



**ECONOMIC RIGHTS**

**“DON’T MOVE, IMPROVE”:**

**Reviving the South Bronx 1970-2012**



**OVERVIEW**

Through visual and textual analysis, students will explore the grassroots community activism of the South Bronx in the 1970s and '80s.

**STUDENT GOALS**

- Students will be able to describe the perseverance of communities in the South Bronx in the 1970s and 80s.
- Students will read a biography of Dr. Evelina López Antonetty to learn about her journey to activism.
- Students will practice visual literacy by examining photographs and murals.

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

**Grade 3:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.7

Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).

**Grade 6:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.3

Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).

**Grades 11-12:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

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## KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

- Abandoned
  - Biography
  - Mural
  - Renewal
  - Slogan
  - Tone
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## ACTIVISTS

- Anne Devenney
- Dr. Evelina Lopez Antonetty
- Father Louis R. Gigante

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**“DON'T MOVE, IMPROVE”**: Reviving the South Bronx 1970-2012**INTRODUCING RESOURCE 1***Allen Tannenbaum. Charlotte Street Cleanup Wheel Barrows, 1980.* © Allen Tannenbaum—All Rights Reserved.

As New York transitioned from an industrial to a postindustrial economy, many jobs were lost and unemployment, poverty, and crime rates increased. Poor neighborhoods suffered from disinvestment as the city withdrew services like sanitation and fire protection as a means of dealing with dwindling tax revenues. This was especially true in the South Bronx in the 1970s, which had been bisected by the Cross-Bronx Expressway two decades before and then further isolated and disrupted by other new highways. The South Bronx was also suffering from the effects of discriminatory bank lending practices, middle-class “white flight,” and an infrastructure destroyed by abandonment and arson. With the motto “Don’t Move, Improve,” community activists came together to rebuild their streets by clearing vacant lots, renovating housing units, and fundraising these efforts. Investigate photograph “Charlotte Street Cleanup Wheel Barrows” taken by Allen Tannenbaum to observe these activists at work.



Allen Tannenbaum. *Charlotte Street Cleanup Wheel Barrows*, 1980. © Allen Tannenbaum—All Rights Reserved.



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## DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- Who are the activists in this photograph? What are they doing?
- Based on this photograph, what challenges did residents of the South Bronx face in the 1970s?
- “Don’t move, improve” was the motto for many community activists in the South Bronx. What do you think this slogan means? How does it relate to this photograph?
- In 1977, President Carter came to Charlotte Street during his surprise visit to the South Bronx. According to Lee Dembart’s article “Carter Takes ‘Sobering Trip to South Bronx,” President Carter said, “It was a very sobering trip for me to see the devastation that has taken place in the South Bronx in the last five years. But I’m encouraged in some ways by the strong effort of tenant groups to rebuild. I’m impressed by the spirit of hope and determination by the people to save what they have. I think they still have to know we care.” If you lived in the South Bronx at this time, how do you think you would respond to the president’s visit?



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## INTRODUCING RESOURCES 2 & 3

**Resource 2:** Nelida Perez, “Dr. Evelina López Antonetty,” *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and Virginia Sánchez Korrol, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Dr. Evelina López Antonetty, nicknamed the “mother of the Puerto Rican Community” and the “hell lady of the Bronx,” was a driving force behind many changes that took place in the South Bronx in the 1970s and 80s. Read her biography in “Latinas in the United States” to discover her journey to community activism.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=.62ljQ-XQScC&pg=PA49&lpg=PA49&dq=Dr.+Evelina+Lopez+Antonetty&source=bl&ots=WO7MrwivOV&sig=w63Y9XRl2yverULWClqOAXG3cgU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CEcQ6AEwCGoVChMI-vS9v7CixwIVyCseCh2w-gZv%20-%20v=onepage&q=Dr.%20Evelina%20Lopez%20Antonetty&f=false#v=snippet&q=Dr.%20Evelina%20Lopez%20Antonetty&f=false>

## DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- What stood out to you about Antonetty’s journey to activism?
- What causes did Antonetty champion?
- What tactics did Antonetty use to enact change in East Harlem and the South Bronx?

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Resource 3: Tats Cru, *Dr. Evelina Lopez Antonetty Mural*, 2011. United Bronx Parents Inc. Courtesy of Joe Conzo.

In 2011, the following mural was painted by Tats Cru to memorialize Antonetty's contribution to the South Bronx. Discover the message of the mural by closely analyzing its images and texts.



Tats Cru, *Dr. Evelina López Antonetty Mural*, 2011. United Bronx Parents Inc. Courtesy of Joe Conzo.

**DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS**

- How is the mural's depiction of the South Bronx similar to Tannenbaum's photograph on page 3? How is it different?
- What can we learn about Antonetty's character from her gesture and expression?
- Read the quotation by Antonetty. What is its message? What is its tone?
- Notice all of the affiliations listed under Antonetty's name. What does this tell us about her?



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**“DON’T MOVE, IMPROVE”**: Reviving the South Bronx 1970-2012**ACTIVITY 1**

Introduce your students to the Museum of the City of New York’s collection portal to discover Mel Rosenthal’s striking images of the South Bronx. Type “Mel Rosenthal Bronx” into the portal’s search function to view his photographs of the destruction and perseverance of communities in the South Bronx.

For more on Mel Rosenthal, see “Mel Rosenthal in the South Bronx” on MCNY’s blog: <http://blog.mcny.org/2014/06/03/mel-rosenthal-in-the-south-bronx>

Challenge your students to find a photograph that best matches the tone and message of Antonetty’s quotation:

*“We will never stop struggling here in the Bronx, even though they’ve destroyed it around us. We would pitch tents if we have to rather than moving from here. We would fight back. There is nothing we would not do. They will never take us away from here. I feel very much a part of this and I’m never going to leave. And, after me, my children will be here to carry on.... I have very strong children and very strong grandchildren.”*

—Dr. Evelina López Antonetty

**ACTIVITY 2**

Ask your students how their neighborhoods could be improved. Examples could include picking up litter from city streets, adding more green space in their communities, etc. Discuss what tactics they could use to make a change in their community. Create a class-wide campaign to promote such a change, whether through making posters, signing petitions, or raising money with a bake sale.



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## ADDITIONAL READING

### THE NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLES

“The Talk of the South Bronx; South Bronx Residents Try to Change the Odds” by Lee A. Daniels, April 11, 1981, highlights the community activists who stayed in the South Bronx to repair and rebuild their neighborhoods.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1981/04/11/nyregion/the-talk-of-the-south-bronx-south-bronx-residents-try-to-change-the-odds.html>

“The Bronx as Children Sketch It” by Fred Ferretti, October 7, 1984, describes artist and activist Joan Baren who sketches abandoned buildings with over 600 children in the South Bronx.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1984/10/07/style/the-bronx-as-children-sketch-it.html>

“In the Bronx, Blight Gave Way to Renewal” by Manny Fernandez, October 5, 2007, looks back to President Jimmy Carter’s visit to Charlotte Street in 1977.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/05/nyregion/05charlotte.html>

## CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

“City Room; Struggling to Make ‘the 99%’ More Representative of Reality” by Alice Speri, October 29, 2011, explores Occupy Wall Street in the context of communities like the South Bronx.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C07E6DA173DF93AA15753C1A9679D8B63>

“FreshDirect Breaks Ground in the South Bronx, Prompting Protests” by Winnie Hu, December 22, 2014, describes protests in the South Bronx against the development of a FreshDirect headquarters in the neighborhood.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/23/nyregion/freshdirect-breaks-ground-in-the-south-bronx-prompting-protests.html>




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Gonzalez, Evelyn. *The Bronx: A History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

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Schutz, Lacy, “Mel Rosenthal in the South Bronx,” MCNY blog, June 3, 2014.

<http://blog.mcnyc.org/2014/06/03/mel-rosenthal-in-the-south-bronx>

Tannenbaum, Allen. *Charlotte Street Cleanup Wheel Barrows*, 1980. © Allen Tannenbaum—All Rights Reserved.

Tats Cru, *Dr. Evelina López Antonetty Mural, 2011*. United Bronx Parents Inc. Courtesy of Joe Conzo.