WHAT’S THIS?

In the southeastern part of East New York, Brooklyn, there is a huge development going up: the Nehemiah Spring Creek Houses.

In the midst of the 2009 housing crisis, it presents a very different model for housing development. Students from Brooklyn College Community Partnership (BCCP) at Wingate campus collaborated with the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) to do a semester-long investigation of the area. This book and soundtrack use documentary and fiction to show our journey into this uncharted land.

"We did a lot of research on the history of the land. We interviewed and photographed many people and things. It was cool because I knew a lot about East New York. I used to live there."

_Nayelly Escobar_

This program was funded in part by The National Endowment for the Arts, public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the Bay and Paul Foundations, the New York State Education Department and the American Architectural Foundation’s Accent on Architecture Community Grants Program which is sponsored by CNA Insurance Companies and Victor O. Schinnerer & Company.

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_for more on CUP, visit www.anothercupdevelopment.org_

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_Special thanks:_

_A:_ Walter Campbell, Brooklyn Community Board 5
_B:_ Ronald Waters, Nehemiah Housing Development Fund Corporation
_C:_ Reverend David Keith Brawley, St. Paul Community Baptist Church
_D:_ Jean-Paul Ho, Hayden Stephen, Dorothy Leggett, Fillmore Real Estate
_E:_ Nehemiah Spring Creek Houses!

Ronald Dillon, Concerned Homeowners Association
Robert Hasselbrook and Bill McShane, Capsys Corp.
**Reverend David Keith Brawley** is the Pastor at St. Paul Community Baptist Church. They are part of a larger organization called East Brooklyn Congregations (EBC). EBC came up with the idea for the Nehemiah houses. They loan the project money to make sure the homes get built.

**Jean Paul Ho**, Hayden Stephen, and Dorothy Leggett all work for Fillmore Real Estate at MeadowWood Estates, a group of condominiums right next to the Nehemiah Spring Creek Houses.

**Ron Waters** is the General Manager and the Director of the Nehemiah Housing Development Fund Corporation. The company acquires property, builds the units, markets them, sells them, and makes sure people move in.

**Walter Campbell** is the District Manager for Brooklyn's Community Board 5. CB5 is a city agency that monitors city services for the East New York Community.
Robert Hasselbrook and Bill McShane work at Capsys Corp. Capsys builds the Nehemiah Spring Creek Houses.

Ronald Dillon is President of the Concerned Homeowners Association. They are a group of homeowners who get together to have their concerns addressed.

Related Companies bought the land for the Gateway Mall from New York City. The City used that money for infrastructure for the area.

The City of New York is providing direct housing subsidies to residents and already put in the infrastructure in the area (like sewers and streets).

The Community Preservation Corporation gave the project a loan.
It really sucks badly  
I can’t live comfortably  
No comment on drugs  

People are so crazy  
I can’t take the madness No!  
It sucks in Brooklyn  

No more peace silence  
I’m stuck in this my own Hell  
I wish it better  

Brooklyn will have peace  
Sooner or later in time  
All is well again  

Brooklyn, Queens, New York  
Is a big part of my life  
A very sad part  

So many bad things  
It doesn’t really bother  
It is just so wrong  

As a Guitarist  
It is hard cause I’m short  
People mess around  

It’s good in one way  
Some people are generous  
They help each other live  

This is my only chance  
To show my true colors Ok  
I’m ready to move on
It was funny to see a bicycle just tossed on the side of the road. It has a funny side and a sad side as well.

Gavin Noble
Welcome to the MURDER CAPITAL

"East New York had a dual personality. First, it was the worst place in Brooklyn that you could live. Second of all, if you lived in that section and survived, you had it made because you lived in the worst place in the world."

Ronald Dillon

"The 75th precinct, I can recall, used to walk around with T-shirts saying 'the killing fields.' This was the murder capital of New York."

Reverend Brawley

"I remember ten or twenty years ago, people would tell me 'do not go to that neighborhood at night, do not go when it gets dark.' I remember one time I was stopped at a red light, and a group of people tried to get into my car. And that's how bad it was, you had drug dealers, you had all kinds of problems."

Jean-Paul Ho

*To learn more about the killing fields, listen to track 2
Two ways the neighborhood could go in the future.

William Metellus
"First, we joined East Brooklyn Congregations, and one of the things they do in that culture, and in our culture, is what they call house meetings where people from the community just come together and talk about what their needs are. It’s kind of a needs assessment. What would you like to do? What would you like to change? And oftentimes it begins, believe it or not, with your anger. I know that sounds like a strange place to start, but wherever somebody’s anger is, that’s usually where their passion is. So you know when people say, 'Look, our community is de-valued, we’re disenfranchised and have no services.' So that’s kinda how we got into it."

Reverend Brawley
St. Paul Community Baptist Church is one of the churches that started to build Nehemiah houses. From this point of view the whole picture is more embracing.

Isaiah Peeples
WHAT IS Nehemiah?
"The Book of Nehemiah speaks about the people of God coming back to their homeland only to find it in ruins. They would have a sword in one hand and trowel in the other in order to build bricks and mortar but also to defend their community. And it was that image that I think gave birth to the idea of rebuilding East Brooklyn."

Reverend Brawley

*Curious about Nehemiah? Go to track 5
This represents the church and you see that you have different people. You can see the different churches coming together here.

Isaiah Peeples
I am used to riding my bike. Mostly I go from my hometown in Canarsie to sometimes Starrett City, Gateway Mall, and even further down. I was riding around there one day and I saw these houses, and I said, "Ah, they are making new houses." I said, "Let me check this up, I got to see what is happening...

... So I ride my bike, and then there is this big construction dude chasing after me. I heard him say "get out" and "beat it!" I don’t know what the hell is going on and I’m just curious. And by doing this project here, it helped me learn a lot more than I used to know about the mysterious buildings that I saw. Now they’re not mysterious anymore, I know who and what is behind it.

Isaiah Peeples
What was there before?

*For more of before go to track 6
The Department of Sanitation had been using the land as a dump site for many, many years. They brought in fill from outside to bring it up to a certain level. Everything is at a certain elevation in the city: city streets, city services such as infrastructure, sewers. So they brought in about eleven feet of sand that had to be dredged out of Jamaica Bay. In other words, it's not as 'mother nature' created it over centuries or millennia.

Ron Waters
First there was a landfill, then the Gambino family buried some bodies (they might be haunted by ghosts), then they turned it into Nehemiah houses.

_Nayelly Escobar_

I wanted to show some of the garbage that Nehemiah is going to be built on and how it got there over time.

_Isaiah Peeples_
"At one point, if I remember correctly, there was a conservation issue. There was a particular kind of mouse – don’t quote me on the exact type of mouse – it was a mouse with a fuzzy tail or something. If you build you may obliterate this mouse. But residents of East New York could care less about a mouse. We wanted to see a house, not a mouse."

Reverend Brawley

*Follow the mouse with track 7
The colors were just pretty much every color. Garbage is like every color and nasty and doodish and when it’s mixed together it looks nasty.

Nayelly Escobar
"What makes it real special is that it is one of the largest lots of land left in the city. Basically what we’re talking about is the construction of an entire section of the city; a brand new section of the city. I don’t know if it’s ever been done this large before, so it’s unique."

Reverend Brawley
WHERE ARE THE HOUSES COMING FROM?

The houses are pre-fabricated by Capsys at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

They're delivered by truck on local streets.
WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE COMING FROM?

FOR PHASE I OF THE NEHEMIAH SPRING CREEK HOUSES:

- **50%** of the units are reserved for people from Brooklyn Community Board 5 (CB5)
- **45%** are for any New Yorker who wins the housing lottery, is a first-time homebuyer, and has the credit and income to qualify
- **5%** are reserved for uniformed NYPD

**After Phase I,**
the units will be open to any qualifying first-time homebuyers from all over the City

There will be **five** phases for Nehemiah Spring Creek, 115 - 130 houses will be built in each phase
"The biggest selling point to modular would be the speed and the quality. One building can come out of the factory in 12 days. The fact that you are saving time completing the projects means that you’re saving money, because you are paying less interest on the construction loans."

Robert Hasselbrook
The houses are constructed inside the Navy Yard factory where they are designed to be stacked on top of each other.
They are now placed on trucks ready to be shipped.
Then they are shipped overnight to the site.
"It has taken us three years to build 117 houses in Phase I. I expect to do Phase II in two years, because we’re all on a roll."

Ron Waters
Make Your Own Spring Creek Development

1. Cut out the houses
2. Fold the tabs down so you have a solid foundation
3. Now you can put your Nehemiah houses anywhere!
Don’t go down to the BASEMENTS ‘cause there aren’t any

"For this round of houses, Spring Creek, we’re not building basements to ensure that everything is environmentally safe for the residents that live there, but the remediation was a phenomenal process."

Reverend Brawley

"The practical impact of building on top of a landfill is that they can’t have basements. If you have a basement, methane gas from the landfill will collect in it. The fact is they never remediated any of this stuff. The remediation was ‘We’re going to pave everything over with black top.’ Instead of doing the remediation, the community got no basements."

Ronald Dillon

*Get the down-low on basements on track 7
Gavin Noble (ENY investigation team): Can you tell us about the process of applying for home ownership?

Ron Waters: Ok. We have an open lottery system for New York City residents.

GN: From all over the City?

RW: Any place in the City. It’s advertised in the media. We use the Daily News, we use... what is the civil service paper? El Diario and The Chief. We post it and we give to them an idea of the cost, the low and the high income limits that are a part of the program. Back in 1995 or 1996, we put the ad in the papers, and we received approximately 12,000 requests for an application.

GN: How many houses were there for that phase?

RW: This was for a projected 500 or so odd houses. That shows you what the demand is. A tremendous need. And what we do is then the City comes in and supervises the opening of the mail bags, we pull these letters out of the mail bag at random. And it is opened in the presence of a group of people, including some priests, some reverends, some pastors. The applications are opened very carefully in a supervised manner, and they are given what is called a “waitlist number.” And then we start screening the applications in that sequence, from 1 on. So, it is absolutely over and above what is honest.

GN: You screen the applications, then you pick them at random?

RW: Our first group that we logged was about 3,200 people. And we are slowly going through that. And, by the way, a lot of people don’t qualify. Even when you put the income limits in the ad, a lot of people do not qualify.

GN: Can we ask what the limits are?

RW: We have been able to sell houses to people who were $36,000 a year – that’s a household income. In order to get the best financing we use the State of New York Mortgage Association and they dictate the maximum income in order for this to be classified as affordable housing. So, people could earn just a bit over $100,000 a year, they could still qualify. But, of course in the end, credit history has to be perfect. A-ok, good rating – no judgement against anybody.
"I picked an architect, Alexander Gorlin, who I think it is very capable and competent. But everybody in the world is an architectural critic and some people like it, some people hate it, some people don't care one way or the other. But that is what makes up an interesting world that we are living in."

Ron Waters

*For more from Ron, listen to track 14*
"Oh forget it, the lottery is scam. The lottery is within Nehemiah. So if there are 100 houses being built, and there are 1,000 people going to Nehemiah meetings, there is a lottery for those 1,000 people. If you, not having gone to the meetings, want to apply in the middle of the process, they say the application process is closed."

**Ronald Dillon**

"We wanted the folks that live here in East New York to get their fair share of the homes. The 50% they reserved in Phase I was satisfying, but it is still not enough."

**Walter Campbell**
Nehemiah helped a lot of people. The same property they buy for $40,000 they are selling for about $300,000. A lot of people have done very well with it. So it does increase the value of the community. We have a census that shows basically when there is more homeownership, and there is pride of homeownership, it does increase the revenue in the community and does change the community itself. And as a real estate person, I can tell you this: it doesn’t matter what type of home it is, it’s the people, it’s the community.

Jean-Paul Ho

"We like to participate in the city’s homeownership program. Which means buying a house, owning property. We don’t believe that much in rental. The majority of homebuyers are women, single and sometimes with children. I don’t know why, don’t ask me."

Ron Waters

"Everybody wants to own a home. Owning a home is the American Dream, ok? You know, it’s a tax write-off. One other thing, if you’re going to buy a house, I don’t care how beautiful the carpet is... pick up your carpet and take it with you. Hardwood floors will take you a long way."

Walter Campbell
Ron Waters in front of polaroids of first-time homebuyers.
"To date the Nehemiah people have built about 3,000 homes here in East New York and Brownsville, and less than one-half of 1% have any delinquencies. In the world that we live in today, we are an anomaly. I’m not boasting, but I’m proud of this situation. Less than one-half of of 1% is essentially zero. And I credit that to our screening process and the State of New York Mortgage Association who are the underwriters of most of the loans."

**Ron Waters**
ESSENTIALLY ZERO
"I have a projection for 2030. When you’re dating, the person is going to want your blood type and your credit history."

**Hayden Stephen**

"No one should be saying who should live in a neighborhood. We don’t live in those dark ages anymore. We live in a world where everyone has an opportunity, and no one should tell you where you should live. It doesn’t matter what color you are: green, purple, orange... what matters is your credit."

**Jean-Paul Ho**

"Believe me, you screw up, your score tells them whether you can get a mortgage or you can’t. So, if buying a home is an essential thing in your lifetime, then be careful to keep your credit score very high. Best thing you can do. And if you get married make sure you marry a girl who doesn’t have a bad credit score, because they add them both together. You may have a good one and she may have a bad one, then you’re in trouble. So always marry a rich girl."

**Ron Waters**
More on credit on track 11
YOUR CREDIT SCORE

5 THINGS THAT COUNT!

- Payment History: 35%
- Amounts Owed: 30%
- Types of Credit in use: 10%
- Length of Credit History: 15%
- New Credit/Inquiries: 10%
The apartments look fantastic. I would live there. I would own it. I would just come in there and just live there.

Gavin Noble
FROM THE NEW LOTS AVENUE SUBWAY,

THROUGH CLEVELAND STREET,

TO COZINE AVENUE,

TO FLATLANDS AVENUE,
PASSING ASHFORD STREET,

TO THE NEHEMIAH SPRING CREEK HOUSES
"There are people who applied for the lotteries back in 1983 who died waiting for Spring Creek. It took so long, people died from different things. They never got their wish. That was their ultimate wish, to get a home in Spring Creek. And we are closing tomorrow on a lady who has waited. She didn’t die, obviously. She survived, she is just ready to retire. I think she might have had a baby back when she applied in the 80’s. And this baby is now a veteran of the Iraq war, he just came back, he’s married and has a child. They’re gonna live in the house with her. I mean, it’s a real human interest story, fantastic."

Ron Waters
In the future, I would love to see these houses filling every part of Brooklyn.
Nayelly Escobar
"I think by 2030, at least the trees we’ve planted will be fully grown. I think by then you will definitely see the supermarket. I think you’ll see a good start for transportation. Some would even call it a city within a city by 2030."

**Reverend Brawley**

"I live in a townhome development in New Jersey. These homes are 25 years old now and there are a thousand of these homes, and the place looks as good, if not better, than when it was built. The landscaping work has now grown, trees have grown, shrubs have grown, all the green stuff is beautiful."

**Ron Waters**

"If it keeps going the way it is going, in twenty years, there won’t be any land available, it’ll be fully developed and at its max."

**Hayden Stephen**

"2030...Maybe the mortgage would just be getting ready to dwindle down, you know because people will get a 25 to 30 year mortgage for those homes."

**Walter Campbell**

"This is a low-lying area that used to be marshland. It’s a probability thing that a flood at five years will only be a minor one. But every 100 years there might be a major one."

**Ronald Dillon**

*More talk of the future on track 16*
THE CREW
CREDITS

BOOK

Front cover: Thaddeus Cooke
Page 3: Map by Rosten Woo
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Page 51: Photos by Isaiah Peeples, Thaddeus Cooke, Gavin Noble, William Metellus, and Prudence Katze

Back Cover: Hatuey Ramos-Fermin

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SOUNDS

Track 1: Featuring Dionne Matthias, Gavin Noble, Nayelly Escobar, and Thaddeus Cooke. Music by Ian Boyd
Track 2: Music by Thaddeus Cooke
Track 3: Featuring Gavin Noble, Mixed by Thaddeus Cooke
Track 4: Featuring Nayelly Escobar
Track 5: Featuring Dionne Matthias. Music by Thaddeus Cooke
Track 6: Featuring Gavin Noble and Nayelly Escobar
Track 7: Featuring Thaddeus Cooke
Track 9: Featuring Nayelly Escobar
Track 10: Featuring Gavin Noble. Music by Thaddeus Cooke
Track 11: Featuring Nayelly Escobar. Music by Thaddeus Cooke
Track 12: Featuring Gavin Noble, Nayelly Escobar, and Thaddeus Cooke. Music by Thaddeus Cooke
Track 13: Featuring Gavin Noble. Music by Thaddeus Cooke
Track 14: Music by Thaddeus Cooke and Isaiah Peeples
Track 15: Featuring Gavin Noble

Track 16: Music by Thaddeus Cooke

Additional sound mix: by Rosten Woo

To hear the audio tracks, please visit www.anothercupdevelopment.org/ENY