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Change is constant. It's something that doesn't just happen within the political sphere, although it has become the battle cry of so many politicians nowadays. Every candidate promises change, but in reality, regardless of who comes into office, change is an inevitable force of nature. It's a necessary part of life, and in general, as a country, we find ourselves craving change on the political landscape. However, change to me is a much more powerful phenomenon than simply who comes into office, or what social programs are put into place. Change, especially social change, is not always positive. There are social changes that break down barriers, and grant people with more rights, more freedoms. Then there are social changes that look good on the outside, but once you dig a little deeper, a whole new host of problems may exist just below the surface.

For me, change is the driving force behind New York City. Think of how neighborhoods in New York cycle through periods of popularity and personality (of the residents, retail, restaurants, etc.) in a seemingly endless fashion. This is especially evident in the downtown area where gentrification has taken the character out of the neighborhood and replaced it with high-rise luxury condos and Whole Foods. When I was in college I lived in an uncomfortably small studio on 6th and A, in a great pre-war building where the floors were crooked and the plumbing ancient. By that time Alphabet City was no where near what it had been, and I often took night time strolls through Tompkins Square Park, albeit with my boyfriend. Although I lived in the area, my proverbial blinders blocked out much of my surroundings, and I wasn't necessarily interested in the history of the area, and what the park meant to so many others. A recent trip to my old block left me completely confused. I hardly recognized any of it, save for the cafe on the corner. Today, living in Alphabet City isn't something to be frowned upon, I think at this point, some people wear it like a badge of honor. It immediately projects a certain type of cool onto that resident, and in that respect social change is neither a bad nor a good thing, but more automatic.

I'll admit, I fully go to the Whole Foods on Bowery and Houston, and every time I walk there, I'm perpetually reminded just how much change the area has gone through and is continuing to go through. Despite the fact that the new developments stick out like sore thumbs amongst what original architecture remains, it's almost sad to know they are the future of the area. I was walking down Bowery with my boyfriend, and he pointed out the obviously missing CBGB, which was such an integral part of the downtown history, and created a definite persona for the area. Now, it's just another space available to rent or buy; to be torn down and built back up as something "better." Out with old and in with the new. Every time I'm on Bond Street, I stop to admire the new building, 40 Bond, whose ostentatious entranceway lets any passerby know that important people live there. I find it really amusing that the structure of the front gates was inspired by the countless graffiti squiggles that cover almost every public surface, especially since the building doesn't really fit the mold of the downtown, urban architectural landscape. Flanking the incredibly intimidating glass and steel structure are typical pre-war buildings, but I get the sense that their days are numbered. It has become trendy to live in the area, and that is the kiss of death for a neighborhood. What concerns me about this is not the kind of people who are moving to the area, but what happens to the residents who already live or lived in the area? Where do they go when the rents are hiked and buildings are sold to developers? What happens to mom and pop shops that have been in the area forever? How do all these people cope with being displaced?

I'm from New York, and even though I never experienced Bowery as "Skid Row," I grew up knowing it wasn't a great neighborhood. I remember my parents freaking out when I was a freshman in college because I was going to the Bowery Bar with friends ("What!?! You're going down to the Bowery!?! Take pepper spray!"), because now I live two blocks away. Currently, the area is being "developed." Even that word begins to take on a new context and starts to sound dirty. Is development a good thing? And if it is, at what cost? What exactly happens when an area is developed? I understand there are certain contexts in which development is necessary, but I'm a little lost as to how 27 luxury lofts with 24 hour concierge service and private gardens is a positive social change.