



# Crossing Broadway: Washington Heights and the Promise of New York City

*Robert W. Snyder*

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In the 1970s, when the South Bronx burned and the promise of New Deal New York and postwar America gave way to despair, the people of Washington Heights at the northern tip of Manhattan were increasingly vulnerable. The Heights had long been a neighborhood where generations of newcomers—Irish, Jewish, Greek, African American, Cuban, and Puerto Rican—carved out better lives in their adopted city. But as New York City shifted from an industrial base to a service economy, new immigrants from the Dominican Republic struggled to gain a foothold. Then the crack epidemic of the 1980s and the drug wars sent Washington Heights to the brink of an urban nightmare. But it did not go over the edge.

Robert W. Snyder's *Crossing Broadway* tells how disparate groups overcame their mutual suspicions to rehabilitate housing, build new schools, restore parks, and work with the police to bring safety to streets racked by crime and fear. It shows how a neighborhood once nicknamed "Frankfurt on the Hudson" for its large population of German Jews became "Quisqueya Heights"—the home of the nation's largest Dominican community.

The story of Washington Heights illuminates New York City's long passage from the Great Depression and World War II through the urban crisis to the globalization and economic inequality of the twenty-first century. Washington Heights residents played crucial roles in saving their neighborhood, but its future as a home for working-class and middle-class people is by no means assured. The growing gap between rich and poor in contemporary New York puts new pressure on the Heights as more affluent newcomers move into buildings that once sustained generations of wage earners and the owners of small businesses.

*Crossing Broadway* is based on historical research, reporting, and oral histories. Its narrative is powered by the stories of real people whose lives illuminate what was won and lost in northern Manhattan's journey from the past to the present. A tribute to a great American neighborhood, this book shows how residents learned to cross Broadway—over the decades a boundary that has separated black and white, Jews and Irish, Dominican-born and American-born—and make common cause in pursuit of one of the most precious rights: the right to make a home and build a better life in New York City.

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