

ABSTRACT

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Fighting for a Radical City: Student Protesters, Cultural Radicals,
and the Politics of Space in 1960s and 1970s Lower Manhattan

(Under the Direction of DR. KATHLEEN CLARK)

In the popular imagination, 1960s radicalism often appears as a national phenomenon that varied little from region to region. Looking at the case of downtown Manhattan during these years, however, challenges this assumption. Student radicals at New York University in Greenwich Village and cultural radicals in the Lower East Side/East Village were just as concerned with issues of urban equity and with the politics of urban space as they were with more national concerns such as ending the Vietnam War. NYU students advocated that the university offer open admissions and free tuition to any New Yorker who wished to attend and fought against what they perceived to be the university's imperialistic management of Bellevue Hospital; East Village hippies sought to build a radical community within the postwar city, but their attempts to join an impoverished community of primarily African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and European immigrants proved problematic. I consider the ways in which late 1960s radicals in downtown Manhattan negotiated how a city should be constituted, and I argue that, in challenging the concrete city conditions that they deemed to be indicative of larger systematic problems, these radicals' activism constitutes not only a piece of 1960s radical history but also a chapter of local history. Manhattan radicalism in the 1960s was predicated on the urban environment that it was a part of, and a consideration of the radical efforts to reconstruct the postwar city is essential to understanding period radicalism and the development of cities in the late twentieth century.