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of 40 or more well-dressed black professionals, and whites are still rare enough on the streets of Bed-Stuy to stand out.

Bed-Stuy's nascent signs of gentrification are nowhere near the sweeping changes that lured white residents into the neighboring, once predominately black sections of Fort Greene and Clinton Hill. One reason Bed-Stuy has been slower to attract white inhabitants is that Fort Greene features cultural and academic centers like the Brooklyn Academy of Music and no such plans.) My potential landlords also mentioned that they chose to post the vacant apartment on Craigslist instead of in the newspaper classifieds, in order to attract "the kind of tenants like you." Whether they were referring to strictly white renters or merely young professionals of any race is up for debate. What is clear, though, is that in recent years the arrival of young black professionals (the so-called buppies) has had an impact on the area. Some residents see the buppies as

> THE PRICE OF ART

East Williamsburg/Bushwick

- Priced out of Williamsburg and Greenpoint, artists began colonizing further east along the L line, to an industrial area that borders some vacant housing projects and a mainly Latino neighborhood.

- About 12 renovated factory buildings can be found near the Morgan Ave stop on the L train, according to Kevin Lindernood, who four years ago helped start Office Ops, an arts center that rents out performance and studio spaces.

- No galleries have popped up yet, but Kings County, a bar opened last year by a metalworker and his tattoo-artist brother, adorns its walls with locals' masterworks.

The area is still the kind of place where you look over your shoulder while walking the desolate streets at night, but that hasn't stopped rents from rising. One local artist says he pays about $3 per square foot in a 1,000-square-foot apartment, while architect Mark Blumenberg says he and his roommate pay $1,400 for 1,200 square feet.

- According to broker Robert Peguero, a former artist-tenant in one of his Williamsburg buildings moved to East Williamsburg in 1995 and got 1,000 square feet plus a backyard for only $500 a month. But a two-bedroom railroad apartment that would have rented for $800 four or five years ago would now go for $1,400 or so.

South Bronx

- The Longwood Art Gallery, a pioneer in the Boogie Down Bronx in the '80s, has been incorporated into Hostos Community College—an easy walk from the new arts community that's settling in where the Port Morris and Mott Haven neighborhoods meet. A monthly "culture trolley," run by the Bronx Council on the Arts, is providing tours of artists' lofts.

- Warehouse and factory buildings line Bruckner Boulevard near the Bruckner Bar and Grill, which draws in artists to drink and shoot pool. A zoning change approved in March by the City Council will likely lead to many more of these buildings being converted into live/work spaces.

- Multimedia artist Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, who pays close to $3,000 for a 3,000-square-foot loft, says she was the first person to move into the building two years ago. Now she fears a rent hike. "I came here first, I dealt with rats, it was pretty raw," she says. "My landlord and I put work into it, but there was no one here at all. There are a lot of people in here now."

- The newly renovated Clocktower Building anchors the community—but the rent isn't cheap. Painter John Mascaro recently moved in, and he says he pays $1,350 for about 650 square feet.

Clinton Hill has Pratt Institute. These venues draw a multiethnic crowd, as well as commercial outlets that new residents find convenient. Bed-Stuy has few such places, besides Restoration Plaza and its Billie Holiday Theatre.

Some locals contend that the grim, reality-based stories rapped about in songs by Jay-Z and the Notorious B.I.G. have been another factor in keeping potential white interlopers at bay. (Though, as local author Kenji Jasper says: "Go see the block where Notorious B.I.G. grew up. If you listen to his music you know it was a rough place, but were you to say you were from that block now it would be a joke, like saying you were from Scarsdale!")

Although the area's crime rate has dropped by more than 60 percent in the past 12 years, it's still twice the city's average. FreshDirect doesn't deliver here, and the Zagat guides are written as if Clinton Hill and Williamsburg abutted a great void, beyond which no restaurant of any merit could possibly exist. Perhaps most telling is that Starbucks has yet to open one of its Magic Johnson-cosponsored "Urban Coffee Opportunities" stores, such as the one that does a brisk business on 125th Street in Harlem.

Working from the theory that most New Yorkers would rather have inexpensive rent than convenient access to a Starbucks, I went to see firsthand what the early stages of gentrification look like, and answered a Craigslist ad for a two-bedroom apartment in a renovated brownstone near Food 4 Thought. The rent was $1,200 a month—about $1,000 less than similar apartments listed in Fort Greene. The friendly black couple who owned the building seemed unconcerned about my complexion, telling me that in the morning I would see other white "pioneers" who live on the block heading to work in Manhattan. I asked if the neighborhood was dangerous, and they assured me that if I minded my own business nobody would bother me. They added that the long stretch of public housing along Gates Avenue was scheduled to be torn down in the near future. (A spokesman for the New York City Housing Authority said there were evidence that gentrification will be a class shift, rather than a racial one. "This will be a wealthier neighborhood, but the complexion will be the same," says Monique Greenwood, owner of the Akwaaba Mansion and the former editor-in-chief of Essence magazine.

But artists who are in more financially precarious positions than Greenwood and Danny Simmons tend to see things in more racially explicit terms. "When I think of gentrification, I don't think of other black people moving in to the neighborhood, I think of white people," says Shaka King, a 25-year-old filmmaker who grew up in Bed-Stuy. King's parents bought their house in 1983, and have watched its value double, triple and quadruple. "When the time comes to sell my house, I would like to sell it to other black people," says Shaka's mother, Judy King. "I say that not because I am racist, but because I know for a fact that black people have a hard time buying in middle-class white neighborhoods."

Activists like Amadi Ajamu of Sista's Place coffeehouse are hopeful they can convince more people to think like Judy King. "The basis of racism is economic," says Ajamu, who leads workshops for prospective homeowners at the Jefferson Avenue lounge. "What we do is convince black people not to sell their homes." Organizations like the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation also help local residents buy and retain their homes. But as Todd Johnson, owner of Le Cafe Starving Artist, puts it, "It's fine if people want to come up with collective strategies for holding on to the point that is that every owner has a sweet spot."

If the working-class Polish families that still reside in North Williamsburg and the large Puerto Rican community in the Lower East Side are any indication, it's unlikely that Bed-Stuy will lose the core of its black character in the coming decades. But as the perception of the neighborhood continues to improve, more wealthy residents will consider moving in. When you're fighting to maintain the ethnic makeup of a place, people are very quick to jump on your efforts and label them reverse racism," says TRUE. "But you don't go to Chinatown or Little Italy and call the people there reverse racists. We don't look at ourselves as fighting gentrification per se—we are fighting to preserve the black cultural legacy of Bedford-Stuyvesant."