

Aging in Place in Harlem

a personal narrative

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May 2024

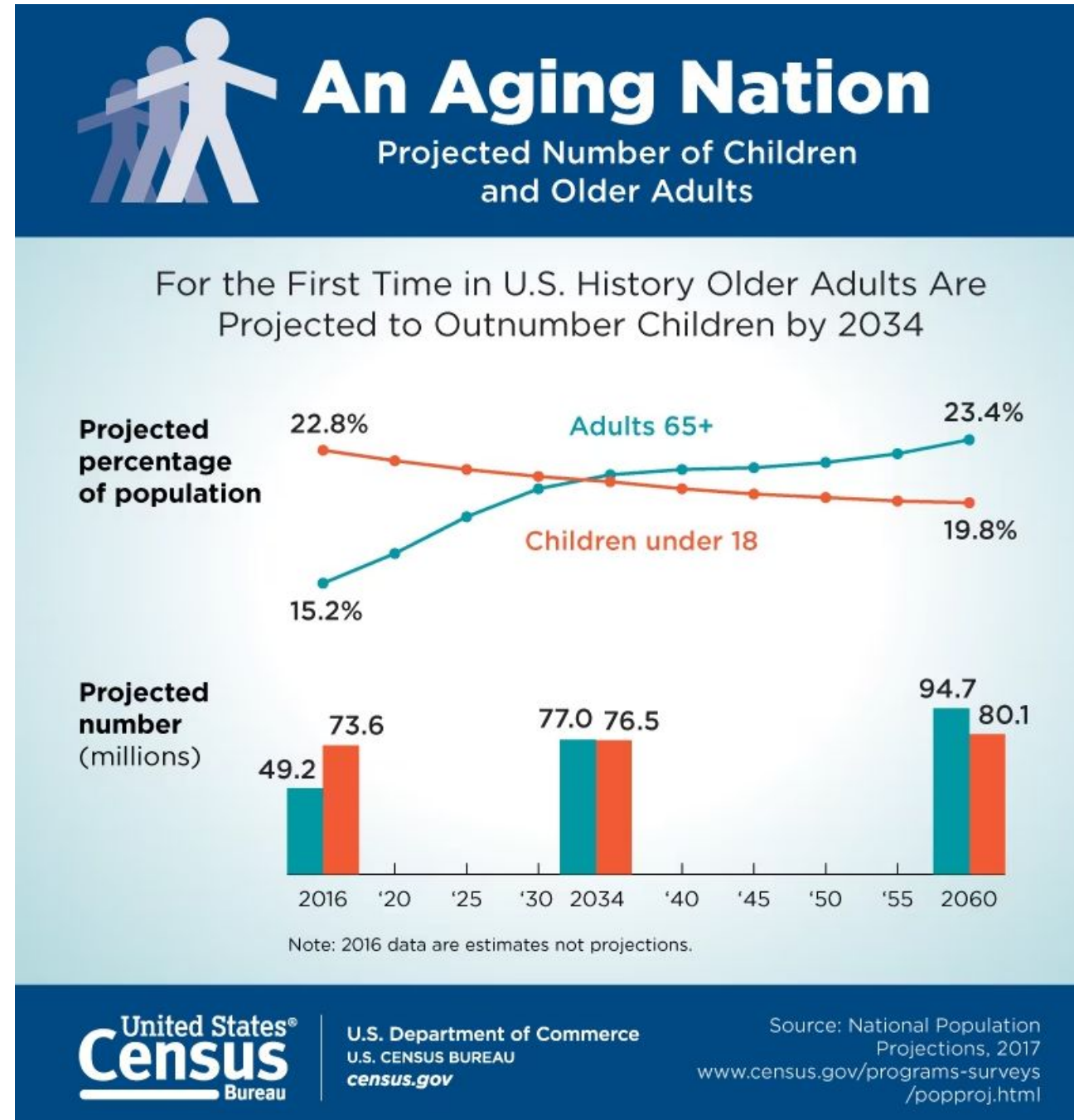
An Aging Nation

My presentation is personal. I do not offer research or presume to speak for my generations.

Instead, I offer impressions, what I have noticed, what friends have told me, and to share my experience of aging in this place, this Harlem.

I fact-checked rumors when I could.

I was often spectator and editor.



What is “in place”?

Rosemary got lost in her westside neighborhood and called her friend from a Chelsea coffee shop 80 blocks away. Now she is aging on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica with her surfer son and a caregiver.

We thought some familiar landmarks might have helped her.

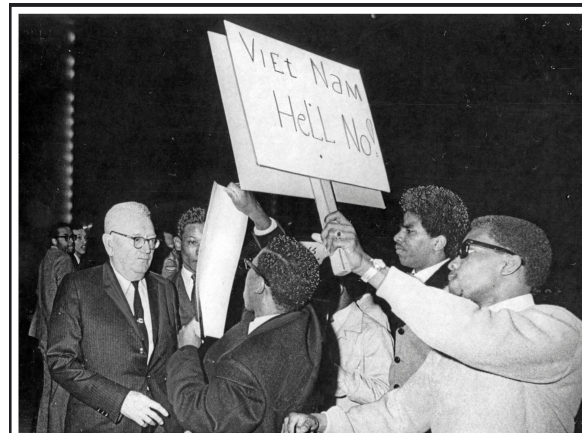
- **A sign in an empty store acknowledging what used to be there.**
- **Perhaps a Kiosk to look for clues as to where she was.**
- **Perhaps an app to look for directions for where she was going**
 - **Large and simple print is best**
 - **Braille & Audio options would also be valuable**
 - **Pictures/Visuals instruction should be included**
 - **Perhaps a med-alert bracelet held up to scan points on street posts every five or 10 blocks - telling where you are, how far from home, etc. Either in large text or audio.**



Activism

We took over almost all campus buildings at Howard University in 1968 with grievances connected to scholarship and identity. We heard that U.S. Marshalls were coming, they never showed up. But remembering Kent State.

I went to J School at Columbia University in 1969 in a summer program for Members of Minority Groups developed in response to the 1968 Kerner Commission report that sought to identify the genesis of 1967 riots.



FT Financial Times

The riots that shook America: Detroit ...



Five Days of Unrest That Shaped, and Haunted, Newark - The New York Times

Community Activism

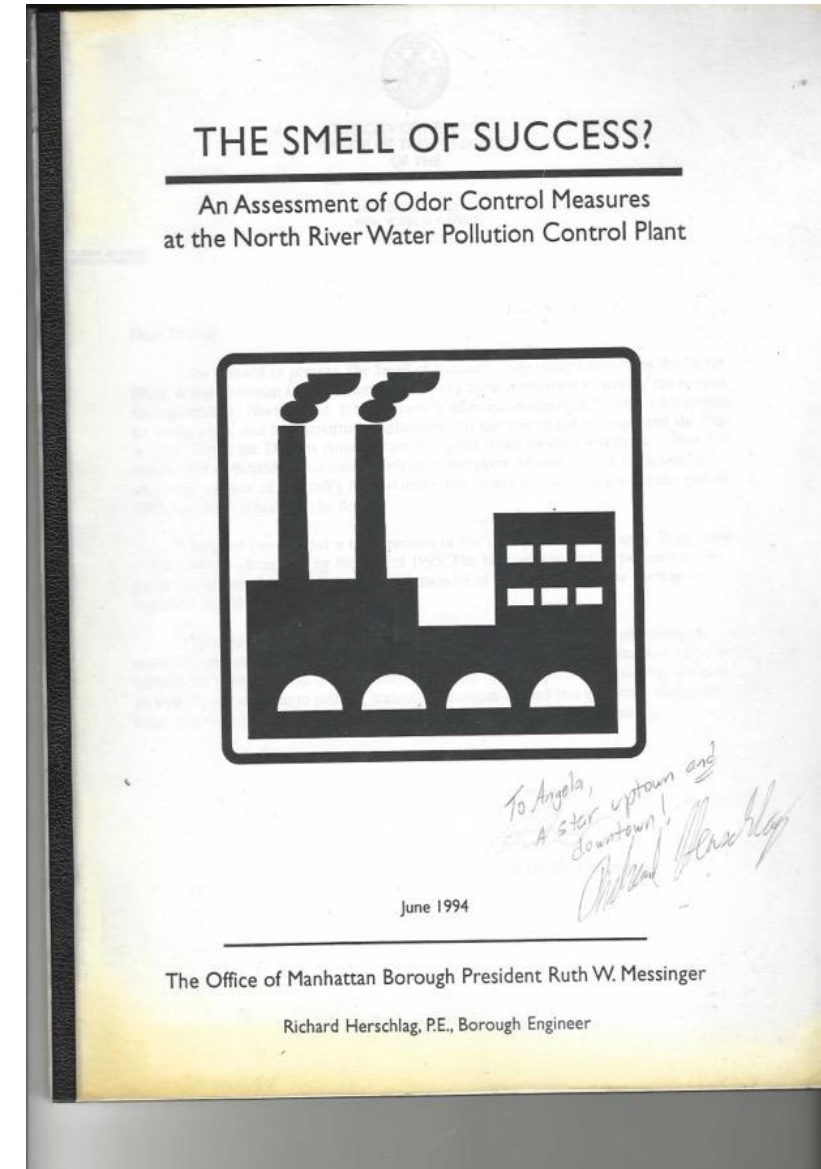


Peggy Shepard on the left with Chuck Sutton holding signs to protest the North River Waterwaste Treatment Plant

The morning of January 17th, 1988, after 7 a.m. protestors were arrested for holding up traffic on the westside highway and holding signs such as "Our Community is dying". *The Other Side of Water.*

This community has taught itself, through almost three decades of experience... the value of vigilance, persistence, public participation in local land use and zoning issues, and the need for direct action, all due to the struggle around the North River Plant. Advocacy groups have emerged to help mobilize the community's voice and power so that this community will never be taken advantage of in such a blatant manner again.

Struggle works! *Vernice Miller, WEACTION. Fordham Urban Law Journal 1994*



Service

Newsday with publisher Bill Moyers covering the Black Arts movement, student activism, civil rights, and black consciousness.

Politics and government. Finally, one of my candidates **Ruth Messinger** won and I ran the Harlem Office for Ruth, the Manhattan Borough President.





What is Aging with Mobility?

I ran the NYC marathon when I was 52 (finished in 4:44:19), and the triathlon at 60 where I swam 1.5k in the Hudson and rode 40k up Westside Hwy to Gun Hill Road.

From the time I arrived in the city in 1969, I rode a bike daily and everywhere, including through Times Square and uphill at night from the Village after dancing.

I never thought it would be my legs that would go. Now I have a stick to tap with, not lean on. And not every day. Not yet.



Taking a Step Back: Buddhism

I am not the only one aging in place.

Often, we are aging in place by ourselves.

In 2005, I accompanied Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh when he returned home to Vietnam. A few years later, I invited his monastics to New York City where they practiced walking meditation on NYC sidewalks.

I taught meditation to youth at detention centers and vets at the VA. I began retreat practices that included a 21-day tour and retreat to South Africa at the Sacred Mountain Retreat Center in the Southern Drakensberg-uKhahlamba-Maloti mountains. I continue to meditate and study with Harlem Insight.

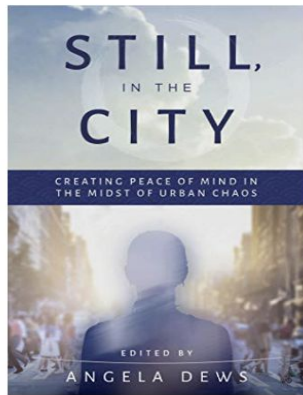


HARLEM INSIGHT SANGHA



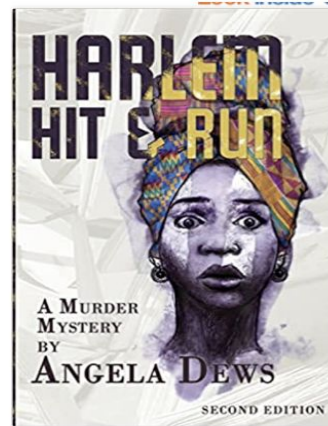
I capture my experiences in fiction and nonfiction.

Non-Fiction



Still, in the City is a collection of stories about the practice of urban Buddhism—when a New York City subway becomes a mobile temple, when Los Angeles traffic becomes a vehicle for awakening, when a Fifth Avenue sidewalk offers a spiritual path through craving, generosity, and sorrow.

Fiction



Harlem Hit & Run is recent history wrapped in a murder mystery. It is full of the dialogue and details of how we were in the 1990s. Harlem is one of the complex characters.

Who Shot John (coming)



The beating drums touched my body as much as my ears, and when I turned, I saw the street merchants marching.

A chorus of voices chanted:

“Whose streets? Our streets?”

“Harlem is for Africans. At home and abroad.”

“No justice; no peace.”

“Racist Giuliani got to go.”

An army of color, probably 200 strong, threaded its way east across 1-2-5.

Stepping Out of Isolation

What do seniors need to support our ability to go out, reconnect, and share what we have learned over these many years?

Accessibility

- Accessible voting sites mean little if we have to walk up a steep hill to get to there.
- Retrofit public buildings with ramps like post offices have done
- Prevent buses from parking in bus stops – this blocks accessible entry/exit for passengers
- Add bannisters/handrails to stairs in all public buildings and where possible in parks

Bike Lanes & Bus Lanes

- Retrofit the bike lane roadmap in conjunction with bus lanes for pedestrian safety
- Enforce laws for bikers against speeding and/or not deferring to pedestrians and streetlights
- Certain streets cannot safely include a bike lane.

Curb cuts & ramp bumps

- Contracts for curb cuts and contracts for curbs are different. Sometimes it takes months.
- Paint curbs bright.

Stepping Out of Isolation (continued)

What do seniors need to support our reconnecting and offering what we have learned over these many years?

Can public parks save us from loneliness?

Former NYC Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver asks that question and says isolation is an illness

- Parks are outdoor community centers, but they must be accessible and safe for seniors and the disabled.
- Seniors prefer quiet areas, not next to basketball, handball, pickleball.
- No blind spots, but open vistas where we can see our surroundings
- Accessible playgrounds for seniors and disabled kids allows us all to play and learn about each other.
- Being in green space can heal by reducing stress and anxiety and calming the soul.
- Need benches. It is a false choice to eliminate seating to keep the homeless out of the park.

Preservation

- Develop apps that offer the history of an existing building or the space where it once stood

Utilities

- Require alternative energy sources to lower bills for all of us = solar panels
- Install motion-sensor lights in NYCHA properties for efficiency and safety