

VOL. 177, NO. 5



MAY 1990

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



Growing Up in EAST HARLEM ⁵²

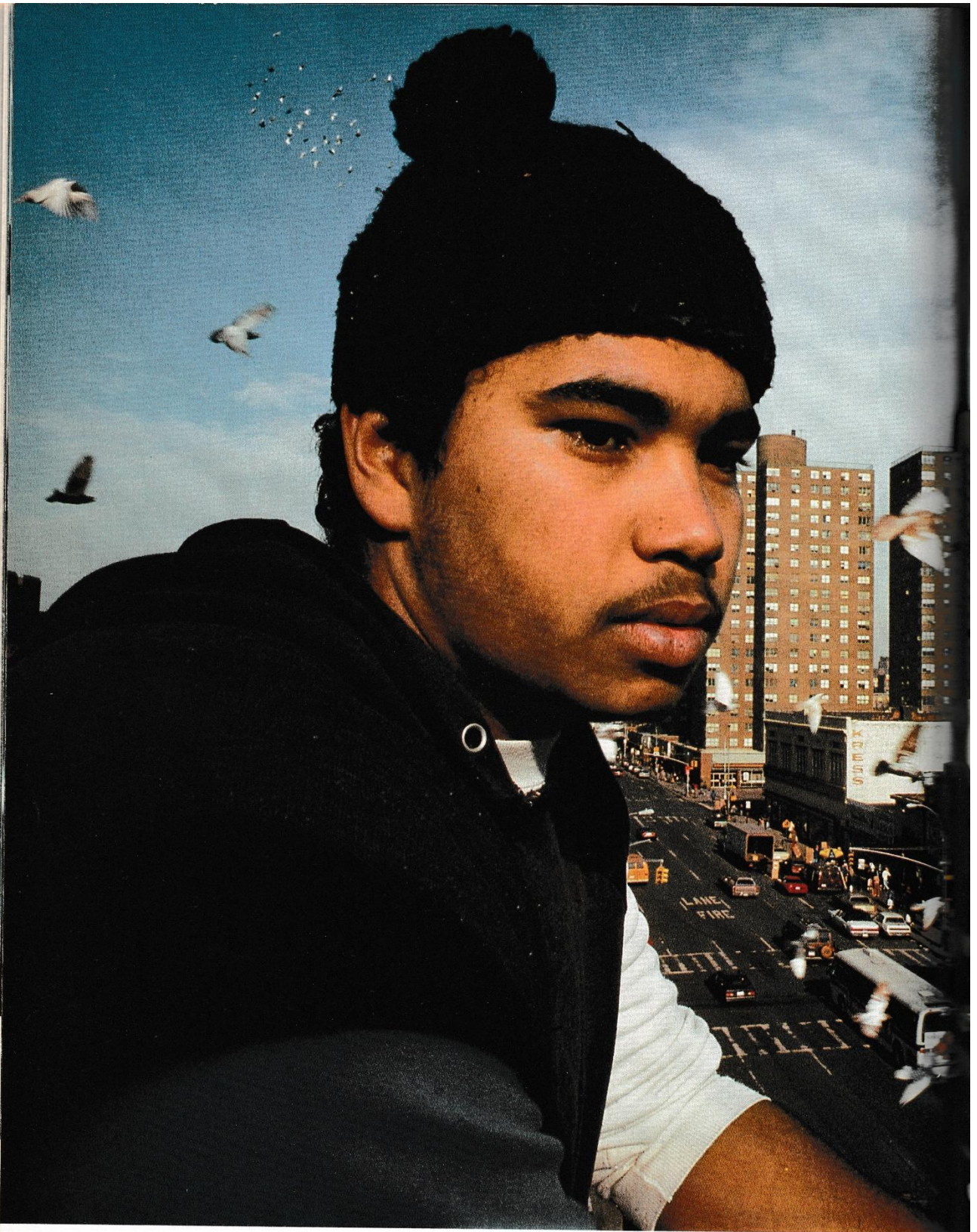
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Growing Up in **EAST**



By JERE VAN DYK

Photographs by
JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ
BLACK STAR

The mainland's oldest and most vibrant Puerto Rican community, standing just north of New York City's wealthy Upper East Side with its shoulder to Black Harlem, struggles to overcome a legacy of neglect and a recent invasion of crack cocaine. For Tany Davila, dreams take wing from a rooftop above Third Avenue, where he flies some of his 175 hand-groomed pigeons.

HARLEM

IT WAS CALM AND HOT as I watched the barrio waking up for another Saturday. A man worked under a car, the wash flapped on a rooftop line, Latin music throbbed up from the street. Someone made strong coffee and new bread.

From the roof of a high rise that was littered with crack cocaine vials and broken bottles, I could see the green fields of Central Park, a sailboat tacking on the East River, the glittering skyscrapers of midtown Manhattan, a world away.

In the middle was East Harlem itself: brownstone tenements, housing projects, vacant lots, burned-out buildings, shattered windows—200 square blocks where 120,000 people live beset by drugs, crime, and despair but also in a cousinship of hope, love, and optimism that stirs the outsider.

Fifty percent of the people are of Hispanic origin, 49 percent black, a few others of Italian or Asian ancestry. Per capita income hovers around \$4,000. One in seven East Harlem adults is out of work. More than one in three gets some form of public assistance, among the highest welfare rates in the nation. The area has some of the city's worst crime and one of the nation's highest school-dropout rates. Drugs and AIDS haunt every man, woman, and child who lives here.

To live in Spanish Harlem—the neighborhood, *el barrio*—you must watch yourself and everyone else, because you are in another world; you are, as my friend Joe Rodriguez told me on my first day, “across the line.”

“Don't stare. Be cool,” Joe said. He had been here, he spoke the language. “It's all body language,” Joe said, showing me how. “Look up and ahead, never down. Do a bee-line. Keep your hands out of your pockets.”

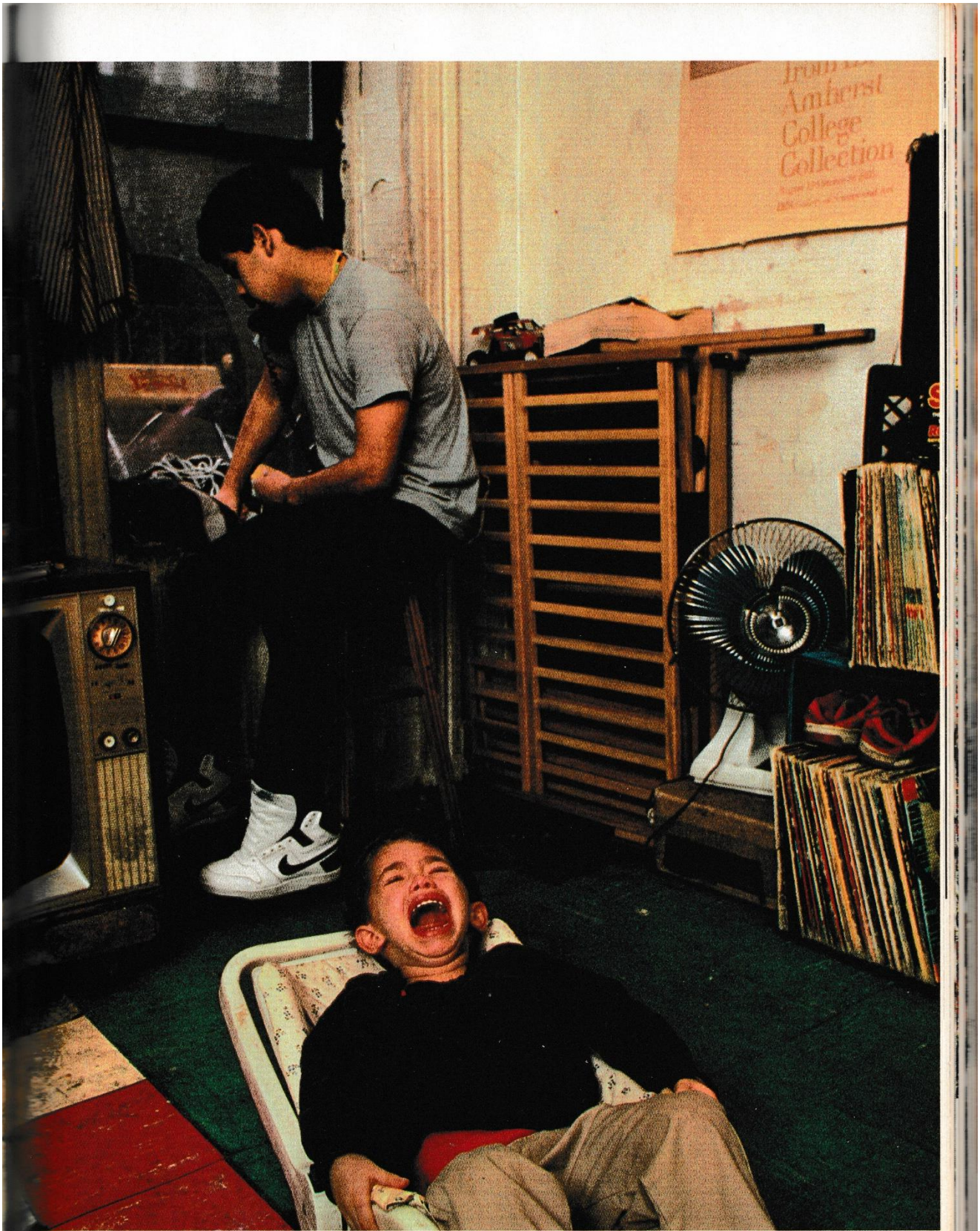
Walking along Third Avenue, we passed a stand selling yucca, yams, *batata*, *plátanos*, mangoes. Then we came to a bad corner, Lexington and 110th Street, filled with people with quick eyes and dark clothes.

“Three star, three star,” a man shouted, hawking cocaine. “Methadone 60, 80,” said another, advertising synthetic heroin. A man with his hair in dreadlocks silently held out two hypodermic needles in a wrapper.

JERE VAN DYK, a writer living in New York City, covered the Brahmaputra River for the November 1988 GEOGRAPHIC. JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ grew up in Brooklyn, New York. This is his first assignment for the magazine.



Born addicted to cocaine but now fully withdrawn, a four-year-old screams, perhaps for attention, while his uncle sells heroin over the



phone. Since the boy's parents both deal and use drugs, he and a sister are being raised by their maternal grandmother. Two other siblings, including a girl born with only one hand—possibly due to her mother's crack habit—live with another grandmother.





A dented blue police car pulled up, and two young officers, bareheaded, with their hair combed back, stared coldly at the corner. Business slowed, the dealers' voices dropping as one of the cops spoke into a walkie-talkie, then drove away. I went down another street and found an undercover officer frisking two young men against a brick wall. These suspects looked about 14.

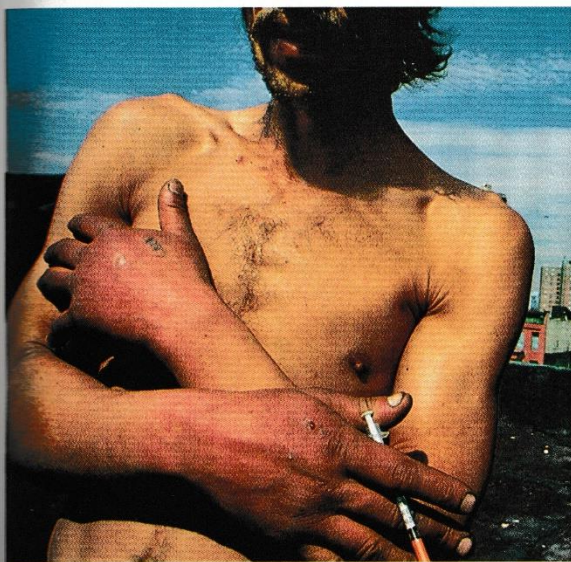
"Kids support their parents by selling drugs now," explained a uniformed cop who had come with others to assist the undercover officer. You can buy crack, heroin, angel dust, and other illegal drugs in a hundred places in East Harlem. When the city police department's tactical narcotics teams swept dealers out of the Lower East Side, West Harlem, Queens, and Washington Heights, the pushers moved to the barrio, renting apartments, working out of grocery stores, moving on.

"We need a warrant to go in," the cop said. "By then it's too late. Our hands are tied." A woman dispatcher's voice crackled on his radio, calling out another address. The day would be long.

"Drugs have become a major part of the economy," said the young officer, whose white bulletproof vest showed under his shirt.

Neither the New York City Police Department nor the federal Drug Enforcement Agency knows how much drug money changes hands in the barrio each day. But Capt. Joseph Lisi of the police department's narcotics division was willing to guess: "It's millions of dollars a year," an amount that would easily cover the rent on the Empire State Building.

Not so long ago, it was different. "This was a nice community," recalls Pete



Before innocent eyes, drugs and thousands of dollars change hands each day in el barrio—East, or Spanish, Harlem. A line forms at night outside a school on 117th Street; look-outs whistle and shout code words to screen passersby (far left). A recent 90-day police operation saw the arrest of 2,000 for sale or possession—many from outside the city—and the seizure of more than a hundred firearms. "I'm afraid of crack fiends," one dealer admitted. "They're savages."

Avoiding crack's intense but brief high and its subsequent jitters, some addicts prefer shooting speedball, cocaine and heroin, a practice that like all frequent needle use collapses veins and causes swelling.



Long the refuge of poor immigrants, the tenements of Spanish Harlem march south like barracks toward the skyscrapers of midtown. Many Harlem buildings have been abandoned by landlords as unprofitable, and some have been torched, leaving streets pocked with vacant lots. Towering projects, erected by the city after the 1940s, break the low skyline on both sides of busy Third Avenue. These superblocks provide needed housing for some of the area's 120,000 residents.

Saddled with ownership of more than 60 percent of the vacant land and buildings, the city provides grants to groups



willing to renovate and buy. It is not enough, according to homesteaders like Estela Vázquez and her husband, Key Martin (right), who have spent five years of evenings and weekends submitting forms, framing windows, and guarding against vandals.

"It feels sometimes like we're building the Pyramids," says Estela. Her group, one of only three active in el barrio, sees the character of the neighborhood itself at stake. With speculators buying up buildings and one-bedroom condominiums selling for \$130,000, real estate values are bound to rise, forcing long-time residents from their homes.





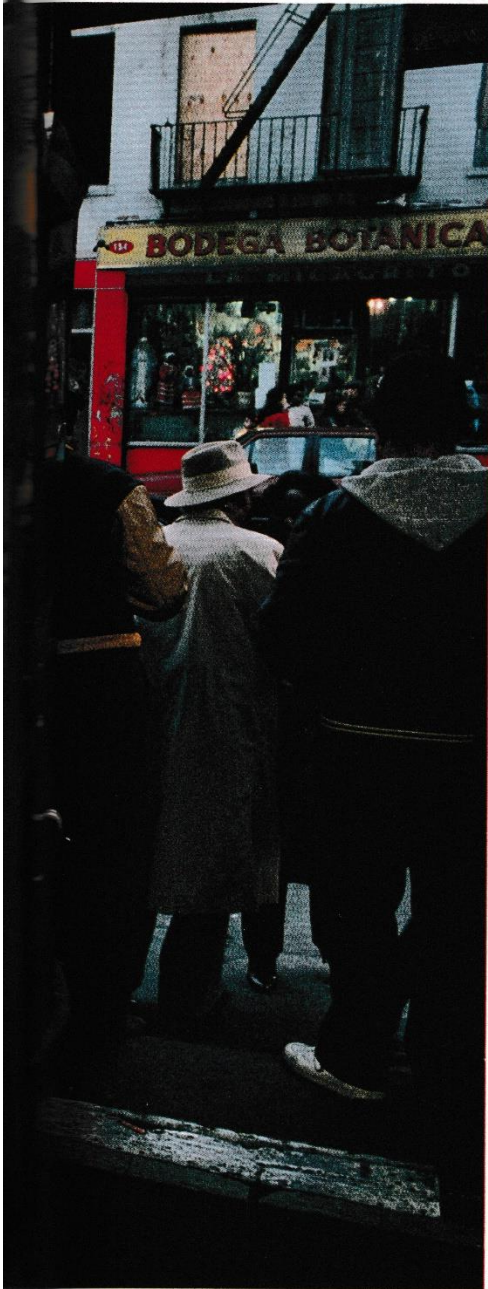
Pascale, 75, remembering the simple East Harlem of his youth. The neighborhood was known then as Little Italy, a place of two-cent ice creams, ten-cent movies, unlocked doors, kerosene lamps, and a policeman on the corner who knew your name and your reputation.

"People worked hard," Pascale says, his face reflecting the pleasant memory. "There was respect for the family."

Even today you catch glimpses of what it must have been like—in community vegetable gardens that thrive in vacant lots, in a school

classroom where kids talk about the future, in the hospital where a doctor hugs two children she has known since they were born, in a church parade on a summer night.

I watched the 105th annual procession of Our Lady of Mount Carmel coming up 116th Street. The faithful—Hispanics, blacks, and whites—walked together at a solemn pace, candles flickering in the dark, following a plaster Madonna on a float, led by a brass band whose members wore black pants and red berets. These were proud people any American



"I can relax here," says Margaret McQuillar (below, at right) of the garden she and Elizabeth Smoaks help tend on Pleasant Avenue. Children and civic pride blossom amid the okra and apple trees. At a 110th Street old-timers club, men unwind with dominoes after work. Talk includes politics, sports, and plans for the block party.



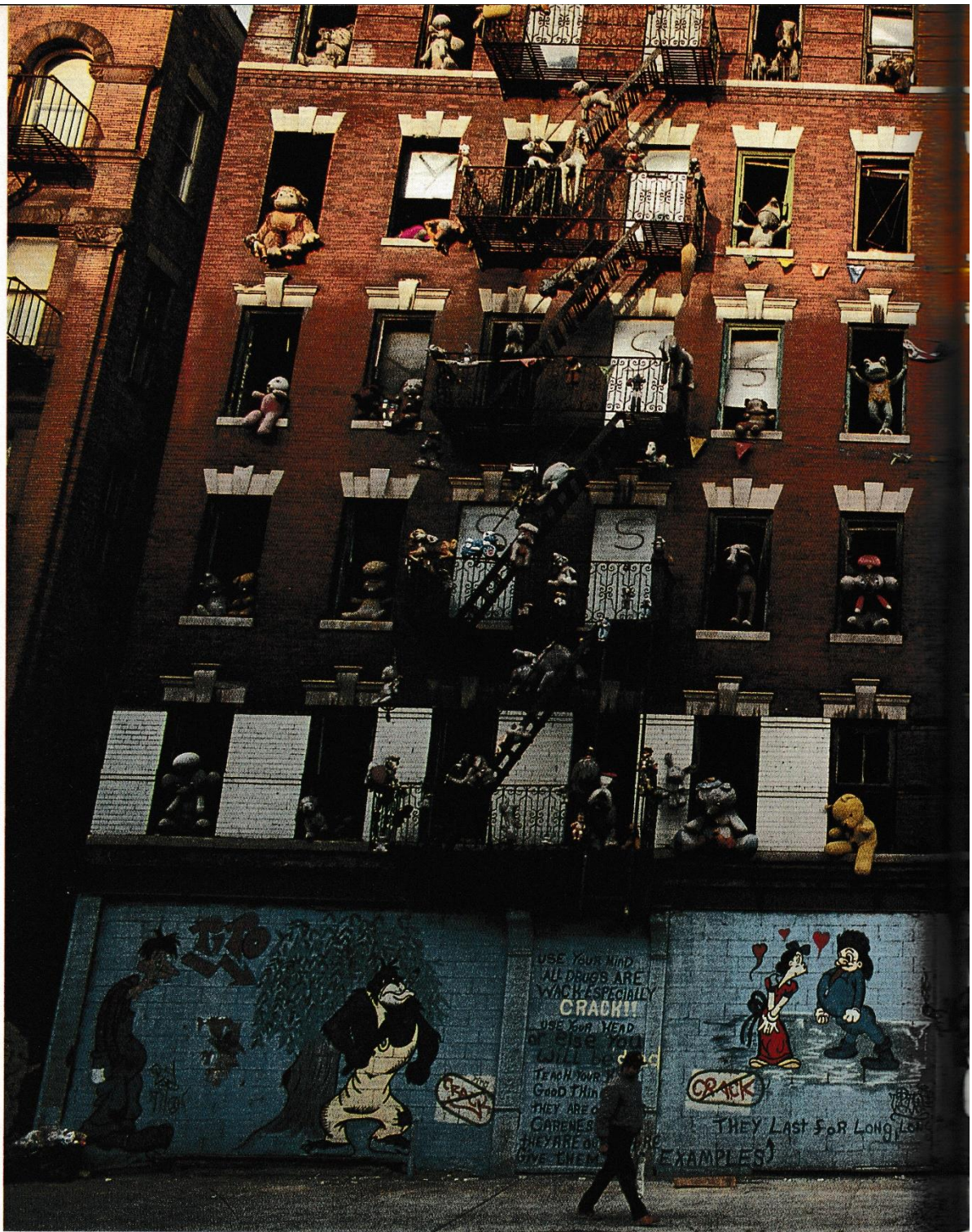
would recognize, people who cared about their neighborhood. Seeing them made me realize that there are pockets of calm just beneath the barrio's turbulent surface.

LUGO'S BARBERSHOP on Lexington Avenue is a warm place where neighbors can talk, surrounded by color maps of San Juan and Puerto Rico. Relaxed families smile from snapshots on display. Inspirational, handwritten mottoes are posted on the walls: "Never become a victim of fear

or envy; that will keep you from doing good." "He who has obstacles and overcomes them is the winner."

The man behind the mottoes, Alejandro Lugo (pages 66-7), ran a comb through his customer's hair. "You find good and bad all over the world," he said. "I always wanted to come to this country. I saw the big buildings in a dream when I was a boy living in Mayagüez." Since 1952 Alejandro has lived in the barrio, and he intends to stay.

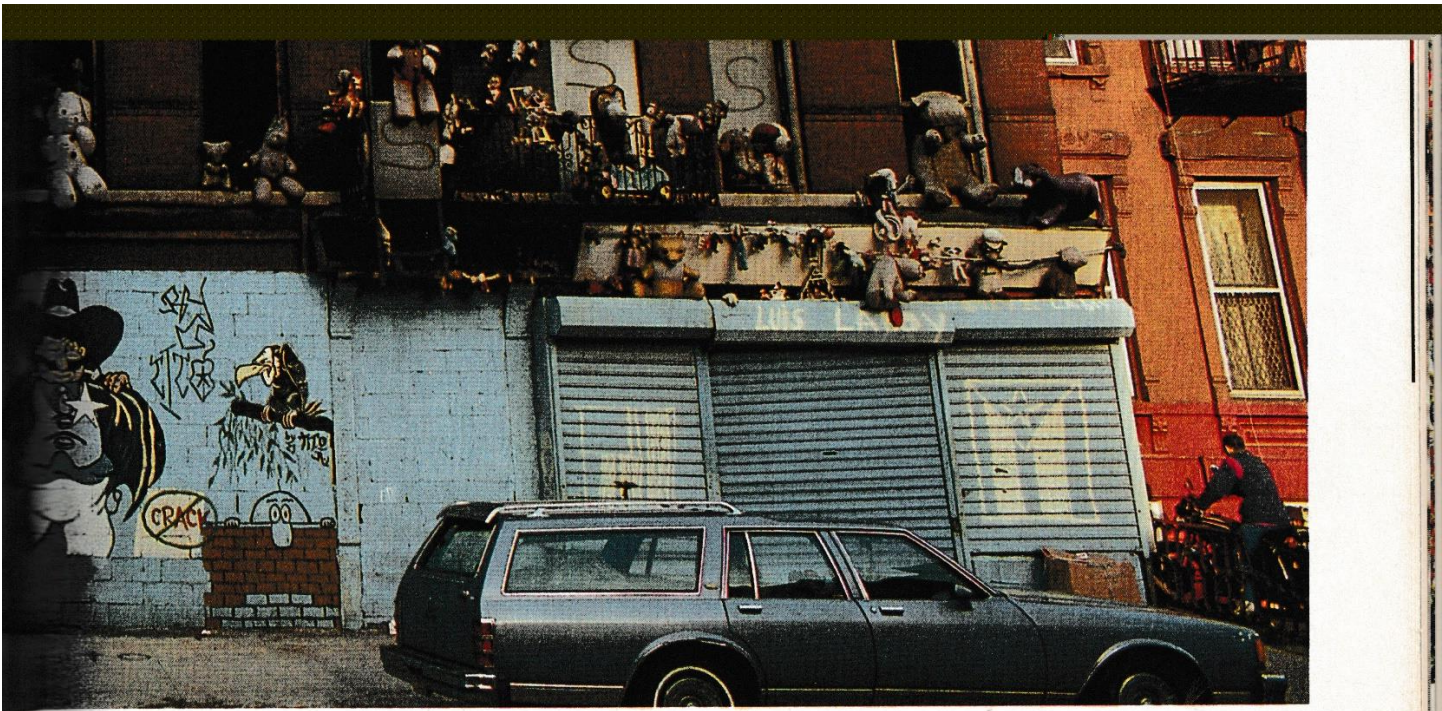
Alejandro is a Puerto Rican, belonging to



the next-to-last wave of immigrants in the barrio. The first Europeans to arrive were the Dutch, who came in the mid-1600s. They imported African slaves. Two Dutch brothers, Hendrick and Isaac DeForest, were among the earliest settlers, breaking land for a small farm by the river. A village called New Haarlem, named for the city in Holland,

flourished there. The English came next, then the Germans, Irish, and Swiss. Each group prospered in turn and was joined by the next wave of immigrants speaking a new language but looking for the old opportunities, working for low wages in sweatshops.

Jews and Italians came in the 1890s, fleeing Manhattan's overcrowded Lower East Side.



The new immigrants worked in the needle trade, sewing garments. When those workers moved on, the garment industry recruited new ones from Puerto Rico. By 1930 some 45,000 Puerto Ricans lived in East Harlem. They still predominate there, though newcomers arrive steadily from poor Caribbean countries and from war-ravaged Central America.

A parents' protest, stuffed animals occupy an abandoned building on 118th Street where crack dealers once gathered. Created by Juan Antonio "Tito" Rolon, who lives across the street with his wife and two sons, the artwork attracted attention and helped persuade dealers to move on. The building is now being renovated for homeless people.

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"I was an orphan," said Alejandro. He put his scissors down. "A nun took me in and sent me to Catholic school. Now I try to give back. I am a deacon of the street." On Sundays Alejandro closes his shop and changes into a long robe for services at St. Cecilia's, the cathedral of the barrio, as it is called. During the week he visits the sick, teaches the Bible to children, and lends an ear to neighbors in trouble.

I watched him speak to the congregation at St. Cecilia's. "We see miracles every day," he said fervently. "Herod wanted to kill the children, and no one helped prevent it. Today we can care for our children."

You want to believe his words when you look around the church. There were altar boys with jeans and running shoes showing beneath

their robes, altar girls in dark dresses, and uncertain new immigrants with their hair wetted down. The building was packed, and the worshipers clapped as they sang. Father Norman Simmons delivered the homily in Spanish, and when the Mass was finished, children ran up and down the aisles.

Outside St. Cecilia's, after the service, the sun was bright and the air smelled fresh after a hard rain, and on the church corner two disposable hypodermic needles glistened in a puddle.

Who sold the drugs? I was about to find out. In the dark hallway of a boarded-up house, I waited to meet a crack dealer who had agreed to talk. I heard the lock slide inside the door and he let me in.



The dealer took a swig of Olde English beer. I'll call him José. A Bible, covered with dust, lay on a dresser.

"No names," José said, establishing the ground rules. "Just titles. The boss puts up the money. The carrier makes the buy. The runner brings the stuff into the spot, a house or an apartment in the neighborhood. The bookie keeps track of the money. *That* man is never alone." José grinned, putting the bottle to his lips again. "Another runner brings it to the pitcher, who sells it on the street."

Dealers keep regular hours. If a worker fails to show up on time, the boss comes to find out why. And there is turf, jealously guarded. "One guy owns a block. He leases the corners," José said. "You need money to get

A woman's work is never done in el barrio, where nearly half of all households are headed by females, one of the highest ratios in the U. S. For mothers on 111th Street (above left), sharing the gossip and salsa that float on city breezes helps ease the burden of large families and insufficient day care. Relatives and neighbors offer support, as do the area's many active churches.

While retail and service jobs exist locally, unemployment runs high. Much of the garment industry (above) has moved overseas or across the East River, as immigrants from war-torn Central America crowd into other boroughs.

started and to hire workers. And you've got to pay protection money. A middle-class day is \$50,000."

José took another drink, letting the profit figure sink in.

"Right now," he said, "there are 20 brands of crack on the street." Entrepreneurs sometimes try to break into business by underselling the competition—a dangerous practice, according to José: "On Wall Street you hire a lawyer. Here you kill."

We heard what sounded like gunfire coming from outside. José's wife, Therese, turned up the television. "The walls have ears," she said, as she lit up a joint. Acrid marijuana smoke filled the room. José got up, picked up a vial, walked into the back room. He talked as he went away, then was quiet for a few seconds. When he came back, his eyes were glassy, his movements quicker. I was

uneasy. Crack sends you up, makes you fearless, unpredictable.

Outside in the air again, I walked down the middle of the street, my head reeling. Under streetlights, people stood around, leaned on double-parked cars, sat on stoops. Three motorcycles shot by, screaming in the night.

EVERY MORNING for weeks I went into the barrio, and every evening I walked slowly out again, past where it abruptly ends at 96th Street. Walking down Park Avenue, I felt the eyes of uniformed doormen of elegant granite buildings examining my unshaven face, my old jeans and running shoes. It didn't matter if they thought I was from the barrio; I knew I was only a visitor there. You had to be born in the barrio to understand it, to know what really made it tick. Fear, crime, violence,



drugs—that was the frightening exterior you read about and saw.

It was the humanity that drew you in: The ice-cream man with the drooping mustache tending his wooden cart, Mexican-American boys selling flowers on the corner, weekend baseball on a neat diamond near the river, a happy man crossing the street to shake a friend's hand, kids practicing rap music on the corner, dressy little girls playing hopscotch in the park.

There were people like Dr. Nabil Saad and Raymond Cornbill, who help run North General Hospital, a small 200-bed facility on 124th Street.

"We take everyone who walks in the door," said Nabil Saad, Egyptian-born president of the medical staff and chief of pediatrics. "We accept the poorest of the poor."

"Even if they can't pay," said Raymond

Cornbill, chief operating officer, "we have a moral obligation."

It's clear that things here are tough. Life is on the edge—big families, small incomes. The hospital's staff does indeed see some of the most desperate cases in the barrio—the homeless people with venereal disease, the tuberculosis patients, the AIDS victims. But East Harlem isn't all drugs and crime.

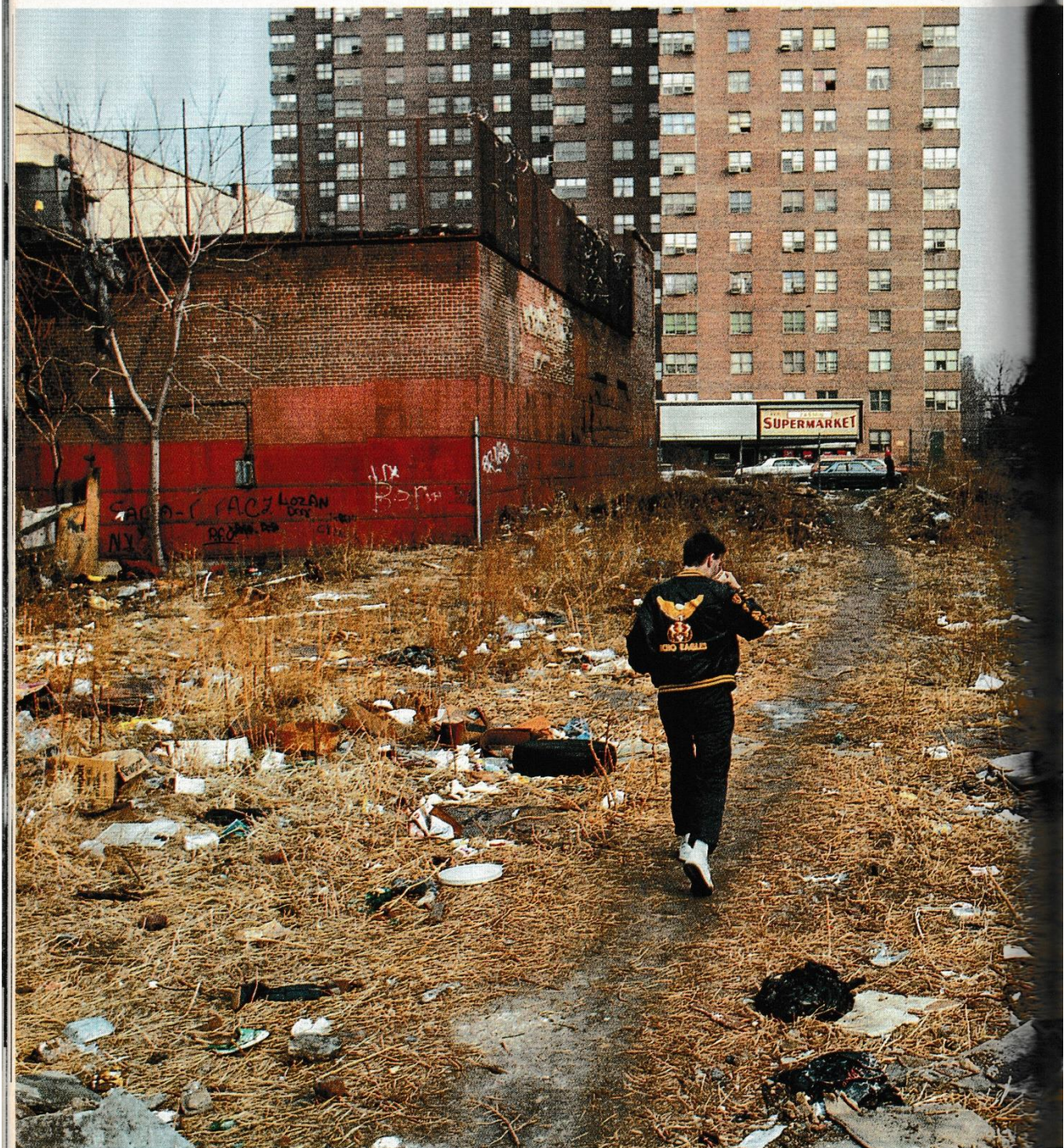
I came to know many of those residents—people who work, send their kids to school, shop in the little stores that open for business every day. Self-reliance, usefulness, responsibility—that is their code.

"I've worked for everything I've got," said Maria Penton, showing me her airy loft on 107th Street. Around us were rows of sewing machines, ironing boards, a time clock, dresses on metal racks—the tools of her successful dressmaking business.



A healing presence, Alejandro Lugo (left), a deacon at St. Cecilia Church, often closes his barbershop to minister to shut-ins. Paid "grandmothers" play with toddlers (above) so mothers can attend classes at a center run by the Little Sisters of the Assumption. "Poverty is the enemy," says co-director Judy Garson. "Drugs are the cheapest way to feel good." One rising cost: babies born with AIDS, their mothers infected by needles. Dr. Richard Stone, Metropolitan's chief of pediatrics, cradles Angela, who died at 18 months.





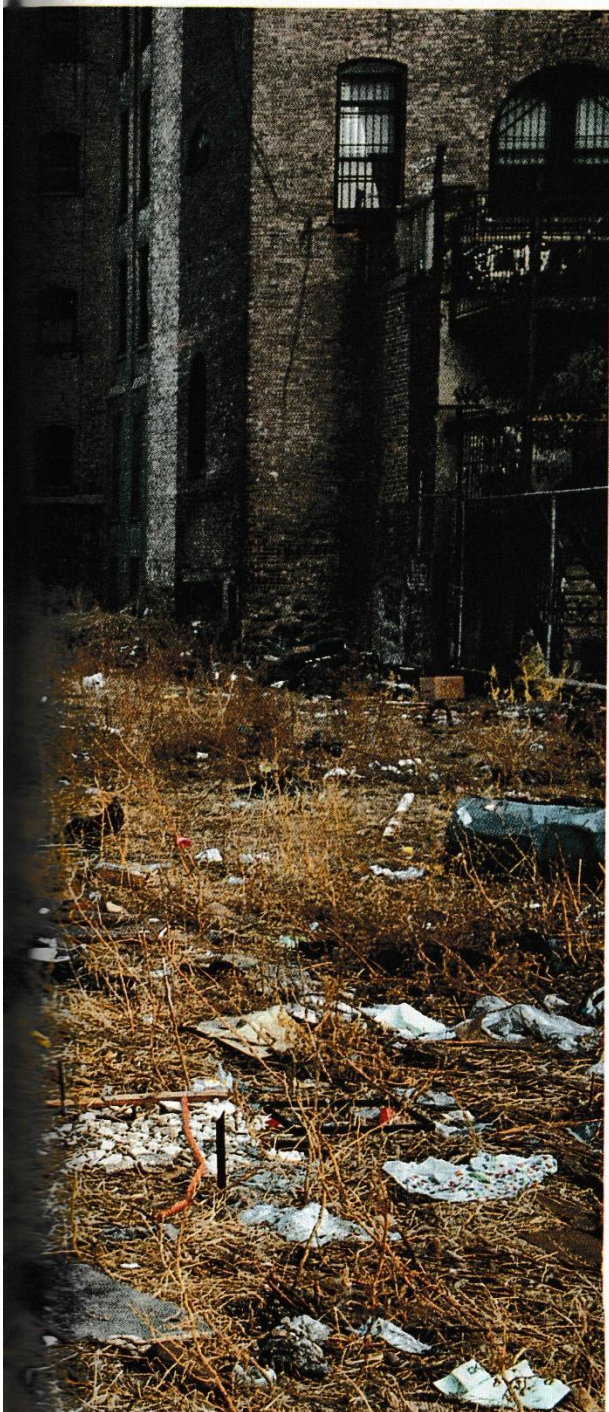
"Too many people lost their self-esteem when they came from Puerto Rico," she said. "The government gave them apartments, clothing, furniture; it made the people shrivel up and die." Maria has lived in the barrio since 1948. She has witnessed gang wars, crack fights, decay.

She pointed a finger at me. "They created a monster! All those generations of welfare!

There is no respect any more because people haven't worked."

But she is proud of her accomplishments. She showed me some black cotton dresses with puffed sleeves. "I can give you this dress in ten days. Hong Kong takes longer. That's how I can make it."

She starts her workers at minimum wage and gives them four raises a year. She



pointed to a man lugging dresses around—her husband.

“I offered him what he was making at his other job,” she said. “He accepted.” She lit another cigarette. “I’m the boss here. He’s the boss at home.”

Third Avenue, like 116th Street, is a business district, where sidewalks are filled with racks of shirts and dresses. Store owners are

Valued only as a shortcut, a vacant lot collects debris. Around the corner, stores line Third Avenue as it saunters north toward el barrio’s commercial heart at 116th Street. Such lots are disappearing as new offices and stores open in the area, matching a slow but steady spread of public-housing units and renovated condos. Citing the area’s quick access to other boroughs and financial incentives as a state economic-development zone, business leaders talk confidently of the future.

often Asian. Corner groceries are run by families from the Dominican Republic. Yemenite Arabs operate the candy stores, bought from Jews. Koreans run vegetable stands and fish stores. Chinese are buying whole buildings.

Near 118th Street, I saw a sign in a window full of televisions, lamps, furniture: “Muebleria Kosches, Est. 1888.” Inside, Robert Kosches finished talking in Spanish to a young couple and walked me to the back of his store.

Robert had grown up in the neighborhood but now commuted from New Jersey. “My grandfather, who came from Austria, started this business,” he said, switching to English.

He is hopeful. “There is a tremendous market up here. I get calls from real estate agents every day,” he said, pointing across the street to Inner City Sports, Casa Elegante, McDonald’s, all newcomers. Several streets away a mosque for New York’s thriving Islamic community is rising.

SINCE 1988, when East Harlem was designated as a state economic-development zone, land appraisals have climbed. Businesses can qualify for utility subsidies, generous construction loans, and tax breaks, based on the size of their investment and the number of local people they employ. Urban homesteaders, who renovate old tenements and buy them from the city at bargain rates, are beginning to change the face of the neighborhood as well.

Walking up Second Avenue, I came across a young man with a carpenter’s tool belt slung over his shoulder. His boss, David Calvert, of Youth Action Homes, explained what the carpenter was doing.

“We take old buildings that have been foreclosed by the city and rehabilitate them for homeless people,” David said. Kids from East Harlem, where the program originated more than a decade ago, do the work.

Ramon Nuñez, the carpenter I had seen in the street, put down his tools and looked me in the eye. "I feel more responsible now. I'd rather work, take my time, do it right."

Ramon, one of 36 youths under David Calvert's instruction, works a week, goes to school a week. If Ramon stays off drugs and sticks with it for a year, he will receive a high school diploma, a driver's license, and a permanent job. Most trainees make good, with 40 of 60 youths advancing to full-time jobs each year—at 20 percent over the minimum wage.

Their work was good. In the newly renovated apartment the molding hugged the corners, the bathroom door hung straight, the closet doors shut tightly.

What about life on the streets?

A tall, thin boy spoke up. "I envy the drug dealers sometimes, but it's not worth it," he said, referring to the gold chains and the \$80 running shoes that pitchers and runners and carriers can buy with the profits of their trade. His jeans and work boots were covered with dust from work. He was an appealing young man, 17 years old, polite, soft-spoken. He had a nice smile. I'll call him Roberto.

What about the future?

"This is New York City," said Roberto. "You never know what might happen."

A few weeks later I heard that Roberto had been shot in a street dispute over drugs. He would survive, but life would be different now that he was out of David Calvert's program.

"PEOPLE ARE STRUGGLING against great odds," said Sister Judy Garson, leading me into a brownstone town house with bars on the windows and a steel gate on the door. The Little Sisters of the Assumption and other volunteers work out of this house, helping barrio families with food, nursing care, child care, advice. The Little Sisters have been here for 30 years.

"Believing in yourself is so important," said Sister Judy, as another nun put aside groceries for a young mother. "Often the only time a woman is praised is when she produces a beautiful baby. It's two steps forward, one back. But people *are* making it."

Luz Maldonado, 32, is one of them. "My husband left me, but I've got my feet on the ground," said Luz, a gregarious woman who drops by the Little Sisters' house regularly. She sat with her baby, Marisa, who seemed healthy and well cared for.

"Coming here, being with the Little Sisters, I know I'm not alone," Luz said, upbeat, smiling again. "I'm going to college at night." She took off her coat, put it aside, and looked lovingly at her daughter. "I'm going to make it," she said.

Women like Luz keep the barrio glued together. The percentage of households in East Harlem headed by women—48 percent—is among the highest in the U. S. While men play dominoes in the shade or drink from brown paper bags on the corner, women take care of the family. I saw them day after day, walking the kids to school in clean clothes they can be proud of, waiting for them in the afternoons, making sure they got past the dealers. Women often make the difference between a child who survives and one who dies early.

I met youths who study hard and look to the future at the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics, a consolidated grade school, junior high, and high school on 116th Street. Once known as the Drug Store, for the illicit business openly conducted there, the school now attracts national attention for academic excellence. The student body is 98 percent black and Hispanic. The school's dropout rate is less than 2 percent, well below the city average of 40 percent. Some 90 percent of its students rank at or above their grade levels in reading tests, and nearly 100 percent of its graduates go on to college.

"When I came here four years ago, there was no running water in the bathrooms," says Patricia Cook, the high school principal. She explained how investments by companies such as IBM and General Electric have helped turn the school around. The corporations provide much needed equipment, and their employees tutor students, serve as role models, and give advice.

Ms. Cook leans over the table. "When you see how these kids have been wronged in life. . . ." Her voice drops off. "I want to give them the best education possible. We require four years of math and science. Next year we start Japanese." Her eyes fairly burn, this young blond educator, born in the Bronx and educated at Vassar. When the bells ring here, students hurry to class. "I want this to be one of the best prep schools in the world," she says.

Throughout Community School District No. 4, which lies entirely within the barrio, things are looking up. In 1974 the district ranked last in

(Continued on page 74)

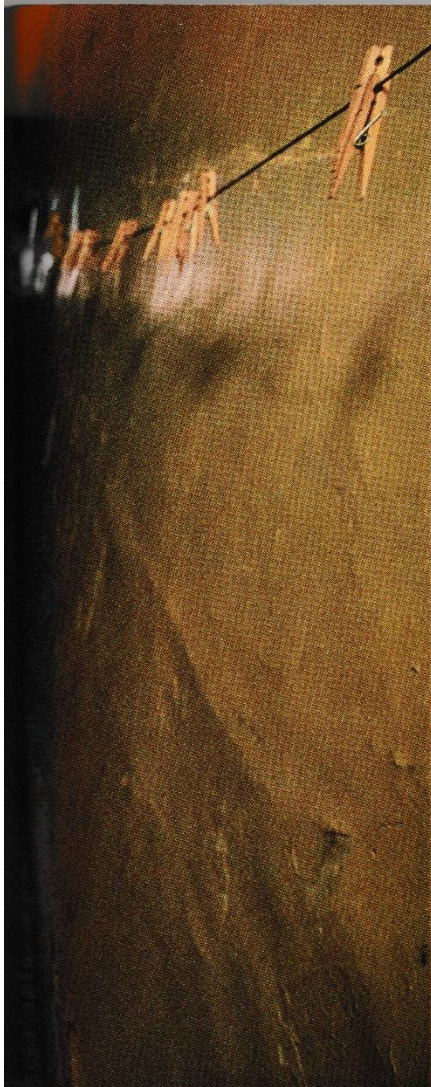
Pedro: on the path to manhood



Approaching a cave in Schoharie County, New York, 200 miles north of el barrio, 15-year-old Pedro Tirado matches strides with unofficial big brother Barry Greene. "There's no cave he can't handle," says Barry, a Bronx real estate investor who befriended Pedro eight years ago. For Pedro, who's been in perhaps a hundred caves, "seeing fossils and animals is the best part." Curiosity served Pedro well in elementary school, from which he graduated in above-ground attire (above), and led to his meeting Barry, then an instructor at a local pool. "He pestered me to show him my flippers and mask," says Barry. "He had this spark you don't see very often."







“**G**uys who used to be my friends got me to skip school,” says Pedro, at home with his mother, Anna (left). “But I don’t do that no more.” Now in eighth grade, Pedro attends Harbor School for the Performing Arts, one of East Harlem’s 20 schools of choice. Observers credit this idea with having helped the district raise reading scores from lowest in the city in 1974 to just above average. Pedro pursues gymnastics and circus arts as well as subjects like mathematics. “I love probabilities,” he says.

With six people living in a two-bedroom flat, Pedro studies where he can, usually the living room (lower

left). His bedroom is a place to play with visiting cousins, even as his 26-year-old brother, Flaco, naps. Flaco was later shot to death over an alleged theft of stereo speakers.

“I will definitely get a high school diploma, and maybe college,” says Pedro, who has been offered help by Barry Greene. Either achievement would put him in the minority in East Harlem, which suffers one of the nation’s highest dropout rates. Only one-third of the residents have finished high school.

“Someone once told me there is a third category of people in addition to wolves and sheep,” says Barry. “There are the eagles.” Pedro’s an eagle.”





citywide reading scores. By 1988 East Harlem students had climbed to 17th place, just above the average. The private investments help, but the district has also pioneered in schools of choice, under which East Harlem junior high youths can enroll in any of 20 "theme schools" in the district. These schools specialize in one area of study: music, computers, science, and so on.

At Public School 83 proud students stood in front of their exhibits on tooth decay, snails, electricity, water pollution, frogs.

Migdalia Maldonado-Torres, the school administrator, turned to Armandi Muniz, 11,

and asked a question: "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

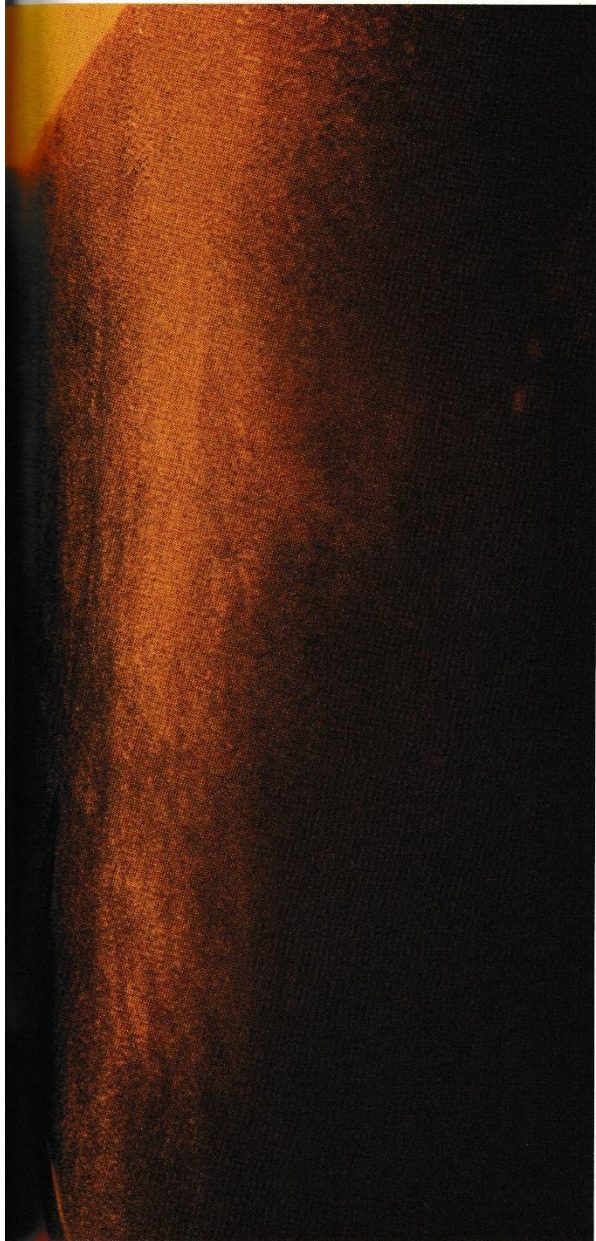
"A scientist," he said, eyes bright.

Lizette Santiago was next: "A veterinarian and an actress," she answered, poised and serious in her white blouse and blue skirt.

"I grew up in East Harlem," said Mrs. Maldonado-Torres. "I live in Westchester County now, but I feel a commitment here." She paused. "It's not for the paycheck."

Though they know the odds, people still choose to live in the barrio. Raphael Flores is in that category.

When I first saw Raphael, he was on the



Warming up for a winter parade, Orlando Oquendo prepares to march on Three Kings Day. The celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany cheers residents with camel-riding kings, folk music, and hundreds of costumed children. Renewed in spirit, a small town in a big city, el barrio carries its burdens with an irrepressible Latin beat.

"I've been off crack for a week," she said.

Warren made some calls. The rehabilitation centers were full, but she could sleep here until they found a place. She smiled.

When Raphael had a moment, the two of us stepped outside. "There are so many young people like that," he said. "I talk to them about God, tell them they can't do it by themselves. I read them the Bible. It's the only answer I know."

I THOUGHT about the people I had met: Roberto, shot; Therese, now in prison for selling heroin; José, negotiating the treacherous currents of the crack trade. But there was also the tenacious Maria, still making dresses and money at her shop; Sister Judy, walking up another flight of stairs to visit another young mother; Alejandro, philosophizing as he clipped another customer's hair; Raphael, trying to save the lost kids; Luz, watching over her daughter. And there was Steven Sloan.

"Come on," Sloan said, "don't drag now." I looked up and saw him, a black man striding ahead of a dozen youngsters. Sloan tapped the ground with a long white cane, feeling his way. When the blind man stopped in the park, the children stopped with him.

"Stretch easy now," Sloan said. "Make sure your legs are straight." He touched their backs and legs with his hand.

"OK, everybody run a lap," said Sloan, a physical education teacher who works with learning disabled youths at Public School 102.

One by one the students straggled back after running their laps on the concrete oval in Jefferson Park.

"I try to teach the kids that life is hard, life is tough, nothing comes easy," Sloan told me. "I try to teach them character, to be proud of what they are."

He made them do sprints again and again. I found myself watching a slender boy, about 14, running ahead of the others. He had a nice easy stride; he could be good. □

phone at Hot Line Cares, the neighborhood's only 24-hour crisis counseling center. He is its director and founder.

He gently chided a caller: "We don't have time to dance! You have to clean your insides of the hurt, your anger, and the habit."

The doorbell rang, and a waif-like young woman walked in, trying to smile. Warren, a former street kid who works as a volunteer, filled out a form for her.

"I don't know where I live," she said tentatively. "I . . . I would like to seek some help. I don't have nobody to talk to."

"What about drugs?" Warren asked.