"Ain't No Stopping Us Now"
The Fordham Business Improvement District and the Future of the South Bronx

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Chapter I

*Introduction*

When you first think of the Bronx throughout the 20th, up to the 21st century, what are the types of images that come to mind? Do you imagine The Bronx as a 1940’s crime engulfed environment with black suited, heavily armed, Italian gangsters, angrily roaming the streets at night, threatening businesses and wealthy merchants everywhere? Do you imagine a hazardous, toxic and drug infested environment during the 1970’s, streets filled with hopeless youth wondering aimlessly into desolate buildings in search for cocaine? Or do you imagine a vibrant city full of penetrating, colorful cultures continuously filling up the open air with blasting music joyfully playing on a hot summer’s day above open balconies accompanied with the warm-swell of freshly baked goods from nearby Italian restaurants?

There is no right/wrong or precise answer to my above question. The truth is that we, the inhabitants of the Bronx, do not see this borough as one single entity, but instead we portray it as a slow moving train towards modernization but never towards perfection. For every thriving neighborhood, new restaurant, clothing store, pharmacy or open public spaces, we the Bronx’s residents are the ones shaping the future of this thriving community.

The Bronx is so much more than a representation of different cultures and languages. The vibrancy of the Bronx throughout history with its epic tales of wonder and awe, as I will introduce to the readers below, has been represented in numerous books and movies by many famous actors or authors. One particular book by author Jill Jones entitled *The South Bronx is Rising* will emphasize the borough of the Bronx as a city of dreams, hope, renewal and transformation.
The purpose of my thesis will not be to give my readers a historical framework and background of the Bronx because any savvy individual can log on into the internet and easily obtain historical information about the borough without hesitation. To emphasize the importance of the Bronx, I have decided to focus this thesis on a small, yet thriving corner, the business districts of the Fordham Road Shopping area.

I chose to examine this intensely crowded area of the Bronx due to my own personal observations and attachment over the years to this public space. It is amazing, with the passing of time, what one’s vision and memory are able to capture and recall in an instant. Rushing through our hectic daily lives, we tend to neglect or forget to pay attention to the changing environment unfolding around us, especially that of the Bronx. We only seem to make the connection when we see different types of ethnicities emerging into our neighborhoods. At that point in time we realize things are not the same. In this essay, I will make my readers acknowledge the importance of the borough of the Bronx throughout the 20th and 21st history, by focusing on one particular area, currently regarded by many as one of the most thriving neighborhoods in the New York City area, the Fordham Road Shopping District.

The Fordham Road Shopping District is not that well known due to people commuting to the area like myself. Few inhabitants of the Bronx raise their heads up to appreciate, feel, acknowledge or even praise this small, underrated part of New York City with its thriving cultures, business districts, high end shopping stores and traditional cuisines. We (me included) simply roam freely around the Bronx with the notion that we are functioning and living in an environment filled with crime, drugs; blocks full of project buildings, with alarming poverty rates. Maybe our over worked conscience has not allowed us to realize the fact that we seem to conduct most of our daily businesses in other parts of the city than in the Bronx. For every little
and all types of necessities to be taken care of, we immediately (mostly) tend to the subway and resolve that need in the city of New York most of the time. Why do we mostly choose Manhattan or the Bronx to conduct it in the Bronx. Why do we mostly choose Manhattan or the Bronx to do our shopping, to eat in restaurants, or most of all, to work, rather than in

To provide an overall brief historical background on the Bronx, first I will focus on my specific area of study, the Fordham Road Shopping center which passes everything from East Fordham Road, (past Fordham University’s North train station), up to the Jerome Avenue 4 line train station. From the station, up to the Jerome Avenue subway station, one could spend a good many minutes if you check out the stores as you go. For anyone taking into account that this length of area is mainly filled up with clothing stores, immediately one starts to compare the area with an upstate malls or avenue. The Bronx together with the Fordham Road Shopping district are Madison Avenue, and yet it is considered the third busiest shopping there is so much more of worth and acknowledgment found in this particular best to bring it all to life.

Bronx (17th Century–late 2oth Century) 

Work that I have come across throughout my academic career at The South Bronx Rising: The rise, fall and resurrection of an American city has fascinated me deeply enough to create a lifelong attachment to it. 

try, social work or anthropological assignment dealing with the Bronx County through the 20th century, this is the primary book that I use.
Part of my obsession with this particular work of literature has come through Jill Jones' clear writing which leaves us readers filled with the awe and wonder about the development of the Bronx County from 16th century onward.

Since the media today doesn't do justice to the overall image of the Bronx, I feel the need to shine some light to my borough by highlighting some intriguing historical facts about the area which will put the Bronx in a positive light.

The negativity that is usually portrayed by the media through movies with crime infested projects full of drug addicted African-American gangsters during the 80's and 90's; or with the Italian mafia mobsters conducting illegal business in back alleys during the 1940's has clearly hardened outsider's hearts to the point that people are scared to approach this area. It is time, through this essay, for the Bronx's real worth to come out in the open.

Jones states in his book the primary fact that the Bronx is the sole borough of New York City situated on the American mainland. (Jones, 1986: 11) As an inhabitant of The Bronx, even after countless observations on different types of bus and train maps, this particular fact of the Bronx being the only of the 5 boroughs of New York to be attached to the mainland, never caught my attention. One would think even maps are constructed in a way for the reader to observe the attention to details.

Few expect the Bronx to be older than a century; mostly don't even imagine the borough to even have an interesting historical background at all since most of its attention has been set in the most notorious crime filled years of the 1940's up to the early years of the 1990's. In reality, most of its history goes as back as the time when the first settlers first set foot in America during the Age of Exploration.
In 1639 the first white settlers arrived in the persons of Jonas Bronck (Hence the name the Bronx) and his wife, Antonia Slagboom. (11) Mr. Bronck, a Scandinavian businessman at the time linked to the Dutch West Indian Company, was wealthy enough to purchase a 500 acre surface of forestry wilderness from three Native American tribes, the Mohegans, the Ranachquas and the Tackamucks for the price of “two guns, two kettles, two coats, two adzes, two shirts, one barrel of cider and six bits of money.” (12) With new human disturbances and a forest filled wilderness, the Bronx reflected the perfect environment of tranquility, prosperity, and hope. Bronck, before dying, was quoted saying, “The invisible hand of the Almighty Father surely guided me to this beautiful country, a land covered with virgin forest and unlimited opportunities. It is a veritable paradise and needs but the industrious hand of a man to make it the finest and most beautiful region in all the world.” (12) Little would Mr. Bronck know that in the far future, his prestigious “wondrous land” throughout the 20th century would slowly transform itself from an upper class, luxurious getaway away from the city’s horrendous slums, to a troubled slum in itself.

Almost two hundred years later, a new owner and entrepreneur started to attract businesses in town. The arrival in 1841 of the industrialist Jordan L. Mott heralded the introduction of the machine age into the bucolic landscape. (Hence the area name, Mott Haven) (12)

During the early years of the 19th century onward, there was a tremendous rise of Irish immigrants fleeing from their potato cursed motherland towards the overcrowded streets of New York City. Approximately 1 million Irish immigrants infiltrated the streets of New York from the 1820’s up to the 1840’s. (13) Since the population lacked knowledge of urban life, for them agricultural areas were the perfect spots able to provide them a secure lifestyle and profit. Areas
such as the Bronx seemed a perfect fit for their farming skills where, according to the book, they flourished in a positive and productive rate.

It is fascinating to see the vast difference of life and reality during the 19th century taking place in New York City and the Bronx. These two boroughs were so close to one another, yet so different in every aspect of life. In today’s society, our opinion is quite the contrary between the two, with great business potential while the Bronx is characterized as a decaying back alley of American dreams, left alone to rot in the terrible age of crime and drugs since the 1970’s onward. This particular location, once infected with high rates of poverty in the south-western region during the 1980’s, was barely maintaining a working and middle class society in the north where a lot of Italians, Irish, Albanians and a few fourth generation German families still are residing. In the end, even at the turn of the 21st century, considering all the improvements that have taken place and still are, the borough of the Bronx is still viewed as an unhealthy environment. During the 19th and 20th century, the imagery was the opposite. Here is an excerpt taken from an article in The New York Times describing the views Madison Grant had of the Lower East Side of Manhattan, which back then was a predominately Jewish neighborhood:

"The neighborhood where these people live is absolutely impassable for wheeled vehicles other than their pushcarts. If a truck driver tries to get through where their pushcarts are standing they apply to him all kinds of vile and indecent epithets. The driver is fortunate if he gets out of the street without being hid with a stone or having a putrid fish or piece of meat thrown in his face. This neighborhood, peopled almost entirely by the people who claim to have been driven from Poland and Russia, is the eyesore of New York and perhaps the filthiest place on the western continent. It is impossible for a Christian to live there because he will be driven out, either by blows or the dirt and stench. Cleanliness is an unknown quantity to these people."
They cannot be lifted up to a higher plane because they do not want to be. If the cholera should ever get among these people they would scatter its germs as a sower does grain." (Brodkin, 1998: 29)

This plague infested environment was nowhere comparable to the tranquil, green spacious environment of the Bronx. I myself can further elaborate on the specifics of 19th century life found in the lower east side of New York City when I was introduced by my Anthropology of Museums professor to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum's tour. The tour is called Getting By: Immigrants Weathering Hard Times and it provides detailed account information of the struggling lives of European immigrants living in New York City in the mid-19th century onward time period. On my particular tour, our first stop was inside this tremendously small apartment building (96 Orchard Street) 11 by 12 feet wide, where a Prussian Jewish family, Julius and Natalie Gumpertz, used to occupy back in 1873 with their four children, Rosa, Nannie, Olga and Isaac.

The front room was a minuscule 11 feet by 12 feet and was where the Gumpertzes slept. The coal-burning stove in the kitchen was the only source of heat. The bedroom had no window, fresh air or natural light, and was separated from the kitchen by a wall. The four children slept on one mattress in the bedroom. The outhouse was behind the building and the museum says it was used by hundreds of people a day. The Gumpertzes' rent: $6 a month.¹

One winter night, Julius decided to disappear, never returning home, leaving Natalie helpless and alone with four kids to raise in an economically torn out city. The Panic of 1873 was a period where the country was on a 6 year recession which for individuals, especially

females like Natalie, finding a job was a devastating challenge. In order to support her kids, in an area where public welfare did not even exist, the tour guide informed us, that Natalie managed to turn her apartment building into a shop for making dresses. Living space, poverty, filth, overcrowding, diseases and high mortality rates (close to 25% according to the tour guide) were few of the issues concerning immigrant in New York City in the 19th century.

![Natalie Gumpertz's apartment in the late 19th century. Courtesy of the New York Tenement Museum](image)

By the early 20th century, the Bronx was filled with Italians, Germans as well as Eastern and Western European Jews. Every group immigrated to the United States for their own legitimate, political, even life threatening reasons. As I stated above, the earliest group of immigrants in the Bronx to arrive in large numbers, were the Irish which escaped the potato famine of Ireland. Later on, they were followed by the Germans who were in search of a better way of life. The difference between the two groups was that the Irish were mostly fit for farming and back breaking cheap labor while the Germans obtained a more educated and sophisticated lifestyle which made them skilled laborers in the industrial/urban working field. While the Irish maintained their farming life in the Bronx, the Germans were able to excel their statuses by moving north in the Bronx through the collection of higher levels of wealth. The Irish were famously known to have been excellent political leaders especially in the Democratic path. The
Irishmen worked tremendously long hours of back-breaking work at very low wages, to the point that in the book a very famous saying states that throughout all of America’s railroad systems, if you dig underground you will find thousands of Irishmen’s bodies.

The immigration of the Western and Eastern European Jews (coming from Germany, Poland and Russia) too saw themselves at a better advantage of life in the U.S since they too as a population obtained valuable skills for the fast growing industrial environment taking place in New York City during the mid to late 19th century. German Jews left Germany mostly due to their restricted lifestyles in the German mainland, which at the time was struggling economically, while the Polish and Russian Jews were desperately seeking a place where they were not hated, frowned or killed upon. Both groups varied tremendously from one another. The German Jews reflected a sense of sophistication and Western culture to their ways of life from their style of dress to their public manners. The Eastern European Jews possessed more simple traditional ways of life. Their style of clothing did not reflect modern Western culture but more of a European Medieval culture of simplicity and dark colors. Also hygiene wise, both groups differed greatly from one another. Either way, Jones explains the fact that as soon as the German Jews became appalled at the sight of the Eastern European Jews and their backwards lifestyle, they immediately started to aid one another in hopes of unity in the land of opportunities.

The Italians, like the Irish, lacked education and skills fit for the city life, so they too moved in the Bronx where farm and rural life was easier to take care in such poverty-stricken conditions. The Jews, according to Jones, were famously known to settle in the southern part of the Bronx, the Grand Concourse area from 160th street upwards and in the Hunts Point area. The Irish, Germans and Italians occupied the next available portion of land, focusing around the
middle section of the borough. The far Northern portion of the Bronx was still an undisturbed wilderness that few were courageous enough to enter, let alone live in.

Surely during the hard working years of the 19th entering towards the 20th century, individual life did not come without negativity, especially racism. The Italians, Jews, Eastern Europeans, and other predominate South European groups who entered the area a couple of years after the turn of the 20th century were seen as heathens due to their religious beliefs (Roman Catholic and Judaism), their lack of hygiene and their primitive ways of life. They were labeled to have overly sexual desires, often seen as criminals, all due to the lack of education and often were seen as resembling animals when at work (the immigrants did all the back breaking work which a U.S citizen refused to do for little money). The Anglo-Saxon Protestants were seen as the noble example of sophisticated society in the U.S, while the Irish, the Italians, Jews and Eastern/Southern Europeans were labeled as inferior races. (How Jews Became White Folks and What that says about Race in America, Karen Brodkin: 1998)
From the beginning of the 20th century onward, up to the early years of the 1940's, the Bronx was flourishing, especially with the construction of the luxurious Concourse Plaza Hotel, located by 163rd street and Grand Concourse.

It wasn't until the mid-1940’s that New York City saw a new emerging group of immigrants rapidly infiltrating the last free space of New York City, Puerto Ricans and the African Americans. The former was a newly emerging flow of immigrants also seeking a better way of life after WWII from their poor island. The latter group, sadly to say, has been a part of the American mainland before the immigration of the Dutch communities in the 17th century, and yet whether free or not, they have continued to have been neglected, forgotten and frowned upon. The African American community, by this time pretty much all or most of them being free from slavery, were looking for a better way of life as well. As the African American community settled around the Harlem area in uptown Manhattan, the Puerto Ricans started to enter the Southern part of Bronx, "driving" the current inhabitants, majority the Irish, Italian and Jews, northward. Throughout history, this movement is commonly known as "white flight". (Jones, 1986)

As the Puerto Ricans and blacks started to rapidly settle in the southern area of the Bronx in the mid-40's up to 60's, racism, and segregation started to increase in great quantities. Like the previous groups of immigrants who settled in the Bronx beforehand, the Puerto Ricans too lacked adequate skills for the development of urban life. Aside from their lack in industrial skills, education was also scarce or nonexistent among the community.

Most of the 1940's Puerto Rican immigrants, according to Jones, were simply escaping hardships from back home, and their little exposure to education brought them toe to toe with the African American community when seeking similar employment opportunities. The blacks on
the other side were escaping segregation laws from the South but many blacks coming to the
North (dark skinned Puerto Ricans as well) saw repeated instances of hatred and racism similar
to the South, but in the North this type of racism was often labeled as “racism with a smile”.

Piri Thomas, a dark-skinned Puerto Rican, lamented: “I ain’t ever been down South, but
the same crap’s happening up here. So they don’t hang you by your neck. But they slip an
invisible rope around your balls and hang you with nice smiles and ‘If we need you, we’ll call
you.’” (113)
During the 60’s, 70’s, 80’s and early 90’s, the borough of the Bronx was hit with neglect, destruction, poverty and economic stagnation. In the late 1960’s residential buildings around the borough were slowly decaying and some were left purposely abandoned for decades at a time. Deserted, worn out, destroyed and crime filled, most of Bronx’s neighborhoods were labeled unsafe and hazardous to live in. Drugs spread rapidly during these troubling years. One tenant recalls the street activities taking place in Charlotte and Minford in the late 1960’s; “On Charlotte and Minford they sold drugs like they were groceries. They used to carry the drugs upstairs in a baby carriage.” (225) Post-segregation years took a negative toll for the African American community, especially for those living in areas such as the Bronx where the clashing of different cultures and ethnicities made them a bigger target for hatred and isolation. When a specific group is shut out from the general society for certain reasons, crime and illicit activities are the only path available at hand assuring means of escape from the hardships of reality. This paragraph taken from the book gives readers a clear idea of how demoralized the second, third and fourth generations of Bronx-ians felt when their own environment was falling apart piece by piece in front of their eyes:

“One shopkeeper who watched the transformation of the neighborhood with amazement and sorrow was Charles Lefkowitz, who had come to his brother’s Wilkins Avenue clothing store in 1922 when he was fifteen and still in knickers. He first noticed the addicts in 1962 and soon became expert at potting the telltale scratching of the nose and face and the deadness of the eyes. As drugs and crime picked up, he and his wife closed the shop earlier. More and more people were crammed into the neighborhood and business had never been so good, but the “incidents” were constant. One day a junkie wandered into the small store and Lefkowitz gave him fifty cents “just to get him out of my hair.’ Later that night, Lefkowitz got a call at home saying this very
same junkie had been caught breaking into his business. ‘I said, “Why did you pick on me?” and he said’, “Charlie, I was so hopped up I didn’t know what I was doing.” But I prosecuted him, and he threatened, “When I get out I’m coming back to burn your place up.” Sure enough, when he got out, he came back and started a fire in the window. They called me at three in the morning.” (226)

No one was safe in the Bronx during the 1970’s and 80’s. Not only were everyday people exhausted from the rising crime and degrading life surrounding them, cops too felt the need to just give up on protecting and serving when such protection was not even enough to begin with. The more they helped and arrested, the worse the situations got. “In 1961, in the Forty-second Precinct there had been 18 murders, 183 robberies, and 667 burglaries and the citywide homicide total was 390. By 1971 those figures had soared to 102 murders, 2,632 robberies, and 6,443 burglaries and the citywide homicide had more than quadrupled to 1,466.” (227)
As graphic as the descriptions of the crimes and dangerous activities are stated above, 

troubling era did indeed drain the borough out of its life, but to say that it left Bronx 

less would be an exaggeration. Certain neighborhoods in the Bronx were not only notorious 

for their devastatingly high crime rates; they were also famous for prestigious presidential 

appearances from time to time. Teddy Kennedy made his appearance in March 1980, just before 

the New York presidential primary accompanied with Herman Badillo, who squired the 

president around in the rain, taking him to the very spot where Carter had stood. (333) Just three 

years before Kennedy’s visit, President Jimmy Carter had traveled to New York for a U.N 

headquarters meeting on October 4th of 1977. Few were informed about the fact that on the 5th of 

October, President Carter arranged to visit the South Bronx together with Mayor Abraham 

Beame and HUD Secretary Patricia Harris. Everyone was shocked to see such a high ranking 

official marching in the desolated, destroyed and crime infested streets of the South Bronx in the 

outmost tranquility and serenity with little security protection. Ronald Regan too marched to 

Charlotte Street on August 6th, 1980. His visit stirred a lot of thoughts from the everyone. 

People were confused as to how all of a sudden the same president who cut Urban Renewal plans 

years before was now appearing in the same neighborhoods preaching for a new beginning. Was 

this visit to be considered another publicity stunt to attract votes towards his election, or did 

Reagan really care about the struggle that the public of the Bronx was going through? Visits 

from high ranking officials put the unbearable living conditions of the South Bronx in plain 

public view. All of America finally could see and relate to the struggle that hundred thousands of 

people were going through, especially during the 1980’s. Like they say, where there is a door 

closing, one opens.
Chapter II

Introduction of the BID

Before elaborating on the overall current conditions of the South Bronx area, particularly on the Fordham Road Shopping District, first I must introduce my readers to the one of the most socially activist partnerships whose appointed duty is to help improve business districts everywhere in U.S. These are the famous Business Improvement Districts, or commonly known as the BIDs.

South Bronx’s Fordham Road area is surrounded by several major institutions. The famously known Jesuit university of New York, Fordham University of the Rose Hill’s campus site is between East Fordham Road, Southern Boulevard and Webster Avenue. New York Botanical Garden and the Bronx Zoo are both located across the street from the university, which
further elaborates the importance of the historic position present in this particular South Bronx area.

As far as exact location, Fordham Road stretches approximately from Jerome Avenue to Third Avenue, from Grand Concourse/189th Street to 192nd Street, from Jerome Avenue/Fordham Road to 191st Street; from East Kingsbridge Road/ 192nd Street to Fordham Road; from Webster Avenue/188th Street to Fordham Road; and from 189th Street between Webster Avenue and Park Avenue.²

According to the BID’s 2008 Master Plan presentation, the office is responsible for 35 business blocks, consisting of approximately 300 businesses.

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²NYC Business Improvement District Profiles 2008-2009. (PDF file)
According to NYC.Gov, the official definition of a Business Improvement District (BID) is: *a public/private partnership in which property and business owners elect to make a collective contribution to the maintenance, development and promotion of their commercial district.*

The city has labeled the BIDs as grass-roots, community-driven organizations that require legislative authorization to be established. It is also stated that it is the policy of the City to establish a new BID only after a substantial level of support from stakeholders in the district has been documented. With their support, the website explains, a BID can be established to improve conditions in your neighborhood and have a direct, positive effect on your business.

The borough of The Bronx consists of a total of 8 BIDs: *161st Street, Belmont, Fordham Road, HUB/3rd Avenue, Jerome Gun Hill, Kingsbridge, Southern Boulevard and White Plains Road.* Two new BID locations will soon be opened in the Bronx, one in Burnside Avenue and one in Westchester Square, according to NYC.GOV/BID official website.

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3 [www.nyc.gov/smallbiz](http://www.nyc.gov/smallbiz)
Why create a BID?

The mayor explains that the purpose of a BID is to improve conditions for businesses in specific areas, attract and retain further businesses, generate jobs and improve the overall quality of life for those who use the district. This enables stakeholders to decide which services to provide to meet the district’s unique needs.

The State of New York currently has 64 Business Improvement Districts. The BID’s Final Report states that, “In 2008 BIDS generated $104 million in revenue; served over 3,200 look faces in New York City and over 16,000 retail businesses; employed over 530 sanitation workers and over 360 security workers.” (NYC Business Improvement Districts Profiles 2008-2009, (2010): p.2) The particular BID organization that I will focus on will be the Foriliham Road partnership which first opened on December of 2004 and currently located at 2488 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10458.

According to Wilma Alonso, Executive Director of the Fordham Road BID, “since the city is so busy taking care of other political and social issues, there comes a moment in time when the maintenance of a specific neighborhood district is often forgotten or not seen as a priority at the moment when compared to other emergency situations taking place. That’s where we come in. We help the city by taking on some of its ‘hard work’ off their backs onto ours and we are proud of doing it.” New York City’s official website further elaborates in detail on the more specific jobs the BID is responsible for such as the Physical Maintenance of the environment (street/sidewalk cleaning and graffiti removal), Public Safety/Hospitality, Community Service Care (fundraising/homeless and youth services), Landscaping Improvement (park/open space maintenance/trees/flower planting), Marketing Developments (special events/district public relations/promotional materials/holiday decorations), and the most noticed, Capital
movements, dealing with improved streetlights/custom trash receptacles/directional street
signage/custom news boxes and flower boxes.

4. How funds the BID?

The SBS (NYC.Gov) website explains that the BID programs and services are
funded by a special assessment collected from property owners in the defined boundaries
of the district. The assessment is levied on the property-owners, who may then pass it on to their
tenants, if their lease contains such a provision. The assessment is billed and collected by the
City of New York and then disbursed to the District Management Association who in turn
delivers the district's services.

5. How much will a store owner have to pay to become part of the BID?

The website explains that the sum of all the individual assessments that property owners
pay comprise the total yearly assessment (operating budget) of the BID. Operating budgets of
BID's in NYC range from $53,000 to over $11 million. On average, an individual property
owner will pay an assessment that is equivalent to 6% of his/her real estate tax charge.

6. Who oversees the BID?

Each BID is governed by a Board of Directors that is elected by the members of the district.
The Board of Directors has the fiduciary responsibility and hires management to administer the
BID on a day-to-day basis. The Board is divided into classes that include: commercial property
owners, commercial tenants, residents and public officials. BID members vote for directors in
their respective classes. The majority of directors must be property owners. The Mayor, Comptroller, Borough President and a member of the City Council are defacto board members.4

Before I start breaking down the overall metamorphosis of the Fordham Road Shopping District, first I would like to briefly introduce my readers to a quick historical background of the area. From Jill Jones’ book, The South Bronx is Rising, we will quickly examine a short historical timeline dating as far back as the late 19th century:

- **1874**: The West Bronx was annexed to the New York City. The Fordham Road Shopping Center started taking its first stand on the neighborhood. (Jones, 1986:22)

- **1923**: On April 18th, 1923, Yankee Stadium held its official game. The surrounding areas such as the luxurious Grand Concourse Plaza Hotel and the Fordham Road Shopping district started gaining further fame and publicity due to the continuous enhancement of the South Bronx environment. (Chapter 4)

- **1957**: The city of New York is asked by its board members to start enhancing the deteriorating conditions of the Fordham Road Shopping District/Concourse area. (Chapter 10)

- **1977**: On July 13th, 1977 the Bronx was drastically affected by an overall blackout, especially the Fordham Road Shopping area. (Chapter 29)
Historically the Fordham Road Shopping district has been run (mostly) by generational "mom and pop" stores, as Gary Robertson, general manager of PC Richard's and Son located at 2501 Grand Concourse, stated to me when I interviewed him. When I asked him what he meant by "family stores", he said that they were stores opened in the neighborhood dating all the way back up to 70 years. Wilma Alonso, the Executive Director of the Fordham Road BID, stated that historically, the stores in the Fordham Road Shopping district have been mainly owned by Jewish business families since the early 20th century, and for the most part, even after a century later, the owners still reside from the same family, simply their business has been passed on to the next generation.

In the introduction section of the final edition of the Master Plan presentation from the BID, section 1.2-Area History (P-2), states that the due to the first opening of the St. John's University in 1841 (now Fordham University), teachers, students and visitors created a demand to access to this particular area from other parts of New York.
The demand for a bigger transit public system to accommodate the newly dense populated area forced the city to open construction on the New York and Harlem Railroad transit system. Not only did the new transit provide access to Manhattan, but in turn brought more visitors and settlers to Fordham. (P-2)

Before we further elaborate on this newly improved shopping district in the Bronx, the question arises, what makes this particular area of the Bronx such a profitable, demanding, promising environment worth of any future investment? The introduction on the BID’s 2008 Master Plan on the Fordham Road Shopping District, gives us brief but detailed idea about the overall history of transportation development of the Bronx throughout the 19th and 20th century.

Bronx had its initial street railway system first introduced in 1863, followed by the electric motive power in 1892. The construction of the Bronx Zoo in 1899 and the Botanical Garden in 1902, Fordham Road started to attract millions of visitors to the Bronx. Immediately seeing the available opportunities at hand, merchants went into business. Retail facilities began spreading throughout the Fordham Road area rapidly.

The major constructions of the subway in 1905 and the University Heights Bridge in 1908, enabled residents from all over New York to come to live and shop in Fordham Road. The area continued to grow rapidly, especially with the construction of the Grand Concourse in 1909. It was officially “urbanized” from the once known country path to a paved 100’-wide roadway in 1914. Once NYC enforced the zoning regulation into place in 1916, Fordham Road was finally established as a thriving commercial district in New York.

What is shocking is that even throughout the Great Depression years, business owners and builders were convinced that population growth near Fordham would continue to thrive. This movement would then further support business development. The introduction of Alexander’s
Department Store revived retail trade on Fordham road during a time when business was declining. The confidence in Fordham Road's future, along with a great variety of merchants, good transit facilities, and a central location has established Fordham Road's solid reputation as a successful shopping center. (P-2)


How has the Fordham Road BID changed Fordham Road?

On our first meeting with the Fordham Road BID crew, back in December of 2010, Wilma Alonso, Daniel Bernstein and Emily Groene all welcomed me into their office with a great big smile, and a heartfelt joy for what we were about to discuss which was the positive effect the BID partnership was having on the neighborhood. At the time I had little knowledge on the overall existence of the BIDs, let alone one of them actually participating towards the improvement of the South Bronx area.

Halfway through the meeting, Wilma got up and brought to the center of the table a fairly “huge”, thick wide book titled, 2008 Fordham Road Streetscape Master Plan. Right below the title it gave the date of completion, June 30th, 2008. This was the same plan presented to Mayor Bloomberg and Commissioner Robert W. Walsh in 2008 the Fordham Road BID had for the future of Fordham Road. (The same plan I will be using throughout this essay)

What attracted me the most towards this 48 page presentation book was that every corner of Fordham Road, from the Jerome Avenue train station up to the Metro North Railroad station, was subject to detailed observation, consideration and analyze. Fortunately for the research making manual copies of the book would have been both time consuming and exhausting, so I was lucky enough to come across an exact copy of it at the Fordham Road BID’s official website (www.fordhamroadbid.org).

This thorough investigation, study and observation of the social and environmental life of the Fordham Road area will help my readers clearly understand the impact the BID is implying on the area. But before I start talking about the future of Fordham Road, let’s first see how much the BID has accomplished for the 2008 fiscal year. Below this explanation excerpt we will see
the overall revenues/ expenses and overall monetary support. Fordham Road BID obtained for the same fiscal year.

Both bullet points and the three charts are taken from the official Small Business Services website on the NYC Business Improvement District Profiles 2009 report:

**Key Accomplishments in FY 08 (p.100)**

- **Administration:** Explored the feasibility of the expansion of the BID’s boundaries

- **Capital/ Streetscape Improvements:** Completed the Fordham road Streetscape Enhancement Master Plan which outlines a vision for future improvements to the Fordham Road commercial corridor (*will touch upon this later on in the thesis*)

- **Marketing/Promotion:** Increased marketing and promotional services for business participation, such as the Fordham Road Advantage Program and the Third Annual Sparkling the Heart of Fordham Event

- **Other:** Helped over 90 local businesses address a range of issues affecting their business through the Fordham Road BID Hotline

- **Sanitation/ Maintenance:** Maintained the BID’s successful sanitation and graffiti removal program which removed more than 162,500 bags of garbage from the corridor and addressed 410 incidents of graffiti

Fordham Road’s Revenues, according to the 09 FISCAL YEAR Annual Report by the Fordham Road BID, Fordham Road falls under the $500,000-$1,000,000 umbrella which also includes a total of 9 BIDs: Columbus Avenue, 47th Street, Fordham Road, Court-Livingston-
Schermerhorn, Washington Heights, Jamaica Center, 125th Street, Lower East Side, and Village Alliance. According to Wilma Alonso, when discussing on the total revenues and income generated for the Fordham Road BID, her thoughts were that the monetary input is definitely good, but at the same time, they wished they had more funds. She further stated that the Fordham Road Shopping District is an entity of its own with its growing daily businesses. In order for the BID to support such big steps, money sometimes and the lack of, becomes the issue slowing down the improvement processes. Daniel Bernstein, Deputy Director of the BID, elaborated more on to Wilma’s input by stating that 2008 was their best year when it came to monetary gains, grants, and profits. In grants the BID gained more than $200,000 dollars in that year alone. Adding on to the official half a million in City money, their total revenue exceeded $700,000. As soon as the economy tanked, Daniel explained, the money being put in also decreased tremendously. All the businesses that in the previous year were gladly supporting us in hundreds of thousands, in 09, they simply stopped. That year we only got a bit more than $30,000 in grants. The amount has a tremendous difference from the previous year. For the 2010 FY, the money is slowly starting to increase, but still incomparable to the profit gained back in 08, stated Daniel.

Daniel was kind enough to provide me with the actual auditing reports of the BID from their 2009-2010 fiscal years. The below charts elaborate more in detail on the revenues/ income/ and expenses gained and conducted through the 09-10 FY. (P.2-4)
FORDHAM ROAD DISTRICT MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION, INC.  
STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION  
JUNE 30, 2010 AND 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASSETS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash and cash equivalents</td>
<td>$ 21,900</td>
<td>$ 70,688</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grants and program revenue receivable</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepaid expenses</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and equipment, net</td>
<td>721</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security deposits and other assets</td>
<td>9,345</td>
<td>9,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total assets</strong></td>
<td>$ 51,475</td>
<td>$ 80,984</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liabilities:</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accrued expenses and other liabilities</td>
<td>$ 53,667</td>
<td>$ 47,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total liabilities</strong></td>
<td>53,667</td>
<td>47,259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commitments and contingencies (see notes)

Net Assets:

| Unrestricted                             | (2,192)   | 33,725    |
| Temporarily restricted                   |           |           |
| Permanently restricted                   |           |           |
| **Total net assets**                     | (2,192)   | 33,725    |

| Total liabilities and net assets         | $ 51,475  | $ 80,984  |

See accompanying notes to financial statements.
FORDHAM ROAD DISTRICT MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION, INC.
STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES
YEARS ENDED JUNE 30, 2010 AND 2009

Support and Revenues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2009</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment revenue</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>32,150</td>
<td>38,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions in-kind</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government grants</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest income</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>3,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total support and revenues</strong></td>
<td><strong>590,100</strong></td>
<td><strong>557,766</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Expenses:

Program Expenses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marketing and promotion</td>
<td>245,093</td>
<td>228,536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitation</td>
<td>253,296</td>
<td>248,661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public safety</td>
<td>12,956</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total program expenses</strong></td>
<td><strong>511,345</strong></td>
<td><strong>477,197</strong></td>
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</table>

Management and general

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>114,672</td>
<td>106,350</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total expenses</strong></td>
<td><strong>626,017</strong></td>
<td><strong>583,547</strong></td>
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</table>

Increase/(Decrease) in Net Assets:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
<td>(35,917)</td>
<td>(25,781)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporarily restricted</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanently restricted</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increase/(decrease) in net assets</strong></td>
<td><strong>(35,917)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(25,781)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Net assets, beginning of year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33,725</td>
<td>69,506</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Net assets, end of year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$(2,192)</td>
<td>$33,725</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See accompanying notes to financial statements.

- 3 -

Skody Scot & Company, CPAs, PC.
In order to better understand the development of businesses over the years in Fordham Road and their opinion on the presence of the BID, I went and interviewed a couple of store owners/ managers in the nearby vicinity. My first stop was the great appliances store, PC Richard’s and Son located at 2501 Grand Concourse. Mr. Carl Robinson is the general manager at the store and also a board member at the Fordham Road BID. A tall, medium height, light skinned gentleman, he politely approached me, thanked me for coming to the store at such short notice and directed me towards a small computer stand with a chair on the side of it to conduct our interview. Instead of myself taking the seat, I offered him the comfort of sitting down since he was going to be my interviewee. He chuckled, sat down quietly, crossed his legs and waited for me to start with my questioning with a smile on his face, even though at the moment phones everywhere in the store were ringing from one corner to another. My first question was how long has he been at the current position, the general manager position? He told me he has been the general manager of the store for almost 6 years now. His previous position was assistant manager. I asked him how long has this store been in the area. He stated that the store has been in this area for almost 9 years now. Before it became PC Richard’s and Son, the previous business here was called Caldors, something similar to Sears, he explained. Then I asked him what happened to Caldors, why did the business close in this particular area? He stated that Caldors went out of business nationwide. My next set of questions focused more on the store’s specific characteristics.

**Me:** How is the clientele here?

**Mr. Robinson:** The clientele here is mostly middle to lower class working people. They are what you call the “blue collar” workers. They are your bus drivers, your nurses, your lawyers, teachers, etc.
Me: What do they mostly prefer to purchase when coming to the store?

Mr. Robinson: The most preferred products that customers like to purchase the most are TVs and home appliances.

Me: How much money would a common customer spend on a usual business day here?

Mr. Robinson: On a slow day, the store can make up to $50,000 in consumer spending while on a fast-paced day, such as a weekend, the store can make up to $100,000 a day in consumer spending.

Me: Can you elaborate for me on how do you think has the neighborhood changed in the past years? Do you see any changes demographically, physically, or environmentally?

Mr. Robinson: The element is the same here as it was years ago. In my opinion, people haven’t moved out as well. Everything to me seems almost the same as when I was a little boy.

Me: (noticing his statement: “Since when I was a little boy”). So you have been living in the area for quite some time?

Mr. Robinson: (chuckling) Oh yeah, I have been living in the area since I was a little boy. This is my neighborhood, this is my home. That is why to me nothing has changed. In my eyes, everything is the same.

Me: Mr. Robinson, are you aware of the environmental and social changes the BID is making in the Fordham Road area?

Mr. Robinson: Of course.

Me: Would you label them positive or negative ones?

Mr. Robinson: (chuckling) Of course I would, label them positive ones! All positive!

Me: Do you support all of their changes to the neighborhood?

Mr. Robinson: Yes, I support them 100%.
Me: If you were in charge of changing this particular environment, what would you do differently?

Mr. Robinson: Well, so far everything that is happening here is being done on a highly positive scale which I would not do differently if the opportunity was given to me. The neighborhood has still a long way to go to better improve itself to the same level of upscale neighborhoods around the five borough areas. An alarming issue in the Bronx, especially in the Fordham Road Shopping District is the choice of food. All you see around here are only options of fast food restaurants. You do not find any healthy food restaurants or any restaurants at all. We are in need of upscale restaurants. Applebee’s just opened around here a few back at least that was an introduction of a nationally acclaimed restaurant opening up in the neighborhoods of the South Bronx. Crime levels need to go down, because that is becoming a true issue around these areas. Also we need to keep the “Mom and Pop” stores. These are the family stores that have been in the neighborhood for generations and to see so many of them closing down to make room for bigger and better stores, well that is just sad to see. I grew up with those stores and I appreciate their history in the neighborhood and they need to stay where they have been belonging: for decades and decades of years. Also for our businesses; we are in need of the same customers. We know the spending of regular customers and through them we can monitor our business better. I am not saying that we need new people everyday and undervalue the rest. New customers are the reason we stay in business. What I am saying is that for those customers that come in the store for the first time, our business would boom if those same people continued their business in the store, because whatever they spend, they know the value of it.

My next interview was done at a small cellular and accessories store right at the corner of Webster Avenue and East Fordham Road called Planet Communications. The owner/manager is
Mr. Raymond Yadid. Mr. Yadid had been in the area for almost 20 years first starting out with five stores, and now ending up only with two.

Me: How long have you been at this particular position?

Mr. Yadid: At this store I have been here 15 years. Overall, I have been a manager for 20 years.

Me: How long has this store been at this particular location?

Mr. Yadid: The store has been here for 15 years.

Me: What was this place before this store entered the area?

Mr. Yadid: Before my store, this spot used to be a night club.

Me: Would you happen to know why the previous store/business did not make it?

Mr. Yadid: To be honest, I am not sure what the reasons the previous business failed were.

Me: How is the clientele here?

Mr. Yadid: We have people from low to medium class families, but overall our store gets a lot of teenagers and young adults who come in to purchase the latest cell phones. Approximately we get working class clientele.

Me: On what particular services do the customers prefer to spend most of their money on?

Mr. Yadid: They mostly come by to pay bills, buy accessories and purchase new phones.

Me: How much money would a common customer spend on a day here?

Mr. Yadid: On average, a customer spends anywhere between $20-$50 dollars on a daily basis.

Me: Can you elaborate on the fact of how the neighborhood has changed in the past decade or so?

Mr. Yadid: The most apparent changes that I have seen in the past decade or so have been both grandiose and small in comparison. I have seen small retail stores closing down for the last 5-6 years. Rent has definitely increased, especially with the recession going on. Parking space has
decreased dramatically and bus lanes have increased which for the customers who used to drive to spend money in this area, now they either don’t come as often or when they come they don’t spend as much time as they used to, since it is a hassle parking cars on off site areas where the possibility of robbery or theft can occur, especially is the cars are parked on off skirt sites from Fordham Road.

Me: Would you say these changes are positive or negative?

Mr. Yadid: Definitely negative ones!

Me: Are you aware of what the BID is doing to the neighborhood?

Mr. Yadid: Yes I am aware of the changes the BID has been making to the neighborhood. They are keeping streets cleaner, they are securing the area better, their street fairs are amusing to attend, and their holiday gatherings do help businesses out a lot during the holiday times.

Me: Do you support what the BID is doing to the Fordham Road area?

Mr. Yadid: Yes I definitely support what the BID is doing to the area. The only issues I have are personal ones on behalf of the landlords of the area who are abusing on store rents.

Me: if you were in charge of changing this particular environment, what would you do differently?

Mr. Yadid: If I were in charge of changing the environment of Fordham Road, first and foremost I would put parking meters back on the streets. I would open more parking spaces. I would also like to provide more store stands in the area so stores can advertise their merchandise on the streets as well.

Even though Mr. Yedid’s insight on the area gave me great information, at the end I still felt the need to find out more about this particular place. The more I interviewed, the more interesting the information about the area was. I felt that a lot of important information was still
missing. This next interviewee, in my mind, would provide me with a greater deal of detailed historical information about the area. After all, changes in any place can be appreciated when compared in greater historical lengths.

Mr. Robert J. Sofia is the Vice-President of Emigrant Bank located by Grand Concourse and East Fordham Road in the Bronx. Entering the bank was the same as entering a historical museum. The ceiling was engraved in golden square plates which were accompanied in decoration with renaissance-engraved stone walls. The above view was magnificent. Everything inside the bank, from the golden hand rails, to the green glassed desk lamps, to the carpeted floors, everything screamed culture, history and sophistication. As I approached Mr. Sofia’s desk, I noticed he was so busy typing and looking at his computer screen, that it took him a while to notice my presence in front of him. Tall, medium built with fading grey black hair, olive skin, with a sense of European sophistication, Mr. Sofia’s smile and grace made me feel immediately welcome in his presence. As I took my seat in front of him, I noticed that the cream colored walls behind him were all filled with historical photos of the Bronx. Immediately I understood that history meant a great deal of importance to Mr. Sofia simply by observing at his surroundings;

Me: Mr. Sofia, thank you for having me here on such busy working hours.

Mr. Sofia—Oh not at all, I am the one who should apologize for not being able to contact you any time sooner. As you can imagine, this particular bank can get very overwhelming during the week. (He opens his drawer, to show me a historical picture of the Emigrant Bank lobby on a busy day in 1972. We both chuckle as we examine the photo.)
Me: Mr. Sofia, how long have you been living in this neighborhood? Or better off, for how long have you known this neighborhood?

Mr. Sofia: As far as living in this neighborhood I no longer reside here, but in New Jersey. I was born here though and spent a great deal of my childhood and early adulthood around these areas before moving.

Me: So you would call yourself a “Bronx kid”?

Mr. Sofia: (chuckling) Definitely I am a “Bronx kid”. My grandparents were Italian immigrants who immigrated to the Bronx area during the early 20th century.

Me: How long have you been working for Emigrant Bank?

Mr. Sofia: (chuckling, playfully hitting his forehead in laughter and rolling his eyes backward) Oh man, I have been here so long that I myself can't believe it. I have been working here for almost 42 years. I started here in 1969. If anyone would have told me that I would have been here so many years, I would have never believed them. (Ends the sentence with a great laughter)

Me: Wow, those are some years! So if you have been here that long, that means that you got this job when you were really young?
Mr. Sofia: When I first started here I was just out of school and my position here was called a Teller Trainee. We still have those types of positions available in this bank even in today’s times, the teller trainee position. I was paid $32 a week on a 35 hour week. (Chuckling) Can you imagine at that time getting paid $35 a week? How big it was? (Chuckling some more while playfully hitting forehead)

Me: What made you choose this particular bank?

Mr. Sofia: Convenience. It was convenient at the time for me so I didn’t hesitate to start.

Me: Do you enjoy what you do?

Mr. Sofia: Very much!

Me: What makes this particular bank here, the Emigrant Bank, more special than the rest of the banks?

Mr. Sofia: Well this particular bank has an interesting history. At the beginning of the 20th century it was originally named Dollar Savings Bank. Its presence served the immigrant community in New York. Then in 1983 it was renamed, Dollar Dry Dock Bank. In 1992, they named it to its final name, Emigrant Savings Bank. So from the name you can tell that it continues to attend the immigrant community that surrounds it. The only change they have made in the name is from Immigrant to Emigrant. That is the slightest difference. Aside from that, this bank was built for the immigrants of New York and continues to serve the first/second/third and fourth generation of immigrants that make up this city-the working class people.

Me: What types of customers approach this bank? Are they mostly older generation people/young adults/parents/ middle aged men/immigrants?

Mr. Sofia: It’s funny you asked that question because I just had a flashback memory on the bank’s environment during the 1970’s. You see Fiorela, during those times, people in this area,
specially people approaching banks such as Emigrant Bank, used to dress up in suits and hats when going out to conduct personal errands. This is the one thing that stays in my mind the most, the fact that in the past people used to reflect elegance and grace, especially around this area wherever they went, regardless on what they had to do. Nowadays everyone reflects their own personal sense of style when they go out, regardless if it is elegant, sportive or casual. In this bank, the majority of customers are the working class people of all ages.

Me: Have you ever encountered problems with the law from the customers during your time in this bank?

Mr. Sofia: Nowadays I can say that for a good 10 years the bank’s environment has been very calm. I don’t remember ever having to call cops for anything. But I can’t say that in the past we haven’t encountered hard times. In the late 80’s, this area had a great amount of pickpockets. People literally felt unsafe to go outside once finishing their business inside the banks because their money would be taken away. I had so many instances when customers would withdraw money from the bank. They would return in an instant complaining to us that just down the street their money was stolen away by pickpockets. We couldn’t do much except call the cops to better secure the area but even that wasn’t enough. Another type of crime was what we call the “ketchup scams”. These types of crimes, similar to the pickpockets, dealt with youngsters spraying ketchup, usually on senior citizens. As they would approach the person from the front notifying them of their spots of “blood” on their coats, another would approach from behind to steal their money. I remember having so many instances of these accidents.

Me: Are you aware of the presence of the BID and if you agree or disagree with what they are doing?
Mr. Sofia: (smiling) Yes I am greatly aware of the presence of the BID for the major fact that I am their Treasurer. (Laughing) No, but seriously, I absolutely love what the BID is doing to the neighborhood. I remember being in this bank in 1995 with a few businessmen asking them to form some type of coalition that will act as an advocate for the improvement of the neighborhood. I remember we all tried so hard to form some type of “mini BID” in 1995 but it never happened. It took almost ten years for the city to finally realize the need for the presence of the BID in this area.

Me: What would you like to be further improved about the neighborhood?

Mr. Sofia: I think that this area has been improving so much over the last decades that anyone who listens to this story simply is bewildered. I think as long as this area continues to cooperate with the BID, the future of the businesses will improve astoundingly.

Me: Do you have any closing/last comments on what you have been elaborating on, Mr. Sofia?

Mr. Sofia: (chuckling) If you are interested, I can elaborate more on how the neighborhood was like in the 50’s, if your readers are curious to know?

Me: Oh please, do tell. I think all of us would love to have a visual of the Bronx during the 50’s and 60’s. This way we can have a better idea of the development of the Bronx throughout the last 3 decades. (At this time Mr. Sofia turns to his coworkers and asks them to help him recall some of the memorable stores in the neighborhood during the 50’s and 60’s)

Mr. Sofia: Ok let’s see...hmmm, I remember that in the past this neighborhood reflected grace and elegance. If anyone shopped at Fordham Road during the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s, they were seen as wealthy and sophisticated. People used to travel from far to come to shop at Fordham Road. Shopping at Fordham Road was the place to be during these times. I also remember the uniqueness of businesses around the area. Nowadays when you step down by the department
stores by East Fordham Road you see ten jewelry stores in one block, eight cell phone stores in
the other and 13 department stores across the street. Everything is in great quantity all offering
almost the same types of products. In the past, during the 30’s, 40’s, 50’s and 60’s, the stores in
this area were focused mainly on quality than quantity. I remember this jewelry store named
"Modern Jewels" right around the corner that used to cater to your jewelry preference. You
space to a Day Care business. Also a lot of elected officials have decided to open their offices to the area such as Jose Rivera, the State Assembly Member and Gustav Rivera the State Senator. Montefiore Clinic has opened a lot of its offices in this area. A lot of health care insurance companies have decided to open new offices in this area. This type of improvement trend is telling me and the community that professionals and all types of high ranking people want to invest in this area and feel safe enough to either be surrounded by the area or conduct business there.

**Me:** Any closing remarks Mr. Terado?

**Mr. Terado:** What we need in this neighborhood is change of professionalism so people can grow within the community. We need to fight for urban renewal but most of all, we must encourage people to grow within the community. All these professional offices are hiring and training people from the community. They want the community to grow and improve itself. I think this is the solution to continuing to become the best, by growing from within.

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**Chapter IV**

*The Future of the Fordham Road Shopping District*

When speaking with Daniel Bernstein over our lunch meeting about the Fordham Road Shopping District, my ultimate question was, “So what are the BID’s plans for the future of this area?” Daniel looked at me, gave a quick laugh, and said, “Ahh, where to start on the improvements? There are so many that we want to do, but where do we start?” I looked at him for a moment and asked, “Which areas need the most improvements?” “Well Fiorela, by looking at our 2008 Master Plan, the office has separated their actions from immediate improvement, to short term improvements, to long term ones. Our immediate improvements are graffiti removals,
security presence during business hours, the cleaning of streets and the good maintenance of the facilities. Our short term improvements deal with the fixing of pedestrian walkways, re-painting of pavement markings, and the improvement of foot and vehicle traffic. Projects that have a longer improvement rate deal with the installment of green space, the providing of parking spaces and the overall improvement of the physical facade of the area.

When I took a look at the 2008 Master Plan’s improvement section, I found on page P-23 the feedback report the Fordham Road community gave to the BID when they held their meeting on March 26th, 2008. Their feedback dealt with countless issues from the presence of the street vendors being placed in un-designated areas, to the issue of the lack of clean facilities, to the danger of pedestrians crossing traffic under red lights, to the lack of visual signs, to the lack of landscape, lighting and dangerous traffic. When a poll was conducted on the priorities of the area as seen through the resident’s eyes (P-24), 66 people responded whose results were: 39% voted the environment needing the most improvement, 29% voted the request for more parking space, 18% voted cleaner facilities and 14% voted marketing and the overall improvement of the image of the area as being the least important.

The SWOT analysis chart found on page 25 (P-25) gives us a better idea of the current condition of the area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strengths</strong></th>
<th><strong>Weakness</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active retail corridor</td>
<td>Inconsistent amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple transit nodes</td>
<td>Congestion from vendors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low vacancy rates</td>
<td>Cluttered sidewalks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse landscape</td>
<td>Unattractive security gates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>Threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination</td>
<td>Parking availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New light and bus shelters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greening/planting</td>
<td>Heavy pedestrian &amp; vehicle volumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve pedestrian facilities</td>
<td>More vendors coming (Green Cart)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Régulate signage</td>
<td>Limited open space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate with Fordham Plaza</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bryan Park</td>
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<td>Select Bust-Service (BRT)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental statement in BX</td>
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</table>

People’s recommendations for improvement on the area have ranged from the presence of high-visibility crosswalk signs, the installment of pedestrian ramps/sidewalks and curbs, the installment of pedestrian countdown signals to the presence of the leading pedestrian interval (LPI) signal which gives pedestrians a heads when crossing the road before the green light is first given to the motorcycles.

Page 30 (P-30) of the 2008 Master Plan states a newly proposed streetscape plan provided by the BID to the city of New York. From the existing building line, the BID has proposed a 21’0” Dark Gray “Sparkling” Sidewalk space for pedestrians to use. After the sidewalk space, the office has proposed a 6’0” porous paving strip which will be provided with benches, planted tress (9’0” in diameter) with a 40’0” open space in between trees for outdoor relaxation time. After the porous paving strip, the proposal states for a 12” granite curb, which will be present next to the bus lanes.
The further installment of bicycle rings, bus shelters/bus stops (CEMUSA ones), pedestrian scale lighting, park benches, banners, litter and recycling containers, information directories, wayfinding sings and public art will further enhance the safety and warmth of the area.

Chapter V
Summary/Conclusion

My plan for this thesis has been to shine a positive light to the borough of the Brónx. Too much of unfair and misinterpreted messages are reflected by the media on the area throughout history, especially following the immigration of the Puerto Ricans and blacks after the 1950’s.

I am not shying away from the fact that the Bronx has indeed encountered many instances of poverty, isolation, desolation, economical and social struggles as well as backwardness. These have definitely been a part of the Bronx’s history in the past, but at the same time these instances such as the “burning years” of the 1970’s, the crime infested years of the 80’s and 90’s have pushed the area towards great leaps of improvement. The unfortunate part of the story is the fact that all these improvements have not been advertised by the public at large or by the media. People to this day are still afraid to travel up to the Bronx by train. Even people living in Brooklyn and Queens refuse to enter the borough for fear of crimes, let alone people living in Manhattan and Staten Island whose nonexistent interest in the Bronx continues from ignorance and lack of information. On a personal note, my own best friend of 8 years who is a resident of West 96th Street and Central Park West refuses to come to the Bronx to visit me. She only set foot once around the Yankee Stadium area 3 years ago, was so shocked by the experience that she refused to revisit me even after I spend hours explaining to her the safety and
uniqueness of it all. She still refuses from fear of crimes and kidnapping. *(I live on the northern region of the borough, totally different environment from the Southern region where her experience was not so good).*

Even the store owners whose businesses have survived the area for decades, all came together on one similar conclusion: the need to preserve the area culturally, but fight for social and environmental improvements. Mr. Terado’s closing argument stood with me for a long time when he stated that, “we need to grow from the inside of this community. We should not bring people out of state or from far away to work here. Let’s train and educate the current residents and make them great examples for our community to look up to. Let’s make the residents of our community the professionals of this area. Allow them to richen the borough with their educational skills. This way, anytime the community needs to seek out professionals to help manage their institutions (medical, educational, business), they can look outside their windows and pull out people right out of their own neighborhoods.”

Mr. Mizrahi also made a great closing argument. He stated that, “we need to bring people from the outside in. We need to inform the mass public of the greatness and cultural richness found in the Bronx area. We have people living here from all over the world, representing hundreds of cultures. It is a shame for the world to miss out on such wonders. This neighborhood and its diversity is the reason my business has survived for almost 50 years (from the time when my father first opened it) and it’s going to be these exact people and their future generations who will continue to help me reflect their worth and importance of this area.”
Books:


Newspaper Articles:


Internet Sites: