



UNDERSTANDING

THE



SOURCE

Created By: Ashley Craig
Public Safety Organizer

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Observational Notes

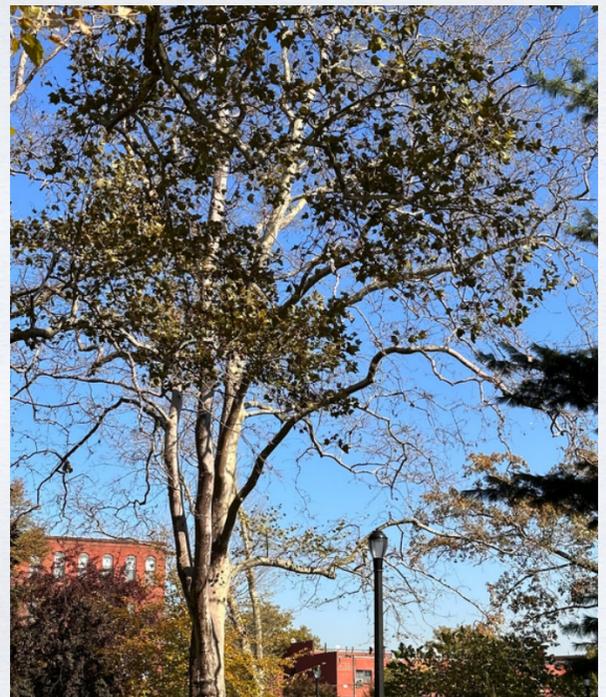
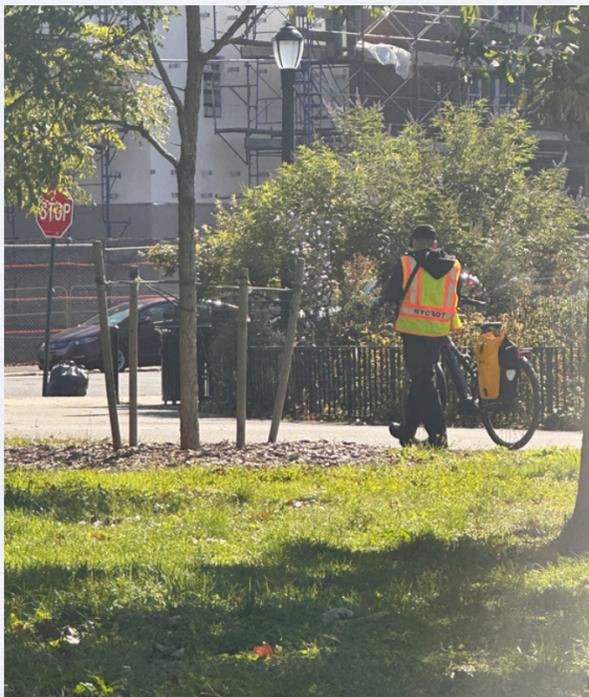
Location 1: Coffey Park

- A lot of birds flying in and out of trees
- A bee next to my leg
- Older man strolling down the road
- Man on the bench with his bike right in front of him
- Hear construction to the left of me
- Hear a truck backing up
- 3 (seemingly young adults just got up from a bench table and left the park
- White family with son playing in the park
- Squirrel running across grass
- Construction got louder
- I'm facing the projects and most/all white people entering/leaving, enter & leave from behind me
- NYC department of transit worker walking his bike through the park

Observational Notes

Continued

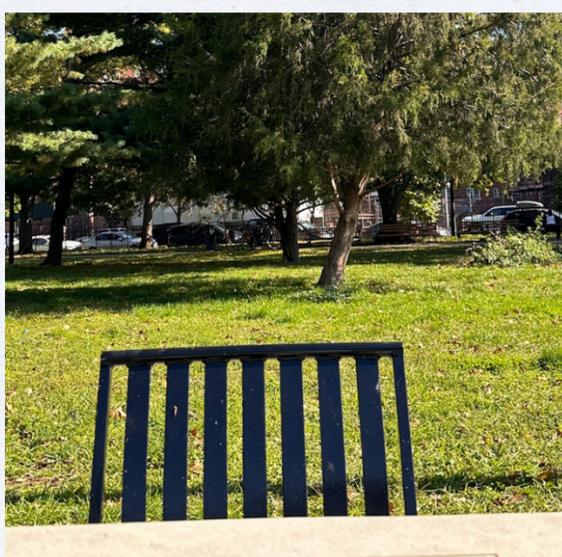
- Elementary or middle school kids have gotten out early and are walking through the park together with no adult
- Ice cream truck is driving by with no music
- Trees are balding
- A man behind me is eating lunch at a picnic table
- White lady pushing her baby stroller out of the park (behind me)
- Person roller-skating
- Lady walking her dog
- Delivery driver from Mark's just drove by on his motorcycle



Observational Notes

Continued

- Rustling in the bushes behind me
- It's very sunny, a little hot
- It's a lot of people in neon vests
- Hammer drill has been drilling non-stop for like 15 minutes
- Helicopter flew over
- Two people (maybe a couple) took a walk around the park (lady said they're exercising)
- Squirrel just got incredibly too close to me
- Lady just yelled at her kid, now the kid is crying
- Two porta potty's are next to me
- Tree in front of me is leaning
- Man walked behind me smoking weed that is very loud



Observational Notes

Location 2: Ikea

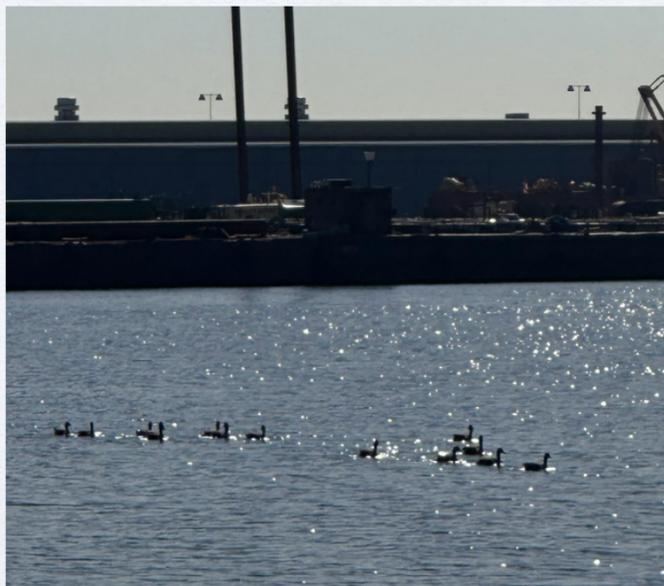
- Couple is flying a drone to take their pictures
- A lot of seagulls
- Man fishing
- Doodles on the bench I'm sitting on
- Seagulls sound like they're fighting
- Family of ducks in the water
- Very loud crow on top of the Ikea sign
- Helicopter flying over the water is loud
- The water looks like it's moving in 10 different directions
- Woman jogging
- Sounds of people stepping on crunchy leaves
- Seagulls flying together across the water



Observational Notes

Continued

- Bird flying away from crane machine
- Garbage can is a weird cone shape
- Man bike riding
- Asian man with sunglasses and a cigarette walking down the dock (he looks cool)
- Man with fishing supplies walking down the dock
- Windmill behind me is not spinning
- Emergency buttons
- Rules and regulations attached to dock
- The smaller trees are balding faster than the big ones
- Sun feels hotter over here
- Couple walking holding hands



Observational Notes

Continued

- Two older white women walking a humongous dog
- White man looking at his phone walking a very fluffy husky
- The tree next to me looks too smooth to be real
- Sun shining very bright against the water
- Heard a bus or truck stop
- Wind blowing through crunchy leaver, making a lot of noise
- There's not many people out here
- Tree's are more orange here
- Sounds like a truck is being loaded
- The fishing man is leaving, walking w/cane
- Two white ladies with huge dog are also leaving
- Idk which bridge that is to the left of me, but I know it's in Manhattan
- Cool Asian man is leaving

Observational Notes

Continued

- Very rusty boat in the middle of the water
- Old couple walking very slow w/ a camera

Interview with Ajene, Red Hook Resident

November 18th. 2022

Ashley Craig:

What is your name?

Ajene Barton:

Ajene Barton.

Ashley Craig:

Do you consent to this interview?

Ajene Barton:

Yeah.

Ashley Craig:

Do you consent to this interview being transcribed, and published?

Ajene Barton:

Yeah.

Ashley Craig:

Okay... What is your connection to Red Hook? How long have you been living or working at Red Hook?

Ajene Barton:

I work in Red Hook. I've been working in Red Hook for... about a year.

Ashley Craig:

How does this community look to you?

Ajene Barton:

Answer honestly?

Ashley Craig:

Yes, please.

Ajene Barton:

(scoffs) This community looks like... Can I say the Bronx? This community-

Ashley Craig:

What does the Bronx look like to you? Explain that for me please.

Ajene Barton:

This community looks um... confused because some parts of it are dirty, for lack of a better word. Um, Other parts of it are gentrified, for lack of a better word.

Ashley Craig:

What would you consider your current goals to be?

Ajene Barton:

In life or in Red Hook?

Ashley Craig:

(both laughing) In life.

Ajene Barton:

My current goals are to... When you say current goals in life, you mean lifetime goals, or what's my goals for tomorrow?

Ashley Craig:

Short term, long term. Whatever that means to you.

Ashley Craig:

What does it mean to be successful to you?

Ajene Barton:

My goal is to be financially free, travel a lot, see the world. Experience as much as the world as I can, the good parts. Parts that I want to experience.

Ashley Craig:

That's real.

Ajene Barton:

Yeah. Um, My short term goals are to save my money, and look for new opportunities that can help me make more money.

Ashley Craig:

Mhm. What would your vision of a safe Red Hook look like?

Ajene Barton:

Safe Red Hook? Is there anything unsafe about Red Hook?

Ashley Craig:

What has your experience been?

Ajene Barton:

Um, In my experience, Red Hook seems like a pretty safe place. There's police everywhere all the time, and I think that helps the safety numbers. Um, I don't know what much else can be done to help the safety of Red Hook, considering that there's police everywhere all the time.

Ashley Craig:

What do you believe the role of the police should be in terms of community safety?

Ajene Barton:

To prevent any issues that could harm the civilians ...within the community or prevent anything that could harm the community itself. Doing their best to understand the community that they're in and knowing how to... build a relationship with the community is a big part of properly policing the people.

Ashley Craig:

Definitely. What changes should be made in the...(laughing)

Ajene Barton:

What changes should be made?

Ashley Craig:

In the Red Hook community.

Ajene Barton:

What changes should be made in the Red Hook community? I would like to see more food places.

Ashley Craig:

That's funny you say that because the next question I was going to ask, how do you feel about the food access in Red Hook?

Ajene Barton:

I think that there should be more food places, access to better food. Not the same three delis... I don't really like none of the three delis.

Ashley Craig:

(laughing) Okay... How does the Red Hook social community affect you?

Ajene Barton:

Social community?

Ashley Craig:

Mhm. Just in terms of you at work and, you know...

Ajene Barton:

The social community of Red Hook doesn't directly affect me in any particular way...

Ashley Craig:

Is that all?

Ajene Barton:

Yeah, that's it.

Ashley Craig:

Okay, what are some pros in Red Hook?

Ajene Barton:

Pros in Red Hook?

Ashley Craig:

Mm-hmm.

Ajene Barton:

Um... (sigh). Pros to Red Hook are RHI a nice program that Red Hook has that empowers the youth of the community.

Ashley Craig:

That's definitely one thing I appreciate about Red Hook as well.

Ajene Barton:

Me too.

Ashley Craig:

What are some cons in Red Hook?

Ajene Barton:

Well, cons in Red Hook. Sometimes parking is weird in Red Hook. Sometimes, I don't know what the correct term for this is, but there's crack heads running frantically on the street (laughing) in front of delis and stuff like that. I don't know if that's a con per se, but it'd be nice to find shelter for everyone in Red Hook.

Ashley Craig:

So that kind of goes along with the resources needed in Red Hook?

Ajene Barton:

The resources needed in Red Hook, and resources in order to help people, rehabilitation.

Ashley Craig:

Yep. Well, thank you so much for your time.

Interview with Justin, Red Hook Resident

November 20th. 2022

Ashley Craig:

What is your name?

Justin:

Justin.

Ashley Craig:

Do you consent to this interview?

Justin:

I do.

Ashley Craig:

Do you consent to this interview being transcribed and published?

Justin:

I do.

Ashley Craig:

Okay.

What is your connection to Red Hook? How long have you been working or living in Red Hook?

Justin:

Red Hook is a community that I feel like has grounded me in a lot of ways. I feel like growing up I've been like.. not connected to my community. I grew up in the Bronx and I feel like I haven't been outside connected with the people who live in the community as much as I have here.

And I've moved to different neighborhoods and I feel like this is the first place where I really... felt stable enough to learn the community and learn the people in the community and learn how community actually works. And what was the second part? I've been living here for, what, nine years we've been here?

Ashley Craig:

Yeah, eight now.

Justin:

Been here for eight or nine years. And then working in Red Hook for four years with Red Hook Farms.

Ashley Craig:

How does the community look to you?

Justin:

It looks kind of crazy right now. It looks kind of like, things aren't... I want to say aren't in our control, but I feel also, like, there are certain systems that want to amplify our voices in the ways that I feel like we are out of control in terms of the construction and things like that. And how long it took and how long it's taken to finish, how long it took to get here to repair Red Hook and how long they're taking to finish it up. It's kind of like... It's not a pretty sight to say the least, but it's going. And I wish there was more information out there. That's all.

Ashley Craig:

Okay. Um, What do you do for a living?

Justin:

To be honest, I am... I want to say I aim to be a sovereign. Someone who has complete control over their life in terms of financially, environmentally, and economic...

Well, that's the same thing. Environmentally and socially, just having complete autonomy over how I want to move about things. And I do that through finding ways of living sustainably like farming. I get that straight from the land. I don't have to go to a store to farm. And I feel like that makes sense for the way to live in general. So... things like that. So I also like to do art, so I try to do that in a natural holistic way. I went to a conference and got some wool and I wanted to spin it into a piece of clothing basically to wear. And I was thinking I can get land, raise sheep and then have clothing right there. And also that'd be taking care of the animals too. But things like that. So that's what I aim to be.

Ashley Craig:

What are the barriers you face in the pursuit of your goals?

Justin:

Hmmm... I feel like the barriers I face... Mainly insecurities and traumas from just being young, from life. I feel like growing up it's just like (you) face certain things, you walk with them and then it's certain triggers for certain traumas come up in regular life, but just regular days and it's hard to deal with and also work and doing what you have to do. So I feel like that's one of the boundaries I face. But I feel like it's also something to learn and grow from. So there's a balance there with it. I feel like it's not all bad is, yeah, what I'm trying to say. But there's a second part of the question?

Ashley Craig:

What would your vision of a safe red hook look like?

Justin:

People being able to have their basic needs met for free, or even just a system to meet basic needs for people in Red Hook so that we can be able to go to work and be able to spend time with people, be able to have the space to think, be able to not be stressed out all the time. And what I mean by that is food, I feel like is a basic need.

And over here there's a food apartheid, where they intentionally have different produce over here, different types of stores over here that are lower cost and lower value produce. So I feel like if you had... And so to combat that, we have farms, things like that.

The farm I work at, I feel like that's one of the ways we meet that need. We have fresh food going out to the people for really... For something that's affordable and it's really good produce. And we also give it away with a barter system so you don't have to pay. And that type of access, I feel, helps me eat healthily and feel better in my body and have knowledge about how the land works. And it's also very just meditative, getting outside. It encourages me to get outside and get in the soil and see life past humans and just social and lessens my anxiety because I'm like, everything is, I mean like this plant right here is very chill. I could be chilled. Things like that.

So yeah, that's how I feel. That's my vision of Red Hook. And being able to have basic things met like toilet paper giveaway and things like that. Or we all come together to have breakfast after we harvest from the farms and utilize the land for different purposes like food or compost, things like that. And we all harvest and come together after tending to the land and eat together, things like that.

And everybody could get a piece and everybody helps clean or brings their own plate or helps compost by throwing their stuff in the compost. And that's how we all contribute. And it's like if... Yeah, I feel like if everybody's basically... They have water, drinks. Feel me, yeah.

Ashley Craig:

That's calm. What do you believe the role of the police should be in terms of community safety?

Justin:

I feel like police should have more interactions outside of just arresting people and being called to answer problems. And I also feel like there should be... In more community spaces I feel like. In terms of.. as regular people in the community. I also feel like we should hire people from the community to police the community. Because this familiarity is like, I don't know these people. They don't know me and they have a certain perspective of me and that could be super dangerous.

And then it's like, you don't know me. So it's like with all the conditioning going on and then the... the way people are viewing people in this neighborhood, familiarity and representation would be huge. I feel like people here would... It's like I know how it goes, so I'm going through this the right way and having the room and the platform to do that, I feel like is important.

Ashley Craig:

Word, Okay. Well thank you so much for your time. Have a good one.

Justin:

No problem. You too.

Understanding the Source

Public safety means having easy access to the necessities needed to live a sustainable life. Often the lack of resources in communities can lead to unsafe and unlawful living methods to make ends meet. With the amount of time I've spent in low, middle, and high-class communities, I can confidently say that access to education, jobs, healthcare, food, and housing resources are significantly limited and subordinate in middle and low-class neighborhoods than they are in higher-class communities.

Regarding education, people in lower-income communities must work many times harder to access quality colleges and universities because, typically, the demographic of people who live there are people of color. In these neighborhoods, school funding is lower, which usually causes many issues, such as teachers not having the appropriate amount of resources needed to teach students or having an inadequate amount of resources compared to schools in higher-class neighborhoods.

Schools like this may allocate their funding in ways that may seem helpful to the students but do more harm than good such as hiring a surplus of security guards or having to prioritize things like repairs and upkeep over supplies for the students.

Job access for people in these neighborhoods is limited because of stereotypes, biases, and stigmas associated with people of color. Although it is illegal to discriminate against race during the hiring process, it is effortless for corporations to find loopholes around this, which they often do. If these people cannot get a job or find a job that does not pay well, their access to healthcare may be limited as well. Healthcare can be costly without insurance and unaffordable for those who do not have the money for it.

As someone who's spent most of their school career in East Harlem, a two-block difference could determine what types of food were accessible to you. Near my high school, we had plenty of corner stores, Popeyes, McDonald's, and all of America's most popular fast-food restaurants. Still, if you walk down a few blocks, you can find Starbucks, Jamba Juice, and healthier food options that are less affordable. This disparity between food options is seen all around New York City and is undeniably a race and class issue, which are arguably synonymous.

Housing in New York is another crisis that impacts those with lower incomes. It is unjust that people are forced to live in inhumane and dangerous conditions because of where they rank in class. In my own experience, I had to live in the shelter system for two years because my mother wanted a safer and less traumatic childhood for my siblings and me. The last year and a half I spent at these shelters,

I lived in deplorable conditions that no one cared to fix, a broken toilet that wouldn't flush, a ceiling that constantly grew water bubbles that burst and flooded our apartment, mold, and plenty of furry friends. No one ever came to repair any of these problems; we were expected to be grateful to have a place to lay our heads at night, no matter how awful the state of the apartment was. However, part of me was extremely grateful not to sleep outside like thousands of people do every night in harsh weather conditions and crime-pervaded streets.

All these things can take a severe mental and physical toll on the people affected. When people are not okay mentally or physically, it can make it difficult to do regular day-to-day things or take care of their essential needs for them to live sustainable lives.

When people in these communities don't have jobs, they can't make money, and when prices everywhere are rising, money is everything. Without money, there is very little they can do to get. They can't afford healthy foods, yet eating unhealthily can cause them to become sick, and when they get sick, there is not much they can do because healthcare is costly. Without money, a vicious cycle can be created, which is why job access is so important.

When some people from these communities become sick or injured, they don't have many options for where they can receive quality care or can't afford the care that they have access to, which causes them to deal with it at home the best they can, and sometimes the best is not enough. Specific symptoms can be a more significant issue than they feel, but they don't have any other choice. I can only imagine how difficult it must be trying to live your life as usual when your physical state is making you incapable of doing so, but that is many people's reality.

Not only is it essential to have access to healthy food, but it's also important to have access to food, period. I'm sure we've all been in positions where we've been so hungry to the point where we say we're "starving," we feel sick, or we get "hangry." For most, it is tough to function throughout the day with no meal or anything to eat without experiencing any of these things. It is very uncomfortable and frustrating to feel, but many have no option but to deal with it. All of these issues can naturally cause people to go into survival mode and do whatever they need to do to overcome it.

The way these issues show up in our communities can and do create public safety issues for the people affected and everyone else in the community. Limited no access to jobs creates a poverty cycle in these communities.

Imagine being hungry every day and having food so close to you but not having access to it because you do not have access to money; naturally, you're going to do what you must to survive, even if that means stealing. In my own experience, when my housing situation was terrible, it was hard going to school every day trying to be focused and putting on a happy face when at home, I just had to soak up a flood caused by a ceiling bubble and not having time to eat breakfast because of it. Or not being able to focus on my homework because of the constant raging headaches I got from the ceiling mold. Or even now, having NYCHA come into my home without any warning to work in my bathroom causes me to be late for work or events I have to attend.

When people go through similar or worse situations than I have stepped out into the world, people don't see what's at home. They don't know that person is starving, and that's why they stole a small snack from the store; they don't realize they have a terrible headache from the mold that's growing on their ceiling at home, and that's why they have their head down in class, they see the effects.

Nobody should ever have to rely on unsafe or illegal living methods to make ends meet. Not only is it not fair, but it's also not safe. It's effortless and understandable to be selfish and want to only look out for yourself. Still, I hope that one day more communities see the importance of finding ways to provide more resources for those who do not have any or fund the places that offer them.

During a public safety zoom training break-out room, we were asked to describe experiences we had with the police, and my partner told me of an experience they had while collecting bottles off the street and garbage cans.

They were yelled at by the cops and asked if they lived there, then told to go home when they actually did live in the neighborhood. This is an excellent example of how even people who are supposed to protect the public can prevent someone from making money for themselves in a harmless way. In an interview with the famous rapper Tupac Shakur, he talks about how our ancestors used to ask for our rights, and over time it stopped being a question and became more of a demand because we saw what was available to us; yet, they were making it unattainable because of where we come from and how we look.

This can be compared to people in our neighborhoods and communities asking for resources to better their lives. They see them every day, yet it is unattainable. After a particular while, they're going to get tired of feeling hungry, tired of being in pain, tired of being broke, tired of being looked down upon by those who have what they don't, and they're going to take what they need to live their life.

What contributing to and creating public safety means to me is helping each other get what we deserve. A lot of the time, it goes beyond physical needs. Sometimes people need an ear to listen to or a shoulder to cry on. Being that space for someone or opening up yourself to get mental help can make all the difference to how you deal with the little things and the big things, such as not having your material needs met. Mental health resources are another critical component of developing public safety.

If we replaced the number of security guards we place in low-income schools with qualified therapists and guidance counselors, there wouldn't be a need for the excess amount of security.

While it is supposed to, It does not feel safe walking into school every morning and seeing a plethora of people with badges and uniforms similar to the police on defense towards you or your peers or walking through metal detectors every morning; it can make them feel like criminals, and who would find it easy to focus and work in an environment like that. And because these things are even needed to make sure children aren't there to hurt each other shows us that we are going wrong somewhere way before they create the intentions to hurt each other. It begins at the source.

We should not be placing all the blame on the people who are just trying to survive. If more resources were accessible to these people and they weren't so difficult to obtain once the poverty cycle began, these issues wouldn't be as prevalent as they are. Public safety starts with those in positions to provide the same resources they have access to, to those who don't have them.

Yet, often, those are the same people who look down on and monetarize them. While it is easy to judge, it's also essential to empathize because that is more progressive than anything else. If we want to make a real difference and genuinely contribute to the safety of our communities, we need to look for ways that we can contribute, whether that's volunteering at our local pantries, spreading the word about job opportunities through our media platforms, canvassing, or donating to nonprofit medical clinics.

A prime example of an organization that works to fix specific issues at its root is The Red Hook Initiative (RHI). I am very grateful to have been able to be a part of a team who cares about the safety of not only our community but many in New York City.

The rallies, the informative zoom meetings, and our training that happens every Friday have all given me perspective on what public safety is and how the people who are supposed to maintain that are showing up and what we can do about it.