



# Power at the Roots: Gentrification, Community Gardens, and the Puerto Ricans of the Lower East Side

By *Miranda J. Martinez*

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Through direct engagement with gardeners, activists, and residents, Miranda Martinez shows the breadth and diversity of the community gardening movement and how these groups inserted themselves into local politics and development to create change. She demonstrates how real people are effective as social forces amid large scale urban change and looks at the complexities and contradictions involved in transformations of urban neighborhoods. One of the most important contributions of this study is its focus on the Puerto Ricans of the Lower East Side and their struggle to sustain its Latinidad. It goes deeply into the ethnic and cultural significance at the neighborhood and personal level to show the contradictory meanings of gentrification to Puerto Ricans and others, and more importantly, the ways that the history and culture of Puerto Ricans are ignored, devalued, and erased. By going to the grassroots, this book vividly demonstrates how Puerto Ricans interact with the global and local trends involved in gentrification and how the struggles against displacement can alter the boundaries of the process.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

A nuanced and captivating story of community gardens and the gentrification process in New York's Lower East Side in the late 1990s, Power at the Roots shows how Puerto Ricans resisted the larger political and economic processes. Through her detailed knowledge of the gardeners and political activists, Miranda Martinez creates an engaging tale of efforts by gardeners, both Puerto Rican and gentrifiers, to frame their needs to stave off the economic and political pressures for sale of the land for housing. While recent studies of gentrification have argued that the process improves life for all groups, this book demonstrates that the Puerto Rican community was deeply affected by the process and lost both gardens and housing. (Ruth Horowitz, New York University and author of *Honor and the American Dream: Culture and Identity in a Chicano Community*)

Beneath the sweeping generalizations about "gentrification" and "racial conflict" lie the stories of how diverse people create, fight over, and sometimes come to share the public spaces of the city. Looking at one of America's most fascinating neighborhoods, Manhattan's Lower East Side, Miranda Martinez has given us a nuanced portrait of how a rich urban community life has been created, why it is now under threat, and how, sometimes, it can be defended. (Philip Kasinitz, City University of New York)

Martinez's brilliant and timely ethnography offers great insight into the interaction between urban policy, governance, and Latino social movements by providing a missing piece to much of the sociological and geographical scholarship on New York City: the story of the gardeners who made Loisaida and transformed the landscape of the Lower East Side. This is a must-read work for anyone interested in the origins and effects of local activism. (Arlene Davila, New York University)

The empirically rich and politically engaged analysis of the community garden experiences in the context of gentrification of the Lower East Side is useful for academics interested in the detailed recent history of community gardens in the Lower East Side, in critical race studies and in accounts of local struggles against gentrification.... Moreover, as it is a very accessible book avoiding too much academic jargon, it is certainly also of interest to activists and other people who lived through these experiences, preserving the memory of their struggles. (*Urban Studies*)

#### About the Author

**Miranda J. Martinez** is assistant professor in the Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York.

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