

# 'Sections' Are for Grapefruit

## Call a Neighborhood a Neighborhood

By DAVID VINE

**I**F I believed everything I read in the newspapers, I'd think I was living in some strange, befuddling place journalists in New York insist on calling a "section."

I always assumed I lived in a neighborhood. From my three years living in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, I think it wouldn't even be a stretch to call Fort Greene a "community." But "the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn"? Why would journalists use this word more often associated in my mind with newspapers and Florida citrus fruit than with areas of Brooklyn?

Luckily, as a new graduate student of cultural anthropology, I've been taught not to believe everything I read. I'm told to try to understand why things are written the way they are. I should work to understand how journalists and others could come to call the place where I live a section and not a neighborhood. As an anthropologist, I need to try to understand the way they see the world.

I first noticed this phenomenon of "the section" when I was working for a community organization in Morris Heights in the South Bronx. We only talked about Morris Heights as a neighborhood or as a community. Journalists only talked about the "Morris Heights section of the Bronx," as in "The shootings capped a chase in the Morris Heights section of the Bronx."

Before long I realized that Morris Heights wasn't the only section in the city. Mott Haven was another section in the Bronx. So too were Bushwick, Brownsville and East New York in Brooklyn; St. Albans and Hillcrest in Queens. Fort Greene, I found, was

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part of the group as well.

Yet, strangely enough, when I read news about Manhattan, events inevitably took place in more simply labeled places like "SoHo," "Gramercy Park" and "TriBeCa." I never did find anything close to "the Upper East Side section of Manhattan" — probably not so good for real estate prices.

From what I've been able to figure out, the so-called outer boroughs are a conglomeration of sections, while Manhattan is an island of neighborhoods. There are times, of course, when a neighborhood in Queens or

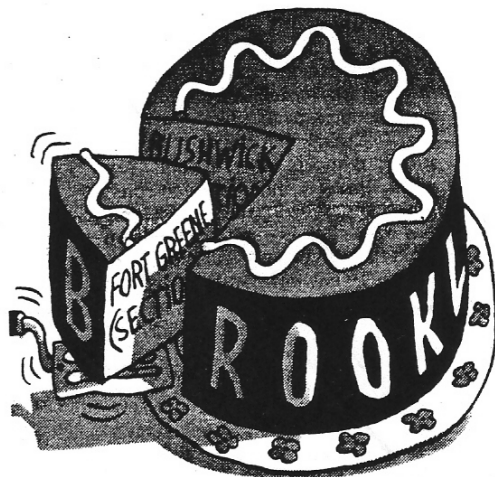
depicting New York as composed only of Manhattan below 96th Street. Above and beyond lies a great void. Areas outside the "center" of the city aren't fully incorporated into New York. They are made more or less invisible and relegated to some secondary status of "section-hood."

As much as I wanted all those Yankee fans in Manhattan to suffer the shame of losing to the Mets, I think this is about more than Brooklyn pride or feeling snubbed by the City. Indeed, beyond journalists, doesn't everyone do this? Don't we all push certain people and places away into the hinterlands of our minds, toward the edges of our mental maps, restricting them to some sort of permanent outsider status?

As a Brooklynite, I know I do it with people from New Jersey. More seriously, this practice reflects racial and class issues. I know I always did it growing up as a white person in Washington, D.C., thinking of the neighborhoods in Southeast and Anacostia as far-off zones of the city, only marginally relevant to my privileged center of the world.

In fact, I'm not really worried about Fort Greene losing its "section" status. It already has in many articles. With more and more white people like me moving into the neighborhood, it won't be long before Fort Greene attains full status, alongside Brooklyn Heights and Park Slope, in Manhattan's club of neighborhoods.

What worries me most is not the words we choose, but the way we — and our elected officials and C.E.O.'s — act. Dropping the word section wouldn't change everyday realities for the less wealthy and less white residents of sections. But just as I could ignore the suffering of poverty in Washington, calling a neighborhood a section tells us something about how we think about and treat certain parts of the city. And perhaps we should consider what it tells us about how we might allow those parts to be treated in the future.



Niculae Asciu

Brooklyn escapes the curse of its section status, but for the most part, the pattern holds.

Except that is, for a few oddities: Brooklyn Heights and Park Slope seem to have risen to the level of untainted neighborhoods and are not described as sections. Far across town, however, you apparently still can visit the Washington Heights and Inwood sections of Upper Manhattan. Granted, this may be journalists assuming a certain readership, but the word "section" is simply unnecessary and thus curious in a profession demanding parsimonious prose.

Trying now to think anthropologically, it occurred to me that this section phenomenon is like taxi maps