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Urban Life 101

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A View Through The Computer: Hudson Yards

Last November, I was leaving the Jacob Javits Center on the westside of Manhattan when I first saw The Vessel, the centerpiece of New York City's newest luxury neighborhood, Hudson Yards. I heard about it's grand opening earlier in the year and had seen plenty of photos and videos taken by people I follow on Instagram. I saw it from a few blocks away that day but did not have a chance to visit as it was raining and I was rushing to get to the 7 train to head home. I was waiting for the weather to warm up this spring to visit. Then Covid-19 happened and visiting places in the city is not something I can safely do at the moment. I used different sources that I found on the internet to give me an idea on what it would be like to actually visit Hudson Yards and to learn more about it.

In order to learn more about Hudson Yards, I searched their website as a starting off point. On the site, you can find condominium listings, sales and rentals, as well as shop, and restaurant listings. At 35 Hudson Yards, there are condominiums for sale listed on the site. The least expensive condo is listed at \$4.25 million while the most expensive is \$27.7 million. Shops like Chanel, Cartier, and Fendi offer luxury shopping for the residents of Hudson Yards. There is a See and Do section that provides info on

the main attractions such as The Vessel and The Edge (the highest skydeck in the western hemisphere.) The About section on the website boasts that *“Hudson Yards has become the cultural center of Manhattan's West Side. A template for the future of cities, this new neighborhood has not only changed the way New York looks to the world, but the way the world sees New York.”* After viewing the website, I instantly felt insecure about my financial situation and I thought I was maybe just a little sensitive because it registered that right now, I could never afford to live in the penthouse overlooking the river and city skyline. Almost everything I saw on the site were things I could not afford. Most people in this city couldn't afford it either. I could go to The Vessel with that being a free attraction part of the public space but almost all of the shops and restaurants are geared towards those with wealth. There were only a small amount of restaurants and shops that I found “affordable” and that's a relative term. What I consider affordable may not be for others and vice versa. I would not consider this place a cultural center of New York City from a new yorker's perspective, however, it may feel like a grand cultural experience for tourist groups and the wealthier populations.

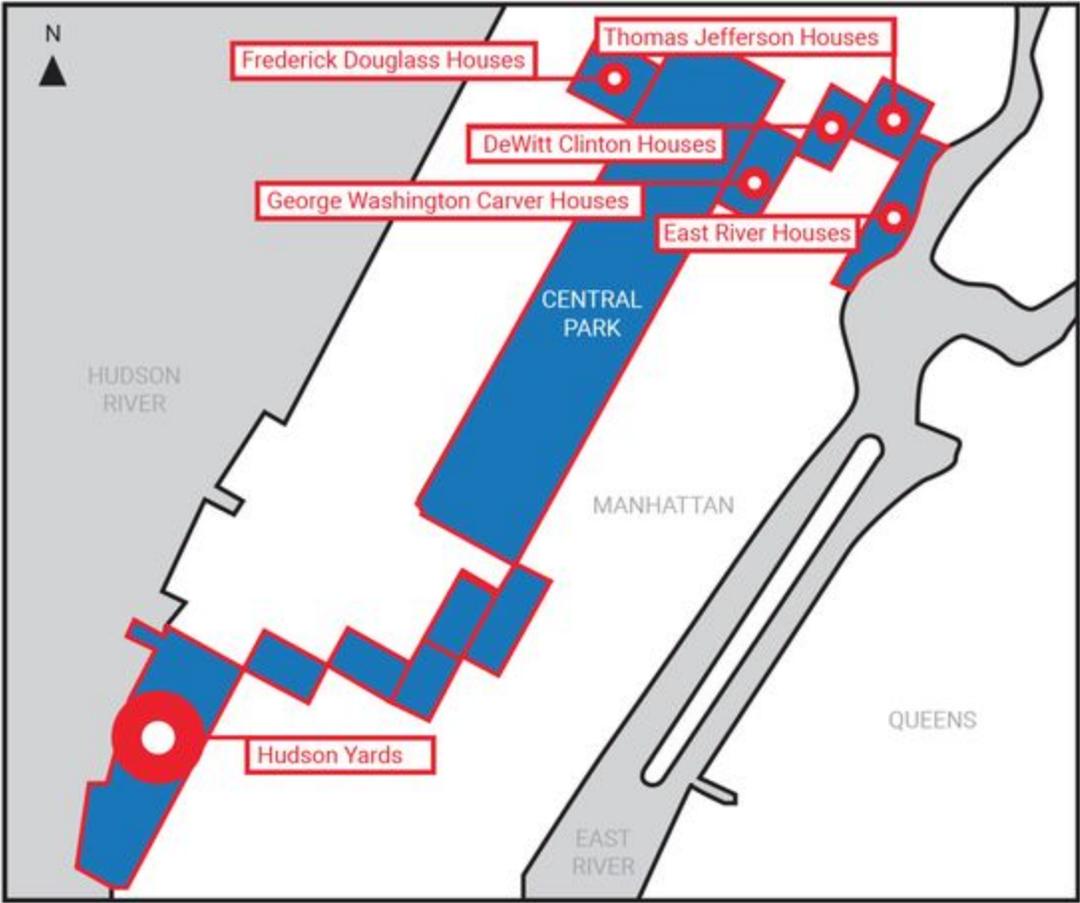
An opinion piece in the *New York Times* by Kriston Capps led me to his article in *City Lab* titled *The Hidden Horror of Hudson Yards Is How It Was Financed*. Capps reveals that “Manhattan's new luxury mega project was partially bankrolled by an investor visa program called EB-5 which was meant to help poverty stricken areas.” The EB-5 visa program is a way for foreign investors to purchase visas for themselves and their families in exchange for an investment targeted to distressed areas with high unemployment. According to Capps, “EB-5 visa applicants must invest a minimum of

\$500k in a project within a designated geographic area called a targeted employment area.” In the case of the Hudson Yards project, arbitrary geographic boundaries (see figure 1) were drawn connecting Hudson Yards on the westside of midtown Manhattan through the park connecting it to Central and East Harlem in order to qualify for this funding. Having taken *Urban Life*, I am not surprised by this discovery. We have seen this kind of theme appear several times over the course of the semester and somehow the lower and middle classes are constantly being short changed due to the rise of the real estate industry. Funding that should have gone to an area in need like Harlem was selfishly used for a high end project downtown. Capps ends the article stating “Hudson Yards is a beacon for New York, open to all who can afford it.” This resonates with me because it's exactly how I felt after searching through the Hudson Yards official website.

In a CBS This Morning segment titled, *Hudson Yards: Just a Billionaire's Playground*, Tony Dokoupil reports on the opening of Hudson Yards. The project itself is massive. Hudson Yards is built over the train yard on a platform that spans four city blocks. It is the largest real estate development in US history and cost over \$25 billion. Tony briefly discusses the controversy of the project receiving 5.6 billion in tax incentives. In rebuttal to the controversies, the developer, Steven Ross, says this project will create \$500 million a year in revenue to the city and 50k new jobs. The developer spoke about the project with such passion about the detail and the art. It was reminiscent of the *City Beautiful* movement mentioned in Sam Stein's *The Rise of the Real Estate State*. For the developers of Hudson Yards, creating an art installation like *Vessel* was their form of *City Beautiful*.

With hopes that it would still be worth a visit, I took a virtual tour through a walkthrough video of Vessel. The vlogger started at the entrance and started to make his way up to the top. The structure is 16 stories high and is made up of 154 flights of stairs. It is shaped like a honeycomb and offers nice views of the river and the city. I was kind of underwhelmed by the footage. I thought it would be a different experience. After searching through articles and videos, I was questioning if I ever want to actually visit Hudson Yards. I don't know if I have as much interest anymore. I saw it from afar and thought it would be a fun place to visit but after learning about it, my mind started to change. Taking a class on Urban Life class has changed my outlook of how I see New York City and a place like Hudson Yards. In my opinion, the space was entirely designed to attract the wealthiest people from around the world and rival places like Dubai. The centerpiece of Hudson Yards, The Vessel, is part of the "public space and gardens." In every video I saw and article I read the term "public space" is used but, in my opinion, this is a way to distract the public from what is actually happening around them by offering a space that seems inclusive.

Figure 1: The geographic gerrymandering created to link Hudson Yards to Harlem



Works Cited

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<https://youtu.be/cUoj9vHwvio>

Hudson Yards official website
https://www.hudsonyardsnewyork.com/?utm_source=Google&utm_medium=Keywords&utm_campaign=HudsonYards&gclid=CjwKCAjwqdn1BRBREiwAEbZcR5mYjoVbH5EyU8hf-cej-IomxKpeAJNGpxcb1pGjSlSGqJIY17aRxBoCkoYQAvD_BwE

Walking NYC: The Vessel at Hudson Yards
<https://youtu.be/2GBWVXBZn2l>