access to a genuine immigrant past. Yet that story is at the same time inseparable from the disappearance of communities and their built environment.

## Appendix A: 99 Orchard Street, 2002

### Next Door Neighbors

A protest at 99 Orchard Street against the Tenement Museum's proposed expansion by invoking eminent domain. Pink sign reads: "Don't ERASE Living History with Artificial History."



Figure 9 – 99 Orchard Street, April 28, 2002  
Tenant Net Site: <http://tenant.net/alerts/lestm/rally0002.html>

## Backyards: 97 and 99 Orchard Street, facing Allen Street

97 Orchard Street's backyard was renovated to put in reconstructed privies and a clothesline. 99 Orchard Street's renovation included enlarging the Congee Village Restaurant.



Figure 10 – Museum Clothesline, July 21, 2010



Figure 11 – Tenement Museum Snapshot Photo Tour, July 21, 2010

## Appendix B: An Ethnic Tour

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Figure 12 – Docent Encyclopedia with Familial Apartments & Ethnic Groups Topics  
<http://www.tenement.org/encyclopedia/toc.htm> [1/30/2011]

# Museum Gift Shop; NYC & Ethnically Themed Gifts (2011)

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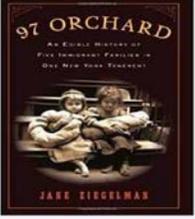
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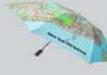
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Figure 13 – "Of Jewish Interest, Of Irish Interest, Of Italian Interest"... [http://shop.tenement.org/store/\[1/30/2011\]](http://shop.tenement.org/store/[1/30/2011])

# Museum Tours with Ethnicity Spelled Out (2010)

<p><b>GETTING BY</b> Visit the homes of German-Jewish &amp; Italian Catholic families surviving the Panic of 1873 and the Great Depression.</p> <p>1HR / AGES 8+ / 2ND FLOOR</p> <p><b>SELECT</b> <a href="#">MORE ABOUT</a> →</p>	<p><b>PIECING IT TOGETHER</b> See the homes &amp; garment shop of Jewish families who lived in the tenement during the "great wave" of immigration to America.</p> <p>1HR / AGES 8+ / 3RD FLOOR</p> <p><b>SELECT</b> <a href="#">MORE ABOUT</a> →</p>	<p><b>THE MOORES: AN IRISH FAMILY IN AMERICA</b> Visit the 1869 home of the Moores, Irish immigrants coping with the death of a child.</p> <p>1 HR / AGES 12+ / 4TH FLOOR</p> <p><b>SELECT</b> <a href="#">MORE ABOUT</a> →</p>	<p><b>Ticket Prices</b> Adults: \$20 Students: \$15 Seniors(65+): \$15 Members: Free</p> <p><a href="#">Buy Tickets Online</a> →</p> <p>To Buy Tickets By Phone, call 866-606-7232</p> <p>Please note that there are no exchanges or refunds on tickets purchased.</p> <p><b>Museum Shop Hours</b> 10am - 6pm 7 days a week Location: 108 Orchard Street</p> <p><b>Open Every Day except for</b></p>
 <p><b>CONFINO FAMILY LIVING HISTORY PROGRAM</b> Meet Victoria Confino, a teen-age, Greek Sephardic immigrant played by a costumed interpreter. Set during 1916. Perfect for families.</p>	 <p><b>IMMIGRANT SOLES: A NEIGHBORHOOD WALKING TOUR</b> Visit Lower East Side sites important to immigrants past &amp; present. This tour does not enter the tenement at 97 Orchard.</p>	 <p><b>NEXT STEPS: A NEIGHBORHOOD WALKING TOUR</b> Explore Lower East Side life from 1935 to present in this walking tour that crosses Delancey.</p>	

Figure 14 – Indoor and Outdoor Ethnic Tours ...<http://tenement.org/tours.php> [1/30/2011]

## Appendix C: Tour “Script”

*Piecing it Together* Tour outline page (2005) (2). Group Management Instructions are on the left side. Questions are in purple; red shows location. The first page notes: “The following document serves as the outline for the “Piecing It Together” tour. As such, it is not a script. It is an informational tool for learning and imparting information in a consistent manner. Please note that there are remarks in the margin.” The last purple question asks the guide to say: “By looking around, which groups currently live on the Lower East Side?”<sup>299</sup>

 <p>The educator should clearly announce the beginning of the tour to both rooms. Also check with the Visitor Center staff to check how many people should be on the tour.</p>  <p>Clearly introduce yourself and your position in the museum, and articulate that you will be leading the “Piecing It Together” tour.</p> <p>Ask visitors if they can hear you clearly, and let them know there is assistive listening equipment available in the Visitor Center.</p> <p>Organize your group so that there is sufficient room on the sidewalk for pedestrians to pass by.</p> <p>Encourage visitors to ask questions throughout the tour.</p>	<p><b><u>Tour Objectives:</u></b></p> <p>Tour will enable visitors to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand how clothing was/is made and who was/is involved in that process.</li> <li>• Discern the different meanings of the word sweatshop past and present.</li> <li>• Discover how the garment industry provided/provides opportunity as well as abuse for immigrants past and present.</li> <li>• Understand how the notion of what is acceptable in terms of home and workplace has changed over time.</li> <li>• Appreciate how work and housing conditions on the Lower East Side and in Tenements like 97 Orchard Street sparked national discourse and reform.</li> <li>• Appreciate the importance of community connections, particularly to immigrants.</li> <li>• Understand the different perspectives about how to improve the garment industry</li> </ul> <p><b>Begin tour in front of the mural at 90 Orchard Street (10 minutes)</b></p> <p><b><u>Introduction to Museum emphasizing the Lower East Side, immigration, and the NY garment industry</u></b></p> <p>The Lower East Side Tenement Museum was chartered in 1988. The heart of the Museum is the tenement at 97 Orchard Street. Located on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, 97 Orchard was home to an estimated 7,000 people from over 20 nations from 1883 to 1935. Our mission is “to promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, a gateway to America.” The Tenement Museum is the only tenement in the United States to be preserved as a National Historic Landmark.</p> <p>Explain that the Tenement Museum offers three tours of restored apartments at 97 Orchard Street. This tour, <i>Piecing It Together</i>, will explore issues of affecting the garment industry.</p> <p> <b><u>Where are you all from?</u></b>  <b><u>What brings you to the Tenement Museum?</u></b>  <b><u>What words do you associate with tenements?</u></b>  <b><u>What do you think that the apartments will look like inside the museum’s tenement building?</u></b></p> <p>The Lower East Side of Manhattan has been home to immigrants, the garment industry, and tenements for years. Lower East Side streets, like Orchard and Broome, have provided homes, workspaces, and community connections for immigrants from around the world. In 2000, the City’s population was 37% immigrant. More than one out of three New Yorkers you meet were born in another country. Not since 1910 when 41% were foreign born, has New York City had such large proportion of immigrants.</p> <p> <b><u>By looking around, which immigrant groups currently live on the Lower East Side?</u></b></p>
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## Appendix D: Interpreting Ethnicity

### Heritage: Tenement Composite Households and Tours

Group	Family	Date	Scenario	Religion	Author(s)	Reviewers/ Secondary Authors	Sites	Tours Original Authors
German	The Frederick Schneiders	1870	Children rebelling, religion and Americanization	German Lutheran	Stanley Nadel, Jay P. Dolan, Annette Bus	Nora Faires	Bavaria, 1848, Kleindeutschland	Annette Bus with Stanley Nadel, Debra Bach
Chinese	The Chew-Chin Household	1900	Laundry Business and Bachelor Household	Confusian in some cases	Jack (Kuo Wei) Tchen	Philip P. Choy, Him Mark Lai	Taishan, Guandong Chinatown, Lower East Side	Peter Kwong with Vernon Takeshita
Free African	The Washingtons	1850	Unexpected Appearance of a "run-away" slave	Abyssinian Baptist Church	James Oliver Horton, Sherrill O. Wilson, Ira Berlin, Elizabeth Pleck	Ira Berlin, Elizabeth Pleck	Virginia, New York City	Sherrill O. Wilson
Eastern European	The Katzensteins	1895	Children rebelling, religion and Socialist politics	Jewish	Thomas Kessner	Michael Stanislawski, Jenna Weissman Joselit	Radomsk, Russia Lower East Side	Seth Kamil, Jenna Weissman Joselit, Naomi W. Cohen
Irish	The Reilleys	1867	Children rebelling, Irish nationalism	Catholic	Hasia Diner, Marion R. Casey, Kerby A. Miller	Carol Groneman	County Carlow, Ireland, a NYC tenement	Ed O'Donnell
Italian	The LaTorres	1910	Diphtheria, Children	Catholic	Betty Boyd, Caroli Rudolph J. Vecoli	Donna Gabaccia	Avellino (Mezzogiorno)	Betty Boyd Caroli with Ed O'Donnell

Amy Waterman's (1990) AHW NEH grant memo listed the historians who worked on the composite households whose drafts I read. I found other names by reading through earlier (unedited), well-crafted drafts and submissions by authors and contributors to "Six Heritage Tours of the Lower East Side." That book only cites its editor Ruth Limmer (1997) as the author

of record. An overlap of the historians enlisted for both heritage projects is apparent in the Museum's approach to Lower East Side ethnic "heritage" and households.

## **25 Nations**

While in 1990, the Museum's leadership referred to 97 Orchard Street's residents as coming from 25 nations, ~87% of residents were Jews from a pre-World War I empire: Russia (including the Pale of Settlement and Russian administered Poland); Austria-Hungary (including Austrian Poland, Romania, and Hungary), the Ottoman Empire, and Prussia/Germany. Many "Country" entries are not nation-states; there seem to be only ten such entities listed here. Dates and origins are problematic, e.g., is Hanover a country in 1905? In the original data sources, New York almost always refers to children of immigrants. The following pages are from a January 1990 memo from Ruth Abram (1990a) to Amy Waterman (AHW) (2-3).

YEAR OF RECORD	COUNTRY		
1870 -----	Austria Baden Bavaria Connecticut England Ireland New York Prussia Russia Washington, DC Wurttenberg	1885 -----	Austria England Germany New York Poland Russia
1872 -----	England Germany Greece Poland	1887 -----	New York Russia
1874 -----	Germany Hungary	1888 -----	Germany New York Roumania
1875 -----	Germany United States	1889 -----	New York
1876 -----	Germany Hungary	1900 -----	Austria Austro Poll Germany New York Poland Roumania Russia
1880 -----	Bavaria England Germany Hanover Hungary New York Poland Prussia Russia Spain	1905 -----	Austria Austro Poll Egypt Hanover Roumania Russia Russo Poll United States
1881 -----	Germany New York United States	1910 -----	Aust. Yiddish New York Russ Yiddish
1882 -----	Germany Poland	1915 -----	Austria Austro Poll England Roumania Russia Turkey United States
1883 -----	Germany New York Russia United States	1925 -----	Austria Geeeee Russia Saxonia Turkey United States
1884 -----	New York		

## Presumed Religion and Empire of Origin

Presumed Religion	%	Residents by 2014*	Origin
Jewish	86.88%	1,132	Pre-World War I: the Russian, Austrian Hungarian, Ottoman Empires, Prussia and other German-speaking regions
Catholic	4.24%	48	Bavaria, some other German-speaking regions, Ireland, Italy
Protestant	3.53%	46	Prussia , some other German-speaking regions
Unknown	5.91%	77	Not clear from data or simply says Place of Birth unknown
Total	100%	1,303	

### Default Assumptions

Early on, the Tenement Museum (2014a) created an “alumni” list that has been subsequently updated to show all known residents of 97 Orchard Street. The initial list had ~800 names associated with a Place of Birth (e.g., Germany), a Document Type (e.g., census), and a Date (e.g., 1880). To date 1,352 residents have been found out of an estimated 7,000. Why or how the Museum initially calculated 10,000 residents from 25 nations, or even its later figure of 7,000 residents from 20 nations is not clearly documented in its 2014 list. The sources used to find the data were described by, Marsha Saron Dennis (1995)—the Museum’s genealogist—in the Jewish Genealogical Society’s newsletter. Language and parents’ place of birth—census data available in later years—were not included on the Museum’s list. Neither was occupation although it is typically available from census data.

Presumed Religion was a category I added to the spreadsheet. I based it on names (many uniquely Jewish), the date the information was obtained, and the place of birth. The ability to create a presumed religion category required broad familiarity with genealogy and historical knowledge of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century migration from areas in which German, Yiddish or Ladino (the latter are uniquely Jewish languages) were spoken. If there was no unique or highly

probable indicator, I assigned an “Unknown” to presumed religion. I also correlated place of origin with Empires in existence based on the date given. I then excluded from the list all landlords, store owners, and property owners (e.g., John Jacob Astor and Trinity Church owned this land earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), unless that owner also lived in the building.

The religious pattern I found—using the Museum’s 2014 “alumni” list—appears to be consistent with some earlier findings concerning Jews. The building’s residents over time appear to be ~87% Jewish with the overwhelming majority coming from two pre-World I War empires: the Russian and Austrian-Hungarian. Since the Tenth Ward census data shows the building’s density was highest from 1880-1915, it can safely be said that most of the building’s Jewish population came from somewhere in the Russian Empire (e.g., Lithuania), followed by Romanians from the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The Ottoman Empire’s demise is seen in the migration of Jewish residents from what is already Greece and Turkey, since they arrive from 1910 through the 1920s. The documented residents from various German-speaking areas (not just Prussia) from 1863-1870 were Protestant, Catholic and Jewish (exact numbers are hard to determine though presumed religion can be assigned in some individual cases). It bears mentioning that Christian Prussians were not necessarily Protestants, meaning that Prussia also included the Catholic Rhineland as well as Catholics in its conquered Polish territories (n.b., Tenth Ward Prussians from 1860-1880 were likeliest to be Protestant).

There are 14 male residents who lived at 97 Orchard between 1865-1870 who fought in the Civil War who are listed as having been born in “Germany” or “Ireland.” They are not listed with wives and/or children. I was told by a historian that the Museum at one point had considered doing an Irish household based on those presumably unmarried soldiers. Also the

1930s shows a few Irish (some American born) single males, consistent with an overall search for cheaper housing in the Depression years. Those same years, show that three families with children had joined the small number of Mezzogiorno immigrants who had started living in the building in the 1920s.

97 Orchard Street—an 1863 Tenth Ward building in a Jewishly-associated part of Kleindeutschland—had attracted Jewish residents by 1870. By 1880, it was a “Jewish” building. Non-Jewish and Jewish residents are both part of 97 Orchard Street’s residential life at its beginning, and at its end when its vacancy rate was highest.

## Appendix E: Mapping the Lower East Side

### Google 2015 Map Lower East Side (current area in red; historic in black)

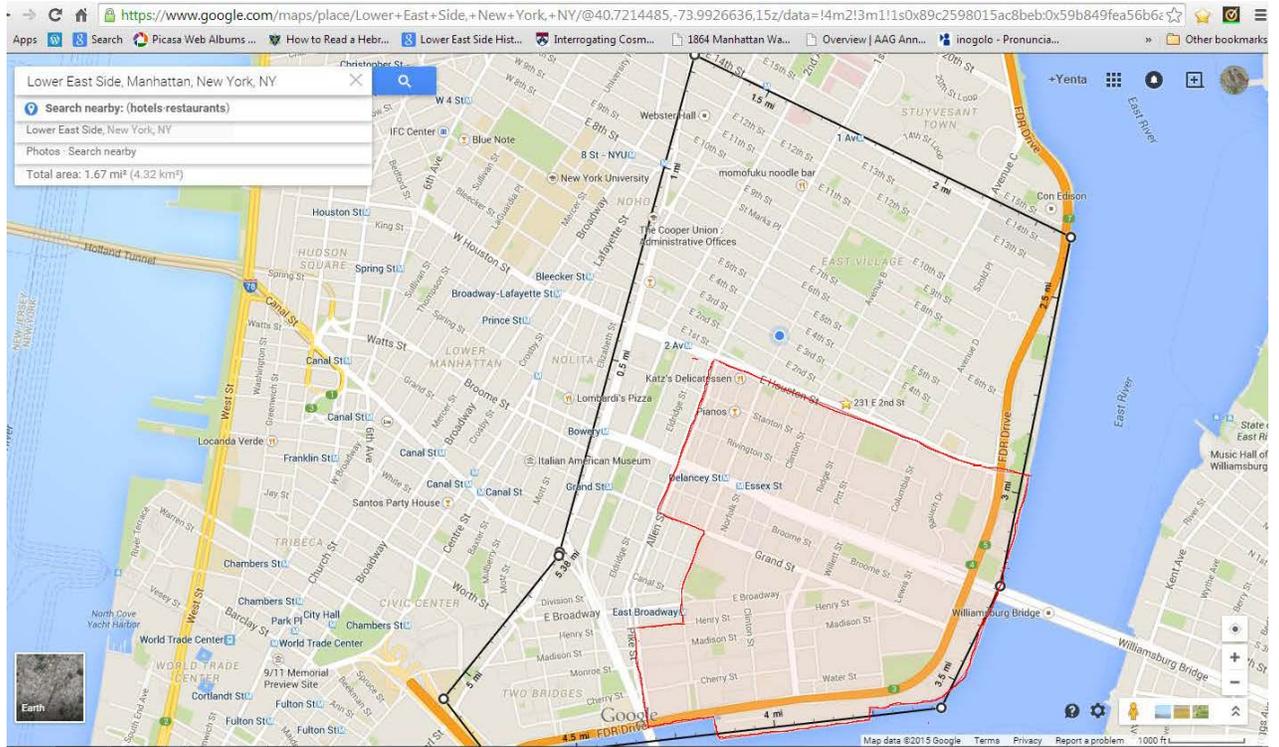


Figure 15 – A Shrunken Lower East Side Starts at E. Houston Street

Neil Smith's (1996a) Lower East Side Map (uses historic boundaries)

The new urban frontier 8

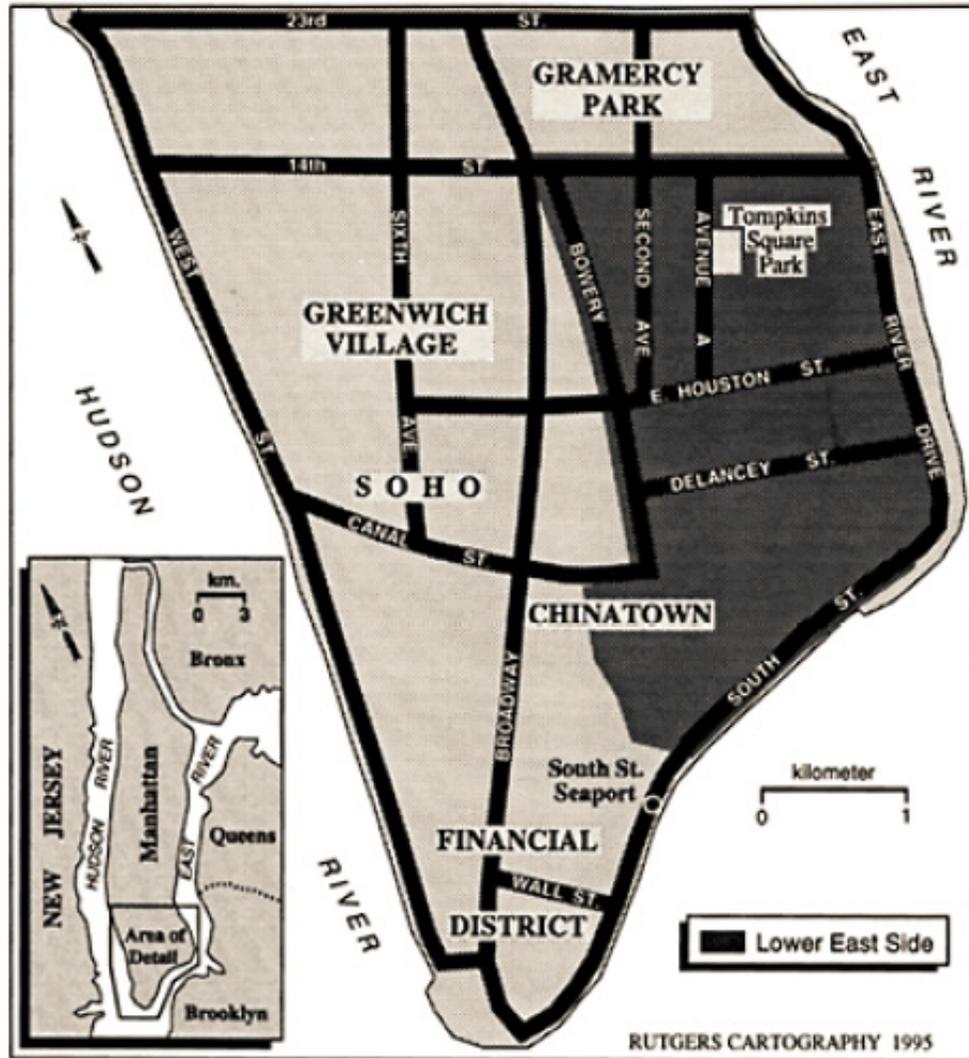
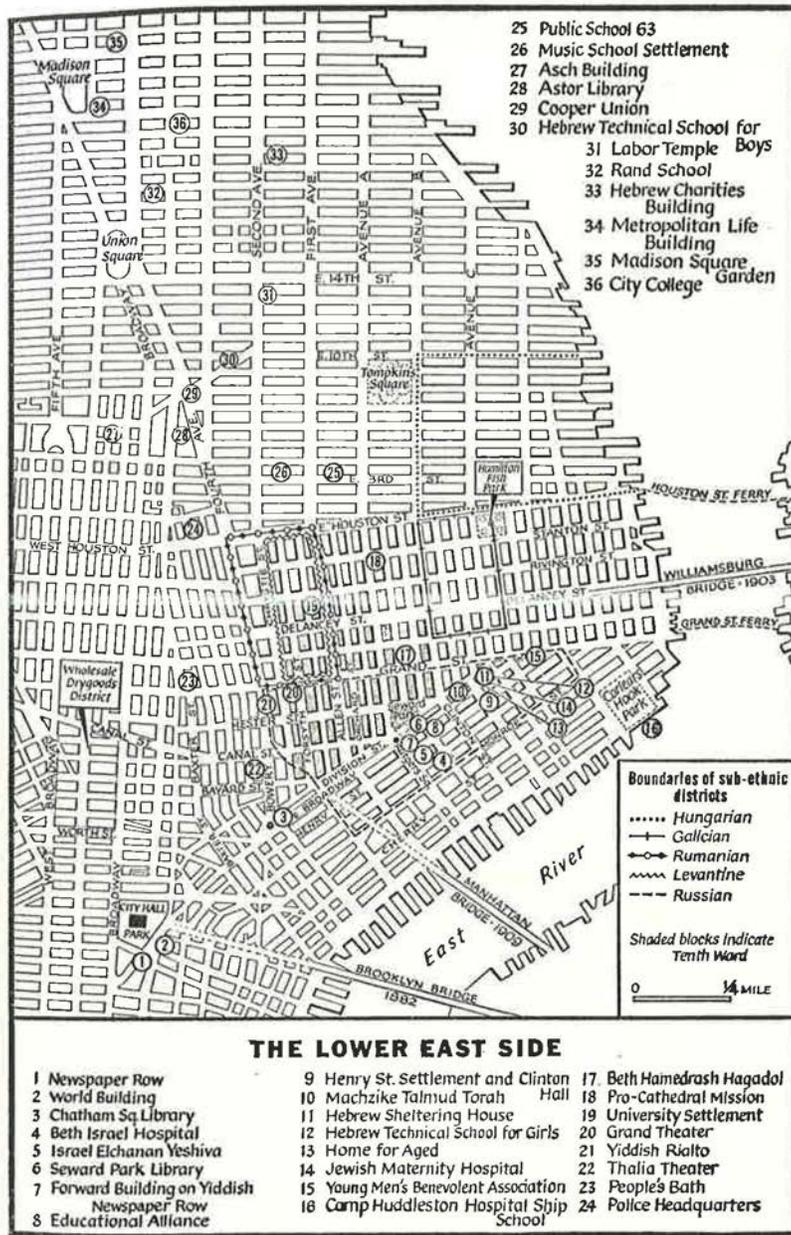


Figure 1.1 New York's Lower East Side

Figure 16 – Neil Smith: Historic Boundaries using 1900 borders up to 14<sup>th</sup> Street

Moses Rischin's (1977) map of historic Jewish Lower East Side boundaries



77

Figure 17 – Moses Rischin (1962) Lower East Map with Jewish “sub-ethnic districts”



**Lower Manhattan Ward boundaries (red numbers)**

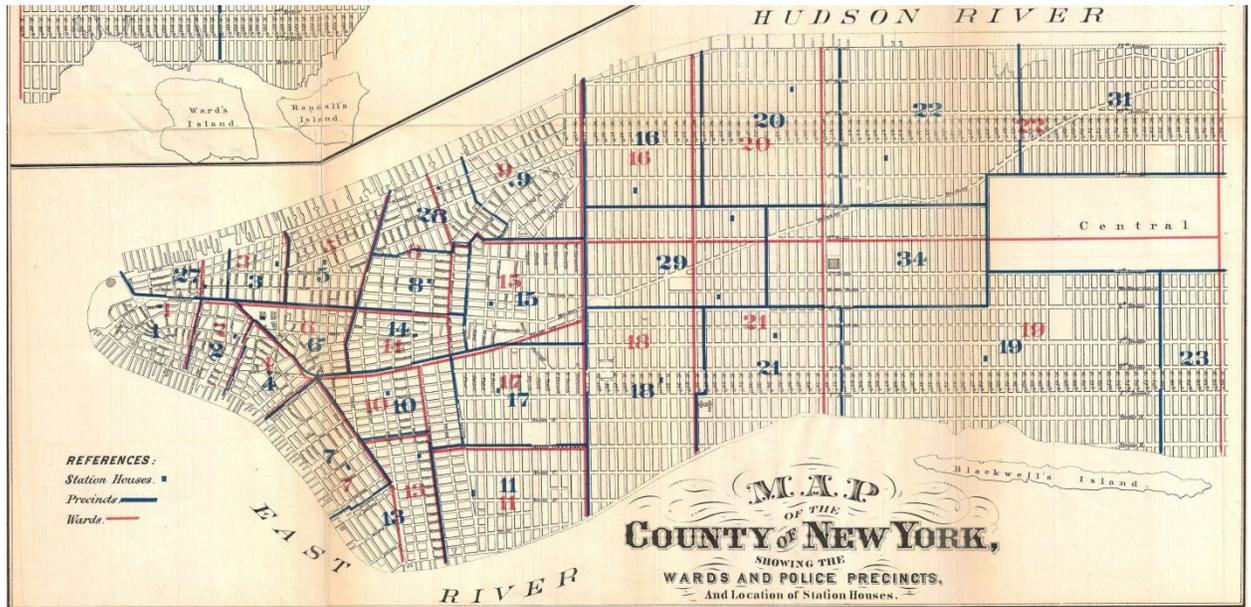


Figure 19 – 1871 Hardy Ward & Precinct Map with 10th Ward  
[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6b/1871\\_Hardy\\_Map\\_of\\_New\\_York\\_City\\_Police\\_Departments\\_-\\_Geographicus\\_-\\_NewYorkPoliceMap-hardy-1870.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6b/1871_Hardy_Map_of_New_York_City_Police_Departments_-_Geographicus_-_NewYorkPoliceMap-hardy-1870.jpg)

## Appendix F: A Commercial Orchard Street

### 97 Orchard as a Commercial Building

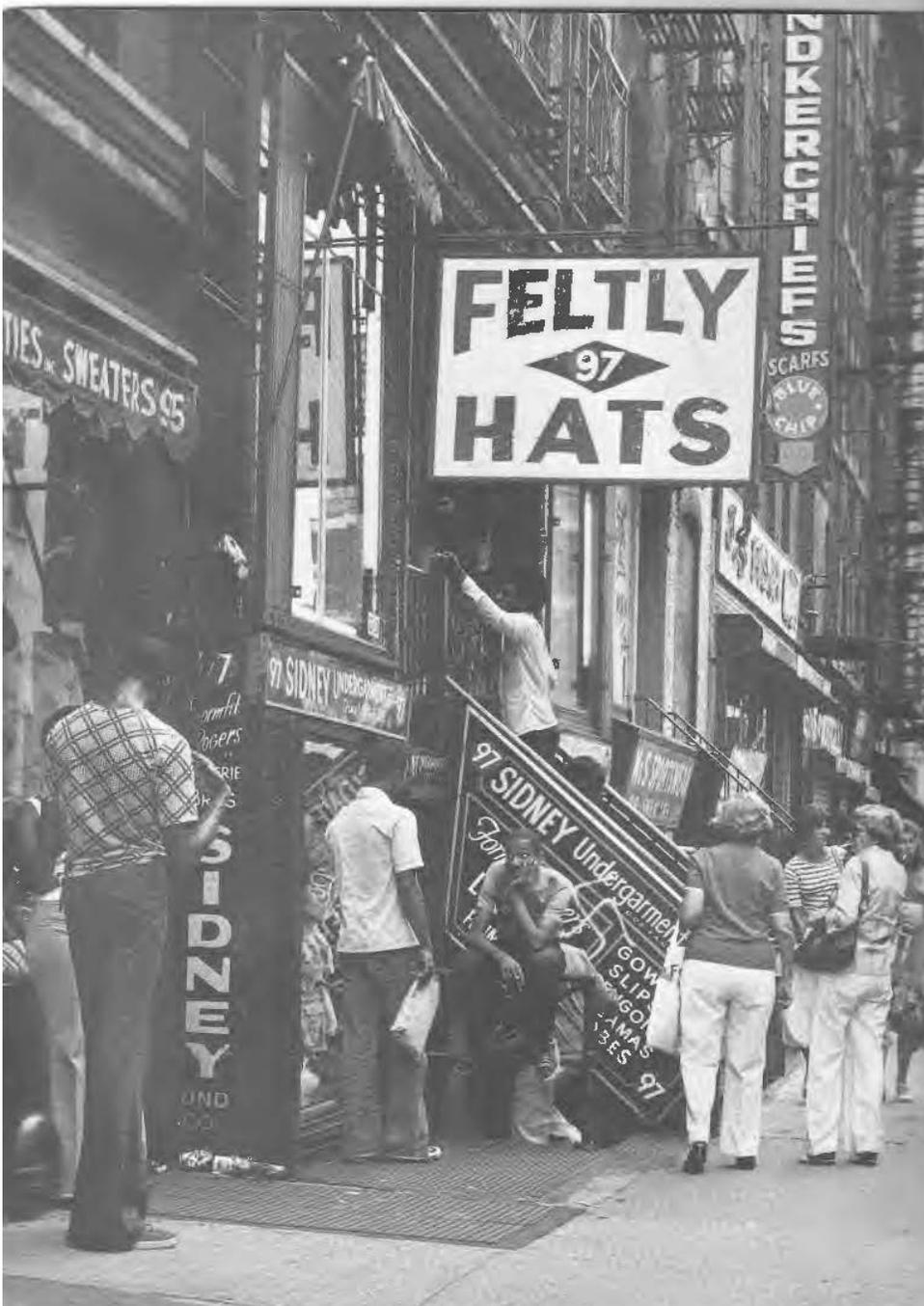


Figure 20 – Felty Hats 97 Orchard Street 1970s ...Sanders' frontispiece

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The Gumpertz family was discovered to be Jewish only after they had been installed as the German apartment but before the apartment was fully open to the public. As German speakers they had initially been presumed to be Lutheran even though a Museum historian had already estimated that approximately 20% of Kleindeutschland's population was Jewish.

<sup>2</sup>The Confino family described itself as emigrating from Castoria in the Ottoman Empire which changed hands in the Balkan wars of 1912. The Museum relatively recently obtained a half-million-dollar grant from a Greek foundation, and they became Greek rather than Turkish in various descriptions and tours. (Herald May 26, 2010)

<sup>3</sup>The Irish Moores were only added in 2008 though they were one of the first building groups researched from 1988 on. They lived in the building in 1869, for only a year. After its first decade, the building basically ceased housing Irish residents. According to the Museum's Docent Encyclopedia (2005), there were a total of 12 Irish families in the building for very brief periods of residence. However, other than the Moores, it does not appear that they were families with children, in other words, they appear to be single men (sometimes related), living in the same apartment. The Museum's historians realized this circa 1992.

<sup>4</sup>Preservationist Zoe Watnik (2013) has written:

The restored apartments are furnished with both reproduction objects and pieces from the period. The fully furnished spaces give the impression of a patina, yet are completely new fabrications, designed and decorated to suit the mission of the museum. These rooms as currently furnished never existed, but are instead recreations based on the standard historic reconstruction practices of the preservation field. (52)

<sup>5</sup>He mistakes the date of the building: it was built in 1863. Although many discrepancies are consistent with archival documents, this is not.

<sup>6</sup>TB (tuberculosis) was then known as the "Jewish tailor's disease" although its prevalence among East European Jews was relatively statistically low for a disease that was indeed at epidemic levels in New York at that time.

<sup>7</sup>A number of changes implemented by new Museum management have taken effect since 2008, when the Museum's founder and director of twenty years Ruth Abram departed. Most recently, the names and scripts of the following tours were officially changed on July 18, 2011. Getting By became Hard Times; Piecing it Together became Sweatshop Workers; The Moores: An Irish Family in America became Irish Outsiders; The Confino Family Living History Program became Victoria Confino. Outside tours also changed: Immigrant Soles: A Neighborhood Walking Tour became Outside the Home: A Neighborhood Walking Tour; Next Steps: A Neighborhood Walking Tour became Then and Now: A Neighborhood Walking Tour. Lastly, Taste of the Lower East Side: A Neighborhood Walking Tour was added. In its first decade, the Museum featured numerous outside tours, usually outsourced to others, particularly to Big Onion a well-known historical touring outfit mainly using graduate students as guides.

<sup>8</sup>That identification with newer immigrants is particularly emphasized in tours from 2002 on. See the Introduction and chapters one and five on the Museum's history of dealing with current local immigrants during that year. One historian said "my sense is that this is largely the result of a few key staff pushing Ruth [who were] interested in the ethics of social history and contemporary social justice and social movements, respectively."

<sup>9</sup>One historian described this as for "...educators in museum lingo, [as] an emphasis on 'activating' the tourgoer's existing knowledge and history."

<sup>10</sup>Ruth Abram was the founder and Director of the Tenement Museum from 1988 to 2008.

<sup>11</sup>As someone who is a guide for a local Jewish not-for-profit, I was curious enough to pay to take the Museum's indoor tours and take notice of its outdoors ones (1998-2009). Guides specialized in tightly and effectively interpreting the Lower East Side through 97 Orchard's historic stories. It was clear in soliciting visitor participation, that guides were trained to ask questions designed to elicit answers that pointed to similarities between prior immigrants and current immigrants. My overall sense prior to working on this project was that many guides were not familiar with the neighborhood as a living place, nor—even more problematically—as a historic one.

<sup>12</sup>A smart answer from a curator is quoted below concerning density (2009 Museum blog entry). It is worth comparing to a prior Museum 1993 answer (see note 8), since it provides a source:

The source for the claim that the Lower East Side was the most densely populated place on earth at the turn of the last century comes from a housing survey conducted by the newly created Tenement House Department of New York City in 1903, charged with insuring the implementation of the Tenement House Act of 1901. The detailed survey found the Lower East Side's 10th [W]ard the most densely populated in the city and, indeed, the world.

In 1903, the [10th] [W]ard had a total population of 69, 944 or approximately 665 people per acre. The most densely populated block in the ward, bounded by Orchard, Allen, Delancey, and Broome Streets, encompassed 2.04 acres and had a population density of 2,233 people per acre. [http://tenement-museum.blogspot.com/2009\\_05\\_01\\_archive.html](http://tenement-museum.blogspot.com/2009_05_01_archive.html)

<sup>13</sup>Historicity is used here in the sense conveyed by the Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology: "The use of an understanding of history as a basis for trying to change it."

<sup>14</sup>Andrew Dolkart, like Richard Rabinowitz, had a parent who came from the Lower East Side. Ruth Abram apparently did not have a familial connection. Her father's family had immigrated to Atlanta.

<sup>15</sup>From its National Landmark filing (Andrew S. Dolkart Lower East Side Tenement Museum October 8, 1993) (10).

<sup>16</sup>Senate bill, IS.1999 in calling for 97 Orchard Street to become an affiliated site of the National Park Service, used the Museum's wording when describing its tenement as "an outstanding survivor of the vast number of humble buildings that housed immigrants to New York City during the greatest wave of immigration in American history" (1994a).

<sup>17</sup>In popular histories and depictions, it's hard to miss the U.S. term "Golden Age of Immigration" with its positive connotations. Its dates roughly correspond to a combination of the Gilded Age (1869-1896) and Progressive Era (1890-1920). U.S. historians generally agree that a more apt term is the Age of Mass Migration, sometimes seen as extending from 1880 to 1924. That end date reflects the effect of anti-immigrant legislation (the Johnson-Reed Act) which stopped most migration from Southern, Central and Eastern Europe, as well as East Asia. There is renewed historical interest in understanding the European social and economic origins of a massive population shift often estimated at 23 million for the U.S. alone, a figure that almost doubles if all global destinations are taken into account (starting within an earlier 19th century imperial context).

<sup>18</sup>Hasia Diner (2000) estimates the total of Eastern European Jewish immigrants at 2.5 million (20). In describing the familial nature of that immigration, feminist historian Paula Hyman (1997) writes "When East European Jews migrated to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as part of that vast wave labeled the New Immigration, women were an important component of the newcomers. In fact, because this was a family migration, women constituted a greater proportion of Jewish immigrants than of any other immigrant population of the time" (222). Thomas Kessner and Moses Rischin agree with that conclusion.

<sup>19</sup>Other remaining local visitor sites include a few restaurants and food shops, the Museum at Eldridge Street (a restored grand former synagogue of which more will be said), the Oresnanz Center (the former Ansche Chesed), and a few historic synagogues with still active congregations. I have conducted tours of these sites (and many others no longer extant), for over twenty years, working for local not-for-profits typically associated with synagogue communities and historic preservation. My own rule is to interpret as much as possible living community in its intersections with a historic site (like most other guides, I give public tours as well as specialized ones for academic institutions and family groups). Not only is the disappearance of the local ethnic built environment a major issue for all of the neighborhood's communities, it has been compounded by a deeply felt generational loss of elderly immigrants and migrants. In my own synagogue which up until fifteen years ago was composed mainly of a lively but largely impoverished mix of pre-and post-war Yiddish speaking immigrants, only three people remain who survived World War II. For all Lower East Side communities, the loss of living memory deeply amplifies the loss of the built environment. Historians are not accustomed for the most part of thinking of the Lower East Side as a recent or current place of living community; for some groups, that's also an issue of judging community by its historic high water marks (e.g., 1911) against which everything else fades by comparison.

<sup>20</sup>Figures are approximate: "In ... 2006, The Tenement hosted nearly 125,000 visitors, representing all 50 states and more than 30 countries; its website ... received more than 300,000 online visitors" (from February 5, 2006, <http://www.tenement.org> accessed January 10, 2010 through the Internet Archive Wayback Machine) The same Museum website, <http://www.tenement.org/about.html> specified 44,000 school children; in 2007 the National Park Service on its website <http://home.nps.gov/loea/fags.htm> estimated that the Museum had 30,000 school children as visitors. The New York Times reported that the Museum had 130,000 annual visitors, 80 paid staff members (originally it had 23 volunteers) and a \$4.5 million budget (Pogrebin 2008). Recently, the Museum claims to be hitting almost 1,000 visitors daily and over 220,000 annual visitors.

<sup>21</sup>Such longing also associates it as a place of forgetting (Boyarin 1989).

<sup>22</sup>The Jewish community that remained in the Lower East Side was institutionally mainly focused on religious life. Under Ruth Abram, their connection to the Museum was somewhat fraught; the complaint was that they were ignored as a living community and felt that they were dealt with as though they were out of place and time. Newer management has effectively done far more outreach to what is now a far smaller community.

<sup>23</sup>Or, in the demeaning, but consciously titillating articles in New York's nineteenth-century "Yellow Journalism" on Newspaper Row.

<sup>24</sup>Rabinowitz (1985) had written to Abram a year earlier that "The Project will also be very important to the American historical profession as a whole... to create a model for public history that can help reshape the way we all think about history. 'Living history museums' have to this point been focused on rural places, focusing on pre-industrial agricultural communities, or in small cities like Lowell, where the proximity of the work and residential environments was clear." (6) This was written in the context of the Museum's earliest stage, when it was associated with what eventually became the Eldridge Street Synagogue Museum. The "Tenement" was the immigrant social history part of the initial larger Project. The two projects parted ways in 1986.

<sup>25</sup>Typically the fabric of a building is understood to be its basic structure, e.g., roof and walls. The Museum broadens this notion through displaying how tenement reform and ensuing changes in housing code affected tenements and sometimes using the term to reference the neighborhood's overall built environment. As will be discussed later, Dolkart uses it to look at interior structural elements such as transoms, windows, entry ways, stairwells, and takes it into the decorative as well (wall paper, painted floors and linoleum).

<sup>26</sup>Internally, the Tenement Museum uses the term reconstructed as well as "restored" to describe 97 Orchard Street. A restoration implies going back to an original and known state. For instance, the nearby Eldridge Street Synagogue can more properly be said to have been largely restored since its upstairs was mainly intact, if quite

neglected. In the case of the Museum, each building space had to be envisioned and put together. As Chapter Four details, constant decisions were made on retroactively associating each area with a given date to be used in re-creating it; an apartment circa 1869 would not look like an apartment from 1929. Since all existing apartments underwent significant changes, the Museum needed to research and deduce what its 1873 apartment would probably have looked like, especially in the absence of original residential furnishings and photographs. I prefer the term re-created, which occasionally is seen in the Museum's own documents. Unfurnished apartments were referred to in at least one Museum (1993) memo as "undressed."

<sup>27</sup>The noted exception here happens at the end of the building's residential life in 1929, when the neighborhood's Jewish population was declining and the Baldizzi family had moved further east and therefore overlapped with Fannie Rogarshevsky who was the building's super. Detailing a building's population offers another way to point at time and space as intimates.

<sup>28</sup>The New York Times noted in 2002 "At its peak, around 1910, the square-mile area bounded by East Third Street, the Bowery, Catherine Street and the East River was home to 373,057 people, a great majority of whom were Eastern European Jews" (Salkin 2002). Many observers would extend the neighborhood's northern boundary up to 14th Street until World War II, which would bring the total to a little less than 500,000. This larger northern part of the neighborhood contained Second Avenue's world-renowned Yiddish Theater. Most observers then and now would agree with the New York Times's use of 373,057 people per square mile for its quoted boundaries which appears to be based on 1910 census data. Note these boundaries also exclude historic Little Africa, Little Italy and Chinatown. Therefore one referenced number (using 14th Street), would be ~700,000 people in less than two square miles. Diner's use of 500,000 Jewish residents from that period includes not just the 7th, 10th, and 13th Wards, but also the 17th and 11<sup>th</sup> (north of Houston Street), all of which together form Community Board 3 today.

<sup>29</sup>Unsurprisingly, given the disruptive experiences of migration and acculturation, this collective memory is often accompanied by a dearth of knowledge about the experiences of actual immigrant ancestors.

<sup>30</sup>Yet even today with a diminished urban presence where Jews form not even an eighth of the City's population, New York remains the largest Jewish city in the U.S. despite much of its pre-war population having relocated to tri-state area suburbs. This pattern is still discernable. In describing more recent population shifts based on a 2003 Jewish Federation demographic survey, the New York Times noted:

But Jews who left the city seemed to stay in the area, because the Jewish population has risen by a corresponding amount in three suburban counties in New York State .... But the addition of those immigrants – now totaling 186,000 – a sluggish economy and an aging population helped to more than double the rate of poverty among the city's Jews since 1991... One in five Jewish households in New York City – one in six if three suburban counties are included – reports an income that meets a commonly accepted definition of poverty. (Berger 2003).

<sup>31</sup>The Tenement Museum's interpretations exclude the Iroquois, Dutch and English in any historic grouping. African Americans are most likely today to live in social housing located at the edges of the neighborhood. The German, Irish, and Italian presence is almost erased from the built environment. Jews continue to live in the neighborhood, in an ever shrinking residential enclave located in the co-operative housing on Grand Street going east.

<sup>32</sup>The Museum's *Getting By Tour* (2005e) explains tenement as a word that "... comes from the latin [sic] root *tenere*, which means to hold. Tenements are essentially buildings that 'hold' many families." Henry Roth's (1934) *Call it Sleep* is just one of many well-known literary depictions of Lower East Side Jewish tenement life.

<sup>33</sup>See Chapter Four for a discussion of 97 Orchard Street as a larger symbol of American immigration, and as to the Tenement Museum's earliest origins as part of the Eldridge Street Synagogue Project. Arguably its various

transformations allowed it to frame earlier interpretations of tenement history into a generalizable American narrative, in a type of broadening that left visible its original underpinnings.

<sup>34</sup>For New York area Jews, this primarily happened in the 1950s and later in the 1970s. Nor is this pattern of suburbanization limited to the mid-twentieth century. Authors such as Kotkin (2000) who track ethnic suburbs get quoted in the New York Times for extolling this extension of the American dream: “In 1970 nearly 95 percent of suburbanites were white, Mr. Kotkin writes. Now minorities constitute over 27 percent of the nation's suburbanites” (Appelbome 2011). Success in becoming American can still be seen as tied to suburbanization and/or spatial dispersion, even if some of these older in-ring suburbs that are now associated with particular groups are also a reflection of the high price of urban housing costs in many areas.

<sup>35</sup>These concerns particularly loom large given the poverty of the Lower East Side’s Fujianese community as well as of some other Asian immigrants (Kwong 1998), (Museum of Chinese in America and Association of Asian American Writers 2010), (Wong 2006). This is a topic of concern for activists and theorists who worry that current racism against Jews and Asians is downplayed due to stereotypes of success which ignore poverty, and also for academics and others who worry about a new Ivy League numerus clausus for Asians (Zhou 2004, Chou 2008).

<sup>36</sup>“In asking residents to search within their memory to reconstruct the history of the neighborhood, I found that they often struggled to remember what had existed in the neighborhood before the arrival of luxury condominiums, upscale bars and boutiques, and affluent residents and tourists. My favorite response, and perhaps the one that is most telling, is when I asked a resident where he would take someone who is unfamiliar with the Lower East Side to learn about his neighborhood. He replied that he would take his guest to the Tenement Museum. Afterwards, he revealed that he had never been inside the Tenement Museum, yet he still believed that it could properly represent his neighborhood. This incident raises the following questions. Why would this particular person rely on a museum to represent his neighborhood when he has a choice of other places, such as his school, his former playground, or his family restaurant? Why would a Chinese-American resident who spent most of his childhood in a Mitchell-Lama public housing project choose to represent his neighborhood as a historical exhibit of a five-story tenement building inhabited by former Germans, Italians, and Eastern European Jews—but not by people with a similar identity? (Chan 2009) (28-29)

<sup>37</sup>Italians and Irish also had areas set aside in 2010 for their shopping. Jewish items include somewhat generic yet ironic gift-shop and website Yiddish themed items such as “Yiddish for Dogs” and “Haikus for Jews.” See Appendix. <http://shop.tenement.org/store/>

<sup>38</sup>See Maggie Russell-Ciardi’s (2008) sympathetic write-up as to the Museum’s desire to actively “deromanticize” visitor expectations (44). Russell-Ciardi is a former Museum director of education.

<sup>39</sup>Historian Hasia Diner had done historical research on Irish immigration. The full quote from Diner (2000) reads:

Jewish tours of the Lower East Side visit the Tenement Museum.... Indeed, tours organized by synagogues, Jewish community centers, and other Jewish groups from around the country dominate the prearranged visits to the Museum. The largest number of ‘off-the-street’ visitors also happen to be Jews, women and men whose families came to America in the post-1880 wave from eastern Europe. (118)

<sup>40</sup>A different question might be how well the Museum’s “accuracy” is conveyed through its modes of transmission: that is living history combined with re-created stories and apartments.

<sup>41</sup>Key to a critique of “model minorities” literature is undermining images of Jews and Chinese as monolithic groupings sharing paramount cultural values of sacrifice for family and education. Tracking differences in class and acculturation within subgroups and for individuals more accurately reflects a variety of possible trajectories for U.S. migrants, including the multi-generational persistence of poverty.

<sup>42</sup>See Zukin's critique of tenement determinism is based on her reading of Herbert Gans' work.

<sup>43</sup>Aimee VonBokel (2013) in a critical recent dissertation noted:

Thousands of immigrant experiences are brought to life in the museum through the stories of a few actual residents... by way of meticulous reproductions of the apartments in which the immigrants lived. This is what makes the museum special. Visitors learn about historic figures as they walk up the same staircase, and stand in the same rooms where these immigrants once worked, ate, and slept... (2)

Although it indexes the power of place [and critiques the Museum as telling the story solely of white Europeans], it does not question or reference how those "actual" stories became attached to 97 Orchard Street or to which apartments, or ask what other groups' stories the Museum had at one point actively engaged in telling.

<sup>44</sup>It is worth describing the organization of these paper archives stored at the Museum's annex circa 2010 that concerned the Museum itself. The archives arguably are designed primarily to show how projects were run rather than to provide insight into the Museum itself. Records go into the Archives when a project manager (PM) believed a project was complete. The PM chooses not only if and when, something is placed in the Archives, but what gets chosen for the Archives folder (including questions of originals and copies). The PM also names the project. It is then assigned to a new or existing Record Group and typically placed in a new folder by the Museum's full-time archivist. The Museum began to accumulate archives on itself starting from the time it was part of the Eldridge Street Synagogue Project in 1986-1987 and was self-consciousness about the importance of the social history it was researching. I agreed to the Tenement Museum's request that I not access any records with HIPPA information or with donor information. Therefore, all information provided here on donors is publicly accessible, sometimes even on the Museum's own website.

<sup>45</sup>"I use 'race' and 'ethnicity' more or less interchangeably and combine them in the adjective 'ethnoracial.' Both terms have had a variety of definitions attached to them in the scholarly in popular literatures in play at any given time. 'Ethnicity' is a relatively new word, coming into use mainly after World War II. It replaced 'people' and 'nation' and served as an alternative to 'race,' which was associated with biology, eugenics and other theories of scientific racism. In this discourse, 'ethnicity' emphasized cultural attributes in contrast to biological ones. More recently, 'ethnicity' has been used to describe the cultural heritages of Europeans, while 'race' has been used for everyone else's heritage. Because the meanings of each term have varied, and because both have been used to described socially salient identities and identifications, I also put them together as 'ethnoracial' or 'raciaethnic'" (Brodkin 1998) (189, n1).

<sup>46</sup>Abram (2007) wrote, "'Kitchen Conversations' was chosen with the thought that it might call in mind talking around the kitchen table—something anyone might have experienced and enjoyed" (66). Liz Ševčenko more recently described it as "held in a space with mismatched wooden chairs, conjuring images of friendly family exchanges." (John Kuo Wei Tchen and Liz Ševčenko 2012 ) (92)

<sup>47</sup>There are museums that are not designed expressly for tourists per se. A community based museum such as the nearby MOCA (Museum of the Chinese in America) assumes that much of the staff, interpretation and exhibits are put together by or with and to serve community members. This is sometime true of house museums that largely pull visitors from local communities and which may not charge high admission fees.

<sup>48</sup>It would seem that two institutions cribbed from the same Museum materials in writing about the Museum. In promoting a talk given by the Tenement Museum's founder, Chicago's National Public Housing Museum (2009) issued a flyer stating that the Tenement Museum "set a precedent in using history as a tool for addressing contemporary social issues." The National Park Service (2004) quotation is from the 2004 conference in which Ruth

Abram was a featured speaker. Presumably, both cribbed the quotation from Ruth Abram's biography; the 2004 talk was subsequently published in an edited volume where the biography with that sentence appeared.

<sup>49</sup>Interviews and documents leave a consistent impression that Ruth Abram use of the term "immigrant ancestors" was meant to be "multi-ethnic." While Jack Kugelmass (2000) correctly interprets this as a "social lowering" of such ancestors so as to create a commonality with contemporary immigrants, it also reflects Abram's avowed sense that she was debunking overly romanticized depictions of family and nostalgic depictions of the Lower East Side that interfered with more accurate historical ones. Thus, the depictions she preferred stressed past and contemporary commonality in hardship and stigma. This can be seen in the increasing stress, as seen in drafts and scripts in *Getting By*, on the Baldizzi family being on welfare, and the Gumpertz wife being abandoned. Abram's tone toward the category of "immigrant ancestors," is strongly commemorative when noting hardship and accomplishment.

<sup>50</sup>Although it has been slightly updated, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum's older mission statement can be seen in a variety of website pages and paper documents such as in Our Mission (February 10, 2010), as captured in the Internet Archive. As will be discussed later, its mission evolved between 1990 and 1993; I have paper archival documents of a number of formulations in which key terms such as "tolerance" or "gateway" are added.

<sup>51</sup>As culled and paraphrased from his professional biography: "Richard Rabinowitz is the founder and president of the American History Workshop (AHW)." Rabinowitz worked with the Tenement Museum's founder and director, Ruth Abram, to design the Museum's interpretative apartments. He was primarily known then for his 'living history' approach, which was implemented in Old Sturbridge Village. He has curated many exhibits, including the New York Historical Society's 'New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War'.

<sup>52</sup>From a website description of a Museum (2010e) tour: "Participants will explore how the Lower East Side has been developed, shared and recycled by successive waves of immigrants."

<sup>53</sup>Although the use of the word tolerance disappeared due to its new management, the Museum is not, and has never been an activist organization in terms of advocating for immigrants. Under Abram, It did join a more activist Museum coalition: the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. However, even today it does not advocate on topical issues such as the Dream Act.

<sup>54</sup>Agency in the built environment also popularly appears when cities are seen as characters and literary persona.

<sup>55</sup>See Rothberg (2009) as to a broader, productive use of multi-dimensional memory in regard to post-colonialism and the Holocaust.

<sup>56</sup>From the Museum's website:

TENEMENT INSPECTORS. *HOW DO YOU KNOW IF A HOME IS SAFE?* Take on the role of housing inspectors in 1906. Interview a tenant and a landlord and investigate 97 Orchard Street to determine if the building is up to code. As students debate who is responsible for taking care of the building, they think critically about safety and gain the tools to inspect their own homes today. GRADES 4-8," <http://www.tenement.org/groups.php> (accessed 4/21/13). This was one of the Museum's first school programs.

Another version explains: "In 'Housing the Masses,' attendees pretend to be tenement inspectors in 1906. They explore the building, expose violations in building codes, and talk to 'tenants' and 'the landlord' about why the building is the way it is." (2010 Museum Blog)

<sup>57</sup>Lawrence Veiller was a favorite reformer whose work figures prominently in the Museum's building narratives particularly in tours in which school children play at being a housing inspector, police officer, tenant or landlord.

Veiller, an architect who headed the New York State's Tenement House Commission, was politically quite conservative and promoted suburbanization relatively early. Like the far better known Jacob Riis, he advocated tearing down much of the Lower East Side but worked actively to tighten code and design better tenements.

<sup>58</sup>Dolkart's exhibit "Biography of a Tenement" had a "dollhouse" model of 97 Orchard. It was inspired by the model exhibit done by the Tenement House Committee of the Charity Organization Society of New York (COS) by Lawrence Veiller in February 1900, that was attended by over 10,000 people in two weeks (Dolkart 2006) (75).

<sup>59</sup>Some exceptions are noted. Tenement inspectors, something that the Museum's school program makes into a structured role playing game for children, can be corrupt or even anti-Semitic. Conversely, historic radical figures such as Rose Pastor Stokes are rendered into reformers.

<sup>60</sup>From CityLore's *Place Matters* website:

....the Lower East Side was hardly a tabula rasa. Significant numbers from the older cultural groups had stayed behind, much to the dismay and confusion of reformers. Beyond the prohibitively time and resource-consuming burden of finding new housing, immigrant communities had forged deep attachments to their homes and local cultural centers. Housing authorities interpreted this fidelity as inertia, and evidence that residents had failed to assimilate. In their view, Lower East Siders' apparent preference for squalor over the suburbs directly correlated with low aspirations, and contemporaneous redevelopment logic suggested that these under-achieving residents should be replaced with rising numbers of ambitious white-collar workers who were on track to fulfill the American Dream.  
<http://placematters.net/node/1735> (Molly Garfinkel) (Accessed January 15, 2014)

<sup>61</sup>In theory Reformers are memorialized at 97 Orchard where "An unrestored [Ruin] apartment bears witness to the impact of the 19th century reform movement's campaign for improved housing," at least according to the Museum's (2006a) website.

<sup>62</sup>In popular histories and depictions of the Lower East Side, Riis is associated with tenement reform. His name is on local housing projects and New York City Parks. This review of the Tenement Museum by a popular (non-Jewish) travel blog writer and immigrant speaks to its perceived connection with Riis:

Given I love history and culture through design and architecture, I was drawn to see how Jewish immigrants fresh off the boat from Eastern Europe lived back in the 1800s and early 1900s in the Lower East Side, as portrayed in Jacob Riis' photography book 'How The Other Half Lives.'" <http://www.monica-suma.com/2013/08/13/he-tenement-museum-immigration-and-my-grandmother/>

In the *Getting By* Tour (2005e), the background materials for the guide on Riis are more nuanced:

Some of these associations come from the sources we've inherited about tenements, like the photographs and writings of reformers like Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine. These reformers were trying to expose the worst kinds of housing conditions in the neighborhood, in order to galvanize people to fight to improve them. But their sources left us with images of the most hopeless, degenerated living situations. (3-4)

<sup>63</sup>Wikipedia provides a lovely depiction of how Riis pioneered photography techniques to portray dirt and grime: "Riis had for some time been wondering how to show the squalor of which he wrote more vividly than his words could express." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob\\_Riis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Riis)

Riis (1890) has been the subject of debates including academic critiques of his writing about Jews, Italians and "Orientals" in "How the Other Half Lives" and other publications. Chapter X is titled "Jewtown;" Riis distinguished the Mulberry Street Bend from the East Side and was particularly focused on demolishing it.

<sup>64</sup>Dolkart seems decidedly uninterested in Riis as a figure. I personally read that as an indictment given Dolkart's abiding interest in architect Lawrence Veiller, who as an environmental Reformer, worked assiduously on documenting desired code changes, inspiring model tenements, and depicting the "evils" of life in Old and Pre-Law tenements. While the Museum's historians were aware of Riis' views, his well-known stock images and more acceptable quotes were, and are, extensively used.

<sup>65</sup>"Be An Agent For Change: How to Make a Difference," <http://tenement.org/agents-for-change/> (accessed September 19, 2010). This site has been "live" since 2007.

<sup>66</sup>Its blog however did a write-up about discrimination against African Americans in Levittown, PA in the 1950s. <http://tenement-museum.blogspot.com/2009/05/real-estate-and-racism-in-levittown.html> (accessed November 24, 2010).

<sup>67</sup>One historian said:

By utilizing today's immigrant neighborhood in its flattening and equating sense of 'inclusiveness,' the Museum conveys an unstated, but strongly implied message of the moral 'rightness' of difficulties presently being experienced by contemporary immigrants. 'That's the way it was; that's the way it is.' This fatalistic sentiment effectively releases visitors of any sense of moral obligation toward ameliorating the lives of today's immigrants.

<sup>68</sup>I have not been able to determine the source of this figure. Garment manufacturing, as it is called here, largely has declined in New York City. The shock to Lower Manhattan in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 was particularly acute, since security conditions in the following months didn't allow for the easy movement of goods and workers. Likewise, since the Museum uses terms such as garment manufacturing and sweatshops somewhat interchangeably, it is not entirely clear if the number 180 refers solely to sweatshops, solely to garment manufacturing, or to a mixture of both. It implies that, to the Tenement Museum, ethnic garment manufacturing is performed, ipso facto, in a sweatshop. Sweatshops were a known problem in the 1980s; in the 1990s a strong unionization campaign with UNITE! took place with support from the CSWA (Chinese Staff and Workers Association). What local post 9/11 garment manufacturing persists, is not well documented, and is certainly far less than what previously existed. Likewise, much of what may have been deemed objectionable per legal and other standards has largely been eliminated.

<sup>69</sup>One former guide who led walking tours also indicated discomfort with pointing out any manufacturing setting as a presumed sweatshop.

<sup>70</sup>The Tenement Museum, and particularly Ruth Abram herself, had numerous interactions with Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who along with Nathan Glazer was co-author of *Beyond the Melting Pot*, a book that can be viewed as a comparative study of New York ethnicity. Of interest here is Brodtkin's (1998) (148) discussion of model minorities that takes Glazer to task for asserting in that book that "the Negro middle class contributes very little, in money, organization or involvement in the solution of Negro social problems" (Nathan Glazer & Daniel P. Moynihan 1963) (53). While Abram's politics on Jews, African Americans and Latinos differed with those cited in the book, Abram made a successful effort to court Senator Moynihan for funds, book endorsements and legislation. Perhaps the greatest congruence can be seen in the views expressed by the Museum concerning the need to make new Americans into "democratic" citizens and to commemorate earlier immigrants.

<sup>71</sup>Suzanne Wasserman interview, 10/19/11 at her office as director of the Gotham Center for New York City History, at the CUNY Graduate Center.

<sup>72</sup>Custom Scalamandré wallpaper was donated and used for the Gumpertz, Rogarshevsky and Levine apartments, giving new meaning to “tenement chic” (Rohrlich 1998). The research on the wallpaper was fully professional as was its re-creation, which Scalamandré eventually marketed.

<sup>73</sup>As Abram (1990d) wrote: “It’s a museum about how immigrants constructed ladders up and out.”

<sup>74</sup>Jack Kugelmass (2000) noted that the story told of the Jewish Gumpertz family far more effectively demonstrated social mobility than that of the Italian Baldizzis, and that the Museum had been trying to equalize a patent narrative disparity in this regard (186). While branches of that family were clearly upwardly mobile, I am doubtful of Nathalia Gumpertz’s ability to be socially mobile without the benefit of an inheritance.

<sup>75</sup>The odd syntax is remarkable; “in the hope that” is not an optimistic formulation associated with the absorption of knowledge in a learning experience. It is closer to an experiential model associated with a deeper emotional impact in which the past is “experienced,” perhaps even cathartically. See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998c).

<sup>76</sup>Fodor’s Guide and various websites have picked up on this generic “struggles of past generations” to describe the Museum experience.

<sup>77</sup>Abram framed the program as focused on the value of democratic dialogue.

<sup>78</sup>Text quoted from the ‘More About’ area of the *Getting By: Past and Present*. The Lower East Side Tenement Museum. <http://www.tenement.org/tours.php> (accessed November 10, 2010). The text with “Share your experiences” is now seen in the tour description for “HARD TIMES: TOUR AND DISCUSSION.”

<sup>79</sup>This reading is somewhat at divergence with the work of historians Suzanne Wasserman and Thomas Kessner, who in their work for the Museum and otherwise had noticed Jews and Italians who had retained a neighborhood presence. See Wasserman’s (2000) work on Knickerbocker Village and on Jews and Italians who stayed in the Lower East Side during the Depression.

<sup>80</sup>Even among “ethnic groups,” Jews from different areas lived in separate parts of the Lower East Side (Rischin 1977). See Rischin (1977) and Sanders (1994) for the streets that East European Jews lived on based primarily on their region of origin (e.g., Hungary, Galicia, Northern Russia, etc.). Various Little Italy blocks were known by regional names from the Mezzogiorno or Sicily (Kessner 1977).

While Italians were never a majority on the Lower East Side (always under 10 percent of the population) their presence grew steadily from the turn of the century through the 1930s. Within their neighborhoods, Italians tended to settle next to people from the same region of Italy. Neapolitans dominated Mulberry Street, the Calabresi claimed Mott Street, and Siciliana - who dominated the Italian immigration after 1900 - took over Elizabeth Street. In fact, immigrants from individual Sicilian towns tended to congregate together on different stretches of Elizabeth Street.”(American History Workshop 1994) (34)

<sup>81</sup>Given the Museum’s perspective on past diversity, an interesting question would be in what contexts did various groups bridge or bond to each other. “Murder Incorporated,” founded by Italians and Jews from the Lower East Side and Brownsville, is an example of inter-ethnic cooperation that does not make for a good civics lesson. Many of its members met in two very particular shared spaces for children: public schools and candy stores.

<sup>82</sup>There is some literature on early social housing as a model of immigrant progress and acculturation. The “First Houses,” a model housing project that was the first government sponsored social housing built in the United States is an exception to that rule, in part because it was expressly built in the Depression by Mayor LaGuardia and President Roosevelt as a response to New York’s housing crisis. It also has been run as a showplace for NYCHA and is a model project. Like most urban public housing it initially housed the neighborhood’s “white” ethnic groups. Far less attention than is warranted has been given to the importance of projects for New York’s poorer ethnic white

groups who dominated this housing in the post-War decade. In the Lower East Side, anecdotally, a high percentage of those who made it into lower middle-class Mitchell Lama co-op housing, first left tenements for projects. The local *Lo-Down* wrote about the infill plan that NYCHA is currently considering.

About one-fifth of all apartments in Community District 3, which is composed of the LES, the East Village and most of Chinatown, are in public housing developments. By any measure, “the projects” loom large in the neighborhood. Five sprawling NYCHA complexes below East Houston Street have more than 1,500 apartments each. Yet in spite of their close proximity to other types of housing, the projects are largely invisible to outsiders, easily overlooked by the larger community. During the current debate, which the *Daily News* dubbed NYCHA’s “very own Tale of Two Cities,” many people might be tempted to see the luxury plan as “a public housing issue” of concern only to those who live in the projects. But it has quickly become clear that the housing authority proposal is so sweeping and all-encompassing that it is bound to impact the entire neighborhood, from the Brooklyn Bridge to East 14th Street.

<http://www.thelodownny.com/leslog/2013/03/a-closer-look-nychas-plan-to-build-luxury-housing-on-the-lower-east-side.html> (accessed March 4, 2013).

<sup>83</sup>“Using the Past to Build the Future,” is a quoted heading from an academic article about the Museum’s work by its former Director of Education, Maggie Russell-Ciardi (2008) (49). A similar formulation “to use the past to build a better future,” was used earlier in “Pulling Threads, documenting how the Rogarshevsky apartment was pulled together (Museum: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2004) (23).

<sup>84</sup>The 1965 Hart-Celler Act abolished the national origins quota system that was American immigration policy since the 1920s. The 1965 act marked a radical break from past immigration policies, which had excluded Asians and Africans and preferred northern and western Europeans to southern and eastern ones. At the same time, for reasons other than the Hart-Celler Act, Latin American immigration dramatically increased.

<sup>85</sup>Racialized employment refers to the preferential ranking and routing of “appropriate” employment by employers based on racialized assignment: e.g., Latinas being seen as easiest to manage in low-skilled factories.

<sup>86</sup>Newer groups of migrants/immigrants to the U.S., particularly from the Caribbean and Latin America, have increasingly been seen as non-white for much longer periods of time. Thus, it seems less likely that newer, non-Asian migrants will benefit from an equivalent future shift.

<sup>87</sup>If impoverished, showcased families needed help, the Museum *sotto voce* suggests that today’s migrants might likewise be deserving of such aid. In reinforcing its connections between past and present, a less vaunted path to past success is presented and implicitly modeled precisely when it may not be available.

<sup>88</sup>During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Museum’s public, street level “Tenement Window,” became dedicated solely to displaying revolving art installations, officially intended to reflect an artist’s depiction of the concerns of new immigrants. This program was seen as a response to criticisms that the concerns of the neighborhood’s current immigrants were not reflected in the Museum, even as visitors tramped in to see re-created past stories. The 2005 *Piecing It Together Tour Program Outline* document (pitoutline.doc) reminds the guide that as the group stands outside of the building “*You should mention that the Museum presents art about contemporary immigration in its storefront window, and encourage visitors to return to examine the work more closely after the tour.*” [Italics in original] (1) (2005).

Similarly, the 2005 Getting By tour document prompts: “Educator should interpret the storefront window exhibition, explaining how it explores connections between immigration past and present” and then provides the following example: “In the four storefront windows of 97 Orchard Street, the Museum hosts a series of changing art installations about contemporary immigrant experience. It invites immigrant artists to use this space to tell their own stories and to explore the connections between immigrant experiences past, as represented by 97

Orchard Street and present in the neighborhood today.” (4) (2002, 2005). While the negotiated history of the Tenement Windows program is complex, it seems fair to say that it was a dedicated space seen by the Museum as depicting contemporary immigrants in ways that tied them to the building itself.

<sup>89</sup>The Museum’s (2009b) “About contemporary Windows Exhibits:” had the same text throughout 2008-2009. “The Tenement Windows is a space for artists to display site-specific installations about issues of concern to recent immigrants. Artists work with ESOL classes to create installations that illuminate parallels students see between their own experiences and lives of 97 Orchard Streets’ residents.” In 2011, the Museum’s (2010h) website FAQ cautioned: “The Windows of 97 Orchard feature art about contemporary immigration. These exhibits are free and always on view. They are best seen before or after a tour, not instead of visiting our tenement.” The Windows program stopped when the downstairs was redone to install the Museum’s current permanent “ShopLife” commercial tour.

<sup>90</sup>I use the term “composite” here since that was the Museum’s own term as seen in documents and in its archival filing catalogue. Various quotes later in the chapter will help explicate how the Museum used this term.

<sup>91</sup>Big Onion is a historical touring outfit that mainly employs graduate students, many of whom are well versed in labor history, and some of whom are familiar with the Lower East Side’s specific history. Its founder is Seth Kamil. Big Onion was an early vendor for outdoors Museum heritage tours. Kamil also worked on a Museum project.

<sup>92</sup>Here “Heritage groups” refers to the six historic Lower East Side groups that the Museum by 1988 saw as representing its nineteenth-century neighborhood: African Americans (Free Africans), Chinese, East European Jews, Germans, Italians, and Irish.

<sup>93</sup>While some historians such as David Lowenthal go to great pains to distinguish the interpretation of heritage sites from historical ones, such distinctions seem blurry in a Museum whose claims vis à vis its heritage groups are primarily made in the name of historical inclusion and commonality of experience.

<sup>94</sup>Museum literature from its first decade typically referenced 10,000 people and 25 nations. Interestingly, older numbers also stick; current review travel articles in USA Today, Frommers and other publications still use these figures although they have updated the Museum’s photos and/or street address in reviews re-written after 2012. The Museum switched to the lower figures in the late 1990s.

<sup>95</sup>The 1994 demographic data analyzed by Shenton (1994) shows from census to census an lack of persistence among tenants. Some noted exceptions include the John Schneider family (the building’s saloon keepers), and the Rogarshevsky’s (including adult children). The Gumpertz family also lived at 97 Orchard for 15 years.

<sup>96</sup>Amy Waterman (1990a) from the AHW wrote a memo listing these 25 nations. This list includes Connecticut as a nation. The word nation, as in “state,” also does not accurately characterize most of the German-speaking areas listed. It lists places that are not yet states. Nor does it accurately represent “origin” in listing places that served often as ports of transit for migration from Eastern Europe and Posen. Its classifications are, at best, confusing. Not least, it obscures the larger statistical impression of Jewish migration from three pre-World War I empires.

<sup>97</sup>The earliest versions of its mission of interpreting urban housing had been put crafted when it was still a “Museum without Walls,” meaning it did not have a permanent home.

<sup>98</sup>I’ve collapsed this into one category since I think it an appropriate read of how it was understood at the Museum.

<sup>99</sup>Abram (1990h) wrote on 6/27/90;:

We have at long last, negotiated an agreement with our landlord, giving the Museum an option to purchase the building. The landlord may ask us to exercise our option any time after the fifth year If he

has not done that by the 10th year, we have the right to purchase the building at that time for a named price....we will now have a ten year lease on the entire building... And, we have the right to proceed with our restoration.”

By October, she had signed a 97 Orchard lease with the Helpern family for two storefronts and the above “option to buy” clauses. The building was purchased in 1996.

<sup>100</sup>From a website description of a Museum (2010e) tour: “Participants will explore how the Lower East Side has been developed, shared and recycled by successive waves of immigrants.”

<sup>101</sup>What historian Thomas Kessner (1992) wrote in the Museum essay, “The Immigrant Ghetto as Symbol and Community, is in agreement with Dolkart’s read of census data for 97 Orchard. It was based on his research and that of historians Stanley Nadel, Jay Dolan, and James Shenton.

<sup>102</sup>According to an early AHW (1994) version of the Docent Encyclopedia:

While Italians were never a majority on the Lower East Side (always under 10 percent of the population) their presence grew steadily from the turn of the century through the 1930s. **Within their neighborhoods**, Italians tended to settle next to people from the same region of Italy. Neapolitans dominated Mulberry Street, the Calabresi claimed Mott Street, and Siciliana - who dominated the Italian immigration after 1900 - took over Elizabeth Street. In fact, immigrants from individual Sicilian towns tended to congregate together on different stretches of Elizabeth Street. (36) [Emphasis added].

Irish were far more commonly residents of the Ninth Ward than the Tenth; the Moore apartment opened only in 2008, because of difficulties in finding funding and in finding an Irish family with children. The Moore family only lived in the building a year; their story of infant death is arguably the saddest of the Museum’s stories.

<sup>103</sup>He adds that: “The staff decided to select dramatic stories that capitalized on the ‘power of place.’” Here 97 Orchard is ethnically diverse in a “place” that allows its stories to be powerful. There is little reason to suppose that “staff” rather than Museum leadership made decisions regarding its interpretive schemes.

<sup>104</sup>Today, in Lower Manhattan, neighboring Little Italy has disappeared yet a few blocks in Little Italy now get a large amount of street and other traffic from heritage and general tourists. Chinatown (which began as historic Chinatown and grew to include Chinatown – Lower East Side) is another area deeply associated with tourism; however Chinatown functions more as an ethnic enclave, which remains a familial and commercial hub for Chinese in outer boroughs. It draws general New York area as well as general tourism. Tourism in New York of African American sites is primarily associated with Harlem, the African American Burial Grounds, and to a lesser extent with Weeksville in Brooklyn. Tourist buses and trips to all of these destinations, including the East Village and the Lower East Side abound. By 1910, Kleindeutschland was mainly overtaken by what became the Lower East Side, and has all but disappeared from popular reference. Walking tours are very challenged to show that historic built environment based on the remaining sites located on the Bowery, East 4<sup>th</sup> Street and near Tompkins Square Park.

<sup>105</sup>The Docent Encyclopedia (Museum: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2002b) (aka, Source Book) is alphabetical. I viewed earlier drafts with a footer on each page showing it was “Prepared by American History Workshop 6/8/94.” That version (American History Workshop 1994) noted “The funds to restore and interpret the Gumpertz apartment were granted by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1993. The American History Workshop served as the interpretive planner” (24). There is a PDF version published with the 2002 online version that lacks the earlier interesting and detailed appendices about the Baldizzi and Gumpertz families. There is also a published PDF of the 2005 version (which incorporates the 2002 version) and then adds in the Moore family. Hence some references will show 2002, 2005.

<sup>106</sup>Shenton (1994) indicates that based on 1870 census data, six of the German families were peddlers who were definitely Jewish. “The surnames indicate that six of the families were of Jewish backgrounds. They totalled (sic) thirty of the tenement's residents. What is not clear is the religious background of the remainder of the tenants. Since the largest number came from Prussia, they could be either Protestant (Lutheran) or Roman Catholic.” (6) He didn't know at this point that the percentage of Germans that are Jewish between 1870-1890 will turn out to be 50%. In the early 1990s, Kessner, Dolan, and Nadel materials all identify the same six families from this early German period as Jewish, based on surname.

<sup>107</sup>The Docent Encyclopedia (2002b) backs up Dolkart's (1992) assertion as to the preponderance of residents being Jewish, in analyzing household density and the number of tenants in various periods of habitation:

The number of tenants living in 97 Orchard Street increased steadily over time - from 77 when it was built to 111 in 1901. With the conversion of the first floor from residential to commercial use in 1905 (2 less apartments), the tenant population dropped a bit, though the population density of the building remained the same. This steady increase in density suggests the building gradually deteriorated over time. This was reflected in changing occupations of the residents: from artisans and petit bourgeois in 1870 to industrial workers by the turn of the century. The occupations of the residents at the turn of the century also reflected the prominence of the garment industry in the neighborhood at this time.

By the early 1930s, only seven families lived at 97 Orchard Street. Although the building's vacancy rate was slightly higher than others in the neighborhood, it was nonetheless representative of overall demographic trends on the Lower East Side. Due in part to the restrictive immigration legislation of the 1920s, the extension of mass transportation and the construction of bridges during the early 20th century, and continued deteriorating living conditions, the population of the Lower East Side began to decline during the late 1920s. (67)

In its 2005 Docent Encyclopedia, the Museum's writers appear skittish concerning the question of just how diverse 97 Orchard Street was or even, the Lower East Side itself. Columbia University historian James P. Shenton (1994) who had analyzed 97 Orchard's demographics for the AHW for Appendix C of the 1994 Docent (Source) Encyclopedia (where he had noted changes from 1880 in regard to the 1890 Police census) had clearly warned that the national origin of residents could not even be estimated other than noting that all the names were Jewish.

The density per room had increased to 1.83, an increase of 0.50 in a decade. The increase included 14 additional adults and 16 children over 1880, a 4.35% increase in the proportion of children in the building. The surnames listed indicated that the population of the building was all Jewish but **one can not estimate the national origin of the inhabitants.**” (12) Appendix C, [Emphasis added]

<sup>108</sup>Nor does Long's account offer an accurate recapitulation of the 1870 data as described by Kessner and others. By 1930, there were only seven tenants some of whom were Italian.

<sup>109</sup>Karen Brodtkin (1998) views the choice of not highlighting a Jewish story by attempting to universalize it, as a mode of performing Jewish identity through advocating a politics of minimizing difference. It can also be read as a signal of Jewish acceptance, or desired acceptance into mainstream culture.

<sup>110</sup>Ruth Abram was then co-head with Roberta Gratz of the Lower East Side Historic Conservancy which was housed at Eldridge Street. While the Eldridge Street Project worked on immigrant social history, its focus was primarily on the restoration of the synagogue. The Project was more obviously aimed at a Jewish constituency. Although the Tenement Museum was legally chartered in 1988, Abram had already taken the Lower East Side History Conservancy immigrant social history projects and consultants with her in 1987. The Museum's archives therefore start with the 1985 files of projects that Abram first worked on at Eldridge Street and then at the Conservancy. The

Lower East Side Tenement Museum had become the Lower East Side Historic Conservancy before the New York State Board of Regents granted it its own Museum charter.

<sup>111</sup>Brodkin (1998) views the choice of not highlighting a Jewish story by attempting to universalize it, as a possible mode of performing Jewish identity through advocating a politics of minimizing difference. It can also be read as a signal of Jewish acceptance, or of desired acceptance into mainstream culture.

<sup>112</sup>The Museum's archives do not show how Rabinowitz supported this assertion since he does not provide borders or years. Instead, I provide historian Hasia Diner's (2000) description of the area's past Jewish demographics here.

Historians use the phrase 'Lower East Side' as an understood point of reference without exploring exactly what or where it was...more Jews lived in New York City than anywhere else...it attracted Jews to a degree unmatched by any other immigrant group. Jews, more than most other immigrants, stayed put in New York, and from the 1880s until the 1920s, most settled in the area that came to be known as the Lower East Side, In 1890... almost all Jews—lived in the three wards that constituted the Lower East Side. (35)

See Diner, p. 131 for 1910 census. N.B., The archival record shows Rabinowitz as explicitly indicating a personal, familial sense of attachment to preserving the story of Lower East Side Jewish migration' On seeing 97 Orchard Street for the first time, Rabinowitz (1988) wrote: "I could not get my mind off the powerful messages that an encounter with such a tenement brings to my mind as a historian and as a child and grandchild of immigrants to the Lower East Side.... (1)

<sup>112</sup>Diner (2000) and others generally estimate the number of East European Jewish immigrants who arrived by 1924 at approximately 2.5 million (20).

<sup>113</sup>Despite Rabinowitz' pronouncement, some entries in the Museum's (2005d) Encyclopedia also implicitly assumed that the neighborhood was at one time predominantly Jewish. Here a ~40% number is per the 1930 census, not 1910's: the full entry is based on publications by historians Thomas Kessner and Moses Rischin.

World War I and the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which set restrictive quotas on immigration from Eastern Europe, hastened the drop in the Lower East Side's population. The Jews who left the neighborhood were no longer replaced by new arrivals and the area lost 40 percent of its population between 1920 and 1930. But many Jews remained and they still accounted for 39 percent of the neighborhood's population as late as 1930. Even today the Jewish presence on the Lower East Side remains significant, as anyone will quickly notice walking down Orchard Street on a Saturday when businesses that are owned by religious Jews are closed. [http://www.tenement.org/encyclopedia/jews\\_decent.htm/](http://www.tenement.org/encyclopedia/jews_decent.htm/)

<sup>114</sup>What is obviously undisputed was that the Lower East Side was never exclusively Jewish.

<sup>115</sup>When Dolkart wrote his memo in November 1992, the Museum hadn't yet opened for standardized group public tours but thought it could do so in 1993. In 2006 when he finally published *Biography of a Tenement* (envisioned as a Museum joint publication in 1993), Dolkart gave a talk about the book at the Museum Shop. The Museum's (2006c) press release (below) strongly tied past tenants to contemporary immigrant tenement residents, although that topic is not touched upon in the book.

Tenement Museum President Ruth Abram approached Dolkart in 1988, not long after she and cofounder Anita Jacobson had found the building, and asked if he would document its physical history. Thus began a years-long process that has at last come to fruition with the publication of the meticulous "life story" of a structure that is so central to the immigrant experience. Even now, more than a century after the construction of 97 Orchard and so many other tenements like it, new waves of immigrants – many of whom face the same challenges as their predecessors – continue to call these buildings home.

<sup>116</sup>Other documents show both Dolkart and Rabinowitz as aware of their own Lower East Side antecedents and interested in interpreting the Lower East Side experience as one in which various groups become American.

<sup>117</sup>The UJA is the United Jewish Appeal; The Federation is the Jewish Federation. In New York City, they had merged as part of a larger movement to combine appeals as part of Jewish philanthropic consolidation.

<sup>118</sup>The historians listed here in conjunction with their assigned composite tenement household come from a list in Waterman's (1990) memo to Abram (see Appendix D).

The Katzensteins: Drawn from research by Thomas Kessner, Jenna Weissman Joselit and Michael Stanislowski. The Washingtons: Drawn from research by James Oliver Horton, Ira Berlin, Elizabeth Pleck and Sherrill O. Wilson. The Chew-Chin Household: Drawn from research by John Kuo Wei Tchen, Philip P. Choy, and Him Mark Lai. The (Frederich) Schneiders: Drawn from research by Stanley Nadel, Annette Bus, Jay P. Dolan and Nora Faires. The Reillys: Drawn from research by Hasia Diner, Marion R. Casey, Carol Groneman and Kerby A. Miller. The LaTorres: Drawn from research by Betty Boyd Caroli, Donna Gabaccia and Rudolph J. Vecoli. (6-7)

<sup>119</sup>When Abram states in March 1992 that the crucial story of the "Free Africans" next door would be represented, it seems likely that by 1990 she already knew that Free Africans had not been found at 97 Orchard per se. See Kugelmass (2000) (190-191) for the account of the 1992 interview with Abram, as cited in Chapter 1.

<sup>120</sup>It is not hard to see why by 1992 that the American History Workshop approach, which emphasized period rooms and living history interpreters, would be difficult to reconcile with composite families. It was even harder to juggle once the "real" Baldizzi and Gumpertz stories start taking shape. One conversation elicited this description:

Very early in Museum's history they weren't sure what they would do. Ruth was very good at finding people and getting them to help the Museum... she formed a Tenement Scholars Committee; they were basically a group of scholars from all different fields and background... but they decided they would create composite apartments; German, Chinese, amalgam composite apartments by ethnicity; personally I consider [it] the total opposite of what we've done. .. the decision was done because they thought it too hard to create an actual family's apartment. In 1987 Chinese, Free Black, German, Italian, Eastern European Jewish, Irish was what they chose.

<sup>121</sup>Thomas Kessner (1992) wrote this revised draft as an introduction for what was supposed to be a volume of essays including "Biography of a Tenement" that the Museum had initially funded through a Ford Foundation grant (Abram 1990f), meant expressly for historians to create a published volume using an "Annales" approach.

<sup>122</sup>The Final February AHW Conceptual Plan stated:

The immigrant experiences of other ethnic and racial groups, ones which have lived in the area but not in this building, will also, and always, be included in our story. They will be interpreted through a variety of formats, such as

Publications (e.g. new books and issues of "Tenement Times")

Original dramatic presentations

Walking tours

Workshop activities at the museum (See "Roll Up Your Sleeves," below)

Pre-visit programs designed for schools

The museum's orientation programs (See below) (Rabinowitz 1990b) (7)

<sup>123</sup>The Final February AHW Conceptual Plan stated: "... three "living history" apartments will be made authentic to each of three periods, restored to reflect three different architectural conditions of the building:...

The decor, furnishings and programs in our "ethnic households" will focus on representatives of the immigrant communities which actually lived in the building between 1863 and 1935. We will use the rooms to interpret the experiences of members of three immigrant communities, any of those which might have inhabited the building during our focal periods. Over time the apartments may be transformed (that is, a new family would "move in"). For example, the apartment representing the earliest period might initially treat a German family and, at another point (perhaps a year later) an Irish family. The second period might be represented by Eastern European Jews or Italians, the third by Italian or Chinese immigrants." (Rabinowitz 1990b) (6)

<sup>124</sup>A controversial teacher's union, the UFT's stance and practices concerning diversity have been dicey for decades. Most teachers are "white," most students are not (with the recent exception of Manhattan), and the bitter strife in the wake of Ocean Hill Brownsville strike of 1968 remains salient. Most school teachers in 1968 were Jewish.

<sup>125</sup>The use of Central European (rather than Russian) Jewish Immigration is another notable discursive change. I can only guess that it's a nod to later building residents who were likelier than previous ones to be from the Austria Hungarian Empire (e.g., Romania) rather than from the Pale of Settlement per se.

<sup>126</sup>A Museum (Mendelsohn 1993) education proposal describes House of Heritage (13)

<sup>127</sup>Donna Gabaccia (1991) in reviewing Marsha Dennis' first draft, posed this salient question to Museum employee Wangsheng Li in a 3/25/1991 memo. "Alumni" is the Museum's term for "the people actually associated with the property - as owners, shopkeepers and tenants from 1863 to 1935" (Abram 2005) (21). However, in reviewing Museum materials, I noted alumni lists also included landowners such as John Jacob Astor and names that certainly preceded 1863 (Trinity Church sold the land to Lucas Glockner) or were associated with shops after 1935.

<sup>128</sup>David Lowenthal (1999) has notably opined that heritage is necessarily discrete from history, heritage being notably associated with nostalgia, distortions and uses of the past. While I find many of his insights to be on point, I am unsure that what historians do (let alone museums), differs as neatly as he would prefer. These borders are very slippery particularly for institutions that chose to speak in the name of history and employ historians for that very purpose. For an analysis of the different ways in which heritage is used for tourism, including in relation to dark tourism, see Turnbridge and Ashworth (1996). The borders of history and heritage are more apparent for "living history" whose origin in heritage national folklore exhibits is clearer. Arguably, Living History's performative power is connected to destination entertainment as much as to commemorative ritual.

<sup>129</sup>What became the historic Lower East Side of 1880 to World War II, included a number of different areas, with different boundaries and names. Some historians interviewed saw the Five Points, Little Africa (much earlier), Little Italy, Historic Chinatown as continuing to be separate areas; others saw them as becoming part of historic Lower East Side when it started growing. Others noted that some of these other areas overlap with the East Side (as it was then known) depending on the year.

<sup>130</sup>An example of thicker, inassimilable identities can be seen in a research document titled "The Immigrant Ghetto as Symbol and Community," written by historian Thomas Kessner.

Walk down Orchard Street. It is old and worn, and diverse. It is not of a time but of many times. This mélange of many nationalities, colors and religions demonstrates the tensions and failures of the American immigrant experience as well as its victories...But few other places contain the range of cultures

and races that live side by side on these streets. And sometimes, when diversity can avoid the pitfalls, the American symphony can be heard on these streets. (Kessner 1992) (2-3)

In referring to the current persistence of deep diversity in the Ghetto, Kessner implicitly raises the question of the limits of Americanization for the Lower East Side's older and newer immigrant populations. This aspect of his work does not seem to have been picked up on in tour scripts.

<sup>131</sup>Of relevance here is a letter from Kevin Jackson (2002), head of the New York Historical Society, which noted that "the museum ... serves the larger needs of the state and the nation by clarifying how 'the places we call home' shape our identities and participation in civic life." Here 97 Orchard Street exemplifies a larger, shared civic immigrant experience of the Lower East Side. The re-creation of prior residents' lives offers insight into an immigrant acculturation socialization process for new citizens in a democracy for immigrants from different cultures coming together as tolerant American citizens. For Jackson the idea of civil life 'at home' influencing citizen identity is broader than that of housing

<sup>132</sup>This narrative thread is still referenced. For instance, the Museum (2010a) launched a theme called 400 Years of Immigration History timed for the 4th of July. The Museum's blog announced that "Drawing on a timeline of immigration from JFK's A Nation of Immigrants, we'll share several tweets every day... It'll be a great chance for our followers to learn more about America's immigrants, past and present"

<sup>133</sup>In explaining Abram's deep commitment to multi-ethnicity and tolerance, a historian said: "She wanted the Lower East Side to be considered the place of the urban pioneers..." Yet it's a misplaced metaphor for tolerance.

<sup>134</sup>In looking at post-war Jewish social options, Brodtkin (1998) aptly describes this choice as a full embrace of democracy's message in which Jews became better Americans than prior Americans.

<sup>135</sup>A stress on new immigrants engaging in American participatory democracy is most clearly seen in the Museum's ESOL (ESL) programs. See footnotes in previous chapter.

<sup>136</sup>"Tolerance" is a term that appears early on as its mission changes in 1990. The "work" it does changed in the Museum's second decade when Abram founded a network, now called the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience that included sites such as Robben Island and Terezin. Once Abram left in 2008, the Tenement Museum no longer remained a part of this network.

<sup>137</sup>Abram did an extensive mark-up of both the first and second AHW Conceptual Plan in January, 1990.

<sup>138</sup>The *Shiva* tour was given from 1998 to 2002. When the Levine apartment was opened, the Rogarshevsky apartment was then incorporated into the "Piecing It Together" Sweatshop Tour.

<sup>139</sup>Prior to the introduction of the 2002 *Piecing It Together* Tour, the *Sitting Shiva* tour mentioned that Fannie Rogarshevsky had stayed past 1935.

<sup>140</sup>Using the appellation "immigrants" to describe nineteenth-century Africans, may be meant as inclusionary but as a practical matter effaces the history and experience of their enslavement.

<sup>141</sup>A universalizing impulse may or may not be anticipated by Jewish donors. Kugelmass (2000) sees collective memory and heritage tourism on a collision course here with what he called Abram's "ecumenical mode." Even prior to 1990 when the Museum's quasi mission was to interpret the social history of housing, Abram solicited funds from Jewish organizations and donors as a Lower East Side story, a connection that arguably sufficed for some donors. Abram was not interpreting that housing to tell an explicitly or exclusively Jewish story.

<sup>142</sup>The archives show “Multi-Ethnic Advisory Councils” listed as the “#1 high priority” in the strategic plan for the early 90s for two years in a row. Community buy-in and heritage funding were seen as necessary for the Museum to be able to buy 97 Orchard Street. The Councils then disappear from strategic plans. An interview indicated that they were seen as a community based way of bringing forward heritage groups to support the Museum, as an advisory council / liaison connected to fund-raising. (This person thought it not particularly realistic given the Museum’s definition of heritage groups). It seems to point to the Museum assuming a connection between heritage groups (past immigrant) and community groups (more contemporary migration) in regard to Chinese immigrants and African Americans (whose late twentieth-century communities were not descendants of its mid-nineteenth immigrants/migrants.)

<sup>143</sup>John Zuccotti is a prominent Italian-American businessman who is the Director of Brookfield Properties, a multi-billion dollar real estate development firm that maintains the former Liberty Plaza Park, near the World Trade Center, as a public park, in exchange for generous real estate benefits from New York City. In 2006, this plaza was renamed Zuccotti Park, which, in 2011, became the site of the Occupy Wall Street protest camp. Susan Sessions Zuccotti, John Zuccotti’s wife, is an award-winning author of four books about the Holocaust, two of which were honored by the National Jewish Book Council.

<sup>144</sup>The Museum’s (1994c) Version 1 is marked as “Script for Fund Raising Slide Shows: Script: THE TENEMENT MUSEUM.” Draft #2, Version 2 also has penciled in comments and notes.

<sup>145</sup>This New York City 4/5<sup>th</sup> figure appears to be from the 1901 Industrial Commission findings concerning the 1890 census. It includes the American born children of parents of foreign origin (white). If immigrants alone are taken into account, the percentage based on that report would be 42 per cent. The Commission was kind enough to also look at the immigrant figures for above and below 14th Street (the then northern border of the Lower East Side).

<sup>146</sup>The lists came from the Eldridge Street project with which the Tenement Museum had previously been affiliated with as part of the Lower East Side Historic Conservancy. It is suggestive that Orchard Street data was not usable for this purpose of proving multi-ethnicity.

<sup>147</sup>The biblical quote is used widely in the world of Jewish institutional fund-raising to tie an educational mandate to the active transmission of legacy, heritage, identity and values. The text invokes the transmission of Jewish religious content, albeit in ways that have been secularized in other American contexts including as identity. But the Museum is **not** a Jewish institution so its use of this collective trope for fundraising is quite revealing.

<sup>148</sup>Phillip Morris, Grey Advertising, and Paul Weiss are three of the firms that Morris Abram was connected to that provided extensive pro bono support to the Museum.

<sup>149</sup>An April memo from Abram (1993b) to the AHW explains some heritage tour connections to fundraising.

... we've continued our Heritage Tour program. Two are planned this month. For instance, trustee Arlene Agus hosted one for Jewish philanthropists attended by the Lists (Albert List Foundation) and Alan Slifka and the heiress to the Levi Strauss fortune. A second dinner is set ... Roger Rosenblatt and Ruth Messinger, among others, are attending. We'll be focusing on African American history at this dinner. They are probably our most effective networking device (2)

<sup>150</sup>Tutela (2008) notes in her dissertation on the Museum’s educational programs some of Morris Abram’s direct fundraising connections. Her list includes: Paul Weiss (the Museum’s pro bono legal firm where he was a partner), Philip Morris (a client of Paul Weiss) and Grey Advertising, also his clients. She interviewed the Museum’s former chairman of the board, William Kahl. “Kahl described him this way: ‘Morris Abram was a lawyer for the New York law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison, whose client was Philip Morris. (104) ‘Grey Advertising also was a client of Morris Abram’s law firm’” (106).

Philip Morris was famous in NYC at that time for two distinctions: being a Jewish tobacco firm (hence needing to be on Park Avenue South rather than on Park Avenue), and as a large supporter of the arts. The Madoff connection was part of a social world that Morris Abram moved in; newspaper investigative coverage from the last few years has made quite clear how the Madoff family moved in overlapping moneyed Jewish social and institutional circles that worked partially on trust based networks. More generally, Ruth Abram as Morris Abram's daughter gave the Museum unofficial social access to Jewish fund-raising networks and the overall imprimatur of connections to the UJA/Federation and many other sources.

<sup>151</sup>From the New York Times (2008) article about the Madoff family titled *Standing Accused: A Pillar of Finance and Charity*: "It is perhaps a testament to the family's importance in Jewish philanthropic circles that when a nephew of Mr. Madoff's, Roger Madoff, died of leukemia in April 2006, paid death notices appeared in newspapers from charitable organizations ranging from the Gurwin Jewish Geriatric Center to the Lauri Strauss Leukemia Foundation to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum."

<sup>152</sup>Peter Madoff (Bernie Madoff's brother) is a convicted felon now serving a ten year sentence due to financial misconduct. He was a principal in the Madoff firm. News coverage in the aftermath of the Madoff firm's downfall noted the Madoff firm payments to Lent, Scrivner & Roth. *BusinessWeek* (Epstein 2008) reported: "Among issues lobbied on Madoff's behalf, according to lobbying records: money from Interior, National Park Service, and housing appropriations for a 'tenement museum' on the lower east side of New York City." The *Los Angeles Times* (Andrew Zajac and Janet Hook 2008) valued this contribution as \$.1.1M in grants. "The firm's most obvious lobbying success on behalf of Madoff involves a civic project, New York's Lower East Side Tenement Museum...In 2002 and 2005, Madoff's lobbyists landed grants totaling more than \$1.1 million for the museum, according to Taxpayers for Common Sense." The Center for Responsive Politics also tracked these appropriations.

<sup>153</sup>Ruth Abram's politics were further to the left on a liberal spectrum than those of her father, Morris. She was active in American Friends of Peace Now, and the New Israel Fund. She was also active in feminist circles.

<sup>154</sup>Abram (1990h) wrote:

We have at long last, negotiated an agreement with our landlord, giving the Museum an option to purchase the building. The landlord may ask us to exercise our option any time after the fifth year. If he has not done that by the 10th year, we have the right to purchase the building at that time for a named price....we will now have a ten year lease on the entire building... And, we have the right to proceed with our restoration.

<sup>155</sup>Just after attending the pre-closing for the building's purchase, the following quotes are typical of such statements in Abram's progress and goals reports to the Museum's board. "6. TO INCREASE THE MUSEUM'S ANNUAL AUDIENCE TO CAPACITY." (5) ...our goal is to derive 50 percent of the Museum's annual budget from earned income." (Abram 1995) (6)

<sup>156</sup>A description of the Lyndhurst program which featured the Confino apartment to teach "poverty."

Upon completion of the pilot program, the Lyndhurst Educators met with the six Sleepy Hollow Middle School teachers who participated in the visits. Three were Language Arts teachers and three, Social Studies. All gave very positive feedback about the site visits and felt that the Confino first person interpretive strategy was an effective way to interact with the Middle School population. They stated that the Lyndhurst visit was also well received by the students but felt that they would like a role playing activity included. They did suggest improvements with the pre and post visit. Since the Social Studies Standards and curricula dictate what is taught and how, they advocated a pre and post visit which more directly mirrors the concept of comparing and contrasting the two economic groups. A list of topics that the teachers would like the students to compare was given to the educator. These topics are: clothing,

space and privacy; roles of men and women; transportation; medicine and issues of health and coming of age. (Lyndhurst 2002) (2)

<sup>157</sup>Funding for the apartment was from the Sephardic Amado Foundation, which had also funded the general research on the building's Sephardic Jewish families. The foundation and CUNY put enormous effort into research and training the various "Vickie" interpreters who unsurprisingly were a big success. (See footnote below.)

<sup>158</sup>The Tenement Family Apartment Proposal (circa 1995) for the apartment describes:

A Living History Experience. The Tenement Family Apartment will change over time, presenting a variety of families who lived at 97 Orchard Street and nearby tenements at various time periods. By changing the stories, the Museum offers visitors an opportunity to encounter families from different nationalities as well as the changes in housing conditions which occurred over time. (Kate I. Fermoile 1995) (1)

<sup>159</sup>See articles about the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (Stern 2010, Herald May 26, 2010)

<sup>160</sup>This is New York where people including performance studies students are apt to notice such things. In puzzling out their varied responses, one NYU student noted the inability of the interpreter to return a common greeting in Ladino; another described Victoria's Jewishness as "subdued" in order to favor a more general immigrant story.

<sup>161</sup>The Confinio apartment archive is uniquely chock full of basic descriptions of Judaism used for training the multiple Vickie interpreters (e.g., Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement and the holiest day on the Jewish calendar). It points to assumptions in the difference of presumed knowledge and skills for an interpreter, rather than for a guide, docent, or educator who would give a tour of the Gumpertz, Rogarshevsky or Levine apartments. First person interpreters need to improvise as they stay in character, not least to answer questions.

<sup>162</sup>Dwight Conquergood (2002) famously quoted Michel de Certeau on narrative's ability to cross boundaries:

'What the map cuts up, the story cuts across' (1984:129). This pithy phrase evokes a postcolonial world crisscrossed by transnational narratives, diaspora affiliations, and the movement and multiple migrations of people, sometimes voluntary, but often economically propelled and politically coerced. In order to keep pace with such a world, we now think of 'place' as a heavily trafficked intersection, a port of call and exchange, instead of a circumscribed territory. A boundary is more like a membrane than a wall. In current cultural theory, 'location' is imagined as an itinerary instead of a fixed point. (145)

<sup>163</sup>Space is "composed of intersections of mobile elements...actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it..." (Michel de Certeau 1980) (117). In a somewhat different vein, a historian noted in relation to repetitive tours performed over time, that "they also often encourage the creation of new 'truths.'"

<sup>164</sup>Reaven's notes also mentioned "Certainly there are techniques, like respecting private space, memorizing stories, internalization of stories, beginning, middle and end, etc., but these can be learned."

<sup>165</sup>Josephine Baldizzi Esposito was reportedly annoyed by the apartment's staging as full of things. Oral transcripts give a strong sense that she wanted her memories of poverty preserved for her family and others. She died in 1998. She heard about the Museum from a friend and former neighbor, Rita Bonofiglio Ascione.

<sup>166</sup>This gets worked into various tours; here is just one example from a draft Museum (AHW) script for audio tapes:

We've have the records of so many people that lived in these apartments in the 1870s we had tenants from Germany, Ireland, England, and the question simply was who to present first. And the answer fell into our laps. This is what happened. We, at the Tenement Museum, work with a genealogist. She makes most of her living not from the Tenement Museum, I can assure you, but from doing genealogies for

people who believe they stand to inherit money. And that is what she was doing at the surrogates court one day, when the clerk brought her the wrong file and she flipped through it while waiting for the correct file. Then she called me and said "SIT DOWN! I have to read this to you. It's dated 1883. It says, ""The petition of Nathalie Gumpertz respectfully shows: that the petitioner is a resident of number 97 Orchard Street; and that the petitioner has been not been able to find or hear anything from or concerning her said husband, and that the petitioner verily believes that her husband, Julius Gumpertz, is dead!" (Kaplan 1995a) (2-3)

I will simply note that the claim that there was a surfeit of potential familial tenants from Germany, Ireland and England for the Museum to interpret seems to be fanciful. Even German born Louis Glockner, the builder and landlord, was never interpreted. There were no real candidates from Ireland (except Moores 2008) or England.

<sup>167</sup>One of the few residents about whom much was known was Lucas Glockner: he had built 97 Orchard and his life as a German-speaking resident and landlord was relatively well documented. I am venturing a guess that the AHW had not wanted to lead with his story; there is reason to think based on the composite tenement households and the "real" stories chosen, that Abram had wanted narratives that showed hard luck before eventual success. Dolkart became interested in Glockner as part of the story of the building.

<sup>168</sup>Nathalia is Nathalie Rheinsberg Gumpertz's given name in German; hence Museum documents may refer to her by her English or German name.

<sup>169</sup>Kwong (PK) is also a sociologist. Horton (JH) made other astute observations at that meeting. Here is a fuller rendition of that dialogue (Rabinowitz is "RR;" LC is Lizabeth Cohen).

LC: Important to stress that people like Gumpertzes identified themselves based on numerous factors. People didn't just hang their hat on one factor, like their Germanness.

RR: In NYC, Natalie could walk a few blocks and see people she had never seen before; a situation that never would have occurred in European hometown.

PK: Chinese launderers did laundry for mainly male occupants of cheap Bowery hotels: Black & White seamen, travelers, etc. (By a certain point, Black seamen are 30-40% of all seamen. See Jeffrey Bolster, John Hopkins diss., 1991 or '92 for best work on Black seamen.)

JH: Chain migration facilitated by ability of immigrants who were here to offer or find jobs for newcomers.

JH: Also important to remember that Blacks are not immigrants in the same sense as Europeans. For one thing, Africa is not a country. Africans had very hard time getting along with one another at first. The possibility of coining the term "African-American" implies the greatest melting pot the world has ever seen. In N.Y., there were Dutch-speaking Africans, and many Africans who arrived at quite different times.

PK: Burial grounds imply organization of ethnic community.

PK: We should talk not only about ethnicity, but also about race.

JH: Yes, especially since Irish, for ex., weren't considered white people. (Reaven 1993f) (2)

<sup>170</sup>Again, I echo Jack Kugelmass' (2000) caveat that the social mobility and educational trajectory of the Baldizzi Esposito family was different than that of the Gumpertz Reisman family. Kugelmass read this as an attempt by the Museum to retroactively equalize them as ultimately successful.

<sup>171</sup>For another version of the virtual tour, see: [http://www.tenement.org/Virtual\\_Tour/vt\\_baldstory.html](http://www.tenement.org/Virtual_Tour/vt_baldstory.html)

<sup>172</sup>Josephine Baldizzi Esposito was primarily interviewed by Marci Reaven from 1993-1994 who then wrote a series of documents. The earlier 1989 transcripts were done by a different interviewer.

<sup>173</sup>There was debate as to where the exhibit's apartment should go. The Baldizzis were assumed to have lived on the third floor. In the fall of 1990, the proposed exhibit space downstairs had additional room and the upstairs still did not have a certificate of occupancy from NYC's Department of Buildings. Hence in an October 25 memo, Abram (1990j) points out that a first floor slot might be better: "We now have an additional exhibit space. How best to use it is a pressing question. If Philip Morris funds the Baldizzi apartment only, and we can not use the upstairs, that space may become the Baldizzi apartment." (2).

<sup>174</sup>From the Docent Encyclopedia, Josephine Baldizzi entry:

When Josephine spoke to a group of mainly Asian students about her experiences in the tenement, a boy stood up and told her that his family had a bathtub in their kitchen. Josephine said that she was shocked to learn that children still lived like that, and (from somewhere deep inside her) she told him, "Don't ever let anybody tell you they're better than you.

[http://www.tenement.org/encyclopedia/97\\_Orchard.htm#josephine](http://www.tenement.org/encyclopedia/97_Orchard.htm#josephine) (accessed 3/3/2014)

<sup>175</sup>As to interpreting which voice, meaning that of various family members, the AHW (1993c) is still asking at a June 2, 1993 meeting on storytelling: "Can we offer the same story from different characters' perspectives? Different viewpoints of the Baldizzi story, as seen by John, Josephine, parents." A vantage point for storytelling has not yet been settled upon, nor has a script.

<sup>176</sup>This quote from Tenement Times Fall 1994, was first cited by Jack Kugelmass (2000) (185).

<sup>177</sup>Scalamandré went on to design and sell "Tenement Wallpaper" based on a layer that was found in the Rogarshevsky apartment. Unsurprisingly, this generated *New York Times* (Rohrlich 1998) news coverage in what can be seen as an example of authenticity in "tenement chic." The Museum's FAQ (2005, 2010) notes: "A textile and wallpaper company called Scalamandre reproduced the wallpapers in the Gumpertz, Rogarshevsky, and Levine apartments pro bono for the Tenement Museum. The papers are available for sale by Scalamandre." (4)

<sup>178</sup>According to the AHW Docent Source Encyclopedia (American History Workshop 1994):

The interpretive program is largely drawn from the memories of Josephine Baldizzi Esposito, who lived at 97 Orchard with her family from the approximate ages of two to nine. During the oral history interviews (conducted primarily in 1993-94 by Ms. Marci Reaven), Mrs. Esposito came to believe that her family actually lived in the southwest apartment on the floor above. Perhaps the Baldizzi story will move to the third floor once it is open to the public. (3)

This also indicates that this part of the Encyclopedia was written prior to October 3rd, 1994.

<sup>179</sup>This earlier apartment was initially to be part of a "Biography of a Tenement" exhibit. See further down.

<sup>180</sup>The building was never condemned; like the "27 nations" phrase, it's a flourish presumably meant to impress as displaying exactitude (precisely in being inexact) in rendering history.

<sup>181</sup>"It is the written record of her testimony, supplemented by affidavits from her daughters, neighbor, and former landlord - and discovered by genealogist Marsha Dennis - that first alerted the museum to the Gumpertz household." Docent Encyclopedia, Gumpertz Family, (Museum: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2005b).

<sup>182</sup>Unlike the apartment furnishings and tour script, the earliest Docent Source Encyclopedia dated 4/26/1994 (prepared by the American History Workshop) does not change the older Gumpertz narrative at all except to note: “We first surmised that the Gumpertzes were Jewish by these marriages, because the daughters married Jewish husbands.” (American History Workshop 1994) (27) No date is given for that surmise. Archival documents, including a statement by Abram, say much the same thing. What is clear is that the Museum’s leadership realized that the Gumpertz family was Jewish only after the family had previously been chosen for its German apartment due to the compelling story of the Surrogate Court documents. This suggests strongly that the last quarter of 1992 was when Dennis’ further research into Gumpertz familial marriages would have started rippling through.

Memos show that Reaven rapidly understood its possible interpretive implications and pushed for further research. Since she reported directly to Richard Rabinowitz and his name is on some of these early tour scripts, it seems probable that he was aware of the situation and needed to negotiate this terrain with Abram.

<sup>183</sup>One interesting question in looking at the Museum’s work is when does German implicitly mean Christian, and when is it taken to explicitly mean that Jews are included in Kleindeutschland. Stanley Nadel (1992) in his writing for the Museum noted that: “Under these increasingly poor conditions, tailoring gradually ceased being a German trade. ‘Polaks,’ Polish Jews from Prussian Poland (often counted in the census as Prussians or Germans) and the Austrian and Russian Empires, had generally displaced the Germans” (3). Nadel clearly understood that Jews from Polish Prussia were often listed as Prussian. In this instance he appears to implicitly use “German” to mean Christian Germans. In other examples, he attempted to demonstrate an understanding of German “ethnicity” in New York as inclusive of Jews, differing from an East European Jewish experience. While noting endogamy, he mainly described early German Jewish integration into a larger, somewhat secularized German immigrant community that remained divided along regional, geographic lines. His entries in the Encyclopedia of New York, give a sense of this:

German Jews were in fact integrated into German society on all social levels, from the criminal gangs to the leadership of the German Society, and from the labor movement to the financial elite.

Particularism rather than religion was a source of division. Those who emigrated from the fragmenting German states during the mid-nineteenth-century often arrived in the city with little sense of belonging to a German nation. Differences in dialect, politics, cuisine, and other aspects of regional culture left many unable to identify with immigrants who were from other parts of Germany.

<http://www.virtualny.cuny.edu/EncyNYC/germans.html>

<sup>184</sup>Stanley Nadel’s Museum research had noted that the Tenth Ward was predominantly Prussian. Its conquered Polish territories are in Poland today, which was also the case in the 18<sup>th</sup> century prior to the partition of Poland. Some of these territories became Polish after World War I; others after World War II. Nadel’s (1990) general research was groundbreaking in tracking Kleindeutschland’s demographics, by showing among other things that Bavarians and Prussians lived in different parts of the neighborhood (wards) and almost never married each other.

<sup>185</sup>The term “East European” had been dropped by the Museum in referring to Jewish immigrants, since it is the assumed default origin for most American Jews. Even recent descriptions of *Piecing it Together* (now *Sweatshop Workers* as of July 18, 2011), refer simply to Jewish: “See the homes & garment shop of Jewish families who lived in the tenement during the ‘great wave’ of immigration to America” <http://www.tenement.org/tours.php> (accessed July 19, 2011). The description of the *Sweatshop Workers* tour has changed and no longer uses this language to refer to the Levine and Rogarshevsky families.

<sup>186</sup>A September list (1994b) of “Still to Come: Artifacts” indicates that a variety of religious and other items still needed to be added to both new apartments.

Gumpertz: Food, laundry lines, ironing board more evidence of children living with mother, more fabric in front room, sewing things, religious items, wine glasses, rug, German newspaper or other evidence that Nathalie is German, smoke in gaslights and staining walls, stove removed from parlor, evidence of children's work and housework, water issues (wood bucket), stove replaced with 1870's one.

Baldizzi: more evidence of father and children, dripping faucet, trash in air shaft, crucifix on wall, votive candles in appropriate receptacle, rosary, "Our Lady of Perpetual Help" statuette, remove Venice scene, evidence of crocheting (consult with Josephine), FDR portrait, food, heat issue, investigate pipe in bedroom, evidence of home relief label.

<sup>187</sup>Museum records indicated that Nathalie Gumpertz was a member of a mutual aid (and burial society), "the Joshua Windows and Orphans, of the Free Sons of Israel." While recently researching a different German Jewish fraternal society, Keshet Shel Barzel (the Iron Ties), I came across an 1888 payment given to her newly widowed cousin's wife upon the death of Nathalie's cousin—who was the executor of Nathalie Gumpertz's estate. Dr. Sallo Callman's Kleindeutschland lodge was composed mainly of immigrants from Posen. I gave the payment record to the Museum for whom it was new data. Dr. Annie Polland, the Museum's current lead historian, has recently done a large amount of high-quality research on the Gumpertz and Rheingold families that is being integrated into updated Museum tours and its larger understanding of the neighborhood's history.

<sup>188</sup>Soyer's work showed that the Museum's leadership had not paid attention to the founding of early Lower East Side synagogues where Prussian Jews occasionally joined Polish Orthodox shuls despite the far greater prestige of nearby German Reform congregations. The first such local synagogue that I know about is Beis HaMidrash HaGadol from 1852 on nearby Norfolk Street whose founding was largely defined by its mix of Polish and "German" Jews (from Prussian conquered areas). By 1878, such mixed Polish congregations were found throughout the area (Mendelsohn 2009). Soyer cites even earlier dates for local synagogues with Posen and Polish Jews (5).

<sup>189</sup>Here, East European Jews followed Prussian Polish Jews into a Kleindeutschland building, street and area where Jews were already welcome, a topic of relevance to a larger literature on immigrant settlement patterns.

<sup>190</sup>Soyer (1993) had written about *Hinter Berliner* such as the Gumpertz family: "Though they often spoke Yiddish, rather than German, they were likely to have been exposed to the German language and culture through the state schools in their home regions. The Jews in these border areas of the German cultural sphere of influence were thus increasingly Germanized as the 19th century progressed" (9). In other words, it is possible they knew or understood Yiddish given their dates of birth and dates of emigration. This was also borne out by the non-Museum historians I queried, but is not knowable *a priori* without knowing more about the family.

Pamela Keech (1994a), a month later wrote the apartment scenario: "She [Nathalie] would not have spoken Yiddish, this language a later addition to the culture of the Lower East Side." (1) Soyer's point was that Jews had spoken Yiddish in the Prussian conquered area of Poland prior to its partition. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, they were less likely to do so. What active and passive language skills Nathalie therefore brought to a Jewish part of Kleindeutschland is therefore a matter of conjecture rather than certainty given her age. Some Museum scenarios have Nathalie working hard as a dressmaker using her various linguistic skills for purchasing materials (possibly in Yiddish) or serving customers (quite likely in German for a dressmaker at that time). One script written in May by Reaven (1993b) has Nathalie arriving off the boat speaking Yiddish. (4)

<sup>191</sup>Soyer in his report cites work on Kleindeutschland's Jews by Stanley Nadel who was working for the Museum on its German apartment and tours, and by Hasia Diner (who was researching Irish history for the Museum and not involved in discussions of the Gumpertz apartment). Jay Dolan also worked with Nadel on Kleindeutschland.

<sup>192</sup>Shenton, Kessner, Nadel, and Dolan had all previously reached the conclusion that at least six of the 1870 census households were Jewish peddlers based on names.

<sup>193</sup>For an excellent later state of the art piece about the Jewish variants and origins of Gompertz as a surname, see the Gompertz (2008) cross reference by JGSGB (The Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain). Also see Deitz Bering (1992) as to Prussian and German onomastic practices regarding Jewish names.

<sup>194</sup>This quote is a Museum (1994a) AHW formulation found in a variety of 1993-1994 documents describing the family's background. In these documents, Museum spellings of the town names are inconsistent and somewhat idiosyncratic. I am therefore using the standard spellings in German and Polish.

<sup>195</sup>Neither historian had any connection to the Museum. One historian specializes in German Jews, the other in Polish Jews. This is from the second answer. "In the 1880s, Orelsburg (Szczytno) was a town of about 4300 people 'mostly Polish-speaking Lutherans' (according to the *Slownik Krolestwa Polskiego*). I would think that their Yiddish might be closer to the Litvak Yiddish. But they may have been acculturated because of the small number of Jews living historically in these areas. As to Prusice, in 1842, it had 2429 people (1772 Lutherans, 545 Catholics, and 112 Jews), by 1873, the population dropped to 2149 people, a mixture of mostly Catholics and Lutherans, though a synagogue is still mentioned."

<sup>196</sup>The *Getting By Tour* unusually comes with a footnote for that paragraph that cites a well-known book (without a page citation): John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1955). Unfortunately, this reinforces the impression of someone updating old scripts in an attempt to retrofit an anti-German narrative that equalizes all anti-immigrant sentiment. The book does document persistent anti-German sentiment but primarily during World War I. It also documents (20<sup>th</sup> century) anti-Semitism and most especially, anti-Catholic sentiment (earlier and continuing). Hence, in describing Germans in New York's 1870s *Kleindeutschland*, the footnote does not accurately paraphrase Hingham's findings.

<sup>197</sup>The only reference to being Jewish comes later: "Julius belonged to the Joshua Lodge of the Fraternal Sons of Israel, a society meant to provide some support to member families if the breadwinner should get sick or die." (8)

<sup>198</sup>Historically it is an open question as to what extent the Lower East Side was a voluntary "ghetto."

<sup>199</sup>Only one Irish household in 1870 was a family, the Moores who lived there for a year. The "English" tenants appear to have Jewish names, indicating England as a place of transit (the longer passage to the U.S. by way of Southampton was cheaper). Passengers sometimes stayed to earn money before travelling on to the States. This again is well known "territory" in historical and genealogical circles.

<sup>200</sup>Since the tour mentions that it is looking forwarding to seeing visitors for its then planned opening next spring (1994), it can be safely assigned to the last three quarters of 1993.

<sup>201</sup>The person who said this had given tours:

This can be considered an early version of the *Getting By Tour*; it has the outside intro set the context for the Museum and [an overview of] here's what we're going to talk about; it goes into the Hallway and then the second floor, which is Gumpertz and Baldizzi. It's bypassing what will next become the Confino apartment on the first floor which gets its own unique interpreted tour. Once the third floor is stabilized, they do Rogarshevsky as part of showing restored apartments, then they add Levine on the 3rd floor. Before the Levine goes in, it's a combo of 2nd and 3rd floors; then with Levine, Levine gets combined with Rogarshevsky (*Piecing it Together*). Then, the 4th floor is restored, and you get the Moore's for their own tour, an Irish family in America, followed by the restoration of the rear-yard which then gets coupled with the Moore's tour.

<sup>202</sup>Natalie Gumpertz's daughters married after their mother died; hence a great-grandson could not remember an older apartment that Nathalie had moved out of. Interviews show the great-grandson Frank Reisman as knowing that the family candlesticks were from his great grandmother.

<sup>203</sup>Gumpertz Apartment Virtual Tour (from the Tenement Museum's joint Urban Log Cabin site with WNET Channel 13, PBS):

...in 1885 - probably with the added help of an inheritance from her legally declared dead husband's father - to make her first move out of the increasing crowded, ethnically changing neighborhood. In this, she would be following a pattern that still exists. As a present-day Latino told the New York Times recently, "It's the American dream. First you go where you're comfortable, make a little money, get a little English and then head for the suburbs." In Nathalia Gumpertz' day, the German "suburb" was Yorkville. Jew and Gentile alike, those Germans who had started out and succeeded in "Kleindeutschland," [sic] the Little Germany of the Lower East Side, chose to settle in Yorkville and its environs." (Museum: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum 2000b)

<sup>204</sup>The use of the older term period room is sporadic in Museum documents. In one instance, an IMS grant application claimed [erroneously] that the Museum's collections would be used in the "recreation of the period rooms" (Novek 1990). Historians interviewed used the term and its persistence can be seen: the Museum's (2014b) current website offers evening private groups tours and receptions in "period parlors."

<sup>205</sup>The period room genre of display is related to the diorama, with the former often featuring costumed mannequins. Dioramas are typically associated with natural history representations portraying a context for animal and/or human life that is a type of classification in and of itself. Evolutionary and chronological hierarchies are associated with both, as well as with placing exoticized humans (Neolithic, primitive, folkloric) on display. Living History in museums involves the animate, display of living costumed humans and shares that diorama antecedent with an older museum classification system that gets shifted into interpretive interactions with visitors.

There is an old anthropology joke: the way you know that a culture is disappearing is when it appears in a museum. When it's relegated to the basement, that's when you know it's really in trouble. The Museum's Living History Theater and its visitor orientation area were placed at the store basement level.

<sup>206</sup>A parallel labeling of both families with a national and religious designation also serves as a marker for ethnicity.

<sup>207</sup>Even though this was jettisoned as an overarching interpretive scheme, its core concept was incorporated into some Museum narratives. An education proposal from 1993: states "The two family histories chosen for interpretation, the family of Nathalia Gumpertz during the 1880's and the Baldizzi family of the 1930's, compare and contrast two periods of prolonged and deep economic deprivation and struggle" (Jacobson 1993) (3). Another example can be seen in the Rogarshevsky (1998) and Levine (2002) apartments, in which a doubling of Eastern European Jews allowed showing garment trade families from different eras.

<sup>208</sup>The *Getting By* Tour website description of the Gumpertz and Baldizzi families showed a slightly different reference to the periodization scheme: "Visit the homes of German-Jewish & Italian Catholic families surviving the Panic of 1873 and the Great Depression" <http://www.tenement.org/tours.php> (accessed January 10, 2011)."

<sup>209</sup>This variant divides the building by housing code, thus connecting its apartments' interpretation to the Museum's earlier interest in the social history of housing.

<sup>210</sup>As recently as 1999, a professional award write-up describing the Museum conveyed its erstwhile cultural center emphasis on exhibits, theater and living history with costumed interpreters, de-emphasizing its money-making tours of interpreted apartments:

It features two galleries and a theater. Its libraries and archives are available for staff and participating scholars. It offers walking tours, plays, multi-media shows, and exhibits. Its newspaper, Tenement Times, brings the work of scholars to the general public. Its educational programs served over 25,000 school children last year. (Arts & Business Council of New York 1999).

<sup>211</sup>An earlier, proposed title was: “Walks in History: A Heritage Guide to the Lower East Side and its Environs.” Another was “Walking in History: A Heritage Guide to the Lower East Side” (Limmer 1996)

<sup>212</sup>The description from NYU Press instead gives a sense of the neighborhood’s compactness for its turn-of-the-twentieth-century visitors: “A century ago, travelers to the area could attend a black-faced minstrel show performed by Irishmen, drink German lager, visit Jewish-run gambling houses, and dine on Chinese delicacies, all within a matter of blocks.” [http://nyupress.org/books/book-details.aspx?bookid=3730#.U\\_eQIPRDs5A](http://nyupress.org/books/book-details.aspx?bookid=3730#.U_eQIPRDs5A)

<sup>213</sup>It also ignores the long-time Italian presence in the northeastern part of the neighborhood, between East 10th and East 14th Street, where a giglio (an immense tower decorated with religious statuary and lilies), was raised annually at saints’ street fairs up until the 1960s.

<sup>214</sup>Many sites, especially German or African no longer exist; the reader is just pointed to a “this was once there” note. Given when it was written, I do feel it was important to point out neglected and contested sites such as the eighteenth century African American Burial Grounds. Nonetheless, doing so without explanation begs the question of whether it is in a locale that was viewed as part of what became the Lower East Side.

<sup>215</sup>The book’s editor Ruth Limmer wrote these sentences.

<sup>216</sup>The Paul Weiss law firm did the NYU book contract as part of its pro bono work for the Museum. The cover memo for the contract was written on 9/16/96.

<sup>217</sup>There is reason to think that the site’s technical infrastructure did not integrate well into the Museum’s own larger website, which made for an argument not to maintain or upgrade it. This indicates that in many ways this was a spin-off project initiated by Abram that was not fully supported by newer management after Abram left in 2008. Other funders who joined American Express included the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island.

<sup>218</sup>For a partial account of the Museum’s attempt in 2007 to establish a Historic District, see Adam Steinberg (2014).

<sup>219</sup>Nor was there much institutional contact in terms of immigrant community interaction, the main exception being its English classes that placed the Museum into direct contact with local adults. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs were first started in 1994 in conjunction with NYANA, and then by 1996, with University Settlement House. Language instructors offered civics lessons based on materials from 97 Orchard’s history. These programs garnered good press and prestigious grants, and became major speaking points as to Museum community outreach. Student class reviews were enthusiastic. By 2002, its weekly classes were replaced by a “more manageable” Shared Journeys program in which ESOL classes given at other institutions participate in an after-hours Museum tour and workshop.

Other early programs for local adult immigrants did not do well. The Museum was not able to successfully train and employ former garment trade workers as bi-lingual docents despite generous funding on the part of the ILGWU and others. It did achieve good success in initially marketing its school programs to local Community School District One, which brought revenue and broad participation by immigrant and migrant children in Title I schools. Its more extensive subsequent marketing shifted the economic and social diversity of child attendees.

<sup>220</sup>The Museum's portrayal of past urban poverty was arguably seen more broadly, meaning as not necessarily unique to immigrants. Many early documents insist that the Museum is interpreting "the urban working class experience" and utilize a universalizing language of social history to imply an uniformity in its research findings. Formulations pertaining to ethnic immigrants are there from its beginning, but not uniquely so, suggesting that references to working class life were seen as more inclusive in interpreting tenement social history, not least in regard to African Americans.

<sup>221</sup>Zoe Watnik's (2013) recent thesis on preservation used the Tenement Museum as one of its case studies. Watnik, had this to say in describing its exemplarity: "97 Orchard stands as [a] [sic] fine example of this nineteenth-century building model found throughout New York City and other American urban centers." (48)

<sup>222</sup>Moynihan used prepared Museum materials to advocate for its national landmark status by showing how 97 Orchard and the Lower East Side were integral to an American story. Some materials rendered its tenement as a survivor, a last witness to past immigrant life.

<sup>223</sup>The Museum's (2002, 2005a) *Docent Source Encyclopedia* estimates that "The Lower East Side's population peaked in 1910 with nearly 550,000 people living there. It contained some of the highest population densities in the world." (64)

<sup>224</sup>Columbia Professor Andrew Dolkart wrote and then filed the Museum's National Historic Landmark Nomination Form on October 8, 1993. As an architectural historian, Dolkart was a Museum consultant and pivotal figure in guiding building interpretations. He submitted the filing with two National Park Service professionals. The designation was officially approved on April 19, 1994.

<sup>225</sup>"In 1903, about two-thirds of the city's 3.4 million inhabitants lived in tenement buildings." (Andrew S. Dolkart Lower East Side Tenement Museum October 8, 1993) (13)

<sup>226</sup>Charlotte Smith (2002) argues that indeed, much like Monticello Virginia, 97 Orchard Street is a house museum that tells a story of a nation's founding.

<sup>227</sup>While the Museum invested in and reaped gains from its preservationist and landmarking approach, Abram (2005) has stated that "the very idea for the Tenement Museum grew not from any interest (or knowledge) in historic preservation, but rather from my experience as an activist" (20). This may well be the case; however she did have previous experience with preservation through her work with the Eldridge Street Synagogue Project.

<sup>228</sup>These challenges included:

Prior to opening .., the building faced serious structural problems, lacked a secondary means of egress from the upper floors in case of emergency evacuation, and featured narrow halls and flammable materials. In addition to these threats to public safety, there was the challenge of protecting the historic aspects of the building from visitors, including the friable layers of paint and wallpaper, peeling plaster, bulging walls, and fragile finishes. Watnik (2013) (49)

She uses 1992 for the Museum's opening date for public entry, rather than October 1994, when its official opening was held for its first apartment and standardized group tour.

<sup>229</sup>Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's language is directly quoted by Stanton (2009). See *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 54. (fn 1) (2). As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues in *A Second Life as Heritage*, heritage entails recycling an object out of the realm of daily lived life through relegating it to a rarified past.

<sup>230</sup>The Eldridge Street Synagogue Project recently achieved a long twenty year fund-raising and restoration campaign, focused on the historic Lower East Side's largest and most architecturally elegant Eastern European synagogue building (erected in 1878). The Project's synagogue building also became a nationally landmarked, National Park Service affiliate and is now called the Museum at Eldridge Street. Its National Landmark Registry filing, like that of the Tenement Museum provides comparable and interesting insights as well as to how the Lower East Side, and its Jewish story, become positioned in terms of their importance to American history.

<sup>231</sup>The Tenement Museum in 2012 successfully installed an interactive exhibit in its downstairs commercial space based on prior tenants, e.g., Felty's Hat, an auctioneer, and Schneider's Salon. Since John Schneider and his wife lived in the back of the saloon, a residential space was also inserted, finally telling a story of German Lutherans.

Extensive renovations were initially undertaken by the Museum to remake the first floor and basement commercial areas into a theater with rooms for hosting touring events, a visitor center and meetings.

<sup>232</sup>The Museum's FAQ (2005a) notes:

97 Orchard Street's stoop and wooden façade was restored in 2001 to look as it did circa 1905 when then landlords Barnet Goldfein and Benjamin Posner gave the stoop and storefronts a facelift. Using a circa 1915 photo of the Rogarshevsky family taken in front of 97 Orchard Street, architects Li/Saltzman traced and compared elements in the image with extant examples in the vicinity to responsibly restore the stoop and façade. (3)

<sup>233</sup>This difficulty is part of why interiors are not fully protected by landmarking per se. It is highly unpopular with developers and even with many preservation architects.

<sup>234</sup>The quote is from Fordham University's website on *Immigration in New York City* (Saywack 2009) that draws on work by two historians associated with the Museum, Kenneth Jackson and Jay Dolan. Jackson, the editor of the *Encyclopedia of New York*, was interested in immigrant citizenship, acculturation and history; Dolan specialized somewhat in the history of New York's immigrant communities. Ellis Island opened in 1892.

<sup>235</sup>In 1996 the Museum jointly ran a short-lived school program with Ellis Island called "After Ellis: Life in a Tenement." Another example of how the Museum used these connections can be seen on a virtual tour of its teen website *From Ellis Island to Orchard Street with Victoria Confino*. See <http://www.tenement.org/immigrate/>

<sup>236</sup>A far more nuanced, and compelling articulation can be found in an AHW memo to Abram's concerning an IMS grant application which described the "tenement, [as] the foremost symbol of the urban immigrant experience."

Although the nation has salvaged, preserved and interpreted scores of rural homes, cabins, huts and villages, we have yet to preserve and interpret a tenement, the foremost symbol of the urban immigrant experience. In a country in which more citizens now have roots in the urban experience than in the rural one, this is an oversight which needs correction. When the physical evidence of history is systematically destroyed, even, as was the case in the destruction of the tenements, as a result of a heightened sense of social responsibility, the unwitting message is that the experience and the people who lived it are unworthy of inclusion in the historical record. The tenement museum and its collections refute that message of exclusion. (Novek 1990) (5-6)

<sup>237</sup>This was subsequent to its required listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992.

<sup>238</sup>In reference to the Statue of Liberty National Monument, Ellis Island and Castle Clinton, the "Bill to Establish the Lower East Side Tenement Museum National Historic Site, 1994" (1994b) only specifies: "(3) to enhance the interpretation of the Castle Clinton National Historic Monument and Ellis Island National Historic Monument through cooperation with the Museum." Later bills specify all three sites.

<sup>239</sup>Today, the websites for all the National Park Service sites in New York City state: “*The Tenement Museum is an affiliated site of the National Park Service.*” Since the National Park Service also operates the Statue of Liberty and Castle Clinton in conjunction with Ellis Island and promotes the Tenement Museum on their interconnected websites, there is a de facto link between the Tenement Museum and the three major public immigration-related sites: Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty, and Castle Clinton (and link with the lesser known African Burial Ground).

<sup>240</sup>There are only 29 National Trust sites; unlike the Lower East Side Tenement Museum which got its designation in 1998, most are owned and run by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Museum’s 97 Orchard Street tenement building was first listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992 and then designated a National Historic Landmark on April 19, 1994. The landmark categories it was certified under were: “XXX. AMERICAN WAYS OF LIFE, D. Urban Life, E. Ethnic Communities (including the Immigration Phenomenon); XXXI. SOCIAL AND HUMANITARIAN MOVEMENTS, J. Poverty Relief and Urban Social Reform (solid caps in original)” (7). In 1998, the Museum had become an affiliated area of the National Park Service.

<sup>241</sup>Despite the 1994 date, the materiality and centrality of 97 Orchard Street do not come across that clearly in this script. There is nothing concerning its inhabitants. Most of the earlier slides are aimed at constructing a somewhat selective multi-ethnic story of the neighborhood that shows its continuity as an immigrant destination.

<sup>242</sup>The Contents page for the Museum’s (1994e) audio video show lists a “Jewish, Italian and Asian Immigration 1880-1935” section; other groups are not listed per se although they are seen in slides. The Jewish slides include pictures of a Torah, the Eldridge Street synagogue, and of immigrants and streets. Interestingly, the German slide includes the unattributed “clannish” German quote from Gumpertz scripts to show American negative reactions to Kleindeutschland’s residents. The visitor show was still playing (probably in an updated form), in February 2001.

<sup>243</sup>All of this raises the question as to why it was so important to Abram to have Lower East Side 19th century residents retroactively obtain acceptance as generic “urban pioneers.” One historian suggested by implication that Abram used the term “urban pioneers” to indicate multi-ethnic immigrants. Abram is quiet concerning the rejection of “new immigrants” in 1910 due to the Congressional Dillingham Commission’s findings—perhaps reflecting her sense that this known story was the implied basis for fighting racial and national immigration quotas.

<sup>244</sup>While the term “urban pioneer” was used ubiquitously in accounts of early gentrification, the term “homestead” also had another understood valence at that time, particular to housing activists in the Lower East Side. Homesteads, as opposed to squats, are a type of co-operatively owned property created from *in rem* tenement buildings that belonged to New York City in the 1960-1980s due to abandonment and subsequent tax default. Homestead agreements were made with the city and various agencies for tenants to fix up buildings for themselves (and sometimes for others unable to do such work) thereby obtaining “sweat equity” in renovated apartments which in theory could not easily be “flipped” or quickly resold for a profit.

<sup>245</sup>In the Lower East Side at this time, 1993-1994, the language of urban pioneers (though not of log cabins!) was very much in vogue to describe “white” residents who had moved into the neighborhood in the 1970s and early 1980s. It was used both to valorize and describe early “gentrification.” Similarly charged language was used in the “reclaiming” of Brooklyn brownstone neighborhoods—conveying a sense that properties were being “rescued,” restored and made productive.

<sup>246</sup>Smith also argues that claims of urban gentrification as on an urban frontier risk riding on an older vocabulary of urban ghetto as dangerous jungle replete with natives as well as colonial settlement.

<sup>247</sup>“Loisaida” refers to an area associated largely with the Puerto Rican community— mostly along Avenue C and, south of East 14th Street crossing Houston Street. Many of the neighborhood “projects” fall into that area; much of it has now been fully gentrified by “blanquitos.” As to the name, most local historians credit poet/activist Bittman “Bimbo” Rivas for coining it in his well-known 1974 poem “Loisaida.”

<sup>248</sup>The hallways and stairs would have needed to be fireproofed and fire escapes installed. Ergo, the expense would have been larger than that of simply bringing the apartments up to code (e.g., by installing individual toilets).

<sup>249</sup>A timeline diagram on a different page of the brochure shows Abram as founding the Lower East Side Historic Conservancy in 1986 although it does not show it initially as part of the Eldridge Street Synagogue Project.

<sup>250</sup>Some accounts state that Abram and Jacobson first started looking for office space as part of the Eldridge Street Project in 1986, or as part of the Lower East Side History Conservancy but broke away in 1986-1987. Tenement Museum archival folders show that the Lower East Side History Conservancy took with it the existing "Eldridge Street" projects that focused on the social history of the neighborhood's immigrants and tenements. Prior to this break-up, the Eldridge Street Project had been run by Roberta Brandes Gratz, assisted by Ruth Abram and Anita Jacobson. The Lower East Side History Conservancy letterhead lists both Abram and Gratz as co-directors. The Eldridge Street Project's primary goal was to restore the grandiose, derelict East European Eldridge Street Synagogue located in the southern part of the neighborhood—in an area now part of Chinatown. The Tenement Museum's archives shed no light on why this split occurred. Interviewees associate this period with the desire by two "up-town," quite strong-minded and visionary founders to interpret different aspects of the Lower East Side's history through very different types of buildings.

<sup>251</sup>From "The Washingtons" – Proposal, Program and Related Correspondence, 1988. This material was part of a funding proposal which would feature "Freed Africans" for an African American themed living history presentation. It remained a project looking for funding through the mid-nineties.

<sup>252</sup>The Conservancy's (1988) proposal for funding programs and a play about the African American Washingtons, specifies that the Conservancy's immigrant heritage trails would include a Lower East Side Black Heritage Trail. Earlier in the proposal it says more inclusively: "These programs and materials are part of a larger Conservancy effort to establish THE TENEMENT, America's first "living history" museum to chronicle and interpret an urban, working class and immigrant experience." (1) I have not seen that precise formulation elsewhere.

<sup>253</sup>"Lower East Side Historic Conservancy, Ruth J. Abram, New York, New York, \$69,970 To support planning for a series of living history walking tours that will interpret six immigrant communities that existed on New York City's Lower East Side from 1850 to 1910." (1994b) (80). "Free Blacks" apparently are listed as an immigrant group for this purpose.

<sup>254</sup>Rem translates as 'thing' in Latin. When a court exercises in rem jurisdiction, it exercises authority over a thing, rather than a person. Properties that were assumed by the City of New York for failure to pay taxes (or other reasons) would become 'in rem' and would be redistributed by court decision. In the Lower East Side, it meant that empty lots or tenements were often city-owned despite city extensions on collecting defaulted taxes.

<sup>255</sup>By August 13, 1987, Abram (1987b) had officially put Rabinowitz in charge of "site selection." Given that CB3 is known to be committed to neighborhood diversity, placing chosen representatives of "heritage" groups on its board could be seen as a strategic attempt to demonstrate to CB3 that the Museum's leadership was actually diverse. The Housing Committee's main official task was to aid in creating affordable housing.

<sup>256</sup>Adam Steinberg (2014), a Museum employee since 2006, cites in his thesis an amended mission. I suspect that this formulation was from around 2006 since it is only cited by what is now called the "International Coalition of Sites of Conscience," an organization that the Museum had helped found. The Museum's own website apparently never included this version of the mission. Steinberg also states that subsequently the Museum's mission was changed in 2010, but does not specify to what (this is the same year that the Museum left the Coalition).

The Museum's mission is to promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side. The Museum interprets the homes of immigrant families who lived at 97 Orchard Street from 1863 to 1935 as the

starting point for public dialogues on immigration, the garment industry, cultural identity, and social welfare. (2014) (3)

<sup>257</sup>The 1990 agreement for an option to purchase was not shared with most staff or consultants. Nor is it accounted for in the public accounts offered by the Museum which usually state that it took five or more years to bring the landlord to the table. For instance, one historian said concerning 1992–1993: “It was always the most amazing thing that she [Abram] was pouring all this money into a building that she didn’t own.”

<sup>258</sup>Abram later attempted to obtain other city owned property for various Museum ventures including an interpretive center and Tenement Hotel to be built on top of the Essex Street Terminal Market.

<sup>259</sup>Part of the Museum’s desiderata when looking for a tenement was to find a large unoccupied *in rem* tenement building owned by the city, since it was assumed that it could then be obtained for free with a minimum of legal difficulty due to the lack of tenants. As a double building, 28-30 Clinton Street was perfect from this point of view. For Abram, its proximity to three historic (unrestored) synagogue buildings, all of which admitted visitors on tours, was not perceived to enhance the value of 28-30 Clinton Street as a tourist destination (see footnote below). Two of the synagogues were on its block; the third became a major events and New York City arts destination.

<sup>260</sup>Abram (1987e) wrote:

Some of the nearest surrounding blocks look like “mean streets”. I am concerned that people would be apprehensive about visiting a museum here...there seems to be little else in the immediate vicinity that would entice visitors to 28/30 Clinton....There seem to be no parking places. This would be a problem for suburbanites and even for those coming individually or as families from other boroughs...It’s also a problem for buses. (2)

Ruth Abram seems to have weighed whether 28-30 Clinton’s virtues would compensate for visitors going to a less known and less safe area than Orchard Street whose symbolic value as a Jewish commercial bargain shopping area meant that it had become an iconic representation of the historic Lower East Side.

<sup>261</sup>Clinton Street was then primarily Dominican and secondarily Puerto Rican with some Fujianese business beginning to appear on the southern end. Its Jewish street presence was primarily due to the synagogues.

<sup>262</sup>I walked by and went into those synagogues (shuls) very often from 1983 on and am a member of one of them. Those immigrants were called in Yiddish “starkers,” meaning they were strong, stubborn and staying put. I’ve also given numerous visitor tours of those buildings that feature their architecture, history and current congregations.

<sup>263</sup>28-30 Clinton is run by the Lower East Side People’s Mutual Housing Association, a local group that rehabilitates and manages long-term affordable housing created from former HPD *in rem* properties. See <http://www.lespmha.org/>

<sup>264</sup>The Tenement Museum when it split apart under Ruth Abram’s direction from the Eldridge Street Project initially kept the Lower East Side History Conservancy’s tenement logo and changed the address when it moved to Orchard Street. It then used the logo with the Museum’s name. (Pushcarts are more typically associated with an iconography of Orchard Street.) In 1988, Orchard Street was still a well-known Jewish-associated commercial area that had residentially become Latino and was now becoming Fujianese. Its merchants were changing as well.

<sup>265</sup>“Revival” was often used to describe the social and economic changes then occurring in the Lower East Side.

<sup>266</sup>Although the archives show planning for what became an educational ruin and also for its archaeological ruin, I have not found documents planning set-aside apartments explicitly as a gesture to archaeological posterity (a prevalent institutional cultural understanding). Rabinowitz (1990b) and others use the phrase “Selectively

downgraded" (as opposed to recreated), showing that material choices would be made to reinforce a sense of dereliction (e.g., to expose steamed layers of wallpaper). I have also found documents referring to these apartments as "Haunted Houses" and "King Tut's Tomb," which suggest that their purpose in regard to tours evolved over time. Terms associated with interim use can be seen at a point when the board would only approve code compliant expenditures and had put the capital campaign temporarily on hold. Abram (1993b) wrote Rabinowitz on April 13, 1993: "I think we might want to think about how we'll use the code compliant undressed spaces in the interim. We could conduct some amazing tours through the haunted house!"

<sup>267</sup>Daly (2002) explains that Ruins reinforce authenticity through showing [a curated] abandonment and decay:

...the empty 'ruins apartment' at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum presents an empty vessel: the room as it was after being abandoned in 1935, not during its occupancy by immigrants... Yet the decay ...creates a different sense of authenticity: because the sites are presented as having been untouched since they were last inhabited or dismantled, they gain authenticity in that nothing is 'staged' for the visitors. The obvious decay of the sites relieves the visitors' uncertainties about authenticity. (17-18)

Yet whereas the sites themselves may appear to be undisturbed in their decay, the visitor does not have an unmediated experience: preservationists and curators make choices about the presentation of the sites' histories that focus on some aspects and obscure others. The curators may have fewer illusions about the accessibility of 'authenticity,' and likely understand that every fact is mediated by its presenters and its observers. (18)

<sup>268</sup>Having seen abandoned Lower East Side apartments chock full of debris, I was skeptical that the Ruins had been left alone since they were literally empty. Simply the way the wall paper was steamed to show each layer, suggested a large degree of intervention. Daly's and Watnik's observations as to how tours of such spaces stress their putative archaeological nature were consistent with my own. However, Daly views them as a purposeful "blank canvas" that visitors understand has a visible curatorial touch despite it being unmentioned by guides.

<sup>269</sup>While there are recent references to Ruins specifically serving as memorials to Reformers, I have not found anything that suggests that such statements represent earlier, unfolding understandings of these spaces.

<sup>270</sup>Simmel (1958) describes:

...the character of the ruin as *past*. It is the site of life from which life has departed... In the case of the ruin, the fact that life with its wealth and its changes once dwelled here constitutes an immediately perceived presence. The ruin creates the present form of a past life, not according to the contents or remnants of that life, but according to its past as such. (385-386)

<sup>271</sup>The Museum's (2010f) views on first person portrayals show continuity on how history should be interpreted as seen in blog interviews with the new program's originators: Sarah Litvin, coordinator of Live! At the Tenement, and Jeffrey Marsh, one of the Museum's educators:

SL: It's a chance to get inside of their heads, interact with them, find out what their lives were really like....[;] JM: It's a human way, a very touching way to encounter them. SL: It's about learning emotionally."... "Is it fair to say that it's about half the real-life person and about half a composite character of that community? SL: For Fannie Rogarshevsky... we know so much that we have to be true to those facts. It's easier when we have specific guidelines but we can interpret the rest of it.

These comments are suggestive that in representing, the less one knows, the easier it is to represent.

<sup>272</sup>Rabinowitz (1988) opined to Abram that living history provided an optimal approach to the re-creation of social history. "By using all the performing and communications art we can bring to bear on this challenge, we will be

interpreting much more than the physical surrounds of American immigrants but the living, day-to-day process by which they constructed new lives in the new land.” (2)

<sup>273</sup>“Piecing It Together: Immigrant Families in the Garment Industry,” (2005: 2-3, The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, [www.tenement.org/documents/pit/pitcontent.doc](http://www.tenement.org/documents/pit/pitcontent.doc) (accessed February 12, 2010).

<sup>274</sup>As Erica Doss (1999) notes, “The power of images is not that they control us in unmediated ways (if they control us at all), but that they tease certain kinds of emotive response (desire, hatred, faith, empathy) and that out of our reactions, and commingled with lots of other cultural baggage, we produce meaning.” (30)

<sup>275</sup>Almost forty part-time guides and interpreters requested recognition in 2007 through the so-called “card check process,” to certify unionization when a majority of workers signed support cards. The Museum stipulated that the entire endeavor be evaluated by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) for certification, a slow-moving action and potentially costly—especially for a small group of employees. The Museum’s response was that they would be amenable only if full-time employees were included and voted for unionization, as well. See below.

<sup>276</sup>As sympathetically reported in May 2007 by *The Villager*:

The workers’ complaints include conditions endemic to the original tenements: extreme temperatures and cramped rooms. The workers want pay increases, benefits, guaranteed hours and improved breaks.

“We teach civic lessons about workers who unionized in the Lower East Side,” ...“We felt the union would be a really wonderful thing, especially given the historical lessons that [the museum] teaches.” ....H.R. Britton, a tour guide who leads up to six tours a day at the museum... [said]: “We’re at the front lines of the museum, but we’re the lowest on the totem pole.”

Britton said leading tours for groups ranging from third-graders to retirees requires a lot of skill in both storytelling and crowd management.

“It’s a complex story that we tell,” he said. “We have to weave these narratives together.” ....Britton is surprised that management is resistant to the staff forming a union.

“I find it really ironic,” he said. “You lionized the unions, but you don’t want one under your roof. How does that square with the peoples’ lives you eulogize (Julie Shapiro and Alyssa Giachino 2007)

<sup>277</sup>Clearly these categories don’t encompass indigenous people, native born descendants of those forcibly enslaved, or Puerto Ricans, all of whom today (a relatively recent phenomena in some cases) are U.S. citizens.

<sup>278</sup>See Handler and Gable (1997) on the presentation to visitors of the proof sources for Colonial Williamsburg’s various interpretations including its reconstructions of historic buildings and characters.

<sup>279</sup>See the AWH’s website bio on Richard Rabinowitz who started at Old Sturbridge Village. The AHW’s (2013) focus is on history and interactivity of place. Its interactive principles include “the Appeal of the Real: Visitors and program participants respond most passionately to authentic places, objects, and stories about real people.”

<sup>280</sup>Joseph Berger (2006 ) quotes this well-known quip in a New York Times obituary for Milton Himmelfarb. Blogger Barry Popper traced it as a paraphrase taken from a Himmelfarb article titled *The Jewish Vote (Again)*. “Although American Jews had come economically to resemble the Episcopalians, the most prosperous of all white groups, their voting behavior continued to be most like the voting behavior of one of the least prosperous of all groups, the Puerto Ricans.” Commentary (Volume 55, June 1973, Pg. 81),

[http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new\\_york\\_city/entry/jews\\_earn\\_like\\_episcopalian\\_and\\_vote\\_like\\_puerto\\_ricans](http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new_york_city/entry/jews_earn_like_episcopalian_and_vote_like_puerto_ricans)

<sup>281</sup>The Museum's (2009c) "Immigrants and Social Welfare" Shared Journeys ESOL workshop offered immigrants enrolled in English language classes elsewhere the opportunity to "Visit the apartment of Natalie Gumpertz, a single mother who raised her children on her own during the economic depression of the 1870s. Participants will use this story as a foundation for a discussion about the challenges of making a living and raising a family in the United States today." Also see the Museum's (2006b) teen website "For Real," to see how its past stories of Victoria Confino are used to provide a historical model (and friend) for contemporary immigrant teens.

<sup>282</sup>There is also a linguistic divide. Mandarin serves as the lingua franca for the Fujianese community who were educated in Chinese state schools and who speak numerous Fujian dialects. New York's older Cantonese speakers are far less likely to know Mandarin.

<sup>283</sup>99 Orchard Street was long owned by the disputative fourth generation Lower East Side Holtzman family who brought in a Fujianese partner, Peter Liang. In July of 2001, they jointly renovated the building to allow Liang's Congee Village restaurant to be carved out of the back side of the building to expand into a wider and more visibly Chinese Allen Street. The owners also created fifteen tiny studio apartments whose new tenants paid over \$1,600 monthly rent, thus making the building both profitable and impossibly expensive for most neighborhood residents.

<sup>284</sup>See Deland Chan's (2009) (Urban Studies, Stanford) master's thesis on post 9/11 state investment into Chinatown's and Downtown's tourism:

In the form of public-private partnerships to establish historic districts, heritage museums, and tourist kiosks, the City of Spectacle caters to the consumer's desires for a sense of cohesion in an abbreviated but digestible past. Tourist attractions, such as Ellis Island ... suggest a unified collective memory that never existed, but is especially useful for marketing the city. The goal is therefore to take the fragmented pieces of the past and reconstruct them in a way that creates a seemingly cohesive place. (34-35)

#### Explore Chinatown Visitors Kiosk

In 2004, the NYC & Company— New York City's tourism marketing organization— launched a \$1 million initiative with the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) and September 11th Fund for the "Explore Chinatown" marketing campaign. According to Cristyne Nicholas, President & CEO of NYC & Company, this campaign would enable Chinatown to tap into the city's \$21 billion tourism industry— much needed revenue after the post-9/11 economic downturn. This campaign printed "Explore Chinatown" tourist maps for distribution throughout the city and at the information kiosk to highlight information about Chinatown's cultural and community activities, as well as dining, entertainment and shopping suggestions. As one respondent notes, the kiosk confirms the city's intent to re-make the neighborhood for tourism (48)

<sup>285</sup>The Museum's mission was updated in 2011 under new management and no longer uses the term tolerance. The same 2002 *Daily News* article (Kates 2002) also described the Museum as "devoted to celebrating 19th and early 20th century immigration" and "the dreams that motivate today's immigrants ..." (1).

<sup>286</sup>Nineteenth-century and earlier twentieth-century migration to Lower Manhattan mainly ensued from the Pearl River delta regions of China. New York's "Chinatown" is the largest in any U.S. city, including San Francisco.

<sup>287</sup>Chan also asked Chinatown and Lower East Side residents about how they remembered their neighborhood:

In asking residents to search within their memory to reconstruct the history of the neighborhood, I found that they often struggled to remember what had existed in the neighborhood before the arrival of luxury condominiums, upscale bars and boutiques, and affluent residents and tourists. My favorite response, and perhaps the one that is most telling, is when I asked a resident where he would take someone who is unfamiliar with the Lower East Side to learn about his neighborhood. He replied that he would take his guest to the Tenement Museum. Afterwards, he revealed that he had never been inside the Tenement Museum, yet he still believed that it could properly represent his neighborhood. This incident raises the following questions. Why would this particular person rely on a museum to represent his neighborhood when he has a choice of other places, such as his school, his former playground, or his family restaurant? Why would a Chinese-American resident who spent most of his childhood in a Mitchell-Lama public housing project choose to represent his neighborhood as a historical exhibit of a five-story tenement building inhabited by former Germans, Italians, and Eastern European Jews—but not by people with a similar identity? (Chan 2009) (28-29)

<sup>288</sup>The Museum's offer to purchase 99 Orchard at a relatively low price had already been turned down by the building's owners prior to its renovation. Once that renovation started, the Tenement Museum claimed that work on 99 Orchard Street had damaged 97 Orchard Street due to its shared 'party wall', thereby leaving it vulnerable to a neighbor's careless renovation. By the time the eminent domain issue was in play, the renovation in 99 Orchard Street had finished when the building was rented out. That meant that imminent future construction damage to the Museum's fabric was unlikely. For a useful write-up of the applicable interior standards for renovating 97 Orchard Street as a national landmark, see Zoe Watnik (2013).

<sup>289</sup>While Schneider's Saloon only opened in 2012, it received initial funding before then. As per the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) (2006) website concerning its grants:

In March 2006, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation awarded \$27.4 million in cultural enhancement grants to 63 Lower Manhattan arts organizations and projects. The grants are expected to leverage more than \$410 million in investments for cultural institutions below Houston Street. The Grants were categorized into four categories capital, events, planning and program.

**Lower East Side Tenement Museum** - received a capital grant from the LMDC for \$1,000,000 [which] [sic] will assist the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, at 97 Orchard Street, with planning for three new exhibitions, An Irish Family in America, Schneider's Saloon and Courtyard. Funds will support staff and consultants to research, plan and design each exhibition, advertising and promotional materials, supplies and equipment, and audit and insurance fees.

<sup>290</sup>Conversely, Battery Park City, a new upscale development that is proximate to Wall Street but near the Hudson River, was being fully rebuilt and/or rehabbed post 9/11 with Federal and City funds.

<sup>291</sup>As discussed in Chapter Four, a visitor sampling study conducted for the Museum by Randi Korn and Associates (2007), offered advice as to whether the promotion of "tolerance" would benefit from linking it to the representation of contemporary immigrants.

<sup>292</sup>The corner building, 91 Orchard Street (double lot 59) on its block (to which lot 61, 264 Broome Street has been added) are now owned by the Museum.

<sup>293</sup>This quote comes from the Museum's May 2007 inducement letter to the IDA, that the IDA quoted in its cover sheet approval in its September 7, 2011 deliberations for its September 11, 2007 official decision (New York City Industrial Development Agency 2007). The inducement letter language was also used in the cover sheet prepared by the IDA for the approval of almost fifteen million dollars of triple-tax free bonds.

<sup>294</sup>IDA (New York City Industrial Development Agency 2007) (1) (3)

<sup>295</sup>DNAInfo reported (Hedlund 2011) on March 3, 2011 the following: “The project is part of the Tenement Museum's multimillion-dollar capital campaign kicked off by now-retired founder Ruth Abram, who made a bid for the property when it went on the market during the area's real estate boom.”

<sup>296</sup>A federal Lower East Side Historic District was declared in September 2000 and announced in April 2001 (Dewan 2001). While it provided federal tax breaks, it had no actual limits or strictures *vis à vis* development, demolition or district maintenance. 103 Orchard—as a relatively intact 1888 inhabited tenement—was then cited as a contributing property (one of ~500), adding to the tenement district's overall distinctive flavor.

<sup>297</sup>One of the more interesting comments about 97 and 103 Orchard which comes from a Museum official has a decidedly anachronistic ring. The Museum officially opened in 1994 (chartered in 1988) but the Lower East Side National Register Historic District was only declared in 2000.

When the museum opened, the tenement's 1935 closure placed its narrative squarely within the period of significance of the Lower East Side National Register Historic District, which ended in 1940 as the European immigration that had given the area its special character also came to an end. (Garcia 2013)

Garcia's other points as to why the Museum needs to tell new stories are far better made.

<sup>298</sup>It also reflects that the priority of interpreting Dominicans and African-Americans shifted during 2007-2011. Dominicans are immigrants (like local Fujianese, a percentage are undocumented); the shift away from African-Americans is extremely interesting and requires further exploration. It is probably not documented in Museum archives *per se* due to the relatively recent timeframe.

<sup>299</sup>The Museum also has a number of earlier guide documents officially called scripts. Somewhat in tandem as guides and docents started being called educators, scripts became outlines and a variety of background documents were also produced. The early AHW scripts quoted were laid out without categories and colors seen in these outlines.

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